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Declining voter participation in Botswana: trends and patterns

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Abstract

This article attempts to analyse the trends and patterns relating to the past eight general elections in Botswana, from the pre-independence period in 1965 to 1999. Factors that have influenced elections in the last eight years will be discussed, and trends established for the same period.

Data from various past election reports and analysis carried out by other researchers will be referred to in this article. The data used will be derived from; the total number of potential voters in Botswana; the number of electorate who registered for the elections and the number who actually voted. Percentages of the electorate who registered and actually voted, the ratio of electorate who voted to potential voters, and the ratio of voted to registered voters will be discussed. The electoral trend of percentage of voters by party and by number, and percentages of national assembly seats by political parties that contested in the last eight general elections will be studied.

A summary and conclusions on these factors and lessons to be learned from the experiences of the past eight elections will be included. These experiences will be beneficial to all the political parties in the country, and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in particular, which has won the 1999 general elections with an overwhelming victory. The BDP government and political parties should learn from the past experiences, and develop an improved and effective performance for the government.

Introduction

Botswana has, since the discovery of diamonds in the 1970s, experienced rapid economic growth rates, leading to her status changing from being referred as one of the poorest countries to the fastest growing economy in the world. In the thirty-three years since independence in 1966, Botswana has been transformed quite considerably. Real GDP growth rate has averaged about 13 percent per annum between 1980 and 1989. This rapid growth was influenced by the high growth of the diamond sector and other factors such as a stable political system, prudent fiscal and monetary policies and transparency in the decision making process. Botswana is one of the major exporters of diamonds, and the mineral sector contributes about 33 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 75 percent of exports (Salkin et al.1997:242).

However, the economy experienced some slow growth rates of about 3 percent a year in 1992-94, and high inflation of 17.7 percent in June 1992. However, since 1995/96, the economy has been recovering from the slow growth, with a growth rate of about 6.6 percent in 1995/96, 7.1 percent in 1996/97 and 8.3 percent in 1997/98. Botswana has continued to show healthy growth, estimated at 7.8 percent for the non-mineral economy in 1998/99, with low levels of inflation of about 7.3 percent in March 1999.

The high growth has emanated from the government's successful re-investment of revenue earned from the diamond sector, with a commitment to the provision of social services and infrastructure to facilitate growth. Efforts were also made during the boom years to diversify the economy away from sole dependence on diamonds to other sectors such as the manufacturing sector. The high growth years thus brought about developments in both urban and rural areas, where the government built schools, clinics, provided clean water and built roads. Employment and business development opportunities were also some of the benefits that came along with high growth rates. Economic development brought about improved standard of living and an overall increase in the literacy rate.

There was an improvement in education to support the development of a skilled labour force to occupy positions that were previously occupied by expatriate staff.

Foreign reserves increased significantly over the years, from P65 million at the end of 1976 to P26.5 billion in December 1998. Botswana also developed healthy balance of payments and Government budget surpluses, placing the country in an advantageous position in the international market. This has, in a way, led to the continued support for the ruling party since the first elections in 1965, particularly in rural areas. The rapid economic development, good economic management and improved standard of living, have created a positive image and a successful track record for the ruling BDP, leading to overwhelming majority support and the winning of all the elections held since 1965 (Molutsi, 1998).

The main campaign issues for 1999 were; unemployment (especially of the youth) AIDS, poverty, issues relating to minority groups (e.g. Basarwa), ethnic diversity, productivity (especially in the civil service), crime and human right issues. Botswana has since pre-independence, had eight general elections. The first elections were held in 1965, and thereafter every five years in 1969, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994 and 1999. The trends of the eight years and factors effecting voter turnout will be discussed in the following section in this article.

Electoral Trends in Botswana

The following tables (1 to 3) show the electoral trends in Botswana from the first elections in 1965 to last elections in 1999. The Tables also show statistics on the percentages of popular vote by party and the number and percent of national assembly seats held by political parties from 1965 to 1999. Table 4 contains data on comparison of electoral trends for selected SADC and industrialised countries. Thereafter, follows the discussion on the factors influencing electoral trends. These factors are: the weak civil society, socio-economic, national identity cards, electoral system and behaviour of political parties. The media and other factors as discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 1: Electoral Statistics: 1965 -1999

1 Year	2 Potential Number of Voters	3 Number of Electorate Registered	4 % of Electorate Registered	5 Number of Electorate who Voted	6 % of 4/1	7 % of 4/2
1965	243 365	188 950	78.0	140 789	58.0	74.0
1969	267 647	156 428	58.5	92 965	34.7	59.4 (54.9)*
1974	309 810	236 848	76.4	95 809	30.9	40.5 (31.2)*
1979	369 515	243 483	67.3	147 658	40.7	60.6 (58.4)*
1984	416 996	293 571	70.4	227 756	54.6	77.6
1989	507 569	367 069	72.3	250 487	49.4	68.2
1994	609 569	370 356	60.8	281 487	46.3	76.1
1999**	800 000	459 663	57.6	355 414	44.4	77.3
Average%			67.6		44.9	66.7

Notes to table headings:

- 1: Number of potential voters.
- 2: Number of electorate registered.
- 3: Percent of electorate registered.
- 4: Number of electorate who voted.
- 5: % of 4/1: Ratio of voters to potential voters, i.e.

$$\frac{\text{Number of electorate who voted}}{\text{Number of electorate registered}}$$
- 6: Number of potential voters of 4/2: Ratio of voters to registered i.e.

$$\frac{\text{Number of electorate who voted}}{\text{Number of electorate registered}}$$

Sources: Edge & Lekorwe: 1998: Molutsi, p.368; Various election Reports;

***The Botswana Gazette*, Wednesday 18th August 1999; *Mmegi*, October 22-28, 1999; *Botswana Daily News*: Monday October 18, 1999.

* These are actual figures as recorded in the respective election Reports to the Minister of Public Affairs and Presidential Affairs.

Table 2: Percentage of Popular Vote by Party: 1965-1999

Party	1965	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999
BDP	80.4	68.4	76.6	75.2	67.9	64.7	54.5	57
BNF	-	13.5	11.5	12.9	20.5	26.9	37.3	26
BPP	14.2	12.1	6.6	7.4	6.6	4.5	4.1	-
BIP/IFP	4.6	6.0	4.8	4.3	3.0	2.4	3.6	-
Others	0.8	0.0	0.5	0.2	2.0	1.5	0.5	0
BCP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
BAM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Party	1965	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999

Source: Edge/Lekorwe: 1998: Molutsi: 370. Press Reports

Table 3: Number and Percentage of National Assembly Seats Held by Political Parties: 1965-1999

Party	1965	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999
BDP	28	24	27	29	28	31	27*	33
BNF	-	3	2	2	5	3	13	6
BPP	3	3	2	1	1	0	0	-
BIP/IFP	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	-
BAM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
BCP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	31	32	32	34	34	44	40
% of Seats								
BDP	90	77	84	91	82	91	67.5	82.5
BNF	-	10	6.5	6	15	9	32.5	15
BPP	10	10	6.5	3	3	0	0	-
BIP/IFP	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	-
BAM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.5
BCP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Notes * Two members of parliament were specially elected, bringing the total number to 31.

Sources: Molutsi 1998: 371; 1999 Press reports on elections; *Mmegi*, 22-28 October 1999.

Table 4: Comparison of Electoral Statistics for Selected SADC and Industrialised Countries between 1994 and 1999

SADC Country	Voting Age Population (VAP)	Number Registered	Total Vote	Vote/VAP	Vote/Registered
Botswana: 1999	800 000	459 663	355 414	44.4%	77.3%
South Africa: 1999	18 000 000	-	15977142	88.8%	-
Namibia: 1999	878 000	-	-	62%	-
Mozambique: 1999	-	7099 105	4934 352		69.5%
Industrialised Countries					
USA: 1996*	196 602 460	14870000	72863000	37.1%	49.0%
United kingdom: 1997*	45093510	-	31298032	69.4%	-
Sweden: 1994	6 848 400	6 496 365	5 725 246	83.6%	88.1%
Japan: 1996**	96672730	97909655	57766696	59.8%	59.0%

Notes:

SADC: Southern Africa Development Community

*1997 total votes only include valid votes

**1996 Total votes for Japan are approximate.

- Data not available

Sources: IDEA: *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report on Political Participation*. Stockholm,

Sweden; *Keesing's Record of World Events*: News digest for June 1999. Volume 45. Number 6; *African Research*

Bulletin: Volume 36 Number 12. December 1st-31st 1999.

Registration of Potential Voters:

On average, only about 69.1 percent of eligible voters registered for elections between 1965 and 1994. This number declines to 67.6 percent when including figures for 1999. This shows that little more than 30 percent of potential voters tended not to register to vote in the past eight elections. According to table 1, the highest percentage of potential voters registered in 1965 (78.0 percent), compared to only about 57.6 percent in 1999. People registered in large numbers to support the late Sir Seretse Khama, the paramount chief of the major and largest tribe in Botswana, and the new leader of the BDP. Sir Seretse had just returned from exile and had an influence as chief and leader of the BDP.

However, potential voters who registered declined significantly to 58.5 percent in 1969. This declined further to 57.6 percent in 1999, which is the lowest potential electorate registered since 1965.

Electorate Who Voted

Column 5 in Table 1 shows the ratio of those who voted to the number of potential voters. The column shows that on average only about 45.0 percent of potential voters participated in the past eight general elections. The highest number of voter participation was experienced in 1965 (first elections in the country) when 58.0 percent cast their votes. Participation declined to 34.7 percent in 1969 and further declined to 30.7 percent in 1974, the lowest participation in elections in the country. However, participation increased to 40.7 percent in 1979, 54.6 percent in 1984 the highest since 1965. It is worth mentioning that in 1984, Botswana was experiencing high economic growth rates, coupled with development of urban and rural areas, employment and investment opportunities as well as introduction of various incentive schemes to support the growth of different sectors in the economy. Botswana's real GDP growth rate averaged about 13 percent from 1980 to 1989. However, as mentioned before, socio-economic factors have very little impact on voter turnout. After the 1979 and 1984 increase, voter participation has been declining since 1989, from 49.4 percent to 44.4 percent in 1999.

Voter participation is low in Botswana when compared to participation in some countries in the SADC region and some of the developed countries. Table 4 shows turnout in selected countries in SADC as well as participation in selected developed countries. According to the IDEA Global Report on Voter Turnout, participation across the world rose steadily between 1945 and 1990, increasing from 61 percent in the 1940s to 68 percent in the 1980s. The average global turnout for the 1990s went down to 64 percent (IDEA: Report: 9). In the case of Botswana, the turnout averaged about 44.9 percent between 1965 and 1999. Turnout in the 1980s was about 52.5 percent in the 1980s and declined to 45.5 percent in the 1990s. When looking at the global picture, Botswana seems to follow a similar pattern of increased voter turnout in the 1980s and decreased participation in the 1990s.

However, when comparing Botswana's turnout in the first and last elections with countries in the region, voter participation is low in Botswana. For example turnout for South Africa's 1994 first general elections was highest in the region at about 85.5%, Mozambique (66.4 percent in 1994) and Namibia (63.8 percent in 1994) and Zimbabwe (59.9 percent). (IDEA Voter Turnout Report, 1945-97: 54:71 and 77). Participation in these countries is higher than Botswana (58.0 percent in 1966). The results of the 1999 elections in South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique show a voter turnover of 88.8 percent, 62.0 percent, and 69.5 percent respectively (*Africa Research Bulletin*, 2000:13795 and 13794). South Africa experienced the highest voter in all the SADC countries. Botswana's turnout in the 1999 elections was 44.4 percent, which is about 25 percent lower than Namibia and Mozambique and about 44 percent lower than the turnout in South Africa. Participation in Zimbabwe's last elections was 26.8 percent, which is much lower than Botswana. In the turnout for 1999 elections in industrialised countries, Sweden had the highest turnout of 83.6 percent, followed by UK 69.4 percent, Japan 59.8 percent and

the lowest turnout of 37.1 percent was in the USA. Botswana participation in the 1999 elections was 44.4 percent.

Ratio of Voted to Registered

As indicated in Table1 column 6, the ratio of electorate who voted to the total number of electorate who registered was high in 1965 and 1984 and 1999, at 74.0 percent, 77.6 percent and 77.3 percent respectively. The highest voter turnout to those who registered was in 1984, at 77.6 percent. The lowest voter turnout was experienced during the 1974 general elections, where about 40.5 percent of electorate voted (the actual number was 31.2 percent as recorded in the 1974 election report to the Minister). In 1974 76.4 percent of electorate who registered and only 40.5 percent turned up to vote. The situation improved since the 1979 elections, when an average of 70 percent of voted to registered was maintained from 1984 to 1999.

Factors that Affect Voter Participation

• ***Weak civil Society*** There are various possible factors/constraints that have been blamed on the low voter participation; these include:

a weak opposition, a weak parliament and a weak civil society, which is unorganised and inarticulate, leading to a Paternalistic democracy. The electorate was ill-informed, with low political education, and some voters not turning up during registration and elections believing that they have already voted for the ruling BDP government, and thus find no need to vote. (Molutsi, 1998h: 369).

Generally, people need to be educated on voting and its benefits. They need to be informed about the values of democracy, the constitution of the country and their rights as voters. This information and education process should take place well before the registration and elections day. Voter education should come before so that the voter can be well informed about the purpose and benefits of elections and loses for not participating, as well as the importance of registering and actually voting. Voters in Botswana still need a lot of education on these issues, so that they make well-informed choices with education they have.

• ***National Identity Cards.*** The other constraint that has been voiced by both political parties and the public in Botswana is the requirement that all voters should be in possession of a valid national identity card (Omang). In some cases, some voter's national cards have expired; others have renewed their cards but have not been issued with new cards as yet. There are also problems related to collection of new or renewed cards by owners for one reason or the other. The requirement was later changed such that voters could use Omang renewal receipts for registration. The requirement was, once again, changed such that expired Omang cards could be used. The latter was introduced during the supplementary registration exercise in the 1999 elections. This was done after the IEC had realised that there were a lot of eligible voters who have not registered due to problems of being in possession of invalid national identity cards.

• ***Electoral System.*** An electoral system that is too cumbersome, time consuming and not well-organised can discourage voters from participating. Elections in Botswana are characterised by long queues, which are time consuming, and the process of actually casting ones vote is very slow. This was worse in the 1999 when a new system of using ballot papers was introduced. Discs were used in the previous elections. Most voters were not familiar with the use of ballot papers and did not receive sufficient voter education on the new process. The lack of knowledge about the new system might have discouraged some potential voters from registration and actually casting their vote. (In 1999, polling officers had to explain procedures in detail to individual voters as they came in to cast their

votes, causing delays. There were also some spoiled ballots papers, in part, due to the fact that system was new and voters were making mistakes in the process). Registration also requires voters to register and vote in their respective places of residence/constituencies. This might prevent those who are mobile or are not at the locations where they registered from voting. The state of emergency, which is discussed in detail by Molomo in another article in this special issue, may be yet another factor that discouraged the voting age population to participate in the elections.

• **Behaviour of Political Parties.** The other possible explanation for the low voter participation might be because of the current confusion relating to the split of the BNF and the formation of new political parties by former BNF candidates (some of whom are parliamentarians). The electorate might not be sure or still undecided which party they belong to or to vote for. The way political parties manage their differences, how they relate and how they handle loss can also discourage people from registering and participating in elections. The manner in which they consult with the electorate before and after elections can influence voter participation.

• **The Media.** The media also plays an important role in communicating with voters, especially in informing voters about for example, democracy, elections, candidates contesting in the elections and campaign issues. The way the media reports about this issues can have an impact on peoples participation in elections. The media in Botswana has been reporting on various issues, including news relating to conflicts within and between parties, problems associated with the election process in the country, etc. Reports on other factors such as bringing into parliament representatives with past records of corruption, crime debts, and misappropriation of funds, and the use of government resources for campaigns by the ruling party and nomination irregularities might have added to the factors discouraging participation in elections, particularly in 1999, the election year which was characterised by both positive and negative reports in the press about democracy and elections the country.

• **Participation of Youth.** Reports from the IEC and the media indicate that the youth did not register and vote in large numbers as expected. Voting is a voluntary exercise and lower participation on the part of the youth might be because they were engaged in other activities during registration and election time or they were not interested in voting. One other explanation for the low participation might be the insufficient voter education by the IEC, political parties and youth NGOs such as the Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC). In 1999 there were about 200 000 (two hundred thousand) (includes 18-24 years old) potential youth voters, out of the 800 000 potential voters (*Gazette*, Aug 18, 1999). Figures on youth who registered and actually voted were not yet available at the time of writing the paper. Some of the complaints raised by the youth (through the media) are that they were not consulted when the voting age was reduced. They allege that they heard about the age reduction in the media. They feel that they are still treated as children that are not able to make mature decisions on their own, hence, their low registration and participation in the 1999 elections (for detail see an article by C. Ntau and T. Ntsabane in this in this issue).

• **Socio-Economic Factors.** Botswana was experiencing high real economic growth rates in the 1980s (13 percent), increased literacy in the country etc. Voter turnout was also high in the 1984 (54.6 percent) elections and the highest turnout since 1965 (58.0 percent). However, according to research undertaken by IDEA

there is no statistical correlation between a country's level of literacy and its voter turnout rate. However the 52 states, which have literacy levels of above 95 percent, clearly have a higher turnout rate (71 percent) compared to the 104 states with literacy rates below 95 percent (61

percent). These figures confirm that, while literacy is clearly an advantage, one should be careful not to equate issues concerning the ability to read and write with a voter's political literacy – i.e., the capacity to make coherent choices and decisions when voting – which are not dependent upon formal education levels (IDEA: 32).

The report further says when it comes to voter turnout, “there is no difference between rich and poor countries (measured in terms of GDP in US\$ for the ear of elections), small and large countries (in terms of population)”(IDEA: 32). The report states “the only socio-economic factor which does seem to correlate with turnout rates is the United Nations somewhat more sophisticated “Human Development Index” (HDI)....The top fifth of countries have an average voter turnout of up to 72 percent...and the bottom fifth an average of 56 percent” (IDEA: 32).

All the above factors can influence voter's behaviour and their desire to register and actually cast their vote. They can lead to voter apathy and general dissatisfaction about politics and participation in elections

Performance of Political Parties: 1965 - 1999

- ***The Ruling Party.*** As mentioned by Molutsi, Botswana's politics has been a one party dominated democracy, as evident from electoral patterns from 1965 to 1999 elections, the BDP has continued to dominate and winning elections. Table 2 shows that the BDP obtained the highest popular votes of 80.4 percent in 1965 and has, over the last seven elections, won an average of 83 percent of seats in parliament. The BDP won the highest number of seats in 1979, obtaining 91 percent of the seats. The lowest number of parliamentary seats won was in 1994, which was 67.5 percent. This figure has increased significantly to 82.5 percent in 1999. This is mainly due to split of the BNF, leading to BDP re-gaining votes in the process.

It is worth mentioning that the BDP has, over the past elections, enjoyed popular support, especially in the rural areas where majority of the population lives. The BDP's stronghold in rural areas is attributed mainly to factors such as; the first president's influence and significant developments, which have taken, place in rural areas. For example, the provision of clean water, building of health and education facilities and the construction of roads. The BDP has, also, since independence, adopted positive policies and programs geared towards rural development the ruling party has successfully established institutional framework in the villages to facilitate decentralisation, participation and implementation of policies and programs. Other programs introduced and implemented include drought relief, destitute allowances, remote area dweller development and financial assistance policies to help develop the agricultural and business sectors in Botswana.

- ***Performance of Opposition Parties.*** Table 2 shows that the performance of opposition parties has not been very impressive between 1965 and 1989. The situation improved only after the 1994 general elections. The only strong opposition before was the BPP, which obtained 14.2 percent of popular vote and won 10 percent of seats in the national assembly in the 1965 elections (there were only three parties contesting for elections, i.e. BDP, BPP and BIP).

In the 1974 elections, the BDP obtained 76.6 percent of popular vote, winning 84 percent of national assembly seats (the parliamentary seats were increased from 31 to 32). The BDP's campaign was during 1974, mainly dominated by domestic issues relating to housing and the importance of education in the country (Elec.1994). The BNF suffered declining support, from 13.5 percent in 1969 to 11.5 percent in 1974, and winning only 6.5 percent of parliamentary seats, compared to 10 percent in the 1969 elections. Some of the factors attributing to the poor performance are “...a weak opposition which is poorly organised, with no formal written programs, and stifled by lack of financial resources to effectively educate voters through seminars like the BDP” (Molutsi: 1993a: 21).

It is interesting to note that in the 1979 elections, the BDP maintained the lead, with 75.2 percent of popular support and won 91 percent of seats in the national assembly. On the other hand, opposition parties continued to suffer setback, except the BNF, which had a slight increase of 12.9 percent of votes, while maintaining 6 percent of seats in parliament. The BPP lost some of the seats in parliament, which were reduced from 6.5 percent in 1974 to 3 percent in 1979. The BIP/IFP lost all of the seats in the national assembly (3 percent to 0 percent). The BDP won two seats in Francistown, which were previously held by the BPP and BIP. Some of factors leading to the BDP winning additional seats in the north are said to be the increased support the party received from the Angolan refugees who naturalised in 1979 (Election form 1945:41).

It is worth mentioning that the first president of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama, was re-elected unopposed in 1969 and 1974. However, in 1979, Dr Koma of the BNF contested for presidency but was defeated by Seretse Khama (Molutsi, 1998h).

In the 1984 elections, the BDP experienced reduced support, from 75.2 percent in 1979 to 67.9 percent in 1984. The party also lost some seats to the opposition, decline from 91 percent to 82 percent. The opposition parties performed much better in the 1984 elections, when the BNF support increased from 12.9 percent to 20.5 percent in 1984, winning 15 percent of seats in the national assembly. Two of these seats were held in Gaborone, the capital city. The BNF also gained control of the city council for the first time since independence (Molutsi, 1998i).

In 1984, the seats in the national assembly increased from 32 to 34. The number of parties contesting in the elections also increased from three to five, being the BDP, BPP, BNF, and BIP/IFP and BPU. In 1984, the BNF contested the elections for "electoral malpractice", leading to a re-election held in December 1984 in which Dr K. Koma of the BNF won an extra seat in parliament. The then vice president of the ruling BDP government, the late Hon P. Mmusi, lost in the by-election, but retained his seat by being specially elected (one MP stepped down for him) (Molutsi, 1998j).

It is important to mention that the first president of Botswana, Seretse Khama died in July 1980. The then Vice-President Dr Q. J. K. Masire took over as president (according to the Botswana constitution, the Vice-President automatically becomes president). President Masire was re-elected in 1984, defeating Dr Koma of the BNF and V. Masole of the BPP. The campaign issues during the 1984 were concentrated on economic issues in Botswana (for example high growth rate, employment and business opportunities, etc.etc) and the political situation in Southern Africa, e.g. apartheid in South Africa and its attacks on its neighbours, SADC, the war in Angola and Mozambique).

As shown in Table 2 and 3, in 1989, the ruling BDP experienced reduced popular support of 64.7 percent, from 67.9 percent in 1984. The BDP, however, won increased number (91 percent) of seats in the national assembly. Popular support for the BNF continued to increase, reaching 26.9 percent in 1989. However, parliamentary seats for the BNF declined from 15 percent to 9 percent. Some of the contributing factors to loss of seats were the internal splits the party was experiencing in the Ngwaketse constituency and the death of the Chief Bathoeng II. The reduction of the powers of chiefs led Chief Bathoeng II to resign his position as chief to joined the BNF. The new legislation introduced other authorities such as land boards, district administration, etc.) (Molutsi, 1998k: 365).

The 1994 general elections introduced significant changes in Botswana's politics. The opposition parties came in stronger than ever before, sending a very strong message to the ruling BDP that indeed change is inevitable. The elections were also characterised by the increased number of political parties from six to nine. Some of the new parties were a split from the BNF. Parliamentary seats also increased from 34 to 40, an increase of six seats. As shown in Table 2 and 3, the BDP suffered a reduction in popular support down to 54.5 percent from 64.7 percent in the 1989 elections. The BDP won 67.5 percent of the national

assembly seats. The BNF was very successful by obtaining 37.3 percent of popular vote and the number of seats increased significantly from 9 percent to 32.5 percent.

Splits within the party (North-South factions) contributed to increased the loss of support for the BDP. The opposition parties took advantage of these other negative factors such as economic slow down, poor government-labour relations, retrenchments to tarnish the BDP's image in the eyes of the electorate. They capitalised on them and used them as their main campaign issues. As a result, the BNF obtained a stronghold in urban areas where their campaign was directed at, for example economic hardships, high rentals and tariffs, and job losses experienced by urban dwellers. The BNF campaign aims were directed at fighting these evil effects on behalf the electorate living in urban areas, pressing for increased salaries for the lowly paid and closing the gap between the highly paid and the lowly paid (Molutsi, 1998k). Consequently, the BNF won 37.3 percent of popular support in towns such as Gaborone, Lobatse, Selibe Phikwe and Francistown West. Other constituencies in rural areas obtained strong support of the BNF, for example Ghanzi, Maun/Chobe and North East. The BNF increased support in these areas while the BDP had a reduced majority in its traditional strongholds (Molutsi, 1998l). Issues leading to BDP's reduced votes in these areas include the unsatisfactory situation of the minority groups in Botswana (for example Basarwa, Bayeyi) and the fact that these areas are less developed than other rural centres in the country.

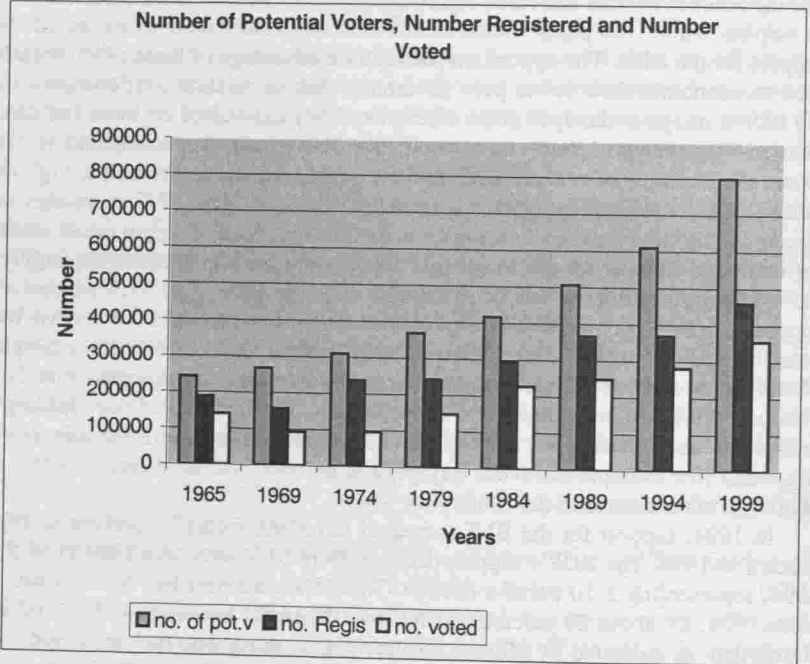
In 1994, support for the BNF increased threefold, from 12.9 percent in 1979 to 37.3 percent in 1994. The BDP's support declined from 64.7 percent in 1989 to 54.5 percent in 1994, representing a 10 percent decline. The BDP's support has been declining steadily since 1974, by about 20 percent and fell by 10 percent between in 1989 and 1994. This shows that, as indicated by Molutsi, "voters punish those who hurt them and are ready to vote for parties that promise to delive." (Molutsi, 1994a: 241). The BDP acknowledged the disappointment in the 1994 election results, where the then acting Secretary General commented that;

Some of the BDP's policies lead to failure in some constituencies... e.g. high utility rates ... and that the BNF was able to capitalise on high tariffs and unemployment... and the so called North-South divisions within the party contributed to the party's defeat in some constituencies (Kufa and Motsemme, 1994a: 307).

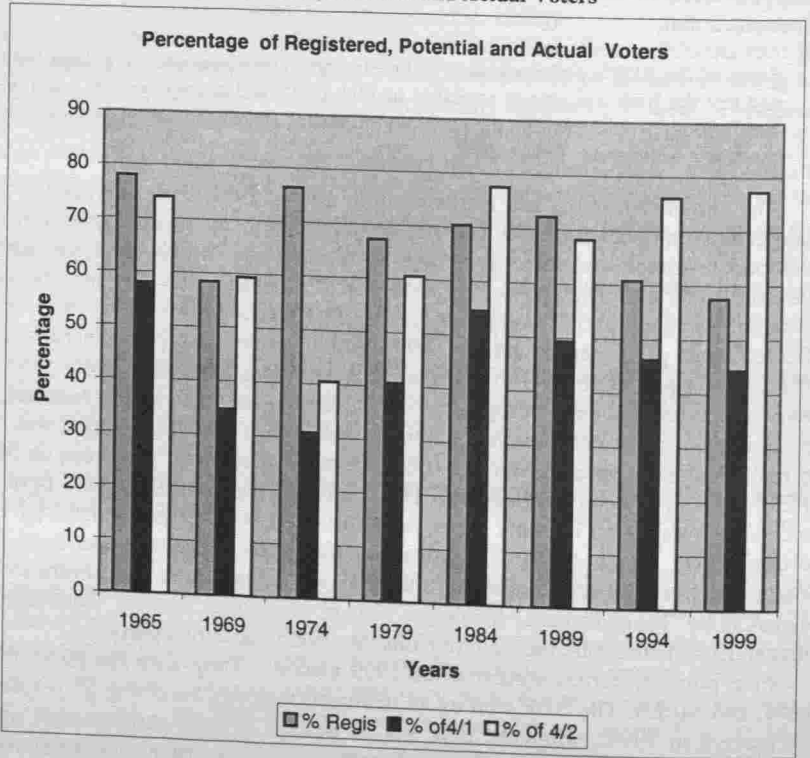
The number of parties has increased from nine in 1994 to about fifteen in 1999. The main campaign issues for 1999 were the Aids, education and unemployment of the youth, position of women and minority groups in the country, citizen empowerment, poverty alleviation etc. etc. The split of the BNF, BDP's North-South division, as well as the formation of many parties contesting in the 1999 election have in one way or the other affected voter participation and the 1999 election results. The preliminary results of the DRP opinion poll confirmed in that the BDP won by a landslide victory. The BDB has won back seats that were occupied by opposition parties. The BNF continues to be the strong opposition as indicated in the opinion poll results. The opinion poll was conducted by the Democracy Research Project (DRP) of the University of Botswana on March 22nd to 27th 1999 in fifteen constituencies. They indicated that the BDP would have won by a landslide victory, and in some cases, won seats that were presently held by opposition parties. (DRP, March 1999). The fifteen constituencies are; Gaborone West, Gaborone South, Gaborone Central, Lobatse, Selibe Phikwe, Francistown East, Francistown West, Maun/Chobe, Mogoditshane, Moshupa, Kanye, Shoshong, Serowe, Kgatleng, East and Ghanzi. Despite the split, the BNF remains the strong opposition party.

Five political parties contested the 1999 election. They were the BDP, BNF, BCP, BAM, and MELS. The BDP won by an increased majority, receiving 57 percent of votes (54 percent in 1994), while the BNF got 26 percent of total parliamentary and council votes (a significant reduction from 32.5 percent in 1994). BCP and BAM received 12 percent and 5 percent of the total parliamentary and council votes respectively (Mmegi: 22-

Graph 1: Number of Potential Voters, Number Registered and Number Voted



Graph 2: Percentage Registered, Potential and Actual Voters



28 October, 1999a: 1). The highest number of votes received by the BDP is an indication that voters still have confidence in the party, which has been ruling the country for 33 years (*Mmegi*: October 22-28, 1999b: 2).

The BDP and BNF have remained the two strong parties, despite the formation of other parties, particularly by former BNF members. It is also important to note that in Botswana, people vote for the party, not individuals. The defeat of the BCP during the 1999 election is a case in point. Of the 11 MPs who defected from the BNF to form the BCP, only J. Kavinadama of Okavango constituency retained his seat, though with a narrow margin. This is also an indication that Botswana do not like defections and formation of new parties. It is worth noting that the defections have cost BNF votes to the BDP. The BDP regained some constituencies in rural areas and parliamentary seats lost to the opposition in 1994.

Conclusion

It could be said that in the last eight elections held, voter participation has been declining steadily. The highest level of participation was in 1965 (58.0 percent) and the lowest in 1974 (30.9 percent). This shows that, on average, only about 45 percent of potential voters participated in the last eight general elections. This constitutes less than 50 percent of potential voters. The highest total number of electorate who registered was in 1965 (78.0 percent); the lowest was in 1999 (57.6 percent). On average, about 67.6 percent of voters registered in the last eight elections. This is slightly lower than the 70 percent registration maintained between 1965 and 1994. Therefore, slightly lower than 30 percent of potential voters tend not register for general elections. The ratio of electorate who voted to number registered was high in 1984 (77.6 percent), followed by 1999 (77.3 percent) and the lowest was in 1974, at 40.5 percent. Only about 57.6 percent of potential voters registered in 1999. The average voter turnout in the last eight elections stands at 66.7 percent.

The major concern is the poor participation in the democratic process as indicated by the 45 percent participation in the last eight years. This is the ratio of electorate who voted to potential voters. This means that about 55 percent of people eligible to vote do not participate in exercising their democratic right to choose their representatives and leaders through the ballot box.

The declining voter participation is not so much to do with socio-economic factors (IDEA:32). The decline is mainly due to the lack of appropriate and sufficient voter education. Voters need to be educated on their country's constitution, their right to vote and the importance of exercising that vote, and power that vote can have in shaping their lives. They need to be well informed about the electoral system and process, benefits and losses of not voting, as well as the importance of registering and actually voting. This information and knowledge should be disseminated to voters well before the election day to increase voter participation. To enable them make well-informed choices about their leaders and representatives in a democracy. The IEC would have to closely examine such issues and reconcile them with the constitution of the country, to ensure that they abide with the requirements of the constitution and to make Botswana's democracy a strong and long lasting one

Therefore, in conclusion, the government, the IEC, NGOs and political parties should aspire to work on the 55 percent of potential voters who did not participate in elections. This can be achieved by working on the factors that affect voter participating. That is by improving on the electoral system, ensure that voters receive the necessary education on democracy and elections through political parties, the media, NGOs, schools etc. as well educating them on the value of participating in the democratic process of selecting their leaders.

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