



Botswana

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Gaborone

Type of Government: Parliamentary Republic

Head of Government: President Festus Mogae
(since 1 April 1998)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Mompoti Merahfe

Population: 1,586,119

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 126

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Botswana's overall record of support for democratic governance abroad is **good**, particularly within the southern African sub-region. Since its independence in 1966, Botswana's sound governance, peaceful transitions of power, and well-regarded political leaders have given the country domestic credibility and stability. This internal strength, which has contributed to Botswana's image internationally as Africa's longest continuous multiparty democracy, has enabled it to speak out against anti-democratic violations abroad and to engage in effective conflict management during constitutional crises in other countries. The country's strong democratic record also makes up for a lack of geopolitical clout and military might, and allows Botswana to assume a leadership role on the continent that belies its small size.

Botswana's support for international democracy has been relatively consistent since 1992, with successive administrations becoming somewhat more willing to involve themselves at the diplomatic level in ongoing controversies and democratic challenges. To some extent, this trend has tracked changes in world political opinion, which has increasingly favored the policing of gross infractions of democracy and human rights in other countries, and retreated from strict interpretations of the principles of self-determination and of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of states.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

While Botswana is one of Africa's most highly-developed constitutional democracies, its foreign policy centers on the pragmatic objectives of security and economic development through regional integration and diversification of trade and technology sources. As such, it has sought to enhance the effectiveness of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a working vehicle for economic development, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, based on the principles of collective action and responsibility. Botswana seeks to play a role in reducing Africa's vulnerabilities and restoring its importance in the global economy through regional cooperation and growth-oriented strategies.

Botswana frequently has drawn on the prestige and capital it has acquired as a regional model of stability and democratic governance to exercise diplomatic leadership in the African and southern African region.¹ Over the past decade, Botswana has used a range of policy tools to express its disapproval of violations of democratic governance. These tools have included behind-the-scenes diplomatic pressure, credible threats of economic sanctions, participation in peacekeeping forces, and even military intervention. To enhance the effectiveness of its opposition to illegal overthrows, Botswana often has teamed up with other neighboring SADC members, particularly South Africa and Zimbabwe, to exert collective pressure. It has also supported multilateral efforts to impose sanctions on undemocratic regimes.

Given the turbulent history of southern Africa, regional stability and peacekeeping have featured heavily in Botswana's foreign policy, and they often have been the primary motives for its opposition to violations and reversals of democracy. The country is also concerned with perceived attempts by western or former colonial powers to dominate regional political affairs. Thus, as a way to signal its refusal to cave in to diplomatic prescriptions developed outside the continent, Botswana sometimes has been less willing to join



western nations in condemning anti-democratic actions. Botswana's weak response to the political crisis in Zimbabwe is a prime example of this.

Botswana rarely has severed diplomatic or trade relations in response to a state's violation of democratic principles, reflecting both the pragmatic nature of its economic policies, as well as the reality of its geopolitical position as a state with far less military capacity than, for example, its neighbors in South Africa and Zimbabwe. For example, although the government was openly critical of South African apartheid and of white minority governments in general, it never cut trade ties with South Africa, feeling that such a move might have unhinged or even devastated the Botswanan economy. With his background as a former IMF economist and governor of the Bank of Botswana, current President Festus Mogae is one of a line of technocratic Botswanan leaders who, since independence, have tried to manage the challenges facing this diamond-driven, middle-income economy primarily in terms of economic development and sound fiscal and monetary policy.²

A special circumstance facing Botswana is its burden of having one of the world's highest HIV/AIDS infection rates, which is forcing the government to address the mounting challenge of remaining fiscally solvent in the face of rapidly rising health costs and a shrinking workforce.³ In the near- and medium-terms, this urgent concern is likely to continue to influence Botswana's policy agenda in the direction of greater pragmatism, as well as to preoccupy its leaders with domestic rather than foreign issues.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Botswana's response to the illegal overthrow of democratic governments abroad has been good overall, particularly within the southern African region where it has more political leverage.

When Lesotho's King Letsie III seized power in a military-backed coup, Botswana, together with leaders from South Africa and Zimbabwe, intervened by using diplomatic pressure and the threat of sanctions to force Letsie to back down and ultimately restore constitutional government in 1996. Two years later, civil war broke out again in Lesotho following elections. In addition to meeting behind the scenes with Lesotho leaders in concerted negotiations, Botswana and South Africa sent a joint military force into Lesotho to restore order, working

under the auspices of SADC as a legitimizing structure.

The international community, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU), widely condemned Colonel Ibrahim Mainassara's overthrow of Niger President Mahamane Ousmane in 1996. However, other than including its voice in denunciations expressed by different organizations, such as that of the OAU, Botswana did not issue its own separate condemnation of the coup, nor did it downgrade its ties with the new regime. Botswana's response to the 1999 coup in Cote d'Ivoire, in which President Henri Konan Bédié was overthrown and the political opposition was persecuted, was similar to its reaction to the coup in Niger. The OAU immediately issued a strong condemnation of the coup as "a serious and unacceptable step backwards" and urged "a rapid return to constitutional order." Yet the Mogae Administration played no visible role in the continental expression of disapproval, even though the OAU also called on member-states to individually denounce the coup. Botswana has, however, been relatively critical of regime overthrows in Nigeria. In addition, during the Abacha regime, it condemned the killing of innocent civilians.

These reactions reflect a typical pattern for Botswana: in opposing overthrows of democratic rule, it has tended to respond more vigorously to democratic infractions in neighboring states, and less so or not at all in countries further away. Botswana has regarded regional democratic reversals not only as actions that undermine democratic norms but also as potentially destabilizing and threatening to its own security.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Botswana has played an active role in opposing electoral manipulations abroad. Its record of condemning stolen elections, criticizing flawed voting, and helping to monitor voter registration and other electoral processes has been good, although disappointing in the case of Zimbabwe. As a member of the Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of SADC countries, Botswana has participated in numerous election observation missions within the region, as well as received them. It has also sought to improve and professionalize the ECF's monitoring and evaluation processes.

In May 2001 President Mogae, together with South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, began to exert collective diplomatic pressure on Zambian President



Frederick Chiluba after Chiluba expelled his vice-president and eight other cabinet ministers from the ruling party for opposing his plans to specially amend party rules so he could run for an unconstitutional third term. Eventually Chiluba relinquished his plan.

In Nigeria, Botswana has played an active role in promoting electoral transparency. For example, in 1999 former Botswanan president Sir Ketumile Masire led a 23-member Commonwealth Election Observer Group to monitor Nigeria's first independently conducted parliamentary and presidential elections since 1983. The flawed elections and violence that erupted in Cote d'Ivoire in 1999 and 2000 did not attract the same kind of concern from Botswana. Cote d'Ivoire has neither the strategic importance of Nigeria nor the regional proximity of Zambia.

Though most other democracies outside southern Africa strongly criticized the controversial Zimbabwean election in March 2002, the Mogae Administration took a more ambivalent stance on the entire controversy. Foreign Affairs Minister Mompoti Merafhe was more vocal and critical than his colleagues in both SADC and Commonwealth meetings. At a SADC summit in September 2001 to discuss Zimbabwe, Mogae joined Mbeki, Namibia's Sam Nujoma, and others to set up a Ministerial Task Force to monitor party interactions in Zimbabwe. Despite earlier tough statements, however, the task force's final communiqué in December offered a glowing assessment of the situation in Zimbabwe. Overlooking arbitrary detentions of journalists and members of parliament, widely reported torture, attacks on white farmers, and the negative report of the Parliamentary Forum, it welcomed "the improved atmosphere of calm and stability" and said "the few reported incidents were being dealt with under the criminal justice system, in accordance with the rule of law."⁴ President Mogae, along with Namibian Prime Minister Hage Geingob and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, also declared his country's support for Mugabe. SADC has been unable to reach a consensus on whether there were ballot irregularities during the presidential election process in Zimbabwe and, in April 2002, formally announced its support for Mugabe's controversial land reform policy.

Botswana's reluctance to condemn Mugabe more forthrightly seems to reflect larger issues, however. First, the land expropriation issue is laden with high levels of emotional symbolism, and Britain's strong opposition appears to have triggered

old feelings of resentment against colonialism, with formerly colonized states instinctively rejecting the idea of diplomacy prescribed from outside the region by western powers.⁵ A second factor affecting Botswana's position with regards to Zimbabwe is its traditionally strong preference for proceeding under the auspices of SADC, or some subset of it. With SADC succumbing to the pro-Mugabe, anti-colonialist line, Botswanan policy has followed suit.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Botswana has frequently capitalized on its international status as a model democracy to promote democracy abroad, and its record on this note is good. Former president Ketumile Masire, as the facilitator of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, has been extensively involved in peace talks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and has launched mediation efforts between the country's warring parties, a critical step toward building a democratic peace.⁶ Botswana has hosted several international conferences on democracy and human rights, and is a member of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) with like-minded states such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. It has received large numbers of anti-apartheid activists as political refugees from both Namibia and South Africa, and is an active member of many organizations that have democracy-related activities, including the Global Coalition for Africa and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, of which it has served in the past as chair.⁷ Within the southern African region, Botswana has worked actively toward economic and political integration and, often in conjunction with South Africa, has sought to make SADC a viable vehicle for economic development, preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, and good governance. Finally, Botswana is a party to most international human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It is also a signatory to the Harare Declaration of 1992 on non-acceptance of Non-Democratically Elected Governments and the OAU Algiers Declaration.

Botswana's voting record at the United Nations on democracy promotion is mixed. In the General Assembly, it has sometimes voted to condemn human rights abuses, but sometimes not. For example, in 1999 it joined 88 other states to pass



a UN resolution condemning the human rights situation in the Sudan, and it has also voted to condemn the human rights situation in Nigeria. However, it joined several other African states in abstaining from a resolution adopted in 1995 to condemn the human rights situation in Kosovo. It endorsed the Warsaw Declaration and the December 2001 UNGA Resolution on Promoting Democracy.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Botswana has not shown as much concern about entrenched dictatorships as it has towards other kinds of anti-democratic infractions. As a southern African state, Botswana is keenly aware that some western democracies at one point supported divisive regimes such as apartheid South Africa. This set of background issues, along with the fact that the country has felt itself somewhat in the shadow of the region's bigger players, has led it to express disapproval of entrenched or repressive dictatorships more through formal resolutions in collective bodies such as the UN, than via unilateral condemnations.

Even at the UN, Botswana has tended to abstain from condemnations of some entrenched

dictatorships, abstaining for example from voting in a December 2000 General Assembly resolution to condemn Iran's human rights record.⁸ In a November 1992 resolution to end the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, Botswana, along with 45 other states, refrained from voting.⁹ However, on the same issue eight years later, with world opinion increasingly turning against the continuance of a U.S. embargo, Botswana joined a very large majority (including such previous abstainers as South Africa) to vote for the resolution. Thus, in addition to an ideological outlook that differs somewhat from that of western countries, international opinion, prior history, trade dependence, and the relative power of the state against whom one is voting are all factors that help explain the willingness or reluctance of Botswana to criticize an entrenched dictatorship.

The Masire and Mogae regimes have supported democracy-promoting activities such as electoral monitoring in Nigeria, but they have not sought to isolate or impose economic sanctions on Nigeria during its periods of dictatorship. The same is true for the dictatorship in the Sudan, a country where civil war has killed more than two million.

¹ In Botswana, foreign policy is managed and overseen by the office of the president, which has been occupied by democratically-elected leaders. The current President, Festus Mogae, recently was recognized by the Africa-America Institute with its highest honor—the National Leadership Award, conferred only once before, to Nelson Mandela—at its Annual Awards Dinner at the UN on 17 Sep. 2002, for serving as “a model of democratic, responsive and courageous political leadership.”
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200209060275.html>.

² Botswana's well-known Five-Year Rolling National Development Plans powerfully suggest the centrality of economics to its policy agenda, the long-term continuity of these policies, and the linkages between good governance and economic development.

³ Nicholas Eberstadt. “The Population Implosion.” *Foreign Policy* (March-April 2001). Between 1990 and 2000, life expectancy in Botswana fell from approximately 64 years to approximately 39 years. Recent projections envision a life expectancy of about 33 years by 2025.

⁴ Amnesty International. *Zimbabwe Memorandum to the SADC on the Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Zimbabwe*. AFR 46/004/2002. London: 2002. A report released by Human Rights Forum in December 2001 also stated that there had been 115 cases of torture and six political killings in Zimbabwe in November.

⁵ “Recent SADC Meeting Crucial.” *The Herald* Harare: 8 Feb. 2002. Mbeki has criticized what he says is a narrow focus on Zimbabwe at the expense of the Angolan war, the conflict in the DRC, and western control of international commodity prices. At a SADC summit in Blantyre, Malawi in February 2002, Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkapa recounted, with some satisfaction, that Baroness Amos, the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, had personally telephoned him and tried but failed to persuade him not to support Zimbabwe at the meeting or at the upcoming Commonwealth summit in Australia, and that following her failure, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw had personally called him and also been soundly rebuffed.



⁶ In the conflict resolution area, Botswana has also offered its Permanent Representative to the UN, Joseph Legwaila, to the UN Secretary General to serve as the Secretary General's Special Representative for the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. In the early 1990s, Legwaila served a similar role in Namibia.

⁷ The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group consists of foreign affairs ministers charged with investigating violations of democratic governance principles that contravene the Harare Declaration of 1991. The Global Coalition for Africa is an intergovernmental policy forum consisting of an alliance of African and industrialized countries that works to promote African development.

⁸ Analysis reveals that the voting pattern on this resolution roughly followed geopolitical lines, with northern industrialized economies generally voting in favor of the condemnation, and Mideast and other countries with large Muslim populations, together with many African and Latin American states, voting against it or choosing to abstain.

⁹ It should be noted that many other African states did vote to end the embargo, including: Angola, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.