

Vision Delayed? The BNF's Uneasy Path to Unity in Action

Jeff Ramsay* 

Abstract

In 2024, the Botswana National Front (BNF) was elected to power as the leading partner within the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC). Founded in 1965, the same year the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) first assumed power, the BNF had been Botswana's leading opposition movement for most of its history. The Front's failure to come to power earlier can be attributed to its inability to achieve its coalition-building ambitions before its 2012 affiliation with the UDC. In this respect, the ultimate triumph of the UDC has been hailed as a delayed realisation of the BNF's original mission to remove the BDP from power through a revolutionary multi-organisational front. However, time will tell to what extent the UDC government will live up to the egalitarian ideals espoused by the BNF's founders.

Keywords: united front, Kenneth Koma, Botswana National Front, Umbrella for Democratic Change, Bathoen II, Botswana

Introduction

For the first three decades of its existence, the Botswana National Front (BNF) evolved from a minor presence in the 1966 local elections to being on the verge of achieving state power by 1994. Its progress during these formative years highlighted its ability to attract support as a political home for ideologically diverse groups that ranged from conservative supporters of traditional Setswana monarchist leadership to advocates for marginalised ethno-linguistic communities and followers of various shades of Marxist thought.

However, after a near victory in 1994, the movement was destabilised by destructive schisms. Having initially grown as an amalgamation of politically disparate groups, the BNF suffered its most significant split in 1998, despite its membership having seemingly reached

* Jeff Ramsay, Livingstone Kolobeng College, Gaborone. Email: jefframsaybots@gmail.com

a post-Cold War consensus in their embrace of a reformist centre-left 'Social Democratic Programme'. Given this paradox, some argue that the Front's bitter factionalism was rooted in the individual failings of its collective leadership rather than in ideological differences. Such analysis downplays the importance of conflicting understandings among its members over the nature and ongoing relevance of its founding vision as a vehicle for 'national democratic revolution', as defined by the movement's 'basic document', *Pamphlet No. 1* (Koma c. 1965). Time will reveal whether the Front's current leadership has succeeded in resolving its internal contradictions.

The above themes are explored in the paper in the form of a chronological narrative beginning with an examination of the visionary role of Dr Koma in defining the nature of the BNF as a United Front. Subsequent sections explore the recurrent challenges faced by the Front's often-fractionious leadership in maintaining institutional cohesion as Botswana's leading opposition movement prior to its 2012 affiliation within the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC).

Dr Koma's Vision

On 30 October 2024, the BNF rose to power as it was the leading coalition partner within the winning UDC. Given Botswana's first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system and a fragmented multiparty political scene, the UDC secured 36 of the 61 directly elected seats in the National Assembly, including the 23 won by BNF candidates, with just over 37 per cent of the popular vote. As the Umbrella's presidential candidate, BNF leader Duma Gideon Boko became the country's sixth president. In addition to benefiting from the decline in support for the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which had dropped from 52.7 per cent in 2019 to 30.5 per cent in 2024 (Independent Electoral Commission, IEC, 2019, 2024), the Front's rise to power reflected long-term political persistence. With its slogan 'Kopano ke Maatla' (Unity is Strength), the BNF had been formed as an instrument:

To unite the different communities in Bechuanaland on the basis of full equality in order to struggle effectively for national independence as contrasted with the nominal independence, to build a united Botswana nation and to mobilise the masses of all the communities in Botswana making them an integral part of the national liberation movement in Africa for real independence and Pan African unity of the continent (Nengwekhulu 1979: 71).

Notwithstanding such lofty aspirations, for many years, realising the Front's rhetorical commitment to broad-based 'unity in action' proved to be elusive, as reflected in the relevant literature (Maundeni, 1998; Molomo 2000; Osie-Hwedie 2001; Makgala 2003, 2005; Maundeni (ed.) 2005; Molefe and Dzimbiri 2006; Selowane and Shale 2006; Sebudubudu and Osie-Hwedie 2010; Sebudubudu and Molutsi 2011; Tutwane 2012; Lotshwao 2015; Seabo and Masilo 2018). The Front's 2024 success within the Umbrella has been seen as the long-overdue fulfilment of the 1960s vision of its founding figure, Dr Gaobamong Kenneth Shololo Koma, of creating an electoral united front to challenge the ruling BDP. From its founding until he left the movement in 2003, Koma was the BNF's dominant personality and ideological leader. He first served as the movement's executive member for External and National Affairs before becoming the BNF's vice president in 1970 and president from 1977 to 2001.

Koma became a political activist in the late 1940s, when he participated in the Non-European Unity Movement and the African National Congress (ANC) while studying at University of Cape Town, where he earned a BA in English and Psychology (BNF 50th Anniversary Committee 2015). In the early 1950s, he briefly taught at Moeng College in the Bamangwato tribal territory and worked at the medical stores in Serowe. During that period, he was associated with the Bamangwato National Congress, a group of educated individuals who united to protest the colonial regime's banishment of their prince and heir to the Bangwato *bogosi* (chieftaincy), Seretse Khama, because of his marriage across the colour bar.

Koma's local activism was interrupted when, in 1954, he received a scholarship to study law, which enabled him to earn an LLB at the University of Nottingham. During his time in England, he visited Seretse and his wife Ruth Khama at least once, shortly before their return to Botswana in 1956, but did not become close to the couple. As a member of the emerging African political intelligentsia, his movements were closely monitored throughout his overseas studies. A 1956 intelligence report from Serowe expressed concern that he might follow Seretse's example by marrying a white Englishwoman; this was a false alarm that reflects the racial paranoia then prevalent among elements within the Bechuanaland Protectorate (BP) administration (Botswana National Archive, BNA, DCN 9/5, 1956; BNA DCN 9/6, 1956, 1957).

By then, Koma's political thinking differed from that of Seretse Khama and most of the other small group of overseas Batswana students of his generation. By 1958, he had adopted a Marxist worldview, which led him to pursue further education at Charles University in Prague, in then

Communist-ruled Czechoslovakia. There, he became the secretary of the Union of African Students, while maintaining contact with and forwarding literature to an extensive network of Batswana back home. In this context, he was seen by the British as the potential leader of the Bechuanaland Congress Party (not to be confused with the later BCP formed in 1998), as a radical influence within the Bechuanaland Protectorate Students Association, and as a key overseas contact for Basotho and Batswana Communists (BNA DCN 9/4, 1957; BNA DCN 9/3, 1959–1961; BNA OP H 196/6, 1962).

At Charles University, Koma earned a Master of Arts in History, Philosophy, and Political Economy by writing a thesis on the Vietnamese political struggle that notably highlighted the organisational success of Ho Chi Minh's National United Front, which formed the basis of his posthumously published book on the topic (Koma 2016). On a personal level, he married a Czech woman, Jan Voegolova, who accompanied him to the Soviet Union in late 1962. There, in 1964, he became the first African student to earn a doctorate at the African Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences. His Political Science PhD thesis was titled 'Lessons of the Congo, 1960–63' (Solodovnikov 1966; Desai 1968).

In early 1965, Koma returned home from Moscow, via Beijing and Dar-es-Salaam, having been away for just over a decade. He was thus present to witness the BDP's electoral triumph in the territory's first universal suffrage elections, when the party took 28 out of the 31 directly elected seats, with 80 per cent of the popular vote (Ramsay 1998a, 1998b; Tafa, 2015). Bitterly divided since a 1962 inter-party power struggle, the BDP's principal opponents, the Botswana People's Party (BPP), which had garnered 14 per cent of the vote and three seats, and its breakaway, the Botswana Independence Party (BIP), with just 5 per cent of the vote and no seats, had been thoroughly routed (Ramsay 1993; Gossett and Lotshwao 2009). Having characterised the BDP's victory as a product of neo-colonialism, Koma interpreted the outcome as a challenge to forge a multi-organisational united front that would 'mobilise all patriotic and democratic forces into a dynamic political force' capable of engaging in a 'National Democratic struggle' against the 'pro-imperialist BDP regime' (Koma c. 1965).

During his time in the Soviet Union, Koma stayed informed about the disintegration of the original BPP through correspondence and contact with a handful of visiting Batswana trade unionists. One of these, Fish Keitseng, would later recall:

I stayed with him for a couple of days after the conference meetings were finished. We mostly discussed Bechuanaland politics and the

problems between Matante, Motsete, Mpho, and the others. Koma wanted to know what was happening, so I told him all I knew. We were both agreeing that disunity was killing the ordinary people's politics. It was then that we first discussed building a United Front. Koma wanted to build an alliance between the BPP factions and the trade unions to oppose the BDP, which was being backed by the British. Before I left Russia, Koma gave me three letters addressed to Matante, Mpho, and Motsete, offering his services in an effort to build the United Front. But the party leaders continued to act for themselves instead of the workers, which is why they lost to the BDP (Morton and Ramsay 1999: 106–107).

In the immediate aftermath of the BDP's landslide victory, Koma began shaping his vision of a united front among opposition parties and other disaffected groups in society. This latter group notably included passed over veterans such as Kgamemang Tumediso Motsete and Leetile D Raditladi, along with an emerging group of traditional leaders who were anxious about their loss of authority under the 1963 constitution that replaced the 1961 Legislative Council framework. Among these were the Kgosi Linchwe II of the Bakgatla ba Kgafela, who provided Koma with an office, and Seepapitso (IV) Gaseitsiwe, then the heir to his father, Kgosi Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse. Seepapitso had begun forming his own political party, the Botswana National Union (BNU), in the vain hope that it would serve as a platform for his participation in the upcoming independence negotiations.

In April 1965, Koma consolidated the different elements of his outreach for the first time. On-and-off discussions continued over the next six months, usually taking place in Mochudi under Linchwe's patronage. The BP's Special Branch closely monitored the progress, out of concern that Koma was seeking a 'now classically Communist system of first establishing an overall "Front" Secretariat' that 'by rigging [would] eventually gain complete and dictatorial control over the opposition' (BNA OP 1/8/3035, 16 August 1967, with additional Special Branch reporting 1965–1969; also, BNA OP 1/8/2992).

In August 1965, 'The Man from Moscow', the first of a series of widely circulated pamphlets, published in Setswana and English, began to appear demonising Koma and his nascent movement/ It was followed by two more pamphlets: 'Khama and the Millipedes' in November and 'Bechuanaland and Independence' in December 1965. The leaflets are thought to have been produced by the Apartheid Regime with covert internal support from sympathetic members of the Bechuanaland Security Services (Parsons *et al.* 1995; Tafa 2016).

Ultimately, neither the BPP leader, Phillip Matante, nor the BIP leader, Motsamai Mpho, were willing to form a political alliance with either Koma or each other, while Seepapitso's BNU faded. However, many of their followers had joined the BNF by the time of its inaugural conference in Mochudi on 3 October 1965. Linchwe opened the meeting but later withdrew, on the grounds that his royal position precluded him from active participation in partisan politics. One of the *kgosi*'s confidants, Ridwell 'Ray' Molomo, was nominated *in absentia* as party president but declined the role in order to retain his status as a civil servant. His place was filled by Daniel Kangangwani Kwele, a well-known educator and supporter of Ikalanga empowerment; having been elected vice president, Kwele stepped in to serve as the movement's first president. Unlike Molomo, Kwele chose to resign from his government teaching job to become a full-time political activist. In addition to Molomo, Kwele, and Koma, the BNF Central Committee, as elected on 10 October 1965, consisted of Bernard Letsididi as secretary-general, deputised by Henderson Tlhoiwe, Seth Setiko as organiser, Ronald Letsholonyane as publicity secretary, and Kitchener Moletsane, Anderson Tshephe, Jon Kalane, Clement Setshwane, Fish Keitseng, and Klass Motshidisi as additional members.

As an executive member for External and National Affairs, Koma initially served as the Front's *de facto* chief organiser and publicist. In this capacity, he authored a series of pamphlets explaining the new group's nature and goals. He began with *Pamphlet No. 1*, 'The Botswana National Front, its Character and Tasks' (Koma c. 1965), which became the movement's 'Basic Document'. Other titles included 'The National Question', 'Education in Black Africa', 'The Second Phase of the African Revolution has Begun', and 'Chieftainship in Crisis'.

In his writings, Koma placed the BNF's commitment to the National Democratic Revolution within the Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialist tradition, as espoused by Vladimir Lenin in his seminal *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Lenin 1917); and grounded in his and RN Roy's, 'Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions' adopted in July 1920 at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern; Lenin and Roy 1921). As elsewhere, the theses served as a guiding framework for multi-organisational cooperation in the region, decades before the 1950s Congress Alliance and the emergence of liberation movements in the 1960s. In their various twentieth-century iterations, such United Fronts tended to conform to the 'two-stage theory' associated with Lenin and refined and championed by Mao Zedong and other revolutionaries who have emphasised the need to overthrow colonialism as an essential step towards a transition to socialism.

In addition to the National and Colonial theses, and its adoption of the ‘Twenty-one Points’, Comintern’s 1920 Congress was a turning point for Ivon Jones’ landmark contribution on ‘Communism in South Africa’, with its trenchant critique of the economic and social function of ‘native labour reserves’, including Bechuanaland, in sustaining Imperial Capital (South African Communist Party 1981). Jones’ submission was followed by further pioneering analysis by such early Comrades as Albert Nzula, Maphutseng Lefela, and Kanye born Lee Thelesho Leepile (Leepile 1926–1935; Nzula *et. al.* 1979; Edgar 2017). Having championed communist opposition to Bechuanaland’s incorporation into South Africa, in 1934 Leepile called for an independent ‘Botsoana’ people’s republic that ‘would take control of the railway, abolish debts to white traders, and establish elected tribal councils while working with progressive Dikgosi’ (Leepile 1926–1935, 21 July 1934). At the time, he also joined fellow Communist Party of South Africa Central Committee member Lazar Bach in setting forth a wider vision of a future Soviet Federation or Union of Southern African Republics (Leepile 1926–1935, 5 May 1934; Simons and Simons, 1969: 473; Allison 1991: 230). Koma’s vision of a multi-organisational united front thus conformed to a locally grounded universal revolutionary tradition.

The BNF made its electoral debut during the 1966 local council elections, fielding seven candidates in various constituencies out of the 165 contested seats, without success. Their best-performing candidate was Fish Keitseng, who received 36.1 per cent of the votes in Peleng East. The other pioneer BNF candidates were S Mathangwane in Mathangwane with 30.8 per cent, Henderson Tlhoiwe in Ramotswa West with 13.9 per cent, Abram Motsumi in Ramotswa South with 10.3 per cent, Rapula Sello in Morwa with 6.5 per cent, R Sinombe in Mmathethe with 3.0 per cent, and S Nkele in Bophirima ward, Mochudi, with 2.9 per cent. The overall election outcome saw 136 seats won by the BDP (75 of which were unopposed), 21 by the BPP, five by the BIP, and three by independents (Gosset and Lotshwao 2009).

Following the poll, the BNF Central Committee was reshuffled with only Kwele and Koma retaining their positions. George Kgake became vice president, with Henderson Tlhoiwe as secretary-general, deputised by Pretty Molefe, S Mathangwane as treasurer, Klass Motshidisi in charge of Social Affairs, and Obonetse ‘OK’ Menyatso, Samson Gower, Serogola Seretse, and Molefane Waleboa as additional members (Tafa 2016).

Sedition Case and Apartheid Regime Interference

Despite the BNF's modest initial ballot showing, members of Botswana's first government, like the British administration before them, viewed the Front as a threat. This perception was evident in an August 1967 memorandum from the head of the Police Special Branch, W.S. Grant (BNA OP 1/8/3035, 16 August 1967). The report noted that Koma 'had been thoroughly indoctrinated in Communism' before his return to Botswana. It went on to describe the BNF as a communist conspiracy with Koma as the 'controller', whose aim was to gain 'complete and dictatorial control over the opposition' by co-opting leading *dikgosi*, trade unionists, civil servants, and students through Socialist Bloc scholarships, as well as BPP and BIP activists. In November 1967, police raided the BNF office in Mahalapye, and seized correspondence and literature, including copies of the Front's newsletter *Puo Phaa* (Straight Talk). In the aftermath of the raid, sedition charges were filed against Central Committee members Koma, Molefe, Menyatso, Tlhoiwe, and Motshidisi, based on *Puo Phaa* content (BNA OP 1/8/3035, Police reports December 1967–June 1968; Parsons *et al.* 1995: 267–268). During its opening session in 1968, Parliament, overriding objections from BPP opposition members, retroactively endorsed the raid by passing the hastily formulated *Printed Publications Act* of 1968, which required the registration of all periodicals (Botswanalaws.com 1968).

If the *Puo-Phaa*-based prosecution aimed to derail the emerging BNF, it had the opposite effect. Instead, the government's heavy-handed actions united its critics and others concerned about the implications for Botswana's newly established democracy. There was a surge of support for the Front from a diverse group of individuals through petitions and financial contributions to its legal defence fund. By the time the case was dropped in July 1968, the BNF had enhanced its international and domestic profile (Parsons *et al.* 1995: 267–269, 278).

On 12 August 1968, the Apartheid regime made its first attempt to infiltrate the Front when an agent approached Koma in Mahalapye, claiming to represent potential financiers wishing to meet with members of the BNF leadership (BNF 2004). The following day, having informed others of the approach, Koma, accompanied by Dikobe Otumetse with Rapula Sello serving as driver, left Mahalapye to rendezvous with the said financiers at the President Hotel in Gaborone. There they met with two individuals, identified as Jan Van Niekerk and Jacobus Nel, who claimed to be business executives from South Africa. The two claimed they were already financing Leabua Jonathan's Basotho National Party in Lesotho and politicians in Swaziland (Eswatini), and they could provide similar

financial aid to the BNF if Koma agreed to step back from active politics and act as a 'consultant'. In return, the agents expressed their willingness to supply six vehicles for the upcoming election campaign. They would also pay drivers and full-time campaign organisers, and instruct filling stations to service the party's vehicles. In what appeared to be an attempt to bribe Koma, the pair also proposed purchasing a wholesale dealership in Mahalapye for the party's benefit. At that time, the BNF reportedly only had a small 'office in Mahalapye with two typewriters, duplicating machines, some stools, and numerous books' (BNF 2004).

Immediately after the encounter, Koma convened a meeting of BNF members at Frank Marumo's house in Gaborone, where a consensus was reached that the offer be rejected. Koma was further tasked with preparing a detailed report about the matter for the next BNF Congress, ensuring the incident's documentation. Despite this rejection, there would be further attempts by South African agents to infiltrate the BNF into the 1970s.

Comrade B2

Dikgosi Bathoen II, Linchwe II, and Neale Sechele (of the Bakwena) were among the prominent individuals who had supported the *Puo Phaa* legal defence fund. Thereafter, Koma led a group of executives to speak with the *dikgosi*. These discussions were rewarded by Kgosi Bathoen's decision to run as a BNF candidate in the 1969 elections. In a November 1968 statement to members of the House of Chiefs, President Seretse Khama affirmed that, while there is 'no express prohibition on the chiefs to take part in politics in our laws', the government believed that any chief or traditional leader wishing to participate in politics must first resign their chieftaincy (Parsons *et al.* 1995: 278). By agreeing to abdicate, Bathoen established a precedent that lasted until 1998, when Seretse's son, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, became a BDP member of Parliament (MP) without renouncing his status as Bangwato *kgosi*.

Bathoen II's shift from *kgosi* to 'Comrade B2' was a pivotal moment for the Front's efforts to gain a wider electoral support ahead of the 1969 elections. By then, he had already established himself as one of Botswana's foremost twentieth-century leaders. From 1928, when he assumed the Bangwaketse throne, until his death in 1990 he maintained a critical stance towards colonial and later post-colonial authority. Only eight years old when he witnessed his father's assassination in 1916, he was cared for by his grandmother, Gagoangwe, and aunt, Ntebogang Ratshosa, both of whom also served as his regent. After graduating from Lovedale Secondary School in South Africa's Cape Province, he was eager to continue his studies, but, at the age of 18, was pressured to take the

throne (Morton and Ramsay 1987; Ramsay 2011). Following his cousin Kgosi Sebele II's (of the Bakwena) extrajudicial detention in 1931, Bathoen began questioning Britain's legal authority over the internal affairs of local *merafe* (tribes). This led him to join the Bangwato regent, Tshekedi Khama (1926–1959), in raising the issue with the colonial secretary of state and the British Parliament. When their protests failed, the two challenged the high commissioner's powers in court. Although the High Court ruled against them in 1936, the colonial government agreed to negotiate a settlement, which resulted in the Native Administration Proclamation of 1943 (Crowder 1985; Morton and Ramsay 1987; Otlhogile 1993).

Within Gangwaketse, Bathoen promoted community development initiatives, notably establishing in 1929 a tribal public health programme, two decades before the British National Health Service was introduced. His involvement in public works included founding schools, such as Seepapitso II Secondary School and the territory's first Teacher Training College, along with school feeding programmes, water and irrigation schemes, and other infrastructure projects. Other initiatives included forming co-operative societies, establishing the territory's first library and museum, promoting mining in Moshaneng and Kgwakgwe, and organising annual agricultural shows and sports tournaments (Schapera 1970; Ramsay 2016).

For many years, Bathoen chaired the African Advisory Council (called the Native Advisory Council until 1939), where his early nationalist vision was reflected in his proposal for a territorial flag and public holiday, Protectorate Day, on 30 September. Fearing South African annexation, he lobbied for the creation of a separate Bechuanaland military unit under direct British command during the Second World War. From 1950, he also served on the multiracial Joint Advisory Council, where he joined others in pushing for limited self-rule through the creation of a Legislative Council. Although other imperial territories had such 'Legcos', the British hesitated in the case of Bechuanaland while the issue of South African incorporation remained unresolved. In 1952, Bathoen and Tshekedi further proposed unifying Botswana under a self-governing 'Federated African Authority'. In 1958, Britain finally approved the formation of the Legco, thereby marking the start of the modern era of multiparty politics. As a non-partisan Legco member until its replacement by the National Assembly and House of Chiefs in 1965, Bathoen played an active part in the drafting of Botswana's 1963 constitution and in the subsequent Independence negotiations (Fawcus and Tilbury 2000). Apart from his discontent with the ineffectual nature of the House of Chiefs, legislation that diminished the authority and independence of traditional leadership,

such as the Tribal Land and Matimela Acts, spurred Bathoen's post-Independence conflict with the government. Still favouring the organisation of Botswana as a tribal federation, Bathoen was attracted by Koma's proposal in *Pamphlet No. 1* to replace Botswana's existing Parliament with a two-house system under which there would be:

A house of Parliament to which members would be elected in the usual Western Democratic fashion and a House of Nationalities which would follow Batswana traditions as closely as possible and in which the different tribal and ethnic groups would be represented by an equal number of members (Koma c. 1965).

Where the views of the two houses conflicted, the House of Nationalities would take precedence. The nature and status of the House of Nationalities would remain a vexing issue within the BNF for decades, with the concept evolving further to include the promise of additional civil society members.

The alliance between Dr Koma and ex-Kgosi Bathoen II bore fruit in Botswana's second general election, which was held in October 1969. In a strategic but controversial move, Bathoen, rather than Daniel Kwele, was put forward as the BNF presidential candidate. This gambit gave rise to internal dissension, notwithstanding Kwele's problematic assertion that if the Front came to power, he would act as a sort of Prime Minister, heading the government while Bathoen would be relegated to serving as a ceremonial head of state (Makgala 2003). As it was, Kwele was unsuccessful in his bid for the Nkange Constituency, coming in third with 10.6 per cent of the vote. On election day, the Front finished a distant second to the BDP with 13.5 per cent of the popular vote, which secured the Front three constituencies in the Southern District, along with 22 local council seats concentrated in Gaborone, Kweneng, and Southern District. The BNF had contested a total of 21 parliamentary and 71 local council seats. In Kanye South, Bathoen defeated the then Vice President Quett Masire by a margin of 1,245 to 505 votes, resulting in Masire having to return to Parliament as a Specially Elected member. The Front also won Kanye North through M Yane with 1,607 votes and Ngwaketse-Kgalagadi through Patrick Tshane who got 2,030 votes (Supervisor of Elections 1970). Outside the Southern District, the BNF was only able to secure significant support in the Lobatse-Barolong Farms with O Maruloa securing 1,026 votes and Gaborone-Ramotswa where P Motsumi managed to secure 1,255 votes. The BDP vote declined from its 1965 all-time high of 80.4 per cent to 68.2 per cent (Supervisor of Elections 1970).

During the campaign, the BDP targeted Bathoen for his ties with Apartheid 'homeland' leaders. The BDP campaign specifically alleged that the former *kgosi* wanted to merge Botswana with the emerging Bophuthatswana homeland, and claimed that the key symbol adopted by the BNF as its electoral emblem represented a desire to open the border gate at Ramatlabama. Masire thus characterised the Front as 'an unholy alliance of tribalists [Kwele], feudalists [Bathoen], and would-be Marxists [Koma]', while accusing Bathoen of wanting to turn Botswana into a 'Tswanastan, a society in which Chiefs rule in barren homelands' (Morton and Ramsay 1994: 32–33). Bathoen openly supported a more accommodating relationship with the Apartheid and the rebel Rhodesian regimes. While Masire spoke of the need to help 'our oppressed brothers in Rhodesia', Bathoen told the *Rand Daily Mail* that 'We live in a glass house and cannot afford to throw stones' (Morton and Ramsay 1994: 32–33). Yet, as much as the BDP hoped to tarnish the BNF with Bathoen's cross-border sympathies, the BDP campaign concentrated on domestic matters. While Masire warned against 'the revival of feudal privileges and the reassertion of arbitrary political authority', Bathoen criticised the government's approach to development (Morton and Ramsay 1994: 32–33). 'Civilisation', he told Seretse Khama, 'was the development of one's character and not leaving home to build slums' (Morton and Ramsay 1994: 32–33).

Bathoen II's views on cross-border relations were diametrically opposed to the BNF's identity as an anti-imperialist united front aligned with the regional liberation struggle. Despite this, he cultivated support among comrades with his patriotic fervour and empathy for ordinary Batswana. Beyond his demeanour, his record of public service subverts facile assumptions about the feudal or reactionary nature of traditional Setswana governance. Besides differing on federalism and sharing an appreciation for the continued relevance of *bogosi*, the progressive and traditionalist factions within the Front found common ground on land issues. Notwithstanding Koma's characterisation of *bogosi* as a form of feudal overlordship within a semi-feudal society, *Pamphlet No. 1* acknowledged the communal nature of indigenous landholding: 'The soil which entombs the bodies of our ancestors was the common property of the living and the dead' (Koma c. 1965).

The 1970 and 1973 BNF Conferences

Not everyone accepted Bathoen's leadership. In December 1969, two newly elected BNF councillors defected to the BDP, claiming that the Front had lost direction. In January 1970 Daniel Kwele resigned to rejoin

the civil service, and he called the BNF a 'tribal front' as opposed to a national front (Makgala 2003). In 1979, Kwele was Specially Elected as a BDP member of Parliament, and he briefly served as an assistant minister in 1981. Incompatibility with the BDP way of doing things led to him subsequently leaving the party to form the Botswana Progressive Union (BPU; Masire 2006). In the period leading up to and following the BNF's April 1970 conference, additional members, especially from the Northeast, also left the Front, after raising concerns about tribalism, opportunism, and intellectual dishonesty within the movement (Makgala 2003). The 1970 conference was held in Kanye, allegedly at Bathoen's insistence, where the former *kgosi* was confirmed as the BNF president, with Koma becoming vice president (Maundeni 1998; Makgala 2003).

Throughout the 1970s, the BNF leadership struggled to maintain its contentious coalition while expanding its support base. An additional challenge was that external groups attempted to infiltrate the Front. The most dangerous of these attempts was the renewed efforts by Apartheid regime agents to capture the movement. In 1972–1973, such agents again offered money and other inducements to persuade the Front to publicly advocate for a closer relationship between Botswana and Bophuthatswana, as well as to establish friendlier ties with South Africa. Koma later credited Keitseng with warning him about this development:

Another important event in which Fish Keitseng played a key role was at the 1972 [1973] BNF conference in Lobatse. What happened was that two Afrikaners from South Africa approached Chief Bathoen, promising to finance the BNF's rise to power in the 1974 general elections. They would provide vehicles for every constituency and tell all the petrol filling stations to supply fuel to the vehicles. They would also provide money for the BNF election campaign as well as money for putting up offices for the BNF on the following conditions: a) that Koma resign from the leadership of the BNF, b) that the BNF agree to recognise the Homelands or Bantustans, and c) that the BNF change its name to be renamed the Botswana National Party. The BNF conference nearly split on this issue, as there were some leaders who tried to persuade the conference that the wise thing would be to pretend to agree with the conditions in order to receive the financial assistance and later return to the party line. Fish Keitseng, along with Lencyetse Koma and myself, who had only recently returned to Botswana after completing [his] studies in political economy in Moscow, opposed the offer to the Central Committee. At first, only the youth were mostly supporting us in rejecting the conditions, but ultimately, the

majority of the conference delegates rejected the conditions. As usual, the BNF entered the 1974 general election without funds and lost (Morton and Ramsay 1999: 119–120).

An additional BNF account of its 1973 Conference, which was held at Peleng, Lobatse, reports that, at an earlier Central Committee meeting, Ambrose Motsumi and Patrick Tshane briefed members about an offer from a group of white South Africans who had met with Bathoen (BNF 2004). On the night before the conference, the Central Committee drafted an agenda whose first item was a South African offer of 75,000 rands, as an initial instalment of a package totalling about one million rands. The report further elaborates that at the conference, itself, Chief Bathoen II asked Ambrose Motsumi to report on their meeting with a group of white South Africans, who were said to be waiting just across the border, at the Pioneer Border Gate. According to the report, as the conference became divided on the issues, some delegates are said to have argued that

The Party could accept the package and ignore the conditions. (*Re ka palama Kwena gore e re tlodise Molapo, yare re sena go goroga, ra e bolaya.*) We can ride on the back of the crocodile and kill it after crossing the river. The progressives maintained that it was a commitment to be fulfilled, or else face the consequences. You either dance to their tunes or get out of their way. A lot of lobbying occurred, and the progressives won the argument (BNF 2004).

For the remainder of the 1970s, the BNF was underfinanced but free of South African entanglements. The failure of the Apartheid regime to pull the Front into a dependent relationship was a critical turning point. While Bathoen remained outwardly loyal to the Front until he left politics in 1986 to become the first president of the Customary Court of Appeal, his influence waned. This shift culminated in Koma being installed as the BNF president in 1977.

Further Progress

The role of ‘study groups’ as incubators for the BNF warrants its own detailed study. Described as ‘the main strategy for training both BNF social democrats and socialists’, they certainly strengthened the Front’s progressive wing after 1975, when they were institutionalised to promote political education and develop a socialist core capable of serving as the Front’s ideological leadership’ (Tafa 2015). Over the next three decades, the study groups succeeded in attracting a loyal youth following, many of

whom became staunch advocates, activists, and officeholders. Inasmuch as the groups proved effective in expanding and deepening the Front's membership, they were also seen by some internal critics as fostering dogmatic and divisive tendencies that alienated others within the movement (Dingake 2004).

Although labour activists, such as Klaas Motshidisi, played a key role in the establishment of the BNF, local unions generally avoided direct institutional support for political parties prior to the formation of the UDC. In its 2004 position paper, the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU) thus affirmed that the 'BFTU believes that it can best represent the interests of the working people by leaving politics to individuals. BFTU will not explicitly support any particular party ... it will therefore work closely with the government of the day' (Tafa 2013). Notwithstanding this arms-length policy, trade unionists emerged from the 1970s as another pillar of BNF support. This was particularly the case for organisations representing public service workers, such as the Manual Workers Union and teachers' associations, which grew in influence after gaining enhanced recognition with the passage of the *Public Service Act* of 2008 and the corresponding formation in 2009 of the Botswana Federation of Public, Private and Parastatal Sector Unions (BOFEPUSU; Werbner 2014). However, industrial unions in the private sector, aside from the Botswana Mine Workers Union, remained small and marginalised.

Another source of recruitment for the BNF has been academia, particularly among staff members and generations of students at the University of Botswana (UB). Student politics, as played out in confrontations with the UB administration and in Student Representative Council contests, led to the formation of the Movement Against Student Suppression, or 'MASS-BNF', as the Front's student wing.

Botswana's third general election, held in October 1974, was notable for its low voter turnout of 31.2 per cent (Supervisor of Elections 1974). While the BDP fielded a full slate of 32 candidates for seats in the National Assembly, the BNF only managed to nominate 14, with their opposition rivals, the BPP and BIP, limited to just eight and six nominees, respectively. With an 11.5 per cent share of the national vote, the Front trailed in a distant second place to the BDP in the popular vote, and lost the Ngwaketse-Kgalagadi constituency to Masire. The outcome of the 1979 elections was similar, with the Front again trailing in a distant second with 12.9 per cent of the popular vote, having fielded candidates in 16 constituencies (International Parliamentary Union, IPU, 1979).

The BNF scored an electoral breakthrough in the 1984 elections, which was the first in which Masire, as Botswana's second president, contested as the leader of the BDP. Against the backdrop of a severe

drought and a sharp, though temporary, decline in diamond revenues, the BNF secured 20.4 per cent of the vote, and won five seats, which included both Gaborone constituencies. The Front also gained control of most urban councils. The elections are remembered for bringing Koma into Parliament after he defeated the then vice president, Peter Mmusi, in a December by-election for the Gaborone South constituency. This happened after Koma went to court to have the original result overturned. Without objection, the High Court sided with Koma when the permanent secretary to the president, Festus Mogae, acting as Supervisor of Elections, confirmed the discovery of an unopened ballot box (Parson 1985; Egner and Whiteside 1985).

In the lead-up to the 1984 elections, the BNF had conducted vigorous outreach to garner support from the intelligentsia, including civil servants, indigenous businesspeople, and disaffected members of the ruling Party. These efforts included approaching the deputy commander of the Botswana Defence Force and *kgosi* of the Bangwato, Ian Khama, who maintained his distance (Central Intelligence Agency 1984). Among those who joined the Front were former BDP figures such as Leach Tlhomelang, Botshabelo Bagwasi, and Wellie Seboni, who brought new energy to the movement. However, this influx caused resentment among some Front veterans, who accused the recruits of being right-wing opportunists; this accusation would be repeated intermittently over the next two decades (Makgala 2003).

In an effort to build on its electoral success and leverage some of the BNF's growing talent pool, in September 1986, Koma formed a commission led by Michael Dingake to recommend reforms for the Front's administrative and communication structures. In its report, the commission called for establishing a party headquarters and making other administrative improvements. Although these recommendations were adopted at the Front's 1988 Conference, they were never fully implemented (Dingake 2004). Ahead of the 1989 elections, the BNF also introduced candidate selection through party primary elections open to all registered members. While this change aimed to boost intra-party democracy, it led to election disputes, with some primary losers breaking away to run as third-party or independent candidates popularly known as *mekoko* (cocks or roosters) in Botswana after former Gaborone mayor and cabinet minister Wellie Seboni's symbol of a cock when he ran as an independent candidate for one of the Gaborone constituencies in the 1984 elections.

In the 1989 general election, the BNF increased its share of the popular vote to 27 per cent, having fielded candidates in 31 out of the 34 National Assembly constituencies. The combined share of the popular vote

for the five other opposition parties in the poll was just 8.3 per cent, with no parliamentary representation. However, the BNF's success was marred by the loss of two of its previously safe parliamentary seats in the Southern District. This setback was due to supporters abandoning the Front for the breakaway Botswana Freedom Party (BFP). Led by Tlhomelong, who in 1985 had succeeded Bathoen as the BNF MP for Kanye South in a by-election. The BFP siphoned off enough of the Front's conservative base to deliver both constituencies to the BDP for the first time since 1969 (IPU 1989).

In 1991, the BNF initiated negotiations with the BPP and the BPU, to create a People's Progressive Front (PPF) as a framework for a coordinated election campaign leading to a coalition government. Disagreements arose over whether to dissolve existing parties into a new one or to keep their identities while forming an umbrella organisation. The latter option, favoured by the BNF, was seemingly adopted in an agreement known as the Unity Charter. However, in the run-up to the 1994 elections, the PPF collapsed over continued disagreement on whether it should function as an umbrella or lead to a complete merger.

In the absence of the PPF, the 1994 elections were a missed opportunity. At the polls, the BNF gained 13 seats by attracting 37.1 per cent of the popular vote, which was its highest total ever. Had the PPF been maintained, the PPF might have achieved an outright win. A shift of roughly 3,000 votes across five constituencies would have resulted in a combined opposition win of twenty-two seats, compared to the ruling BDP's 17. In addition to the 13 seats won by the BNF, the BDP secured four constituencies with only a plurality, where candidates from a united opposition would probably have won. An example is the Maun-Chobe constituency, where the BDP candidate, Bathiti Temane, received 4,804 votes, while the total opposition votes reached 6,229. Elsewhere, in the Northeast, the combined votes of Beleti Mbambanyi (BNF) and Knight Maripe (BPP) would have surpassed those of the BDP candidate, Chapson Butale. In Ngwaketse West, the BNF candidate, Moshe Gare, narrowly lost to the BDP after his BNF primary opponent, Shawn Nthaile, ran under the banner of the 'United Democratic Front'. Notably, a united opposition could have won despite the BDP capturing 54.6 per cent of the popular vote, given the ruling party's supermajorities in many of its safe seats (Ramsay 1994).

Another factor was voter turnout, which was less than half of the approximately 650,000 people who were eligible to vote. The BNF had limited its potential by threatening to boycott the polls during the first round of voter registration. Driven by an unsubstantiated belief that the Front should have won 14 seats instead of just three in the 1989 elections,

the BNF's 1991 Conference had passed a motion to boycott the next elections unless their demands for an Independent Electoral Commission and a lowering of the voting age to 18 were satisfied; these demands were only granted after 1994.

Things Fall Apart

The outcome of the 1994 elections sent shockwaves through Botswana's political establishment, with the realisation that there was a strong possibility for an emerging BNF, with or without other opposition parties, to unseat the BDP in the next elections. In the case of the ruling party, the fear of losing power was a factor in its pursuit of electoral and other reforms, as well as the 1998 passing of the baton to Botswana's third president, Festus Mogae, along with the recruitment of Lt Gen Ian Khama to become his vice president and heir apparent.

For the BNF, the prospect of victory led to increased internal competition within the movement. This trend was apparent at its 1997 Ledumang Conference in the divide between self-proclaimed progressives led by Dingake and the old guard led by Motshidisi. At the conference, Dingake's faction won most of the seats up for election in the Central Committee. The losing side then formed a 'Concerned Group' that petitioned Koma, alleging election rigging, and threatened legal action. This caused tension between Koma and Dingake, with the former being seen as supporting the Concerned Group's efforts to weaken the majority of the Central Committee.

The increasingly bitter factional fight climaxed in violence during the Easter weekend of 1998, when a Special Congress was held at the Palapye Community Hall to try to resolve the conflict. After the infamous 'Battle of Palapye', members of the Central Committee tried to suspend Koma, blaming him for inciting the chaos. In response, Koma used Section 12.1.6 of the BNF constitution to dissolve the Central Committee. The deadlock was taken to the High Court, which upheld Koma's authority. In June 1998, Dingake and other members who were excluded from the Central Committee resigned from the BNF to form the rival Botswana Congress Party (BCP), which included 11 of the BNF's 13 MPs, most local councillors, and many prominent figures.

The deeper causes and consequences of the BNF 1998 breakup continue to be the subject of debate, with critics pointing a finger at Koma's allegedly divisive leadership and support for Ian Khama's elevation to the vice-presidency (Dingake 2004). While it is not the purpose of this paper to adjudicate the various claims and counterclaims, what is clear in hindsight is that the BCP's founders badly underestimated the brand

loyalty of the majority of the BNF's supporters. They were also dismissive of the ideological concerns of those who feared that the movement was abandoning its socialist ideals.

In the immediate aftermath of the split, many commentators looked upon the depleted BNF as an empty shell. This sentiment grew stronger after the Front withdrew from the Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM). In January 1999, the Front had agreed to join BAM alongside the newly formed United Action (Bosele) Party, Tlhomelang's Independence Freedom Party, and the BPP. In March 1999, an agreement was reached among BAM members to contest the next elections under one symbol and voting disc. Koma repudiated the agreement, thereby reaffirming the BNF's resolve to maintain its separate identity and party symbol. Amid the confusion, it became clear that the BNF differed from its BAM partners in insisting that the Alliance serve as an umbrella rather than a merged entity.

In the October 1999 elections, the BDP thus faced three opposition movements that had uncertain support: the BNF, BAM, and the BCP. Despite the enthusiasm of dedicated BNF supporters on the ground, which was evident in the Radio Botswana and Yarona FM candidate debates and in rally attendance, most independent media commentators speculated that the BCP would be the ruling Party's biggest challenge. It was, therefore, a shock to many when the BNF surpassed both the BCP and BAM at the polls. While the BDP secured a solid majority with 57.1 per cent of the popular vote and 33 parliamentary seats, the BNF came in second with 25.9 per cent of the vote and six seats. The BCP followed with 11.9 per cent of the vote and just one seat, with BAM relegated to 4.7 per cent of the vote with no seats. In the local elections, the BNF won 80 out of 364 contested seats, trailing the 302 won by the BDP but outperforming the BCP and BAM, which secured only 13 and six seats respectively (IEC 1999). Like the BCP, the BAM leadership had underestimated the intense loyalty of the BNF rank and file.

The Lost Decade 1999–2009

Although the BCP breakaway was undeniably a significant setback, which deprived the BNF of a potential victory, the 1999 poll showed the Front's resilience as Botswana's leading opposition movement. The outcome further triggered a decade-long debate within the BNF and the broader opposition about achieving opposition unity. This debate centred around three competing models: Umbrella, Pact, or Merger. The model that garnered the most support among BNF cadres before its achievement in 2012 was that of an umbrella organisation, where the BNF and its partners would keep their individual identities but run in elections with a shared

manifesto and a common space on the ballot. A pact was envisioned as a looser arrangement where participating parties would maintain their separate identities and even manifestos, yet unite behind a single candidate in each constituency to prevent vote splitting. Despite BAM's failure, the third option of a complete merger remained on the table. BNF supporters often argued that such a merger could be best achieved if the other parties were willing to join the Front as group members (Somolekae 2005).

As the new millennium began, the BNF continued to face internal divisions that further hindered its ability to connect with others. The ongoing polarisation within the Front was not resolved by Koma's resignation as president in 2001. The fight for his replacement once again split the movement when the Concerned Group's candidate, Otsweletse Moupo, defeated Koma's preferred successor, Peter Woto, whose supporters became known as the 'Party Line'. In 2003, Koma joined other Party Line dissidents in creating yet another breakaway, the National Democratic Front.

During the 2004 elections, the BNF maintained its share of the popular vote at 26.1 per cent while doubling its seats in the National Assembly to 12, albeit in the context of an increase in the number of constituencies from 40 to 57. The BNF entered the elections as part of a fragile alliance with BAM and the BPP, which ran under a joint election manifesto, with the BNF leader Moupo being nominated as the presidential candidate for all three parties (IEC 2004; Osei-Hwedie and Sebudubudu 2005). The BNF's fortunes declined in the 2009 elections, with their loss of six seats and its vote share dropping to 21.9 per cent (IEC 2009).

Formation of the UDC

The period leading up to the 2009 elections was marked by a sharp economic downturn in the country, which was directly caused by the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. Inflation, which had remained steady at about 7 per cent for several years, surged to 12.6 per cent in 2009. In response, the Khama administration implemented austerity measures and, following the elections, continued them. This resulted in three consecutive years without public service wage increases despite a significant rise in inflation. This policy was challenged by the BOFEPUSU, which represented around 100,000 public employees. When the government refused the labour federation's demands for a 16 per cent across-the-board wage increase, a public service strike was called, which lasted from April until the end of June 2011 (Werbner 2014; Makgala and Malila 2022).

Prior to the strike, in May of 2010, a faction opposed to Khama's leadership splintered from the BDP to establish the Botswana Movement

for Democracy (BMD) under the leadership of Gomolemo Motswaledi. The defection of MPs to the new party resulted in a BMD member, Botsalo Ntuane, becoming the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, thus temporarily breaking a three-decade tradition of BNF leaders holding the position. Unfazed, Duma Boko, who had been elected the BNF's president in July 2010 with a mandate to pursue an opposition coalition, embraced the opportunity to collaborate with the BMD. After lengthy negotiations in which BOFEPUSO played a critical role, in November 2012, the BNF joined the BMD and BPP in forming the UDC alliance, which ran in the 2014 elections under a single banner. In the elections, the UDC came in second, winning 30 per cent of the vote, including 16.6 per cent for BNF candidates. With the BDP's vote falling to 46.5 per cent, the BDP failed to win a majority for the first time (IEC 2014). The outcome of the elections might have been quite different had the BCP not opted to remain outside of the UDC.

Prior to the 2019 elections, the BMD imploded, leading to the emergence of the Alliance of Progressives outside the UDC. This development was offset by the BCP's affiliation with the UDC, whose total vote increased to 35.9 per cent, including 19.2 per cent for BNF candidates. The growth of both the UDC and BNF vote in 2019 challenges the perception that voters had significantly abandoned the BNF. While the BDP rebounded to gain 52.6 per cent of the vote, support in its traditional Central District strongholds had been undercut by the emergence of the Botswana Patriotic Front (IEC 2019). In retrospect, the 2019 elections can be seen as a harbinger for the UDC/BNF's 2024 triumph in winning a total of 37.2 per cent of the vote, including 23.1 per cent for BNF candidates

Koma's Vision Realised?

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the BNF's ultimate success within the Umbrella has been interpreted as a long-delayed realisation of Koma's 1960s vision of forging a multi-organisational united front to overturn the ruling BDP. In this context, Koma may be cast as a Moses-like figure who guided his followers through the Sinai wilderness, but was ultimately unable to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. A decade ago, Bojosi Othlogile, who edited Koma's MA thesis for publication, was unequivocal in his observation that

The formation of an umbrella organization has been the lifelong desire of Dr Koma. Ever since his return from the Soviet Union, he has attempted at different times to bring together diverse opposition parties into a united front. Those who attended the BNF Study

Groups of the 70s and 80s can testify that the role and formation of an organisation of all interest groups was a constant theme (Koma 2016: vii).

While, from a strictly structural point of view, the UDC is a multi-organisational front, naysayers have countered that the BNF's founding commitment to the National Democratic Revolution was about the fundamental transformation of Botswana society on behalf of the marginalised and working class (e.g. Selatlhwa 2024). Of course, over the past six decades, much has changed in Botswana, Southern Africa, and the rest of the world (including Viet Nam), and these changes challenge a Marxist worldview from the 1960s. Time will reveal to what extent the recently elected UDC government can truly transform Botswana into a 'Second Republic' consistent with the egalitarian ideals espoused by the BNF's founders.

References

Official Documents and Reports, and Botswana National Archives (BNA) Material

- BNA DCN 9/3 DIR October 1959, May 1960, September 1960, December 1961.
BNA DCN 9/4 NDIC September 1957.
BNA DCN 9/5: Northern Divisional Intelligence Report (NDIR) November 1956.
BNA DCN 9/6: Ngwato Intelligence Report (IR), December 1956 and March 1957.
BNA OP 1/8/2992, 'Bechuanaland United Front Party', 1965.
BNA OP 1/8/3035, Special Branch reporting on the BNF, 1965–1969: SP 31/3, 'New Political Parties', 25 August to 30 October 1965; SP 31/5-6, 'Botswana National Front', 17 January 1967 to 20 August 1969; SP 31/8, 'Participation of Tribal Authorities in Politics', 11 October to 8 November 1968.
BNA OP H 196/6 VIII 'Refugees April–November 1962'.
Botswanalaws.com 1968. *Printed Publications Act 15 of 1968*, <https://botswanalaws.com/consolidated-statutes/principle-legislation/printed-publications>
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA-USA) 1984. 'Botswana: Surviving Under Adversity, An Intelligence Assessment', Sanitised [modest redactions] Copy Approved for Release 13 January 2011.
Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 1999. *Report to His Honour the Vice President and Minister Of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on the General Elections 1999*. Gaborone: IEC-Botswana.

- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 2004. *Report to the Minister Of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on the 2004 General Elections*. Gaborone: IEC-Botswana.
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 2009. *Report to the Minister Of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on the 2009 General Elections*. Gaborone: IEC-Botswana.
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 2014. *2014 General Elections Report*. Gaborone: IEC-Botswana.
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 2019. *Report to the Minister for Presidential Affairs, Governance and Public Administration on the 2019 General Elections*. Gaborone: IEC-Botswana.
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) 2024. 'Disaggregation and Analytical Assessment of Electoral Outcomes for the 2024 General Election to the 13th Parliament of the Republic of Botswana, Systematically Categorized by Constituency', spreadsheet available on Google Documents, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10XFVIJg83liciaQcR44l0qk9DFnhCwcaPLlQalB-tBo/edit?pli=1&gid=1661938075#gid=1661938075>
- Supervisor of Elections [Botswana] 1970. *Report on the General Election 1969, March 1970*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Supervisor of Elections [Botswana] 1974. *Botswana General Election Report, 1974*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

Secondary Sources

- Allison, D 1991. 'Social Mobilization and Racial Capitalism in South Africa, 1928–1960', PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Botswana National Front (BNF) 2004. 'BNF History' at bnf.org.bw/web.archive.org (WayBackMachine), 6 August 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040806115511/http://www.bnf.org.bw/History.asp>
- Crowder, M 1985. 'Tshekedi Khama and Opposition to the British Administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1926–1936', *Journal of African History*, vol. 26, no. 2–3, pp. 193–214.
- Desai, R 1968. 'Explosion of African Studies in the Soviet Union', *African Studies Bulletin*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 248–258.
- Dingake, M 2004. *The Politics of Confusion*. Gaborone: Bay Publications.
- Edgar, R 2017. *Prophets with Honour: A Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafó*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Egner, B and Whiteside, A 1985. 'Multi-party Elections in a Frontline State: Botswana's Politics of Succession', *Indicator South Africa*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 11–13.
- Fawcus, P and Tilbury, A 2000. *Botswana: The Road to Independence*. Gaborone: Pula Press and Botswana Society.

- Gossett, CW and Lotshwao, K 2009. 'Report on the 1965 General Election and the 1966 Local Government Election', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 41, pp. 47–63.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1979. Botswana Election report, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/BOTSWANA_1979_E.PDF
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1989. Botswana Election report, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2041_89.htm
- Koma, K c. 1965. *Pamphlet No. 1*, BNF, first c. 1965 draft edition located at Botswana National Archives (BNA) BNB 1090.
- Koma, K 2016. *The Experience of Vietnam on the Multi-Organisational United Front*. Gaborone: Botswana Society.
- Lenin, VI 1917. 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline', republished in *Lenin's Selected Works*, Progress Publishers (1963), now widely circulated through the Lenin internet archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/imperialism.pdf>
- Lenin, VI and Roy, RN 1921. 'Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions', The Second Congress of the Communist International, verbatim report, circulated in *Lenin's Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, Volume 31, pp. 213–263, available online, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>
- Lotshwao, K 2015. 'The Weakness of Opposition Parties in Botswana: A Justification for More Internal-Party Democracy in the Dominant Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)', *African Journal of Political Science*, vol. 9, no. 9, pp. 1–9.
- Makgala, C 2003. "'So Far So Good?'" An Appraisal of Dr. Ng'ombe's 1998 Prophecy on the Fate of the BNF', *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 51–56.
- Makgala, C 2005. 'The Relationship Between Kenneth Koma and the BDP, 1965–2003', *African Affairs*, vol. 104, pp. 303–323.
- Makgala, C and Malila, I 2022. 'Challenges of Constitutional Reform, Economic Transformation and Covid-19 in Botswana', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 49, no. 172, pp. 303–314.
- Masire, QKJ 2006. *Very Brave or Very Foolish? Memoirs of an African Democrat*. Gaborone: Macmillan.
- Maundeni, Z 1998. 'Majority Rule, Life Presidency and Factional Politics', in Edge, W and Lekorwe, M (eds), *Politics and Society in Botswana*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, pp. 378–396.
- Maundeni, Z (ed.) 2005. *40 Years of Democracy in Botswana: 1965–2005*. Gaborone: Mmegi Publishing House.
- Molefe, K and Dzimbiri, L 2006. 'A Failure to Unite Means a Failure to Win the Leadership Challenge for Botswana's Opposition', *Journal of African Elections*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 114–121.
- Molomo, M 2000. 'Understanding Government and Opposition Parties in Botswana', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 65–92.

- Morton, B and Ramsay, J 1994. *The Making of a President: Sir Ketumile Masire's Early Years*. Gaborone: Pula Press.
- Morton, B and Ramsay, J 1999. *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground*, by Fish Keitseng. Gaborone: Pula Press.
- Morton, F and Ramsay, J 1987. *Birth of Botswana: A History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate*. Gaborone: Longman Botswana.
- Nengwekhulu, R 1979. 'Some Findings on the Origins of Political Parties in Botswana', *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 47–76.
- Nzula, A, Potekhin, I and Zusmanovich, A 1979. *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, 1905–1934*, Zed Press, an English translation by Robin Cohen and Hugh Jenkins of *The Working Class Movement and Forced Labour in Negro Africa*, first published in Russian in Moscow (1933).
- Osie-Hwedie, B 2001. 'The Political Opposition in Botswana: The Politics of Factionalism and Fragmentation', *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, vol. 45, pp. 57–77.
- Osei-Hwedie, B and Sebudubudu, D 2005. 'Botswana's 2004 Elections: Free and Fair?' *Journal of African Elections*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 27–42.
- Othogile, B 1993. 'Tshekedi Khama and ANO vs. High Commissioner', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 25, pp. 29–38.
- Parson, J 1985. 'The 1984 Botswana General Election and Results: A Macro-Analysis', paper presented at the University of Botswana 1984 Election Study Project, 1985.
- Parsons, N, Henderson, W and Tlou, T 1995. *Seretse Khama, 1921–80*. Gaborone: Macmillan and Botswana Society.
- Ramsay, J 1993. 'The 1962 BPP Split', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 25, pp. 79–87.
- Ramsay, J 1998a. 'The Emergence of Nationalist Political Parties' in Lekorwe, MH and Edge, WA (eds), *Politics and Society in Botswana*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, pp. 134–150.
- Ramsay, J 1998b. 'Twentieth Century Antecedents of Decolonising Nationalism in Botswana', in Lekorwe, MH and Edge, WA (eds), *Politics and Society in Botswana*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, pp. 101–117.
- Ramsay, J 2011. 'History of the Bangwaketse Royal House', in Ramsay, J (ed.), *A Royal Affair Peo Ya Ga Kgosi Malope II*. Gaborone: Whirlwind Investment, pp. 13–33.
- Schapera, I 1970. *Tribal Innovators, Tswana Chiefs, and Social Change, 1795–1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seabo, B and Masilo, B 2018. 'Social Cleavages and Party Alignment in Botswana: Dominant Party System Debate Revisited', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 50, pp. 59–71.
- Sebudubudu, D and Molutsi, P 2011. 'The Elite as a Critical Factor in National Development: The Case of Botswana', *Discussion Paper No. 58*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute.

- Sebudubudu, D and Osie-Hwedie, B 2010. 'In Permanent Opposition: Botswana's Other Political Parties', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 85–102.
- Selowane, O and Shale, V 2006. 'Opposition Politics and the Challenges of Fragmentation in Botswana', *Journal of African Elections*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 122–140.
- Simons, HJ and Simons, RE 1969. *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950*. London: Penguin.
- Solodovnikov, VG 1966. 'African Studies in the U.S.S.R.', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 359–366.
- Somolekae, G 2005. *Political Parties in Botswana*, EISA Research Report No. 27. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).
- South African Communist Party 1981. *South African Communists Speak, 1915–1980*. London: Inkululeko Publications.
- Tafa, E 2016. *A History of the Botswana National Front*. Gaborone: BNF.
- Tutwane, L 2012. 'Modernising the Botswana National Front: A Case for Political Marketing', *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 44, pp. 119–127.
- Werbner, P 2014. *The Making of an African Working Class: Politics, Law, and Cultural Protest in the Manual Workers Union*. London: Pluto Press.

Media Sources

- BNF 50th Anniversary Committee 2015. 'Remembering Cde Goabamang Kenneth Koma', *Sunday Standard*, 1 June 2015.
- Leepile, LT 1926–1935. Articles in *Umsebenzi/The South African Worker*, 30 July 1926, 27 August 1926, 3 September 1926, 23 September 1933, 7 October 1933, 3 February 1934, 2 April 1934, 5 May 1934, 21 July 1934, 4 August 1934, 5 May 1935.
- Ramsay, J 1994. 'The Opposition Could Have Won', *The Botswana Gazette*, 26 October 1994.
- Ramsay, J 2016. 'Yes Merriweather and Bathoen II Delivered Health for All', *Mmegi*, 18 May 2016.
- Selatlhwa, I 2024. 'Marobela Dumps BNF CC, Slams Leadership', *Mmegi*, 19 July 2024.
- Tafa, E (Comrade Moore) 2013. 'The Role of Trade Unions in politics', *Mmegi*, 21 June 2013.
- Tafa, E (Comrade Moore) 2015. 'The BNF and the October Revolution', *Mmegi*, 19 May 2015.

Appendix: Party (Vote %) and Seats Won 1969–2024

Year	BNF		BDP		BPP		BCP		Other parties**		
	% of vote	MPs	% of vote	MPs	% of vote	MPs	% of vote	MPs	Party	% of vote	MPs
1969	13.5	3	68.3	24	12.1	3			BIP	6.0	1
1974	11.5	2	76.6	27	6.6	2			BIP	4.8	1
1979	12.9	2	75.2	29	7.4	1			BIP	4.3	0
1984	20.5	5	67.9	28	6.6	1			BIP	3.0	0
1989	26.9	3	64.7	31	4.3	0			BIP	2.4	0
1994	37.7	13	54.3	26	4.2	0			IFP	3.0	0
1999	25.9	6	57.2	33			11.9	1	BAM	4.7	0
2004	26.1	12	51.7	44			16.6	1	other	5.6	0
2009	21.9	6	53.3	45			19.2	4	other	5.7	1
2014	UDC *		46.5	37			20.4	3	other	3.1	0
	30.0	17									
2019	UDC *		52.6	38			Part of UDC		AP BPF	5.1 4.4	1 3
	35.9	15									
2024	UDC *		30.5	4			20.9	15	BPF	8.3	5
	37.2	36									

*BNF share of UDC vote % and seats: 2014 (16.6%) 8; 2019 (19.2%) 4; 2024 (23.1%) 23.
 **Figures exclude independent candidates.
 Key: BNF Botswana National Front; UDC Umbrella for Democratic Change; BDP Botswana Democratic Party; BPP Botswana Peoples Party; BIP Botswana Independence Party; IFP Independence Freedom Party; BAM Botswana Alliance Movement; AP Alliance of Progressives; BPF Botswana Patriotic Front.

Source: Compiled from Supervisor of Elections (1970, 1974); IPU (1979, 1989); IEC 2004–2024 reports; Egner and Whiteside (1985); Ramsay (1994).