

# Electoral History and Turnover Tradition in Botswana's Outlier Constituency of Kgatleng West

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## Abstract

Botswana is regarded as Africa's oldest surviving multiparty democracy, yet constituency-based studies have been rare until 2024. This paper examines Kgatleng West, one of three constituencies in Kgatleng District, which is notable for its turnover of parliamentary representatives from various parties since the first elections in 1965. The victory of the opposition Botswana Congress Party in Kgatleng West in 2024 means that the constituency has been represented by five different parties; a rare victory by a woman candidate adds a gender dimension. While tribal royalty has influenced voter choice, Bakgatla are traditionally independent-minded. Kgosi Kgafela II, who was enthroned in 2008, even called for Kgatleng's independence. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which ruled from 1966 to 2024, won only four constituencies in 2024, including Kgatleng East. Wiseman, in his study in Kgatleng in 1978, framed its politics around conflicts and alliances involving tribal leader Kgosi Linchwe II, the BDP, and the opposition Botswana Peoples Party. This paper analyses Kgatleng voters' fickleness, by examining the dynamics of conflict and shifting alliances among the BDP, Bakgatla royalty, and opposition parties across all 13 election cycles up to 2024. The paper provides background on party politics and elections in Kgatleng, with a focus on Kgatleng West's candidate selection, campaign strategies, and challenges for the 2024 elections, and an analysis of the election results for parliamentary and council candidates. The paper concludes that, despite being deeply rooted in the country's electoral culture, traditional campaigning strategies like motorcades, political rallies, distribution of free party-apparel, and town hall debates do not guarantee electoral success for the most visible or aggressive party. Furthermore, the dynamics of conflict and shifting alliances are such that the imposition of candidates by the national party hierarchy, without consideration of local dynamics, can be counterproductive, as seen in Kgatleng East and Kgatleng West for the Umbrella for Democratic Change.

**Keywords:** election; Kgatleng royalty; turnover; candidate selection; campaign strategy; conflict and alliances

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## **Introduction**

Since the country's first parliamentary elections in March 1965, which led to Independence on 30 September 1966, Kgatleng constituencies have been changing hands between different political parties more than other districts in Botswana. Both the then ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which held power nationally from 1966 to 2024, and three different opposition parties had enjoyed varying degrees of success in Kgatleng. Although the focus of this paper is the newly created Kgatleng West constituency, appreciable historical background to the dynamics of electoral politics in Kgatleng is given, sometimes with reference to developments at the national level. The study on Kgatleng West examines a constituency where a woman candidate won despite significant challenges faced by women candidates in Botswana politics. All political parties in Botswana have been accused of failing to promote women's leadership beyond tokenism, despite women comprising the majority of party membership and of participants in campaign activities. The unprecedented turnover and alternation in Kgatleng surpasses those of the nearby Gaborone, which would be expected to be more liberal as the capital city. Kgatleng, on the other hand, has a mixture of semi-urban or peri-urban, rural, and remote communities.

Constituency- or local-level studies are a rarity in Botswana, with John Wiseman's 1978 journal article titled 'Conflict and Conflict Alliances in the Kgatleng District of Botswana' being one of the very few, if not the only one. The study is quite dated since it was published almost five decades ago after the country's experience of only three elections in 1965, 1969, and 1974. Therefore, a great deal has since changed in terms of the socio-economic and political dynamics of the district at the time of the thirteenth electoral cycle in 2024. Wiseman's choice of Kgatleng was influenced by two key factors. The first factor was that it was an area where the opposition Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) had significant support, having won the Mochudi constituency in the 1965 and 1969 elections, while the Kgatleng/Tlokweng constituency was won by the BDP. For the local government council elections, the BPP and BDP attained parity, even though the BDP used its incumbency as a governing party to increase its number through specially elected councillors (i.e. councillors appointed by the Minister of Local Government). Wiseman's second factor for studying Kgatleng was that Kgosi Kgato III of the Bakgatla was hostile to the BDP government and was believed to have played a key role in ensuring the BPP victory in the elections. Wiseman notes that, while the government attempted to co-opt Kgato by appointing him as the ambassador to the USA in the late 1960s, by the early 1970s his diplomatic posting had ended,

and he was back in Mochudi, continuing his hostile relations with the government and getting involved in local politics (Wiseman 1978).

The royal involvement and influence can also be seen in subsequent elections in Kgatleng, even during the time of Linchwe's son and successor, Kgosisikgolo Kgafela II, who was enthroned in September 2008. Kgafela's relations with the BDP government were even more hostile than his father's. So serious was the hostility that, at some point, he was jailed, and later fled the country for South Africa in 2012. Almost 50 years after Wiseman's study, the political and electoral dynamics in Kgatleng are characterised by renewed conflict and alliances. During Wiseman's study, the contest was between only two parties, namely the BPP and BDP, whereas four more parties had joined the fray by 2024. These additional four parties were the Botswana National Front (BNF); the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC); a splinter group from the BNF, namely the Botswana Congress Party (BCP); and even a splinter entity from the BDP, namely the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). The impact of the BPF in Kgatleng West seems to have worked against the UDC, as the UDC's former member of Parliament (MP) in the area defected to the BPF and appears to have taken with him enough votes to deny the UDC victory in Kgatleng West. The 'marriage of convenience' that had been observed by Wiseman (1978: 490) between BPP and Linchwe played itself out in the new millennium, with the opposition and the BDP under a new leader, President Mokgweetsi Masisi, joining the conflict. The BDP's internal conflict, whereby the party's specially elected (i.e. appointed) parliamentarian from Kgatleng had hostile relations with the party leadership, saw her defect to the BCP and ultimately win Kgatleng West in the 2024 elections. Kgatleng West was one of only two constituencies won by the BCP in the southern part of the country, while the BDP's victory in Kgatleng East was one of only four constituencies that the party won in the south.

Wiseman also observed that tensions existed between Mochudi and its outlying villages. He writes that, while both have similar populations, Mochudi's centralised chieftainship created an unequal allocation of resources favouring the traditional capital. However, through political party structures and the District Council, the outlying villages improved their position, and BDP councillors who represent the non-Mochudi section of Kgatleng have been dominating the District Council since 1966 (Wiseman 1978). While Wiseman, in his paper, stresses conflict and alliances between political parties and Linchwe, this paper primarily looks at the turnovers and campaign strategies of the parties in the 2024 elections. A 2000 publication by Geoffrey Barei examines what he terms the decline of chiefly influence in elections, and Kgatleng under Linchwe is one of Barei's case studies.

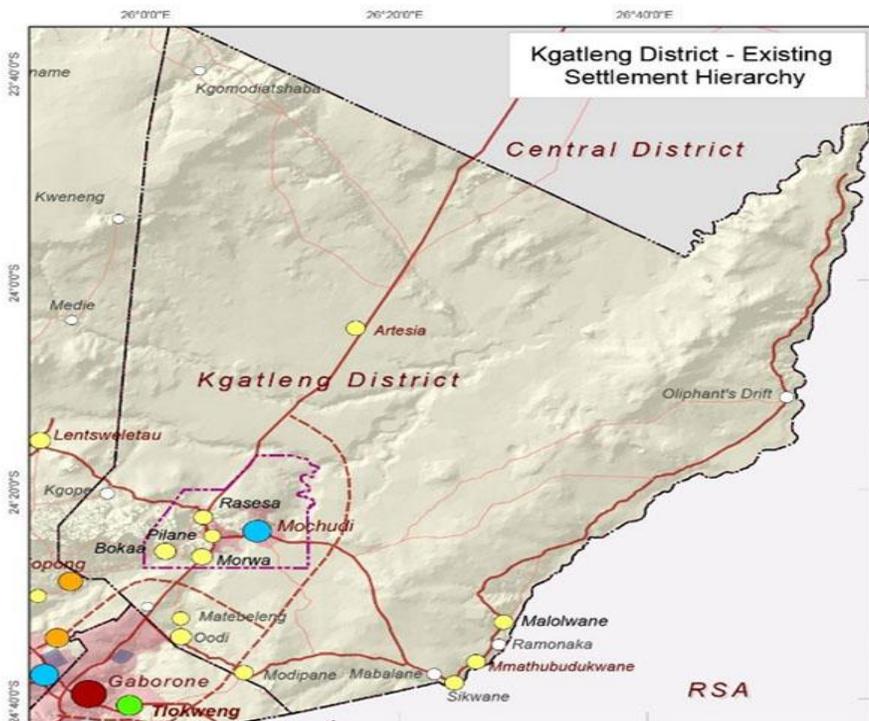
However, in the new millennium, Kgosikgolo Tawana Moremi III of Batawana and Kgosikgolo Lotlaamoreng II of Barolong contested elections on the BDP and UDC tickets and won (Tawana also later won under UDC ticket). The BDP fielded Kgafela's younger brother, Mmusi Kgafela, in Kgatlang West in the 2019 elections, and he also won. He was also a losing BDP candidate for Kgatlang Central in 2024.

Kgatlang District is a mix of various ethnic groups, with the Bakgatla ba Kgafela being dominant. The Bakgatla arrived in the territory in the early 1870s and settled in Mochudi, after fleeing persecution and forced labour in the Transvaal Boer republic across the Madikwe River. The Bakgatla settled in Bakwena territory under Kgosikgolo Sechele I, who had previously offered them sanctuary from Boer enslavement. They settled in a place called Mochudi, which is an Anglicised spelling of 'Motshodi', who had been the *kgosikgolo* of the Bakwena in previous generations. However, the Bakgatla were hesitant to submit to Sechele. It was only after their leader, Kgosikgolo Kgamanyana, was flogged by Boer leader Paul Kruger in 1871 for refusing to provide forced labour that the Bakgatla sought refuge in Sechele's domain and paid tribute as a sign of subjugation. However, their desire to be an autonomous state soon led them to stop paying tribute and go to war with their Bakwena host; they successfully asserted their independence until British colonial rule was imposed in 1885 (Makgala 2009).

The original Bakgatla settlers were later joined by other groups, most of whom were seeking a peaceful existence. Additional Bakgatla from the Transvaal established the villages of Mabalane, Sikwane, Mmathubudukwane, and Malolwane along the Madikwe River (Makgala 2009). In the late nineteenth century, the Kalanga, an ethnic group of Shona extraction from the north, settled in Mochudi. Inter-marriage and assimilation into the Bakgatla community led to a loss of their culture and language as they adopted those of their Bakgatla hosts. Some of the Kalanga established cattle posts and the village of Kgomodiatshabe in the furthest north of the territory, which was primarily inhabited by the Basarwa/Bushmen/San people.

In the late nineteenth century, the Batlokwa, a breakaway group from nearby Tlokweng, joined the Bakgatla in Mochudi. Soon after, a group of Balete from Ramotswa settled in Modipane, while another group of Batlokwa settled in Odi. The territory also welcomed Kalanga settlers who established themselves in Matebeleng, which was separated from Odi by the Notwane River. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Bakaa arrived from the nearby Bakwena tribal territory, and settled in Bokaa and Rasesa. A few years later, a group of Bakgatla fleeing the Transvaal settled

in Morwa. In the twentieth century, a group of Herero, who had fled German genocide in Namibia, settled in Pilane. The Herero maintained their culture and language, even as Pilane grew due to the influx of Tswana speakers who outnumbered the Herero (Makgala 2009). Over time, smaller settlements that may have begun as cattle posts, such as Artesia and Leshibitse, grew into gazetted villages in the Kgatleng District. All these villages, which later became council wards, paid allegiance to the Bakgatla *kgosikgolo* in Mochudi.



**Map 1: Kgatleng District Council development plan (2007–2031)**

*Source:* Department of Surveys and Mapping (2013).

By the second decade of the new millennium, most villages in Kgatleng, especially south and west of Mochudi (see Map 1), experienced significant growth due to an influx of immigrants from Gaborone, where land and residential plots were scarce. The 2021 population and housing census indicated that Kgatleng's population had increased enough to warrant the creation of a third constituency, Kgatleng West, in addition to the existing two constituencies. Kgatleng West runs along the railway line and the A1 Highway, which are crucial economic routes connecting the

country's southern region with the north. Kgatleng West includes Pilane, which constitutes the district's main industrial area on the A1 Highway and railway. Mmamashia, also on the A1 Highway and railway, is emerging as an industrial hub in Kgatleng West. As the district's capital, Mochudi is home to several shopping malls, private businesses, and government and district council offices. While there are a few service businesses in the surrounding villages, these services do not provide adequate employment for the local population. Aside from a small quarry at Belabela near the railway line and Masama, a small coal mine, the district lacks job creation in the form of large-scale mining activity for strategic minerals, large-scale commercial agriculture, and manufacturing industries. Consequently, unemployment, particularly among the youth, is a significant issue in Kgatleng, generally and during elections.

The next section offers an overview of political dynamics and elections in Kgatleng from the first parliamentary elections in 1965 to the 2019 elections, thereby highlighting Kgatleng's deviation from the voting trend in Botswana. This is followed by a profile of the candidates for Kgatleng West in the 2024 elections. Campaign strategies by various parties and candidates in Kgatleng West are explored against the backdrop of national developments. The final section analyses the 2024 election results (Republic of Botswana 2024) in relation to these strategies.

The central argument of this paper is that the *kgosikgolo* played a significant role in elections from the 1960s, by sometimes supporting opposition parties and sometimes intervening in BDP politics; the royalty became less influential by 2024, with royal candidates losing in both Kgatleng Central and Kgatleng East. Generally, voters in Kgatleng have not developed strong attachments to any party. There have also been numerous defections by politicians from one party to another from the mid-1970s to the lead-up to the 2024 elections. The conclusion is that voters in Kgatleng are notably fickle, and have been swayed by the *kgosikgolo*'s endorsement in the past and by individual candidates in recent elections.

The methodology included desktop and field research, interviews with activists and candidates, attendance at political rallies, and town hall debates. Both traditional and social media offered valuable insights.

### **Politics and Elections in Kgatleng Before 2024**

The Kgatleng District has a long history of plurality that is traceable to the country's first parliamentary (Legislative Assembly) election held in March 1965 and to the council or local government elections held in 1966. At Independence the district had two constituencies, namely Mochudi and Kgatleng/Tlokweg. The BPP won Mochudi in 1965 and also did quite well

in the local government or wards elections in 1966. Nationwide, the BDP won 28 of the 31 parliamentary seats and formed the new government, while the BPP won only three seats, one of which was Mochudi. The BPP became the main opposition party. The Kgatleng/Tlokweng constituency consisted of some villages situated roughly on the south-western side of the Kgatleng District and the village of Tlokweng in the then South-East District. This was the arrangement until the 1994 elections, after the 1992 Delimitation Commission had reconstituted Kgatleng into Mochudi East and Mochudi West constituencies. The 2022 Delimitation Commission led to reconfiguration of the district with the newly demarcated Kgatleng Central added and the original constituencies renamed Kgatleng East and Kgatleng West. The latter constituency constituted of nine wards (Bokaa North, Bokaa South, Bophirima, Morwa, Pilane, Rasesa North, Rasesa South, Kgomodiatshaba-Dikgonnye, and Artesia-Leshibitse).

During submissions to the 2022 Delimitation Commission at a meeting held in the village of Artesia (Mosomane) in November 2022, residents from surrounding villages had argued against the naming of constituencies after villages, such as Mochudi East and Mochudi West. Their argument was that this created an impression that Mochudi was somewhat superior to other villages in the district (Motsamai 2022). It was also claimed that using village names for constituencies was derogatory. They also advised for creation of a new and third constituency since the population of the district warranted such a development. A quota of 38,682 people per constituency was determined from the 2021 population and housing census. They suggested that a new constituency be called Kgatleng Central while Mochudi East and Mochudi West be renamed Kgatleng East and Kgatleng West respectively (Republic of Botswana 2022). A concern was also raised that members of Parliament who were appointed to cabinet were unable to pay frequent visits to their constituencies (Motsamai 2022).

Kgatlang District, or Mochudi as its tribal capital, has interesting connections to the formation of political parties in Botswana. For instance, after the establishment of the BDP in 1962, the Bakgatla regent, Mmusi Pilane, granted the party permission to hold their inaugural elective congress in Mochudi. However, Mmusi changed his mind when BDP members, who included future Botswana presidents Seretse Khama and Quett Masire, arrived to hold their congress. The group hastily moved to nearby Gaborone (a colonial government territory that was not under chiefly or tribal control) where they held their congress under a big *morula* tree (Morton and Ramsay 1994). Interestingly, in its over 60 years, the BDP has never held an elective congress in Mochudi or Kgatleng, while it has held it more than once in some locations.

The BPP success in Mochudi in the 1965 elections is attributed to what Sandy Grant (2002) calls the ‘last minute sweep through Mochudi’ of Linchwe’s elder sister, Tshire. Moreover, Grant writes, ‘For some reason, the BDP campaign in 1965 never quite took off although it was led by two founding members of the party, Norman Molomo and MA Maribe’ (2002: 17). As a result, the BPP’s candidate in Mochudi, TW Motlhagodi, won the constituency, which made Mochudi the only constituency that the BPP won in the southern part of the country (the other two were Tati West, and Francistown and Tati East in the north). Motlhagodi triumphed over RD Molefe of the BDP, by receiving 2,163 votes compared to Molefe’s 1,278. Nevertheless, Molefe made it to Parliament as a specially elected member and was appointed as the parliamentary secretary for Agriculture. TW Motlhagodi again won the Mochudi constituency in 1969, when he defeated BDP’s Norman Molomo, who had been an MP for Gaborone and Ramotswa in the first parliament.

On 3 October 1965, the BNF was established in Mochudi by socialist Dr Kenneth Koma. Linchwe opened the meeting but left early due to his membership in the House of Chiefs, which barred *dikgosi* (chiefs) from partisan politics. He provided an office for Koma, while Ray Molomo, a friend of Linchwe, was elected as the first president but declined due to his civil service position. The *dikgosis*’ discontent with the new political order, which marginalised them, was evident in the establishment of a brief quasi-political party known as the Botswana National Union. This party was founded by Seepapitso VI, the son of Kgosi Kgolo Bathoen II of Bangwaketse, in Pilane near Mochudi in the mid-1960s (Grant 2002).

Molomo is credited with naming the BNF newsletter *Puo Phaa* (Straight Talk). In 1976, accusing the BNF of lacking direction, Molomo defected from the BNF to the ruling BDP (Makgala 2006). In the lead-up to the 1984 elections, Linchwe was displeased with the incumbent MP, Greek Ruele, and favoured his friend Ray Molomo, who had been defeated by Ruele in the BDP primaries. Linchwe’s actions appeared to support independent candidate Sandy Grant (an Englishman and long-time Mochudi resident), who faced controversy over using the Bakgatla’s monkey totem as his election symbol (Parson 1990; Barei 2000). Grant changed his symbol to an eye, which was advertised all over Mochudi, including Linchwe’s residence on Phuthadikobo Hill. Ultimately, Grant finished fourth with 250 votes, while the BDP retained the constituency. This outcome highlighted that the Bakgatla did not vote as their chief wished, and indicates that there were other influencing factors (Parson 1990; Barei 2000).

In a historical development, the BNF won the two Gaborone constituencies in the 1984 elections. They invited Linchwe as a guest

speaker at their celebratory event in Gaborone. The government dispatched Assistant Minister of Local Government and Lands Lesedi Mothibamele to publicly reprimand Linchwe before his people for meddling in politics. After reading him the riot act, Mothibamele refused to answer any questions and went back to Gaborone. This infuriated the Bakgatla, who rallied behind their leader. Ruele refused to be part of a delegation of Bakgatla elders sent to Gaborone to protest the treatment of Linchwe. This tension is thought to have contributed to Ruele's defeat in the 1989 BDP primary, which was won by Molomo. Molomo proceeded to win the national elections by a slim margin of 29 votes, but, citing irregularities, the BNF lodged a case with the high court. They won the case and a by-election was ordered for Mochudi; Molomo again won for the BDP, this time with a bigger margin of 104 votes. By-elections of this nature are rare in Botswana even though the courts are normally inundated with cases of plaintiffs querying election results, citing irregularities, and requesting fresh voting. Most of the cases are dismissed by the courts on technicalities (Sebudubudu 2005). The most prominent cases have been those lodged by the UDC alliance following the 2019 elections, which the UDC lost to the BDP.

Political protests and the government response of sending in the riot police can be traced to the 1966 local government elections in Mochudi. The BDP won eight of the 14 contested seats in Kgatleng while the BPP won the remaining six. However, the minister for local government augmented the BDP majority of two by nominating four additional party members for council membership. This annoyed BPP members in Mochudi, who resorted to public protest. 'Somebody, presumably the District Commissioner, must have rung the alarm in the belief that if things were not already out of hand they were certain to get that way. The Special Police Unit stationed at Lobatse was summoned to Mochudi' (Grant 2002: 18). However, Grant (2002: 20) observes that 'A faded photo of this supposedly major political incident shows just nine BPP loyalists, all women, parading their party flag in front of the Community Centre (now Brigades)'. The dispensation of special elections, whereby losing BDP candidates such as Molefe in 1965 and the council candidates enter Parliament, has been strongly criticised by opposition parties over the years as undemocratic and undermining the will of the voters.

By the 1994 elections there were two constituencies in Kgatleng, namely Mochudi East and Mochudi West, which were both won by BNF. It is believed that Linchwe had become sympathetic to the BNF and may have given it tacit support (Barei 2000). However, the BNF experienced a crippling split when a breakaway faction established the BCP in Mochudi in 1998. Hence, the BDP easily won both Mochudi East and West

constituencies in the 1999 elections by capitalising on the opposition split vote. In the 2004 elections, BNF won Mochudi East while BDP won Mochudi West, and these parties retained these constituencies in the 2009 elections. The UDC alliance (BNF and the Botswana Movement for Democracy, BMD) won the two Mochudi constituencies for the opposition in the 2014 elections. Acrimonious relations between Kgafela II of the Bakgatla and the BDP-led government, which saw the Bakgatla leader flee the country to South Africa in 2012, was partly attributed to the UDC electoral success. However, the parliamentarian for Mochudi East, Isaac Davids, defected to the BDP in 2017 but the UDC rewon the constituency in a subsequent by-election held in April 2018 following the murder of Davids by his farmworkers. The UDC's success was also attributed to the perceived persecution of Kgafela (*Botswana Guardian* 2018).

While campaigning in Mochudi, President Masisi pledged to ensure the return of Kgafela from exile; this promise may have contributed to the BDP reclaiming both Mochudi East and Mochudi West constituencies from the UDC. The BDP had even recruited Mmusi Kgafela, Kgafela's younger brother, as the party's candidate for Mochudi West. However, Kgosikgolo Kgafela remained in exile and did not even attend his mother's funeral held in Mochudi in January 2022. As a strong critic of the constitution of Botswana, Kgafela vowed never to return to the country until the constitution was overhauled. He also embarked on an ambitious call for Kgatleng's separation from Botswana to become an independent state. The UDC joined forces with the unpopular former president Ian Khama and paid the price, as people voted overwhelmingly for the Masisi-led BDP and reversed the 2014 popular vote, with BDP gaining 53 per cent of the vote (Seabo and Nyenhuis 2021). The BMD, which had split from the BDP in 2010, did not win any parliamentary seats in the 2019 elections, while its splinter group the Alliance for Progressives (AP) salvaged a solitary seat in Francistown. BNF members represented the UDC for Mochudi East and Mochudi West in the 2019 elections. Meanwhile, the relentless war of attrition between Masisi and Khama saw the latter fleeing for South Africa in November 2021, claiming that his life was in danger. The government had lodged several cases with the courts against Khama.

Since Independence in 1966, only Ray Molomo had been appointed as a substantive minister from Kgatleng District; this point was acknowledged by retired President Masire (2006), who noted that even the small village of Tonota in the Central District has had more cabinet ministers. This prompted some Bakgatla elite to approach President Festus Mogae (1998–2008) about their area's marginalisation in cabinet appointments. Unity Dow, a losing BDP candidate for Mochudi West in

2014 and then a specially elected member of Parliament in 2014 and 2019, along with Mmusi Kgafela and Mabuse Pule, who were elected in Mochudi West and Mochudi East respectively in 2019, were eventually appointed to Masisi's cabinet, with Pule initially serving as deputy speaker before becoming a junior minister.

The BPP's influence in Kgatleng and elsewhere declined significantly in the 1970s and 1980s, with the BPP maintaining only a minor presence in north-eastern Botswana. The BPP's decline can be attributed to the personality cult of party president Philip Matante, who had been a member of Parliament for the Francistown constituency since the inaugural 1965 elections and leader of the opposition, until his death in 1979. He seemed irreplaceable; he even stood for election from his deathbed on 20 October 1979, and passed away five days later on 25 October, with the BDP winning his Francistown seat. Matante's incapacitation resulted in only the BDP and BNF registering presidential candidates, with the winner being the party that gained the most parliamentary seats in the first-past-the-post electoral system. Wiseman's 1978 observation of the BPP's vulnerability and subsequent decline in Kgatleng is instructive:

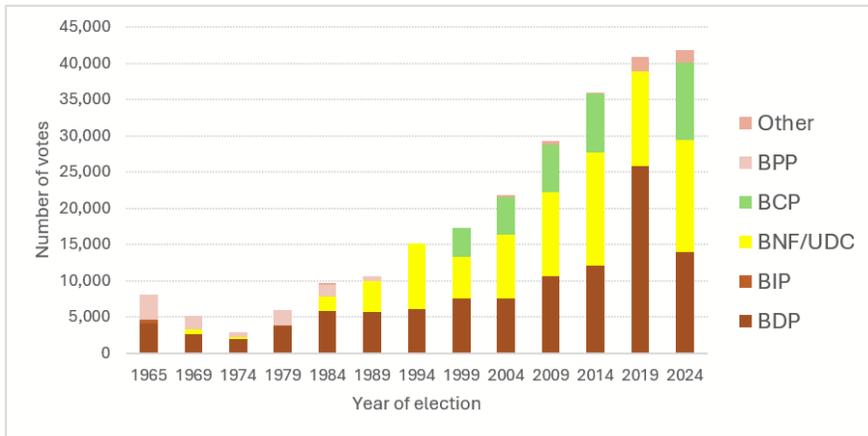
A symbiotic relationship therefore existed in Kgatleng between the Chief and the B.P.P. which could not have survived without his tacit support. Linchwe could not openly indulge in party politics and so, if he was to influence what went on in the Council, it could only be through his special relationship with the B.P.P. In the period under discussion each needed the other, but both maintained their separate identities. Like most symbiotic relationships, this one was asymmetrical in terms of the importance of one partner for the other. Because of the poor organisation of the B.P.P. its impact as a party in its own right in Kgatleng was shallow: without the tacit support of the Chief it stood little chance of survival within the area. For Linchwe, however, the B.P.P. represented one alternative in pursuing the policy of opposing the influence of the B.D.P. Government in Kgatleng. It was always possible that he could use other alternatives (Wiseman 1978: 490).

The BPP's support for Linchwe in the race for the Kgatleng District chairmanship backfired when he was defeated by a BDP candidate in 1972. Wiseman notes that alliances in Kgatleng consequently shifted significantly throughout the 1970s. By the 1974 elections, Linchwe, realising that he could not defeat the BDP, withdrew his support for the BPP and backed the ruling party, which led to the BDP winning nearly all council seats,

including Mochudi (Wiseman 1978). In return and with BDP support, Linchwe became the chairman of the District Council. Wiseman also illustrates this strong cooperation with a photograph of Linchwe and President Seretse Khama walking hand in hand in Mochudi, which Wiseman argues reinforces his point about the Chief's key role in shaping conflict and alliances in Kgatleng. Surprisingly, Wiseman does not mention perhaps the greatest conflict between Linchwe and Seretse Khama, which arose from Linchwe's revival of traditional initiation rites among the Bakgatla in the mid-1970s, and was strongly condemned by Seretse Khama as rampant tribalism threatening national unity (Grant 1984).

In 1982, Knight Maripe became the BPP's president, but he could not match Matante's charismatic and fiery persona. His insistence on speaking English and Ikalanga at political rallies instead of the national language, Setswana, led to accusations of tribalism. The BPP steadily declined during his long tenure from 1982 to 2000. Joining the UDC became crucial for the BPP, which was allocated Kgatleng East for the 2024 elections, despite BNF activists disputing the BPP's presence there. The BNF activists claimed that the decision favoured individuals over the BNF's interests and threatened to abstain from voting or support the BDP instead. The UDC allocated the Kgatleng West constituency to the AP, but BNF supporters raised concerns about the AP's lack of support, although their grievances were less severe than with the BPP; the BNF supporters merely asked for better communication with AP representatives (Basimanebotlhe 2024a). The UDC allocated Kgatleng Central to the BNF, and there do not appear to be any significant grievances with this allocation.

Inter-party defections have been common in Kgatleng for quite some time. As noted, Ray Molomo defected from the BNF to the BDP in the mid-1970s, though he was not a parliamentary candidate at the time. When the BNF split in 1998, leading to the formation of the BCP, Isaac Mabiletsa and James Pilane defected to the BCP as parliamentarians for Mochudi East and West respectively. Mabiletsa returned to the BNF for the 2004 elections, and won the Mochudi East constituency, which he retained in 2009. He later became the BNF's vice president but then defected to the BCP and ran for the Mochudi East constituency in the 2014 elections, where he lost. A BNF councillor, Isaac Davids, defected to the BDP and won the Mochudi East constituency in the 1999 elections. After the BMD was formed in 2010, he joined the party, which became part of the UDC coalition, but returned to the BNF in 2012 and then won the Mochudi East constituency in 2014 for the UDC, only to defect back to the BDP with the seat in 2017. Figure 1 shows the pattern of voting in the Mochudi/Kgatlang constituencies from 1965 to 2024.



**Figure 1: Votes in the Mochudi/Kgatleg constituencies, 1965–2024**

Figure 1 suggests that the 2019 elections were anomalous. Otherwise, there is steady growth in support for BNF and BCP. The election of candidates as MPs from the three main parties in 2024 aligns surprisingly well with the overall vote shares in the district.

### **The Profiles and Challenges of Kgatleg West Parliamentary Candidates**

Four parliamentary candidates ran in Kgatleg West: Unity Dow (BCP), Daniel Molokwe (BDP), Kenneth Rapoo (UDC), and Moagi Molebatsi (BPF). The famous Unity Dow was the only female candidate and had the most impressive profile. She is a trained lawyer and women’s rights activist who founded the Metlhaetsile Women’s Information Centre in the early 1990s in Mochudi. Metlhaetsile was a non-governmental organisation promoting women’s rights through legal aid, counselling, education, community mobilisation, advocacy, and public-interest litigation. Dow gained fame for winning a landmark 1992 case against the government over the Citizenship Act’s discrimination against her children because their father was a foreigner. Appointed as a High Court judge in 1997, she participated in the High Court’s 2006 case favouring Basarwa land rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. She retired in 2009 to start a law firm and has authored several books, including fiction. She joined the BDP and won the party’s primary elections for the 2014 national elections but lost the Mochudi West constituency to a UDC representative. President Ian Khama appointed her as a specially elected MP, and she served as assistant minister

and later minister of education, and then as minister of infrastructure and housing.

After the 2019 elections, President Mokgweetsi Masisi reappointed her as a specially elected MP and minister of foreign affairs. She later clashed with Masisi over the government's hiring of a right-wing advocate from South Africa for a court case involving former President Khama, whom the government accused of siphoning 100 billion pula from the Bank of Botswana. This strained relations between the African National Congress government in South Africa and the Botswana government. A local court dismissed the case as based on fabricated evidence. In a notable incident, Kgosikgolo Mosadi Seboko of Balete successfully sued the government for a disputed farm. After the government appealed, Seboko claimed that Masisi warned her that judges would rule against her, but that he would use his executive power to grant the farm to the Balete. This sparked outrage over Masisi's perceived judicial interference. Subsequently, Seboko was unceremoniously removed as Botswana's representative at the Pan-African Parliament while in Cape Town. The government sought to replace her with Unity Dow, who declined. Consequently, Dow faced severe state-sponsored cyberbullying and character assassination. In 2023, she resigned from the BDP and later joined the BCP with a popular Bokaa-based party activist, who was designated as a potential parliamentary candidate for Kgatleng West, agreeing to step aside for her. While political defections are often seen as motivated by selfish interests instead of principle, Dow's defection was perceived as principled and justified. Her decision to leave a coveted cabinet position for the humble backbench may have increased her appeal. Often, opposition MPs crossing the floor to the BDP were rewarded with cabinet positions, while equally outspoken BDP backbenchers could be silenced with cabinet appointments (Molomo 2012).

Daniel Molokwe, the BDP candidate, had been a branch secretary and became a councillor after winning a by-election in Rasesa in February 2017, following the previous councillor's death in 2016. He won the Rasesa ward again in the 2019 elections, when the BDP secured a majority in the Kgatleng District Council. Molokwe was elected as council chairperson and was unanimously re-elected in 2022. His role allowed him to drive development projects and frequently address *kgotla* (traditional fora) meetings across the district. As chairperson, he accompanied the president and ministers at meetings and launches of projects, which gave him significant visibility and access to communities, and made him the face of the district council. Molokwe won the July 2024 party primary elections with 1,230 votes, which narrowly outpaced the runner-up's 1,106 votes;

three others trailed further behind. The Kgatleng West constituency competition was mainly between Dow and Molokwe.

The UDC candidate Kenneth Rapoo of the AP was nominated without primary elections, which caused discontent among BNF veterans, who claimed that AP's footprint in the constituency was inconsequential. Moagi Molebatsi, the former UDC MP for Mochudi East, left the UDC for the BPF out of frustration. Isaac Davids of the UDC won Mochudi East in 2014. Davids later defected to the BDP, and was murdered by his farm workers. His murder was not related to politics, but led to Molebatsi's victory in the ensuing by-elections in April 2018. But Molebatsi lost the Mochudi East seat to the BDP in 2019, which meant that he was not an incumbent MP in 2024. He reportedly has a farm in the greater Bokaa area and a residential property in Bokaa village, which may explain his shift from Kgatleng East to Kgatleng West for the 2024 elections. Aligned as he was with Khama's BPF, it was felt that Molebatsi could face resistance from Kgosisikgolo Kgafela's loyalists while seeking support from Khama and former UDC backers (Selatlhwa 2024).

### **2024 Campaign Strategies in Kgatleng West**

The different political parties in Kgatleng West used similar campaign strategies, which included motorcades, rallies, candidate posters, town hall debates, and the distribution of party apparel, umbrellas, and flags. Motorcades often ended with a rally to introduce candidates to the voters. The BDP uniquely offered branded sunglasses for members. Radio stations organised radio debates between parliamentary candidates. Free party apparel enhanced party visibility at events and in daily life. Localised town hall debates took place in the Morwa, Bokaa North, and Bokaa South wards. House-to-house campaigns allowed personal interaction between activists and voters. The scale of these campaigns varied, based on each party's resources and the commitment of cadres or foot soldiers.

Parties had constituency chairpersons who coordinated activities and were supported by campaign managers of individual candidates. The chairperson acted as a liaison between campaign managers, candidates, grassroots supporters, and the party's regional or national office. The BDP followed its long-standing practice of providing each constituency with a new and branded van and a substantial campaign budget. Parties distributed T-shirts featuring the party president's portrait and party symbols, such as the BDP's vintage wagon jack (*domkrag*) and flag with red, white, and black stripes, and the UDC's blue umbrella symbol. The BCP's symbol included a lime upper section around a black cow. Campaign materials like flags, posters, and T-shirts were used extensively; often posters of candidates from

different parties appeared on the same lamp posts and electrical poles. Candidates aimed to maximise their visibility by branding their cars and distributing various items, although this distribution did not guarantee them votes, as many individuals collected and wore items from different parties, and sometimes wore them simultaneously. Perhaps this was a demonstration of the political tolerance and peace that is characteristic of Botswana. Even people not registered for elections received party apparel.

House-to-house campaigns involved groups of volunteers, usually three or four, in party T-shirts and hats or caps, promoting candidates in local neighbourhoods. Often focusing on undecided voters, the volunteers explained their party's manifesto and how the candidate would address local issues. While most volunteers were unpaid, candidates may have offered stipends or food. Some council candidates indicated that they bore more campaigning burdens than parliamentary candidates did, because council candidates often had to canvass for support in other council wards in the constituency, sometimes at the expense of their own wards. They noted that campaigning is quite expensive, with personal expenditures ranging from P20,000 to P30,000 per month on food, stipends, fuel, and supplies for door-to-door canvassing. The BDP, which had far more resources than its competitors, issued large numbers of T-shirts, umbrellas, sunglasses, and caps but the candidates had to use personal resources to support the campaign. BDP candidates dispelled the widespread perception that their party had money to burn and could easily bankroll campaigns for its candidates. Parliamentary candidates indicated that it is not uncommon for a candidate to spend over P500,000 on a campaign. An opposition parliamentary candidate in Kgatleng West talked of assisting unemployed and financially challenged council candidates with loans or monthly stipends of about P1,500. A parliamentary candidate's fancy launch complete with pomp and ceremony could cost close to P100,000 of their personal resources.

Parties assess their chances of winning a constituency and the strength of their candidate. A financially struggling party does not want to overspend in a constituency where the likelihood of success is low, at the expense of a stronghold constituency that must be maintained. However, the well-resourced BDP could strengthen its campaign in what looked like a lost cause just to save face and avoid a humiliating defeat that could demoralise party candidates in a constituency (Masire 2006). The BDP seemed willing to do anything to ensure that its prized candidates, like Unity Dow in the 2014 elections, emerge victorious. Reports indicate that her 2014 election campaign received P30,000 from party headquarters. BDP activists in

Kgatleng West also talked of camping in difficult constituencies or wards to improve the party's chances.

In some cases, opposition parties assisted their candidates with T-shirts, while other opposition parties could not. Door-to-door campaigning was generally seen as the most effective strategy because cadres interacted one-on-one with voters. However, it could also be the most expensive method, as some party cadres requested favours such as groceries for their households in exchange for door-to-door efforts. Candidates reported that it was common for them to buy 300 to 500 T-shirts and an equal number of posters per ward. Activists noted that, in remote wards of Kgatleng West, communities were often drawn more to immediate gratification in the form of feasts than to ideas or promises of services such as infrastructure. Therefore, a candidate who frequently provided such merrymaking had a better chance of winning in such wards.

Candidates also made their presence known at community events, such as by providing vehicles equipped with public address systems for announcements. More enterprising candidates lead prayers and the singing of hymns, and even collected utensils after people had eaten at memorial services or funerals. Rallies were used to spread a party's message and denounce rivals. Rallies were announced in advance via social media and public address systems in the village, usually in the evenings. A motorcade of supporters drove through the main streets to the sounds of songs and party slogans, and ended at the rally venue where a candidate was launched with a fanfare. Starting in the 2014 election campaign, the UDC introduced old double-decker buses that were hired from South Africa and painted in party colours. In 2024, the buses showcased the *tsharologa* (unfurling umbrella) message, and a Facebook post announced the 'Kgatleng West UDC *tsharologa* tour loading' alongside an image of the party bus and candidate Kenneth Rapoo (Sebele 2024). *Tsharologa* became a popular slogan at UDC rallies (Figure 2).

The BCP launched Unity Dow in February 2024 in Rasesa, with the party president, Dumelang Saleshando, praising her as a human rights activist and capable former High Court judge. He noted that Dow was the second woman nominated as a specially elected MP for two consecutive terms and that she served as the minister of foreign affairs in her second term (Ntshole 2024). Saleshando claimed that the BCP was the only party ready for the October elections, unlike other parties that were struggling with internal conflicts. He outlined plans for when the BCP is in power and criticised the BDP's service delivery failures. The party also introduced its council candidates for Kgatleng West, with Kgololo Kgetsi highlighting water supply issues in Bokaa despite the nearby Bokaa Dam supplying water

to Gaborone, and also criticising the BDP government’s reversal of plans for a power plant in favour of a shopping complex. Former MP for Mochudi East, Isaac Mabiletsa, raised concerns about new state funding of parties as favouring the ruling BDP (Ntshole 2024). Following the launch, Dow’s campaign intensified with rallies, motorcades, and a branded second-hand minibus, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 2: A UDC *tsharologa* campaign bus**  
*Source:* Mqondisi Dube, *VOA*, 26 October 2024,  
<https://www.voanews.com/a/police-in-botswana-block-opposition-protest-alleging-election-rigging/7842320.html>.



**Figure 3: A branded Unity-Dow minibus and a poster of the Bokaa North BCP candidate on the electrical pole**  
*Source:* Author.

Town hall debates on radio and social media were prominent in the campaigns of parliamentary candidates across the country, including in Kgatleng West. The UDC organised a workshop in Palapye to familiarise its candidates with the party's manifesto, which was also discussed in members' WhatsApp groups. A UDC team monitored radio debates for guidance and shared voice notes to aid the candidates' preparation for the next debates. In late September, Radio Botswana and GabzFM Radio hosted the four Kgatleng West candidates from BCP, BDP, BPF, and UDC at Alafang Sue Community Hall in Bokaa, as part of the *#mydemocracyconstituencydebates* programme. UDC candidate Kenneth Rapoo pledged to improve local health services and address the challenges that the constituency's vastness pose for ambulances. He also called for education reform and the establishment of manufacturing industries to boost the economy, and proposed monthly allowances for pensioners and students (Radio Botswana and GabzFM 2024). The BPF candidate Bright Molebatsi advocated for developing Kgatleng West and noted that the country's busiest A1 Highway and railway pass through the constituency, and thus have economic potential. He suggested that this could attract industries and support horticultural farming at the nearby Bokaa Dam. He emphasised the need for better road conditions and a police station in Bokaa, and condemned corruption as a barrier to development (Motsamai 2024).

Unity Dow presented herself as the best candidate for Kgatleng West, which she described as impoverished and underdeveloped, with many unemployed residents relying on the temporary Ipelegeng public works programme. She emphasised the lack of manufacturing industries and the need for a police station in remote areas like Kgomodiatshaba. Dow criticised the Deborah Retief Hospital as being too small for Kgatleng District's population, dilapidated, and poorly resourced. She asserted that the BCP manifesto provided a clear strategy for economic improvement and social support, including child grants and labour law enforcement. Daniel Molokwe of the BDP countered that Kgatleng District had made progress in service delivery and business establishment. He claimed his experience as the council chairperson positioned him well to represent Kgatleng West. While acknowledging unemployment as a concern, he stated that Ipelegeng was a temporary measure. Molokwe highlighted the District Development Plan's goal to attract investment and improve roads, and he asserted that he would advocate for road improvements as an MP. He noted plans for a new hospital, acknowledged progress in various health services, and stated that the Deborah Retief Hospital, despite its age, contained modern equipment. As a representative of the ruling party, Molokwe was put on the back foot

by other panellists and was forced to defend the BDP government's track record, but he also questioned Dow's cabinet performance and Molebatsi's parliamentary record.

By mid-October, it was reported that 'Unity Dow was early and had an organised campaign. Dr. Dow has been well-prepared, being the first candidate launched back in February. Her organizational strength and early outreach give her a timing advantage, which might translate to voter confidence' (Selatlhwa 2024). By contrast, the BDP's delay in launching its manifesto probably disadvantaged Molokwe. Concerns were raised that 'This delay not only disadvantages voters but also candidates ... Some candidates struggle during ongoing political debates hosted by different radio stations because they are not well-versed in their party's promises' (Basimanebotlhe 2024b). While Molokwe's experience could be beneficial, it was noted that 'the BDP's delayed start in campaigning could hinder his reach and visibility among undecided voters' (Selatlhwa 2024). Although the BCP had never won a parliamentary seat in Kgatleng, the competition was seen as genuinely between Dow and Molokwe but Dow seen as likely to 'walk away with Kgatleng West constituency' (Selatlhwa 2024).

On 19 October, Molokwe and the Kgatleng West council candidates were launched in Pilane by Mabuse Pule, who was the BDP parliamentary candidate for Kgatleng East, a deputy cabinet minister, and a former deputy speaker of Parliament. In his campaign, Molokwe emphasised his track record, which included his work as the council chairman and as a councillor for Rasesa. He highlighted his bold, people-focused decisions, such as opening the multi-storey Mochudi Wholesalers building, which had been idle for over 19 years due to the owner's violations of building regulations. This resulted in the creation of over 200 jobs. He also stated that he championed the ease of doing business by relaxing some rigid council by-laws that hindered small businesses. For instance, while regulations required hot water equipment for operating a restaurant or bakery, he allowed temporary operations with basic setups like water kettles, particularly for low-income operators. One example he gave was the Bull and Bush liquor restaurant, where businesses operated successfully with shared facilities like mall restrooms, or even external facilities. Once the BDP started its campaign, it showcased its financial muscle by erecting a billboard for its parliamentary candidates in all constituencies, including for Molokwe in the Phophane section of Mochudi (Figure 4).



**Figure 4: BDP billboard for Daniel Molokwe in the Phaphane section of Mochudi**

*Source:* Author.

Ian Khama, having returned from exile in South Africa, held a lively ‘meet and greet’ rally in Bokaa on 23 October 2024 to boost the BPF’s local support. He was joined by candidates from Kgatleng West, Kgatleng Central, and Charles Hill in the western reaches of Botswana (Lt Gen Dr 2024). He challenged the perception of the BPF as a Bangwato party and highlighted that it had candidates in 45 constituencies nationwide. Khama condemned Masisi’s treatment of the elderly and criticised Masisi’s administration for corruption and service delivery failures. Khama urged attendees to accept promotional items like T-shirts from the BDP but not to vote for the BDP. He showcased the BPF manifesto, promising improvements for those affected by the BDP, and warned against vote rigging; he cited the BDP’s tactics in the 2019 elections and issues with ballot papers at polling stations, which prevented many civil servants from voting early in the 2024 elections, as evidence of the BDP’s vote rigging strategy borrowed from the ruling Zanu-PF in Zimbabwe. Khama’s schedule for ‘meet and greet’ rallies was tight, and took him to many constituencies nationwide. He mentioned that he had been in Mochudi and Pilane the previous day, and had not planned to come to Bokaa but agreed to a request from activists in the area the night before.

Kgatlang West held town hall debates, organised by local residents, for council candidates in Morwa, Bokaa North, and Bokaa South. Kgatleng West appears to be the only constituency in Kgatleng that held such debates, while reports of town hall debates by council candidates in other parts of Botswana are scarce. The Morwa debate on 5 October 2024 featured candidates from BCP, BDP, BFP, and UDC, and an independent candidate,

under the theme ‘Why Should I Be Voted’. A social media advertisement indicated that

Tlale Mabiletsa, one of the event organizers, expressed his expectation of a vigorous and engaging discourse among the candidates. He further mentioned that the outgoing ward councillor, Opakile Setlhabi, will address the audience regarding his five-year tenure in office. Additionally, the Morwa Village Development Committee often regarded as the village’s parliament, will present its report on village affairs. The local advocacy group, ‘Itlho la Motse’ [‘The Village Eye’], is also anticipated to update the audience on its progress in advancing village development’ (*WeekendPost-Insightful* 2024).

The author attended debates for Bokaa North and South council candidates. The debates were initiated by the local political scientist and journalist Tefo Pheage, who funded most events while seeking villagers’ support. Launched in 2019, the debates included contributions from residents, in the form of décor and bottled water. By the 2024 elections, the only external donation was a public address system from a BCP candidate. Co-hosted by a fellow journalist Victor Baatweng from Maun, the debates aimed to promote political engagement, educate residents, hold politicians accountable, and set the political agenda. Financing was a challenge, as Pheage covered most costs himself. Claiming the debates were a private initiative, the Bokaa Village Development Committee (VDC) often refused to provide the community hall free of charge during election years. Pheage announced on the village Facebook group that the debates would not proceed due to this refusal. In both 2019 and 2024, villagers pressured the VDC to reconsider by threatening to raise the required P800 fee and then force the VDC to disband after the elections; this threat led to free access to the hall shortly before the debates. Costs primarily included airtime for coordination and for regular meetings with candidates, who were asked to bring three supporters to assist on debate day. These supporters also participated in pre-debate meetings to ensure smooth proceedings.

The first debate included candidates from BCP, BPF, and UDC, and attracted about 300 attendees. The BCP and UDC had far more representation than the BPF did. The BDP candidate was absent due to a conflict with the BDP president’s radio debate. Organisers of the debate mentioned that the BDP requested a last-minute postponement, which was too late. The UDC contingent sat to the right, with BCP and a few BDP members in the centre, while the BPF was on the left. An empty chair was

reserved for the absent BDP candidate, which UDC and BCP candidates referenced sarcastically for questions needing a response from the BDP. In a lengthy introduction, Pheage emphasised the importance of undecided voters. The BCP candidate effectively linked issues to the Kgatleng District Council Development Plan which he said excluded Bokaa, while the UDC candidate spent much of his 10-minute allocation discussing himself and trying to clarify that he belonged to Bokaa and was not a carpetbagger, as some had portrayed him. A week later, the Bokaa South debate featured UDC and BCP candidates, with the BDP again absent. The need to harness the potential of the nearby Bokaa Dam as a centre for tourism, fish farming, and crocodile farming was raised by the BPF candidate in the Bokaa North debate and the BCP candidate in the Bokaa South debate. Audience members engaged with candidates through questions. Candidates believed that debates are more effective than rallies for meaningful articulation of party promises and interaction with the voters.

In a confusing development, there was talk by UDC activists of Molebatsi having campaigned for UDC council candidates against the BPF where the BPF was standing. This suggests he may have used the BPF as a temporary platform to undermine the UDC's parliamentary victory, which is a common tactic among those dissatisfied with primary election outcomes.

### **Kgatlung Elections: Results and Analysis**

As in previous elections in Botswana, the 30 October 2024 elections took place in a calm atmosphere, with each party represented by about two observers to monitor polling stations for irregularities. Party members also observed the ballot counting. The national results were devastating for the BDP, which lost power for the first time in 58 years. The UDC won 36 seats out of 61 contested parliamentary seats, and 39 per cent of the popular vote, the BCP won 15 seats, and the BPF secured five seats. The BDP obtained only four seats in Parliament despite receiving 31 per cent of the popular vote; this was a higher percentage than the combined total of the BCP and BPF, which together won 20 seats. Results in Kgatleng demonstrated the continued fickleness of the district's voters. In Kgatleng West, Dow (BCP) won with 4,425 votes, while Molokwe (BDP) received 4,229 (see Table 1 for candidates' vote share). Rapoo (UDC) garnered 3,522, and Molebatsi (BPF) trailed with 1,204. A total of 13,605 votes were cast in the constituency, with 225 of them spoiled. The competitive nature of Kgatleng West was evident in Dow's victory, which was decided by just 196 votes over the BDP runner-up. This was the BCP's first parliamentary victory in Kgatleng, and some attribute Dow's success to her principled stance during

her persecution by Masisi, which led to her defection to the BCP. Her defection was seen as principled, unlike many defections that seemed motivated by the politician's self-interest for survival. Additionally, Dow's support for needy village women through her Metlhaetsile advocacy organisation may have contributed to her victory. Her BDP detractors and former comrades attribute her victory to her alleged orchestration of large-scale voter trafficking from Gaborone and other areas into Kgatleng West. They claim she did the same while she was still with the BDP. Perhaps they were all involved in voter trafficking. The contentious allocation of Kgatleng West to AP by the UDC seems to have cost the party the constituency, as its former MP (Mochudi East) defected to the BFP with some members, as evidenced by former UDC foot soldiers who campaigned for the BFP. This dynamic seems to have negatively affected and divided UDC's votes.

Among the four constituencies won by the BDP nationwide was Kgatleng East, which non-royal Mabuse Pule narrowly retained with 4,661 votes against the UDC's Nono Kgafela-Mokoka (a former BNF deputy secretary-general), who received 4,631 votes, while BCP's Steven Makhura came in third with 2,484 votes. Again, it seems the contentious allocation of the constituency to the BPP cost the UDC the parliamentary seat, as some of its members might have voted for the BDP as they had threatened to do. Being a royal woman did not work for Kgafela-Mokoka, as some voters allegedly threatened not to vote for a *ngwetsi* (daughter-in-law) and 'outsider'. Although feminists and scholars tend to be sceptical of this, both elite and grassroots party activists report that, while women significantly outnumber men in political parties, women often prefer male candidates over fellow women. Being royal did not benefit Mmusi Kgafela in Kgatleng Central, where he was second with 5,127 votes, while Maribe Morolong secured the constituency for the UDC with 7,241 votes. BCP's Nninka Senwelo received 3,777 votes, and BFP's Donald Seleke lagged with just 452 votes.

After failing to bring Kgosikgolo Kgafela back from exile in South Africa, Masisi did not attend the launch for Mmusi in Kgatleng Central. While BDP parliamentary candidate launches are typically exuberant, Mmusi's was notably low-key, with some BDP members leaving before his acceptance speech. There had been a long-standing undercurrent in the BDP claiming that Mmusi was aloof, did not fully engage in community events, and exhibited a sense of entitlement by avoiding hands-on party work and relying on others to do it for him.

The results for councils were devastating for the BDP nationwide and in Kgatleng Central, but the BDP did perform well in Kgatleng West by

capturing six out of nine council wards (Bophirima, Pilane, Morwa, Bokaa North, Rasesa North, and Dikgonnye-Kgomodiatshaba). The remaining three wards were divided between the UDC, which won two (Bokaa South and Artesia-Leshibitse), and the BCP, which secured one (Rasesa South). Table 1 shows vote shares in the district’s council elections while Table 2 illustrates elected councillors in the district:

**Table 1a: Vote shares in Kgatleng District Council, 2024**

Parliamentary constituency	BDP candidates' vote share (%)	UDC candidates' vote share (%)	BCP candidates' vote share (%)	Other candidates' vote share (%)	Total (%)
Kgatleng West	35	33	28	5	101
Kgatleng Central	36	38	22	5	101
Kgatleng East	30	42	22	5	99
Average of the three Kgatleng constituencies	33	38	24	5	100

**Table 1b: Vote shares in Kgatleng Parliamentary Elections, 2024**

Parliamentary constituency	BDP candidate's vote share (%)	UDC candidate's vote share (%)	BCP candidate's vote share (%)	Other candidates' vote share (%)	Total (%)
Kgatleng West	32	26	33	9	100
Kgatleng Central	31	44	23	3	101
Kgatleng East	40	39	21	0	100
Average of the three Kgatleng constituencies	34	36	26	4	100

The vote shares of the parties’ candidates in the district council elections (Table 1a) for Kgatleng District as a whole are very similar to the parliamentary vote shares (Table 1b). However, in Kgatleng West, the BCP’s Dow outperformed her BCP ward candidates, while the BDP and UDC parliamentary candidates underperformed. As mentioned earlier, the Dow brand and her persecution by BDP leadership seem to have benefited her during the elections. Also mentioned earlier, the fielding of an AP candidate in an area where the party had minimal presence disillusioned a former UDC parliamentarian from the old Mochudi East constituency who defected to BPF and ran in Kgatleng West, thereby drawing votes away from

UDC and undermining the party. Whereas the BCP had won council wards in previous elections, it was also outperformed by the BDP and BNF and had never won a parliamentary seat until 2024.

**Table 2: Kgatleng District Elected Councillors, 2024**

<b>Parliamentary constituency</b>	<b>BDP councillors</b>	<b>UDC councillors</b>	<b>BCP councillors</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kgatlang West	6	2	1	9
Kgatlang East	3	5	1	9
Kgatlang Central	1	9	0	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>

The election results highlight an interesting dynamic in traditional campaign strategies. While financial and material resources are critical, their effective deployment matters more than mere visibility. The BDP historically had more financial backing from business ties, and there have been allegations of ‘protection fees’ extracted by party operatives from local businesses. Despite almost always outspending the opposition, the BDP sometimes lost, as seen when resource-limited opposition candidates defeated well-funded BDP rivals in various constituencies.

Furthermore, while many attendees at rallies may be members of the hosting party, anyone can obtain party apparel and then attend a different party’s rally to get their apparel and wear the colours of different events simultaneously. It is also common, for example, to find Zimbabwean vegetable vendors, mechanics, and construction workers, among others, wearing T-shirts of Botswana parties. Therefore, the effectiveness of issuing party apparel to win an election is debatable.

Large crowds at rallies can mislead predictions of election outcomes. At his Bokaa rally, Ian Khama reiterated that the rigging of the 2019 elections was evident. He pointed out that, despite a large turnout at the launch of UDC’s president, Duma Boko, in Gaborone Bonnington North, Boko lost to a BDP candidate whom he had previously defeated in 2014. Khama’s well-attended rallies in Kgatleng West did not secure victories for BPF candidates. Many candidates have lost to rivals who have smaller crowds and fewer resources, as the entertainment factor may draw attendees but not votes. Defectors often mock former leaders and comrades, which can alienate voters who perceive it as bitterness, especially when those defectors lost primary elections. This may explain the declining effectiveness of rallies compared with door-to-door campaigns. Molokwe’s launch in Pilane was a festival that attracted more attendees, including alms-

seekers (often unregistered voters), than Dow's launch, yet he still lost to her. Molokwe's launch took place on much larger, newly cleared ground, amid numerous luxury vehicles, and thus highlighted opulence – something Masisi had tried to discourage, but to no avail – in a country with one of the highest levels of economic inequality globally. Interviewed candidates noted that, while rallies may seem popular due to large crowds, they are not effective in attracting new voters. However, participation in rallies is a necessity of the country's political culture. At these events, speakers primarily address converted party members, while opponents from other parties often respond with dismissive shouting.

The claim that Molokwe and the BDP lost due to a late start to their campaign can be countered by the view that Masisi was seen as failing to fulfil his 2019 promises, despite the significant hype around new or revised government programmes. A 2022 Afrobarometer survey noted that corruption was so widespread that a growing number of Batswana believed the Office of the President had turned into a cesspool of corruption. Opposition parties, mainly the UDC, have won about 80 per cent of nearly 20 by-elections since 2019 (Makgala 2024), which raised concerns for the BDP ahead of the 2024 elections. Masisi, blamed by BDP members for the reckless politicking, foul language, and duplicity that led to the party's defeat, claimed that the UDC's victory stemmed from its enticing manifesto promises, despite their similarity to the UDC 2019 manifesto. The Bokaa North town hall debate had little impact, as the BDP candidate won with 517 votes despite not appearing at the debate, while the BCP candidate came second with 489 votes despite performing well at the debate.

Winning candidates attribute their victories to what they believe were well-coordinated campaigns and well-packaged messaging despite their teething problems. One of the problems cited was the lack of adequate cooperation from primary-election candidates who lost, and who were alleged to work against their parties for the benefit of rival parties. This was said to be a problem across different parties. Inadequate resources were also noted by opposition candidates as a problem. Nevertheless, some losing candidates simply attributed their defeat to the will of the people in a democratic dispensation and promised to work harder to win in the future.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines the political dynamics and elections in Kgatleng West, from the first parliamentary elections in 1965 and local government elections in 1966 to the 2024 national elections. The influence of chieftaincy often proved decisive, but there were instances where the public acted independently. This indicates that the voters here were unusually fickle and

had changing loyalties. The Kgatleng District has experienced unmatched turnover at the parliamentary level, and has maintained this trend for 13 national election cycles.

Unity Dow's victory in 2024 marked the BCP's first parliamentary constituency win in Kgatleng and made her the party's only female parliamentarian and its second parliamentarian in the history of the BCP. The 2024 elections also showed that, in Kgatleng East and Kgatleng Central, voters could deny members of the tribal royalty victory, while supporting non-royals.

Kgatlang East was also one of only four constituencies won by the BDP nationwide.

This paper scrutinises the efficacy of campaign strategies of the parties in the country's democratic development. While providing party apparel and holding large rallies do not guarantee electoral victory, voters wearing the colours of different parties simultaneously does demonstrate Botswana's political tolerance and peace.

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