African Review Vol. 43, No. 1, 2016: 1-26

The Politics of Opposition Electoral Coalitions and Alliances in Botswana

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Abstract

This paper examines the limitations of coalition politics in Botswana. As in other African countries with a one party dominant system, the opposition sees coalition, cooperation and alliance politics as the most viable way to wrestle power from the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Botswana's electoral outcomes have never culminated in the formation of a coalition government. However, the opposition has tried various forms of pre-electoral coalitions but with partial success. The paper argues that although coalitions or alliances present an opportunity to the opposition, the challenge in the main has been disagreements over the model of cooperation. The paper, therefore, contends that alternation of power in Botswana remains somewhat a distant possibility mainly because of the nature of opposition electoral cooperation. It maintains that the politics of the opposition coalition or cooperation in Botswana has been one of failure, doomed to fail, hence, a model of failure or at worst no model, as the principal opposition parties are yet to forge a working alliance. This makes the ruling BDP the key dominant force while the opposition remains largely on the periphery.

Introduction

The democratisation wave identified by Samuel Huntington in the early 1990s, particularly in Africa, ushered in an era of optimism that party systems will become more competitive and established, with a reasonable possibility of alternation of governments, away from the one party system that dominated and ruled the first three decades of the post-independence era, in most African countries. This optimism, including what Thomas Carothers (2002, 6) called 'democracy promoters' was in part based on what prevailed in Europe, Latin America, parts of East and South Asia, and Africa

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itself, whereby many countries in these regions moved 'away from dictatorial rule toward more liberal and often more democratic governance' (Carothers 2002, 5), with a rippling effect. However, for much of Africa these expectations turned out to be exaggerated as things evolved inversely with unexpected outcomes, to the chagrin of those who pinned their optimisms on the democratisation upsurge. Instead, most African countries experienced an explosion of political parties and an unwarranted disintegration of the party system (Resnick, 2011). For instance, 479 political parties were registered for the 2011 elections held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which translates into 'negligible support from voters', and thus aids ruling parties (Resnick 2011, 737). The other unforeseen outcome, that has been bemoaned by political scientists, is the emergence of a one party dominant system that has become one of the major defining features, if not a norm, for most African political systems (Resnick, 2011; De Jager and Du Toit, 2013; Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010).

In their seminal work, De Jager and Du Toit (2013, 3) put it aptly in relation to Southern Africa, when they attest that 'there has been a steady increase in the number of dominant party systems – systems where one party dominates over a prolonged period in an ostensibly democratic system with regular elections and multiple parties participating in elections'. Undeniably, these unanticipated developments of democratisation in Africa have worked against the emergence of competitive and entrenched party systems, and the development of sound democratic political systems in these countries.

There is no doubt that 'political opposition parties are considered crucial to the nurturing, enhancing and consolidating of democracy in every political system' (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2010, 85). Yet, opposition parties have so far failed to live up to these expectations in most African countries because of a number of challenges, amongst others, resource disparities and disintegration of the party system (Resnick, 2011; Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010). Put differently, Resnick (2011, 739) cautions us that '…while democratization has created the space for many new opposition parties to emerge, their electoral success remains hindered by two major challenges: the many advantages enjoyed by incumbents and the absence of well-articulated, *relevant* policy platforms that would help distinguish them from their competitors', a tall-order for non-established opposition parties. In this way, opposition parties in Africa are generally confronted with a formidable challenge; that of portraying themselves as '*credible* democratic alternatives' (Resnick 2011, 736), to ruling parties. This indicates that African democracies

generally suffer from what Barrington et al (2010, 449) describe as '*the lack of viable alternatives to the democratic system*' (**emphasis ours**), suggesting that they are far from realising consolidation. For Barrington et al (2010, 449-450) the key pointers for consolidation are 'holding repeated free and fair elections; peaceful transfer of power through elections; surviving a 'test'; adherence to the 'rule of law', legitimacy; and survival for a lengthy period of time'.

Most African democracies, if not all, are yet to satisfy all these pointers, including Botswana, the longest and uninterrupted democracy in Africa. Others are experiencing reversals. Faced with these challenges, the opposition sees coalition politics as the most viable way to wrestle power from ruling parties. And as Back puts it, coalitions are 'a necessity' (2008,71). However, opposition coalitions in Africa have hardly succeeded in defeating ruling parties (Resnick, 2011), save for a few countries. Opposition coalitions in Botswana are no exception. The opposition has equally tried with various pre-electoral coalitions without evident success.

This paper therefore assesses the limitations of opposition pre-electoral coalitions in Botswana as its political outcomes have never led to a change of government nor a coalition government. This makes the study of pre-electoral coalitions interesting. However, before it discusses the Botswana opposition experience with pre-electoral coalitions, the paper offers a theoretical discussion on coalition theories, their possible benefits and limitations.

Theoretical Context

Coalitions, coalition formation and their role are crucial to politics. This explains why the development of coalitions and their formation have pre-occupied political scientists for the past 50 years, and the consequent emergence of several theories on coalition formation (Back 2008; Tsebelis and Ha, 2013). The literature generally associates coalition politics with parliamentary democracies (Altman, 2000; Back, 2008; Bandyopadhyay et al, 2011). Yet, they do exist within presidential systems (Altman, 2000). According to Bandyopadhyay et al (2011,2) 'coalitions can form both ex ante (before elections) and ex post (after elections)'. For Majeed, 'coalition is that mechanism which incorporates the multiplicity of interests, which ensures co-existence of various centres of solidarity, which accommodates various groups' (2000, 179). The conjectural literature on coalition and coalition formations, particularly on post-electoral coalitions in the developed

countries, is expansive and established (Golder, 2006; Resnick, 2011; Bandyopadhyay et al, 2011). Yet, the literature on coalitions in Africa is still in its infancy (Resnick 2011).

Similarly, the literature on pre-electoral coalitions is not only emerging but it is equally focused on the developed countries (Golder, 2005; Golder, 2006; Resnick, 2011; Bandyopadhyay et al, 2011). Thus, pre-electoral coalitions in Africa have been accorded little attention thus far. As a result, there is a paucity of literature on these formations. This is not to suggest that pre-electoral coalitions have not been explored in Africa (Resnick, 2011). This paper considers opposition pre-electoral coalitions (non-government), and not post-electoral government coalitions. Resnick (2011, 736) defines pre-electoral coalitions as 'the coalescence of two or more political parties under one party banner for the purposes of either presidential or legislative elections or …negotiated pacts whereby parties compete under their own individual banner but agree not to compete against their coalition partners for the same legislative seats'. This definition is sufficiently comprehensive to embrace all types of coalescences, whatever shape they assume. This paper therefore adopts this definition.

The academic literature on coalitions is varied ranging from 'cooperative game theory', that largely disregards party policy position, 'to non-cooperative game theory (which minimizes party distances, and calculates the 'continuation value' of a coalition formation game), to empirical studies (which identify the policy positions of different parties in the coalition formation process and their influence)' (Tsebelis and Ha 2013, 1). A survey of the literature reveals that initial coalition theories were informed by cooperative game theory as they disregarded policy. That is, they were 'policy-blind' (Back, 2008; Tsebelis and Ha, 2013). The main supposition for these theories was that 'parties are motivated exclusively by the aim of attaining the payoffs associated with being in office, which among other things means controlling the important ministerial portfolios' (Back 2008, 73). This is supported by Wyatt (1999, 5) who contends that 'the size of the winning coalition was the key determinant in the composition of a coalition. This was predicated on the rational calculation of the potential coalition participants'. According to this proposition, politics was regarded as 'a zero-sum game' in which those who took part in the coalition kept it 'to the minimum size required to win the contest for office and thus optimise their share of the spoils of office' (Wyatt 1999,5). Basically, cooperation according to these theories, was grounded on the willingness of the participating

parties who are motivated by the possible benefits they were likely to derive from the coalition, and that the coalition was held together as long as all the partners were committed to it. Thus, total cooperation was required for sustenance of the coalition. For Back, 'a party's size should affect its likelihood of getting into government' (2008, 73). In the same vein, large parties are better placed to get 'formateur status' (Back 2008, 73). It should be noted that a '*formateur*' party' is one of 'the [crucial] institutions that regulate coalition bargaining', yet disregarded by even more complex studies that followed but are grounded on cooperative game theory (Tsebelis and Ha 2013, 2-3).

Theorists that followed cooperative game theory conjecture that the size principle is not always plausible. They contend that 'the ideological dispositions of coalescent parties complicate matters as they force parties to rule out some combinations and thus the size principle would not be strictly applicable' (Wyatt 1999, 5). Yet, others have developed this argument further, and note that 'depending on a particular situation either factor might be significant' (Wyatt 1999, 5). Back (2008, 73) identified Robert Axelrod as one of the leading proponents to embrace policy orientations in coalition formation. The argument is that 'minimal winning theory states that coalitions will form that are ideologically 'connected' along policy dimension, which means that the parties in the coalition must be placed adjacent to each other on a dimension'. The other theory that recognises policy orientation is the median voter theorem which postulates that 'the party controlling the median legislator will have increased bargaining power, since there is no policy position that can be implemented that is preferred by a majority of the legislators to the ideal position of the median legislator' (Back 2008, 73). Back (2008, 73) further notes that coalitions tend to advantage incumbent parties 'as they represent the reversion point in the event the other parties fail to agree on an alternative'.

Unlike, cooperative game theories, the non-cooperative concentrated on 'the institutional detail' (Tsebelis and Ha 2013, 3), i.e formateur. For instance, Baron advanced a model 'with three parties in two dimensions based on two rules of selection: (1) a sequential rule for the selection of a *formateur*; or (2) a random selection rule', and the reasoning behind this model is that 'the *formateur* will apply a mixed strategy regarding which party to whom he will make the offer to join him in the government formation game' (Tsebelis and Ha 2013, 3). In short, non-cooperative theories embrace policy positioning in

bargaining – although the plausibility of some of the models is in doubt (Tsebelis and Ha, 2013).

Tsebelis and Ha (2013, 4) follow a different approach as they argue that 'governments have a collective responsibility and select and implement the agreements they make', and that 'these agreements need to be ratified by parliament, and thus one has to examine the institutions regulating the interaction between governments and parliaments'. In summary, despite the contending positions regarding coalition theories, the initial theories sought to answer the question; 'what type of government will form?', and the other theories 'what type of parties will get into government?', with all of them based on the assumption 'that parties can be treated as unitary actors' (Back 2008, 74).

The justification for using the party as a unitary actor is that 'bargaining takes place between parties by party representatives, not individual legislators, and game theoretical modeling becomes less tractable as the number of actors increases' (Back 2008, 74). Coalition formation can be such a fluid and complex process that does not have a one-size fits all solution. Wyatt (1999, 8-9) identified three preconditions that are critical for coalition formation to be realised; 'knowledge of party voting strengths', 'knowledge of potential partners' and '(un)willingness to negotiate'. This suggests that the absence or lack thereof of these prerequisites may obliterate the prospects of coalition formation. Although some scholars observed that policy orientations of the potential partners may impede coalition formation (Wyatt 1999), this is not always the case (Majeed, 2000). Majeed (2000,10) suggests that 'unwillingness of parties to form coalitions is generally not due to ideological reasons' because 'parties, that have been ideologically poles apart, have entered into electoral alliances and coalition, in India, Italy, Israel and elsewhere. This contrasts with the views of a number of authors who have held that the parties entering coalitions are ideologically compatible'. This demonstrates that the argument on harmonious policy positions when forming coalitions is flawed. As coalition formation is such a complex process, the type and form of coalition that prevails is determined by a combination of the above prerequisites. It is plausible that some prerequisites may play a more influential role over others.

It is generally acknowledged that a viable democracy exists where there is a possibility of an alternation of government. In this sense, democracy is inconceivable in the absence of political parties (Barrington et al, 2010).

Writing in relation to South Africa, Southern (2011, 289-290) suggests that the feasibility of a democracy 'is dependent upon one crucial factor, namely, a strong and committed political opposition'. Interestingly, a viable opposition has generally eluded African countries because opposition parties are generally uncompetitive and uninstitutionalised, resulting in one party dominant party system. Consequently, the opposition in a number of African countries resorted to coalition, cooperation and alliance politics as the most viable way to wrestle power from dominant parties.

Resnick (2011, 736) notes that 'in a region [Africa] where democratization has led to a proliferation in parties, electoral coalitions represent a strategy for reducing excessive party fragmentation'. It is worth noting that pre-electoral coalitions are largely identified with first-past-the-post (FPTP) as opposed to proportional representation (PR) system because the former is associated with votes wastage whereas the latter does not (Resnick, 2011). Put differently, pre-electoral coalitions systems are common in 'disproportional electoral systems' (Golder 2005, 647). Wyatt (1999) makes a related point in reference to the Indian system, in terms of the way its electoral system is configured. He notes that the system which is 'based on a single member single plurality method, encourages electoral alliances among smaller political parties. The lack of proportionality in the mechanism, combined with the regionalisation of the Indian party system, punishes parties who are not dominant or whose support is not geographically concentrated' (1999, 6). This is not to suggest that pre-electoral coalitions do not exist in proportional electoral systems. South Africa is a typical example of such.

Both developed countries such as France and Germany (Golder, 2006), and developing countries, including Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia have had pre-electoral coalitions (Resnick, 2011). For instance, in 2013 four Nigerian opposition parties (the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and Congress of Progressive Change (CPC), and an offshoot of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APC) formed the All Progressives Congress (APC), in order to challenge the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2015 elections (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2014). The APC successfully defeated the ruling PDP, making it the first election to be won by an opposition party since the end of military rule in 1999, and thus ending the dominance of the PDP (BBC, 13 April; accessed 25 August 2015). Another example of the few successful coalitions in Africa was experienced in Senegal during its 2000 presidential elections, which catapulted Abdoulaye Wade to power. Resnick (2011, 744)

states that 'in that election, the then ruling *Parti Socialiste* (PS) was [successfully] challenged by the Alternative 2000 coalition, which was led by Abdoulaye Wade and the PDS'. Even then, one thing that came out clearly was that members of the coalition 'prioritized defeating the incumbent over pursuing common policy goals' (Resnick 2011, 744), a common thread (end goal) in almost all pre-electoral coalitions formed in Africa.

Coalitions are formed because of the envisioned benefits (Sened, 1996), at least in theory, particularly in Africa. Remarkably, even 'the international democracy assistance community often expounds on the advantages of coalition-formation for opposition parties' (Resnick, 2011, 736). Golder (2005, 649) also advances the argument that pre-electoral coalitions are presented 'as signaling devices' to voters. Thus, as Golder (2005, 649) puts it in reference to Ireland, India and Sweden, opposition parties formed electoral coalitions in these countries to signal their ability to compete effectively with the ruling party and encourage the electorate to vote for them'. This has not been easy for the opposition parties in Africa, however. Golder (2005, 650) observes that 'pre-electoral coalitions can be expected to offer benefits to risk averse voters who would rather know the identity of the post-election coalition for sure rather than wait for the lottery that occurs during a government coalition bargaining process'. In other words, pre-electoral coalitions do not leave the voter guessing as to what is likely to happen following an election. Resnick (2011, 739) has authoritatively summarised the possible benefits of coalition formation as follows;

> Disparate parties can pool their meager financial resources into a more substantial collection and launch a larger campaign. In addition, through a coalition, a party can appeal to a broader constituency beyond its original base and thereby mitigate the possibility of splitting the opposition vote to the incumbent's benefit. In ethnically-divided societies, coalitions may have the added benefit of encouraging dialogue among parties that transcends their individual ethic, linguistic or religious orientations. In fact, … pre-electoral compromises are more amenable to attracting votes across group lines than post-electoral compromises.
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> Moreover, parties may assume that voters choose candidates strategically rather than sincerely. In other words, they believe voters are influenced by the prospects of a party and are thereby 'loath' to 'waste' their vote on candidates who may not win, even if they personally favour that candidate over all others. In such cases, a

> coalition of either a large number of parties or a few of the better-known ones provides the electorate with the sense that change is possible, encouraging opposition sympathizers to vote accordingly. Likewise, the expectation of an opposition coalition becoming a serious contender can attract funding from the private sector, providing the opposition with additional resources and creating momentum that could last well up until the election day. ….[additionally] opposition coalitions are more likely to prevent ruling parties from employing 'divide and rule' tactics.

Even then, a pre-electoral coalition does not necessarily guarantee votes. Notwithstanding, the envisioned advantages of pre-electoral coalitions, Resnick cautions us that 'election data for all opposition coalitions formed in Africa's electoral democracies since 2000 reveals that coalitions rarely result in incumbent defeat' (2011, 735). What possibly accounts for this? Coalition formation faces a number of limitations, which make it an intricate process that is fraught with difficulties. Brian O'Day (2004, 5) identified three shortcomings to coalition formation; 'the party may have to compromise on priorities or principle', 'party loses some control over the message and tactical decisions' or even 'their individual identities or names in the election period', and lastly 'by associating with other members of the coalition, …the party may also be associated with the negative aspects of those other members'. This demonstrates coalition formation could have far-reaching ramifications on members of the coalition, particularly the possibility of dissolving a party.

In reference to India, Wyatt (1999, 2) contends that 'alliances are complicated by social cleavages, factors internal to parties and the dynamic nature of electoral politics in the state'. Social cleavages, he adds (1999, 11) 'are a significant obstacle to the formation of electoral alliances among parties that represent different cleavage constituencies', and 'compromises with representatives of an adversarial constituency are difficult to sustain', thus making bargaining an onerous task (1999,10). Back makes a related point, when he opines that, it is important to consider 'internal workings of parties …when explaining coalition outcomes' because 'parties are less likely to be in government the higher their level of factionalization and the higher their level of intra-party democracy' (Back, 2008). In this sense, a fractured party in which the leadership fails to control its members is likely to discourage other parties from working with it. For Back (2008, 85) a divided party 'could also affect other parties evaluations of that party. Parties may for example view a

factionalized party as being less likely to deliver the [essential] goods, in terms of getting all its members to vote a specific way'. Thus, Southern (2011, 289) quoting Ferree states that 'opposition parties, knowing "better" credentials are key to persuasion, should devote considerable effort to [try] to change their image'. This suggests that parties need to shed negative image(s) to make significant electoral gains - a real challenge for most opposition parties.

Voter precariousness is another limitation facing opposition pre-electoral coalitions. Resnick (2011, 735) observed that 'a country's total electoral volatility is often due to fluctuations in voting for opposition parties that enter and exit coalitions, indicating the inability of coalition members to build loyal constituencies and become institutionalized overtime'. Resnick (2011) contends that members of the coalition are not capable of creating an electoral base. According to Resnick (2011, 751), 'one of the main reasons that these opposition coalitions do not craft linkages with voters is that participating parties are focused more on office-seeking, rather than policy-seeking, coalitions that form and disintegrate between elections. This in turn is because their constituent member parties often lack policy substance and predominantly rely on the personality of their party leaders for differentiation'.

The failure to build an electoral base amongst opposition parties suggests that opposition pre-electoral coalitions in Africa are doomed to fail, even if they were to have sufficient funding. Where such support exists, it is regionally concentrated. A combination of these limitations makes pre-electoral coalitions, particularly in Africa, fluid and brittle. In this way, we argue that pre-electoral coalitions in Africa are more of an electoral strategy of reducing vote splitting as opposed to offering an alternative programme that may eventually lead to the defeat of the incumbent party. Moreover, coalitions are a way of boosting parliamentary numbers of the opposition to make it difficult for the ruling party to pass bills, thus acting as checks and balances. To this extent, coalition formation is an attempt to strengthen democracy, particularly where the party system is fractured.

Having surveyed the different contending coalition theories, the arguments advanced for coalition formation, the imagined benefits as well as limitations of coalitions, this paper seeks to explain the limitations of coalition politics in Botswana, and thus contribute to the small and underdeveloped literature on pre-electoral coalitions, especially on Africa – a continent that is yet to realise

democratic consolidation. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, in countries such as Botswana where a disproportionate electoral system (FPTP) is in use, it is highly plausible that what Wyatt (1999, 7) described as an 'opportunistic alliance' will develop as opposed to ideological opposition pre-electoral coalitions. It is these opposition pre-electoral coalitions in Botswana, which is the focus of this paper that we now turn to.

Opposition Electoral Coalitions in Botswana

Undoubtedly, scholars have widely acknowledged Botswana as a continuous multi-party democracy. If the 1965 pre-independence elections are not discounted, eleven successive multi-party elections have been held thus far. It is in fact one of the few known countries in Africa where opposition parties' are permitted to form and function with ease or freely. Put differently, there are no overt obstacles that are meant to obliterate opposition parties. Osei-Hwedie (2001, 59) had this to say about the absence of obstacles in Botswana; 'the opposition parties in Botswana face no or little suppression of their operations by the ruling BDP. There are no restrictions on the formation, numbers or functioning of opposition parties. The opposition parties are allowed to organise meetings, rallies and campaigns without undue restrictions'. This is notable by African standards because the political environment in most African countries is hostile to opposition parties. There are two plausible explanations for this state of affairs.

First, it could be that the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) is committed to democratic principles, at least by African standards. Second, and as in most African countries, the party system is fragmented assuring the BDP a comfortable win, and thus access to state patronage. The latter explanation is not implausible considering developments in some of the African countries, where intolerance to the opposition was displayed when ruling parties realised that they were on the verge of losing elections and/or the opposition was likely to mount a formidable challenge to the ruling party. A clear case is Zimbabwe in 2008 and 2013. Instead, the major challenges of the opposition parties in Botswana include amongst others a disproportionate electoral system, which works in favour of the main party, and inequitable access to resources and the media, which are all tilted in favour of the BDP (Sebudubudu and Maripe, 2013). Nevertheless, there are a few countries in Africa that use FPTP yet the system has resulted in a change of government. Zambia is one such a country.

Interestingly, Botswana's electoral outcomes have never culminated in the formation of a coalition government nor government turn over - making the ruling BDP the key dominant force in the country's politics. Since its formation in 1962, the BDP maintained what Sebudubudu and Molutsi (2011, 17) described as 'a grand coalition of the strategically well-placed and privileged leaders …. It was its strategic placing and the fact that its formation had been facilitated by the Protectorate Administration that gave the BDP its moderate ideological stance …'. It is this grand coalition and its moderate policy orientation that in part contributed to its electoral success, with the opposition remaining largely on the margins of the country's politics. As Osei-Hwedie (2001, 58) rightly noted, prior to the 2014 general elections, 'the only occasion on which something of a threat to the BDP's electoral dominance emerged was in the 1994 elections when the [Botswana National Front] BNF won 13 seats with 37 per cent of the vote …'. This was the highest number of seats and votes a single opposition party ever won in the country's history. According to Osei-Hwedie (2001, 65) the performance of the BNF particularly in the 1994 elections was enhanced 'by a combination of dissatisfaction with unemployment, poverty, corruption scandals and the government refusal to grant workers' request for annual increase'. This argument is not far-fetched considering the fact that the government in economies such as those of Botswana is the biggest employer.

As in other African countries with a one party dominant system, the opposition has resorted to coalition, cooperation and alliance politics as the most viable way to wrestle power from the indomitable BDP. The opposition in Botswana has tried various forms of pre-electoral coalitions but with partial success. Opposition electoral coalitions in Botswana pre-date independence. Molefhe and Dzimbiri state that 'collaboration or unity among Botswana's opposition political parties is not new' (2006, 115). They further argue that the establishment of the Botswana National Front (BNF) in 1965 'represents the first partially successful experiment with party unity in Botswana. The party was formed to reconcile warring elements within the BPP to create a progressive block intended to bring down BDP rule' (2006, 115). Similarly, Sebudubudu and Molutsi (2011, 18) consider the formation of the BNF as 'another form of political coalition worth noting in Botswana's experience …. The BNF was formed out of [a] faction from the [Botswana People's Party] BPP breakup …The grand goal of the BNF was to bring together patriotic forces and nationalists across the political spectrum into a political force in order to challenge the dominant BDP. The BNF, like BPP, was on the left of the political spectrum and was more ideologically aligned

to socialist tendencies than the BPP'. Although Molefhe and Dzimbiri regard the creation of the BNF on the one hand as an initial somewhat 'successful experiment with party unity in Botswana', on the other hand they contend that its 'creation did not succeed in reconciling the warring factions within the BPP… (2006, 116)'. It should be noted that the BNF was not a pre-electoral coalition, in a true sense, as per our definition above. The foregoing suggests that the BNF is a product of conflict. It is thus not surprising that it has been defined and consumed by conflict throughout its history. Thus, conflict has become part of its identity (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2011; Molefhe and Dzimbiri, 2006).

As a result of internal squabbles, the BNF turned out to be the party that split the most in Botswana, prior to general elections. Most of the parties that broke away from the BNF turned out to be insignificant, dormant and went into oblivion. Others merged with the existing opposition parties. However, the 1998 BNF split that led to the formation of the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) turned out to be major, and did irremediable damage to its prospects of winning state power. This split reversed the purported 'threat' that the BNF posed to the BDP supremacy during the 1994 elections, alluded to by Osei-Hwedie (2001). In turn, the BCP has become one of the major opposition parties in Botswana when considering its popular vote during the 2004, 2009 and 2014 elections, such that it is key to forming an appealing and winning opposition coalition in Botswana. Prior to the 2014 elections, the BCP was the majority opposition party over the BNF that has proved itself as the main opposition party over the years, despite the many splits that rocked it. There is no doubt that the BNF splits worked to the advantage of the BDP and also dented and weakened opposition efforts to present a formidable challenge to the BDP. The BNF splits, combined with the failure of the opposition to work as a collective, contributed to negative perceptions towards the opposition as a whole in the eyes of the electorate. It is in this context 'why opposition parties are usually portrayed as weak and posing a minimal threat to the ruling parties in Botswana and in Africa in general' (Osei-Hwedie 2001, 57).

Notwithstanding the advantages enjoyed by the ruling BDP, this description of the opposition in Botswana is somewhat apt considering that opposition parties are allowed to mobilise freely. Yet, its performance has been disappointing. What is puzzling about the opposition in Botswana is that 'opposition politicians are well aware of the costs of vote-splitting' and this explains why 'there have been several attempts to reverse the fragmentation of the opposition' (Poteete 2012, 84). In turn, the opposition parties have

experimented with various forms of opportunistic coalescence politics that, as we show below, realised some partial success. The main aim and end goal of all these efforts were to challenge BDP dominance as opposed to presenting an alternate policy programme. As Molomo (2000, 18) puts it 'more and more parties became obsessed with removing the BDP rather than conceptualising an alternative to its rule. It needs to be borne in mind that the crucial role of the opposition is to create a democratic alternative. However, attempts to unite opposition parties still fall short of creating that image'. Below we document the various forms of opportunistic opposition pre-electoral coalitions in Botswana.

The first real attempt to form an opposition pre-electoral coalition was in 1991, when the Botswana National Front (BNF), Botswana People's Party (BPP) and the Botswana Progressive Union (BPU), made an attempt to form the Peoples Progressive Union (PPF). The proposal was for the participating parties to form one political party. Nothing tangible emerged out of this effort (Molomo, 2000). In 1993, another BNF splinter group, the Freedom Party (FP) merged with the Botswana Independence Party (BIP) to form the Independence Freedom Party (IFP). The IFP also failed to present a real challenge to the BDP (Molomo, 2000; Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010). This was followed by another attempt in 1994, whereby three smaller parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Botswana Workers Party (BWP) and the Marxist-Leninist, Engels and Stalinist Movement (MELS) formed the United Democratic Front (UDF) under which the partnering parties retained their individual identities. It is important to note that SDP and BWP are BNF splitter groups (Molomo 2000; Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010). The UDF turned out to be a spent force without much impact on the electoral support of the BDP.

In 1999, the IFP, BNF, BPP and the United Action Party (UAP) formed the Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM). Just like the UDF, members of the BAM were to maintain their individual identities but using a shared symbol. The BAM failed before it could even take off because the BNF opted out of it a few months before the 1999 elections (Molomo, 2000; Molefhe and Dzimbiri, 2006). Its withdrawal meant that only three smaller parties – IFP, UAP and BPP - participated in the 1999 elections under the BAM coalition. The BNF withdrawal from BAM was followed by that of the BPP after the 1999 elections. It could be argued that the BNF engineered the BAM coalition as an attempt to spite its newly formed splinter group, the BCP, which was not part of this opposition pre-electoral coalition. The withdrawal of the BNF

once again led to negative perceptions towards opposition parties' efforts to work together, resulting in a reversal of the 'threat' the BNF posed during the 1994 elections. It should be noted that the BNF withdrawal did not come as a surprise because, as usual, it was fraught with internal divisions at the time of BAM formation, as before and ever since.

Another attempt was made in 2003 resulting in the BAM, BNF and BPP forming a pre-electoral Pact and agreeing not to challenge each other in the 2004 elections. The BCP, once again, was not part of this Pact (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010; Poteete, 2012). The non-participation of the BCP once again failed to reverse opposition vote splitting, yet the combined opposition vote posed a serious challenge to the BDP. As shown in Table 1 below, the combined opposition vote consistently stood at above 40% from the 1994 elections onwards (1994-2014), reaching 50% in 2014, while that of the BDP leveled around 50% for the same period, but declined to 47% in 2014, making it the lowest popular vote to be obtained by the BDP in its history. However, this combined opposition vote could not be translated into equitable seats, owing to the disproportionate electoral system in use, FPTP. Percentage of seats and votes won by parties in elections in Botswana, 1965-2014 are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Percentage of seats and votes won by parties in elections in Botswana, 1965-2014

	1965		1969		1974		1979		1984		1989		1994		1999		2004		2009		2014	
Party	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes
BDP	99	80	77	68	84	77	91	75	82	68	91	65	67	55	83	54	77	51	79	54	65	47
BNF			10	14	7	12	6	13	15	20	9	27	33	37	15	25	21	26	11	21		
BPP	0	14	10	12	7	6	3	8	3	7	0	4	0	4				2	0	1.4		
BIP	0	5	3	6	2	4	0	4	0	3	0	2	0	4						0		
BAM															0	5	0	3				
BCP																					5	20
BCP/ BAM															2	11	2	16	9	22*		
NDF																	0	1				
UDC																					30	30
Other	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	5	0	1	1	1.4	0	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: *In 2009 the BCP and BAM contested the elections as a pact/alliance and obtained a combined popular vote of 22%; **In 2014, BMD, BNF and BPP contested the election under UDC coalition and secured 30% of votes

Source: 1965 – 2009 election results reproduced from: Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2010; and the 2014 percentages were calculated from the results released by the IEC

With the BDP popular vote being at an all-time low following the 2004 elections, the opposition made yet another effort aimed at contesting the 2009 elections as a coalition, thus another opportunity to wrestle power from the BDP (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010). As a sign of commitment to opposition coalition towards 2009 elections, four opposition parties - BAM, BCP, BNF and BPP - entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) through which they pledged not to challenge each other in the by-elections held prior to the 2009 elections (Molefhe and Dzimbiri, 2006). The MoU on by-elections did not hold up to the 2009 elections.

Equally, the pledge to work as a pre-electoral coalition during the 2009 elections turned out to be a futile exercise as it did not materialise nor could it be sustained because the four parties did not agree on the model of coalition for the 2009 general election. The BNF argued for a pre-electoral coalition whereby there will be what Back called a 'formateur status', as the main opposition party becoming the basis of cooperation. As Molefhe and Dzimbiri (2006, 117) stated 'the BNF failed to agree with other collaborating partners, preferring an alliance model similar to that of South Africa's tripartite alliance where there is a lead party around which cooperation arrangement are built'. This was unlikely to work bearing in mind particularly the historical relationship between the BNF and the BCP. As expected, that suggestion was rebuffed by other parties. The other parties were first for an umbrella coalition, and when there was no agreement on this, they argued for a pact. Ultimately the four parties failed to participate in the 2009 elections as a coalition. In turn, only the BAM and BCP formed a pact at which they agreed not to challenge each other. This BAM-BCP Pact realised some partial success as it pooled a popular vote of 22%, but still not significant when compared to that of the BNF at 21%. The BCP popular support was 16% in 2004 (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2010). As with the BAM, BNF and BPP Pact of 2004, the non-participation of the other opposition parties, particularly the BNF in the BAM-BCP Pact similarly worked to the advantage of the BDP. The two parties (BAM-BCP) merged following the 2009 elections. This merger entailed both parties deregistering their individual symbols with the electoral authority. The two parties agreed to maintain the name of the Botswana Congress party (BCP), probably because the BCP was broadly known than BAM, and the symbol of the new party reflecting the two deregistered symbols. The New Democratic Front (NDF), which was another BNF splinter group, had a BCP special status membership but ultimately its members individually joined the BCP.

Four opposition parties - BCP, BNF, BPP and the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD), a BDP splinter group which was formed in early 2010, pledged to present a pre-electoral coalition during the 2014 general elections. The four parties entered into extended and difficult cooperation talks that came to be known as Umbrella I (Sebudubudu and Bolaane, 2013). At the beginning of these talks and as a sign of commitment to work toward a common goal, the four parties, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) through which they declared not to challenge each other during by-elections held before the 2014 elections. This MoU did not hold. These talks were encouraged by the opposition's collective vote, and further boosted and motivated by the 2011 two months civil servants strike, the longest ever 'under the auspices of the Botswana Federation of Public Service Unions (BOFEPUSU)' (Sebudubudu and Botlhomilwe 2013, 125). During this strike 'the BOFEPUSU leadership pledged that its members would only support a united opposition in the 2014 general elections' (Sebudubudu and Bolaane 2012, 458). Little did they know that the first set of opposition talks were going to collapse on 22 December 2011 over the model of cooperation and also the sharing of constituencies amongst participating parties. The BCP was for a Pact model whereas other parties were for an 'Umbrella' model, along the lines of BOFEPUSU model (Sebudubudu and Bolaane 2012). Following the collapse of Umbrella I, the BMD, BNF and BPP forged ahead with what came to be known in Botswana politics as Umbrella II, which resulted in the formation of a new political party called Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC).

Under the UDC, the three parties maintained their individual identities - as opposed to merging - but used a shared symbol during the 2014 general elections. As was the case with previous opposition cooperation arrangements, the intention was to unseat the ruling BDP from power. This goal proved to be a futile exercise with the BCP not being part of this coalition but realized some partial success. The coalition party mustered 17 seats (30% popular vote), which is the highest second number of seats to be gathered by an opposition party following the 13 seats (37% popular vote) obtained by the BNF in 1994. The BCP obtained 3 seats and 20% of the popular vote.

The total number of seats won by the opposition was not sufficient to unseat the governing party although as a collective the opposition won 50% of the popular vote – once again demonstrating the disproportionate nature of the electoral system in use in Botswana. The failure by the principal opposition

parties (BCP and BNF) to cooperate dented the opposition chances of unseating the well-oiled BDP machine –once again creating and reinforcing negative perceptions towards opposition parties. These perceptions were reinforced by divisions that prevailed within the BNF, prior to the 2014 elections, with some doubting the UDC prospects if its symbol did not bear the BNF symbol. For the BNF symbol to be used by the UDC, it had to be first deregistered with the electoral authority, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Other UDC coalition members, BMD and BPP, had already deregistered their individual party symbols. The BNF was yet to do so because some of its BNF members had taken the party to court arguing that its Constitution did not allow it to join another party. Even then, these members did not succeed in their bid. In some quarters, these divisions and the court cases presented the UDC as yet another fragile opposition pre-electoral coalition. To the surprise of many, the UDC held until the 2014 elections and performed beyond expectations. These doubts were not unwarranted considering that the BNF, a key member of the UDC, was established against the backdrop of conflict and has been consumed by factions and internal squabbles in its entire history. This made it less attractive to other possible coalition partners, in particular the BCP. Back (2008, 74-75) authoritatively warns us that:

> A party whose members have diverging policy views, and that consists of distinct factions, will most likely have difficulty reaching agreements with other parties. This implies that a factionalized party is less likely to get into government. One possible mechanism that could explain an effect of factionalization on bargaining is that parties not united on policy issues may also disagree on who they should govern with. This means that factionalized parties will have difficulty making bargaining decisions. Policy disagreements within a party will probably make other parties less likely to trust the factionalized party to honour bargaining agreements, since differences in policy views might later be maintained as a low level party discipline. This uncertainty may in turn lead to the exclusion of these parties from bargaining if actors are risk-averse.

The foregoing quote suggests that it may be difficult for a political party that is divided or at war with itself because of internal squabbles and/or lack of indiscipline, or existence of both, to enter into a successful coalition. It is plausible that the history of factions and/or recurrent splits that the BNF experienced over the years may have made it difficult for a party such as the

BCP to strike a chord with the BNF. Poteete (2012, 85) had this to say in relation to the BNF: 'recurrent internal struggles repelled potential allies and thwarted the BNF's hopes of re-emerging as the main challenger to the BDP'. Entering into a coalition with a party that is riddled with factions makes the coalition brittle, unstable and less appealing to voters. The issue of factions within the BNF, and disagreements with other possible opposition coalition partners amongst others, over the model of cooperation, has generally contributed to a partial success of pre-electoral opposition coalitions that have been formed so far in Botswana or lack of a winning opposition coalition in that country.

In addition to the issue of a fractious party, Back (2008,76) argues that 'parties are less likely to be in government, …the higher their level of intra-party democracy'. This argument may be true for the BNF because its high level of intra-party democracy has degenerated into instability and high levels of indiscipline, and thus the party leadership is not in a position to control party cadres through established structures. From this, it can be discerned that the BNF has lost organisational direction. This may explain why some of its members were willing to disregard the party's highest decision making structure, Congress, which had resolved that the party should coalescence with other opposition parties for the 2014 elections. The party resolution also urged the party leadership not to dismember the party identity. It can therefore be discerned from the above discussion that any efforts to form a pre-electoral coalition with a divided party, as the BNF was prior the 2014 elections, raised doubts on prospects of such a coalition and increasing the possibility of it being punished by the electorate. However, the performance of the UDC has added impetus to opposition cooperation. There has been mounting pressure on the BCP to cooperate with the UDC for the 2019 elections, and already there are indications that the two parties may work together during those elections. For instance, the BCP has taken a decision at its Congress held in Kanye in July 2015 to enter into cooperation talks with the UDC.

In the case of Botswana, as in other African countries, opposition pre-electoral coalitions are boosted by the number of votes the opposition polled as a collective (see Table 1 above, on votes received by different parties in the last eleven general elections). This is in line with Molefhe and Dzimbiri's argument who assert that 'unity seems to be driven by strength in numbers and the thinking appears to be that if the opposition parties pool their resources they will be able to oust the BDP using the principle of FPTP

[which they are against] – that is, that the majority wins' (2006, 119). This thinking tends to downplay the fact that voters identify or vote for a political party for a number of reasons, including amongst others, party loyalty or membership, leadership as well as its policy orientation. Osei-Hwedie says 'it is a combination of rationality, party identification and loyalty which determine voting preferences of the electorate' (2001, 65). Barrington et al (2010, 364) add that 'voters with strong party identification typically support candidates from the same party in election after election. Weak party identification has positive and negative effects on a political system'. In the case of Botswana, as in other African countries, opposition parties have a challenge of party identification.

In a study conducted in February and March 2012 in six constituencies in Gaborone and adjacent areas, 24% of the 805 respondents indicated that they would prefer to vote for the BCP, 14% for BNF and 6% for BMD while 45% would vote BDP, and 8% would not vote, if elections were held at the time of the study. This study suggested that it would have been difficult for a single opposition party or even the opposition as a collective to defeat the BDP (Mokgatlhe and Sebudubudu, 2012). In another study conducted by the Afrobarometer Botswana Chapter in June-July 2012, 39% of the 1200 respondents suggested that they were close to the ruling BDP, while 10%, 9%, 2% and 1% were affiliated to the BNF, BCP, BMD and BPP respectively. And 35% of the respondents indicated that they were not affiliated. When asked which party they would vote at the time of the Afrobarometer study, 50% would vote BDP, 13 % BCP, 11% BNF, 4% BMD, and 1% BPP. The Afrobarometer survey results also suggest that no single opposition party or even opposition parties as a collective could wrestle power from the BDP. Moreover, opposition support is regionally concentrated – creating a challenge for them in their efforts to wrestle power from the BDP. This indicates that the party system is flux, but in favour of the ruling BDP. It also suggests that opposition parties in Botswana are yet to become competitive and indeed institutionalised.

Although pre-electoral coalitions are perceived as a viable option for the opposition, it is probable that they may not necessarily result in higher votes for the coalition in part because of the challenges discussed in this paper. Resnick (2011, 743) cautions us that 'pre-electoral coalitions not only have proved relatively unsuccessful at facilitating incumbent turnover, but also have reduced the ability of political parties in Africa to address their second and even greater challenge: the lack of well-defined policy platforms and

ideological orientations'. Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie (2010, 93) equally add that 'electoral alliances and electoral reform alone are no panacea and will not guarantee a win for the opposition, as they suffer from credibility problems in the eyes of voters. Such credibility problems arise from the many splits that have taken place, and, even more so, the inability of the opposition to present a viable and alternative programme to that of the ruling party'. This is because 'most coalitions in Africa are based on office-seeking, rather than policy-seeking, motives' (Resnick 2011,743), and 'consist of parties that are distinguished predominantly by the personality of their leaders rather than a distinct political programme that is relevant to the concerns of African citizens' (Resnick 2011,735).

This argument may be extended to the case of Botswana because all the pre-electoral coalitions that have been formed thus far, the UDC included, were meant to wrestle power from the BDP without a clear cut discernable programme. In the end, all these forms of opposition pre-electoral alliances in Botswana have been, in the main, opportunistic in nature. However, factors such as those that prevailed in the 1994 elections, alluded to by Osei-Hwedie (2001), resulting in the BNF winning the highest number of seats ever, as a single party, reared their ugly head during the 2014 elections. A combination of those factors as well as others such as the decline of the education sector, shortage of water and intermittent power cuts played themselves out resulting in the opposition parties as a collective winning more votes (50%) in the 2014 general elections, but these were not translated into sufficient seats to win state power. These factors should have provided all the opposition parties including the BCP, an incentive to cooperate. But the failure to agree on a model of cooperation has in the main thwarted opposition cooperation resulting in the formation of a fragile coalition, the UDC. However, this proved not sufficient to allow it to wrestle power from the BDP, with the BCP not being part of this coalition. The UDC won 17 seats (30% of the votes) and the BCP won 3 seats (20% of the votes).

Conclusion

This paper examined the limitations of the various forms of opposition pre-electoral coalitions in Botswana. The paper argued that although pre-electoral coalitions or alliances present an opportunity to the opposition, the challenge in the main has been disagreements over the model of cooperation. The paper maintains that the politics of opposition coalition or cooperation in Botswana has been one of failure, doomed to fail, hence, a model of failure or at worst no model, as the principal opposition parties - BCP and BNF - are

yet to forge a working alliance. The BNF predisposition to split and recurring factions could have affected its prospects to mount a formidable challenge to the BDP or to form a working coalition with the BCP. This is plausible as Back (2008, 85) cautions that a divided party could 'have problems acting as unitary actors and in reaching decisions about which partners the party should choose, since members have highly divergent policy views'. This, he adds, may also 'affect other parties' evaluations of that party', and consequently perceiving it as being 'less likely to deliver the goods, in terms of getting all its members to vote a specific way' (Back 2008, 85).

Thus, in the absence of a workable model, this paper, therefore, contends that alternation of power in Botswana remains somewhat a distant possibility mainly because of the 'opportunistic' nature of opposition cooperation. As a result, pre-electoral coalitions in Botswana could at best be described as more of a strategy to reduce excessive vote splitting as opposed to offering the electorate with a discernable programme that may ultimately ensure a defeat of the incumbent party. This makes the ruling BDP the key dominant force and the opposition remains largely on the periphery. To this extent, it could be argued that part of the problems that affect the opposition prospects to obtaining state power in Botswana are internal, thus rendering them an 'in permanent opposition' (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2010, 85). One of the challenges that work against opposition parties is that they are yet to institutionalize, a necessity for these parties to present a formidable challenge to the ruling party. However, the chances of the BDP losing power would be more real during the 2019 elections if the BCP were to cooperate with the UDC. This is based on the combined opposition vote, particularly in the 2014 general elections. To this extent, the year 2019 is perceived as a critical juncture in Botswana politics that may mark the end of BDP dominance.

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