



The 2019 Elections in Botswana: Context, History and Future – Chris Brown

Logan Cochrane^{1,2} and Chris Brown²

1 Hawassa University, Ethiopia

2 Carleton University, Canada

The Nokoko journal is committed to a world where people are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, where respect for individuals' varied differences is maintained, and where everyone can realise their full potentials. NokokoPod is a companion to the journal, covering current African issues. It aims to bring forth new perspectives that broaden, trouble, complicate and enrich current discourses. Edited and annotated versions of the conversations will be made available on the journal website.

This issue of NokokoPod discusses the upcoming election in Botswana. The podcast for this discussion is available on the Nokoko journal website. This conversation took place on August 28th, with Logan Cochrane and Chris Brown in Ottawa, Canada. This version of the PDF has been reviewed by Logan Cochrane and Chris Brown. In addition to the conversation, a set of annotations have been added as footnotes so as to strengthen the value of these publications and enable them to act as a resource for listeners and readers who want to have additional context and/or find additional resources on the topics discussed.

Logan: 2019 was a big year of elections across Africa: South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, Malawi, and others, as well as some yet to come, including Tunisia and the topic of today's discussion: Botswana. With us is Professor Chris Brown, who is a member of the Department of Political Science at Carleton University. To get us started, could you tell us a bit about your connections to, and research interests in, Botswana?

Chris: First of all, Logan, thank you for inviting me. It is a real pleasure to be a part of this podcast series. I have been thinking and/or working in Botswana for over 40 years now. It was 1978 when I was fresh out of university, with my Bachelor of Arts degree in hand, that I first went to Botswana with CUSO,¹ as it was back then, as a volunteer. My first real job was as a rural development planner in Kweneng district in Botswana. I do not think I knew at the time, but it turned out that I was arriving in a country that was just on the cusp of something a little bit different and a little bit exceptional. It was a very poor country at that time—one of the poorest in the world.² However, it was beginning a process of very rapid growth and it was institutionalizing a democratic system. I thought that was normal. I thought every African country was like that. It was only sometime later I realized that maybe Botswana is a bit different.

After CUSO, I went to grad school. I did my PhD thesis on local government, specifically village-level politics, in Botswana, which included almost two years of fieldwork in the 1980s. Then, in the 1990s, I took three years of leave from Carleton University and I

¹ Cuso International was established in 1961 and provides international volunteer placements.

² According to the World Bank Data Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/country/botswana>), in 1985, 59% of the population was below the national poverty line. Using the \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) as a poverty line, in 1985 42.6% of the population was extremely poor. On the latter measure, by 2015 this has dropped to 16.1%.

went back to Botswana. I worked for the Ministry of Finance as a policy advisor on local government issues. I have had a fairly long connection, but mostly on the government side in Botswana. This year, 2019, I am in Botswana. I am on sabbatical and it is the first time in my life that I am actually going to be writing academic work about Botswana. All my publications have been more on Canadian foreign policy towards Africa and regional relations in southern Africa.³ I have never actually written, other than a few conference papers, about Botswana. For me it is kind of exciting. After all of this time, to try and pull it together and actually write academically about Botswana. Botswana is now on its fifth president. The fourth one's term just finished last year; the project I am working on is looking at his presidency and how it has been shaped by the previous history but is also shaping the history going forward. That is the project I am working on right now.

Logan: It is an exciting year to be in Botswana. Before we jump into the potential governance changes and the election, for those of us who are not familiar with Botswana and its history, could you give us a bit of Botswana 101 on it being the oldest multiparty democracy and some of the successes and challenges of its experience.

Chris: I have to preface my comments by saying that Botswana is a small place. I was just in Ethiopia and I was talking to a history teacher. We were talking at length about the history of Ethiopia. It was fascinating. He asked me: "Well, what do you do?" I said, "I am working on Botswana." He said: "Botswana. I have never heard of that place. How big is it?" I said, "Well, how big is Addis Ababa? Five million. The total population of Botswana is half of the population

³ A listing of some of Dr. Brown's publications can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/polisci/people/brown-chris/>

of Addis Ababa—although the country is fairly big, it is the size of France. It is a very sparsely populated, relatively small, country."⁴

I have always been interested in Botswana because in some respects you can point to it as a place that works in Africa. I think there is way too much Afro-pessimism, where people are always focusing in on things that went wrong and trying to develop an analysis based on that. I found Botswana interesting because—I do not want to be a Pollyanna, there are lots of challenges and limitations—it was a place where things worked relatively well. As a result, you ask yourself: "Why is that?" That line of questioning may lead to more interesting policy prescriptions. When we look at the political system, it is (I believe) Africa's oldest democracy.⁵ It is the only country that came to independence during the 1960s that has had uninterrupted constitutional rule since that time. Later countries did also, but Botswana is now the oldest. The coming elections, in October, will be the 12th in the history of the country.

When you look at the various rankings—I am not a huge fan of these rankings, but the Mo Ibrahim, The Economist, or Freedom House and other rankings that try and rank African countries on governance or democracy indicators⁶—Botswana is usually right at

4 As of 2018, the population of Botswana was 2.2 million. The country is 600,370 km² (France is 640,679 km² with a population of 67 million)

5 Botswana and Liberia are both given the title of being Africa's oldest democracy. While the history of Liberia's democracy is longer, Botswana's has continuously functioned.

6 The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (<http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/>) finds Botswana as having the 5th highest ranking of overall governance, as of 2018. This has fallen in recent years; in 2013, it was ranked 2nd. In the 2018 report, the African countries ranked with the highest overall governance were Mauritius, Seychelles, Cabo Verde, Namibia and Botswana. In 2019, Freedom House gave Botswana 72/100, one of the countries categorized as 'Free' in sub-Saharan Africa. Botswana's ranking was on par with Senegal, behind Cape Verde (90), Mauritius (89),

the top. Not necessarily the number one, but two or three. Why is that? It is the record of free electoral competition—no one has ever suggested there has been anything untoward in any election in Botswana. It is the record of constitutional succession—they are now on their fifth president, they have had four constitutional, peaceful successions from one to the other. It is the kind of broader activity in civil society that we associate with a functioning liberal democracy. There is a rambunctious and free press, which is very open about criticizing political leaders. There is an independent judiciary. There was a very important case, just recently, related to homosexual rights, where the courts have made a ruling that is clearly against public opinion and clearly against the dominant cultural ideas.⁷ However, the courts are independent, and they made that ruling. There is a fairly active associational life. There are all sorts of organizations of different types advocating on different things. A lot of the components that political scientists point to in order to say “okay, this is what makes for a liberal democracy,” they are present in Botswana.

I do not want to suggest, though, that everything is perfect. The people who are most critical of Botswana's political system are the Batswana themselves. Actually, they are a little bit tired of Westerners and other people from outside coming along saying “aren't you wonderful.” They do not want to hear that. They have been hearing that message for way too long. They say “No. There are things here that do not work the way we would like them to.” Academics in the University of Botswana are the first to list what they see to be the weaknesses of the system. The most obvious and basic kind of democratic test that Botswana has not passed is that there has never been

Ghana (83), Sao Tome and Principe (83), Benin (79), South Africa (79) and Namibia (75).

⁷ For some reporting on this case, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/botswana-high-court-decriminalises-gay-sex>

a change in ruling party. There have been eleven elections so far and they have all been won by the same party. That kind of basic ‘can you change power from one party to another?’ has never happened. One can argue that the ruling party has won every election fair and square and there are good reasons why, however that transition has never happened.

There are other things that are very contentious today in the country. Just looking at the political system, the one that gets the most press probably is that they have a *de facto*, but not *de jure*, system whereby the current president is handpicked by his predecessor. It is a kind of anomaly that arose during the 1990s when they adopted term limits. The Botswana political system is kind of a hybrid presidential-parliamentary system—in a vague way, like the French system. You have an executive president, but you also have a parliament that operates on the British model. When the system was initially created, on the parliamentary model, there were no term limits. The first president served for 14 years, until he died in office.⁸ The second president was serving and had no intention of leaving until he lost the elections or grew too old.⁹ In the 1990s, the third wave of democratization came along in Africa. One of the big things was term limits. There was a lot of public pressure in Botswana for it to adopt term limits. It did. However, they adopted it in the middle of a presidential term. The president who was in power said: “Ok. The clock starts today.” As a result, the 10-year term limit is not in line with the electoral cycle. Under a parliamentary system, theoretically, they could call elections at any time, but they have a very well institutionalized practice of holding elections every five years. October 2019 will be five years exactly since the last ones. There is this

⁸ Sir Seretse Khama (1921-1980) was the first president, being in office from 1966 to 1980.

⁹ Ketumile Masire (1925-2017) was the second present, being in office from 1980 to 1998.

18-month gap that was created, where April 1st, 2018, the fourth president, as his 10 years were up, he resigned and left office.¹⁰ Under the constitution, the vice president becomes the new president. How do you get to be vice president? The way you get to be vice president is that you are hand-picked by the president. In effect, the current president was handpicked by his predecessor. A lot of people in Botswana are very troubled by that and see this as a big problem. This is an anomaly that will go away if the ruling party ever loses an election because then things will be back in sync. However, as long as they keep winning, it is there.

A lot of people also look at the outcomes of the system. While it has had very strong economic growth over long periods of time, there is an increasing problem of youth unemployment.¹¹ The education system is strong—they are pumping out lots of high school and even university graduates who are not finding jobs. We have 20-25% unemployment in the youth sector.¹² People are concerned about that. Botswana, and Southern Africa in general, has been very hard hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Botswana used to be the worst country in the world, I think it is now second or third, in terms of

10 The third president, Festus Mogae, was in office from 1998 to 2008, who was followed by Ian Khama, who was in office from 2008 to 2018, and is discussed in detail below.

11 According to data from the International Labour Organization, youth (ages 15-24) unemployment has risen from 9.3% in 1991 to 12.8% in 2018. The rise has not been steady, however. In 2003 and 2016, the rate was above 13%, dropping after those peaks. This data is also available via the World Bank Data Bank.

12 The data in the above footnote are official figures. News reports, which reference different measures of unemployment, cite figures up to 40%. For example, see:

<https://www.thepatriot.co.bw/analysis-opinions/item/7372-employment-creation-and-sound-and-good-industrial-democracy.html>
http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/22/c_138329234.htm
<https://www.news24.com/Analysis/amabhungane-analysis-turmoil-in-africas-model-democracy-20190801>

having the highest rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence.¹³ They are doing a good job; it is nonetheless a huge issue. There has been a fair amount of criticism, mostly external but also internally, about the treatment of the very small indigenous minority, the so-called Khoisan people. I do not like that word, but there is no good word from their own languages. As a political scientist, one thing that I am very aware of is that although the electoral system is strong and a lot of the institutional apparatus around it is strong, one thing they do not have is very good party financing laws. It is very murky and obscure where the money for the political parties come from and who is buying influence. There is lot in the press these days about South African influence - very rich South Africans who are making very big donations to political parties in Botswana.¹⁴ There are a lot of questions and issues. One needs to be a little bit careful about the miracle narrative, while still acknowledging a very solid record.

Logan: Another miracle narrative of sorts is the sustained economic growth for decades.¹⁵ Could you give us some background on where that growth is coming from? How is it being shared? Are there issues of inequality?

13 As of 2018, UNAIDS data shows that there is a 20.3% adult HIV prevalence rate in Botswana. One of the successes is the high rate of treatment coverage, with 85% of adults on antiretroviral treatment – there is universal, free treatment. The country remains one of the most affected in the world by HIV. Only Lesotho and eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) have higher adult prevalence rates.

14 This is discussed in more detail below. An example of this kind of reporting: <https://www.thepatriot.co.bw/news/item/7386-r1-75m-cash-intercepted-at-botswana-border.html>

15 Data on GDP growth varies by source. According to the World Bank, which largely uses national data, from 1961 until 2008 annual % growth ranged between 0.25% to 26.3%. In 2009, annual growth was negative, as it was again in 2015. GDP (in constant 2010 US\$) has risen dramatically from 205 million in 1960 to 18 billion in 2018, having had steady growth throughout. GDP per capital (in current US\$) has also risen dramatically, from only \$60.5 in 1960 to over \$8,200 in 2018.

Chris: In the literature on Botswana, that is the key question that everyone tries to grapple with. How come Botswana managed to have such sustained growth over such a long period? From the time of their independence in 1966, at which point they were at the very bottom of the UN list of least developed countries, they were right there—at that time—with Bangladesh, Haiti, Niger and Afghanistan.¹⁶ That was the bottom five. From that point, up until the 2008 financial crisis, it had one of the highest rates of economic growth of any country in the world.¹⁷ It averaged 8-10% for 40 years, which is phenomenal. It is growth; there are equity issues, it has a very high Gini coefficient.¹⁸ Even so, that high growth helped Botswana to today have upper middle-income status—it is one of the two or three richest countries in Africa by per capita income.¹⁹ That does mean that a meaningful percentage of the population has been lifted out of poverty; the levels of absolute poverty have definitely fallen dramatically.²⁰ You do see that very strong growth record.

16 The 'Least Developed Country' list was first produced in 1971, by the United Nations (and is a list that continues to be maintained). There are currently 47 countries on that list. Since its creation, only five countries have 'graduated' from the Least Developed Country status; Botswana was the first to do so, in 1994, followed by Cape Verde in 2007, Maldives in 2011, Samoa in 2014 and Equatorial Guinea in 2017 (<https://unctad.org/en/Pages/ALDC/Least%20Developed%20Countries/UN-recognition-of-LDCs.aspx>).

17 According to an OECD report, "Botswana is well known for having one of the world's highest economic growth rates since its gained independence in 1966" (from: UNDP. (2009). *Assessments of Development Results – Botswana*. UNDP, Evaluation Office, page vii).

18 A Gini coefficient measures economic inequality, with 0 meaning perfect equality and 1 indicates total inequality. According to the World Bank, Botswana is one of the most unequal countries in the world.

19 As of 2017, according to the International Monetary Fund, Botswana had the 5th highest GDP per capita in Africa (the highest were: Equatorial Guinea, Seychelles, Mauritius, and Gabon).

20 See footnote 2 for additional details.

Responding to the big question of why, there are a number of explanations out there that I personally think do not work. However, you hear them a lot. I tend to think of these variables as consequences, rather than causes, of the growth. The most obvious is diamonds. Currently, Botswana is the world's largest producer of diamonds by value, second largest by volume, and diamonds are by far the largest contributor to both GDP and exports.²¹ I tell my undergraduate students—in jest—if they want to do something practical to help a third world country, what they should do is get engaged. It is still the tradition in Canada that when you get engaged, you buy a diamond, and there is a very high chance that it came out of a hole in the ground in Botswana. It does point to the centrality of diamonds to the economy. The problem with that, however, is that many countries in Africa, and elsewhere, have had significant mineral resources. We tend, in political science, to talk about the resource curse;²² how resources have been bad for development and

21 For 2018 world diamond production data, see <https://www.ehudlaniado.com/home/index.php/news/entry/world-s-top-diamond-producing-countries>. According to a recent report, mining (primarily diamonds) contributes about 22% of GDP, 40% of government revenue and 72% of exports. See http://econsult.co.bw/tempex/file/Mineral%20revenues%20and%20public%20finance_final_compressed.pdf

22 See, for example (some of the highly referenced works on the 'resource curse'):

- Auty, R. (2002). *Sustaining development in mineral economies: the resource curse thesis*. Routledge.
- Brunnschweiler, C. N., & Bulte, E. H. (2008). The resource curse revisited and revised: A tale of paradoxes and red herrings. *Journal of environmental economics and management*, 55(3), 248-264.
- Humphreys, M., Sachs, J. D., Stiglitz, J. E., Soros, G., & Humphreys, M. (2007). *Escaping the resource curse*. Columbia University Press.
- Mehlum, H., Moene, K., & Torvik, R. (2006). Institutions and the resource curse. *The economic journal*, 116(508), 1-20.
- Robinson, J. A., Torvik, R., & Verdier, T. (2006). Political foundations of the resource curse. *Journal of development Economics*, 79(2), 447-468.

how they have contributed to corruption and conflict. For me, the diamond money has been well used because of the good institutional arrangements. I do not think the existence of the diamonds explains success. I think the success explains why the diamonds were used properly.

Similarly, a lot of people will tell you that Botswana did well because it is ethnically homogenous. I am enough of a constructivist to say I do not believe that. I point out that, ethnically speaking, Botswana is just a little bit less homogenous than Rwanda or Somalia,²³ neither of which have done that well in terms of ethnic conflict. Again, I would see the relatively strong national identity, the relatively strong coherence, and the ability to build an overarching Botswana identity—as opposed to various tribal or ethnic identities—as a consequence of their success, rather than a precondition for their success.

What do I think does work in terms of explanations? There is a local academic, Patrick Molutsi (who is now retired), who wrote a lot about the connection between the current political system and the pre-colonial, traditional African political setup.²⁴ I do think there

Ross, M. L. (1999). The political economy of the resource curse. *World politics*, 51(2), 297-322.

²³ According to one assessment (Fearon, J. D. (2003). Ethnic and cultural diversity by country. *Journal of economic growth*, 8(2), 195-222), which is largely based on linguistic diversity, Botswana had an 'ethnic fractionalization' score of 0.351 (on an index of 1 being more, 0 being none). On that same index, Rwanda was less fractionalized, at 0.18 and Somalia as very fractionalized at 0.812. However, according to another study ranking ethnic fractionalization (Alesina, A., Devleeschauwer, A., Easterly, W., Kurlat, S., & Wacziarg, R. (2003). Fractionalization. *Journal of Economic growth*, 8(2), 155-194), Botswana was found to be more fractionalized, although still higher than Rwanda and less than Somalia.

²⁴ Some of Patrick Molutsi's works include:

is merit to that. Like a lot of countries in Africa, Botswana had very profound pre-colonial political traditions that were strongly consensus-based, that emphasized peaceful resolution of disputes, and that emphasized collective, community-based decision making. As such, these traditions lay a political culture foundation for a modern democratic dispensation. Even today, you have all these Setswana political proverbs that are quoted over and over again. The most famous is "*Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*", meaning 'the chief is a chief by the will of the people.' Every politician gets quoted that at them, every time they open their mouth. Another is "*Mafoko a kgotla a mantle otlhe*", meaning at the kgotla (the public meeting place) everyone is allowed to speak. Any politician who tries to open their mouth gets told that. There is that powerful tradition. The problem is that within the tradition you also have deeply patriarchal elements. Women were not allowed at these traditional meeting places. There is also no historical foundation for electoral democracy. There is no word in Setswana for 'to vote,' they had to make that word up when the electoral system was introduced.²⁵ There is no concept of

Holm, J. D., Molutsi, P. P., & Somolekae, G. (1996). The development of civil society in a democratic state: the Botswana model. *African Studies Review*, 39(2), 43-69.

Molutsi, P. P. (1990). Social stratification and inequality in Botswana: issues in development, 1950-1985. *Dissertation Abstracts International. A, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 50(11).

Molutsi, P. (2004). Botswana: The path to democracy and development. *Democratic Reform in Africa: The quality of progress*.

Molutsi, P. (2005). Botswana's Democracy in a Southern African Regional Perspective: Progress or Decline? *40 Years*, 10.

Molutsi, P. P., & Holm, J. D. (1990). Developing democracy when civil society is weak: the case of Botswana. *African Affairs*, 89(356), 323-340.

Sebudubudu, D., & Molutsi, P. (2008). Botswana's democracy: explanations for success? *Politeia*, 27(1), 47-64.

Sebudubudu, D., & Molutsi, P. (2011). The elite as a critical factor in national development: the case of Botswana. *Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*.

²⁵ The English verb "to vote" is translated into Setswana as "go tlhophha", which means to select or to choose.

political parties. In fact, the traditional political culture was very much built around preventing factions, preventing different parties. There is a foundation for their current democratic success in the traditional political culture that I think is important, but I would not overstate it.

Another thing that I think is important is the coincidence of Botswana's location, being next door to South Africa. It was a very small, very vulnerable, and totally economically dependent country at the time of independence, next door to apartheid South Africa. In the 60s, 70s and 80s, we used to talk about Botswana, Lesotho, eSwatini (Swaziland) as South Africa's hostages. Indeed, the South African constitution of 1910 included clauses for the incorporation of those countries into South Africa. It was assumed up to the 1950s that they would not ever come to independence, but that they would be absorbed, effectively as Bantustans,²⁶ into South Africa. I think that, kind of in reaction to apartheid South Africa, there developed in Botswana a very strong sense that things had to be run differently. They knew exactly what apartheid South Africa was up to, who they were, and what they were like. Botswana decided to be non-racial and to be democratic. There is a very important sense in which that malign influence next door shaped the political culture within Botswana itself.

Strictly economically, there is all this discussion in the academic literature about the developmental state and if there are examples. I am a little bit hesitant to go too far with models like that. If there were ever a developmental state in Africa, however, I would say it was in Botswana. What happened at independence was the emergence of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Finance and

²⁶ A 'Bantustan', also called homeland, was a territory allocated for indigenous inhabitants of South Africa.

Development Planning as it was called then, it is now called the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, which although a very small country with very limited human resources, was this prestige, elite bureaucratic entity. The first president, Sir Seretse Khama, and the first vice president, Ketumile Masire (the latter was a real technocrat and Khama gave him the lead in running the economy) set up the Ministry of Finance on a very technocratic, very meritocratic basis. They brought in national development planning. This was part of my ignorance; when I first went there in 1978, I thought, looking at what happened in Botswana, that development plans in Africa were real documents that had real budgetary impacts on an ongoing basis because that is what I experienced. At that time, they were on National Development Plan three or four. Now they are on National Development Plan eleven.²⁷ These are rolling three to five-year plans. Every three to five years they look at their macroeconomic position, they look at the global position, they add up all the resources that are going to come in from the diamonds and elsewhere, they add up all the things they want to spend the money on, and it actually happens that way. If you want to spend a Pula, that is the currency, on anything, it has to have been approved in the National Development Plan. They had this very technocratic, meritocratic approach where they were able to take the diamond money and pump it into infrastructure and human resource development.

At independence, there were literally 12 kilometres of paved road in the entire country. Today, they have paved the Kalahari. They have provided fresh water for everyone. They have built schools and clinics. All the infrastructure you can build, they have built it. All the education you could provide, they provided it. They have not figured out how to promote the market, they have not figured out

²⁷ National Development Plan 11 covers the five-year period from April 1, 2017 through March 31, 2022.

how government can be an agent of market promotion. However, they have certainly figured out how government can provide infrastructure and can provide human resource development. The national planning framework has allowed them to do that. I think that this is quite important in explaining this path of growth.

I should also add that they were very smart about how they approached De Beers. De Beers controls the world's diamond cartel. While industrial diamonds have intrinsic value for cutting things, the diamonds in jewelry have no intrinsic value. The value of it depends entirely upon the fiction that 'diamonds are forever', that they represent love, and so forth. De Beers has, throughout history, kept the price of diamonds, via the operation of its cartel, well above any market clearing price. Diamonds were discovered in Botswana one year after independence, which is very significant. I think if the diamonds had been discovered before independence, that things would have been very different. One year after independence, they discovered that the richest, most fabulous diamond deposits in the world were in Botswana. There is a mine in Botswana called Jwaneng that produces 25% of the world's gem diamonds—just a big hole in the ground.²⁸ At the bottom of that hole in the ground there is a steam shovel—one steam shovel—that keeps going 24 hours a day. There are six dump trucks that are massively huge dump trucks, which bring the stuff up 24 hours a day. That is where many of the world's diamonds come from. They discovered this fabulously rich diamond resource and what they did was they went into partnership with De Beers, rather than fighting with De Beers. From the beginning, they

²⁸ Jwaneng is the world's richest diamond mine. In 2017, it produced 15% of world diamond production, by value; see <http://www.paulzimnisky.com/2017-global-natural-diamond-production-forecasted-at-142m-carats-worth-15-6b> For some images and additional details, see:

<http://www.debswana.com/Operations/Pages/Jwaneng-Mine.aspx>

<https://www.mining-technology.com/projects/jwaneng-diamond-mine/>

created something called Debswana,²⁹ which is the diamond mining company in Botswana with a 50/50 equity partnership between De Beers and the Government of Botswana. From the beginning, it had a 50/50 stake. Over the years, they have upped their take from diamond production. Today, the Government of Botswana owns a 15% share of De Beers. It has bought equity in De Beers, not just Debswana, but the head company. It has members on the Board of Directors of De Beers—meaning that the Government of Botswana knows how Debswana, the diamond mining company in Botswana, works as well as how De Beers operates globally because it is right there in the board. Once you add in the 50% equity stake, the royalties and other taxation et cetera, right now the government gets 81% of the take from diamonds and De Beers gets 19%. Every ten years they do a new deal; they are actually negotiating a new deal now, and you can see the two sides kind of sparring. The government is saying that by its calculation, De Beers still makes money, and it is still worthwhile for De Beers to be in this partnership, if it is only taking 5%. The whole debate is about how much further the government can push De Beers. I think they are very smart about that because basically what Botswana is doing is going into business with De Beers to control the world diamond market. You will be aware of the Kimberley Process,³⁰ where the whole conflict diamonds thing came along and there was a threat to the world diamond market. Botswana, with De Beers, was in the lead to put in place the Kimberley Process and the Certification Scheme, in order to protect the world diamond market. In the 2008 global recession, De Beers needed to withdraw supply in order to keep prices high and Botswana was right on board—they understand how important it is to

29 For additional history on Debswana, see:

<http://www.debswana.com/About-Us/Pages/Our-History.aspx>

30 The Kimberley Process aimed to address the problem of 'conflict diamonds'. In 2000, the UN supported the development of a certification scheme which resulted in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, which came into effect in 2003.

keep this going. That provides the revenue stream and then the sort of technocratic national planning system has been very important.

Logan: With that context, can we jump to the elections? The background you gave is a useful link to that as one of the key components for an effective developmental state is stability. In Botswana, while there have been elections, it has been one party. This election may be a new direction. Can tell us a bit about how things look now with the different parties that are emerging?

Chris: There are going to be seven parties contesting this election, a record for Botswana.³¹ If you look from the outside and see those seven parties, it may appear very confusing. My personal analysis—and the elections have not been held yet, so I could entirely be proven wrong—is that you can discern, over a very long timeframe, the gradual emergence of a basic and fairly stable two party system in Botswana. For this coming election, it is entirely possible that, for the first time ever, the ruling party will lose. What are the two parties? On the one side you have the ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). It was founded by the first president, Sir Seretse Khama, and the then vice president, Ketumile Masire, who became the second president. The story of Sir Seretse Khama has been made into a movie, it is on Netflix, called *A United Kingdom*. Sir Seretse Khama was the hereditary chief of the biggest—in Botswana they use the word tribe, so I will—

³¹ This counts only “major” parties, defined as parties that currently have, or have had in the past, representation in Parliament. The seven parties are the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP); three parties that have united in the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) -- the Botswana National Front (BNF), the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) and the Botswana People’s Party (BPP); two other opposition parties that currently have representation in Parliament -- the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) and the Alliance for Progressives (AP); and the newly formed Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). All but the BMD and AP are discussed in more detail below.

tribe, the Bangwato. His father died young. His uncle was regent. He was sent to Oxford in the 40s to get an education, as all good sons of chiefs were at that time. He fell in love with and married a white English woman, Ruth Williams. The movie is about that, and it is a great movie and it is mostly accurate. He came back to Botswana. The tribe initially rejected the marriage. There is a very famous scene where he went to the kgotla, saying the tribe takes him and his wife together, or they do not get them at all. The tribe accepted the marriage. However, he was rejected by the British. He was exiled for six years. It developed later that the British were being pressured—not surprisingly—by the South Africans, who did not want a prominent, multiracial marriage on their doorstep. Eventually, the deal was that when he came back, he was to renounce the chieftaincy and that his uncle was also to renounce the chieftaincy. Both of them did. He was then allowed back into Botswana—the Bechuanaland Protectorate, as it was in the colonial period. He then formed this party.

If the term makes sense, Sir Seretse Khama was a conservative moderniser. The Botswana Democratic Party is a conservative party. It is pro-free market. An instinctually conservative party, it always has been. I think—I could be wrong about this—that Botswana is the only country in Africa that never proclaimed itself socialist. At no time did the government say, 'we believe in socialism.' The BDP, because of Seretse Khama's traditional legitimacy, had an electoral support base initially amongst the Setswana speaking majority—that is, about 85% of the population—a good electoral base to have. The BDP base has continued to be very much rural, older people, maybe less educated people. The BDP is the rural conservative party. But, it was also the party of liberation. Like everywhere else in Africa, there tended to be one party that brought the country to independence, and in Botswana that was the BDP. Elsewhere they tended to be more likely to adopt a socialist attitude or ideology. In Botswana,

not so. At the first election, in 1965, before independence, they got 80% of the vote and some minor parties got the rest. They have been in power ever since. However, their support is declining. For the first time, at the last election in 2014, they got less than 50% of the vote; they got 47% of the vote. In a parliamentary system, the other parties split the vote, so the BDP still won a majority in parliament. However, clearly over time their support has been declining.

The main opposition is a party that actually did not run in the first pre-independence election, it did not exist. Starting with the first independence election in 1969, you had something called the Botswana National Front (BNF), which was founded by Kenneth Koma, who had earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. He came back full of Marxist ideas and he created, initially, a left-wing party. Over time, the BNF has thrown out the Marxism and is now presenting itself as a social democratic party, a center left party in opposition to the centre right of the BDP. Initially, the opposition got votes primarily from the non-Tswana minor ethnic groups.³² Over time, however, what you have seen is that the opposition has gained support, especially in urban areas. Botswana is rapidly urbanizing, you now have up to 50% of the population in what are called urban areas, a lot of those are

32 In the pre-Independence election of 1965, the opposition Botswana People's Party won 3 seats, 2 in predominantly Kalanga speaking constituencies and 1 in a Setswana speaking constituency. In the first Independence election, in 1969, the BPP held on to its 3 seats, while the Botswana Independence Party won 1 seat in a predominantly Mbukushu and Seyei speaking area. At this same election, the first it contested, the BNF won 3 seats, all in the tribal area of one major Tswana tribe, the Bangwaketse, whose paramount chief, Bathoen Gaseitsiwe, had joined the BNF in protest over what he perceived to be the anti-chieftaincy policies of the BDP. The irony of the supposedly Marxist BNF having a Parliamentary delegation led by a traditional chief was lost on no-one. Since 1969, the BPP has lost all its Parliamentary representation, the BIP has disappeared altogether, and the BNF has become the leading opposition party, with support throughout the country.

villages that have grown big.³³ Opposition support has also grown amongst the youth and amongst the better educated. You see that the hegemony of the BDP amongst the Setswana-speaking population is now gone. In the Bangwato tribal area (of Seretse Khama), the BDP—up until 2014—had remained absolutely dominant. In all the other Setswana-speaking areas, however, it is now pretty wide open.

I thought, as an analyst, as early as 1999, that the BNF and that centre-left tradition was poised to win an election. What happened though, was that in 1998, a year before the 1999 elections the BNF split. By that time Kenneth Koma was a really old guy. He was blind and he was kind of doddering. The BNF had all these young, well-educated social democratic cadres and they were impatient to get rid of Koma. They could not get rid of him and as a result they split and formed a new party called the BCP—the Botswana Congress Party. Koma held on to the BNF, and brands matter. In the 1999 election, the BNF continued to increase its vote whereas this new party, the BCP, did not do that well. The split opposition handed the BDP the election in 1999, in 2004, in 2009 and in 2014. In the 2014 elections, the BNF got 30% of the vote, the BCP got about 20%—together it is 50% of the vote. In other words, 50% of voters in the last election voted for one of the two parties that had formed the center left party. This election, in 2019, those two parties have reunited, along with a third smaller party.³⁴ Those three parties have formed the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), which reunites the two sides of the center left party. By straight electoral calculus, it should be that they have a very good chance of winning. I think people, especially the urban areas, the youth and well-educated people, they

33 According to the United Nations Population Division, in 1960 only 3% of Botswana's population was urban. By 2018, the percent of the total population being urban was 69.5%.

34 The BPP, discussed in the footnote above.

are sick of the BDP. It is old. It is tired. It is time to move on. In the rural areas, not so much. I think there is a real chance this time that the opposition wins, especially because those two factions were reunited.

Logan: One of the things that did that cross my news feed was the former president Ian Khama leaving, making some oppositional statements to support anyone else, et cetera.³⁵ How is that playing into the election?

Chris: It has thrown it all into turmoil. Until that happened, I would have been giving you the analysis I just did—fairly traditional political science analysis and that this could be the time that the opposition is going to win. Ian Khama has thrown everything into turmoil. What it means—I do not think anybody in Botswana knows. You could interpret it different ways. However, to back up slightly, let's talk about who Ian Khama is.

Ian Khama is the son of the first president, Seretse Khama and Ruth. To put it mildly, he is a controversial figure in Botswana. His parents sent him to Sandhurst, and he got a military education. He came back, at the age of 24, and became the deputy commander when Botswana created an army in 1977. He had a career of 20 years in the army, eventually becoming the commander of the army, the BDF, the Botswana Defense Force.³⁶ His father had renounced the chieftaincy—I have been told that his father wanted to renounce the

³⁵ See, for example:

<https://www.thepatriot.co.bw/news/item/7363-khama-s-bdp-hit-list-grows.html>

<https://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?aid=82274&dir=2019/august/19>

<https://www.enca.com/news/former-botswana-president-khama-quits-ruling-party>

³⁶ Ian Khama was appointed Brigadier General and Deputy Commander of the BDF when it was created in 1977. He subsequently served as BDF Commander from 1989 to 1998, at which time he retired from the military in order to enter politics.

chieftaincy for himself and his successors. However, the tribe said that he could not do that because he did not have the authority to renounce for his children. Seretse may not want to be a chief, but his children still are the line of succession. Ian was given the leopard skin (crowned) and enstooled as the chief of the Bangwato at a very young age, in 1979, a year before his father died. He has been the paramount chief of that tribe now for over 40 years, but he has never assumed the duties of a chief. What is a chief? A chief in Botswana is someone who sits in the kgotla, presides over public meetings, presides over customary court cases and senior ones attend what they call *Ntlo ya Dikgosi*, the House of Chiefs, which is the advisory second chamber of parliament. He has done none of that. Ian also—and here I am entering very challenging territory—is said by many people in Botswana to be culturally ‘Western’, if I could put it like that. He was brought up by his mother more than his father. He does not speak proper Setswana—earlier I was talking about the consensus-based culture in this community meeting place, one of the things they value the most is rhetorical skills in the kgotla. There are thousands of proverbs and one of the signs of somebody who is a good speaker is that they can draw upon these proverbs and they can utilize them properly, in very flowery speech. Ian does not speak Setswana well enough to do that.

In addition, Ian and his brother, Tshekedi, have been in charge of a company—Seleka Springs—that has received a disproportionate share of the contracts to supply the BDF with weaponry over the years, as middlemen importing stuff.³⁷ There have always been questions about that. Ian was a big conservationist. Animals are a big issue in southern Africa. For rhinos, he established the Khama Rhino Sanctuary, which is a refuge for rhinos. He put in place a hunting

37 For some reporting on this, see:

<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=1&aid=227&dir=2012/April/Friday13>

ban in 2014. He and his brother, or he and his family, have significant financial stakes in a company that runs very high-end safari lodges in the tourist sector in Northern Botswana—the country has the world's largest population of elephants. Ian has done all this stuff. He was the commander the BDF. The third president brought him in as his vice president, although prior to that, Ian had never shown any interest in politics. The third president, Festus Mogae, has since said that this was the biggest mistake of his life and regrets having done that. However, Ian had traditional legitimacy from his father. The BDF is very well respected in the country and so there was a lot of respect out of that. His moves on conservation, a lot of people admired that as well. In sum, the third president brought Ian in, made him the vice president, and under the automatic succession, Ian became the president starting in 2008. With ten-year term limits, he finished in 2018.

His opponents allege that he was an authoritarian president who had no respect for the democratic traditions of Botswana. It is a fact that he rarely went to parliament and that he tended to rule through executive decree rather than parliamentary process. For example, the hunting ban was a decree that was issued one day. He had other interests, for example, he is a teetotaler so he brought in a huge levy on alcohol because he thought that the people in Botswana should drink less. A lot of other actions that he took were his decree, bypassing the parliamentary process. There were a lot of suggestions and allegations that he did not shy away from using the security forces to get at his enemies. Nothing was ever proved. There was a very prominent leader who died in a mysterious car accident—

was it a real accident? The conspiracy theories are that it was set up.³⁸ There is a very well-known case of a person who was killed by the BDF and they allege it was an accident. Was it really or was he somebody who was targeted?³⁹ Ian had very bad relations with the press. In his 10 years, he never gave a press conference. He had very bad relations with the unions. In his first year or two, he faced a major public sector strike and his response was to fire people and clamp down, rather than negotiate. He faced a lot of dissent within his party—I mentioned there are seven parties running now, two or three of them are successors of splinters that left the BDP during Ian's time because they could not abide his rule.⁴⁰ Of course, he has his supporters. He did win two elections, with a meaningful vote. To his credit, when his time was up, he left on schedule, constitutionally, on April 1st, 2018.

Ian Khama's handpicked successor is the current president, Mokgweetsi Masisi, who was relatively obscure. Ian says that he picked him because he thought he was the right guy, even though he did not have a lot experience. The suggestion that people make is that he picked him because he thought Masisi would perpetuate Ian's legacy. What has happened is that since April 2nd, 2018 Masisi

38 Gomolemo Motswaledi. He was the leader of the BMD, which was created in 2010 following a split from the BDP by 7 MPs and their followers over policy differences with Ian Khama. Motswaledi was considered by many people to be a potential future President; he died in a car crash on July 30, 2014. For coverage at the time, see <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-africa-byo-51601.html>.

39 John Kalafatis. An alleged career criminal, he was killed by BDF soldiers on May 13, 2009. There have been persistent allegations that this was an extra-judicial execution somehow linked to Ian Khama. Three BDF soldiers were tried and convicted for the murder; they were subsequently pardoned by Pres. Khama. The Motswaledi and Kalafatis cases are major stains on Ian Khama's record. In early 2019, Pres. Masisi even raised the cases in an attack on his predecessor: <http://www.weekendpost.co.bw/wp-news-details.php?nid=5982>

40 Three current parties are BDP splinters: as noted above, the BMD split from it in 2010; in 2017, the AP split from the BMD; as discussed below, Ian Khama himself led the split of the BPF from the BDP in 2019.

has turned against him. Masisi has turned out to be his own guy. Masisi claims that he is appealing to the democratic traditions of Botswana. He revoked the hunting ban, as an example. But, how did he do it? He supported a motion being brought before parliament, a motion was approved by parliament, a parliamentary committee was appointed, it did a six-month consultation, it reported back to parliament, a white paper was issued, and so forth. Masisi was trying to show greater support for democratic processes.

Masisi has fired a number of people who were very closely associated with Ian, especially in the security services. There is something called the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, which is a kind of a dedicated unit to fight corruption, Masisi replaced the head there. There is something called DISS, the Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services, Masisi replaced those people. He has brought or has encouraged the relevant authorities in the police and DCEC to bring charges of corruption against people. By the way, another one of the allegations about Ian is that under his rule you saw an increase in corruption—not to the level of South African state capture corruption, but fiddling with tender processes and people getting significant amounts of money in order to ensure that tenders went the right way, that kind of thing. Masisi has started an anti-corruption campaign.

On the regional stage, Ian used to like to use megaphone diplomacy where he would criticize other leaders publicly, such as Mugabe and Bashir in Sudan (Botswana stood out as one of the few countries that was criticizing the human rights records in other African countries). However, Ian never went to an AU⁴¹ summit or a SADC⁴² summit; he preferred to stand on the sideline and yell.

41 African Union

42 South African Development Community

Masisi has tried to reverse that. He is going to these summits. He is now part of the African Consensus. For example, the recent turnover in Zimbabwe and the issues that have arisen there, Botswana is no longer standing on the sidelines; it is part of the Southern African consensus around what to do in Zimbabwe. In a lot of ways, Masisi has turned out not to be the guy that Ian thought he was going to be. He has also, by the way, taken away a lot of Ian's privileges. Part of Ian being a military guy was that he actually is a trained pilot. When he was president, one of his habits was to fly BDF planes wherever he was going—he would fly his own plane to meetings or whatever. Ian thought that after he stopped being president, he could still continue to fly BDF planes wherever he wanted to go. Masisi said no. Masisi has taken away some of those kinds of privileges.

Since April 1st, 2018, there has been an increasing crescendo of conflict between the new President Masisi and the old President, Ian Khama. It culminated, in the last couple of months, with Ian officially leaving the BDP and forming his own new party called the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). It is a very ironic name because 'Patriotic Front' to me sounds like Mugabe's party in Zimbabwe and Ian spent all his time criticizing how terrible Mugabe was, but that is neither here nor there. Ian created this new party and it has no political agenda. It does not have a manifesto. When you ask Ian, "Why are you doing this?" he says because he wants to defeat the BDP. Ian's party is running only 18 candidates; there are 57 parliamentary constituencies. It is running primarily in Bangwato areas (the BDP base area) and Ian has been playing the tribal card relentlessly, presenting himself as paramount chief. At one of his early meetings he passed out T-shirts (and again, the fundraising, where do they get the money for all these T-shirts?) that had his picture on the front and in Setswana on the back was written 'Not without my paramount chief.' The suggestion being that the paramount chief is being

badly treated, and therefore the Bangwato should be behind him and vote against the BDP, which they have always voted for.

I do not know what is going to happen. On the one hand, Ian could destroy the BDP. If he takes enough votes away from the BDP in the Bangwato heartland, that could lead to an easy majority for the opposition and put him in a real kingmaker role, which personally I would find a little bit scary. On the other hand (I am living in the capital), in the urban areas and amongst the intellectual educated elite, Ian is despised. It is entirely possible that it will backfire. The opposition coalition— the Umbrella for Democratic Change that brings together the old two parts of the of the center left party— they have embraced Ian. They have agreed to work with him. However, it is highly controversial. There are many members of that coalition that are saying that this is a huge mistake— this is a guy they had been condemning for the last 20 years and who they had been accusing of corruption, authoritarianism and all this bad stuff and now he is an ally? It is entirely possible that it will backfire. People could vote more for the BDP, ironically, because they dislike Ian, who was the BDP president for 10 years. How it plays out, I do not know. What was a somewhat predictable election where the opposition would have been favored because finally the BDP is too old, too tired and it is time for change. And, by the way, the leader of the opposition coalition, Duma Boko, is fairly young, fairly charismatic, with a good public persona. Their manifesto is very aspirational, it talks about creating 100,000 jobs within the first 12 months. They are coming forward with concrete ideas and they have seemed full of energy and ideas. You can see how, without Ian Khama's intervention, as a political scientist I would be saying "This is it. We finally got to the point where the BDP is going to lose." However, with this intervention, I just do not know. It is very hard for me to calculate.

Logan: The urban elite are now in a bit of an unknown position of where their vote may go. Are there other big segments of society, like the youth vote, who feel strongly one way or the other? Are they rallying behind any particular candidate or party?

Chris: That is what I am saying. I think that the basic two-party frame is still there. The BDP still appeals to the rural vote. It still appeals to older people. It is strong country wide. The opposition is more based in the urban areas. It is more appealing to younger people. Demographically, therefore, things favor the opposition. We keep saying, in the US there is a demographic change that is going to ultimately favor the Democratic Party. The same here. It is the demographic profile of Botswana as well, as a very young country. For all those reasons, you would think that the opposition will do well.

One thing I should say: I do not want to overstate the ideological coherence of the political parties. Somebody said to me right now we have the 'transfer window' for politicians. If you follow football, or soccer as we Canadians call it, in the European leagues there is this transfer window where the biggest stars switch teams and a lot of money changes hands and all the rest—I do not follow it enough to know really what is going on. However, in Botswana, it is exceptionally common for politicians to switch parties. Look at Ian Khama's new party, the BPF, who is there? Well it is Ian. But, who has come with him? It is almost exclusively people who used to be in the BDP and who lost primary elections. One of the things that has evolved in Botswana—it is a good part of how their system works—is that the parties have competitive primaries for who is going to be the candidate in a parliamentary constituency, and even at the local level for who is going to be the candidate in the wards at the local government level. These have become quite important competitive processes and they are real. Inside the BDP, three or four cabinet ministers lost primaries this time, and are not coming back.

Cabinet ministers. When you look at those 18 who are running for the BPF, almost exclusively they are people who lost a BDP primary. There is a lot of opportunism around that. Similarly, look at the opposition parties. Who is there? Many of those people are on their fourth or fifth party. They keep jumping back and forth depending on the political winds. I think the voting electorate is more stable than the politicians they are voting for.

There is not a huge ideological disagreement, I do not think that any of the parties fundamentally disagree with the developmental state model that you have in Botswana. The BDP, I called it conservative, but they are not reactionary, and they are not deeply socially conservative, in a North American type of way. The president, Masisi, actually gave a nod and a wink in support of this recent ruling decriminalizing homosexuality, which was cited by the court in its decision. That is from the supposedly conservative party. Meanwhile, one of the main leaders of the supposedly centre left party happens to also be a Christian pastor and he is one of the leading ranters against this decision. In sum, the left-right divide, at least on social issues, does not completely follow party lines. Today, there is nothing strikingly ideologically different amongst the parties. They are all basically saying, "How can we do better at the developmental state model that we already have?" Nobody is saying we should nationalize De Beers, nobody is touching that kind of rhetoric. And thankfully for Botswana, they do not have the land issue that you have in Zimbabwe or South Africa. Land is not an issue because there was no alienation, at least only very minor, during the colonial period. A lot of it comes down to deep party loyalties on the one hand, and on the other hand a kind of personalistic thing with different politicians. That is where Ian's intervention—saying "As paramount chief, you have to follow me"—comes in. I do not know if people will do that or will they stick with the more tried-and-true parties?

Logan: As a last thought, are there other actors—let us say South Africa or even the private sector with De Beers—that are trying to tip the scales one way or another?

Chris: I think this is the one of the most worrisome things and something they need to act on—the whole question of finances and money in the system. Way back, for the BDP, one of its advantages was that it owned a desirable office building in downtown Gaborone, which it rented out and that rent gave it an income stream that allowed it to finance elections. The other thing about the BDP was—still today actually—when it was created, it always made a point of having at least one MP who was white or who was Asian or whatever. I mentioned this kind of non-racialism that is very fundamental in Botswana, and you have only very tiny ethnic and racial minorities, but they do exist. There is one or two percent white and similarly one or two percent people with a heritage in South Asia. For example, the treasurer of the BDP—from the beginning until now, he is a really old guy now—is Satar Data, who is one of the richest people in the country, and an Indian man, who got the monopoly on selling Toyota cars in Botswana. That is a really good monopoly to have. Every election, Satar Data gives every BDP candidate a Toyota Land Cruiser to use during the election. The BDP had these kinds of financial advantages.

These days, elections are much more expensive and there is a lot more money flowing and we do not know where that money is coming from. What is in the press, what is insinuated, is that a lot of it is coming from South Africa. There are people actually associated with relatives of, or closely connected to, Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa. These connections are being associated in the press with Ian Khama. There is someone named Bridgette Motsepe-Radebe, who is a wealthy mining magnate in her own right and is

married to Jeff Radebe, who is one of South Africa's richest black men and is a former Minister of Energy; her sister is married to South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa. Bridgette is alleged to be a main funder of Ian Khama.⁴³ Why people closely connected to the ANC would be backing Ian Khama against the BDP is actually not totally clear to me. Consider Julius Malema—leading the EFF, the Economic Freedom Fighters Party in South Africa—a more radical offshoot of the ANC that has really seized on the land issue in particular. One of things Julius did a few years ago was basically say that Botswana was a neo-colony and that then president Ian Khama should be overthrown in a revolution.⁴⁴ He had this very fiery rhetoric that was very embarrassing for the ANC government. I do not quite see the connections as to why very rich people associated with the ANC would be backing Ian Khama, but apparently, they have been. Where the BDP gets all its money from these days, it is not clear. There are certainly lots of suggestions that it is coming from very wealthy South Africans. And, the other parties as well.

Why would the South Africans be interested in this election? Botswana has these very rich diamond mines. Right now, there are five or six operating mines, but geologists have discovered some 150 kimberlite deposits in Botswana.⁴⁵ There is at least the prospect of further diamond strikes, although I think another big strike is not going to happen, they would have found it by now. However, it is

43 She denies these claims: <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-08-23-00-botswana-allegations-are-crazy>

44 See <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/why-julius-malema-banned-from-botswana/>

45 According to one source, there are 386 kimberlites in Botswana: <http://www.tsodiloresources.com/s/Diamond.asp?ReportID=609946>. There are currently five operating diamond mines, four owned by Debswana (in order of value of production: Jwaneng, Orapa, Letlakhane, Damtshaa) and one owned by the Canadian mining company Lucara (Karowe). Several other mines have operated in the past, while development of new mines is on-going.

not just diamonds. We are talking about platinum and other mineral resources. The Kalahari still needs to be fully explored, in terms of its mineral potential. The suggestion behind all of this, is that powerful actors in South Africa have an interest in backing Botswanan politicians as they have an interest in future mineral resources—a suggestion, with no evidence, no proof, and no documents. It is a real problem in the system that Botswana does not have transparent campaign finance rules. They have just passed in parliament, this week, a bill on declaring of assets so that politicians will have to declare all their assets.⁴⁶ It has been a heavily criticized bill because it requires politicians or candidates to declare all their assets, but it is not publicly listed. They have to declare, and a bureaucratic agency will keep a list, but the public will never know. That is not a very convincing measure. There is another shoe to drop on the financing side and on the role of, especially outside and almost certainly South African interests, in financing political parties in Botswana.

Logan: Looking regionally, if you go up the eastern side of Africa, there has been a shift to the right—on less democratic processes, sometimes in the name of fighting corruption a restriction of freedoms and a restriction of media and so on.⁴⁷ How does this play in the current election or does it play at all?

Chris: The corruption issue is big. I am always a little bit afraid that you end up comparing Botswana with its two neighbors, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is a similar environment, but different in a lot of ways. For the Transparency International rankings, Botswana

⁴⁶ The Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Bill passed Parliament on Aug. 20, 2019. For some typical critical commentary from Botswana, see https://www.weekendpost.co.bw/wp-column-details.php?col_id=1195

⁴⁷ See, for example, our recent episode on Tanzania: Cochrane, L. and Mngodo, E. K. (2019) The Changing Landscape of Freedoms in Tanzania: Esther Karin Mngodo. *NokokoPod* 2019(4): 1-16.

is always number one or two in Africa for being the least corrupt.⁴⁸ Afrobarometer did an interesting survey—they did not ask people about perceptions, they asked ordinary citizens, in the last 12 months have you had to pay a bribe to a policeman, to a teacher, to a doctor, to anybody—again, Botswana came right at the top of Africa for being the least corrupt.⁴⁹ The record is still pretty strong and that links to this kind of developmental state and the sort of very strong technocratic, meritocratic system. But it is undoubted that there has been a significant increase in corruption in recent years.

There is an ongoing scandal right now, it is called the National Petroleum Fund scandal.⁵⁰ They set up quite a large fund, 300 million Pula, that is about CAN\$25 million, that they put aside to purchase oil, to create a kind of strategic reserve because they do not produce any oil. They get all of it through South Africa and they wanted to have a strategic reserve. It was all diverted. Trials are ongoing. There are certainly a lot of questions about what happened with that, and questions about it being linked to the BDP or is it linked to Ian Khama? Is the reason that Ian Khama is doing all this with challenging the BDP because he is trying to hide something, and he is

48 For the 2019 report, Transparency International ranked Botswana as 2nd best on their index, following Seychelles.

49 According to that survey, 7% of Botswana respondents had paid a bribe in the previous 12 months, which was the second lowest “Total Bribery Rate” on the continent. At the same time, the survey also found increasing concern about corruption in Botswana: 52% of people in Botswana feel that corruption had increased over the last year and 42% felt that the government was doing a bad job fighting corruption. For more data, see Afrobarometer: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/data>

50 See, for example:

<https://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?aid=73589&dir=2017/december/08>

<https://apanews.net/en/news/botswana-ruling-party-distances-self-from-us25m-petroleum-fund-scandal>

<https://www.thevoicebw.com/masisi-dada-olopeng-khama-linked-to-the-p250-million-saga/>

afraid that Masisi will actually go the next step and bring Ian to court? Right now, his allies and cronies have been charged, but Ian himself has not. There are a couple of other big corruption cases. There are questions and allegations around contracts and tender processes because there is a lot of money and they are building a lot of big projects—roads, water projects, big massive dams in the north where it rains more and then piping water 300 kilometers to bring it to the capital. There are allegations about payoffs of well-connected people getting millions of Pula to divert those contracts to different companies. This also plays into fear of foreigners because it is often alleged that it is the Chinese companies or the Korean companies that are most likely to make those sorts of payments.

The allegations of corruption are certainly serious. I think people in Botswana believe that there is more corruption than there used to be. Masisi has presented himself as someone who is fighting that and who is going to revitalize the DCEC, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, and going to revitalize the other agencies that are charged with dealing with that. Whether that is true, is a question. There are people trying to say that Masisi is being selective, that he himself might have things to hide. There is a lot of uncertainty and lot of lack of knowledge around that.

Does all this indicate a swing to the right? No, I do not think so. I would say the thing about Botswana is that it was never left. The BDP, from the beginning, was a conservative party. It fully embraced the free market. Another distinction of Botswana could be—I do not know—it may be the only African country, or one of the very few African countries, that never had a Structural Adjustment Program. Why? Because they already were doing all the things the Structural Adjustment Program makes the government do. They had free floating exchange rates. They never tried to control the currency—that is not exactly true, the Pula is marked against a basket of

currencies including the Rand, the Euro and the U.S. dollar. All the things that the Structural Adjustment Program was supposed to make countries do, the Batswana were talking about as things we should do as good economic policy. No one needed to force them to be right, they already were. I do not see a big shift like that because they never were over on the other side.

Logan: I guess we wait until October to see how that plays out.

Chris: It is going to be interesting. It is going to be very interesting.

Logan: Thanks for joining us and sharing your experiences and some projections of how things might go.

Chris: Thank you for having me.