



# Botswana Presidential and National Assembly Elections

30 October 2024



The Commonwealth

BOTSWANA  
2024  
GENERAL  
ELECTIONS



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30 OCTOBER 2024



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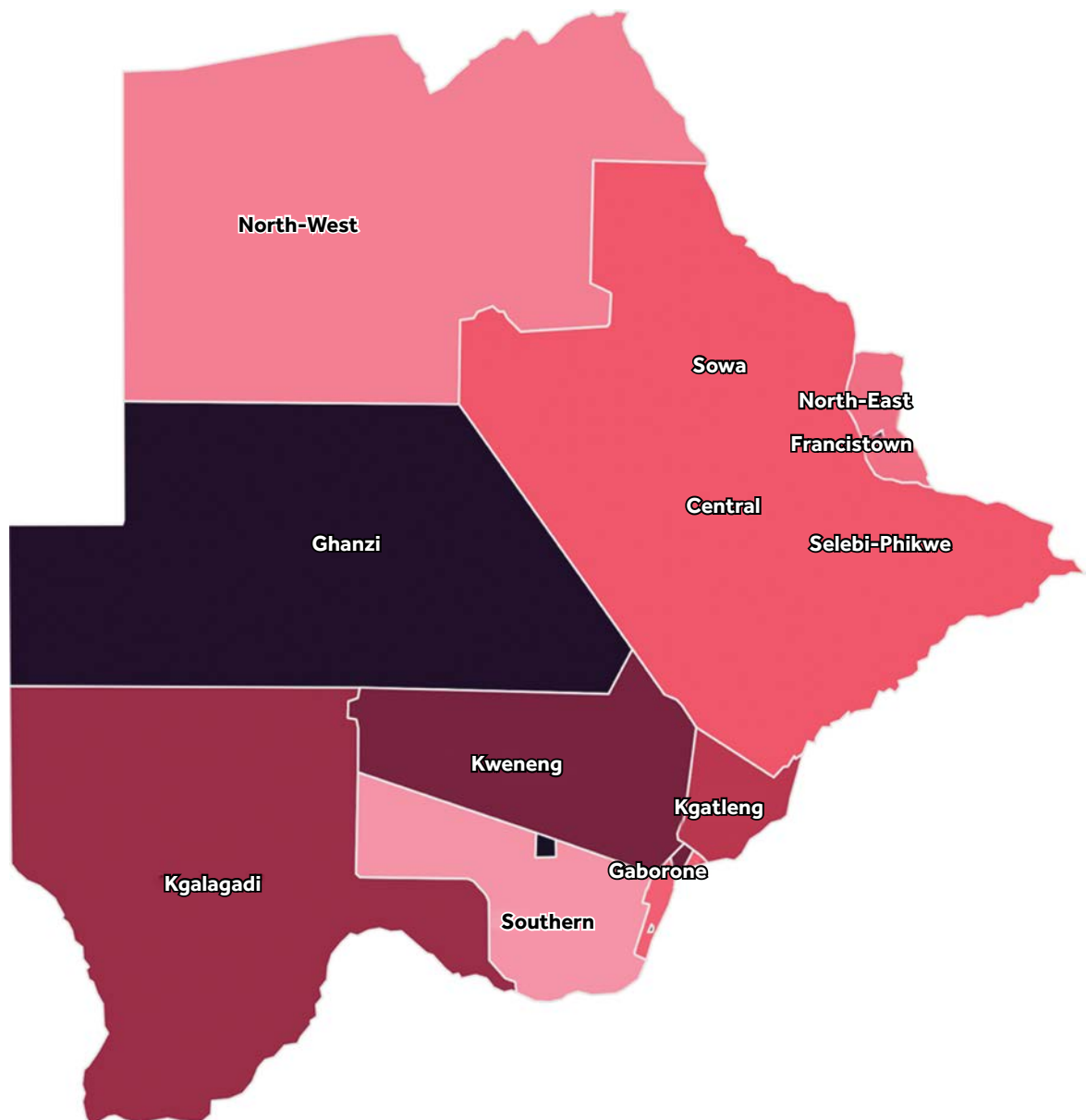
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# Map of Botswana





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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

AP	Alliance Progressives
AU	African Union
BCP	Botswana Congress Party
BDP	Botswana Democratic Party
BNF	Botswana National Front
BMP	Botswana Movement for Democracy
BOCONGO	Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations
BPP	Botswana People's Party
BPF	Botswana People's Front
BTV	Botswana Television
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CET	Commonwealth Expert Team
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CSO	civil society organisation
ECF	Electoral Commissions Forum (SADC)
EOM	electoral observer mission
ICCPR	The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JSC	Judicial Service Commission
KANU	Kenya African National Union
MASI Media	Association of Solomon Islands
NFVE	National Field Verification Exercise



OBE	Order of the British Empire
PWD	persons with disabilities
REFORM	Institute for Political Reform and Democracy Malaysia
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SIBC	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation
SILMA	Solomon Islands Local Media Agency
SPREP PEBACC	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme Pacific Ecosystem-Based Adaptation to Climate Change
SUHAKAM	Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
SLAPP	strategic lawsuit against public participation
UDC	Umbrella for Democratic Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

# Letter of Transmittal

## **Commonwealth Expert Team Botswana General Elections**

**31 March 2025**

20 March 2025

Dear Secretary General,

It is my honour to present to you the Final Report of the Commonwealth Expert Team (CET) for the Botswana 2024 General Elections that were held on 30 October 2024, in my capacity as Chairperson of the CET. The Commonwealth Expert Team, comprising of experts drawn from four regions across the Commonwealth, were a pleasure to work with. Their expert contributions, as well as our engagements with various stakeholders, went a long way to enriching the experience of the Team and the content of this report.

The 30 October 2024 General Elections in Botswana were the thirteenth General Elections since 1961, and the twelfth since Botswana first adopted universal franchise during the 1965 Bechuanaland General Election. The 30 October 2024 Presidential and National Assembly elections was one of the most contested elections in Botswana's electoral history and were held against a backdrop of widespread socioeconomic discontent, rising unemployment, climate change and an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) that was unprepared. Notwithstanding, the CET commends the election officials, voters and the people of Botswana for holding a credible, peaceful, orderly election, that could be considered an example for other democracies worldwide. The Team also acknowledges the involvement of youth and women at all levels of the elections, including as candidates, polling and presiding officers, police officers, party agents,

observers, and more. However, women still remain underrepresented in all elective positions in Botswana.

The CET commends the media, especially Botswana Television for the timely release of election results, less than a day after counting. The CET hopes that such efforts could be extended to all aspects of the election, especially voter education and sensitization, and the campaign.

The CET applauds President Mokgweetsi Masisi for his display of statesmanship and patriotism in conceding prior to the announcement of final election results. The CET also acknowledge President Duma Boko's grace in his acceptance speech and during the formal handover of office. Their actions went a long way in entrenching peace, national cohesion and continuity of Botswana's democratic credentials.

The CET's overall assessment is that in its entirety, the electoral process was peaceful, credible and transparent. Despite challenges prior to voting, the electoral officials conducted the 30 October general elections to the highest standards. The conduct of the electorate was also exemplary. Notwithstanding, certain aspects of the elections could be further strengthened, to ensure that Botswana maintains its standard as a beacon of democracy worldwide.

We hereby submit our detailed findings from the elections and our recommendations which we hope will contribute to strengthening democracy and the electoral processes in Botswana.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Expert Team, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to serve the Commonwealth and contribute to the democratic process in Botswana.



**Senator Gideon Moi**

**CHAIR**

Observers' Signatures



Mr Idzuafi Hadi Kamilan  
Executive Director, Institute for Political  
Reform and Democracy  
**Malaysia**



Ms Georgina Kekea  
Former President, Media  
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Elections and Boundaries Commission  
**Trinidad and Tobago**



Judge Peter Herbert OBE  
Human Rights Barrister & Judge (ret.)  
**United Kingdom**

# Executive Summary

A Commonwealth Expert Team (CET) was deployed to observe Botswana's 2024 general and National Assembly elections on 30 October 2024. The Team was present in Botswana from 22 October to 6 November 2024 to assess various aspects of the electoral process against national, regional, Commonwealth and international standards for democratic elections to which Botswana has committed itself.

The Team held consultations with a wide range of relevant national stakeholders prior to the elections. On 28 November 2024, the Chair of the CET deployed teams to Maun in the North-West District, Serowe in the Central District and Francistown in the North-East District, where they observed pre-election day, voting and post-election day activities.

The 2024 presidential and National Assembly elections were among the most competitive in Botswana's electoral history but, nonetheless, were commendably peacefully conducted. The National Assembly's rejection of the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill of 2024 marked a significant victory for civil society organisations (CSOs) opposing the reform process, which critics contended lacked informed public participation and failed to address core institutional issues. The 2021 Constitutional Review process, increased competitiveness and scrutiny, challenges to dominant political party systems, a challenging economic landscape, climate change, high youth unemployment, deteriorating public infrastructure and widening inequality contributed to the highly competitive nature of the electoral process. Stakeholders also highlighted that support for the incumbent Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) support was also affected by the public personal feud between President Mokgweetsi Masisi and his predecessor, former President Ian Khama.

However, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of Botswana was insufficiently prepared, as evidenced by poor voter education, a delay in voter registration, failure to meet initial registration targets, a delay in the release of the electoral calendar, shortages of ballot papers for early voters in Botswana and the diaspora, and long processing times for voters on polling day. Stakeholders also questioned the independence of the IEC and its credibility, based on its composition and alleged undue influence of foreign nations.

The Team noted a significant underrepresentation of female candidates for elections across all political parties as well as lack of access to media for smaller political parties, resulting in an uneven playing field for campaigns. Several stakeholders expressed challenges related to participating effectively in electoral processes because of a lack of funding for the activities of CSOs and the media in governance work. This limited their oversight and information-sharing and awareness-raising roles.

On election day, procedures were generally transparent, and presiding officers and polling officers conducted the process diligently, in accordance with the Electoral Act and prescribed procedures. The CET commends voters, polling staff, citizen observers and all other electoral stakeholders for the patience and commitment demonstrated throughout the process, despite long queues and harsh weather conditions.

The Botswana general elections of 2024 highlighted both strengths and challenges within the nation's electoral management framework. While Botswana continues to demonstrate its democratic principles, the need for transparency, fairness and standardised electoral practices remains urgent. The elections and the subsequent outcomes further highlight the need for affirmative action to ensure greater inclusion of youth, women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in politics and governance. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report would improve public trust, enhance stakeholder confidence and reinforce Botswana's reputation as a model of democratic governance in Africa.

The CET encourages the IEC, political parties, CSOs and other electoral stakeholders to engage in an inclusive post-election dialogue to resolve the lack of trust that exists and to strengthen the electoral process. The Team also encourages the government and other national and international stakeholders to financially support civil society and the media to ensure more robust participation and engagement.

## Recommendations

### *Legal Framework and Electoral Administration*

- To promote greater transparency, accountability and trust in the electoral process, the CET recommends that the voters' roll be made available online in future elections. Measures should also be implemented to protect sensitive information and uphold data privacy standards.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, consideration should be given to making two complementary copies of the voters' roll available, with additional copies available for purchase, to further support equitable access.
- The CET recommends the inclusion of voter education in the education curriculum for eligible voters.
- The CET recommends increased scrutiny in the voter registration process, alongside a digital or online system for consistently updating the voters' roll, to ensure voter data is current and accurate.<sup>2</sup>
- The CET recommends the implementation of early civic and voter education campaigns, particularly targeting youth and underrepresented groups, to address voter apathy and promote informed participation. The CET also recommends that the IEC make all voter materials easily available and accessible to the public, especially in rural areas. The Team further recommends increased utilisation of social media for voter education, particularly to engage the younger generation.
- To enhance voter education, the CET recommends the IEC partner with the media and civil society to strengthen analysis on key issues affecting stakeholders and ensure the effective reporting of the electoral process, especially election results.
- The CET recommends the implementation of regulations by the IEC to limit campaign spending and require equal media access for all parties to ensure a fair and equitable campaign environment.
- The IEC should enhance accountability by implementing more stringent monitoring and ensuring adequate ballot provisions for diaspora locations. This would require better forecasting of voter turnout and inventory management to avoid similar issues in future elections.
- The CET recommends amendment of the Electoral Act to make voter education and sensitisation core functions of the IEC.
- The CET recommends greater transparency in access to the voters' roll and the enhancement of processes such as ballot distribution and diaspora voting, to build stakeholder confidence in the IEC's management of the electoral process. The CET further recommends the establishment of clear accountability protocols in this regard.
- To enhance security and transparency and build public confidence, the CET recommends establishment of clear, transparent protocols for transporting diaspora and domestic ballots, ensuring stakeholders are informed of the process from collection to storage. For greater transparency, ballots should ideally be counted on-site at polling stations.
- The IEC should adopt a consistent approach to processing multiple voters at a time, to reduce wait times without compromising security, for efficient queue management. The IEC should implement a minimum quota of voters per polling station, thereby limiting the number of persons expected at any station.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Provision of a digital format would allow stakeholders, particularly smaller parties with limited resources, easier access to essential voter information, supporting fairer competition across all political entities.

<sup>2</sup> A digital system would allow for easier access and facilitate regular updates, helping eliminate outdated or incorrect entries, such as duplicate records or records of deceased voters. This approach not only streamlines the process but also reduces vulnerabilities in the electoral system by keeping the voters' roll current and reliable.

<sup>3</sup> This can be implemented by splitting a polling station in a district alphabetically. For instance, a polling station with 1,200 registered voters could be divided into two groups, with approximately 500 to 600 people each. The alphabetical split could designate voters with last names starting from A to L in one group and those from M to Z in the other, effectively creating two separate lists for the same polling station. For example, polling station 1623 would be split into 1623-1 for voters with names A–L and 1623-2 for those with names M–Z. This division would streamline the voting process, making it more manageable and reducing wait times on election day.

- The IEC should develop uniform procedures or place an emphasis in the training of polling day staff on initialling voter cards and applying indelible ink, to ensure consistency and reduce potential for errors.
- The IEC should facilitate ongoing dialogue with CSOs, political parties and other stakeholders to develop campaign reforms and ensure consistent, transparent election practices.
- The IEC should develop a robust emergency plan and contingency plan, including power backup solutions, for potential disruptions on election day. This plan should be communicated to all polling station staff to ensure readiness.
- The IEC should amend its regulations to respond to 'persons presenting unique cases' that warrant them the opportunity to vote in advance polls. The CET recommends the inclusion of medical professionals and other essential workers in advance voting.
- The CET recommends that the appointment of the Chair of the IEC be separated from the Office of the President, in line with international good practice on separation of powers, including the Latimer House Principles. This would ensure the Office of the President is removed from those that govern the election process.
- The CET recommends enhanced legislation to strengthen the independence of the IEC, including certainty of the election date (not less than three months before the end of the term).
- The Guide to Presiding and Polling Officers in the Conduct of Elections should be renamed and should make clear which provisions permit the exercise of discretion and which do not.

#### *Participation and Inclusion*

#### **Women's political participation**

- The CET recommends that the IEC consider adopting permanent voter registration to encourage increased participation in the electoral process, especially for youth, women, PWDs and the elderly.
- The CET calls on political parties and the government of Botswana to adopt and implement temporary social policies and measures to enable women to overcome structural barriers and subsequently increase access to political participation and decision-making. These include but are not limited to gender quotas in elections,<sup>4</sup> promoting gender equality and women's participation in political parties,<sup>5</sup> strengthening the capacities of women candidates, funding and campaign support for women candidates and the recruitment of women candidates.
- The CET recommends the enhancement of the Political Parties Funding Act to mandate political parties to provide funding and training to support potential women candidates in elections.
- The CET calls for legislation to guarantee the inclusion of women, youth and PWDs in politics, including affirmative action, rather than leaving inclusion to the discretion of political parties.
- To ensure gender equality is not left to the discretion of political parties, women should make up at least 30 per cent of all candidates at national and local level prior to the next election, with this share to increase thereafter in subsequent elections by 5 percentage points until a 50 per cent balance is achieved, in line with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. Similar provisions can be made for PWDs and youth – each proportional to the population.
- The CET recommends legislation and affirmative action to ensure women's effective representation in the National Assembly, political leadership and governance, in line with Articles 5, 12 and 13 of the Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Article 5 states, 'State Parties shall put in place affirmative action measures with particular reference to women in order to eliminate all barriers

<sup>4</sup> Legislated candidate quotas, legislated reserved seats, voluntary political party quotas and quota provisions to fit the electoral parties.

<sup>5</sup> Through gender mainstreaming within the internal organisation of political parties, gender-sensitive legal frameworks and policies in political parties, gender audits and gender action plans in political parties, measures to promote women's participation in decision-making, women's wings in political parties and gender mainstreaming in policy development

which prevent them from participating meaningfully in all spheres of life and create a conducive environment for such participation.' Article 13 states, 'State Parties shall endeavour to ensure equal and effective representation of women in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors including through the use of special measures as provided for in Article 5.' Article 13 calls for participation that ensures equal opportunities for women and men in the electoral process.

### **Youth political participation**

- The CET recommends that the IEC consider adopting permanent voter registration to encourage increased participation in the electoral process, especially for youth.
- The CET recommends that the IEC facilitate training for youth in political parties to prepare for roles as councillors and membership of the National Assembly. Funds allocated through the Political Parties Funding Act should be directed towards training initiatives for youth wings.
- The CET calls for consistency in the definition of youth, in line with international and regional instruments to which Botswana ascribes.

### **Persons with disabilities**

- The CET recommends that the IEC continue to engage with various groups of PWDs to better understand the issues they face and to work toward balanced solutions.
- The IEC is encouraged to collect and provide disaggregated data on PWDs at all stages of the election to support voter education and election administration activities, including the selection of appropriate polling stations for PWDs and the provision of sufficient electoral materials.
- The IEC is encouraged to invest more in voter education targeted at PWDs, including developing material such as an inclusive election guide for PWDs to support them throughout the voting process, ensuring their full and effective participation in the electoral process.

### **The elderly**

- The IEC is encouraged to collect and provide disaggregated data on the elderly at all stages of the election to support election administration, including the creation of appropriate polling stations and welfare facilities<sup>6</sup> for the elderly, especially in rural areas.

### *The Campaign and Media*

#### **The campaign**

- The CET recommends the strict implementation of the Electoral Act and its regulations on campaign financing to prevent undue advantage by political parties or candidates and to prevent the influence of foreign entities or corporations in elections.
- The CET encourages the IEC to work closely with civil society and marginalised groups throughout the electoral cycle to implement election awareness-raising campaigns targeted at all sections of society and to engender trust in the institution.
- The CET recommends the establishment of an electoral campaign period to provide all political parties and candidates with sufficient time to mobilise resources, disseminate their messages and engage with voters across the country.

#### **The media**

- The CET recommends enhancing media independence by allowing editorial independence and reducing state control over public media.
- The CET recommends increasing financial transparency by implementing campaign finance reforms, including potential state funding for parties to create fair competition.

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<sup>6</sup> Such as seating, shade and polling stations in closer proximity to rural communities.



- Promotion of media literacy should be encouraged through collaboration between the IEC and civil society, to improve digital literacy and help citizens identify misinformation.
- The CET recommends legal and policy reform to protect journalists' rights and shield journalists from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and other restrictive legal practices, thereby empowering the media to serve its watchdog role effectively.
- The IEC should strengthen its awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns to combat misinformation and disinformation.
- The CET encourages state and private media outlets to dedicate a minimum percentage of coverage to all political parties and candidates to create an equitable playing field.
- The CET encourages state and private media to provide media coverage for marginalised groups, especially women, youth and PWDs, to address their specific needs.
- The CET recommends that the government of Botswana and development partners provide funding and capacity-building support for journalists on inclusive reporting practices.

### **Voting, Counting and Results Process**

- The CET recommends that the IEC provide the list of polling stations and collation centres to the public electronically and in print prior to election day, at least two weeks after verification of the voter register. For transparency of the process, the CET also recommends the use of electronic and other forms of technology for registration.
- The CET recommends consistency in the setup of polling stations, in line with the manual provided by the IEC.
- The CET recommends enhanced training of polling officers on procedures, processes and policies in relation to vulnerable groups, especially PWDs, the elderly and pregnant women.
- The CET recommends that consistent priority be given to vulnerable individuals, including PWDs, pregnant women, nursing mothers and others, during voting.
- The CET recommends the provision of hygiene facilities and shelter for voters and election officials, taking into consideration the high temperatures and the environment in remote parts of Botswana. The CET further calls for improved ventilation and visibility during collation and the counting of votes.
- Given the increase in size of the electorate, the CET recommends an increase in the number of election officials and polling streams at polling stations, to reduce queues and voting times. The IEC may also wish to consider earlier opening of polls for voting to take cognisance of the high temperatures.
- The CET recommends comprehensive training of all election officials, well ahead of the elections, to ensure consistency in the process throughout the country.
- The CET recommends improvement in the conditions of service for polling officials and police officers, including remuneration and the introduction of rotas to enable breaks.
- To enhance efficiency of the electoral process, the CET recommends verification and counting of votes at polling stations.



# 1. Introduction

This chapter gives readers an essential background to the context in which Commonwealth Observer Groups (COGs) and Commonwealth Expert Teams (CETs) operate. It gives a brief summary of the CET methodology and concludes with an overview of the methodology adopted for the 2024 Botswana general elections.



The Botswana CET (Senator Gideon Moi, Pamela Ogiste, Georgina Kekea, and Idzuafi Hadi Kamila) with Giles Enticknap MBE, British High Commissioner to Botswana and UK Representative to the Southern Africa Development Community

## Invitation

Following an invitation from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of Botswana, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, constituted a Commonwealth Expert Team (hereinafter referred to as 'the Team' or 'the CET') to the general elections held on 30 October 2024. The Team was chaired by Senator Gideon Moi, former Senator of the National Assembly of the Republic of Kenya. The Team comprised four eminent persons, supported by a four-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. These were the 13th general elections in Botswana since 1961, and the 12th since Botswana first adopted universal franchise during the 1965 Bechuanaland general election. A full list of the members of the Group and biographies can be found in Annex I.



Commonwealth Secretariat staff team, Naadira Ogeer and Madonna Lynch

## International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed over 200 elections in 39 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral best practices.

## The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following.

1. CETs are independent, including of the Secretariat. 'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General... in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. Observers, not monitors. Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. Taking forward CET recommendations. The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms', such as multi-stakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a CET.
4. Whole-of-election-cycle approach. Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these

recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff, the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and, crucially, bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

## The strength of Commonwealth observer teams

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics, with specific mention here of CETs.

1. Eminent observers  
While CETs are smaller in size than COGs and some other international observer missions, they still comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts.
2. Diversity and peer-to-peer learning  
CETs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's five continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.
3. Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices  
CETs are normally chaired by a former head of state or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows CET Chairs to enter into a 'good offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such good offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

## Terms of reference of the CET in Botswana

The Team was established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the IEC of Botswana. The Team was to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

It was to determine in its own judgement whether the elections were conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Botswana had committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Team was to act impartially and independently. It had no executive role; its function was not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of future elections.

The Team was to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who would forward it to the government of Botswana, the IEC of Botswana and leaders of political parties, and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.

## Activities in Botswana

The CET was present in Botswana from 22 October to 6 November 2024. During three days of thorough briefing in Gaborone, the Team held meetings with the Ombudsperson of Botswana, representatives of political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs) and Commonwealth high commissioners resident in



Gaborone, as well as with other international observer missions. Members of the Team observed some final rallies across the country ahead of election day.

On 28 October 2024, members of the Team and designated Commonwealth Secretariat staff members were deployed to Maun in the North-West District, Serowe in the Central District and Francistown in the North-East District. The Chair and some staff team members were based in Gaborone, where they observed election day processes. A copy of the Deployment Plan is in Annex II.

During deployment in their respective regions, teams met and held discussions with regional IEC officials, senior police officials, political party officials and some voters.



Chair of the CET, Senator Gideon Moi, engages other international observer missions

On 30 October 2024, the Gaborone team attended a pre-election day meeting of international observer missions, convened by the Head of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Electoral Observer Mission (EOM). The meeting was also attended by the African Union (AU) EOM and the SADC Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF).

To share election day observations and findings, the members of the CET attended a post-election day meeting of international observer groups, convened by the Head of the AU-EOM on 1 November 2024. The meeting was also attended by the SADC-EOM and the SADC-ECF.

The Group departed Botswana on 6 November 2024.



Chair of the CET, Senator Gideon Moi, at the pre-election day meeting of international observer missions



## 2. Political Background

### Introduction

Botswana continues to be viewed as a democratic success story in Africa. Since independence in 1966, the country has held elections within the constitutionally provided timeframes, and there has always been a peaceful transfer of power. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has nonetheless been the ruling party since independence. The political environment is increasingly being scrutinised by opposition parties and civil society.

### Political history

Opposition parties have, in successive elections, continued to narrow the electoral gap through alliance-building and the formation of new parties that appeal to different constituents. In 2012, the first alliance was agreed between the Botswana National Front (BNF), the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) and the Botswana People's Party (BPP), which formed an alliance called the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC). The UDC became the front for opposition in the 2014 elections. In 2017, it expanded its alliance, with the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) joining the UDC. This effectively united opposition parties in Botswana.

The 2024 elections saw a significant split within the UDC, the BCP having left in 2023. Since then, new political parties have been formed, including the Alliance Progressives (AP) and the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). The AP has joined the UDC alliance. The BPF, on the other hand, is associated with former President Ian Khama, who is perceived to have formed the party in protest at his deteriorating relationship with the incumbent, President Mokgweetsi Masisi. Former President Ian Khama's influence has also been credited with significant political moments, such as the BPF's win at the Serowe West Constituency by-election on 8 July 2023.<sup>7</sup> The BPF won with 2,933 votes, while the BDP won 1,267, BCP 103 votes and the independent candidate 82 votes.

### Political context of the 2024 general election

Botswana is widely regarded as one of Africa's most stable democracies. However, the 2024 general elections revealed growing public scrutiny and concerns about transparency and fairness in electoral processes. Botswana's commitment to transparent governance faced new demands for accountability and equity, which may require the enforcement of electoral reform.

The 30 October 2024 presidential and National Assembly elections was one of the most contested elections in Botswana's electoral history, owing to widespread socio-economic discontent among the population. This resulted in increased campaigning by opposition political parties and the scrutiny of every aspect of the electoral process and all electoral stakeholders. Key issues raised by various stakeholders included incumbency and the role of the state in elections, concerns surrounding the independence of the IEC, delays in the release of the electoral calendar, the voter registration process and legal challenges to the process, and concerns around the collation and counting of results. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about political party funding, the 2021 Constitutional Review process, the economy and security surrounding the election process.

### Incumbency and the role of the state in elections

While incumbency issues are not unique to Botswana, the influence of the Office of the Presidency on executive functions that relate to elections was noteworthy, including its hosting of crucial offices such as the IEC and state media houses. This does not reflect best practice in guaranteeing the impartiality of these offices.

<sup>7</sup> Out of 9,829 registered voters, with 4,424 valid votes cast, 38 rejected ballots and 45 per cent voter turnout.

## Independence of the IEC

Botswana did not have an electoral commission until 1997, and the establishment of the IEC was viewed as progress on consolidating democracy. However, stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of independence of the IEC, which they attributed to a number of factors. First, the IEC is hosted within the State Ministry of the Office of the President, and the Secretary (Chief Executive Officer) of the IEC is appointed by the President. The independence of the Chair of the IEC has also been called into question, given pre-existing links with the incumbent President. While all other commissioners are nominated by an all party conference, there was controversy and disagreement regarding the decision of this conference to appoint certain nominees. Furthermore, although the nominees are confirmed by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), the composition of the JSC is heavily influenced by the executive arm, with four of its six members being presidential appointments.

## Timing of the release of the electoral calendar

There was a delay in the release of the electoral calendar, which contributed to the perceived lack of neutrality of the IEC. The IEC asserted that the electoral calendar could be finalised only once parliament had been dissolved. The Constitution provides for elections to be held every five years and not more than 60 days after the dissolution of parliament. The elections therefore needed to be held by 30 October 2024, after the dissolution of the National Assembly on 5 September 2024. Various stakeholders noted that this timeline favoured the incumbency, as it is only the presidency that would know when the elections would be held. This was seen to disadvantage the opposition parties and civil society, further limiting their capacity to effectively plan campaigns and provide robust civic education programmes. The date of the 2024 presidential and National Assembly elections on 30 October 2024 was announced on 3 September 2024 by President Mokgweetsi Masisi, leaving less than two months for the nomination of candidates and the campaign period.

## Voter registration

The voter registration process leading to the 2024 elections was challenged in court. The main opposition, the UDC, took the IEC to court for failing to give the party access to observe the voter registration process, arguing that voter registration continues to be the most crucial process in the lead-up to an election. Allegations around the inflation of voter registration numbers were also raised. The courts ruled in favour of the IEC, with cost to the UDC, indicating that there was no constitutional provision for political parties to observe voter registration processes. The IEC noted that the court case was the primary reason for the delay in the voter registration process ahead of the 2024 elections.<sup>8</sup>

## Results and counting at the polling stations

Stakeholders expressed concern around opaque ballot boxes and Botswana's model of transporting ballots to a central location to be counted. They called for counting to be conducted at polling stations, in accordance with international best practice, to enable political parties and observers to observe the vote counting process, and for election results to be publicly viewable at polling stations to enhance transparency in the results process. Stakeholders also raised concerns that ballot boxes could be tampered with during transportation, while political parties may not have the necessary resources to hire vehicles to accompany the ballot boxes. However, the police, the entity responsible for the transportation of the ballot boxes, refuted this, indicating that political parties were called upon to put their seals on ballot boxes prior to transportation, making it difficult to tamper with the boxes.

## Political party funding

In February 2024, the executive introduced the Political Party Funding Bill. While the proposal was welcomed by multiple stakeholders, the process of introducing the Bill came under scrutiny. On 19 August 2024, the

<sup>8</sup> Court of Appeal Civil Appeal No. CACGB-281-2323 in the matter between the IEC and the UDC; High Court Civil Case No. UAHFT-000052-23 in the matter between the IEC and the UDP.

Political Party Funding Act 2024 was passed. The Act provides for the administration of funding by the IEC Secretary under the direction and supervision of the IEC.

Funds paid to political parties are to be appropriated by the National Assembly for the purpose of funding political parties. Among others, the Act provides funding on the basis of the percentage of votes and the number of seats won.

The Act outlines the purposes for which funds received will be used, and political parties should demonstrate how the funds allocated to them are utilised and whether such utilisation follows the purposes based on which the funding was disbursed. There is to be suspension of the disbursement of funds where there is contravention of any of the provisions of the Act, as well as appeals by aggrieved persons on any decision taken under the Act. Further, there are to be general penalties for any contravention of the provisions of the Act, as well as powers for the minister to make regulations for better implementation of the Act.

Despite this, frustration was expressed on the enforcement dates for political party funding, as this was to commence only after the 2024 election. This was seen as a means of limiting access to opposition parties in the 30 October 2024 general elections. Additionally, stakeholders alleged that the party funding model would favour the dominant party in parliament without regard to the number of votes other parties received, even if the dominant party did not secure a parliamentary seat.

However, the CET notes that, while public funding for political parties is good practice, best practice dictates against legislative changes less than 12 months before an election.

## The 2021 Constitutional Review process

While stakeholders welcomed the steps taken to review the Constitution for the first time in the history of Botswana, the delays in revealing the outcomes of the Constitutional Review process raised concerns around the process of its conduct, the appointment of the Commission involved and the publication of the outcomes. Civil society and political parties noted with concern that the white paper and the Presidential Report on the Constitutional Review Process did not reflect the voices of Botswana.

Issues such as the call to directly elect the President and the appointment of the IEC officials were widely raised in the review process, yet the Commission did not reflect these recommendations in the final report. The civil society coalition umbrella, the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO), produced a report outlining the mismatch between the opinions of the Botswana and the Commission's outcome report.

## The economy

The economy played a key role in the 2024 general elections, which were held in the context of high unemployment in the country (25.9 per cent in 2023 Q3 according to the World Bank)<sup>9</sup>, while poverty remains high despite Botswana's relatively high income. With a Gini index of 53.3, the country has one of the highest levels of inequality in the world. Falling diamond prices, and the country's reliance on diamonds in its exports (at 90 per cent of the total) and as a major source of fiscal revenue for a public sector-driven system, have made Botswana's economy vulnerable to external shocks.

Despite investment in infrastructure, water is still scarce. Household debt is also at an all-time high, energy costs are soaring and there is an increasing lack of access to medications. Austerity measures instituted by the government were of concern and opposition parties cited these measures as examples of corruption and mismanagement of the economy. The World Bank captured these challenges, outlining that diversification would continue to be the big economic question leading to the 2024 elections and beyond.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> World Bank. Macro Poverty Outlook for Botswana : April 2024 (English). Macro Poverty Outlook (MPO) Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099209504052420451>

<sup>10</sup> [www.worldbank.org/en/country/botswana/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/botswana/overview)

## The electoral environment

Although the political environment in Botswana was calm, with little to no violence anticipated, stakeholders noted that the 2024 general elections were the 'quietest' in recent history. While this may have been because of the late scheduling of primaries, the delay in the formal announcement of the election date and the late dissolution of parliament, some stakeholders speculated that this was disconcerting and might be a foreshadowing of things to come. Nonetheless, other stakeholders said that the Batswana were law-abiding citizens who adhered to the rule of law by nature and culture.

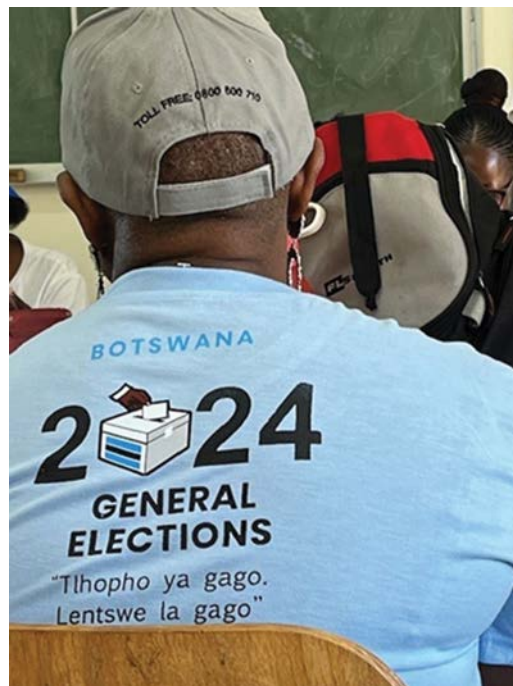
## Political parties and presidential candidates contesting the 2024 elections

The key contenders for the 2024 general elections were:

- BDP – political leader, Mr Mokgweetsi Masisi (incumbent President)
- UDC – political leader, Mr Duma Boko
- BCP – political leader, Mr Dumelang Saleshando
- BPF – political leader, Mr Mephato Reatile

There are 61 constituencies in Botswana. There was a total of 609 polling districts and 2,810 polling stations established for the 2024 elections.

### 3. Electoral and Legal Framework and Administration



#### Electoral and legal framework

General elections in Botswana are held every five years after the expiry of the life of parliament. National Assembly and local government elections are held in one day. The president is the designated flag-bearer of the political party that wins the most parliamentary seats as there is no direct election of the president by voters.

#### The Constitution and electoral laws

The Constitution of Botswana was originally promulgated in 1966 and guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, association and participation in elections, providing all citizens who are 18 years and above the fundamental right to participate in the electoral process of electing members of the National Assembly and the local government and voting in referenda.

The laws of Botswana do not provide for direct presidential election. However, the Presidential Elections (Supplementary Provisions) Act regulates presidential nominations, as conducted by the Chief Justice.

In 2021, President Masisi announced the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the Review of the Constitution of Botswana. Some of the Commission's recommendations were incorporated into a 2024 Constitutional Amendment Bill, which was gazetted in March 2024. Provisions, which are still being reviewed in the National Assembly, include the following.

- Presidents are limited to two terms of office.
- A former president cannot be a member of the executive or be Speaker.
- Former presidents are prevented from actively participating in politics.
- Members of the National Assembly cannot be dual nationals.
- Specially Elected Members of Parliament (SEMPs) are banned from defecting.
- Rights for persons with disabilities (PWDs) are increased.

Given the provisions of the Bill, some stakeholders say that the rift between President Masisi and former President Khama was a driving factor behind some of the proposed reforms.

There were also calls for Botswana to move to a system of proportional representation, but the Bill did not include this.

Other key documents providing the legal and regulatory framework for the conduct of the election are:

- 1968 Electoral Act (as Amended)
- 2012 Local Government – District Councils Act

Botswana is a signatory to the following international human rights treaties as well as key regional human rights instruments.

- International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Commonwealth Charter.

## Electoral system and administration

Although there is no deadline in the Constitution of Botswana for the announcement of National Assembly elections, general elections in Botswana are held every five years, in accordance with the 1966 Constitution. Botswana is divided into 57 constituencies and each constituency returns one member of the National Assembly. The 2024 general elections were to determine the composition of the 13th Parliament of Botswana, as well as 609 local council seats across the country, all elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Legislative power is vested in a unicameral parliament. The president is elected for a five-year mandate and can serve a maximum of two terms in office.

## Independent Electoral Commission

The IEC was established in 1997 after a referendum, to improve transparency and fairness in the electoral process.<sup>11</sup> The IEC is appointed in accordance with Section 65A (1) of the Constitution, which provides that:

There shall be an Independent Electoral Commission which shall consist of-

- a chairman [sic] who shall be a judge of the High Court appointed by the Judicial Service Commission;
- a deputy chairman [sic], who is a legal practitioner, appointed by the Judicial Service Commission; and

<sup>11</sup> Prior to the establishment of the IEC, from 1965 to 1976, elections were conducted from the Office of the President under the direction of the Permanent Secretary to the President.

- c. five other persons (Commissioners) who are fit, proper and impartial, appointed by the Judicial Service Commission from a list of persons recommended by the All Party Conference.<sup>12</sup>

The current chair is Honourable Justice Barnabas Nyamadzabo.

The Commission is responsible for:

- The conduct and supervision of elections of members of the National Assembly and of a local authority;
- The conduct of referenda;
- Ensuring elections are conducted efficiently, properly, freely and fairly;
- Giving instructions and directions to the Secretary of the Commission with regard to his/her responsibilities;
- Performing such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of Parliament.

Members of the Team recognise that the IEC was focused on managing the conduct of the elections. However, it was disappointing that the IEC was unavailable to meet with the Team and there was a lack of communication from the IEC to stakeholders regarding the election process.

While the electoral process itself remained unchanged, the Team noted a common practice in Botswana regarding the appointment of IEC Commissioners. The Commissioners are appointed by the JSC from a list of names recommended by the All Party Conference President. However, this was done in a short period of time, right before the elections. The process sparked significant controversy, with several stakeholders alleging that the appointments were not conducted properly.

In the case of All Party Conference vs Attorney General and Others,<sup>13</sup> opposition political parties, led by the UDC, challenged the appointments of the IEC Commissioners. The opposition argued that the appointments had been made contrary to the procedures established during the August 2024 All Party Conference. At the conference, most political parties recommended a list of 10 potential commissioners, but the ruling BDP pushed for a longer list of 26 candidates. The opposition contended that, despite the majority's recommendation, the ruling party forwarded all candidates to the JSC, which ultimately selected the Commissioners, a process the opposition deemed unfair and unconstitutional.

Additionally, prior to the elections, the Team noted the lack of comprehensive civic and voter education campaigns from the IEC, especially on social media and digital platforms, which could have led to voter apathy. Information relating to voter registration, campaigning, voting and results was released mainly by the national broadcaster and private media, resulting in an information gap.

Although the IEC developed voter education materials, including posters, brochures, fliers and booklets, several stakeholders highlighted the lack of information on voter education, political parties and candidates to enable voters to make informed choices. The IEC has a mandate to conduct voter education on electoral processes.

The Team encourages the IEC to continue to engage with stakeholders to educate the electorate, especially youth, on the importance of voting and electoral process.

## Secretariat to the IEC

The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary who is appointed in accordance with Section 66 of the Constitution. It serves as the administrative and technical arm of the Commission and translates decisions of the Commission into programmes and activities. The current Secretary to the IEC is Mr Jeff Siamisang.

<sup>12</sup> [www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=426668306319215&id=100069281466843&set=a.232805552372159](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=426668306319215&id=100069281466843&set=a.232805552372159)

<sup>13</sup> High Court Civil Case No. UAHGB- UDC; BCP; BNF; AP; BPP; BPF; BLP; RAP; BMD; BRP; MELs; and Attorney General of Botswana; JSC (cited in its capacity as the body that made the impugned decision); BDP; Maotoanong Lapedung Sebina N.O; Uyapo Ndadi N.O; Elizabeth Malebogo Masire N. O; Thebeyame Edward Tsimako N.O; Wame Triphinah Thanke N.O; IEC.



The responsibilities of the Secretariat in terms of the Electoral Act are as follows.

- Exercising general direction and supervision over registration of voters.
- Exercising general direction and supervision over the administrative conduct of elections and enforcement on the part of all election officers' fairness, impartiality and compliance with the provisions of the Electoral Act.
- Establishing polling districts and polling stations in the constituencies.
- Appointing registration and election officers.
- Issuing election officers and registration officers such instructions as are deemed necessary to ensure effective execution of the provisions of the Electoral Act.
- Exercising and performing all other powers and duties conferred upon him/her by the Electoral Act.

## Election petitions

Election petitions form an integral part of the democratic process. Section 117 of the Electoral Act provided for the manner in which election petitions are to be presented. Both voters and candidates in a constituency or polling district have the *locus standi* to file a petition directly with the High Court.

- Petitions may be lodged with the High Court within 30 days of the date of release of the election results.
- Petitions are determined within 90 days of the date of lodging (legal requirement).
- Only a voter or candidate in an election may raise an objection

## Voter eligibility and voter registration



An excited voter on election day

To be eligible to vote, a person must be over 18 years old, a citizen of Botswana and registered to vote. The Electoral Act provides that, following a national census, which also enables the delimitation of electoral boundaries (polling districts and polling stations), the IEC must prepare a new general voters' register to obtain an accurate number of people eligible to vote. The Constitution and the Electoral Act also provide for the registration of overseas citizens. The final register must be prepared and certified before a writ of elections is issued.

The IEC conducted manual voter registrations in three phases.

1. A general voter registration phase was originally due to take place from 1 to 30 November 2023 but was delayed following the filing of a court case by the UDC, seeking to be allowed to record all citizens registering themselves and to observe the voter registration process. On 19 December 2023, after several court appearances, the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the IEC. The general voter registration phase subsequently took place from 5 January to 3 February 2024. Some registered voters were rejected by the system for a variety of reasons, including already being registered elsewhere, not meeting the minimum age requirement<sup>14</sup> and names not matching with that of their national ID cards. The voter register was displayed for claims and objections for an initial period of 42 days, but the IEC increased the display phase to 80 days. Several objections were received and dispensed.
2. A supplementary voter registration was conducted from 26 February to 15 March 2024. The voter register was subsequently displayed for claims and objections, for a period of 21 days, during which the IEC rejected more registrations, for being registered somewhere else, while others did not meet the minimum age requirement.
3. A third phase (a second supplementary registration) was held from 20 to 31 May 2024 to meet the target of 1.3 million (about 80 per cent of total voting population). The voter register was displayed once again for claims and objections, for a period of 21 days, in which objections arose from the same constituency and were dispensed with (it is noted that there were no objections in the first supplementary registration).

All three registers produced in these phases were certified with all amendments by the Secretary of the IEC on 14 August 2024.

Highlights of the voter registration exercise include the following.

- A total of 1,038,275 people (about 80 per cent of the 1.3 million target) were registered.
- It took 57 days to achieve the 80 per cent target.
- 5,514 voters with various disabilities were registered.
- The voter ID was amended to include reference to a disability for the first time
- The IEC acquired braille instructions and templates.
- Within its stated aim of conducting an inclusive election, the IEC engaged local authorities and various stakeholders on the outcomes of the voter registration exercise.

The total disaggregated data is as follows.

Data	2019	2024
Total voting population	1,592,350	1,715,656
Total registered voters	925,478	1,038,275
Men	420,425	474,358
Women	505,053	563,917
Youth	375,461	370,077
PWDs	Data not captured	5,514

Stakeholders expressed frustration over the restricted access to the voters' roll. They highlighted a desire for the roll to be made available in digital format, allowing for easier, more equitable access across all political parties. The frustration around this decision ultimately escalated into a legal battle.

<sup>14</sup> On the last day of the registration exercise, some young people who had not yet turned 18 tried to register, which the IEC deemed to be the result of confusion, as the eligible (and compulsory legal) age for obtaining a national ID card is 16.

In the case of *Saleshando & BCP vs. IEC 2024*, the court ruled that the IEC had the discretion to decide whether or not to publish the voters' roll online. Furthermore, the court found that the IEC had not abused this discretion in its decision. Stakeholders also voiced that they had to pay to acquire a copy of the voters' list and argued that it should be freely available, to support transparency and fair participation.

Smaller and recently established parties struggle with limited access to essential resources, which creates an uneven playing field against well-funded, established parties. Lack of equal access to the voters' roll adds to their difficulties, impacting their campaign reach and efficiency. Other reported issues on the voters' roll included deceased persons or duplicate entries in different constituencies, compromising the accuracy of the list.<sup>15</sup>

Stakeholders called for the IEC to increase transparency and accountability across its operations, particularly in areas affecting the electoral process for diaspora voters and the timely release of electoral resources.

## Campaign finance

Botswana has legislated campaign spending limits of P50,000 per candidate after the writ of elections has been issued. Prior to legislation, the absence of limits on campaign spending affected fairness, as better-funded parties could dominate media spaces. This was compounded by the lack of clear guidelines for balanced media coverage.

## Key electoral preparations

### Boundary delimitation

In Botswana, a review of constituency boundaries is undertaken every 10 years, following a national census. Following the 2022 Population and Housing Census, which showed Botswana's population as having grown to 3.02 million, a Boundaries Commission was appointed by the JSC and conducted a review of constituency boundaries. This exercise resulted in an increase in the original number of constituencies from 57 to 61.

### Polling districts

The IEC increased the number of polling districts to 609, to bring electoral services closer to the community, especially in rural areas.

### Polling stations



Polling station in Francistown

<sup>15</sup> The Botswana Gazette (2024) 'BCP To Sue IEC Over Duplicate Voter Registrations'. 24 October. [www.thegazette.news/news/bcp-to-sue-iec-over-duplicate-voter-registrations-2/](https://www.thegazette.news/news/bcp-to-sue-iec-over-duplicate-voter-registrations-2/)

Polling stations were largely public institutions such as schools and higher learning institutions, as well as a mobile station made of tents. The number of polling stations was increased from 2,258 to 2,808, to make it easier for those in rural areas to vote. The IEC also planned for diaspora voting, with 52 polling stations abroad. There is currently no set maximum number of voters per polling station. According to the IEC, however, polling stations with over 1,000 voters are divided into two (streaming), to avert long queues and delays by voters on the day of polling. Nonetheless, the CET observed long queues of voters waiting to cast their votes and, as the queues are largely outdoors, people in the queues were exposed to harsh weather. Smaller streams would reduce waiting times.

## Other preparations

The IEC opened seven additional offices around the country, to improve access to electoral services.

The IEC observed other elections in the SADC region, including in Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Its observation of the 2023 Zimbabwe elections elicited some criticism from opposition political parties in Botswana, given the controversy surrounding the electoral process and outcome in Zimbabwe. In its defence, the IEC claimed that these visits aimed to help stakeholders encourage and learn from each other. The IEC stated that the visit to Zimbabwe resulted in its decision to adopt the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's (ZEC) accreditation system for observers, which was deemed to be more efficient than the IEC's.

## Stakeholder engagement

The IEC engaged local communities through the platform of the All Party Conference, which includes all registered political parties in Botswana. The IEC also engaged regularly with traditional leaders, the media and faith-based organisations on key electoral issues.

## Recruitment of poll staff

Returning officers, assistant returning officers and other polling staff were recruited and their names were submitted to be gazetted. Polling staff were drawn mainly from the civil service and other administrative services, as well as from among voluntary retirees. The IEC noted that a total of 34,056 election officials were engaged during the 2024 general elections. This total included:

- 28,787 public officers from various central government departments, councils and land boards across Botswana
- 544 retired officers
- 4,725 unemployed persons

The electoral laws of Botswana do not make provision for political party agents. However, they provide for candidate polling agents on the day of the poll. In total, there were 524 polling agents for the National Assembly elections and 4,194 polling agents for the local government elections, with the law allocating two polling agents for each candidate per polling station.

## Procurement of various non-sensitive election materials

Ballot boxes, polling booths and solar lights were procured in advance of the election. Transparency concerns regarding ballot transport and vote counting were raised among stakeholders. There were concerns about the opaque ballot boxes and the alleged likelihood of irregularities in transporting ballot boxes, with reports of police vehicles moving too quickly for stakeholders to follow and ballot boxes lacking standardised security measures. Instances of party agents adding another measure of security by securing ballot boxes with their own locks highlight procedural gaps.

## Recommendations

- To promote greater transparency, accountability and trust in the electoral process, the CET recommends that the voters' roll be made available online in future elections. Measures should also be implemented to protect sensitive information and uphold data privacy standards.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, consideration should be given to making two complementary copies of the voters' roll available, with additional copies available for purchase, to further support equitable access.
- The CET recommends the inclusion of voter education in the education curriculum for eligible voters.
- The CET recommends increased scrutiny in the voter registration process, alongside a digital or online system for consistently updating the voters' roll, to ensure voter data is current and accurate.<sup>17</sup>
- The CET recommends the implementation of early civic and voter education campaigns, particularly targeting youth and underrepresented groups, to address voter apathy and promote informed participation. The CET also recommends that the IEC make all voter materials easily available and accessible to the public, especially in rural areas. The Team further recommends increased utilisation of social media for voter education, particularly to engage the younger generation.
- To enhance voter education, the CET recommends the IEC partner with the media and civil society to strengthen analysis on key issues affecting stakeholders and ensure the effective reporting of the electoral process, especially election results.
- The CET recommends the implementation of regulations by the IEC to limit campaign spending and require equal media access for all parties to ensure a fair and equitable campaign environment.
- The IEC should enhance accountability by implementing more stringent monitoring and ensuring adequate ballot provisions for diaspora locations. This would require better forecasting of voter turnout and inventory management to avoid similar issues in future elections.
- The CET recommends amendment of the Electoral Act to make voter education and sensitisation core functions of the IEC.
- The CET recommends greater transparency in accessing the voters' roll and the enhancement of processes such as ballot distribution and diaspora voting, to build stakeholder confidence in the IEC's management of the electoral process. The CET further recommends the establishment of clear accountability protocols in this regard.
- To enhance security and transparency and build public confidence, the CET recommends the establishment of clear, transparent protocols for transporting diaspora and domestic ballots, ensuring stakeholders are informed of the process from collection to storage. For greater transparency, ballots should ideally be counted on-site at polling stations.
- The IEC should adopt a consistent approach to processing multiple voters at a time, to reduce wait times without compromising security, for efficient queue management. The IEC should implement a minimum quota of voters per polling station, thereby limiting the number of persons expected at any station.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Provision of a digital format would allow stakeholders, particularly smaller parties with limited resources, easier access to essential voter information, supporting fairer competition across all political entities.

<sup>17</sup> A digital system would allow for easier access and facilitate regular updates, helping eliminate outdated or incorrect entries, such as duplicate records or records of deceased voters. This approach not only streamlines the process but also reduces vulnerabilities in the electoral system by keeping the voters' roll current and reliable.

<sup>18</sup> This can be implemented by splitting a polling station in a district alphabetically. For instance, a polling station with 1,200 registered voters could be divided into two groups, with approximately 500 to 600 people each. The alphabetical split could designate voters with last names starting from A to L in one group and those from M to Z in the other, effectively creating two separate lists for the same polling station. For example, polling station 1623 would be split into 1623-1 for voters with names A–L and 1623-2 for those with names M–Z. This division would streamline the voting process, making it more manageable and reducing wait times on election day.

- The IEC should develop uniform procedures or place an emphasis in the training of polling day staff on initialling voter cards and applying indelible ink, to ensure consistency and reduce potential for errors.
- The IEC should facilitate ongoing dialogue with CSOs, political parties and other stakeholders to develop campaign reforms and ensure consistent, transparent election practices.
- The IEC should develop a robust emergency plan and contingency plan, including power backup solutions, for potential disruptions on election day. This plan should be communicated to all polling station staff to ensure readiness.
- The IEC should amend its regulations to respond to 'persons presenting unique cases' that warrant them the opportunity to vote in advance polls. The CET recommends the inclusion of medical professionals and other essential workers in advance voting.
- The CET recommends that the appointment of the Chair of the IEC be separated from the Office of the President, in line with international good practice on separation of powers, including the Latimer House Principles. This would ensure the Office of the President is removed from those that govern the election process.
- The CET recommends enhanced legislation to strengthen the independence of the IEC, including certainty of the election date (not less than three months before the end of the term).
- The Guide to Presiding and Polling Officers in the Conduct of Elections should be renamed and should make clear which provisions permit the exercise of discretion and which do not.



## 4. Participation and Inclusion

### Civil society organisations



The CET engages with CSOs prior to deployment

CSOs and citizen observers play a pivotal role before, during and after general elections. The role of civil society is evident in various aspects specifically related to voter education and the empowerment of women, youth, PWDs and other groups to exercise their political franchise. Citizen observers play a critical role in evaluating various aspects of the electoral process, promoting confidence and deterring fraud and electoral malpractices and providing an accurate assessment of the elections. The Team acknowledges the important role that Botswana's CSOs and citizen observers played in advocating for electoral reforms, promoting voter education and monitoring the delivery of the October 2024 elections, despite limited resources.

CSOs voiced concerns about several aspects of the electoral process. They cited lack of public funding, especially increasingly limited funding for governance-related work from funders, hindering their ability to conduct civic and voter education or effectively engage in election oversight. Prior to the elections, several stakeholders highlighted the shrinking space for civil society and institutions for accountability to operate over the years, especially those that work on policy advocacy. Additionally, Botswana's ranking as a middle-income country, despite having one of the highest wealth inequalities in the world, means there is limited funding for civil society to engage in governance and policy advocacy work.

Funding and capacity concerns notwithstanding, CSOs in Botswana expressed that they had considerable space and liberties to conduct their activities and engagement.

### Women's political participation

Women play a prominent role in Botswana's economic and social life but are sparsely represented in its political landscape. Women's equal representation in the National Assembly remains a distant goal, with



progress occurring at a slow pace. In the 2019 National Assembly of Botswana, women held seven out of 63 seats, making up 11.1 per cent of parliamentarians, despite comprising over 50 per cent of registered voters.<sup>19</sup> Stakeholders noted that 'Botswana is ruled by men but run by women', as most permanent secretaries in the public sector are women, as well as many chief executive officers and heads of banks in the private sector. However, women are glaringly absent from parliament and politics.

Stakeholders cited gender-based violence, a patriarchal political culture, lack of political party funding, the high cost of political campaigns and a lack of quotas and policies to enhance women's participation as some of the reasons hindering women's equal participation in politics. Botswana also has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence per capita in the Southern African region. The Team noted the BDP policy to build up to 50 per cent representation of women, and the BMP policy requiring gender equality in the nomination of candidates. However, such initiatives are party-driven and not grounded in statutory requirements.

Stakeholders highlighted that more women registered for the 2024 general and National Assembly elections than ever before. In 2019, there were 505,053 registered female voters out of 1,592,350 total voters, while in 2024 there were 563,917 out of 1,715,656. The CET also noted that there was near parity in representation of women as polling officials and political party agents, although there is no disaggregated data from the IEC. However, women were grossly underrepresented on the ballot papers at the local council and National Assembly elections. For the 2024 elections, the IEC confirmed 264 parliamentary candidates, of whom only 30 were women. This represents a modest increase in female candidacy from 5.5 per cent in 2019 to 7.9 per cent in 2024.

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends that the IEC consider adopting permanent voter registration to encourage increased participation in the electoral process, especially for youth, women, PWDs and the elderly.
- The CET calls on political parties and the government of Botswana to adopt and implement temporary social policies and measures to enable women to overcome structural barriers and subsequently increase access to political participation and decision-making. These include but are not limited to gender quotas in elections,<sup>20</sup> promoting gender equality and women's participation in political parties,<sup>21</sup> strengthening the capacities of women candidates, funding and campaign support for women candidates and the recruitment of women candidates.
- The CET recommends the enhancement of the Political Parties Funding Act to mandate political parties to provide funding and training to support potential women candidates in elections.
- The CET calls for legislation to guarantee the inclusion of women, youth and PWDs in politics, including affirmative action, rather than leaving inclusion to the discretion of political parties.
- To ensure gender equality is not left to the discretion of political parties, women should make up at least 30 per cent of all candidates at national and local level prior to the next election, with this share to increase thereafter in subsequent elections by 5 percentage points until a 50 per cent balance is achieved, in line with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Similar provisions can be made for PWDs and youth – each proportional to the population.
- The CET recommends legislation and affirmative action to ensure women's effective representation in the National Assembly, political leadership and governance, in line with Articles 5, 12 and 13 of the Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Article 5 states, 'State Parties shall put in place affirmative action measures with particular reference to women in order to eliminate all barriers which prevent them from participating meaningfully in all spheres of life and create a conducive

<sup>19</sup> <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BW/BW-LC01/data-on-women/>

<sup>20</sup> Legislated candidate quotas, legislated reserved seats, voluntary political party quotas and quota provisions to fit the electoral parties.

<sup>21</sup> Through gender mainstreaming within the internal organisation of political parties, gender-sensitive legal frameworks and policies in political parties, gender audits and gender action plans in political parties, measures to promote women's participation in decision-making, women's wings in political parties and gender mainstreaming in policy development

environment for such participation.' Article 13 states, 'State Parties shall endeavour to ensure equal and effective representation of women in decision making positions in the political, public and private sectors including through the use of special measures as provided for in Article 5.' Article 13 calls for participation that ensures equal opportunities for women and men in the electoral process.

## Youth political participation

According to Botswana's 2022 Population and Housing Census, youth aged 18–35 years account for 30 per cent of the population. The CET notes with concern that youth engagement in the governance and the electoral process has declined from previous elections. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Report on Youth Participation in National Parliaments 2023 reveals that only 2.8 per cent of parliamentarians are aged 30 or younger from all over the world, and, of this share, 15.87 per cent are under 45 years old in Botswana. Additionally, only 32 per cent of registered voters are young people.

The IEC confirmed a total of 262 candidates for the National Assembly elections and 2,457 candidates for local government elections. The data are not disaggregated by age. Notwithstanding, the 2024 general election also reflected a low number of youth candidates nominated by all political parties. This drop can be attributed to financial constraints in covering electoral expenses, the high cost of the nomination deposit, insufficient civic education, economic uncertainty, the high unemployment rate and a general sense of apathy towards the electoral process. The electoral laws of Botswana provide for a candidate nomination deposit for the National Assembly, which is returnable under certain circumstances. The amount for the National Assembly is P1,000 and it is returnable upon fulfilment of one of the following conditions.

- The candidate dies before the date of the election.
- There is no contested election.
- A contested election is declared void.
- He/she withdraws his candidacy in due time.
- In any contested election he/she is successful or obtains not less than one-twentieth of the total number of votes cast in constituency.
- His/her nomination is invalid for any other reason.

Youth apathy also stemmed from a belief that voting was not going to make a difference in what youth perceived as a pre-determined outcome. Some stakeholders noted that youth are often told to 'wait their turn' and, even when they join political parties, they are normally not at the forefront of leadership, but used to run errands and perform administrative and menial tasks for more seasoned party members.

Although stakeholders noted a high turnout of youth for voter registration for the 2024 general elections, they were unsure about whether the high turnout would translate into high youth turnout to vote on election day. Efforts by CSOs to boost youth participation have gained momentum, with ongoing voter education programmes to increase engagement, mentorship and flagship programmes. Initiatives such as dedicated podcasts targeted at young voters and an election-focused website were launched to improve engagement, yet more needs to be done to excite the young electorate. The Political Party Funding Act 2024 could also assist in enabling political parties to provide training and support for youth as potential candidates in future elections.

Additionally, in response to concerns over electoral fairness, opposition parties and CSOs organised volunteer groups such as the Organization for Youth and Elections in Botswana<sup>22</sup> to safeguard transparency and educate voters on electoral laws. Such grassroots initiatives underscore the need for a more inclusive IEC processes, with broader representation of political entities to restore trust in the electoral system. Notwithstanding, youth are increasingly participating in programmes and political commentary on social media.

<sup>22</sup> [www.facebook.com/OrganizationForYouthAndElectionsInBotswana](https://www.facebook.com/OrganizationForYouthAndElectionsInBotswana)

On election day, the Team noted high turnout of first- and second-time voters, who expressed excitement at being able to exercise their right to vote. The Team also noted that a high proportion of polling officers were youth. While this is commendable, the IEC missed an opportunity to leverage these officials as peer voter educators in the lead-up to the elections.



Botswana Red Cross volunteers on election day

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends that the IEC consider adopting permanent voter registration to encourage increased participation in the electoral process, especially for youth.
- The CET recommends that the IEC facilitate training for youth in political parties to prepare for roles as councillors and membership of the National Assembly. Funds allocated through the Political Parties Funding Act should be directed towards training initiatives for youth wings.
- The CET calls for consistency in the definition of youth, in line with international and regional instruments to which Botswana ascribes.

## Persons with disabilities

The Botswana National Assembly has passed the Persons with Disabilities Act 2023, with the main objective of giving effect to the CRPD.

However, PWDs in Botswana continue to face challenges with voter registration, securing candidacy for elections and participation in governance. Stakeholders highlighted that PWDs do not have the support and assistance needed to be represented in the political and electoral space. PWDs also expressed a desire to have the opportunity to be elected to office but have not been historically considered for the special dispensation in parliamentary nominations. Additionally, the IEC has no data on how many PWDs participated in the voter registration and voting process. Therefore, without specifically targeting them during voter education and registration, the IEC is unable to adequately plan for them on polling day. PWDs also noted that, on election day, they would like to be assisted to vote by people they feel comfortable and familiar with, and not the IEC mandated person or a returning officer.

On election day, the Team noted efforts by the IEC to ensure participation of PWDs in the electoral process, including granting them priority and assistance at polling centres. However, while polling officers and voters accorded priority to PWDs on election day, there was no voter education and messaging prior to the election on the priority that would be accorded to PWDs, nor were there designated priority lines for PWDs.



CET engagement with PWD's

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends that the IEC continue to engage with various groups of PWDs to better understand the issues they face and to work toward balanced solutions.
- The IEC is encouraged to collect and provide disaggregated data on PWDs at all stages of the election to support voter education and election administration activities, including the selection of appropriate polling stations for PWDs and the provision of sufficient electoral materials.



An IEC presiding officer assisting an elderly voter on election day

- The IEC is encouraged to invest more in voter education targeted at PWDs, including developing material such as an inclusive election guide for PWDs to support them throughout the voting process, ensuring their full and effective participation in the electoral process.

## The elderly

According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, the elderly, 65 years and above, comprise 6 per cent of the total population. However, the IEC did not have data on the number of elderly people registered to vote. The CET observed that elderly voters were accorded priority on election day.

## Recommendation

- The IEC is encouraged to collect and provide disaggregated data on the elderly at all stages of the election to support election administration, including the creation of appropriate polling stations and welfare facilities<sup>23</sup> for the elderly, especially in rural areas.

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<sup>23</sup> Such as seating, shade and polling stations in closer proximity to rural communities.



## 5. Campaign and the Media



The BDP final rally in Francistown

### The campaign

The legal framework for campaigning in Botswana is established by the Electoral Act and the 1966 Constitution, supported by additional regulations from the IEC. This legislative structure aims to ensure transparency, with provisions regulating campaign finance, conduct and media engagement. Campaign activities, including start and end dates, are strictly regulated to maintain order, typically commencing after the official nomination day and operating within specific time restrictions to minimise public disturbances, particularly in densely populated areas.

To protect election integrity, the Electoral Act prohibits various forms of electoral misconduct, including bribery, undue influence, impersonation and other corrupt practices. Campaign finance regulations play a crucial role in promoting fairness, with limitations set by the IEC to prevent undue financial influence on electoral outcomes. Several stakeholders highlighted the alleged influence of foreign nations such as China, India and Zimbabwe on the 2024 elections, noting that funding and campaign support was provided to the governing party for and during the campaign. Concerns were expressed about a visit by the IEC to Zimbabwe for 'benchmarking'. Although the IEC asserted that the visit was to provide moral support and encouragement to the ZEC, and to learn good practices, such as the speedy accreditation process utilised by the ZEC, some opposition political parties questioned the legitimacy of the visit.

Political advertising is controlled under the Electoral Act 1968, mandating public broadcasters to provide equitable airtime for all parties. In the lead-up to the 2024 general elections, public anticipation was tempered by concerns over economic vulnerabilities and delayed announcement of the election day, owing to the Constitutional Review, contributing to a tense political environment. Notwithstanding, during the election campaign, Botswana Television (BTV) hosted parliamentary and presidential debates featuring political party candidates. However, smaller political parties highlighted that, while the parliamentary debate featured candidates from all political parties, the presidential debate featured only the three main political parties.

As the election results started streaming in, the Team noted BTV's comprehensive coverage of the voting, collation and results announcements.

Political parties operate under significant constraints regarding funding, often leading to dependence on private sponsorship. The ruling BDP leveraged significant funding to execute high-visibility campaigns, while opposition parties struggled with limited resources, affecting their ability to reach voters through state media.

Stakeholders also highlighted that corporate entities were cautious about perceived support to private media amid fears of retaliation by the government. Despite the support of private media, which provided some counterbalance, the scale of opposition campaigns remained limited. With private media globally operating in a challenging financial context and struggling to remain afloat, pragmatic choices often have to be made. These issues underscore the need for financial reforms, including possible state support for opposition parties, to address disparities.

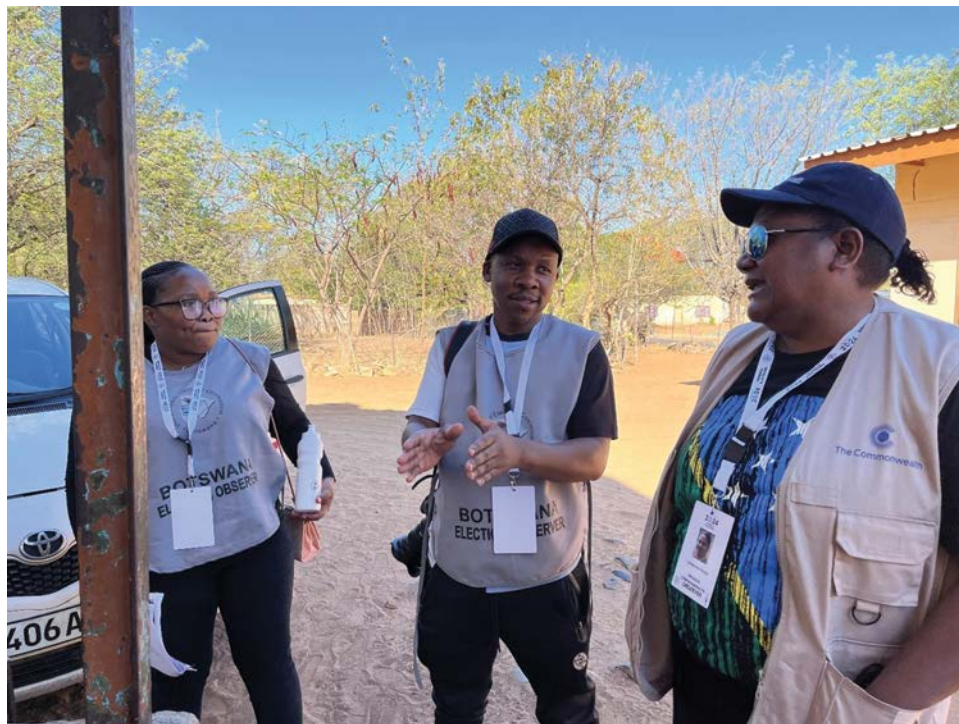
Nevertheless, opposition political parties and candidates hosted vibrant campaign rallies up to the day before the elections, which ended at midnight the day before the election.

Additionally, while the legal framework for elections emphasises fairness, further reforms are anticipated. These include completing the constitutional review process and establishing clearer guidelines on media neutrality, which may enhance public confidence in Botswana's electoral processes.

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends the strict implementation of the Electoral Act and its regulations on campaign financing to prevent undue advantage by political parties or candidates and to prevent the influence of foreign entities or corporations in elections.
- The CET encourages the IEC to work closely with civil society and marginalised groups throughout the electoral cycle to implement election awareness-raising campaigns targeted at all sections of society and to engender trust in the institution.
- The CET recommends establishment of an electoral campaign period to provide all political parties and candidates with sufficient time to mobilise resources, disseminate their messages and engage with voters across the country.

## Media



Commonwealth Observer Group engaging media practitioners on election day

Article 12 of the Botswana Constitution protects and guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of the media and the right to freely receive communication. The media landscape in Botswana includes a mix of print, broadcast and digital platforms. There are seven news outlets in Botswana, including The Daily News, The Botswana Guardian, The Botswana Gazette, The Monitor, The Sunday Standard, The Midweek Sun and The Voice. The Daily News is the only state-run news outlet. All the news outlets are published weekly, except The Monitor, which is published daily. There is only one national TV station, BTV, which is state-owned and -run. There are four radio stations: the state-run Radio Botswana 1 and 2 and 3 plus Yarona FM, Gabz FM and Duma FM, which are privately owned. Radio is the most popular news source in Botswana, given its accessibility, especially in remote and rural areas, with social media and then television coming second and third, respectively.

Since independence, Botswana's media landscape has been shaped by state influence, especially within public broadcasting. The campaign environment demonstrated disparities in media access, campaign spending and general organisation. The ruling party benefited from far more favourable coverage by both state and private media, and there was confluence between coverage of state events by the incumbent as President, and use of the same platform for political campaign. This media bias created an uneven playing field, particularly disadvantaging smaller or less funded parties.

According to the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, Botswana ranks 79th out of 180 countries on media freedom. This ranking represents a regression of 14 places from the previous year and highlights some stakeholders' assertion of intimidation, unequal access of political parties to airtime and media, self-censorship for fear of reprisals and lack of patronage.

Stakeholders and political entities raised concerns regarding the perceived advantage of state-run media in coverage, reach and influence. The state print media reaches every *kgotla* (village administrative office), and each village where there is a *kgotla* receives a copy of the state-owned *The Daily News*, free of charge. Given the rural and remote nature of the landscape, non-state media do not have the same resources



or distribution ability, which inevitably skews the advantage in the state's favour. BTV, the sole national television broadcaster, and the Radio Botswana channels also enjoy significant reach, particularly in rural areas where radio remains the most accessible medium. In comparison, private media outlets have limited resources and outreach, hindering their ability to compete effectively with state media.

State media and its employees are considered the mouthpiece of the government and not journalists bound to a professional code of conduct and ethics. This is particularly problematic given the blurred distinction between the president's role as head of state and leader of the incumbent party, especially when coverage often favours the ruling party.

Some political parties highlighted unequal coverage and the blurring of lines between the coverage of the president as head of state and as the head of the party in government. Moreover, state-controlled media and BTV were criticised for bias towards the ruling party, especially regarding unequal representation of political parties, and for giving the BDP preferential coverage, limiting fair coverage of all political entities. This media control complicates the electorate's ability to access balanced information crucial for informed voting. This lack of balanced representation highlights the media's role in creating an informed electorate and underscores the need for reforms to ensure equitable access for all political entities.

According to several stakeholders, the media landscape is increasingly polarised, with internal conflict within media bodies and reports of misconduct against journalists. Several stakeholders highlighted that, while private media is regulated, state media is not. Legal constraints further shape Botswana's media environment. Some stakeholders cited the 2008 Media Practitioners' Act as being punitive in nature and a deterrent to media freedom, as it gives authorities the power to shut down any media seen to be a threat against national security and imposes high penalties on information deemed to be misleading or incorrect. Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), a tactic often used to silence and intimidate journalists who speak out on matters of public interest, have increasingly targeted journalists covering sensitive political issues or investigating powerful figures. Stakeholders allege that such lawsuits are designed to deter critical reporting, underscoring the urgent need for stronger legal protections to allow journalists to fulfil their role in democratic accountability. Additionally, proposed legislation like the Access to Information Bill 2024 and the Communications Regulatory Authority Act 2012 often lead to self-censorship among journalists, impacting the media's role as a government watchdog. Concerns were also raised about financial pressures facing media outlets, resulting in subtle gagging of dissenting voices. Despite these challenges, some private media outlets continued to provide coverage of the elections, though public media remained tightly controlled by the ruling party.

Stakeholders raised concerns regarding the lack of support to and training of media practitioners. With shrinking advertising revenues, some veteran journalists are moving into other sectors, leaving a new crop of inexperienced young journalists who are not conversant in election analysis and reporting. The Botswana Department of Information Services and Broadcasting Services organised an election training coverage for public media. Some CSOs, through funding from diplomatic missions and international entities, also trained some journalists on inclusive election reporting.

## Social media

In the digital space, social media has become increasingly influential, especially among younger audiences. With an internet penetration rate of approximately 50 per cent and over 1.2 million internet users in Botswana, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok have become popular channels for news consumption and civic engagement. This digital reach has allowed news and political content to circulate quickly, particularly in urban areas, where connectivity is stronger. However, access remains limited in some rural regions owing to infrastructural constraints, creating a digital divide.

CSOs, supported by international agencies, have responded by providing training to journalists on digital literacy and responsible election reporting. Despite these efforts, the extensive distribution and reach of state media across rural areas still give the ruling party a distinct advantage as traditional media remains a primary source of information for communities with limited internet access. The IEC also failed to leverage digital media for voter education before and during registration and in leading up to the elections.

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends enhancing media independence by allowing editorial independence and reducing state control over public media.
- The CET recommends increasing financial transparency by implementing campaign finance reforms, including potential state funding for parties to create fair competition.
- Promotion of media literacy should be encouraged through collaboration between the IEC and civil society, to improve digital literacy and help citizens identify misinformation.
- The CET recommends legal and policy reform to protect journalists' rights and shield journalists from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and other restrictive legal practices, thereby empowering the media to serve its watchdog role effectively.
- The IEC should strengthen its awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns to combat misinformation and disinformation.
- The CET encourages state and private media outlets to dedicate a minimum percentage of coverage to all political parties and candidates to create an equitable playing field.
- The CET encourages state and private media to provide media coverage for marginalised groups, especially women, youth and PWDs, to address their specific needs.
- The CET recommends that the government of Botswana and development partners provide funding and capacity-building support for journalists on inclusive reporting practices.

## 6. Voting, Counting and the Results Process

The conduct and management of election day showcased both effective practices and challenges.



IEC official applying indelible ink on a voter after voting

### Advance voting and diaspora voting challenges



Ballot papers for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections Advance voting was open to the diaspora on 19 October 2024, and to over 12,000 polling officers and thousands of police officers and army personnel in Botswana. Advance voting was marred by insufficient ballot papers in several locations for diaspora voters, as well as in other advance polling stations, which disenfranchised voters and raised questions about the preparedness of the IEC. For Botswana voters abroad, Out of 51 polling stations, 10 experienced ballot paper shortages.<sup>24</sup>

Given the aforementioned irregularities, the process of advance voting was repeated on 26 October 2024 in some constituencies. Members of the Team had the opportunity to visit this exercise at the different locations. Our visit to Seepapitso Senior Secondary School revealed long lines, with only one individual issuing ballot papers. This person was responsible for distributing ballots for both the member of parliament and the councillor. Voters waited patiently until they were able to exercise their democratic franchise. The time for one person to vote while inside the polling station was approximately three to five minutes. There were no measures put in place to improve the efficiency of the voting process.

The issue of inclusiveness was also raised as medical professionals such as nurses felt that they should have been accommodated in the advance voting process.

There was also limited awareness and preparation for diaspora voting, which led to complications. Stakeholders, including media, reported a lack of communication about the arrival of diaspora ballots and the method of secure transport. Observers noted instances of diaspora ballots arriving in unsecured bags without padlocks, and that stakeholders were not adequately informed about the transfer and storage processes for diaspora votes.



CET engaging an elderly voter in Francistown

## Assessment of opening and voting

The Team commends voters who turned out to exercise their constitutional right to elect their leaders. The Team also commends the efforts of the IEC, especially presiding officers and polling officers, who had limited time to prepare for the elections.

The Team noted the absence of marked polling stations prior to election day. However, on polling day, most polling stations were identifiable and set up prior to the opening of the polls at 0630. Polling materials were also delivered to all polling stations on time. However, the Team observed inconsistencies in the setup of

<sup>24</sup> Dube, M. (2024) 'Botswana's Advance Voting Marred by Ballot Paper Shortages'. Voice of America, 21 October. [www.voanews.com/a/botswana-s-advance-voting-marred-by-ballot-paper-shortages/7830447.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/botswana-s-advance-voting-marred-by-ballot-paper-shortages/7830447.html)

polling stations, as, while most polling stations were set up the day or the morning before elections, others were not ready for the start of polls at 0630.



An IEC polling officer crosschecking a voter's card against the electoral register

At the start of the poll, empty ballot boxes were publicly displayed inside and even outside to persons in the queue, to assure voters of the integrity of the process. The presiding officers and polling officials demonstrated effective management, maintaining orderly and calm operations throughout the day. Polling officers verified that ballot boxes were empty and properly sealed in the presence of party agents and voters before the start of voting at 0630.

Despite the voters' roll not being publicly displayed for viewing, political party agents and polling officers had copies. Polling officers identified each voter by their name and voter ID card, in conjunction with political party agents, prior to each voter casting their vote.

Queues were exceptionally long, with many voters waiting up to four/five hours to cast their vote. The process was delayed in some polling stations where ballot papers for councillors and members of parliament were handled by a single official, creating bottlenecks that delayed the flow of voters. This was later adjusted to allow multiple voters to check in simultaneously, which improved the efficiency of the process. For PWDs and elderly voters, presiding officers aided as needed. Seating arrangements were also insufficient at some locations as there were not enough chairs to accommodate all queuing voters.

The Team noted that there was hardly any disruption at polling stations. In some instances, persons presented expired voter registration cards and were denied their vote. They were informed to retrieve their current voter cards before being allowed to participate in the voting process.





Party agents verifying the details on voter ID cards against the electoral register

## Voting procedure



IEC polling officers displaying empty ballot boxes and explaining the procedures at the opening of polls

The voting process on election day generally proceeded smoothly without any evidence of violence, with efficient handling of voter turnout, even as some polling stations experienced long queues.



Long queues in Francistown

The Team noted that the overall voting process across Botswana was extremely slow and was delayed by long queues and the lack of multiple streams for voting, resulting in presiding officers in many polling stations extending voting hours past the 1900 deadline. It was not unusual for voters to wait for up to six hours to cast their vote. This was compounded by all polling centres having only one polling unit for hundreds of voters; several polling centres processing one voter at a time, despite having the capacity to host and process more; high temperatures; and the decision by many voters to cast their vote either very early in the morning or in evening.



Crosschecking of voter ID against the electoral register





CET engaging voters in Maun

Voter's identification cards and personal details were verified by polling officers and political party agents against the electoral register before voters proceeded to vote. The names were then crossed off the electoral register to signify that the voter had voted. In one polling unit, the CET noted that a voter's identification card did not match the details on the polling register. The polling officer requested that the voter go to the IEC for verification of her details, before proceeding to the polling unit recommended by the IEC to vote. However, there were variations in ballot procedures. There were some inconsistencies in ballot handling and verification practices across polling stations, as some voters' cards were initialled on verifying their name while others were initialled after voting.



Application of indelible ink after voting

The Team observed that the voting process was conducted in secret and without any intimidation or external influence. The process was clearly explained to all voters, and those who needed extra support, such as the elderly and illiterate voters, were given the necessary assistance. In rural areas, the Team noted a higher proportion of elderly and infirm voters, making the process slower. In several polling stations, priority for voting was given to elderly voters. However, the Team noted inconsistencies in giving priority to PWDs, the elderly and pregnant women. The Team also noted poor levels of ventilation, shade and seating facilities to ensure the welfare of vulnerable voters and polling officials. The Team commends the IEC for providing voting materials in Braille format for ease of use by the visually impaired and partially sighted citizens.

The application of indelible ink varied, with no standard protocol for marking. For some voters, the left thumb was marked or given a stroke; for others, polling officials focused on covering the cuticle.

## Assessment of closing and results tabulation



Counting of votes in Francistown

The Team observed verification and tallying of votes, including the arrival of ballot boxes and electoral materials from polling stations. The Team commends the overall transparency of the collation process, noting that members of the public were allowed to witness the process. The Team observed that polling officials notified voters of the imminent close of the polls prior to the official closing of the polls at 1900. In instances where there were active queues, the gates were closed at 1900, but all voters within the polling centre were allowed to cast their vote.

The legal procedures for closing of polls were followed, and the Team observed a checklist being followed by polling officials. The police also recorded the information as read out by polling officials. In two instances, however, the process was not followed, leading to a delay of up to two hours for the start of verification and counting. This contravenes Section 70 (1) of the Electoral Act which states:

*'The returning officer shall, as any ballot box is received from a polling station, in the presence of any candidate or counting agent who wishes to be present, proceed to verify the ballot paper accounts of that polling station by opening the sealed packet containing the unused, spoilt and cancelled ballot papers in it and the total number of ballot papers found in the ballot box for that polling station.'*



Centralising vote counting at counting centres raised security concerns from many stakeholders, including CSOs, which voiced support for counting ballots at the polling stations to increase transparency and trust.

The Team observed the presence of international and citizen observers, political candidates, party agents and the media at collation centres. The Team noted that the collation centres were large enough to accommodate the various stakeholders, including the general public. The police were also observed video recording the verification process.



Botswana Police Service monitoring polling stations on election day

The CET commends the presiding officers, polling officers, party agents and law enforcement officials for their professionalism, patience and dedication to ensure an efficient polling experience for all voters. The Team acknowledges the impartiality of polling officials and law enforcement throughout the process. The Team also wishes to commend these officials for providing a conducive environment for international and citizen observers to exercise their mandate. The Team particularly commends the professionalism of the Botswana Police Service, who were unarmed, active and swift to respond to any incidents which arose.

The Team acknowledges the gender composition of polling officials, political party agents and the Botswana Police Service, noting that was balanced representation of men and women across polling centres.

## Recommendations

- The CET recommends that the IEC provide the list of polling stations and collation centres to the public electronically and in print prior to election day, at least two weeks after verification of the voter register. For transparency of the process, the CET also recommends the use of electronic and other forms of technology for registration.
- The CET recommends consistency in the setup of polling stations, in line with the manual provided by the IEC.
- The CET recommends enhanced training of polling officers on procedures, processes and policies in relation to vulnerable groups, especially PWDs, the elderly and pregnant women.
- The CET recommends that consistent priority be given to vulnerable individuals, including PWDs, pregnant women, nursing mothers and others, during voting.
- The CET recommends the provision of hygiene facilities and shelter for voters and election officials, taking into consideration the high temperatures and the environment in remote parts of Botswana. The CET further calls for improved ventilation and visibility during collation and the counting of votes.

- Given the increase in size of the electorate, the CET recommends an increase in the number of election officials and polling streams at polling stations, to reduce queues and voting times. The IEC may also wish to consider earlier opening of polls for voting to take cognisance of the high temperatures.
- The CET recommends comprehensive training of all election officials, well ahead of the elections, to ensure consistency in the process throughout the country.
- The CET recommends improvement in the conditions of service for polling officials and police officers, including remuneration and the introduction of rotas to enable breaks.
- To enhance efficiency of the electoral process, the CET recommends verification and counting of votes at polling stations.

# Annex I. Composition and Biographies of the Group

## Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

*Senator Gideon Moi (Kenya)*

Senator Gideon Moi is a former Senator of the Senate of the Republic of Kenya (2017 – 2022).

He is the Chairperson of Lelgoi Group, Chancellor of Kabarak University and Chairperson of Kenya African National Union (KANU).

He was the former Member of Parliament, Baringo Central Constituency and Chairperson of Parliamentary Committee on Energy, Communications and Public Works (2003 – 2007); Vice Chairperson of KANU (2008–2013); Senator, Baringo County and Chairperson of Senate committee on Energy, Roads and Transportation (2013–2017); and Chairperson of the ICT Senate Committee (2017–2022).

Senator Moi holds a Master's in Development Studies from St. Paul's University, Kenya.

## Observers

*Mr Idzuafi Hadi Bin Kamilan (Malaysia)*

Mr Idzuafi Hadi Kamilan graduated with a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) from University Utara Malaysia in 2008 and earned his Master of Laws from the National University of Malaysia in 2010. He is the Executive Director of the Institute for Political Reform and Democracy (REFORM) and previously worked as a Parliamentary Research Officer in Malaysia's Parliament (2012–2020) and Head of Legal and International Treaties at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) (2020–2021).

Idzuafi attended parliamentary fellowships in the Parliament of India (Lok Sabha) in 2014, Iowa State Senate, in 2015, and the Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia in 2017. He was also a Fulbright Visiting Scholar (2019–2020).

*Ms Georgina Kekea (Solomon Islands)*

Ms Georgina Kekea is a multimedia professional with over two decades of experience in radio, television, and freelance journalism. Her career began in 2000 at the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) in Radio Broadcasting, followed by a transition to One News Television until its closure in 2013. Subsequent freelance work included contributions to ABC's Tok Pisin Service and a return to SIBC from 2014 to 2017. Additional roles included a project officer position at the Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) and serving as Chief of Staff at Island Sun Newspaper in 2018.

Freelance engagements have spanned contributions to Solomon Times Online, work as a correspondent for ABC Pacific Prepared, and communication consultancy with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme Pacific Ecosystem-Based Adaptation to Climate Change (SPREP PEBACC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In 2022, she co-founded the Solomon Islands Local Media Agency Ltd. (SILMA) and launched Tavuli News in 2022.

Ms Kekea currently serves as the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands.

*Ms. Pamela Ogiste (Trinidad and Tobago)*

Ms. Pamela Ogiste is the Assistant Chief Election Officer of the Elections and Boundaries Commission of Trinidad and Tobago and a Public Officer, with 39 years of experience in the government service. She is responsible for overseeing key aspects of election management including the effective oversight of procedures for the conduct of elections, from the issuance of writs to the recruitment, selection and training of poll day staff.

Ms. Ogiste supports registration supervisors, registration officers and other members of staff in the day-to-day operations of the eighteen (18) registration area offices across Trinidad and Tobago. As liaison officer for the National Field Verification Exercise (NFVE), she coordinates all activities at the NFVE Centres, including communication with the Project Management Team, staff training, resource allocation and reporting.

*Judge Peter Herbert (United Kingdom)*

Judge Peter Herbert is a leading United Kingdom human rights barrister, former lead counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and now Co-Chair of Bandung Africa. He sat as a part-time recorder in the Crown Court and served as an immigration judge and employment judge until his retirement in 2020.

Judge Herbert was Vice Chair of the United Kingdom Metropolitan Police Authority and has been an adviser to two United Kingdom Attorney Generals and Home Secretaries on race, equality and justice. In 2002 he was awarded the Spirit of Excellence award by the American Bar Association and the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to human rights and equality in 2010.

Judge Herbert has led several refugee fact-finding missions to Sicily, Lampedusa, Calais and Lebanon.

## Staff Team

### **Ms Nancy Kanyago (Staff Team Leader)**

Legal Adviser, Law Development Section, Rule of Law, Governance and Peace Directorate

### **Ms Madonna Lynch**

Executive Officer, Electoral Support, Governance and Peace Directorate

### **Ms Musu Kaikai**

Political Officer, Africa, Governance and Peace Directorate

### **Ms Naadira Ogeer**

Economic Adviser, Natural Resources, Energy and Natural Resources, Economic Development Trade and Investment Directorate



# Annex II. Deployment Plan

## Commonwealth Expert Team

### Botswana General Elections

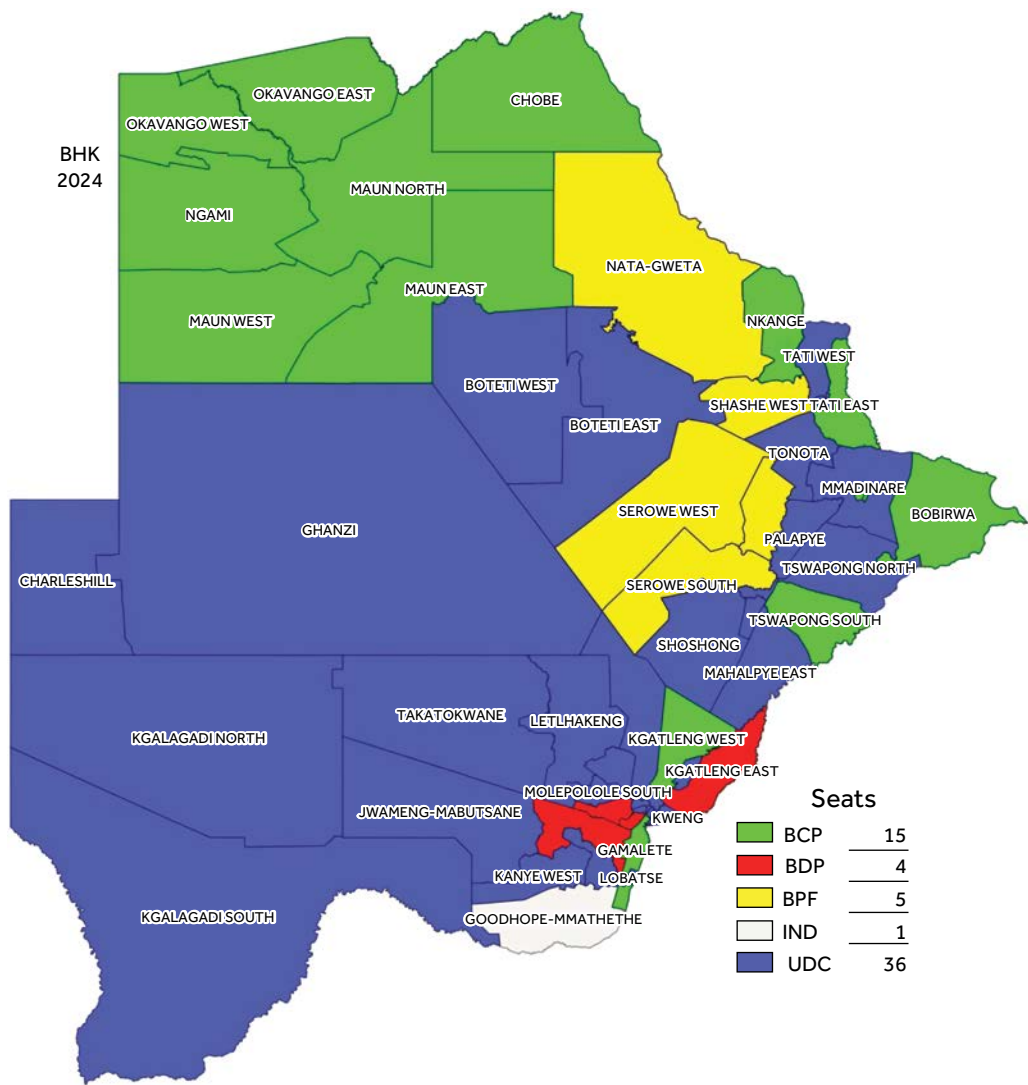
30 October 2024

### Deployment Plan

Team	Members	Region
Team 1	Senator Gideon Moi (Chairperson) Nancy Kanyago	Gaborone
Team 2	Pamela Ogiste Madonna Lynch	Gaborone
Team 3	Judge Peter Herbert Georgina Kekea Musu Kaikai	Francistown/ Serowe
Team 4	Idzuafi Hadi Kamila Naadira Ogeer	Maun

# Annex III. Election Results

## 2024 Parliamentary Results - Final<sup>25</sup>



25 [www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063117465164&\\_\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZUFqippreTwg73lOLsrMhhQSIUi4ZZYQdYyUYYPQgvGQhZM8u-RZfueKhyymZRSOfBXR6f78eTslaV86Mko6kmkWGpiMGX4mye2ro3Cn\\_lEfS8r78w04VXQ1OwsgLGcu6ITIHp6aaYjLnk4Cy\\_-kACIMvZ\\_oL5keR\\_crd7IHZWptIzan-l6lI2ornKMCRCI3f0&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-UC%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063117465164&__cft__[0]=AZUFqippreTwg73lOLsrMhhQSIUi4ZZYQdYyUYYPQgvGQhZM8u-RZfueKhyymZRSOfBXR6f78eTslaV86Mko6kmkWGpiMGX4mye2ro3Cn_lEfS8r78w04VXQ1OwsgLGcu6ITIHp6aaYjLnk4Cy_-kACIMvZ_oL5keR_crd7IHZWptIzan-l6lI2ornKMCRCI3f0&__tn__=-UC%2CP-R)

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