

# Country Brief

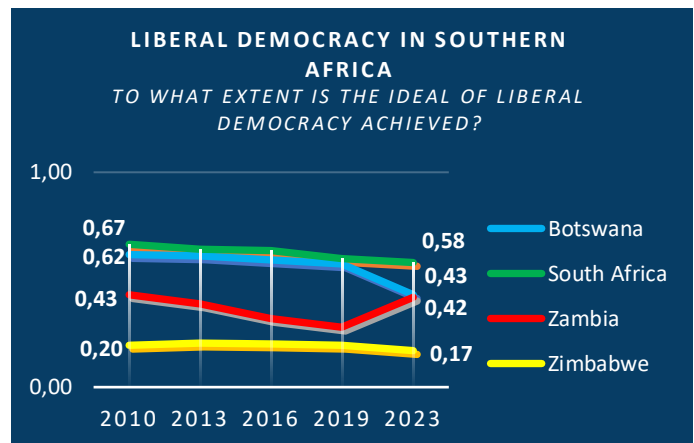
## Botswana

Electoral democracy

### COUNTRY INDICATORS

**Population:** 2.588 million (WB)  
**Urban population:** 72% (WB)  
**Urban population growth (annual):** 2.6% (WB)  
**Access to water:** 92% (WHO-UNICEF)  
**Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 births):** 35 (WB)  
**GDP (current US\$):** 17.61 billion (WB)  
**GDP per capita, PPP (current Int\$):** 17,604 (WB)  
**Global Freedom Status:** Free, Score 72 (FH)  
**Corruption Perception Index:** Score 60, Rank 35/180 (TI)  
**Human Development Index:** Medium (0.693), Rank 117/191 (UNDP)  
**Local Government Association:** [Botswana Association of Local Authorities \(BALA\)](#)

Figure 1



Source: V-Dem Institute (2024)

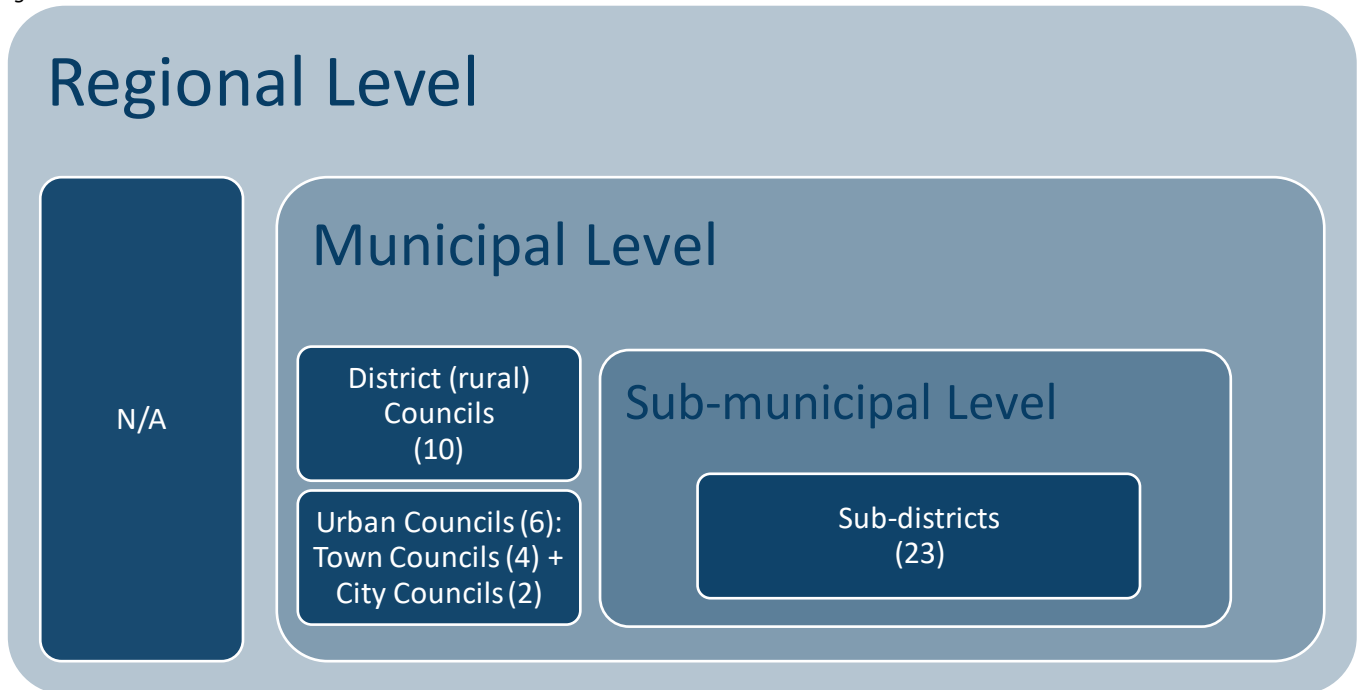
**Clarification:** The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a 'negative' view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.

### Decentralisation

Botswana is a unitary state. Botswana is one out of only five African states that make no provision for local government participant in their constitution (UCLG, 2020, p.39). In 2016, a new policy outlined the roles and responsibilities of all levels of government in the process of achieving sustainable local development. While the country has one of the oldest decentralisation policies in Africa it is still in the process of developing a legislative tool for its decentralisation policy (UCLG, 2020, p.44).

Botswana is divided in 16 districts that are headed by councils (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019). There are two types of councils: District Councils (10), which are in rural areas; and Urban Councils (6), with 4 Town Councils and 2 City Councils. The governance at the local level is further sub-divided into three local structures: sub-districts, land boards, and traditional administrations (*Kgotlas*) based on a traditional system of villages headed by a *Kgosi* (Chief).

Figure 2



1

Source: SNG-WOFI Botswana (2019)

### District and Urban Councils

Urban Councils are headed by Mayors and District Councils are headed by chairpersons (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019). The 16 districts have 609 councillors and out of these councillors 490 are elected democratically for a five-year term while 119 are nominated by the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development. The Ministry also appoints the head of the district administration (the District Commissioner) and district administrators with mandates to fulfil some local government functions (ibid.).

### Land boards and *Kgotlas*

The Tribal Land Act of 1968 established land boards in rural areas that are tasked with the responsibility of land administration. This entails the distribution of tribal land to citizens. There are 12 land boards across the country, each with 12 to 16 members. Since the 1993 amendment, members are appointed and accountable to the Ministry of Lands and Housing. Land boards cooperate with councils in formulating policy (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019).

The traditional administration – *Kgotlas* (assemblies of tribes) – is an age-old institution, regarded as the most basic form of government. It plays two key roles: Firstly, as a public platform allowing the community to raise concerns as well as inform the community about policies and local development plans. They thus provide a channel of communication from central government to the local community. Secondly, as places to settle customary court cases and the development of the villages. The *Kgotlas* are headed by Chiefs responsible for calling the meetings. Eight Chiefs also hold office as members of *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* (House of Chiefs), which is a consultative institution that advises Parliament (SNG WOFI Botswana, 2019).

## Local Autonomy

<sup>1</sup> **District Councils (DC):** Central DC, Chobe DC, Ghanzi DC, Kweneng DC, Kgatleng DC, North East DC, North West DC, Southern DC, South East DC, Kgalagadi DC.

**Town Councils (TC):** Selibe Phikwe TC, Jwaneng TC, Sowa TC, Lobatse TC.

**City Councils:** Gaborone City Council, Francistown City Council.

## Mandates

Under the Local Government District Council Act, councils perform statutory functions, including provision of five key services: Primary education; health care; supply of water to rural areas; local development; and road maintenance (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019).

Table 1

Main Sectors	Local Government Responsibilities
1. General public services	Administrative services (electoral register)
2. Public order and safety	Firefighting
3. Economic affairs/transport	Tertiary and secondary road networks and facilities; Tourism
4. Environmental protection	Nature preservation; environmental protection; Waste management; Sewerage (waste water management and sanitation); Street cleaning
5. Housing and community amenities	Urban and land use planning; Urbanism
6. Health	
7. Recreation, culture & religion	Sports and recreation; Cultural activities (park and open spaces); Religious affairs
8. Education	Primary education
9. Social protection	

Source: SNG-WOFI Botswana (2019)

## Local Government Finances

Councils are responsible for raising and collecting local taxes and user fees or levies to cover operating expenditure. However, local governments remain heavily reliant on transfers from the central government. According to one estimate, central government provides an average of 90% and 80% of district and urban councils' recurrent budgets (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019). Generally, expenditure priorities of local governments include construction and maintenance of primary school and college facilities, teachers' salaries, customary courts, rural administrative centres, and recreational parks. Botswana's domestic government revenues are largely generated by mining and national taxes, which are the primary source of revenues transferred to local governments (SNG-WOFI Botswana, 2019).

## Local Democracy

### State of Elections

Councillors are elected directly in local elections that are held alongside the presidential and parliamentary elections every five years, usually in October. Out of the 609 local councillors, 490 are democratically elected. The next local election is set for 2024.

Botswana has for long been a beacon of hope for democracy on the African continent, but like so many other countries, Botswana's democracy is trending in a negative direction (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1). V-Dem's 2023 Democracy Report classified Botswana as an Electoral democracy, which is a step down from its previous standing as one of only two (along with Seychelles) Liberal democracies in Africa.

The 2019 election was generally considered free and fair, although the opposition claimed that it was rigged. Botswana has been ruled by a single party since independence, media freedom is being threatened, and it remains highly centralised fiscally and administratively. It is important to note that Botswana still require significant reform efforts to begin to foster an environment that is favourable to local governments (UCLG, 2020, p.44).

## Electoral Outcomes

Table 3

Elections	2004	2009	2014	2019
Voter turnout	72,6% <sup>[a]</sup>	76,4% <sup>[a]</sup>	84,6%	71% (53,4% female)
Female <u>Elected</u> Members of Parliament			8,8% (17 out of 192)	5% (3 out of 57)
Nominated Members of Parliament				66% (4 out of 6)
Elected Female Councillors (out of 490)	--	--	13% (63)	14% (71)
Nominated Female Councillors (out of 119)	--	--	39% (47)	22% (26)
Total Female Councillors	19,6% (116 out of 591)	23,1% (139 out of 603)	18,1% (110 out of 609)	15,9 % (97 out of 609)
Female Mayors	18,8% (3/16)	6,3% (1/16)	18,8% (3/16)	6,3% (1/16)

Source: Ministry of Local Governments and Rural Development (CLGF, 2018)

<sup>[a]</sup>African Election Database: <https://africanelections.tripod.com/local.html> (Accessed 13 Oct 2022)

### Women's representation

Women remain severely underrepresented in the political arena. In the 2019 election only 97 out of 609 (15,9%) councillors and 1 out of 16 District mayors/chairpersons were female (see Table 3). Botswana was recently ranked 111<sup>th</sup> in a global assessment of women's political representation in local government (UN Women, 2021). Patriarchal structures remain strong in Botswana, and gender-based violence is rampant.

Botswana does not have any legislated gender quotas.

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## **About ICLD**

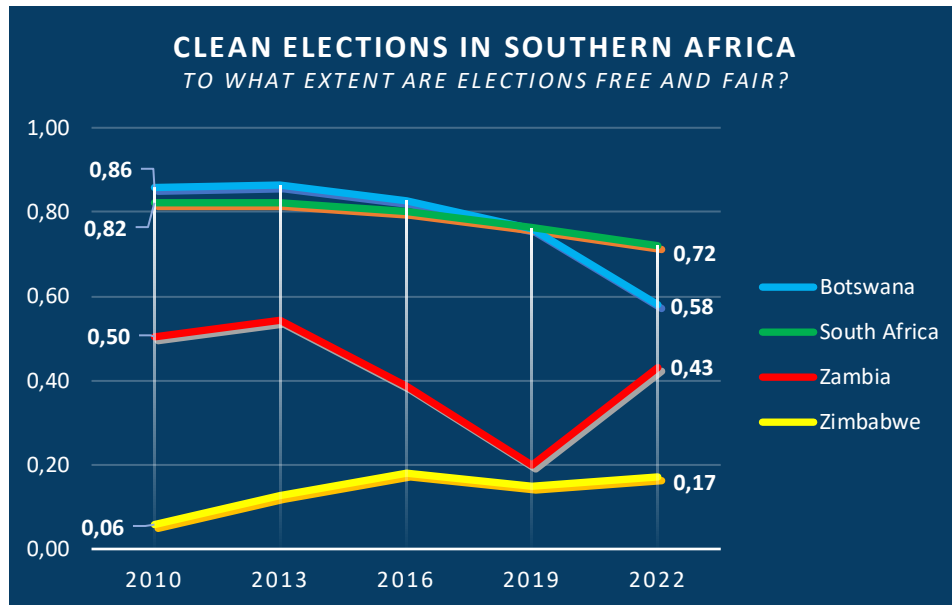
The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organisation is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments. This Country Brief is part of a publication series that investigates the state of decentralisation and local democracy in countries where ICLD programmes operate.

This Country Brief covers events up to October 2023.

## Appendix 1: Clean Elections Index

**Research Question:** *To what extent are elections free and fair?* (Low to High; 0-1)

**Clarification:** Free and fair connotes an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence.



Source: V-Dem Institute (2022)

## Appendix 2: Corruption Perceptions Index

**Clarification:** CPI measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople.

