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The Ruling Political Party Caucus and the Independence of Parliament in the Republic of Botswana

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Abstract

The political party caucus system serves as a decision-making framework utilised globally to facilitate consensus before debates and voting in Parliament. This system may affect the autonomy of individual Members of Parliament (MPs) and Parliament as an institution. This paper is an excerpt from the author's (Balisi, 2024) doctoral thesis. The study utilised qualitative methods and a cross-sectional design. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews with 33 purposively selected participants, comprising Members of Parliament, members of the executive branch of government, and representatives from civil society organisations in Botswana. The study's key findings indicate that binding political party caucus decisions undermine Parliament's independence and hinder MPs' capacity to oversee the executive branch effectively. The caucus system often restricts backbench MPs' ability to oppose or reject executive decisions, publicly criticise, or hold the executive accountable. Members of Parliament frequently feel obligated to prioritise their parties' interests over those of their constituencies due to the caucus system. The study indicates that the party caucus system is more effectively aligned with proportional representation political systems and is somewhat suitable for first-past-the-post electoral systems. The paper recommends that there is a

need to establish a balance between the principles of the political caucus system and democratic values of representation, as well as the independence of Parliament.

Keywords: Political party caucus, Independence of Parliament, Botswana

Introduction

This paper analyses the relationship between the ruling political party caucus system and the independence of Parliament in the context of the Republic of Botswana, from now on referred to as “Botswana”. This study focusses on the impact of the political party caucus system on the autonomy of individual Members of Parliament (MPs) and, consequently, the overall independence of Parliament. A caucus system is a forum used by political parties worldwide to decide and reach a consensus on certain matters ahead of debates and voting in Parliament (Bruce, 1988). Generally, parties decide and agree on bills, motions, policy proposals, candidates to be elected or to be voted into office, and any other important matters before they are tabled for debate and voting in Parliament (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017).

The political party caucus system’s origins can be traced back to the American presidential system (Bruce, 1988) and the Westminster or British parliamentary system (Webb, 2008). In the United States of America (USA), the caucus system was and/or is mainly used to nominate candidates to positions of leadership (Edelman, 2013), more especially presidential candidates. Similarly, in the Westminster/British parliamentary system and the French political system, in European and Commonwealth countries, the caucus system is mostly used to select candidates for higher political offices and to reach consensus on policy matters, bills or any other important issues ahead of legislative debates and voting (Bruce, 1988; Napier & Labuschagne, 2017). The literature search on the political caucus system generated few results, suggesting that little research has been done in this area.

However, the existing literature (among others, Jucá, 2022; Marland, 2020a; 2020b; 2022; Napier & Labuschagne, 2017; Panagopoulos, 2010) reveals that a common feature of the political caucus system is the notion that decisions of the party caucus are binding on all members of the political party. Hence, individual MPs, more especially the backbench MPs, are expected to toe the party line, following the caucus decisions when debating and voting in Parliament. This expectation has sparked some scholarly debates on whether the caucus system is

democratic or undemocratic. Those who view the caucus system as democratic (de Vos, 2021) submit that, during the caucus meetings, all members are given the chance to speak for or against any bills or policy proposals; hence, the caucus system involves a liberal process and is therefore democratic. Others (Marland, 2020a) are of the view that the caucus system is undemocratic since, in many cases, the caucus decisions represent the influence and interests of the political party leaders as compared to the interests of the constituencies and the voices of backbench MPs (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017). The expectation to toe the party line compromises the diversity of interests that MPs are supposed to represent in Parliament. In essence, the caucus system sacrifices the diverse interests of voters (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017) at the expense of solidarity and common agreement of political parties. Therefore, the caucus system presents a gap between the electorate and their representatives.

This paper aims to analyse the effects of the political party caucus system on parliamentary independence. The analysis emphasises the influence of the ruling political party caucus on the autonomy of Parliament within Botswana. The emphasis on the ruling party caucus arises primarily from the fact that, like the then single dominant ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the Republic of South Africa (de Vos, 2021) and other African nations (Fombad, 2016), Botswana has been governed by a single dominant party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), since its independence in 1966.

Single dominant ruling parties, particularly their leaders within the executive, often exert significant influence and control over backbench MPs and Parliament as a whole (Fombad, 2016; Marland, 2020a). The control of the backbench MPs is exacerbated by issues of party discipline. For example, due to the expectation to toe the party line, there is a generic allegiance of the backbench to the executive and the expectation to represent the interests of the ruling elites in Parliament.

Parliament is constituted under Section 57 of the 1966 Constitution of Botswana, comprising the president and the National Assembly. The National Assembly comprises the president (an ex-officio member with the right to speak and vote), elected and specially elected members of Parliament (MPs), the Speaker, and the Parliamentary Counsel. The 12th Parliament of Botswana comprised 63 Members of Parliament, including 57 elected representatives and six specially elected members. The six specially elected Members of Parliament were nominated under Section 58 of the Constitution of Botswana of 1966. According to Chapter 42(3)

of the 1966 Constitution of Botswana, ministers and assistant ministers are selected from the members of the National Assembly. The constitutional provisions indicate that all Executive members are also members of Parliament. In the 12th Parliament of Botswana, 28 (44%) out of 63 Members of Parliament were part of the Executive Branch.

The Executive effectively controls nearly half of the members of Parliament, and the principle of collective responsibility (Maripe, 2017) ensures that every motion proposed by the government will be approved, irrespective of the opposition's or backbench's views. The concept of collective responsibility within the Cabinet, coupled with stringent party discipline and parliamentary caucus dynamics, frequently results in the Executive's dominance over Parliament. Legislation, motions, and policies proposed by the Executive are typically approved with relative ease due to the backing of some MPs affiliated with the Executive. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has maintained dominance in Parliament since independence in 1965, resulting in a weakened opposition in terms of representation. The paper outline comprises an introduction that offers background information about the study, the employed methodology, findings and discussions, and a conclusion.

Methodology

The study used qualitative means and a cross-sectional study design. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to this study since similar previous studies reviewed, including journal articles, books, book chapters, master's, and doctoral studies, used the qualitative approach. The doctrine of separation of powers (Dicey, 1959; Gwyn, 1986), which provides a classic example of how the three arms of government should be divided and autonomous in a functional and liberal democracy like Botswana, served as the theoretical basis for this study. This theory, particularly its principles regarding the independence of each governmental branch, informed the study.

This research employed primary and secondary sources for data collection. A desktop review of official documents was conducted alongside face-to-face interviews to enhance the empirical evidence gathered from the interviews. This was an essential component of data collection, significantly contributing to the reliability of primary data for the study. Secondary data were obtained from published academic journals, scholarly books, and conference proceedings. The utilisation of

various data collection methods aims to mitigate the limitations inherent in individual approaches and to facilitate data triangulation.

A guide for conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews with study participants was developed. The interview guide underwent pilot testing to confirm that all questions were formulated and comprehensible. This was conducted through interviews with a limited sample of the target population as a precautionary measure. The data collection was conducted over four months, from early March 2022 to late June 2022.

The target population included former and current members of the Executive and Legislative branches of government, with Parliament comprising 63 members and the president and the Executive comprising 18 Cabinet ministers. The 18 Cabinet ministers are part of the 63 members of parliament as outlined in Section 42(1-3) alongside Section 47 of the 1966 Constitution of Botswana. The target population also comprised civil society organisations, including political parties, trade union federations, the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO), and lecturers from the University of Botswana's Department of Political and Administrative Studies.

The population for this study comprises 79 participants. The 79 participants consist of 63 Members of Parliament, including Executive members and MPs, four leaders from opposition political parties represented in Parliament, one umbrella organisation (BOCONGO) representing non-governmental organisations in Botswana, two federations of trade unions in Botswana, and nine lecturers from the University of Botswana's Department of Political and Administrative Studies.

Civil society organisations were included in the target population due to their role in representing the interests of citizens. Civil society organisations play a crucial role in this study, as a well-functioning democracy necessitates not only an effective Parliament but also a dynamic civil society that actively advocates for public responsibility and accountability.

The lecturers in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana are significant to this study due to their specialised knowledge in executive-legislative relations in Botswana. The study encompassed five active political parties represented in Parliament, three federations of trade unions (the only existing federations in Botswana), the University of Botswana, and the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO).

The study used purposive/judgemental sampling and snowball sampling to select participants based on their potential to enhance their understanding of the research topic. The sample size consists of 33 participants, including five former members of Parliament, four former members of the Executive, five current members of Parliament, four current members of the Executive, the Speaker of the National Assembly, a former Clerk of the National Assembly, a former Chief Justice, a former Judge of the High Court, four academic experts in political and administrative studies of the University of Botswana, and seven leaders of civil society organisations in Botswana. Various stakeholders significantly influenced the sample size, making it a large number for qualitative data collection.

This study adhered to ethical principles such as respect for persons, welfare, and justice, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were informed of the study's purpose, potential risks, selection criteria, and the researcher's identity. They were required to sign a written informed consent form before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, with their personally identifiable information kept confidential. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and to obtain informed consent. Ethical clearance and research permits were obtained from all relevant stakeholders, and the research permit for Botswana was granted. Participants were informed of their rights to participate or withdraw from the study without fear of victimisation, and that their decisions would be respected throughout the study.

Data from each study participant were transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were coded using the Microsoft Word comment feature, employing In-Vivo and descriptive coding methods as outlined by Saldana (2013). All comments were classified as codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) based on data from study participants. All codes were extracted from Microsoft Word, analysed, and organised into sub-categories, categories, and themes (Clarke et al., 2015). The data in this paper is derived from the subcategory "party caucus" within the theme "operational parliamentary oversight challenges" of the main study (Balisi, 2024).

Findings and discussion

The results presented and discussed in this paper are derived from the author's doctoral research (Balisi, 2024). Specifically, this paper primarily

examines the political party caucus system, categorised as a subcategory of the single dominant political party, within the context of operational parliamentary oversight challenges in the main study.

Just like many other countries in the world, including Western, European, Commonwealth, and African countries, the political caucus system is also used in Botswana by both the ruling and the opposition parties. In Botswana, the caucus system is a formal decision-making structure at a party level. The caucus system is applied at the party level; however, it is recognised by Parliament in the sense that there is a whip for the majority and a whip for the minority. As a way of recognising the caucus system, the Parliament of Botswana allocates time for different caucuses of political parties to meet (Balisi, 2024). Nonetheless, Parliament neither interferes nor engages itself in the caucus business of political parties. How the caucus conducts itself is a subject of internal political party policy, with each party establishing its own caucus rules and regulations.

All study participants submitted that the political party caucus system has pros and cons, considering their impact on the political party and the independence of Parliament. Concerning their impact on the political party, all study participants revealed that the caucus system provides an important platform for strategy making, decision-making, and reaching a consensus on bills and policy proposals before reaching Parliament. It helps the party to consolidate its members, to agree collectively on certain issues, and to speak with one voice in Parliament. Subsequently, the caucus system helps the party to achieve its strategy (de Vos, 2021) and/or manifesto.

The submission by all participants is consistent with Napier and Labuschagne (2017), who assert that the position of a caucus is to provide a pivotal point from which political parties, operate and it acts as a central point that controls the strategy of political parties. Hence, in the contemporary world, political parties have organised caucuses for strategic and functional reasons, to nominate and elect members to political leadership positions (Wiemer et al., 2022), as well as to find common strategic grounds (Marland, 2020b). For instance, political parties in South Africa, including but not limited to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA); the UK political parties, for example, the Labour Party, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, and the Conservative Party; the political parties in Brazil (Jucá, 2022); and the political parties in Canada (Marland, 2020a), engage caucuses to achieve solidarity, to achieve a common strategy, to

enforce a unified and common strategy (Napier and Labuschagne, 2017); to enforce discipline (De Vos, 2021; Petersen, 2019); and to ensure that party members adhere to the party policy (Jucá, 2022) and to support the party manifesto. Thus, a political party caucus is essential to ensure a unified front, to lure party members to debate and vote collectively, to foster party discipline, and to act as a focal strategic point and/or engine for collective decision-making. Therefore, the political party caucus is imperative in pushing the party's agenda and/or manifesto and ultimately in winning debates and votes in Parliament.

On the other hand, participants submitted that, although the political party caucus system is an important strategic decision-making structure, it poses many challenges, more especially considering its impact on the independence of Parliament, the independence of individual MPs, and its impact on the representation, lawmaking, and oversight functions of Parliament. All backbench MPs and MPs of the opposition parties interviewed in this study submitted that the caucus system compromises the independence of Parliament and affects the ability of individual MPs to exercise the oversight function over the executive. For instance, a backbench MP said:

The caucus system of the ruling political party makes the oversight function of backbench MPs almost non-existent. (11.03.2022)

MPs attributed their reasoning to the current executive-backbench MPs relations, the parliamentary system of Botswana, and the overall executive-legislative relations in Botswana.

For instance, during the 12th parliament, the executive constituted more than 60 per cent of the ruling party caucus (Balisi, 2024). The executive had 30 members, whereas the backbench had 14 members. The executive constituted the majority. The caucus process starts at the Cabinet, then to the backbench MPs. The caucus is usually chaired by the president, who holds at least three influential positions in the caucus: the president of the country, the president of the ruling party, and the chairman of the Cabinet (Balisi, 2024). What happens is that once the president has an idea, be it a bill, a policy proposal, or any matter, they will present their idea to the Cabinet caucus. Since the Cabinet owes its allegiance to the president, they are bound to agree with the president's proposals. In addition, in Section 47(1)(2) of the Constitution of Botswana of 1966, the president is not obliged to consult the Cabinet. He/she can decide alone. The president has extensive executive powers

and dominates as well as controls the Cabinet (Maripe, 2017). For example, a former member of the executive submitted that:

The Cabinet acts as a rubberstamp of the president's decisions.
(16.03.2022)

Once the Cabinet has agreed, then the proposal is taken to another stage of the ruling party caucus. This is the stage that involves all members of the executive and all the ruling party backbench MPs. It is worth noting that, in Botswana, all members of the executive are MPs at the same time. At the second stage of the ruling party caucus, the president already has the majority of support from the cabinet ministers against a few backbench MPs. Hence, a Member of Parliament who formed part of the study participants said:

The backbench MPs of the ruling party are in a very compromising position. They cannot easily or freely reject the executive proposals owing to the issues of party discipline and the expectation that they would toe the party line. The backbench is also looking to the president to appoint them to positions in the Cabinet in future. Therefore, the backbench is bound to accept proposals of their leaders from the executive. (05.04.2022)

In addition, an executive member submitted that even if the backbench decides to disagree with the executive, the executive can still push its agenda and win in Parliament without the backbench since the executive forms part of the majority. This could be possible since the executive constituted more than 60 per cent (Balisi, 2024) of the ruling party caucus.

Once the ruling political party caucus has reached a consensus on any matter, the caucus decision is binding (Molomo & Keorapetse, 2017) on all party members. Therefore, due to party discipline issues, the ruling party MPs cannot freely oppose or reject the executive proposals in Parliament or public (Balisi, 2024). Any MP who deviates from the caucus decisions faces disciplinary action (Maripe, 2017), including suspension or expulsion from the party (Molomo & Keorapetse, 2017). For example, a number of the ruling party MPs have faced disciplinary action in the past (Balisi, 2024), either by being suspended or being expelled from the party because they defied the caucus decisions (Molomo & Keorapetse, 2017). Consequently, the independence of individual MPs and the independence of Parliament are compromised.

In addition, the ruling party's backbench cannot hold the executive accountable effectively (Fombad, 2016). The binding caucus decisions also mean individual MPs represent the interests of their political leaders (Balisi, 2024) at the expense of representing the interests of their constituencies. For example, a lecturer at the University of Botswana who formed part of the study participant submitted as follows to illustrate how the caucus system suppresses the independence and the oversight role of Parliament:

There is a lack of independence among members of Parliament. Ordinarily, MPs are supposed to represent their constituencies because that is where they get employed, so to speak. They get the mandates from their constituents to represent their constituencies but then, the problem is that they get torn between representing their people or constituents and also protecting the interest of their political party. These compromise their oversight role in the sense that they are often compelled to toe the party line whenever a party caucus has decided and taken a position on certain issues before they are debated in Parliament. It is very difficult for MPs, especially those who sit in the backbench to then turn around and hold the executive accountable in Parliament. In essence, they are not independent themselves to exercise, first of all, their representative issues, and secondly, their oversight role in Parliament. (20.04.2022)

The majority of study participants (28 or 84%) also submitted that the requirement to toe the party line greatly weakens the backbench and eventually weakens Parliament. For instance, a representative of civil society organisations said:

We have a weak backbench of the ruling party in that they tore the line of whatever comes from the executive. They follow the party caucus and that has weakened Parliament significantly. (28.04.2022)

Parliament is further weakened by the numerical weakness (Lotshwao & Sebudubudu, 2017) of the opposition parties in the Botswana Parliament. No matter how the opposition disagrees with the proposals of the executive (Sebudubudu et al. 2013), there is little or nothing they can do to prevent the executive from pushing its agenda through Parliament because they are in the minority (Maripe, 2017). Therefore, whatever the ruling political party caucus agrees upon, it has a high chance of being adopted by Parliament. Ultimately, the caucus system takes away the independence of individual MPs and the independence of

Parliament in general because, through the ruling party caucus system, the executive dominates and controls Parliament.

The ruling party backbench MPs who formed part of this study's participants also revealed that the ruling party caucus system largely reflects and represents the interest of the executive, more especially the interest of the president. Members of the ruling party backbench argued that, although all members of the party are free to present their ideas during the caucus meetings, the interests of the president, who holds dual positions as the president of the ruling party and the president of the country, always prevail. To this end, one study participant, a former member of the executive, gave an example of how the specially elected members of Parliament (SEMPs) are nominated, to illustrate the influence of the president in the ruling political party caucus and to show how the executive choice and/or interests always prevail in the caucus. He said:

After the elections, it is provided for in the Constitution of Botswana that Parliament should nominate six special MPs. The way it happens in my experience in the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) is that the president with his colleague the vice president (VP), will nominate six candidates and present them before the ruling party caucus. Remember, elections are over, and a new government must be formed. Cabinet has not been announced yet. So, what happens is that the party will meet and caucus on which people to elect as SEMPs. The caucus involves the people who are not sworn in yet as MPs, but they have been elected. They have been declared winners of different constituencies. So, the caucus will meet, chaired by the president. The president, what he would say is that we have to nominate six individuals to go to Parliament. Remember, this is a new caucus, the majority are new, so they look up to the leadership to table the names and propose the names. I was one of the six names proposed. It is a given, six names proposed will always be praised by the rest of the caucus. There has never been an outlier, an unexpected shock where you get somebody who is nominated but his or her name has not been endorsed by the caucus. So, it underlines the power of the executive that ultimately, MPs are going to endorse the names proposed by the executive in the form of the president of the Republic and also by his stature as the president of the party.

Nonetheless, the newly elected MPs are also allowed to come up with alternative names to the caucus. It is the caucus that has to decide before the six names are subjected to Parliament for voting, but to underline the power of the executive, ultimately, even if other names

are nominated within the caucus it is the president's six choices, the executive choices that then goes to the house for voting. Remember, those six names originated from the president and went through the party caucus. Here is where I want to underline the role of the president vis-a-vis the powers of Parliament. The president represents the executive. In the case of specially elected MPs, it is the president's choice that ends up being voted for by the rest of Parliament. (11.03.2022)

This excerpt reflects how powerful and influential the president is in all the decision-making structures. He/she influences the executive, the ruling party caucus, and ultimately, the decisions of Parliament. The study also revealed that the backbench of the ruling political party is restricted from tabling motions in Parliament. Participants who are members of the ruling party revealed that all motions of the backbench MPs have to be vetted by the executive through the caucus system. Therefore, if the executive does not support the motion, it will prevent it from being tabled in Parliament through the caucus system. For instance, one study participant, a former cabinet minister, argued as follows:

In terms of how the BDP (the ruling party) operates, in terms of my experience, motions tabled before Parliament have to be vetted through the caucus system. You do not wake up in the morning from your constituency and say, 'they asked me to table motions on roads, corruption, on this and that', and go straight to Parliament to the Clerk of the National Assembly and submit your motion. In the case of the BDP, you go to the caucus first, and then the caucus discusses and decides on your motion. Remember, the caucus is the executive and the backbench chaired by the president. My experiences are that where the executive is not in favour of a certain motion, it is killed at the caucus level. Of course we debate. The mover of the motion together with supporters of the motion will probably advocate and speak in favour of the motion. Cabinet will also push back if they do not like the motion and chances are more often than not, it is the will of Cabinet that will prevail. They will present their reasons why they believe that motion should be presented in Parliament or not. (11.05.2022)

Essentially, this reveals that backbench MPs are not independent of the executive. They are curtailed and subjected to dominance and control by the executive. Therefore, there is no room and/or provision for an independent MP under a party ticket. There is no free agency, since MPs

are subject to the whims and caprices of their party caucuses and/or the executive.

The notion of restricting backbench MPs, subjecting them to strict and binding caucus decisions, and curtailing their independence in Botswana, as revealed by this study, aligns with the political caucus system found mainly in countries that adopted the British parliamentary model of government, mainly characterised by the fusion of the executive and legislative branches of government (Balisi, 2024). The fusion of the executive and legislative powers is further characterised by the concentration of power in the executive, leading to the dominance and control of Parliament by the executive. For instance, Marland (2020a) specifically elaborates on how party discipline in Canada restricts the independence of MPs and how the executive influences the backbench MPs in the caucus meetings. When reading Marland (2020a), one may conclude that the Canadian experience of the political party caucus system and party discipline is similar to that of Botswana, as revealed by this study. Marland (2022) argues that party discipline is the greatest frustration that Canadian MPs have with their system of government. He reveals further that the party caucus system and party discipline in Canada, where power is concentrated in the Prime Minister and senior advisors, compromise the MPs' ability to vocalise constructive criticism and to represent their constituencies; thus, leading to a democratic deficit. These are similar sentiments raised by the backbench MPs of the ruling party concerning Botswana, specifically that the binding caucus decisions restrict their freedom of representation in parliament. Thus, Marland (2020a) argues that due to the notion of party discipline, backbenchers end up endorsing policies that they oppose privately or that they know little about.

Similarly, Clarke et al. (2021) maintain that party discipline and the caucus system stifle individualism, suppress political representation and promote executive influence and the control of the backbenchers by the executive. The caucus system compels MPs to toe the party line and pressures them to rally behind their leaders. However, for example, initially, MPs in the House of Commons opposed their party to advocate for constituency interests, but gradually, political parties became ideologically cohesive and party unity on votes has been the norm since the end of World War II (Godbout, 2020).

On the other hand, Petersen (2019) denotes how the principle of democratic centralism, party discipline and the political party caucus system, as practised by the dominant ruling ANC of the Republic of

South Africa, has weakened Parliament's ability to hold the executive accountable. Democratic centralism implies that political decisions reached by the party through its formal decision-making structures are binding upon all party members. Hence, the party reserves the right to suspend or expel members who do not support party decisions or toe the party line. Strict party discipline hinders the ability of Parliament to hold the executive accountable meaningfully. Power lies with the political leaders and strict party discipline implies that the backbenchers cannot hold their leaders accountable publicly. The political party caucus system, as practised in South Africa and Canada, has similar features to that of Botswana. The main common features include but are not limited to the fact that all the countries cited above have adopted the Westminster (Parliamentary) model of the caucus system which emphasises strict party discipline, an expectation to toe the party line and binding caucus decisions. Party members who deviate from caucus decisions usually face disciplinary action to the extent of being expelled from their parties.

In addition, one of the common features found in the countries cited above is that the caucus system is mainly used by political leaders to introduce and explain major policy decisions to members (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017). It is a platform where the backbenchers are opportune to question their leaders and voice their opinions (Marland, 2020b); and it is an association where parties coordinate strategy and speak with one voice before a parliamentary session. Hence, what prevails in Parliament is mostly the will of the caucus as compared to the will of the voters.

To this end, some authors maintain that party caucuses are not good for democracy (Panagopoulos, 2010), as they stifle MPs' representation of the voters' interests.

For instance, Napier and Labuschagne (2017) cite an instance where Ugandan legislators belonging to the National Resistance Movement (NRM) complained in June 2016 about the tendency of their political leaders to dictate what positions MPs should take in Parliament concerning topical issues. Ugandan MPs stated that they need freedom to represent their constituencies on issues that may not necessarily align with party causes decisions and/or positions (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017).

On the other hand, the political party caucus system and party discipline, as practised in Brazil, offer a somewhat different manner to that in which the caucus system is run in Botswana, Canada or South

Africa, as explained above. Jucá (2022) points out that, in Brazilian politics, party discipline is strengthened by clientelism and corruption. Jucá (2022) submits that clientelism, corruption and vote buying in Brazil facilitate party discipline and reduce the chances of backbenchers defying party caucus decisions. Hence, in his empirical evidence study on the analysis of the party discipline in Brazil, Jucá (2022) concludes that party discipline is less pronounced in most parties in Brazil except for the Partido da República (PR) party, which subscribes to clientelism and corruption to foster party discipline and enforce its caucus decisions.

Participants were asked to provide possible solutions to mitigate the impact of the political caucus system on the independence of Parliament without compromising the ideals of the caucus system. First, there were suggestions that to attain the independence of Parliament, the party caucus system should be abolished altogether. 75% of the study participants reasoned that restrictions of the party caucus system should be done away with and that MPs should be allowed to debate freely in Parliament and to use their independent minds. They further stated that MPs should be free to represent their constituencies without the interference of the caucus system. Hence, 25 out of 33 participants argued that, once an MP is voted into Parliament, they do not necessarily represent the party but rather, they represent all of the citizens, including those who did not vote for them. Therefore, instead of MPs focusing on representing the narrow interests of their political leaders and their parties, their emphasis should be on representing the national interests of citizens.

27 out of 33 participants submitted that, in the context of Botswana, the control of MPs by the executive and the elimination of the caucus system can be achieved when Parliament is strictly independent, following the classical provision of the doctrine of separation of powers. Strict separation of powers and the independence of Parliament in Botswana can be achieved, among other things, when MPs do not hold dual positions of being a Cabinet Minister and an MP, and when members of the executive are drawn from outside members of Parliament. For example, when Parliament and the executive branches of government are separated in this manner, backbenchers of the ruling party and the opposition would exercise effective oversight over Cabinet, not being bound by toeing the party line or by party caucus decisions.

If executive members are appointed from within the legislature, they will often have allegiance to the appointing authority who made them members of the executive. If the Cabinet is appointed from outside the legislature, MPs would have no allegiance to the party caucus or party agreements, and then they can exercise their independence of mind and conscience in whatever decisions are made in Parliament. When Parliament is independent of the executive, MPs will freely speak, debate and vote in Parliament. They will speak and debate freely without fear of being victimised by the executive, their political leaders or the party caucus system.

Second, 75% of participants suggested that the caucus system is ideal when practised where the proportional representation electoral system is used as compared to the first-past-the-post electoral system. In other words, the caucus system is not in favour of the first-past-the-post electoral system, as used in Botswana and other countries. For instance, a former MP said:

The party caucus system resonates very well with the proportional representative system because this system is purely party-based. On the other hand, the first-past-the-post electoral system is constituency-based. (18.03.2022)

Under the first-past-the-post electoral system, MPs are expected to represent the interests of their voters (constituencies) and the interests of the nation at large. Hence, there is always a challenge when the party (caucus) position differs from the constituency position, national interest or the MP's position.

Third, 16 out of 33 or 48% of participants argued that, owing to the nature and importance attached to the caucus system, parliamentary debates can never be without the influence of the caucus. However, there is a need to define and set some parameters to determine when the caucus system is appropriate. The majority (81%) of the study participants suggested that the caucus system needs to be regulated by considering, among other factors, at least four important dimensions. First, since the caucus is meant to promote the party pledges, ideologies and the achievement of the party's manifesto, the party caucus should impose itself only when it deals with clear policy issues articulated in the party manifesto. In particular, in an electoral system such as the first-past-the-post system, MPs are elected, among other reasons, because they pledged to promote particular manifesto positions. Therefore, it would be appropriate for MPs to abide by party caucus decisions or to

be subjected to caucus restrictions only when matters articulated in the manifesto are debated in Parliament. For instance, an MP submitted as follows:

MPs cannot be expected to campaign for certain manifestos and later to deviate from the manifesto positions they campaigned for during parliamentary debates. (01.06.2022)

Hence, for the issues that are so important for the party, there should be a party position reached through a party caucus.

Second, the party caucus system could be regulated, as the majority (81%) of study participants suggested, by allowing MPs to speak and debate freely and to vote independently in Parliament on matters that do not have any bearing on the provisions of the party's manifesto. For example, a former Chief Justice submitted as follows:

There should be no binding party caucus decisions on matters that are outside the party's manifesto. (26.05.2022)

That would help to eliminate the downside of the caucus system, where the leadership of the party uses the caucus system to regulate every step taken by MPs in Parliament. Although MPs can be guided, they should not be instructed or restricted in terms of how to debate and vote on issues that are outside the party's manifesto.

Third, 24 out of 33 participants noted that there are issues of national interest where MPs should be allowed to debate and vote freely outside strict and binding party caucus decisions. For instance, debates on human rights issues like death penalty laws, laws on abortion, homosexuality, freedom of speech, spy bills, as well as health and education policies, among other things.

Fourth, there was a suggestion that the party caucus system should be regulated in such a way that backbench MPs of the ruling party are free to engage, caucus and vote freely with MPs of the opposition and vice-versa on issues concerning the oversight function of Parliament. For instance, an MP submitted that:

Both backbench MPs of the ruling party and the opposition can caucus and vote together on motions of no confidence, and on any other motions or issues concerning the oversight function of Parliament against the executive. (11.05.2022)

This would improve Parliament's ability to hold the executive accountable, strengthen the independence of backbench MPs, and reduce the constraints imposed by political party caucuses on MPs.

Conclusion

The political party caucus system provides an important decision-making, strategy-coordination and consensus (de Vos, 2021) platform for many political parties in the contemporary world. It is ideal for achieving the party's strategy and manifesto and acts as a vehicle to drive the ideologies of different political parties. The caucus system helps political parties to influence (Balisi, 2024) and lure their members to speak and vote in one direction. Hence, it is an important platform used to offer direction and guidance to members on strategic issues such as bills, policy proposals or the nomination of candidates for higher political positions before parliamentary sessions. Central to the caucus system is fostering party discipline among members to achieve the party's goals. However, the political caucus system has posed challenges to the democratic principles of representation and the independence of Parliament (Napier & Labuschagne, 2017) owing to its strict rules and binding decisions. Backbenchers, in particular, face difficulty under the caucus system because they are supposed to keep the government accountable and represent the interests of their constituents.

This study revealed that the political caucus system, more especially the caucus system of the ruling party, as used in Botswana and other countries such as South Africa, Canada and Uganda, stifles the independence of backbench MPs and compromises the mandate of representation of the MPs at the expense of representing the interests of the executive and the party as well as at the expense of party harmony and solidarity.

Based on the study's findings, the study concludes and provides the following recommendations: there is a need to establish a balance between the principles of the political caucus system and democratic values of representation, as well as the independence of Parliament and/or backbench MPs. This can be accomplished by establishing parameters that delineate the appropriate contexts for the party caucus system and those in which it is not suitable.

In other words, the caucus parameters could be defined in such a way that not all issues are subject to party caucus decisions. For instance, the caucus system could allow some flexibility by permitting

backbenchers to debate and vote freely on issues that are not articulated in the party manifesto. On the other hand, the caucus system could impose itself only on members when issues specifically articulated in the manifesto are brought before Parliament for determination.

In addition, parties could offer some flexibility by allowing MPs to debate and vote freely outside strict and binding party caucus decisions on issues of national interest. For instance, human rights issues like death penalty laws, laws on abortion, homosexuality, freedom of speech, spy bills, as well as health and education policies, among other things. The caucus system could also be regulated in such a way that the backbenchers of both the ruling party and the opposition parties are allowed to caucus and vote together on issues involving Parliament's oversight responsibility.

Furthermore, this study posits that the caucus system is most suitable when implemented within the proportional representation electoral system, while its appropriateness is limited under the first-past-the-post system, as indicated by study participants. This is because, the proportional representation electoral system results in MPs being solely affiliated with their party, lacking constituency representation. In contrast, the first-past-the-post electoral system allows MPs to represent their party's interests and those of their constituencies.

Hence, the strict binding caucus system is more suitable for the proportional representation legislators as compared to first-past-the-post legislators. Therefore, the caucus system under the first-past-the-post electoral system should be more relaxed and flexible.

A structural flaw of the Westminster (parliamentary) model is the fusion of the executive and the legislative branches of government. This relates to the executive's dominance and control over Parliament. Therefore, a strict separation of powers following the classical theory of separation of powers is ideal to eliminate the pressures of the caucus system on MPs. It is hoped that these recommendations will help to maintain the independence of Parliament and to promote the representation aspects of MPs without compromising the noble impact of the caucus system on the parties themselves. The implications of this study are to achieve the independence of Parliament and to strengthen it to exercise its representation, oversight and law-making function effectively without undue influence from the executive. This study focused more on the political caucus system found in the countries which adopted the British parliamentary model of government. Future studies might compare the political caucus system, as practised in the

American presidential system, with the political caucus system practised under the British parliamentary model.

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