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# Political Attitudes and Perceptions of Batswana: The Implications for Sustainable Economic and Human Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Botswana stands out among sub-Saharan African nations for its economic and human development. The central aim of this paper is to consider what makes Botswana different. This paper asserts that the attitudes and perceptions of Batswana (i.e., the people of Botswana) contribute to the nation's economic and human development. It considers how Batswana's attitudes and perceptions differ from populations in other sub-Saharan African countries and the implications of such differences in explaining what makes Botswana's economic and human development patterns stand out from other sub-Saharan African nations. This paper's findings indicate that political attitudes and perceptions of the people in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Botswana, are essential and should not be ignored as factors influencing economic and human development success. Furthermore, it suggests there may be something different about how democracy and governance operate in Botswana that shapes attitudes and perceptions relative to other sub-Saharan African nations.

*Keywords:* NA

*Classification:* LCC Code: DT2670 .P65

*Language:* English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573357  
Print ISSN: 2515-5786  
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 23 | Issue 22 | Compilation 1.0





# Political Attitudes and Perceptions of Batswana: The Implications for Sustainable Economic and Human Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

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*Botswana stands out among sub-Saharan African nations for its economic and human development. The central aim of this paper is to consider what makes Botswana different. This paper asserts that the attitudes and perceptions of Batswana (i.e., the people of Botswana) contribute to the nation's economic and human development. It considers how Batswana's attitudes and perceptions differ from populations in other sub-Saharan African countries and the implications of such differences in explaining what makes Botswana's economic and human development patterns stand out from other sub-Saharan African nations. This paper's findings indicate that political attitudes and perceptions of the people in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Botswana, are essential and should not be ignored as factors influencing economic and human development success. Furthermore, it suggests there may be something different about how democracy and governance operate in Botswana that shapes attitudes and perceptions relative to other sub-Saharan African nations.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the fastest-growing populations in the world. Its population increased from 227 million in the 1960s to just over 1.1 billion in 2021 (World Bank, 2019; O'Neill, 2023). At the same time, sub-Saharan Africa has remained one of the poorest regions in the world. While sub-Saharan Africa has made considerable

progress in ending extreme poverty since the 1990s, it still lags behind other world regions (World Bank, 2018).

Nevertheless, some sub-Saharan African nations stand out regarding their economic and human development relative to other countries on the sub-continent. Botswana is one such nation.

Botswana is one of Africa's most politically stable nations with the longest continuous multiparty democracy. With more than fifty years of uninterrupted civilian leadership, it has a good human rights record, a reputation for progressive social policies, and a government that has made significant capital investments (BBC News, 2018).

Over the past fifty years, Botswana has transformed itself from one of the world's poorest countries to one of the strongest economies in sub-Saharan Africa. This paper considers what makes Botswana different regarding its economic and human development compared to most sub-Saharan African nations. It asserts that the attitudes and perceptions of Batswana (i.e., the people of Botswana) contribute to the nation's economic and human development record. It examines Batswana's political attitudes and perceptions about their nation's economic and political well-being. More specifically, this paper considers how Batswana's attitudes and perceptions differ from populations in other countries in sub-Saharan Africa and how these differences in attitudes and perceptions make Botswana stand out from other sub-Saharan African nations regarding economic and human development.

## II. WHAT MAKES BOTSWANA DIFFERENT

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2019), Botswana's human development index score was among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures a nation's population's health and standards of living. In 2021, the average sub-Saharan nation had an HDI score of .547, which was .185 points below the world's average and .342 below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Sub-Saharan Africa's HDI was .085 points below South Asia's, with the second-lowest HDI score. Between 1990 and 2017, Botswana's HDI score grew from .586 to a high of. 722 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Botswana's 2021 HDI value of .693 was down from .713 in 2020. Only Mauritius (.802) and Seychelles (.785) had HDI scores above the world average among the sub-Saharan African nations. In addition, in 2021, only South Africa (.713) and Gabon (.706) had HDI values higher than Botswana.

Several facts immediately stood out in determining what makes Botswana's economic and human development different from the average country in sub-Saharan Africa. Botswana is more urban, by 22 percentage points, than the average sub-Saharan African nation. Its population's median age was 3.3 years older, and its life expectancy was 5.3 years longer.

Batswana is better educated than populations in the average sub-Saharan African nation. Gender equality is much higher in Botswana. However, the percentage of women holding parliament seats was significantly lower than the average sub-Saharan African nations (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Finally, according to the Ibrahim Index of Governance, Botswana's 68.1 overall governance score in 2021 was among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Only Mauritius (74.9) and Seychelles (73.4) scores were higher (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023).

Lekorwe, Molomo, Molefe, and Moseki (2001) attributed Botswana's success on the subcontinent to several things. First, the nation's

institutions' performance and holding of regular and free elections are anchored by a democratic tradition that blossomed after independence.

Second, Botswana's political system and government institutions enjoy an exceedingly elevated level of legitimacy. Third, most of the population approved of the government's performance in education, health care, basic service delivery, fighting crime, and creating jobs. Fourth, Botswana has received praise for its economic success as a capitalist model on the sub-continent. Lastly, the people of Botswana were passive when it came to politics. Thus, the country has established a democratic tradition and institutions over the recent years that have contributed to its success (Lewin, 2011).

According to Leith (2005), Botswana's political system and economic interests, working with solid traditions, reliable institutions, good leadership, and sound policies, have contributed to its economic and human development success. Botswana's governance is a multiparty constitutional democracy that provides for the indirect election of the president and the popular election of a National Assembly. It also has local councils whose power is limited by the central government's rights (Britannica, 2023). Its elections are generally free and fair, and civilian authorities maintain effective control over the security forces (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Leith (2005) also points out the economy's structural transformation after independence, investment in physical and human capital, and income distribution in the nation as contributing factors. Mulinge (2008) attributed Botswana's economic and human development success to the nature of the country's ethnic relations. He notes that starting in the days of independence, Botswana had very little ethnic tension, and the focus has been more on national awareness than tribal consciousness. However, Mulinge noted that this might be changing.

Governance is another area where Botswana differs from the average sub-Saharan African country. Governance has been defined as the exercise of political authority, managing society's

affairs, and the process of decision-making and implementing those decisions at all levels of government (United Nations Development Programme, 1997; Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 1995; Sheng, 2012). Gisselquist (2012) said good governance was a "catchy shorthanded way" to discuss political and economic institutions' functioning and outcomes. Of late, there has been much talk about "good governance," and good governance" in Botswana" is thought to be a contributing factor to its economic growth (Lewin, 2011).

Botswana has made considerable progress in human development in the 50-plus years since its independence, going from an impoverished, low-income country to an upper-middle-income country with the aspiration of becoming a high-income country (The World Bank, 2023). Sebubudu (2010) noted that good governance in Botswana has resulted in policies favorable to people experiencing poverty and programs that educated, improved health, and created progressive social structures that enhanced the overall capabilities of the population. He noted that democratic governance has been responsive to the entire population's needs, and good governance has resulted in wise use of the nation's natural resources. However, Leftwich (1994) asserted that development may have resulted from politics, not good governance. Thus, he felt that a determined and robust state with a powerful and competent bureaucracy influenced Botswana's human development.

Hope (2000) claims that Botswana's economic and human development success could be attributed to the nation's commitment to decentralization and the notion of local governance, and according to Hope, decentralization and local governance had been more far-reaching and impactful in Botswana than "any other African country" in the post-independence era. Decentralization has resulted in local authorities significantly influencing personnel administration, budgeting, and capable chief executives' appointments. Ghebremusse (2018) credited Botswana's success to its abundant mineral wealth and how the nation has managed those revenues. Niemann

(1993) explained that Botswana's domestic success resulted from its foreign policy stance in Southern Africa. He maintained that Botswana's past foreign policy consisted of avoiding actions that legitimized White minority rule and not taking steps to give South Africa a pretext for intervening in the nation's affairs.

Niemann also attributed Botswana's stability to its elite or petty-bourgeois and governing class. He noted that the social classes' bureaucratic function has increased since independence. The bureaucratic class's behavior has given them much control over social resources and other state benefits, thus raising concerns about the role of class in Botswana politics in the future.

Finally, economic and human development status in Botswana has been attributed to its media's cutting-edge democratizing role. Zaffire (1993) noted that the media in Botswana was uniquely positioned among sub-Saharan African nations to effectively pressure the government to maintain an atmosphere of openness and democracy.

This paper posits that in addition to good governance, solid institutional performance, democratic traditions, trust, sound policies, and good ethnic relations, the people of Botswana's attitudes and perceptions are contributing factors to the nation's economic and political status when compared to populations in other sub-Saharan African countries. Additionally, because of Botswana's history and governance patterns, the people's attitudes and perceptions would be significantly more supportive of the political system and institutional decision-making than populations in other nations. Thus, the views and opinions of Batswana contribute to explaining differences in the nation's economic and human development status, and their opinions are often quite different from populations in the average sub-Saharan African country.

### III. METHODS

The Afrobarometer Survey Round 8 Merged data, which included 34 countries, was the data source for this study. The data for Round 8 was collected between 2019 and 2021. Afro- barometer conducted face-to-face interviews with national

probability samples that generated a cross-section of voting-age citizens (18 and older) in thirty-four countries. A random selection method is used at every stage, producing a probability proportionate to the population size. The sample design included 1,200 or 2,400 cases with a sampling margin of error of  $+/-.8$  percentage points or  $+/-.2$  percentage points (Afrobarometer, 2023).

Geographically, fifty-four countries make up the continent of Africa. These African nations are usually divided into five geopolitical regions. Northern Africa, which is above the Saharan Desert, includes the countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, and today is considered Arabic and culturally and politically different from those countries south of the desert. The four regions below the Saharan Desert are called sub-Saharan Africa or Black Africa: Central Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa. Because this study focused on the nations of sub-Saharan Africa, the respondents from the two North African countries sampled in the Afrobarometer 2022 merged dataset, Morocco and Tunisia, were excluded from the analysis. Of the sub-Saharan African nations, there were no respondents in the study from Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritania, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Somalia, and South Sudan.

The remaining nations of sub-Saharan Africa were further divided into three groups based on the World Bank Analytical Classification. Respondents from Botswana made up a fourth group. The three economic groups based on the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita were identified as upper-middle income, lower-middle income, and lower-income economies. The nations in the low-income economies had a GNI per capita of less than \$1,135 in 2021. The nations in the lower-middle income economies group have a GNI per capita between \$1,136 and \$4,465, and those in the upper-middle income economies group had a GNI per capita between \$4,466 and \$13,845. The Seychelles is the only sub-Saharan African nation with an economy in the

high-income category, but no Seychelles respondents were included in the study in 2021.

According to the World Bank Analytical Classifications, 46.9 percent of the sub-Saharan nations in the study were classified as low-income, 38.8 percent as lower-middle-income, and 12.5 percent as upper-middle-income nations (see Appendix 1).

It was felt that, like Botswana, the attitudes and perceptions of respondents from the more developed nations would be more impactful as an influencer of economic and human development than those from lesser developed nations. They were expected to be better educated, more urban, and more politically aware. However, it was also felt there was a uniqueness about Botswana's people that made their attitudes and perceptions different from the other developed sub-Saharan African nations. Because it is theorized that attitudes and perceptions of the nation's population could influence economic and human development, several variables covering the government's job handling select problems, the national and personal economic conditions, the functioning of democracy and the electoral system, and perceptions of trust and corruption in the nation were chosen for analysis.

The test hypothesis is that there is no difference in the proportional response of Batswana and those of individuals in either upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, or lower-income economies. Independent-sample proportional mean tests were examined to test the hypothesis. The independent-sample proportions test provides significance and confidence intervals for differences in two independent binomial proportions (IBM, SPSS Statistics, 2030). The Wald test was used to determine if a set of independent variables were proportionally different at the .05 level (Analyttica Datalab, 2021). The variables were also factor analyzed to reduce the variables into clusters that shared a common theme. Finally, variables were created and saved using the factor analysis procedure, and a model of the factors influencing perceptions of a country's overall direction was considered. Binary logistic regression predicted the variables

influencing positive perceptions of the country's direction.

#### IV. FINDINGS

Respondents were asked to identify what they thought was the most important problem facing their nation. These problems were divided into ten areas: the economy, financial and income, unemployment, poverty, infrastructure, farming/land/agriculture, education, health and human services, crime, and political matters. The catchall category was other/miscellaneous.

The top five problems identified by the respondents were consistent across the

groupings: unemployment, poverty, infrastructure, education, and political issues. As shown in Table 1, problems related to unemployment and infrastructure were the two most frequently identified. Poverty would be the third, followed by human services, crime, education, and political issues. There were two data patterns when identifying the nation's most important problem that was noteworthy. The average proportion of the population choosing unemployment and finance/income got smaller as you went across country classification groups. However, the pattern was reversed among those identifying the economy, infrastructure, education, and human services as the most important.

*Table 1:* Most Important Problem Facing Your Nation

	Botswana	Upper Middle-Class Countries	Lower Middle-Class Countries	Lower Class Countries
Economy	2.5	4.1	5.6	8.5
Financial/Income	5.2	2.2	3.7	2.6
Unemployment	44.5	31.0	16.7	6.3
Poverty	10.9	6.3	9.7	15.7
Infrastructure	7.3	19.1	24.6	27.6
Farming/Land/Agriculture	4.1	4.9	4.2	4.1
Education	4.1	7.0	7.6	8.0
Health/Human Services	5.3	5.0	9.8	10.3
Crime	4.4	9.7	6.6	8.4
Political	6.1	7.5	7.3	5.4
Other/Miscellaneous	6.0	3.1	4.3	3.1

There was little consistency across country classification grouping regarding perceptions of the nation's most important problem. The largest proportion of Batswana (44.5 percent) and the respondents from upper-middle-class countries (31.0 percent) identified unemployment as the most important problem facing their nation. At 6.3 percent, unemployment was not even among the top five problems identified by respondents in low-income countries. Concerns over unemployment were slightly higher in lower-middle-income countries at 16.7 percent. However, unemployment was only the second highest proportion of respondents in the lower-middle-income countries. Among the

lower-income countries, infrastructure was the problem identified by the largest percentage. On average, twenty-seven-point-six percent of the respondents in the lower-income countries felt that issues like transportation, roads, housing, electricity, the water supply, and communication were among their country's most important problems.

An equally large percentage of respondents from the lower-middle-class countries identified infrastructure as the most important problem facing their nation (24.6 percent). However, only 7.3 percent of the respondents from Botswana felt the same, almost twelve percentage points lower than the respondents from the other

upper-middle-class countries. In comparison, the second-highest percentage (10.9 percent) of Batswana identified poverty as the nation's most important problem. Less than sixteen percent of the respondents from the other three country classification groups felt that poverty was an important issue. Less than 10 percent of the respondents in any grouping said that health and human services were the most important problems. When it came to issues pertaining to education and matters of political governance, the percentage in all three country classification groups ranged from four to eight percent.

## V. THE JOB THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING HANDLING ISSUES FACING THE NATION

This section of the study analyzed perceptions of the government's job handling of concerns in four areas: 1) political and safety, 2) human services, 3) improving the nation's infrastructure, and 4) handling economic conditions. The socio-political issues concerned conditions and behaviors related to safety and security. Human services were concerned with issues important to human growth and well-being while improving infrastructure is key to community development and building capacity. The final group of questions involved the government's handling of economic conditions related to improvements in quality of life.

Respondents from Botswana were significantly less concerned about their government's handling of political and safety matters, human services, the nation's infrastructure, and the economy when compared to respondents from the other country classification groups. As shown in Table 2, on average, 72.6 percent of Batswana perceived their government was doing a respectable job managing the select political and safety concerns compared to only 29.1 percent of respondents from upper-middle-income countries, 44.6 percent of those from lower-middle income countries, and 38.1 percent of those from lower-income nations.

Seventy percent or more of Batswana felt their government was doing a respectable job handling crime, and 88.5 percent felt the government was doing a good job preventing violent conflict. However, the percentage of Batswana who felt the government was doing a good job preventing and resolving violent conflict differed significantly from those who felt the government was doing a good job handling crime and fighting corruption. The percentage of Batswana who felt the government was doing a good job controlling violent conflict was almost thirty percentage points higher than those who felt the government was doing a good job handling corruption and nearly twenty percentage points higher than those who thought it was doing a good job managing crime.

*Table 2:* Proportion of the population that expressed positive feelings about the job their government was handling

	Botswana	Upper-Middle-Income Countries	Lower Middle-Income Countries	Low- Income Countries
<b>Political and Safety concerns</b>				
The government is doing a good job of handling crime	69.9	24.7***	45.0***	39.8***
The government is doing a good job of preventing/resolving violent conflict	88.5	36.8***	52.1***	44.7***
The government is doing a good job-fighting corruption	59.3	22.7***	36.6***	29.9***
<b>Human Services</b>				
The government is doing a good job of addressing educational needs	74.4	41.5***	50.5***	43.9***

The government is doing a good job of improving basic health services	68.4	42.3***	49.0***	40.8***
Infrastructure concerns				
The government is doing a good job protecting rights and promoting opportunities for the disabled	85.1	49.0***	47.5***	38.7***
The government is doing a good job of providing water and sanitation services	64.5	35.6***	43.3***	37.3***
The government is doing a good job maintaining roads and bridges	60.1	40.1***	46.4***	39.7***
The government is doing a good job of providing a reliable electric supply	78.9	49.2***	50.1***	36.8***
Economic concerns				
The government is doing a good job managing the economy	67.2	25.9***	36.4***	31.8***
The government is doing a good job of creating jobs	33.2	14.0***	22.8***	22.6***
The government is doing a good job of addressing the needs of young people	56.6	26.4***	29.1***	27.6***
The government is doing a good job improving the living standards of the poor	68.9	22.1***	27.9***	24.7***
The government is doing a good job of keeping prices stable	54.1	18.9***	24.7***	20.0***
The government is doing a good job of narrowing income gaps	39.4	13.7***	22.0***	19.0***

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  HO: Botswana respondents differed significantly from respondents from the respective groups. Probability of significance is based on Independent Samples Proportions Tests, Wald HO test.

Support for the government's handling of the select human service programs averaged around 71.4 percent for Batswana. That percentage was significantly higher than for respondents in the other classification groups. It was more than twenty points higher than it was for respondents from lower-middle-income countries and almost thirty percentage points higher than those from upper-middle and low-income countries. Well over two-thirds of Batswana felt the government was doing a good job addressing educational needs and improving basic health care. That was compared to less than half of the populations in the other country classification groups. Generally, a higher percentage of sub-Saharan African populations felt their governments were doing a better job addressing educational needs than improving basic health services. The response difference within the respective country classification groups on the human services issues was less than two percent, while it was around six

percent among Batswana. This spread suggests more variation among the respondents from Botswana.

This pattern of Batswana responses differing significantly from respondents in the other three groups prevailed on questions regarding the government's handling of infrastructure concerns. The respondents from Botswana were substantially more optimistic about their government's handling of issues about the nation's infrastructure than respondents from other sub-Saharan African nations. For example, on average, 72.1 percent of Batswana had positive feelings about their government's handling of infrastructure concerns compared to 43.5 percent of those from other upper-middle-income countries, 46.8 percent of those from lower-middle-income countries, and 38.1 percent of those from lower-income countries. As high as 78.9 percent of Batswana felt the government was

doing a decent job providing a reliable electric supply, compared to less than 50 percent of the respondents in the other country classification groupings. The proportional differences between upper-middle-income and lower-middle-income countries respondents did not significantly differ regarding perceptions of their nation's ability to provide a reliable electric supply. However, the average low-income country respondents differed significantly from upper and lower-middle-income populations. Over one-third of the respondents in upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, and lower-income countries felt their governments were doing a respectable job handling water and sanitation and maintaining sanitation services. The closest the collective responses of the other three groups came to 50 percent was on the question of their government promoting opportunities for people with disabilities, and that was 35 percentage points lower than Batswana.

Regarding the government's handling of economic concerns, the respondents from Batswana differed significantly from those in the other groups. For example, on the select variables, on average, 53.2 percent of Batswana felt the government was doing a good job handling the nation's economic concerns compared to 20.2 percent of the respondents in the upper-middle income countries, 27.1 percent in the lower-middle-income countries, and 24.2 percent of the respondents in the low-income countries.

More than fifty percent of the respondents from Batswana felt the government was doing a good job managing the economy (67.2 percent),

improving the living standards of the poor (68.9 percent), addressing the needs of the people (56.6 percent), and doing a good job keeping prices stable (54.1 percent). In comparison, slightly more than twenty-five percent of the respondents in the other three groups felt their nation's government was doing a good job managing the economy or addressing the needs of the young people. In the other three groups, on average, 31.4 percent of the respondents felt the government was doing a good job managing the economy, 27.7 percent felt the government was doing a good job addressing the needs of young people, and 24.9 percent felt the government was doing a good job improving the living standards of the poor.

## VI. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATION'S AND PERSONAL ECONOMIC FUTURE

Table 3 examines the perceptions of Batswana relative to respondents from upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, and low-income countries on the direction they felt their nations were going. Among the respondents from Batswana, 40 percent felt their country was going in the right direction. The percentage holding this perception did not differ significantly from the respondents in the lower-middle-income and lower-income samples. However, the proportion of Batswana saying their nation was going in the right direction differed from those in other upper-middle-income countries. The difference in the percentage of Batswana stating their country was going in the right direction was sixteen percentage points higher than populations in the other upper-middle-income countries. The key takeaway is that most sub-Saharan Africans felt their country was going in the wrong direction.

*Table 3:* Perceptions of the nation's economic conditions relative to personal economic conditions Percent

	Botswana	Upper-Middle-Income Countries	Lower Middle-Income Countries	Low-Income Countries
Direction of Country				
Going in the right direction	39.7	23.6***	39.4 <sup>ns</sup>	38.2 <sup>ns</sup>

Nation's Economic Conditions				
The country's present economic condition is good or the same	61.0	30.3***	39.9***	37.1***
The country's economic condition is better or the same compared to 12 months ago	64.2	38.8***	46.3***	45.7***
The country's economic conditions will be better or the same in 12 months	77.2	51.1***	68.9***	68.9***
Personal Economic Environment				
Your present living conditions are good	43.4	59.1***	49.1***	45.5 <sup>ns</sup>
Personal Economic Conditions				
Rarely gone without food	75.0	68.0***	61.1***	56.9***
Rarely gone without cash	64.0	49.1***	28.3***	24.2***

\* $p<.05$  \*\* $p<.01$  \*\*\* $p<.001$  HO: Botswana respondents differed significantly from respondents from the respective groups. Probability of significance is based on Independent Samples Proportions Tests, Wald HO test

The table also indicates differences in perceptions of Batswana and respondents from other regions regarding their nation's economic conditions. For example, on average, 67.5 percent of the respondents from Botswana had a positive perception of the nation's economic conditions, compared to only 40.1 percent of the respondents from the other upper-middle-income nations. That figure among the respondents from the lower-middle-income and lower-income countries averaged around 50 percent. Thus, the average difference in the perceptions of Batswana and respondents from other sub-Saharan African populations regarding their nation's economic conditions was as high as 27 percent for those respondents in other middle-income countries and as low as 17 percent for those from lower-middle-income and lower-income countries.

There was an optimistic outlook among sub-Saharan Africans across the continent in general. More than 70 percent of Batswana felt their country's economic conditions would improve or stay the same in the next 12 months. However, among respondents from other upper-middle-income countries, that percentage fell to 51.1, while it averaged around 69 percent for respondents from lower-middle-income and lower-income sub-Saharan nations. When it came to perceptions about the present economic conditions of their nations, a significantly higher proportion of Batswana felt their country's

economic conditions were good compared to the other groups. Surprisingly, a larger percentage of the respondents from lower-middle-income and low-income countries felt the nation's economic conditions were good relative to those in upper-middle-income countries. These patterns prevailed when respondents were asked if their country's economic conditions were better or the same compared to 12 months ago.

A significantly larger percentage of the respondents from Botswana were concerned about their personal economic environment compared to respondents from upper-middle-income and lower-income countries. Only 43.5 percent of Batswana felt the present living conditions were good compared to 59.1 percent of the sub-Saharan African respondents from other upper-middle-income and 49.1 percent of those from lower-middle-income countries. The percentage of Batswana describing their living conditions as good did not differ significantly from those respondents living in lower-income countries (45.5). There were two additional measures of personal economic conditions examined. One asked how often you go without food, and the other how often you go with cash. The percentage of Batswana saying they rarely go without food or cash was significantly higher than that of the other three groups. On average, 69.5 percent of the respondents from Botswana said they rarely went without food or cash. Among the

respondents from other upper-middle-income nations, 58.5 percent said they rarely went without food or cash, 44.7 percent of those from lower-middle-income countries, and 40.5 percent from lower-income countries took this position.

## VII. PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN THEIR SOCIETY

Views of the functioning of the political system are an important part of good governance and society's overall well-being. Again, the actions and perceptions of Batswana differed significantly from populations in other parts of the sub-continent, but in a surprising way. For example, the percentage of Batswana voting in the most recent national election did not differ significantly from populations in middle-income countries. In both cases, around 71.5 percent of the respondents in Botswana and the

middle-income countries said they voted in the most recent election. The percentage of Batswana that voted in the recent election differed significantly from the respondents in other upper-middle and low-income countries, and the proportional difference was around four points in favor of the respondents from the upper-middle and low-income countries.

Similarly, there were significant differences in the percentage of Batswana who discussed politics relative to the population in the other three groups. A larger percentage of the respondents in the other three groups said they discussed politics more frequently or occasionally than those from Botswana. Seventy-seven percent of Batswana said they discussed politics frequently or occasionally compared to, on average, 80.6 percent of the respondents from the other groups.

*Table 4:* Comparing individual involvement and perceptions of the functioning of the electoral system and the democracy in their country Percent

	Botswana	Upper-Middle-Income Countries	Middle-Income Countries	Low-Income Countries
Individual participation				
Frequently or occasionally discuss politics	77.2	81.0**	80.0*	80.8**
Voted in the most recent national election	72.2	68.3**	71.0 <sup>ns</sup>	76.4*
Perception of the Democracy				
Less national elections were, at minimum, free and fair	91.8	63.0***	71.0***	67.3***
Democracy is preferable to other kinds of government	72.1	62.3***	72.5 <sup>ns</sup>	70.2*
It is a democracy with a few minor problems	70.0	40.2***	44.3***	39.8***
Satisfied with the democracy in my country	59.6	37.0***	42.9***	41.7***

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  HO: Botswana respondents differed significantly from respondents from the respective groups. Probability of significance is based on Independent Samples Proportions Tests, Wald HO test

The percentage of Africans who say, "Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government" has declined from a decade ago (Gyimah-Boada & Asunka, 2021). Nevertheless, the perceptions of

Batswana regarding democracy were significantly more favorable than those of other African populations. For example, as shown in Table 4, on average, 72.6 percent of the respondents from

Botswana gave a positive response regarding democracy, compared to 50.6 percent of those from other upper-middle-income countries, 57.7 percent from lower-middle-income nations, and 54.9 percent from low-income countries. The only question where the percentage of Batswana differed only moderately from the three other country classification groups was their preference for democracy over types of governments. As shown in Table 4, the percentage difference between Batswana and the respondents from the middle-income countries was not statistically significant at the .05 level. The percentage difference between Batswana and the low-income countries was roughly two percent but statistically significant at the .05 level. However, 72.1 percent of the Botswana respondents preferred democracy compared to 62.3 percent of the respondents from the other upper-middle-income countries. Otherwise, the percentage of Batswana noting that their country was, at minimum, a democracy with a few minor problems was at least twenty-five percentage points higher than the percentage of the respondents from the other three groups. Batswana was the only group where greater than fifty percent (59.6 percent) of the respondents said they were satisfied with the democracy in their county. Finally, there was, at minimum, a twenty percentage point difference

between the percentage of Batswana and those from the other three country classifications that felt their national elections were free and fair. More than ninety percent of Batswana were in this response category.

## VIII. PERCEPTIONS OF TRUST AND CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT

Table 5 focuses on two factors that could impact economic and human development in sub-Saharan Africa regarding governing and good governance. The government's success depends heavily on the people's trust in individual political actors and institutions and the citizenry's perceptions of good governance. Batswana was significantly more trusting in their leaders than populations from other nations throughout the subcontinent. For example, on average, 58.2 percent of Batswana said they had somewhat or lots of trust in their leadership. Among the respondents from other upper-middle-income nations, only 44.2 percent, on average, had either somewhat or lots of trust for their leadership. The average percentage of trust in leadership did not differ significantly among the respondents from the lower-middle (54.8 percent) and lower-income (56.7 percent) nations, nor between Batswana and the low-income group.

*Table 5:* Perceptions of trust and corruption among leaders and leadership institutions Percent

	Botswana	Upper-Middle-Income Countries	Lower Middle-Income Countries	Low-Income Countries
Trust				
Somewhat or lots of trust in the Office of the President	51.8	41.9***	53.1 <sup>ns</sup>	53.3 <sup>ns</sup>
Somewhat or lots of trust in the parliament/national legislature	43.5	34.6***	42.9 <sup>ns</sup>	45.0 <sup>ns</sup>
Somewhat or lots of trust in the courts of law	70.4	49.1***	53.3***	49.6***
Somewhat or lots of trust in Traditional Leaders	73.3	49.4***	63.3***	68.7***
Somewhat or lots of trust in Religious Leaders	60.1	56.0***	70.6***	76.3***

Somewhat or lots of trust in local government councils	50.1	34.2***	45.9***	47.8 ns
Corruption				
Some or no corruption in the Office of the Presidency	58.8	52.5***	62.7*	59.0 ns
Some or no corruption in the parliament/national legislature	62.7	53.8***	59.6**	57.1***
Some or no corruption among civil servants	63.6	63.5 ns	61.2 ns	58.3***
Some or no corruption among judges and magistrates	79.3	64.4***	62.8***	55.3***
Some or no corruption in local government councils	75.8	61.1***	65.7***	62.0***
Some or no corruption in the Traditional Leaders	85.6	70.2***	78.1***	78.1***
Some or no corruption in the Religious Leaders	77.3	75.0 ns	82.1***	84.2***

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  HO: Botswana respondents differed significantly from respondents from the respective groups. Probability of significance is based on Independent Samples Proportions Tests, Wald HO test

When we examined trust in the Office of the President, the data showed a significantly larger proportion of Batswana expressing either somewhat or lots of trust in the Office of the President than the respondents from the other upper-middle-income countries. However, there was no significant difference between the proportion of Batswana and the percentage of respondents from the lower-middle and lower-income classification groups. This pattern held regarding trust in the parliament/national legislatures as well. The data did reveal that in sub-Saharan Africa, in general, a larger percentage of the population was more trusting in the Office of the President than in the parliament/national legislature. The other measure of trust where the response of Batswana differed significantly from the respondents in the other upper and lower-middle-income country groups was regarding local councils. Batswana was more trusting of local councils in this case. However, the percentage of the respondents from Batswana and those from lower-income countries was 50.1 and 47.8 percent, respectively, but not statistically significant. Batswana was significantly more trusting of the courts of law and traditional leaders than respondents in the other three groups. Conversely, Batswana was significantly

less trusting of religious leaders than respondents from lower- and lower-income nations but more trusting than those from upper-middle-income nations.

Corruption was also examined as a measure of good governance. Batswana was more inclined to perceive that corruption is not a major problem in their country than populations from other sub-Saharan African nations. As shown in Table 5, respondents were asked about the level of corruption in the Office of the President, the national legislature, civil servants, judges and magistrates, local government councils, traditional leaders, and religious leaders. On average, and across the seven questions, 71.9 percent of the respondents from Botswana were inclined to say there was some or no corruption in their nation. This difference was almost ten percentage points higher than respondents from the other upper-middle-income nations. The percentage difference between the respondents from Batswana and those from the low-income countries was around eight percent. The difference was five percent greater for Batswana than the lower-middle-income respondents.

Only the respondents from the low-income countries did not differ significantly from Batswana on corruption in the Office of the President. Nearly 60 percent of respondents in both groups said there was not much corruption in the Office of the President. Respondents from other upper-middle-income countries were significantly less likely than Batswana to feel corruption in the Office of the President. In contrast, those in lower-middle-income countries were significantly more likely to perceive corruption. Likewise, the difference between Batswana and the respondents in the upper-middle and lower-middle-income countries did not differ in their perception of corruption among civil servants. The percentage of all three groups indicating that there was not much corruption among civil servants exceeded 60 percent. The difference in the percentage of Batswana and those in the other upper-middle-income countries perceiving corruption among religious leaders was insignificant. In both cases, the percentage with this perception of little or no corruption among religious leaders was around 75 percent. In comparison, it exceeded 82 percent for the respondents from the lower-middle-income and those in the low-income groups. When it came to perceptions of corruption being minimal regarding judges and magistrates, local government councils, and traditional leaders, the percentage of Batswana

with this view was at least 15 percentage points higher than the respondents in the other three groups.

## IX. EXPLAINING BOTSWANA SUCCESS

Table 6 examines the factors influencing sub-Saharan Africans' positive perceptions of their country's overall direction. Respondents felt their country was either going in the "right" or "wrong" direction. A dummy variable was created with "right direction" being coded one (1) and "wrong direction" coded zero (0). All of the variables in the previous sections were factor-analyzed to create a set of independent variables. Altogether, thirteen independent variables were created. These thirteen variables fell into five categories. The first category was the "government handling of" select issues (i.e., economic concerns, infrastructure, political concerns, and human development). The second category is related to economic conditions (i.e., the nation's economic environment and personal economic well-being). The third category is related to democracy (i.e., perceptions of democracy and individual participation). The fourth category was about trust in the leaders and institutions and likewise was the fifth category. A dummy variable was created for respondents from Botswana and used as an additional control variable.

*Table 6:* Factors influencing positive perceptions of the overall direction of the country

	B(sig) (S.E.)	Exp (B)
The government handling economic concerns regarding the nation	.405*** (.023)	1.499
The government handling infrastructure-related concerns	.163*** (.023)	1.177
The government handling political concerns	.304*** (.023)	1.355
The government handling human development concerns	.167*** (.023)	1.182
Nation's economic condition	.890*** (.027)	2.436
Personal economic well-being	-.170 (.024)	.0844
Your present living conditions	.276*** (.047)	1.318

Perceptions of democracy as a political system	.272*** (.038)	1.313
Individual participation	-.007 (.023)	.993
Trust in political institutions and leadership groups	1.281*** (.262)	3.599
Trust in legislative bodies	.226*** (.029)	1.253
Corruption in political institutions and leadership groups	-.008 (.254)	.992
Corruption in legislative bodies	-1.044*** (.254)	.352
Live in Botswana	-.642*** (.097)	.526
Nagelkerke R	.404	
Constant	-.838	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  Significance based on Wald

These variables explained .404 percent of the optimism variation about the country's path. Living in Botswana was a significant indicator in the model, but not in a positive way.

The data suggested that living in Botswana could be associated with a .642 decline in having a positive perception of the country's overall direction and only a fifty-two percent chance that you felt the country was going in the right direction. This finding suggests that living in Botswana does not guarantee that one is happy with the country's direction.

The finding suggests that the likelihood of having positive perceptions of the country's direction was increased with positive perceptions of the government's handling of the select issues. For example, a positive perception of the government's handling of economic concerns was associated with a one-and-a-half times greater chance that you felt the country was moving in the right direction. A positive increase in one's perceptions of the government's handling of the country's economic concerns was also linked to a significant increase (.405) in feelings that the country was moving in the right direction. The government's handling of political concerns (i.e., crime, violent conflict, fighting corruption) was also noteworthy when it came to having a positive perception that the country was moving in the

right direction. Individuals with a positive perception of the government's handling of political matters were 1.35 times more likely to feel that the country was moving in the right direction. A respondent's favorable position on the government's handling of political matters was associated with a .304 increase in the dependent variable. While increases in perception of governmental handling of infrastructure and human development significantly contributed to increases in perceptions of the country's general direction, their impact on the perceptions that the country was moving in the right direction was negligible. Nevertheless, a person with a more positive perception of the government's handling of infrastructure and human development was one times more likely to have a positive perception of the country's direction than a person with a negative perception.

As a cluster of variables, the nation's current economic condition was the strongest indicator of confidence in the country's direction. A positive increase in the respondent's perception of the nation's economic conditions was associated with a .890 change in the perception that the country was headed in the right direction. Those with a positive perception of the nation's economy were two-and-a-half times more likely to think the country was moving in the right direction. Perceptions of one's economic environment were

not a significant factor influencing perceptions of the country's overall direction. On the other hand, feelings about one's economic conditions were a factor, but not to the same extent as perceptions of the nation's economic conditions. Respondents with a more positive perception of their living conditions were one point seven times more likely to feel the country was moving in the right direction. A one-unit increase in perception of present living conditions was associated with only a .276 increase in the perception of the nation's overall direction.

While good governance appeared to influence perceptions of the country's overall direction in sub-Saharan Africa, the influence of democracy as a political system and interests in politics was minimal in the larger picture. Individual participation in politics had no significant bearing on the overall perceptions of the country's direction. Regarding perceptions of democracy as a political system, perceptions of the country's direction were positive and significant. A respondent with a more positive perception of democracy as a form of government was one point three times more likely to have a positive perception of the country's overall direction. An increase in positive perceptions of democracy represented a .272 increase in the overall positive perceptions of the country's direction.

Regarding governance, trust was a stronger factor influencing perceptions of the country's direction than corruption among sub-Saharan Africans. Perceptions of corruption in political institutions and leadership had no significant bearing on perceptions of the country's overall direction. Such was not the case regarding trust in political institutions and leadership groups. Those with greater trust in political institutions and leadership groups were 3.6 times more likely to perceive the country's overall direction positively. Increased trust in legislative bodies was associated with a .226 increase in positive perception of the country's direction.

Furthermore, those respondents were 1.2 times more likely to think the country was moving in the right direction.

## X. DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, Batswana differed significantly from respondents in the other country classification groups in what they perceived as the nation's most important problem.

Surprisingly, this included those respondents in other upper-middle-income countries too. Unemployment was a huge issue for Batswana to the extent that it was thirteen percentage points higher than respondents in the other upper middle-income groups and nearly thirty points higher than those from other sub-Saharan African nations. Despite its high middle-income ranking, job creation in Botswana has lagged behind other nations, and inequality remains a major problem (World Bank, 2023). Like other nations in sub-Saharan, Botswana has a huge and unprecedented youth unemployment problem that more effective programs are needed to address (Nahomang & Diraditsile, 2016). Among the lower-middle-income and lower-income nations, infrastructure was the most important problem facing the nation.

The findings also showed Batswana as politically more satisfied when compared to other populations in sub-Saharan Africa. On one hand, the results suggest that Batswana was politically attentive in that they discussed politics at an extremely high rate. However, this attentiveness was not significantly different from populations in other sub-Saharan African nations. On the other hand, Batswana did not appear to be as politically aggressive as populations from other nations. The people of Botswana seem to have no problem deferring decision-making to society's formal and informal institutions. The findings showed Batswana's trust in their leadership to be significantly greater than populations in other sub-Saharan African nations, especially regarding the courts of law and traditional leaders. This pattern of trust was supported by the perception of a lack of corruption among the leaders that were politically closest to them relative to other sub-Saharan African populations. Consequently, one must consider that this enhanced trust and lack of perceptions of corruption affords political decision-makers in Botswana more freedom when governing.

The findings also showed that Batswana is more likely than populations in other sub-Saharan African nations to have positive feelings about their government's handling of crucial societal concerns. Over two-thirds of Batswana felt the government was doing a respectable job of handling political and safety concerns, human services, and matters regarding infrastructure. The difference in perceptions on these matters ranged from 26.8 to 35.4 percent. On average, the percentage of Batswana felt the government was doing a good job handling political and safety-related matters was 72.6 compared to 37.2 percent. The difference between Batswana and other respondents from sub-Saharan Africa regarding matters related to human services was 26.8 percent. On the human services question, on average, 71.4 percent of Batswana felt the government handling of human services was good compared to 44.6 percent of populations in the other sub-Saharan African nations. Both Batswana and populations in other sub-Saharan African nations found the job their government was doing handling matters related to infrastructure as important. However, the percentage difference between Batswana and the other respondents from sub-Saharan Africa was 29.3 percent. In other words, Batswana felt safe in the local and national environments. Compared to populations in other sub-Saharan African nations, they also felt their government was adequately taking care of their human service and the country's infrastructure problems.

Batswana were more satisfied with the role that democracy played in their nation.

Democracy was the preferable form of government for their nation. They felt the nation was functioning well as a "democracy" and liked how it worked. This perception was less the case in other sub-Saharan African nations. Also, Batswana people were more confident in their electoral system than populations in other African nations, which could be another factor driving the nation's economic and human development status relative to other sub-Saharan African nations. One could posit that governance and representative democracy in Botswana function from an inside/out perspective or consider a

state-centric relational approach. Bell and Hindmoor (2009) describe the state-centric approach as the government, its administrative agencies, and other public bodies being the central players in the governing process. They would suggest that Botswana's political apparatus has been satisfactorily adopting a range of governing strategies, selecting policy goals, and making policy decisions that satisfy the needs of the people of Botswana. Thus, Botswana's political and state apparatus are the central actors in governance, creating and orchestrating policies and practices that influence the population's behavior and put the population at ease. Thus, the patron-oriented nature of Botswana influences the attitudes and perceptions of Batswana and encourages the population to put the nation's well-being ahead of personal well-being.

This paper considered what made Botswana stand out from other sub-Saharan African nations regarding the country's and individual's personal economic well-being and development. The literature suggested Botswana's political history, absence of ethnic conflict, good economy, richness of material resources, and above-average governance practices were among the factors that set Botswana apart from most sub-Saharan African nations. It also suggested that Botswana was different because the government was the economy's primary driver, and Batswana depended heavily on the government for their livelihood. Therefore, if the government continues to do a decent job managing the economy and the nation's natural resources, anti-government and political tensions among the population aimed at the government will be minimized. This point is also significant because its findings suggest that Batswana emphasizes the nation's well-being over individual well-being. In other words, as long as they have faith in the nation's well-being, they have faith in potential improvements in their well-being. The results show that this is not the case among populations in other sub-Saharan African countries. Other sub-Saharan African populations measured their well-being not by the nation's economic health but personal economic conditions.

## XI. CONCLUSION

This paper's findings indicate that the political attitudes and perceptions of the people in sub-Saharan Africa should not be ignored as a factor influencing economic and human development success. It suggested that optimism among Batswana about their nation's economic future, the role of democracy, and trust in its leadership is an asset to governance and economic development. Furthermore, more research is needed to examine the state's role as an influencer and originator of policy agendas rather than waiting for such agendas to emerge from political forces and external mobilization. Also, research examining what makes individuals place "national interests" (or national well-being) ahead of "personal interests" (or individual well-being) could assist in the achievement of initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063.

Support for the national interests over individual interests seems to have been a stable force in Botswana over the years. One could argue that rallying around the collective national interests is crucial to government and other institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. Accordingly, the people of Botswana have embraced democracy significantly more than populations in other sub-Saharan African nations. Therefore, further study of democracy in Botswana relative to other sub-Saharan African nations is warranted. In short, future studies should examine the connection between the political and socializing dynamics of the state and its influence on the positive attributes of governance and human development in other prosperous nations such as Botswana.

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## APPENDIX ONE

### World Bank Analytical Classification: 2021

Higher-income Economies (\$13,846 OR MORE)	Upper-Middle-Income Economies (\$4,466 - \$13,845)	Lower-Middle Income Economies (\$1,136 TO \$4,465)	Low-Income Economies (\$1,135 OR LESS)
*Seychelles	Botswana	Angola	Burkina Faso
	*Equatorial Guinea	Benin	*Burundi
	Gabon	Cameroon	*Central African Republic
	Mauritius	Cape Verde	*Chad
	Namibia	*Comoros	*Democratic Republic of Congo
	South Africa	*Congo, Rep.	*Eritrea
		Côte d'Ivoire	Ethiopia
		*Djibouti	Gambia
		Eswatini	Guinea
		Ghana	*Guinea-Bissau
		Kenya	*Madagascar
		Lesotho	Liberia
		*Mauritania	Malawi
		Nigeria	Mali
		*São Tomé and Príncipe	Mozambique
		Senegal	Niger
		Tanzania	*Rwanda
		Zambia	Sierra Leone
		Zimbabwe	*Somalia
			*South Sudan
			Sudan
			Togo
			Uganda

\*County not included in the 2022 Afrobarometer Studies  
 Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/world-banks-income-groups?tab=table>

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