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Botswana

Botswana: left victory

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The elections in Botswana, a southern African country of 2.6 million inhabitants situated above South Africa, took place on 30 October. Unexpectedly, the left-wing opposition won a landslide victory, forcing a change of government unseen since the country's independence in 1966. The electoral victory of the left has raised hopes of a break with the inegalitarian policies that have prevailed since independence.

Diamonds for some

More than a defeat, it was a rout. The Umbrella for Democratic Change won 36 seats and obtained an absolute majority, with its leader Duma Boko becoming president. The Botswana Democratic Party, the former ruling party, was reduced to four MPs. Botswana has lived up to its reputation as a democratic country, with Mokgweetsi Masisi, the outgoing president, acknowledging his defeat and undertaking a fair transfer of power. For Botswana, this is a historic event that cannot be explained solely by the wear and tear of power.

Botswana's relative prosperity is due to its diamond mines. It is the world's second largest exporter of diamonds, which account for 90% of its economic exports. Masisi has been content to manage this windfall without ever embarking on economic diversification, while competition is fierce with the production of synthetic diamonds used in particular in industry. This crisis is only exacerbating the high unemployment rate, particularly among young people. Added to this gloomy picture is the authoritarian drift of power, with a deeply divided ruling elite.

Misery for others

The Afrobarometer survey revealed that a large majority of Botswana's inhabitants consider Masisi's entourage to be corrupt, and criticise him for his nepotism and contempt for parliament.

The first-past-the-post electoral system meant that the traditionally divided opposition had to unite. From 2012 onwards, the UDC was formed, with the Botswana National Front as its backbone, a party claiming to be a social-democrat from which Duma Boko emerged. The other decisive elements are the social themes of the UDC campaign, which revolve around youth employment and, as the media outlet *The Voice Botswana* points out: 'a national health insurance scheme that will guarantee everyone access to quality health care, paid for by the government and guaranteeing them a decent life and livelihood'. In a country where prosperity benefits a minority, such a proposal hits the nail on the head. Botswana has almost 2,500 millionaires and is considered to be one of the most unequal countries in the world. Financing this measure will require a new distribution of wealth to the detriment of the country's wealthy elite. Will the UDC be prepared to do this? Popular mobilisation will be a decisive factor in imposing this new social policy.

PS:

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