

**Nature Tourism, Property, and Local Politics in Southern Africa:  
A Comparative Analysis**

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## **Introduction**

At first glance, nature tourism may appear to have little relevance to comparative political economy. Nature tourists travel in order to experience nature in “nature,”<sup>1</sup> to see exotic wildlife, beautiful landscapes, and natural wonders, and, sometimes, to hunt wild animals. Few nature tourists are likely to view their excursions as political. However, tourism is economically important at the global, national, and local level. The World Travel and Tourism Council, an industry organization, estimates that the tourism industry accounted for 3.6 percent of the gross global domestic product in 2007 (WTTC 2007). The UN World Tourism Organization calculated that international tourism receipts amounted to US\$ 733 billion in 2006 (WTO 2007).<sup>2</sup> Tourism comprises the main source of foreign currency for at least 38 percent of all countries (Roe and Urquhart 2001). And while less data is available at the local level (Roe et al. 2004), it is clear that many tourism destinations are hubs of economic activity and tourism appears to be the dominant industry in some areas. These monetary flows can have political effects. Tourist travel distributes revenue throughout the complex networks linking people from their place of ordinary residents to their destination. In so doing, tourism can alter “who gets what, when, where, and how” (Lasswell 1958); it can reinforce or alter the distribution of power in particular places.

This paper examines the local political economy of nature tourism in southern Africa. The paper seeks to answer the following questions: what economic benefits do

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<sup>1</sup> The nature tourism destinations often are portrayed as untouched or untransformed by people, the “nature” that tourists experience usually is monitored and managed and has been shaped through interactions between people and ecological processes. Scholars have documented the production of nature and nature tourism (Morton 1996; Tlou 1985).

<sup>2</sup> This figure excludes certain international passenger transport receipts estimated to comprise US\$ 148 billion.

local people obtain from nature tourism, how and why do economic benefits vary across localities, and how do tourism resource flows affect local politics? More bluntly, what do locals get, what explains why some localities get more from nearby tourism than others, and how do tourism jobs and money affect local power relations? This paper addresses each of these questions in turn.

After describing the study sites and briefly discussing the literature on the distribution of tourism revenue, the paper presents data on economic benefit from tourism in eight rural localities. These benefits vary substantially. The paper argues that property rights drive variation in economic benefit across sites. Locals' possession of property rights or lack thereof is the strongest determinant of economic benefit from tourism; locals that possess property rights secure greater benefits. The paper then sketches out a structural and sectoral answer to the question of tourism's effect on local politics. Case research shows that nature tourism resource flows do not have uniform political effects across localities: localities with similar tourism property rights may have different political dynamics. The paper proposes that politics vary not because tourism has no effect on politics but rather because the political effects of tourism depend upon the formal context in which localities are situated. Cross-national differences in the authority of local traditional leaders account for much of the difference in political dynamics across localities. Additionally, sub-sectoral variation in the type of nature tourism in which localities are involved present local political actors with different incentives and opportunities.

## Study Sites

The empirical evidence presented in this paper is drawn from eight rural localities situated in and around two Southern Africa nature tourism destinations, the Okavango Delta in Botswana and the Madikwe Game Reserve in South Africa. Both destinations possess abundant wildlife including the big five large African mammals—lions, elephants, buffalos, leopards, and black rhinoceros—, water-based wildlife, and African wild dogs, and endangered species. Okavango Delta and Madikwe Game Reserve nature tourism is high cost, low volume; tourists pay substantial sums to experience nature with few other tourists around, to have access to skilled tour guidance and hunting assistance, and to stay in comfortable, sometimes luxurious, accommodation. These destinations attract wealthy travelers from elsewhere in Botswana and South Africa, the Southern African region, Europe, North America, and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the world.

Table 1: Research Sites

| <u>Country</u> | <u>Nature tourism destination</u> | <u>Localities</u>                                 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Botswana       | Okavango Delta                    | Khwai, Mababe, Sankuyo, Shorobe                   |
| South Africa   | Madikwe Game Reserve              | Lekgophung, Molatedi, Pitsedisulejang, Supingstad |

While the Okavango Delta is a natural wonder and Madikwe Game Reserve's nature was re-produced through human effort,<sup>3</sup> the development of both areas as nature

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<sup>3</sup> The Madikwe Game Reserve was established on twenty-eight degraded farms that were transferred from South Africa to Bophuthatswana in the late 1980s. The Bophuthatswana government initiated the fencing of the land, the rehabilitation of the environment, and the restoration of wildlife historically present in the area. More than 8,000 animals of twenty-seven different species were reintroduced.

tourism destinations was initiated by policymakers.<sup>4</sup> State authorities invited private sector companies to develop tourism facilities and products, and then granted these companies concession to operate nature tourism businesses: tourist lodges, tourist camps, and, in the Okavango Delta, safari hunting businesses.<sup>5</sup> (Madikwe concessionaires had no direct involvement in hunting as these operations were managed by a provincial parastatal organization.) The first tourist lodge inside the Okavango Delta opened in 1969/70 (Johnson 1976). There were about 32 lodges, hotels, and campsites in 1989, 63 by 2001, and 73 by 2004 (Mbaiwa and Darkoh 2006).<sup>6</sup> The first Madikwe Game Reserve lodge opened in 1994. The number of lodges had grown to three by 1995, 14 by 2000, and more than 30 by 2006.

People have lived within the Okavango Delta and in and around Madikwe Game Reserve since long before these areas became nature tourism destinations. Research focused on eight rural localities: Khwai, Mababe, Sankuyo, and Shorobe localities in the eastern Okavango Delta and Lekgophung, Molatedi, Pitsedisulejang, and Supingstad localities near Madikwe Game Reserve (See Table 1). Data regarding involvement in nature tourism, economic benefit from tourism, and political dynamics was collected through semi-structured interviews, household and business surveys, documentary research, and participant observation in each locality.

These localities are similar in several respects; most importantly, all are geographically remote, politically marginal, relatively poor, and have experienced

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the period discussed in this paper, government agencies and parastatal organizations exercised management authority over Madikwe Game Reserve and the Okavango Delta.

<sup>5</sup> While there is some safari hunting inside Madikwe Game Reserve, concessions were only granted for photographic nature tourism businesses. Hunting operations were managed by a provincial parastatal organization; hunting is scheduled to be phased out by 2009.

<sup>6</sup> These figures exclude safari hunting camps but include facilities in towns along the outskirts of the Delta.

racialized or ethnicized dispossession.<sup>7</sup> However, the localities vary with respect to residents' current involvement in tourism; cases were selected to ensure variation in involvement. Localities' involvement in tourism also has changed over time. While the localities initially had similarly low levels of involvement, some localities subsequently became much more involved in nature tourism.<sup>8</sup> The localities also vary with respect to the three explanatory factors (independent variables) emphasized in this paper: property rights, institutional context (strength of traditional leadership), and nature tourism sub-sector (photographic nature tourism or safari hunting) as shown in tables 2-4. This design allows for comparison of localities within and across tourism destinations and, to some extent, over time. Because context and subsector co-vary across destinations, however, these cases do not permit assessment of the relative importance of these factors.

Table 2: Tourism Property Rights

| <u>Nature tourism destination</u> | <u>Locality Possesses Tourism Property Rights</u> | <u>No Local Tourism Property Rights</u> |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Okavango Delta                    | Khwai<br>Mababe<br>Sankuyo                        | Shorobe                                 |
| Madikwe Game Reserve              | Lekgophung<br>Molatedi                            | Pitsedisulejang<br>Supingstad           |

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<sup>7</sup> Other similarities include dominant language, demographic structure, educational levels, and to some extent, livelihood practices. There is greater similarity across localities within destinations than across destinations.

<sup>8</sup> Pitsedisulejang is somewhat exceptional because of physical distance from Madikwe Game Reserve; it requires much greater effort for residents of this locality to become involved in tourism.

Table 3: Institutional Context: Strength of Traditional Leadership

|          | Strong Traditional Leadership                                   | Weak Traditional Leadership               |
|----------|---|---|
| Locality | South Africa: Lekgophung, Molatedi, Pitsedisulejang, Supingstad | Botswana: Khwai, Mababe, Sankuyo, Shorobe |

Table 4: Nature Tourism Subsector among Property Holding Localities

|          | <u>Photographic Nature Tourism</u>          | <u>Safari Hunting (and Photographic) Tourism</u> |
|----------|---|--|
| Locality | Madikwe Game Reserve: Lekgophung & Molatedi | Okavango Delta: Khwai, Mababe, & Sankuyo         |

### **Who benefits from tourism?**

The distribution of costs and benefits from tourism is a contested matter in the growing literature on the political economy of tourism. While some advocates and scholars present evidence that tourism can foster economic growth and generate employment as well as providing poor countries with a crucial source of foreign currency (e.g. Lee and Chang 2008; World Bank 2006; WTTC 2003), others highlight tourism’s economic and social costs and challenge the theoretical and empirical basis for these claims (e.g. Britton 1982; Duffy 2002; Sinclair 1998). Some of these critiques directly address the distribution of benefits. Drawing from dependency theory, Britton (1982) argued that because tourism is largely controlled by multinational corporations at the international level and domestic elites at the national level, tourism benefits will flow to these actors rather than to people and businesses in the destination “periphery.” Subsequent work further developed Britton’s concept of “enclave tourism” and documented the “leakage” of tourism revenue from host country back to the sending countries from which tourists indicate and elsewhere (See overview in Aili et al. 2007).

When there are few linkages between the tourism destination and local or national businesses, this work indicates, host localities and host countries are unlikely to secure much benefit (e.g. Freitag 1994). Clancy's research on the tourism commodity chain goes further to highlight the importance of specific relationship between international corporations and nationally-based tourism businesses as does Sinclair's economic analysis of tourism and economic development (Clancy 1998; Sinclair 1998).

Research on the Okavango Delta and Madikwe Game Reserve shows that there has been some local involvement in nature tourism since the initial development of these destinations (Bolaane 2005; Van der Heiden et al. 1991; Davies 1997a, 1997b). People residing in the study localities have obtained employment in the tourism industry, obtained contracts to provide goods or services to tourism businesses, and, in a few cases, successfully established small tourism-related businesses (Magome and Sentle 1998). Madikwe Game Reserve managers encouraged lodges owners and managers to hire people from nearby communities, and surveys undertaken in 1998, 2003, and 2006 found that the majority of employees were drawn from the area (Magome et al. 2000; Relly 2004; Turner 2006).<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, observers might reasonably characterize both destinations as enclaves. Firstly, the most lucrative tourism businesses—tourist lodges, tourist camps, and safari hunting operations—are mostly owned and managed by wealthy urban South Africans in the Madikwe case, and foreigners in the Botswana case, not local people

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<sup>9</sup> Each study employed a slightly different definition of “local.” Magome and Sentle included the three villages closest to Madikwe (Lekgophung, Molatedi, and Supingstad), Relly included all people residing within 60 kilometers, and Turner included 12 localities that are situated close to Madikwe or have strong historical ties to Madikwe. In every case, however, people from three study localities—Lekgophung, Molatedi, and Supingstad—comprised the majority of local employees.

(Mbaiwa 2005; Relly 2004).<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the jobs held by locals tend to be lower-level. Most management positions in the Okavango Delta tourism industry are held by expatriates (Mbaiwa and Darkoh 2006; Mbaiwa 2002),<sup>11</sup> and most management positions at Madikwe Game Reserve are held by non-locals even though local people comprise close to two thirds of lodge employees (Author's research). In 2006, only 18 percent of senior staff came from neighboring communities, and just 32 percent were drawn from the North West province. And Britton (1982 p. 345) would likely argue that the locally owned businesses mentioned above—craft shops, independent tour guides, and lodge service providers—were “severely limited in the capital accumulation potential” as are third tier peripheral businesses more generally.

From a local perspective, however, it seems more important to identify the benefits secured by locals than to focus on how to characterize these destinations.<sup>12</sup> Nature tourism has become an important industry in the Okavango Delta and Madikwe Game Reserve areas, and tourism now offers one of very few opportunities for local formal sector employment.<sup>13</sup> Even when locals secure only a small proportion of the resources that flow through nearby tourism destinations and a miniscule proportion of

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<sup>10</sup> While the Mbaiwa and Relly studies focused on owners' citizenship, my research indicates that none of the citizen-owners were from nearby villages and farming areas during the period of concern.

<sup>11</sup> Mbaiwa and Darkoh (2006) allege that employers' racism drive this pattern. Although Mbaiwa found that many local tourism industry employees have very limited education, his informal interviews indicated that this may arise from selection bias; Okavango Delta tourism employers appeared disinclined to employ educated qualified citizens.

<sup>12</sup> The rise of nature tourism (and conservation) has imposed costs upon local people as well as creating opportunities for benefit; some of these costs are discussed in the doctoral dissertation from which this paper is drawn. Because these costs were imposed upon locals independent of and prior to any benefits, they are not directly relevant to the question considered in this paper.

<sup>13</sup> Less than half of working age residents of the South African localities participated in the labor force; the percentage economically active ranged from 28 to 49 percent (2001 census). While the Botswana census does not provide equivalent village-level labor force participation data, a 1997/1998 study found that only 43 of 362 Khwai residents and 71 of 340 Sankuyo residents had formal employment (Boggs 2000). Only 23 Sankuyo residents had formal employment not linked to the localities tourism concession.

destination-related resource flows, these flows may still be tremendously important at the local level. To illustrate, median household income in the four Madikwe localities ranged from zero to 800 South African Rand (roughly US \$0 to 100) per month in 2001 (SA Census 2001).<sup>14</sup> The worst-paid full-time employee at a Madikwe lodge received at least 600 Rand (\$90) in 2006 and most received much more (author's research).<sup>15</sup> Even low-level tourism employment can allow locals to substantially improve their livelihoods. Given that, how can one increase local access to tourism resource flows? Or, what explains cross-locality variation in receipt of material benefits from nature tourism?

### **Explaining variation in local economic benefit: the role of property rights**

The eight localities discussed in this paper were similarly situated during the initial development of the Okavango Delta and Madikwe Game Reserve.<sup>16</sup> By late 2004, when cases were selected, and 2006, when benefit data was collected, however, both participation in nature tourism and extent of material benefit from tourism varied widely. Figure 1 presents data on one indicator of benefit, nature tourism employment. In 2006, the percentage of adults in each locality with tourism employment ranged from 3 to 33 percent; the percentage of households with nature tourism employment ranged from 10 to 68 percent (Also see Table 5).

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<sup>14</sup> All currency equivalents reflect interbank exchange rates for the month and year in which local currency information was provided.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics South Africa provided village-specific census data. Of the twenty-two lodges providing data on junior staff salary ranges, the single lodge reporting a R600 monthly salary was exceptional; the second lowest salary was R1,000 per month. The median minimum salary was R1,348 and the average minimum salary was R1,481.

<sup>16</sup> There were small destination-based differences in tourism involvement between localities. Okavango Delta residents had greater opportunity than Madikwe residents to sell goods to passing tourists because all four Delta localities, but only one Madikwe locality, were situated along tourist transit routes. And Madikwe residents may have had greater tourism employment opportunities because game reserve management authorities encouraged tourism concessionaires to hire local people.

Figure 1: Nature Tourism Employment by Locality, 2006

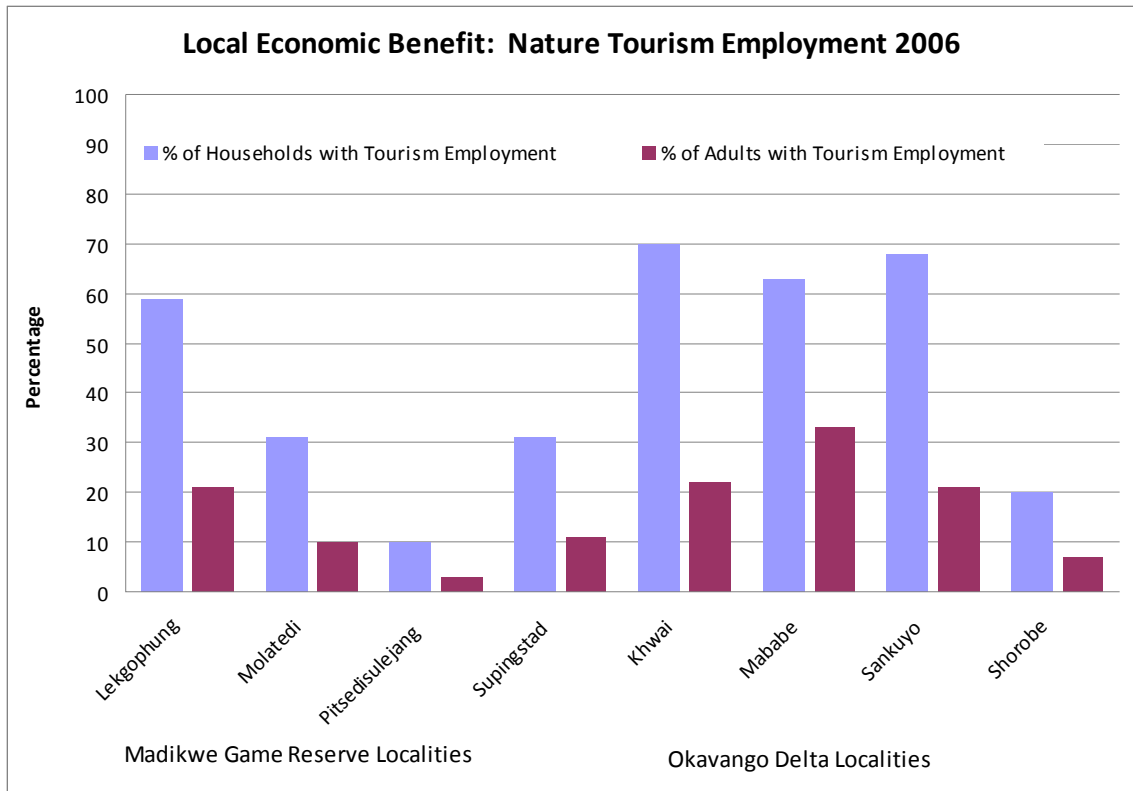


Table 5: Nature Tourism Employment by Locality, 2006

| Local Nature Tourism Employment, 2006 |                 |                                 |   |                             |   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| <u>Destination</u>                    | <u>Village</u>  | <u># of Households Surveyed</u> | <u>% Households with Tourism Employee</u> | <u># of Resident Adults</u> | <u>% Adults with Tourism Employment</u> |
| Madikwe Game Reserve                  | Lekgophung      | 37                              | 59%                                       | 110                         | 21%                                     |
|                                       | Molatedi        | 51                              | 31%                                       | 226                         | 10%                                     |
|                                       | Pitsedisulejang | 70                              | 10%                                       | 336                         | 3%                                      |
|                                       | Supingstad      | 45                              | 31%                                       | 156                         | 11%                                     |
| Okavango Delta                        | Khwai           | 40                              | 70%                                       | 196                         | 22%                                     |
|                                       | Mababe          | 51                              | 63%                                       | 129                         | 33%                                     |
|                                       | Sankuyo         | 40                              | 68%                                       | 242                         | 21%                                     |
|                                       | Shorobe         | 64                              | 20%                                       | 300                         | 7%                                      |

Source: Author's Research.

The funds garnered from nature tourism also varied substantially. While tourism-derived income is more difficult to measure, the data available shows that income also varied widely across localities. Pitsedisulejang and Shorobe localities were at the low end. Pitsedisulejang locality had only one Madikwe tourism-related business in 2006, a privately-owned wood provision service, and local organizations in Shorobe, a large Okavango Delta settlement, garnered less than \$5,200 in 2006, and no more than \$9,100 in 2004 (Author's research).<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Lekgophung locality near Madikwe Game Reserve received more than \$30,000 in 2006 and Khwai, Mababe, and Sankuyo localities in the Okavango Delta each expected to receive more than \$250,000 (author's research).

What explains this variation? At first glance, tourism destination appears to be correlated with employment and with material benefit: the Okavango Delta provide more benefits than Madikwe Game Reserve (Figure 1). In general, the Okavango Delta localities have a higher proportion of tourism employment. However, destination is a proxy for other factors. With respect to nature tourism employment, employment potential is limited by the size of the tourism industry relative to the size of the local population. While the size of the tourism industry proximate to the study localities is fairly comparable, most Madikwe localities are larger than Okavango Delta localities.<sup>18</sup> This difference in population size accounts for most of the difference in employment.

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<sup>17</sup> These estimates include income from the Shorobe basketry cooperative, which sells crafts to passing tourists, and a local trust whose trainees led students and tourists on mobile safaris into the Okavango Delta, until it suspended operations in late 2004.

<sup>18</sup> The 2001 population of the Madikwe localities ranged from 512 to 2756 while the Okavango Delta localities had between 157 and 955 people (Botswana Census 2001, South Africa Census 2001). While the Okavango Delta tourism industry appears to employ more people than Madikwe Game Reserve in total, however, the size of the industry is comparable if one restricts analysis to nature tourism businesses in the eastern Okavango Delta.

Inter-destination variation in material benefit also reflects other underlying factors. Madikwe Game Reserve appears to have a smaller volume of total tourism resource flows than the Okavango Delta. It is plausible that this is because Madikwe is a younger tourism destination. While many Okavango Delta tourism businesses have been in operation for more than 10 years, the majority of Madikwe tourism businesses commenced operation after 2000. This difference in length of operation matters because it takes time for tourism businesses to establish a reputation and begin generating substantial revenue; lodge operators estimates it takes about five years to become established. If these estimates are correct, then inter-destination differences in benefit should diminish over time. More importantly, however, differences in revenue may derive from differences in the type of nature tourism in which localities participate. While Okavango Delta localities derive revenue from both safari hunting and photographic nature tourism, the Madikwe localities derive revenue almost exclusively from photographic nature tourism (see footnote 5).<sup>19</sup> This difference appears to account for most of the difference in material benefit as photographic tourism income was fairly similar across destinations. The political implications of differences between safari hunting and photographic nature tourism are discussed later in this paper.

While neither local population size nor destination maturity nor type of tourism is within the short term control of local people, factors more amenable to local decisions

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<sup>19</sup> While they do not derive any income from safari hunting at Madikwe Game Reserve, Madikwe localities do derive some income from hunting on communal lands. While Madikwe localities garnered between \$1,410 and \$2,245 from this “biltong hunting” of common wildlife each year, Okavango Delta localities could exceed this income with a single high-value species. Khwai locality, for example, was to receive \$3,800 for each of the five buffalo in its 2005 quota.

appear to have little effect on economic benefit.<sup>20</sup> The residents of each locality made varied individual and collective choices about seeking tourism employment, starting tourism businesses, and soliciting charitable projects from tourism businesses. Some local people may have derived individual benefit from these initiatives that was not captured in my data. In the aggregate, however, these varied choices cannot account for the differences in material benefit. Groups of residents in Shorobe, Sankuyo, and Khwai started tourism businesses but Shorobe derived fewer benefits than these localities or even Mababe, which had no local tourism business. Similarly, in the Madikwe area, both Molatedi and Pitsedisulejang residents had created tourism-related businesses, but Molatedi derives greater benefit.

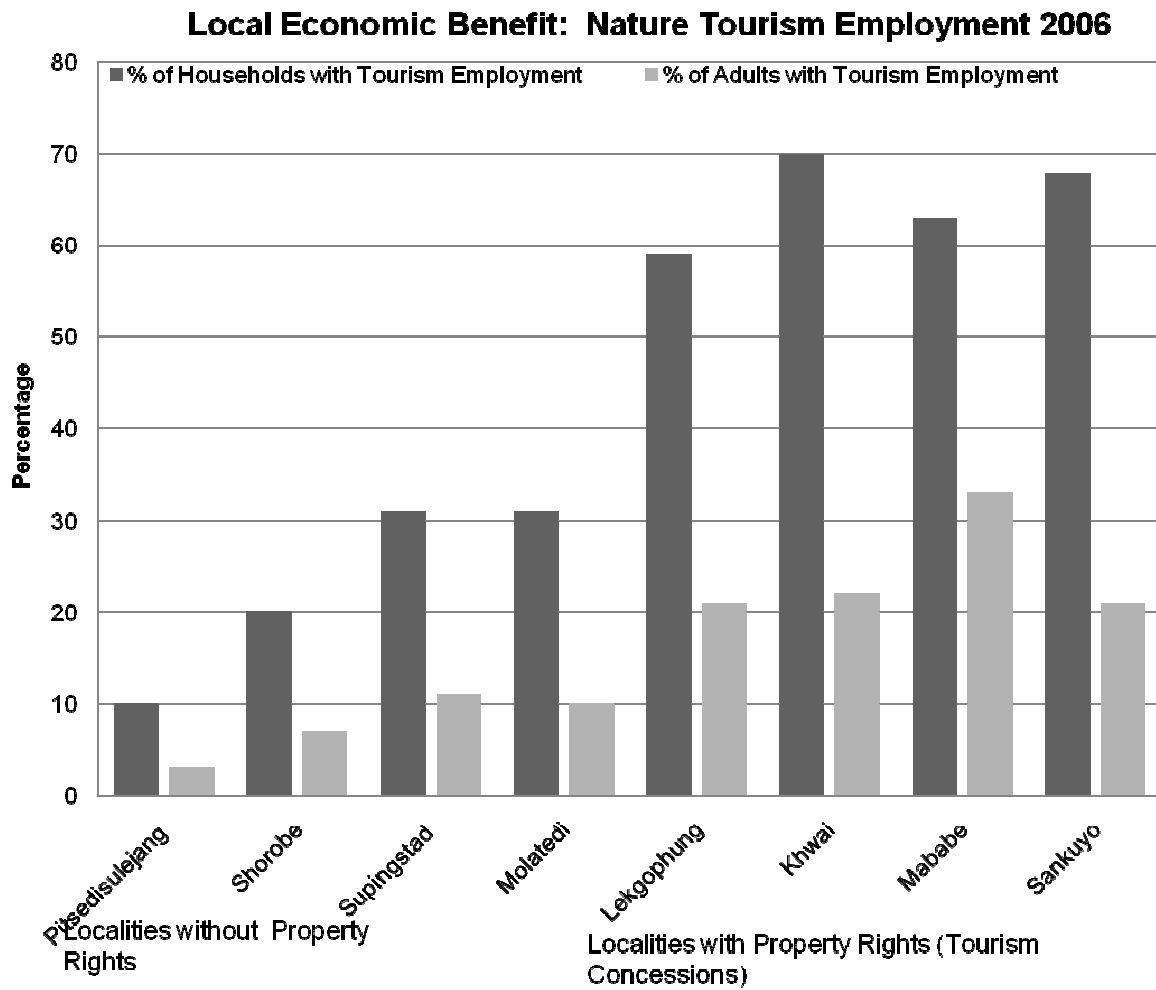
The single common factor differentiating high-benefit localities from lower benefits localities is property rights. This relationship holds up across localities, as shown in Figure 3, which presents employment coded by possession or lack of property rights. And this relationship holds within localities over time. As discussed, while the localities initially garnered similar economic benefits from tourism, receipt of benefits subsequently diverged. This divergence increased rapidly after similar changes in government policy and practice at the Okavango Delta and Madikwe game reserve. While government authorities initially granted tourism concessions solely to private companies, government subsequently decided to grant some tourism concessions to local people. This shift began in the 1990s at the Okavango Delta, and in the year 2000 at

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<sup>20</sup> Recognized landowners and land managers are free to decide which type of tourism they will permit at particular nature tourism destinations within the constraints of state policy. Madikwe Game Reserve is a provincial protected area managed by the North West Parks and Tourism Board. While the board permits hunting at some provincial reserves, in March 2004, the board agreed that it would phase out all hunting at Madikwe by the end of 2008 in response to lobbying by Madikwe lodge owners.

Madikwe Game Reserve. Decision-makers chose offer concessions to some localities but not others, and required localities to fulfill state requirements before granting concessions.<sup>21</sup> Those localities that obtained property rights subsequently garnered much greater material benefit from tourism than other localities.

Figure 2: Tourism Employment and Property Rights<sup>22</sup>



<sup>21</sup> Among the requirements were the following. Residents had to establish new organizations, trusts, to hold the concession on behalf of local people because these concessions were defined as collective, not individual. Further, these trusts had to be established through processes that authorities perceived to be democratic, they had to define the community in a way acceptable to state authorities, and they had to employ an approach to tourism that management authorities found acceptable.

<sup>22</sup> Molatedi, a transitional locality, possessed a concession but its concession-linked business was not yet operative when data was collected.

Why and how do property rights allow locals to secure economic benefit from tourism? Theoretically and practically, altering the distribution of tourism property partially addresses the problems identified by enclave theorists: lack of linkages between tourism destinations and the regional economy, and peripheral peoples' lack of control over the industry. To be sure, allocating tourism destination property rights to locals does not fundamentally alter the distribution of power at the macro level; lodge concessions do not give locals control over sending country travel agencies. Nor do concessions enable locals to pursue alternate, potentially more beneficial, land uses. However, destination property rights do grant local people greater control over the terms of their engagement with the tourism industry. As concessionaires, locals gain access to the more lucrative tourism businesses -- full-service accommodations and hunting operations -- as rights holders, not fully jobseekers. These rights allow locals to directly engage in these businesses or to negotiate partnerships with companies.<sup>23</sup>

The property-holding localities have used their rights to leverage greater economic benefit. Firstly, concessionaire localities, or more accurately, the local trusts which hold tourism concessions on behalf of residents, have derived income directly from their property rights. One trust, the Khwai Development Trust in the Okavango Delta, raised more than \$207,500 in 2000 by revenue by auctioning its hunting quota directly to safari operators; the trust also auctioned its quota in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004. More frequently, however, concessionaire trusts have chosen to raise revenue by

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<sup>23</sup> Multiple factors, including state-imposed rents and royalties, environmental requirements, and visitor restrictions push locals to enter the competitive high-cost, low volume nature tourism market. Because this type of tourism requires substantial capital, management expertise, and access to international networks, most localities have entered into partnerships with private companies.

entering into “joint ventures” with private companies in which all or some tourism rights are subleased to these companies. By 2006, all six concessionaire trusts were involved in joint ventures or operating agreements with private companies. Table 6 summarizes the financial benefits accruing to Okavango Delta concessionaire trusts from these partnerships.<sup>24</sup>

Table 6: Okavango Delta Concessionaire Trust Income from Joint Venture Partners, 2006

|               | Hunting Quota | Land Rental | Community Benefits Fund | Lodge Rental | Total     |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Khwai Trust   | \$193,666     | \$21,981    | \$6,706                 | \$43,500     | \$265,853 |
| Mababe Trust  | \$231,402     | \$25,155    | \$26,432                | \$ -         | \$282,988 |
| Sankuyo Trust | \$194,010     | \$86,592    | \$19,938                | \$ -         | \$300,540 |

Secondly, concessionaire localities have used their property rights to raise capital necessary to create community-owned tourism facilities, to establish photographic tourism businesses, and, sometimes, to subsidize these businesses. The Khwai trust, for example, used some of its hunting auction revenue to renovate and upgrade a run-down hunting camp into a lodge, to start construction of a second hunting camp, and to create campsites. Since 2001, the facilities have provided the trust with an additional source of revenue; the trust rents these facilities to hunting operators, mobile safari companies, and independent travelers.<sup>25</sup> The Sankuyo trust in the Okavango Delta also directed concession revenue towards the renovation of an existing lodge, and has used concession revenue to subsidize the trust-operated lodge and campsite. The Madikwe concessionaire localities used their property rights to raise the capital necessary for establishing

<sup>24</sup> Mababe’s joint venture partner, for example, constructed houses for elderly residents and provides development funds to be used for funerals, sports teams, and other needs.

<sup>25</sup> The safari companies that purchased hunting packages were required to rent the hunting lodge. The campsites are separately managed and can be reserved in part or in whole.

community lodges; the construction of each lodge was funded through grants and loans.<sup>26</sup> These trusts' decision to construct their own facilities delayed and decreased their nature tourism revenue in the short term—much of their joint-venture income is used to repay loans—but probably increased their benefits over the long-term; facility ownership provides the trusts with greater leverage in negotiations with potential private sector partners.<sup>27</sup>

Thirdly, the concessionaire trusts have used their rights to increase to increase locals' access to nature tourism employment. All the trusts have required the tourism businesses operating in their concessions to hire people from the relevant locality unless it can be demonstrated that no local person possesses the necessary skills.<sup>28</sup> The Okavango Delta concessionaire trusts also have employed many residents directly.<sup>29</sup> These concessions-related jobs account for a large proportion of the tourism-related jobs in the Okavango Delta localities and a smaller proportion of jobs in the Madikwe-area localities as shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Concession-Related Employment in Okavango Delta localities, 2006

|                 | Joint Venture Partner Employees | Trust Employees | Total Employees | Households with Trust or Tourism Employment |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Khwai locality  | 48                              | 14              | 62              | 76%   |
| Mababe locality | 54                              | 18              | 72              | 77%   |

<sup>26</sup> The Lekgophung trust also sub-leased eight beds to another company to raise funds.

<sup>27</sup> The Madikwe trusts now possess a valuable asset in addition to wildlife use and business operation rights. Lodge ownership also may make it easier for the trust to change operating partners or to transition into operating the facilities themselves.

<sup>28</sup> Employment commitments are incorporated in legal memoranda of agreement between trusts and their joint venture partners.

<sup>29</sup> The Madikwe trusts had no employees for most of the period between 2000 and 2006. The Lekgophung trust employed one staff person in 2005, and the Molatedi trust temporarily employed one individual to monitor lodge construction

|                  |    |    |    |     |
|------------------|----|----|----|-----|
| Sankuyo locality | 56 | 43 | 99 | 93% |
| Shorobe locality | 0  | 0  | 0  | 20% |

Table 8: Local employment at Madikwe Game Reserve lodges, 2006

|                      | Employees from Lekgophung | Employees from Molatedi | Employees from Supingstad | Employees from Pitsedisulejang |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| All lodges           | 79                        | 116                     | 147                       | 2                              |
| Non-community lodges | 56                        | 90                      | 147                       | 2                              |

To summarize, property rights (concessions) are the strongest determinant of local economic benefit from tourism. Rights to valuable tourism resources enable locality to garner a greater share of tourism-derived employment, revenue, and other benefits. Access to tourism resource flows is one important component of the local political economy of tourism.

### **How do tourism resource flows affect local politics?**

Tourism property rights have allowed five of the eight localities to secure substantial benefit from nature tourism. Have these resource flows affected local decision-making processes, changed who participates in decision-making, or altered the locus and substantive focus of conflict?<sup>30</sup> That is, has tourism altered local political dynamics? This section sketches out an answer to these questions but does not present the detailed case evidence necessary to fully support the argument.

Surface examination of recent conflicts and decision-making processes in the five concessionaire localities would lead one to conclude that tourism property rights (and the associated benefits) alone are insufficient to explain political dynamics. Concessionaire

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<sup>30</sup> Research focused on these three aspects of local political dynamics.

localities lack a uniform characteristic political dynamic. For example, political dynamics in concessionaire localities Khwai and Molatedi differ markedly. In Khwai, both issues and decision-making processes are widely disputed, trust officers have little security of tenure as they are frequently challenged by concerned groups seeking to unseat them, and there has often been a large disjunct between trust decisions and trust actions. In Molatedi, on the other hand, there has been little controversy over the trust since the locality agreed to establish the trust and to construct a community lodge, the few changes in trust leadership have been driven by attrition rather than organized opposition, and trust actions appear to record with trust decision. While this might lead one to conclude that tourism resource flows have no effect on local politics, a closer look shows that the variation in local political dynamics has an underlying logic. There are observable differences between the concessionaire and non-concessionaire localities, and between the Okavango Delta concessionaire localities and the Madikwe Game Reserve concessionaire localities.

In all cases, concession-based involvement in nature tourism has altered the local organizational landscape and, in so doing, altered local decision-making processes and empowered new political actors. Every concessionaire locality has a trust that holds the concessions on behalf of residents; receives rents, fees, and other revenue from these concessions; represents the locality on all concession-related matters and, most importantly, distributes concession-derived benefits and opportunities. In property holding localities, then, tourism has not only brought new resources but also created new locally controlled vehicles for the distribution of benefits. The three non-concessionaire localities, in contrast, either have no trusts (two localities) or have trusts with few

resources to distribute (one locality). Concessionaire trusts are a site through which decisions about “who gets what when where and how” are made. The trust leadership, comprised mostly or entirely of local people, decides how to utilize the concession and how to distribute concession-derived benefits for, and sometimes with, locality residents, trust general members and beneficiaries.<sup>31</sup> Securing a position as a trust board member, or perhaps a senior staff person, may allow one to garner individual benefits and to influence resource allocation, and thus provides one with political influence. Even ordinary residents, however, are entitled to play a role in trust decision-making for the collectivity is a site for trust decision-making.<sup>32</sup>

Khwai and Molatedi localities exemplify the striking cross-destination difference in political dynamics. Trust-focused conflict was widespread in the Okavango Delta localities but rare in the Madikwe concessionaire localities and trusts. The Okavango Delta concessionaire trusts were sites for struggles to secure access to and control over tourism resource flows. The struggles were evident in public processes such as elections, tender processes, and budget meetings, and also manifest in illicit benefit appropriation through tender alliances, theft, and “mismanagement” of trust resources. Residents’ participation in these democratically structured Okavango Delta trusts often took the form of competition for control of rents. In the Madikwe concessionaire localities, on the other hand, trusts appeared to operate as bureaucratic institutions doing business on behalf of the community. There were very contentious struggles over leadership or

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<sup>31</sup> Although the precise definition varies slightly across trusts, beneficiaries and members generally comprise all permanent village residents and other people with strong ties to the locality who are temporarily based elsewhere; government employees and other people temporarily resident in the village are excluded.

<sup>32</sup> Okavango Delta trust members elect the leaders, adopt the budget, and sometimes takes other decisions collectively.

resource distribution, and there were none of the organized “concerned groups” or other oppositional groupings common in the other localities. In fact, the Madikwe concessionaire localities were unusually sedate; much more conflict was apparent in the non-concessionaire Madikwe localities.

These differences in political dynamics across concessionaire localities, this paper proposes, arise from the confluence of two factors, the formal political context in which localities are embedded and the specific sectoral characteristics of photographic nature tourism and safari hunting, that interact with tourism property rights and resource flows to shape political outcomes. Both formal political context and tourism sub-sector differ across destinations; each is discussed below in turn.

State-recognized traditional leadership structures are the central element of the formal political context in Botswana and South Africa communal localities of the type discussed in this paper.<sup>33</sup> While communal localities also participate in “modern” local governance structures, these structures operate at the supra-locality level.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, modern elected local officials exert little locality-specific authority and have little control over intra-locality resource allocation.<sup>35</sup> All the localities discussed in this paper have a

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<sup>33</sup> Control over people, land, and nature was racialized and tribalized in Botswana and South Africa during the overlapping processes of conquest, colonization, and dispossession (Mamdani 1996; Schapera 1943, 1955). As a result, both countries have a dualistic land tenure system, in which the bundles of rights attached to land deemed *freehold* (or private) and land deemed *communal* (or tribal) differs substantially. In general, freehold land tenure systems were established in areas allocated for white settlement, and communal land tenure systems were established in areas allocated for black settlement.

<sup>34</sup> Modern local governance institutions include district councils, land boards, and district administrations in Botswana and local and district municipalities in South Africa. The lowest-level institutions in both countries comprise multiple localities. Botswana’s North West District includes most of the Okavango Delta and South Africa’s Moses Kotane local municipality included more than a dozen villages. The lowest-level modern institutions in both countries comprise multiple localities. Botswana’s North West District includes most of the Okavango Delta and South Africa’s Moses Kotane local municipality included more than a dozen villages.

<sup>35</sup> District councils and land boards in Botswana comprise a mix of elected and state-appointed officials. Local and District municipalities in South Africa are led by elected councillors.

traditional leader (a chief or headman) as do most communal localities in these countries.<sup>36</sup> Traditional leadership institutions were broadly similar in Botswana and South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. State-recognized traditional leaders (chiefs and headmen) exercised authority over land and local people in communal areas, subject to the constraints imposed by state officials.<sup>37</sup> Traditional leaders were the key decision-makers, mediators, and allocator of collective resources; they were at the center of local politics (See Mamdani 1996; Schapera 1955). Subsequently, however, successive colonial Bechuanaland and independent Botswana governments adopted reforms that radically reduced the authority of traditional leaders by depriving them of control over communal land and finances and constraining their authority over people. In contrast, postapartheid South African state reforms to traditional leadership have been much more limited; while leaders can no longer utilize violence with state sanction, traditional leaders have retained substantial authority over communal land and tribal finances. These divergent reforms created cross-national differences in the local political context (See Figure 3).

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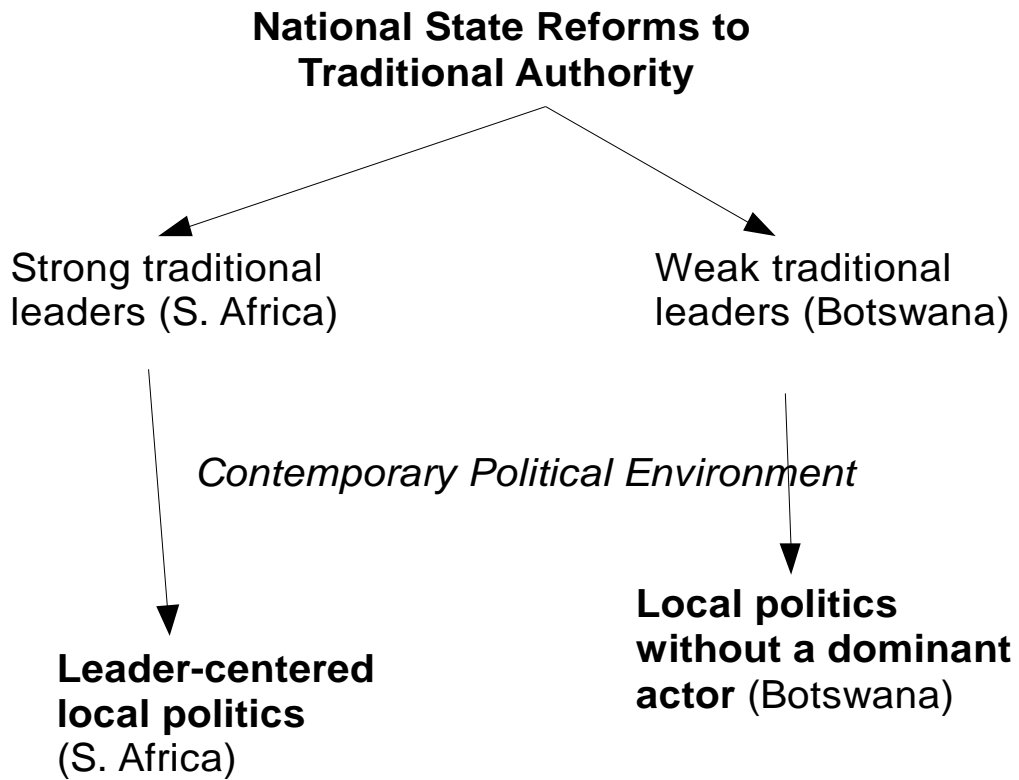
<sup>36</sup> “Traditional” leadership institutions were reformed and reorganized during conquest and colonization, and “traditional” leaders often were imposed where none had existed. For example, traditional leaders were appointed or elected to govern some Okavango Delta areas that had no tradition of chieftainship (Morton 1996; Tlou 1985).

<sup>37</sup> The precise forms of rule and breadth of authority exercised by traditional leaders varied across the Bechuanaland protectorate (now Botswana) and segregationist South Africa.

Figure 3

## State Reforms Affecting Communal Localities

Postcolonial starting point:  
Communal localities governed by “traditional” leaders



Cross-national differences in political context influenced local political dynamics in concessionaire and non-concessionaire localities alike and also contributed to the cross-destination differences in political dynamics across concessionaire localities described above. In Botswana, state policies regarding traditional leaders and local government created an institutional vacuum in which no locality-based actor exercised broad authority over residents or control over resources. This environment facilitated the emergence of the Okavango Delta concessionaire trusts as independent sources of power and sites for contentious politics. The state officials managing the concession process interacted directly with local people, who made collective decisions to create trusts (See Figure 4). The locals made trust leaders formally accountable to their members rather than the traditional leader.<sup>38</sup>

In South Africa, in contrast, state policies allowed leaders to retain substantial authority and facilitated traditional leader-dominant local politics. Madikwe-area traditional leaders mediated local access to tourism concessions; the state officials managing the concession process worked with and through local traditional leaders. (See Figure 4). As a result, tourism concessions have reinforced traditional leaders' authority rather than diminishing it. Both Madikwe concessionaire trusts are linked to their traditional leaders rather than independent of them—each traditional leader was named as the founding trustee. Not surprisingly, the Madikwe trusts have fewer institutional

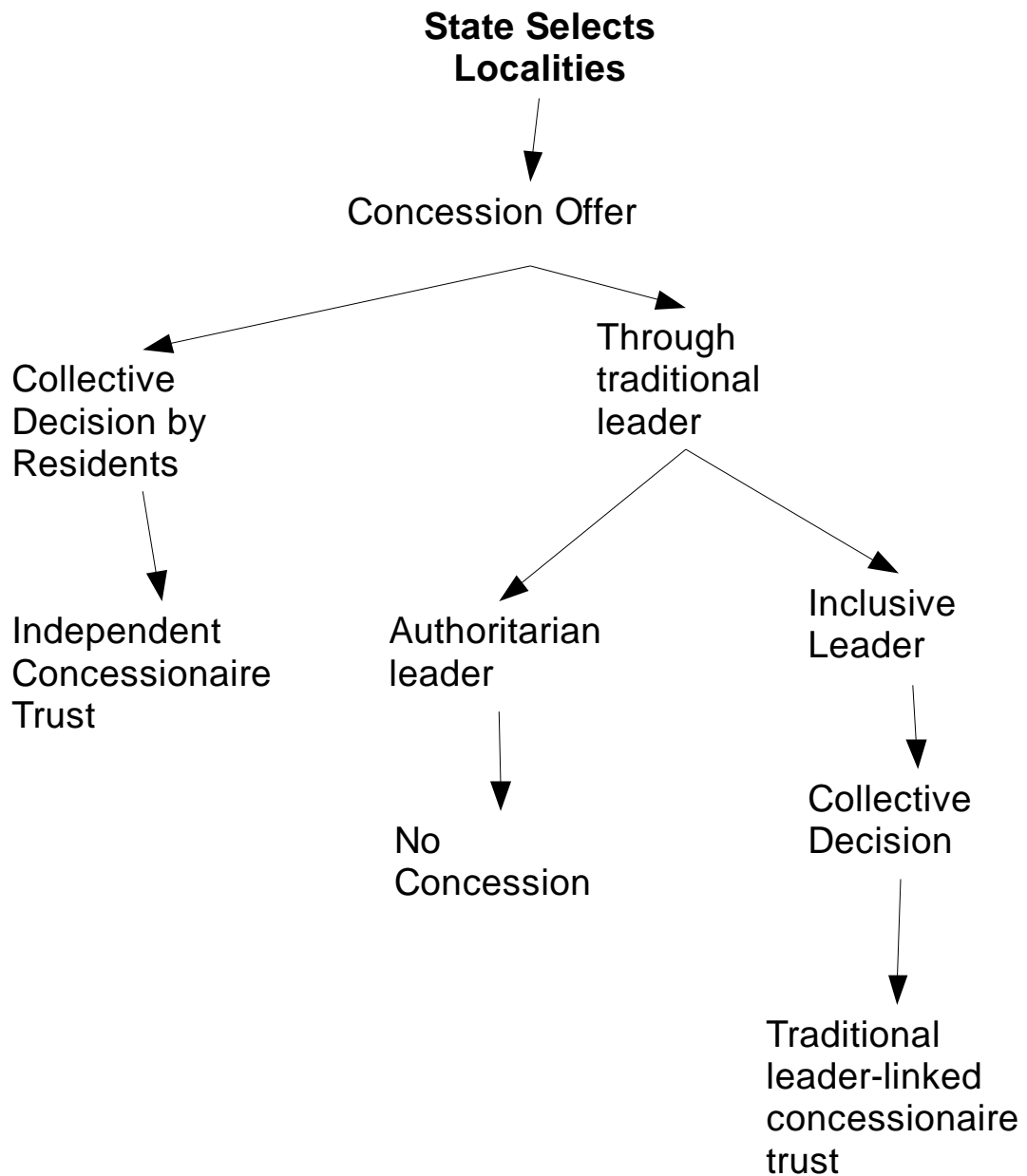
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<sup>38</sup> One of the constraints imposed on Botswana's traditional leaders is that they are barred from holding leadership positions in trusts and other elected organizations; they may only participate in an ex officio capacity.

mechanisms through which local people can force the removal and replacement of unpopular trust leaders than the Okavango Delta trusts.

Figure 5

### Determinants of Local Tourism Property Rights: the Community Concession Process



However, Madikwe concession decision-makers, like their Botswana counterparts, insisted that trust leaders must be chosen through inclusive democratic processes.<sup>39</sup> This may explain why the Madikwe concessionaire localities were more sedate than their non-concessionaire counterparts. Traditional leaders subject to sustained challenges to their authority are unlikely to accede to open elections for concessionaire trust leaders. Politics in the two non-concessionaire Madikwe localities centered upon struggles between the traditional leader and other organized actors to control collective space and resources and to structure decision-making processes. Table 9 characterizes political dynamics by political context and property rights.

Table 9: Local political dynamics by institutional context & property rights

|                                    |                       | Property rights   |   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|
|                                    | Traditional authority | No Tourism concession   | Tourism concession  |
| Botswana: Okavango Delta           | Weak                  | Conflict around resource-less trust (Shorobe)                                   | Trust-centered contentious politics (Khwai, Mababe, Sankuyo)                |
| South Africa: Madikwe Game Reserve | Strong                | Traditional leader-centered contentious politics (Pitsedisulejang & Supingstad) | Minimal conflict, relatively participatory politics (Lekgophung & Molatedi) |

The different sectoral characteristics of photographic nature tourism and safari hunting also may have contributed to cross-destination differences in concessionaire locality political dynamic by influencing local actors' incentives and opportunities. As mentioned, photographic tourism was the only type of nature tourism from which Madikwe concessionaire localities derived revenue. While the Okavango Delta

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<sup>39</sup> The majority of Madikwe concessionaire trustees are village residents who were selected at locality-wide public meetings.

concessionaire localities garnered income from both photographic nature tourism and safari hunting, hunting was the primary source of revenue.<sup>40</sup> Both types of nature tourism can generate substantial revenue and local employment and require substantial investment in marketing. However, photographic nature tourism and safari hunting differ in several respects, including their capital intensity and infrastructural requirements, and the time lag between investment and returns. Generally, high end photographic nature tourism requires substantial infrastructure in the form of high-quality accommodation and catering facilities while safari hunting requires more limited infrastructure because rustic accommodations are part of the hunting experience. Photographic tourism produces returns fairly slowly. In contrast, safari hunting can produce substantial and rapid returns in wildlife-abundant areas as opportunities to hunt high value wildlife such as buffalo, lions, elephants are limited. While it may take photographic tourism businesses months to construct a facility and years to garner high occupancy rates, safari hunting companies can market their hunts directly to the thousands of buyers at the January Safari Club International meeting, or similar conventions in Europe, and then conduct profitable hunts a few months later during the hunting season. Photographic nature tourism also is subject to large fluctuations in demand from season to season, often in response to international and national factors and events outside the control of destination-based businesses. While the safari hunting may also be volatile, hunters appear to be less prone to switch destinations in response to political concerns.

These differences between photographic nature tourism and safari hunting influence the flow of resources to concessionaires and give actors different time horizons

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<sup>40</sup> Most Okavango Delta trusts entered into partnership with hunting companies, who then subleased part of the concession to photographic tourism companies.

and incentives. Hunting has allowed concessionaire localities in the wildlife-abundant Okavango Delta to collect rents, “income derived from the gift of nature,” that has little direct relationship to their investment. These hunting rents may insulate localities from business risks; the concession is likely to continue to generate revenue as long as the wildlife stock has not been deleted. In contrast, photographic tourism has not offered Madikwe concessionaires with substantial income unrelated to investment. Hunting may thus facilitate a focus on benefit-distribution rather than revenue generation among trust leaders and ordinary members, making struggles for resource control more likely in the Okavango Delta localities than in the photographic nature tourism-dependent Madikwe localities where trust leaders have an incentive to focus on business success if they help to derive benefit.

## **Conclusion**

Nature tourism has the potential to alter local politics by affecting “who gets what where and how.” Tourism may alter local politics by bringing new resource flows—jobs, money, and projects into localities. Whether localities gain access to these resources depends largely on whether localities obtain tourism property rights. These tourism resource flows may then affect local politics, but the way in which they do so depends upon the political context and on the type of nature tourism. Tourism resource flows are more likely to alter political dynamics when the political context allows for the emergence of independent trusts, as in the Okavango Delta, than when the context makes the creation of trust dependent upon powerful local actors, as around Madikwe Game Reserve. Independent, democratically structured trusts are likely to become a locus of contentious, sometimes venal, politics, particularly when concessions immediately

generate substantial revenue. In contexts with strong traditional leadership, however, contentious politics are likely to center on the traditional leader and his opponents/would-be replacements rather than leader-linked concessionaire trusts. This is because leadership conflicts would prevent the emergence of the trusts. Traditional leader-linked trusts are likely to be created only when leaders are fairly popular, secure in their exercise of authority, and confident that they can influence the distribution of tourism resources if they desire to. The type of tourism, photographic nature tourism or safari hunting, influences political dynamics by determining the scale of tourism resources available to local actors in the short term and influencing their incentives: photographic tourism appears less likely to incite resource appropriation struggles than safari hunting, at least in the short term. Nature tourism, this paper has suggested, is profoundly political.

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