

Research Article

The ‘Bour Li Dehors’ Case Study: An Analysis of the Rise of Extreme Populism Within Mauritian Modern Politics

Stephen Lyajoon* 

Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

The 2024 general election in Mauritius marked another historic moment in the country’s political history with a crushing victory of the opposition coalition sweeping every parliamentary seats. Mauritian politics is at a crossroad where traditional and modern mechanisms coexist together, bridging the divide between the political elite and the everyday struggles. Observations can be made about the rise of extreme populism as a result of growing dissatisfaction of the previous government and rising cost of living. For over a decade now, Mauritian politics has undertaken a new path, more of a marketing stunt than a political campaign, with slogans such as “viré mam” in 2014 or the more recent “bour li dehors” in 2024. Through an analysis of the country’s political history and the evolution of politics, this paper draws from sociological and political theories to understand and critically analyse how Mauritian politics has evolved to align itself with the changing Mauritian landscape. From an analysis of the Mauritian political system and its evolution throughout time, to the involvement of mass media and technology, this paper further depicts how Mauritian politics is being shaped by the silent mass, reclaiming and disrupting the traditional way of doing politics. Consequently, this paper aims at setting the scene for further research about the evolution of politics in the 21st century where the gap between traditional politics and the social empowerment is being bridged by the advent of technology.

Keywords

Mauritius, Politics, Modern Politics, Populism

1. Introduction

The case study of Mauritius is a very interesting and intriguing one defying all the odd, often very bleak and obscure estimation about its growth. Today Mauritius is hailed as Africa’s success story with one of the highest GDP per capita on the continent. The country, however, was described as a hopeless case due to several factors, notably the ethnic division plaguing the economic and political landscape [24]. Mauritius today is a stable flourishing democracy with coherent political participation. The Mauritius is considered Africa’s most democratic country and part of the select club of

countries whose political system are described as ‘full democracy’ [11]. Nonetheless, as with every political system, the Mauritian model is not without its flaws. Being a former French and British colony, the Mauritian system is largely inherited by its former colonizers [14]. Whilst the Mauritian legal system is a hybrid combination of the French civil law (Napoleonic Code) and British common law, the country’s political system is a replica of the Westminster model with the national parliament on the main island and a system of devolution for the outer islands.

*Corresponding author: stephenlyajoon@gmail.com (Stephen Lyajoon)

Received: 9 May 2025; **Accepted:** 23 May 2025; **Published:** 8 September 2025



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2025. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The British Model, also described as the “winner takes all” model, where the winner is allocated parliamentary seats irrespective of any external factors. Whilst this mechanism is applied in many major democracies, this model proved fundamentally flawed for the Mauritian system, emphasizing the need for adaptation to ensure fair representation of the multi-ethnic and multicultural makeup of the country [14, 20]. Indeed, the multicultural peculiarity of Mauritian society sparked severe need to adapt the Westminster system to accommodate local needs. This became a status quo in Mauritian politics, as outlined by literature, for civil and political survival across the various ethnicities. Nevertheless, this status quo is often put aside once every few cycles, in favor of common agenda among the population, as some sort of reset mechanism in case a government goes rogue. This phenomenon is known locally in Mauritius as the ‘60-0’ mechanism where all 60 available parliamentary seats are swept away by the opposition or opposition coalition by popular votes as a means of retaliation for frustration or dissatisfaction of the government [9]. Though Mauritius is significantly diverse, one peculiarity of the country’s successful political stability has proved to be the resilience of its population, capable to work towards a common goal irrespective of their difference.

2. Mauritius Political 60-0 Mechanism

2.1. Historical Review of the Mauritius 60-0

The ‘60-0’ narrative emerged following the general election of 1982 where all 60 parliamentary seats were secured by a coalition of the main opposition parties, notably the MMM (Mauritius Militant Movement) and then PSM (Mauritian Socialist Party). This emergence was followed by a series of protests and dissatisfaction towards the government. Consequently, this marked a cornerstone of Mauritian politics, still relevant to this day [4]. Bowman [4] talks about a political malaise that peaked with the country’s economic slump caused by external shocks and the difficulty in keeping up with the employment demands emanating from the rapid population growth. Whilst the government only lasted 11 months due to unpopular policies to address pressing economic issues, leading to ideological divergence within the coalition [4], the trend repeated itself with the 1995 national election.

Whilst the build-up of the 1982 ‘60-0’ was sparked by the economic slump and discontentment of the social and economic condition, the 1995 ‘60-0’ ironically emerged as a side effect of the significant economic growth in the country. Indeed, official documents from the World Bank talk about the denaturation of the Mauritian economic and social landscape from the tourism boom and the further stress the eroding comparative advantage such as a result of economic growth and development, leaving once again the social welfare of the population behind [6]. With the emergence of rapid economic growth, characterized as the ‘Mauritian Economic Miracle’,

new challenges emerged, accentuating the frustration of the Mauritian people. Reports from the IMF [8] further highlight the economic slowdown prior to the 1995 election, highlighting the devastating effect of Cyclone Hollanda on the country’s economy, forcing unpopular economic measures at the expense of the population. Rising inflation, economic slowdown and drop in domestic savings, combined with the devastating effect of Cyclone Hollanda causing 135 million USD worth of damage, generated another wave of dissatisfaction and loss of confidence in the government leading to another radical government change [22].

Similarly, almost 3 decades later history repeated itself with another whooping ‘60-0’ election in 2024, fueled by feeling of dissatisfaction towards the government which was further exacerbated by the rising cost of living. This election saw major coverage, from local, regional and even international news, associating the election outcome with a buildup of growing dissatisfaction, growing corruption and even growing authoritarian tendencies from the then ruling party [9, 13]. Indeed, based on previous events a similar pattern can be drawn in predicting this the 2024 election outcome, which was done by experts and commentators commenting the election on local news and radios who indeed were predicting a ‘60-0’ as election outcome [1]. With similar growing dissatisfaction of the government, growing corruption and unprecedented rapid economic decline, the bearing of all major factors was present to culminate to another historic reset in the political economy.

2.2. Ramgoolam vs Jugnauth

Mauritian politics presents a unique paradox, as the premiership position has been dominated by two families since the country’s independence. This phenomenon, often referred to as dynastic politics, mirrors a family-run political enterprise, despite Mauritius being recognized as a vibrant democracy with regular elections and clear power alternation. Dewoo [5] critiques this political structure, suggesting that Mauritius may have “the wrong type of political system” given its distinctive political landscape. While the country operates as a multiparty democracy, party leadership remains largely unchanged, resulting in a political cycle where power is consistently circulated among the same individuals. Existing literature on political dynasties characterizes Mauritian politics as a family business, with the top office consistently occupied by members of either the Ramgoolam or Jugnauth clans [5]. This leadership paradox is particularly ironic in the Mauritian context. On one hand, the nation has upheld free and fair elections every five years since independence. However, the lack of genuine political renewal, evidenced by the continued dominance of two political families, raises concerns about the true extent of democratic evolution in the country.

Both dynasties are well known within the Mauritian political landscape with then leaders being part of the London

Constitutional conference negotiating the country's independence [2]. For instance, Navin Ramgoolam (son of the first Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam) took office as Prime Minister on 11th November 2024 marking his fourth term, preceding Pravin Jugnauth (son of former Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth), who was in power for the last 10 years. Whilst there is genuine transfer of power, this phenomenon is explained by a lack of regulation regarding term limits for party leadership generating a stance of decades-long leadership without any contestation [10]. Though the existence of different parties with prominent presence on the political stage, the Labour Party (Ramgoolam Clan) and the Militant Socialist Movement (Jugnauth Clan) have always been at the forefront, often leading coalitions with other parties to form governments.

3. Politics of the People

3.1. Vir éMam

The 2014 general election represented a pivotal transformation in the political landscape of Mauritius, signaling a departure from traditional political practices. This election reflected a more contemporary approach to political engagement, as Mauritians demonstrated an evolving perception of politics. Notably, the rise of populism in Mauritian politics coincided with this shift, underscored by the extensive use of digital media and modern political tools. Kasenally and Awatar [12] highlight the instrumental role of social media in shaping the discourse surrounding the 2014 elections. A key element of this transformation was the emergence of the slogan "vir émam", which translates to "switch sides" in Kreol. Initially a video clip aiming at mocking the country's leadership by pointing their complete disconnection with the local reality as described by Oozeerally [17], the slogan became a political strategy by the opposition to ridicule the ruling government. Eventually, the phrase evolved into a symbol of public discontent. The widespread dissatisfaction was further exacerbated by discussions of a proposed constitutional amendment, which fueled mistrust toward the political elite. Ultimately, the slogan became a unifying force, rallying the population around shared grievances and resistance against the ruling establishment.

3.2. Bour Li Dehors

Similarly, 2024 represented another wave of populism in Mauritian politics, with the population voicing their anger and dissatisfaction about the country's leadership. The increasing prevalence of corruption and power consolidation nearing a totalitarian-like regime resulted in an erosion of trust in the country's leadership. Mpako and Ndoma [15, 16] highlighted the social tensions of the country preceding the 2024 elections, emphasizing the significant mistrust in both the media and electoral commission. With the "Bour Li Dehors" narrative, a

Cohen-like criminological scenario emerged. An atmosphere of moral panic gradually installed itself with the outgoing government becoming a folk devil – a common evil responsible to be blamed for all social and economic problems.

However, unlike in 2014, the "Bour Li Dehors" narrative, which translates to "Throw him out," emerged as a result of government's mismanagement of the environmental crisis caused by the wreckage of the MV Wakashio—a Japanese oil tanker that spilled significant amounts of heavy oil into Mauritian waters. This incident led to widespread public outrage, culminating in large-scale protests demanding the resignation of an already unstable government. Extensive media coverage, ranging from local media such as L'express [7] to international outlets like Reuters [18] and Al Jazeera [21], further amplified the movement, providing crucial momentum leading up to the 2024 elections. Additionally, the emergence of successive political scandals, each more severe than the last, further legitimized the slogan. By the time of the 2024 election, what began as a simple protest chant had evolved into a near-unanimous call for change, symbolizing a broader movement demanding the restoration of power to the Mauritian people.

4. Mauritius 'Marketing' Politics

4.1. The Mauritian Political Branding

Mauritian modern politics has now evolved into a politics of language, where short, catchy slogans has taken over the political scenery, transforming political campaigns into more of a marketing blitz than platforms for substantive debate. Slogans like the above mentioned "vir émam" and "bour li dehors" have shifted from just mere rallying cries to become the main backbone of political campaigns; they serve as powerful branding tools that shape public opinion and drive voter engagement. The current narrative of Mauritian politics suggests a strong marketing narrative with political parties increasingly prioritizing image, spectacle, and marketing strategies over policy-driven discourse. This reinforces the narrative of political success being measured more by visibility rather than vision. Political analysts have demonstrated how this politics of marketing intensifies political polarization, as seen in Weber et al.'s [23] analysis, where identity becomes shaped by marketing rather than ideology. Indeed, modern Mauritian politics has taken a more marketing-oriented approach where political identity is now forged through branding rather than ideological conviction, deepening divisions within the electorate.

Nonetheless, one can argue on the credibility of such an approach, where the focus has shifted from substantive policy changes to mass mobilization. Perman's [19] framework on political marketing offers a comprehensive understanding of how ideologies can be sold as rallying tools for public approval. The bour li dehors (BLD) narrative, for instance, was fueled by urgency to remove the country's leadership, con-

sequently becoming the central objective of the 2024 election.

4.2. The Role of the Media

Mauritian media has a history spanning over 250 years and is regarded as "one of the most established institutions in the Southern Hemisphere", as noted by Kasenally and Awatar [12]. Their analysis highlights the media's pivotal role in political empowerment. Throughout history, Mauritian politics has been deeply intertwined with the media, whether as an extension of political campaigns or as a tool for propaganda. Bowman (1984) illustrates this media-politics dynamic using the 1982 election, where the media was strategically used for political control. This period saw the rise of a 'branding' approach, framing the election as a turning point toward the decline into authoritarianism should the MMM come to power.

With the advent of social media, Mauritian politics has reinvented itself, benefiting from decentralized communication that allows direct engagement with the population, bypassing traditional intermediaries. This aligns with Araujo and Prior [3], who associate the rise of populism with a need to dissociate from traditional political mechanisms in favor of direct interaction with the public. In a similar pattern, in Mauritius, social media has acted as a catalyst for the shift toward a more marketing-driven approach to politics, where branding and digital outreach play a central role in political engagement.

5. Conclusion

Mauritian politics presents a fascinating case study for its unique complexities. Inherited from its former colonial master, many have argued about the inappropriateness of the system due to the country's distinct social landscape. Yet, this 'broken' system has evolved into a uniquely Mauritian model, shaped by the 60-0 phenomenon as a form of reset mechanism providing checks and balances. Predominantly marked by a diverse social fabric and exacerbated by a dynastic political structure controlled by two prominent families, the notion of populism steadily emerged as a means for the electorate to challenge and redefine political norms. Whilst Mauritian politics has undergone significant transformation over time, technological advancements and the emergence of new tools continue to redefine the political landscape through the reappropriation of political power by the people. This can provide solid groundwork for further research into the evolution of politics within the technological era where the advent of technology is creating an environment of proximity between the population and their leaders.

Abbreviations

BLD	Bour Li Dehors (Throw Him out)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MMM	Mouvement Mauricien Militant (Mauritian Militant Movement)
MSM	Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (Mauritian Socialist Movement)
PSM	Parti Socialiste Mauricien (Mauritian Socialist Party)

Author Contributions

Stephen Lyajoon is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Anon. (2024). Huit leaders de partis sont tombés dans cette election. Radio One. <https://r1.mu/huit-leaders-de-partis-sont-tombes-dans-cette-election/>
- [2] Anon. (n.d). Mauritius Constitutional Conference 1965. UK Parliament, Parliamentary Archives. https://archives.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/GB61_HL_PO_JO_10_11_1144_2235
- [3] Araújo, B., & Prior, H. (2021). Framing political populism: The role of media in framing the election of Jair Bolsonaro. *Journalism Practice*, 15(2), 226-242.
- [4] Bowman, L. (1984). Mauritius, 1984. *CSIS Africa Notes*, 34.
- [5] Dewoo, M. T. (2024). *The Democracy Illusion in Mauritius*. African Books Collective.
- [6] English, P. (1998). *Mauritius reigniting the engines of growth: a teaching case study-Teaching Notes*.
- [7] Figaro, E. (2020). Le facteur Labour dans l'équation «Bour Li Déor». *L'express*. <https://lexpress.mu/s/blog/382780/facteur-labour-dans-lequation-on-bour-li-deor>
- [8] International Monetary Fund. (1997). *Mauritius: Recent Economic Developments and Selected Issues*. IMF Staff Country Reports, 1997(030). <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781451827699.002>
- [9] Jean, A. (2024). Mauritius' 60-0 Sweep: A Double-Edged Sword and Test for Democracy. *Le Mauricien*. <https://www.lemauricien.com/le-mauricien/mauritius-60-0-sweep-a-double-edged-sword-and-test-for-democracy/658402/>

- [10] Kasenally, R. (2011). Mauritius: the not-so-perfect democracy. *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), 33-47.
- [11] Kasenally, R. (2020). Mauritius. In *Africa Yearbook Volume 16* (pp. 489-494). Brill.
- [12] Kasenally, R., & Awatar, D. (2017). Social media, elections and political engagement: The 2014 general election in Mauritius. *Journal of African Elections*, 16(2), 47-70.
- [13] Kupemba, D., & Mohabuth, Y. (2024). Mauritius government suffers electoral wipeout. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y3pg0ey99o>
- [14] Mathur, R. (2012). Party cooperation and the electoral system in Mauritius. *Electoral systems in divided societies: The Fiji constitution*.
- [15] Mpako, A., & Ndoma, S. (2024). Ahead of 2024 polls, Mauritians value political competition, unsure about electoral commission.
- [16] Mpako, A., & Ndoma, S. (2024). Mauritians approach election with diminished confidence in the freedom of their press.
- [17] Oozeerally, S. (2017). Vire Mam au-delà du slogan: une analyse chaotique de la non-linéarité des faits de langue dans le contexte Mauricien. In V. Ramharai (Ed.), *Kaleidoscope Creole: Creole Studies in Multilingual Mauritius, A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Mauritius Institute of Education, 109-127.
- [18] Paravicini, G. (2020). Thousands protest in Mauritius over dead dolphins, demand resignations. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/environment/thousands-protest-in-mauritius-over-dead-dolphins-demand-resignations-idUSKBN25P0G7/>
- [19] Perman, A. A. (2021). Credibility of political marketing on social networking sites in Malaysia: youth perspectives. *ES-TEEM Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(1), 15-25.
- [20] Russell, M., & Serban, R. (2021). The muddle of the 'Westminster model': A concept stretched beyond repair. *Government and Opposition*, 56(4), 744-764.
- [21] Sandooyea, S., Takada, H., & Steele, M. (2021). The devastation of the Mauritius oil spill is still unaddressed. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/6/we-must-make-sure-the-mauritius-oil-spill-does-not-repeat>
- [22] UNDHA. (1994). Mauritius - Cyclones Hollanda/Ivy Feb 1994 UN DHA Situation Reports 1-5.
- [23] Weber, T. J., Hydock, C., Ding, W., Gardner, M., Jacob, P., Mandel, N.,... & Van Steenburg, E. (2021). Political polarization: Challenges, opportunities, and hope for consumer welfare, marketers, and public policy. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 40(2), 184-205.
- [24] Zafar, A. (2006). Mauritius: An economic success story. *Yes Africa Can*, 2007, 91.