

Lesotho: The 2012 Elections, One Step Forward Two Steps backwards.

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Introduction

The May 2012 Lesotho general elections which saw the coalition led by Tom Thabane's All Basotho Convention (ABC) wrestle control of political power from Phakalitha Mosisili's Democratic Congress (DC) was the most closely contested elections in Lesotho since the opening of democratic space in 1993. In the 1993 election, the BCP won all the 65 constituencies with 74.7% of share of the vote. The April 1998 election resulted in a similar landslide victory for the LCD (the splinter from the BCP, which obviously had inherited the BCP's support base) which took 79 of the newly created 80 parliamentary seats with the 60.5% of share of the vote. The 2002 and the 2007 elections followed almost similar patterns with the LCD maintaining its dominance. This time round, even though Mosisili's DC garnered more votes than its congress rivals, the ABC and LCD, not a single one of them could muster an overall majority; the result was a hung parliament which enabled ABC and LCD to coalesce and lock out Mosisili from political office.

How free and fair were these elections? The 2012 elections like the previous four elections were monitored by a broad spectrum of international observers and resident missions. Certainly the 2012 elections were comparatively much fairer and cleaner than the previous four controversial elections. Not

only has Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission perfected its act since the 1998 elections, the introduction of the new regulations, with the proviso that votes would be counted at the polling stations helped matters considerably over the last two elections. The transportation of ballot boxes from polling stations to the counting stations traditionally provided room and opportunities for all kinds of electoral irregularities. Once this loophole was closed, the stage was set for a comparatively cleaner election.

But more significantly, the introduction of Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system with an 80/40 mixed ration of constituency seats (First Past the Post-FPTP) to Proportional Representation seats, by providing more seats and guaranteeing smaller parties presence in Parliament, appears to have tempered the cantankerous nature of Lesotho politics. Thus Lesotho has now gone through three relatively free and fair elections. This is indeed an indication of a great step forward on the road to democratic consolidation. However, the fractious nature of Lesotho politics remains, and the 2012 electoral outcome, producing a governing coalition with a majority of one in Parliament, does not augur well for stability over the coming months. It is important to note that the nine seats held by other small parties are not part of the

coalition. These parties save for the BCP have formed a block regulated by a signed agreement between themselves in terms of which their support for any grouping would be a collective one. Tom Thabane's governing coalition may collapse by either death or floor crossing by anyone member of the coalition, a phenomenon that is not very unlikely given the aggressive campaigns Mosisili has embarked on alleging that government has been stolen from the DC. The parties and the political consequences of such a collapse may be too ghastly to contemplate. This certainly does not augur well for the consolidation of the democratic process initiated in 1993. So what do we make of all this?

The Electoral Outcome

Altogether 18 political parties contested the elections. However, the real players were the three Basotho Congress Party (BCP) offsprings - the ruling Democratic Congress (DC) which had just broken from the Lesotho Congress of Democrats (LCD) which up to then had been the ruling party, and the All Basotho Congress (ABC) a breakaway from the LCD in the run up to the 2007 elections. The Basotho National Party (BNP), the ruling party throughout much of Lesotho post-colony had so declined that it could not even win a single constituency seat. Thanks to the PR system they managed to get five PR seats and are part of the ruling coalition. The rest of the contesting parties could be characterized as a one person outfits with the exception of the Communist Party backed Popular Front for Democracy (PFD), the only non-congress party to win a constituency and two PR seats. In fact PFD is the only ideologically based party in the country.

And so with just over 50% voter turnout, the Democratic Congress (DC) won 40% of the vote which gave them 41 constituency seats out of a total of the 80 constituencies and seven compensatory seats under the PR system, a total of 48 seats, but unfortunately not enough to form a government in the 120 seat Parliament. The All Basotho Congress (ABC) won 25% of the vote giving them 26 constituency seats and four compensatory seats under the PR system, total of 30 seats. The Lesotho Congress of Democrats (LCD) won 21.67% of the vote giving them 12 constituency seats and fourteen compensatory seats under PR system, total of 26 seats. The Popular Front For democracy (PFD) came in with 2.5% of the vote, one constituency seat, and two compensatory seats. The Basotho National Party (BNP) as we have already indicated could not garner enough votes to win a constituency. With 4.17% of the vote they

should have, but they were too thinly spread throughout the country. That notwithstanding, this gave them 5 compensatory seats and earned them a place in the governing coalition.

Lesotho 2012 Elections: Votes and Seats Distribution by the Main Political Parties

Votes	%	Constituency	Compensatory	Total
DC	40%	41	7	48
ABC	25%	26	4	30
LCD	22%	12	14	26
PFD	2.5%	1	2	3
BNP	4.17%	-	5	5

Making Sense of the Confusion

Interestingly, the pattern of voting has not changed much. These figures are not much different from the voting patterns over the last five elections since 1993. In the 1993 election, the BCP won the entire 65 constituency at play, with 74.7% of share of the vote. The April 1998 election resulted in a similar landslide victory for the LCD (the splinter from the BCP which had inherited its support base), who took 79 of the 80 seats with the 60.5% of share of the vote. The 2002 elections were no different with the LCD continued dominance with 79 out of 80 constituency seats. Interestingly that one constituency went to the Lesotho People's Congress (LPC), also a splinter from the BCP led by Ntsu Mokhehle's former Law and constitutional affairs Minister, Kelebone Maope.

The 2007 elections were however different. The LCD split in the run up to the elections and the new breakaway, Tom Thabane's All Basotho Congress (ABC) was to split the Congress political constituency. The result was: LCD with 62 constituency seats, ABC with 17 seats and once again the LPC with one seat. In other words, the Congress parties took all the constituency seats. And once again in 2012, the LCD splits in the run up to the elections, but outcome was almost similar; the Congress offsprings took all but one of the constituency seats.

Comparative Analysis of the Voting Patterns, 1993 -2012 Constituency seats won by main Parties

	BCP	BNP	LCD	PFD	ABC	LPC	DC
1993	65	-	-	-	-	-	-
1998	-	1	79	-	-	-	-
2002	-	-	79	-	-	1	-
2007	-	-	62	-	17	1	-
2012	-	-	12	1	26	-	41

These figures would seem to suggest that the Congress family of parties remain the dominant force in Lesotho electoral politics. In 1993 it won all the contested seats. In 1998 it lost only one seat to its Nationalist rivals, the BNP. In 2002 following the split, the LCD replaced the BCP as the dominant party, and once again it won 79 of the contested 80 constituency seats. In 2007 following yet another split, the Congress parties still managed to win all the contested constituency seats. Once again in 2012, the Congress group of parties took 79 of the 80 constituency parties.

This dominance of the Congress tradition in Lesotho politics has of course spawned a new type of contestation over control of the Sotho state. The traditional contestation of power between the BCP and its Nationalist rivals, the BNP has been replaced by uncompromising contestation for political control inside the Congress movement, a contestation which has been characterised by breakaways at every election – the LCD and LPC from the mother body, the BCP; the ABC from LCD, and more recently the DC from the LCD. A closer look at the 2012 electoral outcome would seem to suggest that the Congress movement is now divided between the urban and rural. While the traditional BCP urban constituency – the professionals, the middle classes and its urban sans culottes voted for Thabane's ABC, the old BCP rural constituency was divided between the LCD and the DC. And this is likely to map the future trends of political contestation within the Congress movement. But what is all this about?

Much of the analyses of the successive crises in Lesotho have unfortunately been informed by the somewhat false assumption that the Lesotho electoral crises has been about an inappropriate electoral system and that a dose of electoral engineering would in the long run create conditions of political stability and democratic consolidation. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Lesotho crisis is precisely about contestation over resources, now taking place against a background of a globalising world economy which has had an adverse effect on a labour reserve economy of the Lesotho type, and intensified the predatory instincts of comparatively weak political and economic elite.

The formal return of democracy in Lesotho occurred against a background of a changing world order. Declining resource base and the continued peripheralization of economically marginal states has thus been the fate of the weak and the poor states within the world economic system. This in turn has

triggered off new struggles and intensified old contestation over resources, engendering conflicts and wars of annihilation over control of the state, the main institution through which accumulation has been mediated in economies of this type. Thus it would seem to me that what has happened in Lesotho over the past nineteen years is not particularly unique. The process of democratization initiated in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) over a decade ago has had mixed results. The reality in SSA is that a majority of countries have literally sunk into intractable crises. Lesotho easily fits into this category; a typical example of a post-colonial state that has been contested rather uncompromisingly by a small stratum of property hunters over the entire period of its political independence. In recent years, competition over access to state resources - ministerial and senior managerial positions in government parastatals, the army, and other institutions - have become very severe, and in return has heightened a pattern of political intrigue.

These tendencies have further been exacerbated by the continued economic decline of the Lesotho state. Recent figures suggest that migrant workers' remittances account for 46.8% of income for all households, and 55.1% for rural households. Mineworkers' remittances, on the other hand, now account for 44.7% of total households and 52.7% of rural households. Despite the recent shifts from export of cheap labour to that of skilled labour, and more recently, water to South Africa, the state of the economy has hardly changed. This deteriorating nature of the economy no doubt constitutes the backdrop to the contestation of state-power that has torn the Congress Movement apart.

Prospects for the Future

If what we have said above is correct, what then are prospects for the future of democratic consolidation in Lesotho politics? Politics in economies of the Lesotho type is indeed a zero-sum game. There is not much to be gained by sitting in opposition benches confined to the role of a permanent opposition. Having been accustomed to the exercise of state-power over the last 19 years is Mosisili and his DC colleagues likely to pack up their bags and surrender the political terrain without a spirited battle? This appears unlikely, already the DC is touring its constituencies informing their voters that they won the election but the government was stolen from them. If this is anything to go by, then we should expect a spirited fight back from the DC, and given that the governing coalition

only has a majority of one in Parliament (with the block of other non-coalition parties outside) , we are probably looking at five years of instability and uncertainty.

'Politics', Adrian Leftwitch tells us, is the `collective activities of conflict, co-operation, negotiations involved in the use, production and distribution of resources', that is, decisions on how resources are used or distributed and the inevitable disputes which arise from the calculations about who wins and who loses. Leftwitch adds that 'fortunately, human beings are the only species which have deliberately devised conscious methods of trying to resolve differences, and cooperation over the use of resources, they are thus in a position to avoid disputes arising from calculations over winners and losers.'

The experience of Lesotho over the entire period of its post-colonial existence does not appear to bear Leftwitch out. This political elite, it would seem to me, prefers to have its own way, and is generally uninterested in forging negotiations and co-operations to avoid disputes over resources. Because of these reasons, democratic consolidation in Lesotho remains particularly vulnerable and unstable. Because of the tradition and culture of uncompromising contestation of power that we have described above, the 2012 electoral has provided an environment in which these contestations are probably going to be taken to new heights. Thus as the tussle for political control continues we are likely to witness a period of political instability over the next five years. The 2012 electoral outcome is certainly a step in the wrong direction, and a repeat of the 1998 crises is quite a possibility.

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