

Impact of Coalitions on Stability in Lesotho

How Reforms can Stabilise the Country

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Abstract

The advent of coalition politics in 2012 ushered a new dynamic into politics in Lesotho. Since the 2012 National Assembly elections, no political party has won an outright majority, which would allow it to form a government alone. In 2012, the Democratic Congress (DC), the then ruling party led by Pakalitha Mosisili, fell short of attaining an outright majority and could not form a coalition with other political parties. Therefore, the first coalition government in Lesotho was formed by the All-Basotho Convention (ABC) Party, the then second largest party led by Thomas Thabane (the Basotho National Party (BNP)), and the Lesotho Congress Party (LCD). This article looks at the impact of coalitions on the instability of governance in Lesotho and examines whether the national reforms process, which is supported by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), has the potential to stabilise the country. It is argued that coalition governments exploit the vulnerabilities of the weak governance institutions. An argument is advanced on the significance of institutional transformation in stabilising the country. The national reforms process is one such opportunity to reconstitute the governance institutions. The article concludes with proposals for policies that would allow for the realisation of the reforms.

Introduction

Lesotho experienced a difficult period between 2012 and 2022, with four changes of government and three elections. All these administrations were coalitions: All Basotho Convention (ABC), Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Basotho National Party (BNP) called Letsema 2012-2015; Democratic Congress (DC), LCD, Popular Front for Democracy (PFD), Maramatlou

Freedom Party (MFP), Basotho Congress Party (BCP), Lesotho People's Congress (LPC) and National Independent Party (NIP) nicknamed Khokanyan'a phiri 2015-2017; and the ABC, BNP, Alliance of Democrats (AD), and Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL) (called Four by Four) 2017-2020. These were brought in and replaced through elections necessitated by the failure of a previous coalition government. There was a grand coalition of ABC and DC in 2020-2022, which was a result of the change of guard in parliament without the need for an election. The ABC, the lead coalition partner, withdrew from the coalition that it led and others followed suit. This was a tactical way of removing Tom Thabane without the disgrace of motion of no confidence. Characteristically, coalitions in Lesotho have been formed for convenience, but have been chaotic and unstable. This makes Lesotho an important case study on coalition governments.

The idea of reforms which has for long been called for by the civil society was formally accepted by the government in 2014 with advice from the Commonwealth. The political leadership in Lesotho, both government and opposition parties, went to study how New Zealand (which uses the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation system and has coalition governments for a long time) has had steady governance and a stable country. The challenges of the coalition government mounted and warranted intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2015 the SADC realised that reforms could be the solution. Since then, the country has been grappling with instability, and security challenges; the reforms have not been easy to achieve and are not yet implemented at the time of writing this paper.

The effect of coalitions on the instability of Lesotho is explained in this paper, and the analysis further examines whether reforms could arrest the challenges to governance that result from coalition governments, and so ensure stability in the country.

The study done for this article assessed the reasons why coalition governments are unstable, and why they never finish a term of office in Lesotho. It sheds some light on the reasons for the instability and offers some policy recommendations that may assist in bringing stability to coalition governments in Lesotho. In order to unpack the research problem, specific questions were set.¹

Problem Statement

Lesotho is a sovereign democratic kingdom, with a parliamentary system and this brings a variety of elements into play, such as traditional and modern leadership. The party system and parliamentary democracy have presented challenges to ensuring stable governance and political stability in Lesotho.

The introduction of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation system has improved the situation, but exposed the country to coalition politics. The intricacies of managing coalition governments have proven challenging. For three coalitions running, none has lasted for more than two years, while instability has been increasing. The reforms process was introduced as a way to reverse this situation. The problem that the study done for this

article sought to address is the intricacies of managing coalitions. It further sought to establish whether the proposed reform process can really help Lesotho to become a stable country.

Central Question

The central question was: Why is it so difficult for a coalition government to function effectively in Lesotho? Contrary to the popularly held view that coalitions brought parties that had not worked together in the past closer together, it seems things are even worse than in the era of interparty conflicts.

The following sub-questions were formulated:

1. What has been causing instability within coalition governments in Lesotho since 2012?
2. Does proximity to power and resources impact on the stability of coalition governments in Lesotho?
3. Are reforms an effective policy response to address instability in coalition governments?
4. What can be done to safeguard coalition governments in Lesotho?

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research methodology. Primary data was collected by means of face-to-face interviews with relevant stakeholders, such as the Independent Elections Commission (IEC), political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs), and academia to determine people's attitudes and views on coalition governments in Lesotho. The qualitative study method was used to review available research articles, and government policy documents as secondary data.

A few respondents were selected as the sample for the study, based on their experience working in government, political parties, and other relevant stakeholders in Lesotho. These stakeholders included CSOs, the security sector, the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL), traditional leaders, the judiciary, the former National Reforms Authority (NRA) personnel, academia, media, the public, and youth. Face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to engage respondents and probe for in-depth views on the topic.^{2,3}

The data was analysed using content analysis and document analysis following a review of the literature on Lesotho's elections over time.⁴ This methodology resonates well with the theoretical basis of the article.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Coalition government is a form of government where two or more political parties come together to form a government. According to Kumar,⁵ a coalition government is formed when a political alliance comes to power, or when only a plurality (not a majority) has not been reached

and several political parties work together to govern. This comes as no political party would have received 50 per cent or more of the votes. As a result of Proportional Representation (PR) and MMP representation electoral systems, the proliferation of many political parties makes it difficult for one party to achieve outright majority to form a government; and in order to resolve a hung parliament, coalition governments formation ensues. From an inclusion point of view, coalition governments come highly recommended as this type of governance ensures that more than one political party is directly involved in governance. Kumar⁶ articulates that coalition governments are made up of democratically elected representatives, but they are a way to grab power regardless of the verdict of the electorate. Coalition politics is merely a partisan grab to capitalise on a political crisis where no political party has received the majority of votes to form a government. Coalitions are filled with challenges and each coalition member suffers from insecurities regarding the coalition, which tends to destabilise the government. Further, citizens also cannot be sure when the coalition government will give way and leave them in a state of political anarchy. Coalition governments are applauded as a means of power sharing between various political parties including smaller parties.⁷

Coalition politics takes five main forms:

- (a) electoral alliances aimed at increasing chances of winning forthcoming elections;
- (b) majority/minority (minimum-winning) coalition governments which result from the inability of one single party to win elections outright in order to form a government on its own accord;
- (c) grand (maximum-winning) coalition governments, a partnership involving two main parties joining forces to control state power;
- (d) governments of national unity which often emerges in post-conflict situations as part of a peace agreement;
- (e) legislative coalitions involving inter-party partnerships to influence legislative outcomes.⁸

The literature reviewed further argues that coalition governments promote democracy and representative administration.⁹ Coalition governments, if run properly, are likely to ensure that a variety of views and opinions are considered and, therefore, are regarded as a sign of maturity.

While coalition governments in Lesotho seem to be problematic and challenging, there are examples of stable and ensuring coalition governments elsewhere are stable. The New Zealand example which Lesotho drew lessons from, Germany and India are examples of functional coalitions. This article uses New Zealand and India as benchmarks.

Stable coalitions in New Zealand and India

Globally, coalition governments have been around for a long time and different countries including the United Kingdom (UK), Finland, and Australia have witnessed formation of

coalition governments. The researchers in this article focus on India and New Zealand as examples of successful coalition governments.

New Zealand and India present some of the world's best cases on coalition government formations which can offer lessons for other countries. Although coalition governments are often unstable and struggle to complete their office terms, in India it is argued that 'coalition governments have been effective in enhancing democratic legitimacy, representativeness, and national unity'.¹⁰ These could be formal or informal arrangements. However, in Lesotho, the formation of coalition governments has been informal over the years as there is no legislation to guide and protect coalition government formation.¹¹ This causes and perpetuates the instability that is seen in Lesotho.

Political parties in Lesotho leave coalitions at any time, not based on ideological differences but mainly on personal interests.

Background to political conflict in Lesotho

The intricacies of the coalitions in Lesotho occur within a particular discernible reality of sustained lack of national consensus, both intra and interparty conflict, political instability, and violence. Key governance moments with a clear mark on the current coalition challenges in Lesotho are the following:

- the 1965 surprise victory and somersault to independence;
- state of emergency and aborted democracy of 1970;
- the 1974 failed coalition attempt and violence;
- the 1985 miraculous elections;
- the military takeover in 1986;
- the praetorianism and the constitution making towards the 1993 elections;
- the post-1993 instability;
- the 1998 chaos;
- the 2002 tranquillity and progress;
- the post-ABC emergence between 2006-2011.

These key moments are elaborated on later in the article. It is a departure from what Lesotho under its founder used to be:

'From the formation of the Lesotho nation-state in the 1820s under the leadership of its founder, Moshoeshe I, until the present, the Basotho are known to have practised the best form of popular democratic participation under the common assembly or *Pitso* system'.¹²

Colonialism damaged the Basotho nation by destroying the all-encompassing governance system that recognised the rights and welfare of its members.

The modern state and institutional challenges: 1965-1986

In their independence negotiations, the Basotho not only lost the opportunity to reclaim the pre-colonial Basotho system, but inherited an authoritarian, unequal, violent, and inhumane state that generates conflict that it cannot contain. What parties differed on was mainly the powers of the king. The MFP wanted an executive monarch, the BNP wanted a constitutional monarch, while the BCP was rather radical and desired a ceremonial head of state. Mothibe¹³ describes this as political elitism placing its survival interests above what the country needs. According to the agreement adopted by the British and all political parties, the Basotho had to have elections in 1965, complete the constitution, and apply for the transfer of independence a year later.¹⁴ The Basotho ran pre-independence elections in 1965. At the time, the BCP was the favourite party, having won earlier district council elections. In the 1965 elections, the underdogs, the BNP, had a narrow win, upsetting the favourites (the BCP).

Table 1: Party votes and seats in 1965

Year	Party	Votes	Seats	% Votes	% Seats
1965	BNP	108 162	31	42	52
	BCP	103 050	25	40	42
	MFP	42 837	4	17	6
TOTAL		259 825	60	99	100

Source: Mahao,¹⁵ and authors' formulations

This result changed the political dynamics. The liberation and Pan-Africanist oriented BCP, which pioneered independence debate in modern politics in Lesotho, questioned the BNP's slim majority and rejected its fitness to receive independence. It was argued, 'Leabua has no popular support of the Basotho'.¹⁶ The BCP then changed its position on the King, wanting more powers for the King,¹⁷ and also opposed the independence handover.¹⁸ On the other hand, the government was determined to show its authority. At the last independence conference in London, where it was concluded that the Basotho met the requirements for the transfer, the BCP leader opposed the decision and warned the British that if they gave Leabua independence, 'they give him an army too'.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the independence was transferred. Despite the weak majority, the BNP pushed through, and defeated the BCP rejection to the independence motion with the support of the MFP member who crossed the floor to support the government.²⁰ The BNP government, under fierce resistance from the BCP and the King who was not content with some provisions of the proposed constitution, received the sympathy of the BCP. In 1968, the King called for a rally to openly reject the constitution. The BCP supported this, a position which clashed with that of the government which did not only disapprove but cancelled and warned the people against attending the rally. The BCP insisted and mobilised the people to participate. On the way, Rathoma, who tried to stop one of the

buses ferrying BCP supporters to the rally, was assassinated. The rally could not go ahead as the government opened fire on those who gathered, and the King himself narrowly escaped death.

The electoral model inherited was not fit as a power sharing formula, but glaring was the immaturity of the political leadership to work effectively and peacefully in a modern political system.

In 1970, when it was clear as the results trickled in that the BNP was losing, it was speculated that the prime minister would concede defeat²¹; shortly thereafter, a public announcement was stopped over the radio and the public was warned to be close to their radios for an important announcement. The following was aired over the radio:

'I, the Prime Minister of Lesotho, in terms of the constitution hereby declare Lesotho to be in a State of Emergency. The decision I and my ministers have just taken is in full consideration of the best interests of the nation. This drastic step has been taken to protect not only the liberty of the individual but also law and order. The Nation requires the maintenance of law and order. An atmosphere of fear and threats of violence was spread throughout the country by the opposition on the eve of the elections. On election day, the results were marred by actual acts of violence all over the country. Now that I have declared the State of Emergency, I hereby suspend the Constitution, pending the drafting of a new one. I call upon you to remain quiet and go about your daily duties in the normal manner. Wait for further instructions.'²²

The public rose in protest and the state reaction was violence and brutality against those perceived to be BCP supporters and its sympathisers.

Table 2: 1970 results²³

Year	Party	Votes	Seats	% Votes	% Seats In Parliament
1970	BCP	152 907	36	49.8	55
	BNP	120 686	23	42.2	35
	MFP	7 650	1	7.3	10
TOTAL		285 257	65	99.3	100

Table 2 demonstrates yet another distortion of the votes and representation by the electoral model. Both the BNP and BCP shared the votes of the MFP, but the BNP's increase in the number of people who voted for it and the percentage thereof did not change for better its seats allocation and representation. This reflects the inadequacy of the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) model, which is exactly the distortion it had made in the previous elections. However, it was the immaturity of the leadership in handling modern political governance that was again manifested. The leaders of the BCP were arrested and King Moshoeshoe II, who vehemently opposed this, was sent to a forced sabbatical. Later, the leaders of political parties that contested in the elections, Leabua Jonathan (BNP), Ntsu Mokhehle (BCP), Tšepo Mohaleroe

(MFP), and Charles Mofeli United Democratic Party (UDP) annulled the polls²⁴ allegedly for the unity government which never materialised. Until 1974, the political conflict in Lesotho has been intra-party in nature. The intra-party nature of the conflict showed when the BCP could not agree on the interim government proposition. One group of BCP, led by the Deputy Leader Pokane Ramoreboli, went to the interim national assembly²⁵ which was intended to pave the way for elections. The other group, led by the leader, Ntsu Mokhehle, attempted a coup²⁶ and fled the country when it failed.

Lesotho experienced unprecedented violence when the BCP sympathisers were purged in the civil service, and state brutality was unleashed on those labelled as enemies. The government established the peace corps, which was a community based anti-crime movement but practically persecuted the BCP members. At the time the BCP had the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA) outside the country launching several attacks on Lesotho. The BNP-BCP divide permeated the people and disrupted the social fibre and the key unifying institutions in the form of family and church were not spared.

During this period, the BNP had turned against apartheid South Africa and drifted towards Eastern countries, embracing the socialist ideology. This globally portrayed Leabua as progressive as he provided shelter to the ANC and Pan African Congress (PAC) refugees fleeing apartheid in South Africa. Despite this acclaimed international position, BNP faced discontent internally for leaning towards communist oriented countries, leading to the party splitting, and the formation of NIP. Besides, more pressing was the democracy legitimacy deficit at home. Sad for the BCP, at the same time its LLA was eclipsed by the dissident groups' apartheid used to destabilise Southern Africa. This is well captured by Wisfelder: 'ANC exiles and BNP developed close relations, while LLA (the BCP military wing) found sanctuary in South Africa and assistance from the notorious Vlakplaas counterinsurgency unit'.²⁷ In 1985, one of the key leaders of the BCP in exile Koenyama Chakela came home to contest elections against the approval of the leader but was assassinated on the way. In desperation to stay in power, the BNP created barriers for the other parties²⁸; hence the opposition all pulled out and the BNP candidates returned unopposed. Six months down the line, the BNP was ousted in a military coup. Kapa²⁹ argues that 'the 1986 military coup in Lesotho was the price BNP paid for its assertive policy'.

The military regime and the return to constitutional order

It was in the military period between 1986-1993 that the current constitution was drawn through the national constituent assembly. The military regime suspended political activity. This quelled the partisan political hostilities and the BNP-BCP confrontations to a degree. The King had executive powers but exercised them with the advice of the military council. The seven-year military rule saw many important developments and the following are key:

- During this period, the King was sent into exile in England³⁰ (ostensibly on a sabbatical). This created tension in the country and the drift between the military and the

chieftaincy. Later the King was dethroned and an outspoken principal chief of Thaba-Bosiu was removed from the position. The eldest son of the King took the crown.

- In paving way for the return of the country to constitutional rule, the military government invited political parties to the national constituent assembly to draw the new constitution. Although at the beginning the parties resisted, they later accepted and drew the constitution. The civil society was not happy with the decision of the leaders to accept to deal with constitution making under Order No. 4, which barred them from interacting politically with the people. The constitution which was also sent to the public for comment, allowed for the FPTP electoral model. The new constitution did not bring any fundamental change on the recruitment of the security chiefs. Besides, the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative remained delicate. This is coupled with the undefined freedom of members of parliament to cross the floor and change loyalties.

The post-1993 political challenges and instability

The BCP landslide victory in the first elections on the return to civilian rule in 1993 with 75 per cent of the voters' support and 100 per cent representation³¹ was met with resistance. The opposition rejected the BCP victory. 'The BNP, stunned at being trounced by the BCP, questioned the legitimacy of the electoral process and by extension of the elected BCP regime and soon set about rendering the state ungovernable'.³² The military and the civil service, which had been largely influenced by the past, made governing very hard for the BCP. In January 1994, hardly a year after elections, there were hostilities between two factions in the army. Further, ministers were abducted by the army and the deputy prime minister was assassinated by the soldiers. The high-powered SADC delegation, made up of Presidents Ketumile Masire and Robert Mugabe of Botswana and Zimbabwe, respectively, was joined by FW de Klerk of South Africa and Nelson Mandela of the ANC to intervene in mediation. The latter two leaders were thought to be relevant given the Lesotho-South Africa proximity and the then approaching elections in South Africa. In the second part of the year, SADC was in Lesotho again, this time after the removal of the prime minister by the King. This was directly linked to the unresolved issues of the dethroned King. In the SADC brokered process, the prime minister was reinstated and the King reclaimed the palace, but Lesotho was far from being stable. The BCP internal woes were getting out of hand. The BCP intra-conflict and the factionalism made it difficult for the party to lead the government.

In 1997 the BCP split, and the splinter party, LCD led by Ntsu Mokhehle, retained the majority in parliament. In terms of the constitution, Section 87(2), he who leads the Executive as the prime minister is the one who has confidence of the majority of the National Assembly. On the other hand, the constitution stipulates in Sections 87 (5) & (6) that the office of the prime minister becomes vacant if he resigns, is removed, and/or ceases to be a member of the National Assembly. In this instance, none of the above applied for Mokhehle to leave office. Put differently, the party that never contested the elections led the government. This was

vehemently challenged by the discontented BCP and the other parties. This was a very rough pre-election environment as the interparty conflict was at its peak.

The 1998 polls came and were won by the LCD overwhelmingly. Of the 80 constituencies, 79 were taken by the ruling party with the BNP taking only one. The elections were outrightly rejected by the opposition parties – the BNP, MFP, BCP, and other smaller parties – which staged a protest that disabled the functioning of government. The government offices were made to close and were at the command of opposition activists, government vehicles confiscated and keys held in custody by the protesting parties which camped at the royal palace for six weeks. The SADC intervention, where Deputy President Mbeki facilitated a ballot recount by the commission led by South African Justice Pius Langa was not conclusive in its findings. It said that there was no rigging found, while it was not possible for the commission to declare the elections free and fair.³³ The SADC did not release the report in Lesotho nor at the SADC meeting in Mauritius. This mismanagement of the report strengthened the suspicions of opposition parties that South Africa was biased; violence mounted and the government was rendered dysfunctional.

The new prime minister stated to SADC: ‘The only intervention I can and do request is of a military nature’.³⁴ The military intervention by South Africa, ostensibly on behalf of SADC, led to the destruction of property but also a change of the electoral model. Besides, the military intervention that kept the government in place, there was an agreement to review the electoral model and establish an Interim Political Authority (IPA) to bring all parties together.

The change from FPTP to the MMP brought relative stability and observable progress after the 2002 elections, except that the LCD split in 2006, though it retained its majority against the defecting ABC. In 2007, there was a fierce contest against the appropriate application of the MMP electoral model. The LCD returned to office under controversial circumstances where it undermined the model to gain more seats. In explaining the discontent, Professor Jorgen Elklit who guided Lesotho in designing the model argued that: ‘anxious to be returned with more than the slim majority Mosisili commanded before defection of Thabane, the LCD devised a strategy that would deliberately annihilate the MMP’.³⁵ The conflict was resolved by changing the law to abolish the second ballot. The 2007-2011 period marked a very hostile confrontation between the ruling LCD and the staunch opposition of the ABC, which was led by Mosisili’s former political confidante, Thabane.

The political conflict that has beset Lesotho has defined the context within which the coalition politics are being played out to date. The major conflict, which was also definitive for Lesotho politics, was over independence. This showed that the political leadership was more opportunistic than principled in its approach to how the modern Lesotho should be governed.³⁶

The inter-party BCP-BNP conflict intensified and escalated at the expense of political development and institution building. In the process, the inter-party conflict swiftly became intra-party as well. Political parties faced internal conflict which they could not handle, something that resulted in the proliferation of political parties. This political discord at both intra-party and inter-party level in Lesotho has rendered Lesotho unstable:

'Since independence from Britain in 1966, the political history of Lesotho has been dominated by instability, controversy, and conflict sometimes spilling over into violence'.³⁷

The change in the electoral model that has distorted party support in representation has accommodated more parties in parliament, thus reducing discontent; but it has not transformed the conflict. Makoa, as cited by Mahlamenyane,³⁸ argues that the MMP has not cured but opened a new side to the political conflict. There is consensus among researchers that political parties as agents of democracy are also engineers of instability given the intra- and inter-party conflicts.³⁹ The politics of Lesotho are defined by the nature of the interaction between the political actors.

Characteristically, Lesotho is driven by the politics of personality cult. In the event that political parties are weak in their internal democracy as is the case in Lesotho, Kapa and Shale⁴⁰ postulate that personality politics become the party norm, spilling over into the national politics. Considering the weak governance institutions, the rogue elements not controllable in party politics easily encroach into the governance of the country as well. Leaders who break away continue to have the same attitudes in the new parties as they create rivalry with their parent parties. Therefore, coalition governments in Lesotho are not only a product of unresolved conflicts but also a manifestation of the effects of such. In comprehending the intricacies of coalitions in Lesotho, the quality of leadership, over and above institutions and processes, is fundamental.

'The flawed leadership of the political elite is the root cause of both intra-party and inter-party conflict in Lesotho. Conflict results from the intense rivalry among the political elite over access to state power and resources in the context of poor resource endowment and the lack of a vibrant and productive private sector. Thus, the electoral contest becomes a bitter zero-sum struggle since electoral defeat could mean a loss of livelihood'.⁴¹

The challenges of managing coalitions in Lesotho can be understood from different perspectives. However, political conflict is a prominent factor. It is against this strong conflict-ridden political history that the focus turns on to coalition politics.

2012-2022 Coalition governments in Lesotho: Convenience and chaos

The adoption of the MMP electoral system ensured that parliament is inclusive and reduces the chances of post-election violence in Lesotho, but it left the party system unreformed.⁴² This model and the electoral law gave rise to coalition government formation as no parties could form a government single-handedly with the current legal framework.

Lesotho has had coalition governments for 12 years since 2012 as a result of the MMP. This followed many years of the country's use of the FPTP electoral system, or winner takes-all system. Following the 2012 parliamentary elections in Lesotho, no political party won an outright majority to form a government. Although the DC had the highest number of seats in

parliament, it failed to form a coalition government. The second highest party, ABC, courted the BNP and the LCD.

Confrontational and antagonistic coalition 2012-2015

In 2012, Lesotho saw an emergence of coalition politics. The DC which secured more votes than any other party found it difficult to form a government, but the second largest party ABC did. The LCD, the former arch-rival of the ABC and the BNP (also a sworn rival of the LCD), joined the ABC led coalition. None of these parties had prior knowledge about coalition formation but they still formed it nevertheless.⁴³ This coalition lasted for a year and in the second year, the challenges seemed to be insurmountable. There was a fallout between prime minister Tom Thabane and his deputy, Mothetjoa Metsing. Thabane, acting in line with the constitution and in terms of the Lesotho Defence Force Act (1996), advised the King to remove the army commander Lieutenant General Tlali Kamoli and commission Brigadier Maaparankoe Mahao as the lieutenant general and the commander. The deputy prime minister made a public announcement refuting that. At the time, the LCD of the deputy prime minister had courted the main opposition (DC), the party that broke away from the LCD, hardly eight months before the 2012 elections. In response, the prime minister acted swiftly to prorogue parliament in fear of a looming motion of no confidence. The SADC intervention sought to open parliament but not for parliament to transact its usual business but allocate budget for the brought-forward elections in 2015.

Coalition challenges – Inter- and intra-party conflict

The 2015 elections resulted in yet another, but differently led, coalition. Since both big parties, the DC led by Pakalitha Mosisili and the ABC led by Tom Thabane, fell short of attaining an outright majority, another coalition was imperative. The DC formed a coalition with the LCD and other smaller political parties, namely: the PFD, the BCP, the LPC, the MFP, and the NIP. The management of many small parties in a coalition was less of a trouble. Mosisili managed the coalition partners fairly well.

The political instability and the security challenges in the army intensified. Within the two years the army command had been changed, Brigadier Maaparankoe Mahao was assassinated by the soldiers and the coalition collapsed. The discord within the leading coalition partner DC led not only to the split of the party but to the demise of the coalition as well. The deputy leader of the DC, Monyane Moleleki, who was discontented at not being the deputy prime minister, challenged Mosisili's leadership of the party. He orchestrated Mosisili's ouster by going to court, but he failed. However, Moleleki staged a motion of no confidence in the prime minister in parliament. This was successful, but instead of handing over power to Moleleki, Mosisili advised the King to dissolve parliament and call for elections.

The badly contested 2017 polls

The DC-LCD electoral pact could not prevent the ABC from amassing the support that allowed it to coalesce with the sympathisers, the BNP and the RCL – this time joined by the DC splinter party, the AD led by Monyane Moleleki. The internal jostling within the ABC led to the removal of the leader, Thomas Thabane, in the change of guard which did not warrant elections. This paved way for a grand coalition of the ABC and the DC, each coming with its entourage of well-wishers and sympathisers.

In October 2022, parliamentary elections were held, and the newly formed Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) led by a businessman, Sam Matekane, won the majority of seats but still fell short and could not form a government alone. Thus, to form a government, the party went into an agreement with the AD and the Movement for Economic Change (MEC). Later around October 2023, threatened by a motion of no confidence, the RFP beefed up its coalition by accepting the Basotho Action Party (BAP), HOPE, and the LPC into the coalition. This brought the total number of parties in the current government to seven, equal in size to the coalition that was led by Mosisili.

Coalition governments seem to be unstable in Lesotho as stated above. They remain chaotic and seem to be just for convenience, without serious commitment to addressing the nation's concerns such as unemployment, poverty, and social ills including gender-based violence (GBV). However, coalitions in Lesotho have become an unstable agreement in uncertain times, where there are no permanent political allies or enemies. Kumar⁴⁴ reiterates:

'Often, the parties in the coalition are at odds with each other on even basic issues. This leads to a lot of political infighting apart from creating political compulsions for parties to compromise on their ideals and values. Often, coalitions cause the ruling party or leading parties to form alliances with a smaller party with fewer number of seats. This enables them to grab power again and go against the verdict of the electorate for change. If there are too many parties controlling the fate of the people, anarchy and disorder will eventually result because no single party is in power. Multiple parties mean a multitude of opinions on every issue and lack of agreement on policies or their implementation.'

This is the challenge in Lesotho, and this article argues that the formation of coalition governments in Lesotho must be legislated to ensure stability and ensure effective service delivery to the citizens.

The collapse of the first coalition (2012-2015) on account of the fallout between the parties is an indication of the failure to manage conflict. It was a similar case with the second, the third, and the fourth coalitions. However, their nature varied. The first was inter-party, the second intra-party, the third intra-party and the fourth intra-party. Shale⁴⁵ argues that the Lesotho coalitions suffered not so much from absence of conflict management mechanism, but reluctance to operationalise them. The inability to deal with conflict that cost the coalitions is part of the bigger challenge of party governance. Party system reform is critical given the centrality of parties in the democratisation of Lesotho.⁴⁶ The proliferation of political parties in Lesotho, which would otherwise be seen as a barrier to the formation of coalitions,

does not seem to be a barrier. Sworn political foes have been in coalition. The LCD coalesced with the splinter party ABC, and the BNP collaborated with the arch-rival LCD, while the DC which broke away from LCD joined hands with the LCD to the demise of the Thabane ABC, which itself is a breakaway from the LCD. Kapa observes that 'the only convincing explanation for the formation of alliances seems to be the office-seeking motives of political elites'.⁴⁷ Mwangi⁴⁸ presents four sources of uncertainty besetting coalitions generally:

- decisions parties have to make and the circumstances under which they have to make them;
- political events coalition partners may face;
- the variety of preferences;
- the challenges to predict human behaviour, more so in a changing political environment.

It is the management of these uncertainties that determines success or failure of the coalition. Mosito⁴⁹ argues that the pressure brought to parties by the coalition dispensation has led to the 'judicialization of politics. This refers to the spread of legal discourse, jargon, rules, and procedures into the political sphere. One of the challenges of the coalitions is to put institutions of governance under pressure. According to Shale,⁵⁰ the government became synonymous with political disunity, lack of trust, and gross dissatisfaction with how the leader of the coalition government handled state affairs, including matters of appointment of ministers during the 2012-2015 coalition. The decisions prime minister Thabane took and the circumstances under which he took them challenged the stability of the coalition. The cabinet reshuffles that he did, which were undermined by ministers who refused to leave, were done without consultation of the coalition partners. A series of events afterwards, including a military coup staged by the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), led to the collapse of the coalition government in 2014. The discord between the Chief Justice and the president which occurred during the first coalition (2012-2015) could not be addressed by the constitution. As a result, political intervention was seen to be the only legitimate way of resolving the impasse. However, this was not ideal.

Perspectives on the coalition

The Basotho had thought coalition government would bring strong delivery output since the many party ideas would complement each other. Indeed, coalition government is the combination of different ideas on how the country can move forward. However, opportunistic coalition governments should not be encouraged, and should not be allowed to be formed as this leads to uncommitted coalitions whose members know that they could be out of power the following day.⁵¹ The people that were interviewed share the sentiments that coalition governments in Lesotho are correctly characterised as unstable, and are more reactionary than developmental and progressive. The deputy speaker of the National Assembly believes that Lesotho is on a learning curve, as coalition politics is a new phenomenon. On the other hand, some

respondents attribute the instability of coalitions to the opportunistic self-serving leadership of political parties. Although the deputy speaker and those who look at the situation more objectively do not discard the issue of benefits, they argue that coalition management is part of the broader leadership orientation and training that political parties need. The challenges observed in the coalition management would be better on day-by-day management. This has tested the capacity of political parties to deal with the challenges of coalitions.

Proximity to power

It is assumed that people join politics not so much to enrich themselves but serve the people and pursue certain policy ends. In order for this to happen, political parties have to be closer to power in order to make laws, change and introduce policies, and determine the development path of the country. This also goes with the benefits of one getting a salary or being able to influence the manner in which tenders are being allocated. There is a general consensus that 'a politician in Lesotho is not ashamed of crossing the floor even after taking an oath' as one respondent observed. They simply align with the party which offers the best prospects for being in the cabinet.

Those who never make it to cabinet destabilise the government. Coalitions are a shared power arrangement. Therefore, the centre of power is not one but many, given the coalition combination and its proportionality. This makes every position hotly contested because what the party gets in the shared power arrangement is critical not only to the party as a collective but, more importantly, to the leaders as individual persons. The Executive back-bencher scenario is complicating coalition government management. This systemic difficulty discards any sort of meritocratic consideration. 'Persons who cannot even articulate the manifesto of the party under which they are elected want to become a minister, failing which they threaten to cross the floor or vote in favour of the motion of no confidence against their own party', one respondent observed.

Reform is an imperative

The respondents believe that reforms are necessary and do have potential to curb this worrying phenomenon. Reforms have the potential to bring change, but since the process is not people-driven but leader-led, it may be difficult to achieve. Generally, respondents agree that reforms are a solution, given the popularly held view that Lesotho needs reforms – although not so much for what, in specific terms. This comes from the lack of clarity on what and how exactly will the reforms improve or change the situation. Some take it for granted that since reforms are recommended by the development partners and SADC, they will certainly help. There is on the other side, those who believe that reforms are not a panacea but certainly will leverage change not only in the political system, but also in internal party democracy, formation of coalition governments, regulation of coalitions and the restriction on the freedom

of members of parliament in changing loyalties. The current constitution of Lesotho (1993) provides in Section 82(1) (b) that parliament shall first meet in not more than 14 days after election. This pressurises parties to rush into coalitions and it has proven problematic. The reforms propose a 60 days staggered period for the formation of government, allowing the lead party to negotiate coalition in the first 21 days after which, the similar opportunity will go to the party with second highest votes, and the third. This will give parties opportunity to negotiate coalition agreements without much of the pressure. Nonetheless, it is uncertain that parties shall be made to negotiate in public, as citizens demanded. Politicians in the NRA rejected the citizens' proposal that the prime minister be elected directly by the voters, and that ministers should not be drawn from members of parliament.

The reforms seek to instil accountability, as floor crossing is to be regulated. However, politicians are not comfortable with the citizens' demand that voters have a say on the act of floor crossing. Reforms are aimed at changing the status quo and improve governance, including intra-party democracy and regulation. However, this is going to happen at the behest of politicians who hold the vote that changes the constitution in parliament. The powers of the King are another important area. While the Basotho would like to see more powers given to the King, precaution has to be taken. Giving executive powers to the King might compromise his role as the unifier.

Findings of the study

It is clear from the literature reviewed and from the respondents that coalition governments in Lesotho are predominantly for convenience and not for developing the country. The intricacies of managing coalition governments in Lesotho is a subject that may not be understood outside the political history and context. The unresolved political conflict that has characterised Lesotho has shaped the manner in which coalitions are handled. The coalition politics are to a large extent a reflection of the party democracies and the broader political spectra. The following specific findings are drawn from this study:

- The coalitions are prone to conflict which is a norm in politics, but they do not know how to deal with the conflicts. The conflicts are both intra- and inter-party.
- The coalition governments have exposed the vulnerability of politicians to the idea that politics is linked to resources, and the coalitions are seen as the vehicle towards proximity to the control and access to resources.
- The weak economic base on which Lesotho politics play out makes for a rough terrain that erodes morality and turns politics into the survival of the fittest. As a result, coalitions in Lesotho are immune from any of the know coalition governance guidelines.
- Reforms are likely to change Lesotho's political system and coalition frameworks. However, politicians deliberately curtail those important aspects necessary for real accountability.

Recommendations and lessons for Lesotho

- When a party joins a coalition, it must be bound by whatever minimum programme they agreed to, and a coalition government should stand or fall in its entirety. This should be legislated to ensure that a coalition government is stable and that it completes its term of office.
- Proliferation of parties, however undemocratic it might sound, must be stopped. It is a debatable issue how many political parties are needed for the successful working of a democracy. But there does not appear to be any reason to have many fragmented, small parties, particularly those with no well-defined ideological positions, and not a chance of coming to power and run a government.
- Many of the small parties are also organised around individual personalities, who either were thrown out, or themselves walked out when it was no more lucrative to be with a bigger party. When a party's name is mentioned, it is the so-called leader that comes to mind, and not any philosophical position. To address this, it is possible to set some ceiling such as the requirement of a minimum number of votes in an election, or a certain amount of funds. This can be done by implementing the NRA's recommendations and legislating these into the electoral law.

Conclusion

Lesotho coalitions are a critical learning experience. The failure of political parties to manage conflict, the contest over resources and proximity to power are huge obstacles. The political leadership in Lesotho has found politics as the way of getting closer to the national resources, nothing else. Therefore, reforms should go further than the political realm and also address the mind-set of political leaders. Skills development for political leaders is critical if the reforms are to make any difference.

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