

ALLIANCES, COALITIONS AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN LESOTHO 2007-2012

Motlamelle Anthony Kapa and Victor Shale

Dr Motlamelle Anthony Kapa is lecturer and head of the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the National University of Lesotho
e-mail: amkapa@yahoo.co.uk; ma.kapa@nul.ls

Dr Victor Shale is EISA's Zimbabwe Resident Director
e-mail: victor@eisa.org.za

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses political party alliances and coalitions in Lesotho, focusing on their causes and their consequences for party systems, democratic consolidation, national cohesion and state governability. We agree with Kapa (2008) that formation of the pre-2007 alliances can be explained in terms of office-seeking theory in that the political elite used alliances to access and retain power. These alliances altered the country's party system, leading to conflict between parties inside and outside Parliament, as well as effectively changing the mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system into a parallel one, thereby violating the spirit of the system. However, the phenomenon did not change state governability; it effectively perpetuated the one-party dominance of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and threatened national cohesion. The post-2012 coalition, on the other hand, was a product of a hung parliament produced by the elections. The impact of the coalition on the party system, state governability and democratic consolidation is yet to be determined as the coalition phenomenon is still new. However, state governability has been marked by a generally very slow pace of policy implementation and the party system has been both polarised and reconfigured while national cohesion has been strengthened. The major challenge for political leaders is to manage the coalition arrangement for the good of the country, which we strongly feel they must, since it seems that coalition governments are very likely to be a permanent feature of Lesotho politics.

INTRODUCTION

Whereas political party coalitions and alliances have been widely discussed in Western Europe and other regions (Riker 1962; Lipset & Rokkan 1967; Carroll 2004; Wiseman 2004; Kiss 2009; Lefebvre and Robin 2009), little research has been done into the value of these phenomena and why they form in Africa (Karume 2003; Khembo 2004; Kadima 2006; Kapa 2008). There is a gap in the literature, which this paper seeks to address using Lesotho as a case study, on the consequences for the party system, democratic consolidation, national cohesion and state governability of party coalitions and alliances.

The article is divided into five sections. The first provides a conceptual entry point to the subject before exploring theoretical propositions on political party formation as well as party coalitions and alliances. The second section explores the factors that lead to party coalitions prior to elections, in Parliament and in government. The third section provides empirical evidence of the experiences of Lesotho to judge whether it confirms or negates the theoretical considerations, and gives a brief background to the intra- and inter-party democracy within which coalitions and alliances are located. In the fourth section we look at the nature and structure of the two coalitions, the post-2012 parliamentary election ruling coalition and the opposition coalition, known as Bloc. The final section sums up the paper, highlighting conclusions and recommendations.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUALISATION CONSIDERATIONS

Coalition and alliance are sometimes used interchangeably. This is because in both cases there is cooperation between political parties and little if any time is spent on understanding the nature and form of this cooperation, ie, the objective of the cooperation, its structure and the power distribution between parties? For the purposes of this article political party coalitions and alliances are considered to be groupings of parties which are pursuing a common goal.

The conceptual distinction between coalitions and alliances is borrowed from Kadima (2013, pp 1-2). He regards an alliance as the coming together of at least two political parties prior to an election in order to maximise their votes and a coalition as the coming together of at least two political parties to work together in Parliament and/or in government on the basis of the election outcome, especially when the elections have not produced an outright winner. Both these situations have arisen in Lesotho and we distinguish between the two for purposes of analysis, treating alliances as those entities entered into by political parties before the 2007 elections and coalitions as the post-2012 election arrangement between

the All Basotho Convention (ABC), the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and the Basotho National Party (BNP).

In his pioneering work, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (1962), William Riker indicates that politicians form coalitions that are just big enough to ensure a majority in Parliament, but no bigger or smaller. They are motivated in these decisions primarily by a desire for power or prestige. Thus there is no sense in sharing Cabinet posts among more parties than is necessary – hence the concept of a minimum winning coalition (Newton & Van Deth 2005, p 234). This theory is also called office-seeking or office-oriented (Kadima 2006, p 5). Oyugi (2006, p 54) expresses the rationale for the formation of coalitions very aptly when he writes:

If coalition formation involves a process which leads to sharing power as well as the material benefits that go with it, then coalition formation is a process which normally occurs because neither or none of the co-operating parties can manage to win an election and govern on its own. It is therefore a necessary evil – an evil in the sense that normally no party ever coalesces except in circumstances in which not to do so would deprive it of the chance to exercise power.

The theory applies in situations where political parties have close or convergent ideological orientations. But this is not a blanket rule. In his study of five African countries – Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, and South Africa – Kadima (2006, p 228) finds that ideological proximity has not been a factor in determining coalition formation. Rather, he believes, the formation of coalitions in South Africa and Mauritius has led to ideological harmony between the main parties. In both cases, ‘... all the main parties have embraced neo-liberal ideology, thus shifting to the centre’ (Kadima 2006, p 233). Sithanen (2003, p 7) observes that ‘in Mauritius, coalition formation and governance has been influenced by office-seeking strategy’ rather than any other considerations. In the 1982 general elections, for example, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) and the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM) joined forces to govern the country, albeit for only nine months (Kadima 2006, p78). The MMM again formed a coalition, this time with the Movement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM), in order to guarantee its electoral victory in 2000 (Kadima, p 228).

Politicians do not form coalitions exclusively to seek power but also to influence public policy in favour of their interests and those of their parties. Thus, when they are aware that they have no chance of winning elections politicians form coalitions to, at least, win a place in Parliament so that they can influence policy-making in their favour (Newton & Van Deth 2005, p 234). They will support a minority government as long as it is responsive to their interests. The outcome

of such a coalition will, in most cases, enhance democratic governance through consensus (Newton & Van Deth 2005, p 234).

Lastly, political parties enter into coalition agreements for the purpose of resolving political conflicts and contributing to the process of nation-building. This is common in countries characterised by ethnic, racial, and/or religious divisions, for example, South Africa after the first democratic elections, in 1994 and Mauritius since independence. Kadima (2006, p 233) finds that in Mauritius coalitions have been formed between the Labour Party (LP) and its rival, the Parti Mauricien Socialiste Democrate (PMSD) to help nation-building and reconcile the majority Hindu represented by the former and the mainly Creole people represented by the latter. This point is corroborated by Sithanen (2003, p 9), who submits that coalition governments in Mauritius have become important instruments for ensuring integration and participation in decision-making and empowerment, thus promoting national unity.

In South Africa a government of national unity consisting of the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom party (IFP) was formed for the purposes of *nation-building* in the then racially and ethnically divided country (Kadima 2006, p 233). Kadima goes on to show that in the KwaZulu-Natal province the ANC and IFP formed a coalition to end the endemic violence between their supporters.

The formation of coalitions in Lesotho, however, cannot be explained by ideology, the influence of policy or nation-building (Kapa 2008). This is because Lesotho's political parties have no clear ideological differences and/or orientations and even those claiming to be left-of-centre in the political spectrum are either too minuscule to hope to win power or have made no significant impact on the country's politics since their formation. Thus, all politically significant parties seem to embrace, to a large extent, the reigning hegemonic world's neo-liberal ideology, which is marked by, among other things, a free market system and political pluralism.

None of Lesotho's political parties reflects any other ideology in its manifesto and almost all of them are nothing but instruments of elite circulation wherein the parties' names are different but the leading faces have been seen in the country's politics before, albeit under different appellations (Kapa 2008). None of these elites during their time in public office since the return to multiparty politics in 1993 has articulated or implemented any policies that are inconsistent with the neo-liberal ideology. The policy-influence thesis also seems to be less plausible in the context of Lesotho, as, indeed, is the case in other African countries (Oyugi 2006, p 63).

The only convincing explanation for the formation of alliances seems to be the office-seeking motives of political elites. Both those elites within the ruling party and those in opposition were motivated by the desire for access to state power

and, by extension, to the benefits that go with public office. Access to power in an environment where there are limited, if any, alternatives for wealth accumulation is a means of survival in a political economy characterised by extreme poverty and limited options. As a result, Lesotho has a history of throat-cutting electoral contests which have been followed by conflict, most notably, the near civil war that followed the 1998 elections.

The conflict was solved by the introduction in 2001 and adoption in 2002 of the mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral model in an effort to reform the country's discredited first-past-the-post (FPTP) political system which had over-rewarded the winners and unduly punished the losers.

Gallagher (2008, p 247) distinguishes between two variants of the MMP system – the proportional and the parallel – and highlights how parties benefit depending on their relative sizes. He submits that under the MMP:

The list seats are awarded in such a way as to rectify the under-representation and over-representation created in the constituencies, ensuring that a party's overall number of seats (not just its list seats) is proportional to its vote share. Typically, small parties fare badly in the single-member constituencies, winning hardly any seats, but are brought up to their 'fair share' overall by receiving the appropriate number of list seats, while the larger parties usually win more than their 'fair share' in the constituencies, are awarded few or none of the list seats because their constituency seats alone bring them up to or close to the total number to which they are entitled.

The above scenario reflects what happened in Lesotho after the 2002 elections. The smaller parties performed badly in the constituencies but were compensated by the list seats, and the big ones, particularly the LCD, did well in the constituencies but received no PR list seats. It is noteworthy that the MMP contains mechanisms for determining the maximum and minimum number of seats political parties can be awarded in each election. This is done through an agreed formula applied after each election. Roughly the formula is: $\text{Total Votes} / \text{Total Seats} = \text{Quota}$, $\text{Total Party Votes} / \text{Quota} = \text{Party Seats}$. Thus there is no fixed formula for calculating the seats; each election produces a quota depending on, among other key issues, the voter turnout in each election. This enables what Bogaards (2013, p 14) dubs a 'majority ceiling and minority premium' (the maximum number of seats winners are allowed and the largest number the opposition can get to prevent dominance of the ruling parties and also to strengthen the opposition) to be accomplished to some extent, although not entirely, as he would prefer.

In Lesotho, while winning parties may have as many constituency seats as possible, the more they have the fewer PR seats they will get. This is

what happened in the 2002 elections in which the LCD won all but one of the constituency seats, with a total vote of 65.8% but received no PR seats. On the other hand, the number of seats a party gets depends on the quota after each election. The higher the quota the more 'expensive' the seat, and vice versa. One other issue is that the number of parliamentary seats remains fixed at 120, so all calculations must add up to this figure.

Against the backdrop of a new electoral system and its attendant constraints, as described above, political parties became less reluctant to join forces and resources both prior to and after elections (Kapa 2008, p 340). The country's biggest parties since independence, namely the BCP and the BNP (between 1993 and 1998) and later the LCD and the BNP (1998-2002), may have initially hoped to do well and to govern the country without the support of others. The smaller parties had also not entered into alliances among themselves or with the bigger ones. Following the 2002 elections, however, the parties realised they needed to coalesce in one way or the other to remain competitive.

PARTY ALLIANCES

The phenomenon of political party alliances in Lesotho emerged in the run-up to the 2007 parliamentary elections. Lesotho's political parties were historically characterised by adversarial relations (Makoa 2005) with very limited, if any, propensity for cooperation despite the fact that Lesotho is a largely homogenous society with no ethnic or racial conflict (Kapa 2008). Hence we propose that the explanation for the formation of alliances prior to the 2007 elections is the office-seeking theory. The alliances that were formed are those of the Congress parties, the ABC/LWP/SDP Alliance, the LCD/NIP Alliance and the 'Big Five'.

The Alliance of Congress Parties

The Alliance of Congress Parties (ACP) was formed by leaders of the BAC, the Lesotho Peoples' Congress (LPC) and one faction of the BCP, led by a veteran BCP politician Ntsukunyane Mphanya, as an attempt to counter what they saw as a 'degeneration of democracy into a *de facto* one-party state' (ACP Press Statement 2006). The ACP had a well-defined structure and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) under which it contested the February 2007 elections. The parties indicated in their MoU that they did not have ideological differences because they were splinters of the BCP and therefore it was easy for them to form an alliance. They agreed to allocate resources, Cabinet and other senior portfolios if they won. Although ultimately the ACP did not make a dent in the ruling party's support, it performed better than all the smaller parties, which contested

the elections individually. Typical of alliances, which have a tendency to be short lived, the ACP collapsed when it failed to win the election.

The ABC/LWP/SDP Alliance

Like the ACP, these three parties agreed to cooperate in the 2007 election. They agreed not to compete against each other and fielded their candidates under the ABC flag, apart from in the Matelile constituency, where the Lesotho Workers' Party (LWP) leader stood as a candidate. Candidates for party lists were nominated under the LWP and included the ABC leader and other senior members and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidates, although these were low on the list and could not go to Parliament. Only the ABC and LWP benefited, securing 17 FPTP and 10 PR seats respectively, giving them a total of 27 of the 120 seats. The alliance collapsed soon after the 2007 elections due to conflicts between the leaders

The LCD/NIP Alliance

The agreement between the LCD and the National Independent Party (NIP) was contained in their MoU entitled 'Memorandum of Understanding between Lesotho Congress for Democracy and the National Independent Party on Strategic Partnership and Co-operation for the 2007 elections'. Article 3 of the MoU stipulated the manner of cooperation between the two parties. The LCD would compete for the 80 constituencies while the NIP competed for the 40 PR-based seats. The agreement was controversial because it was signed by the NIP's deputy leader and the party's central committee against the background of objections and court cases lodged by the NIP's founder and leader, AC Manyeli.

Manyeli is reported to have had strong reservations about the terms of the alliance, among them the stipulation that the NIP should only field PR candidates (Ramonotsi 2006, p2). Article 3(c)(i) of the MoU stated that the NIP would place its own candidates in the first five places and the LCD's candidates would occupy 'the next 6+4 places', which meant 'the top six LCD members, who would also be standing in the 80 constituencies, were being secured in the event that they failed to win. The other four candidates would be part of the entire PR list but would not be FPTP candidates.

Two observations can be made about this provision. Firstly, it provided insurance for some senior LCD leaders, who were obviously no longer guaranteed victory in the constituencies because of the split in the party which had led to the formation of the ABC, which had become a sudden threat to the then ruling party (Shale 2007, p 19). Secondly, the LCD, which had not benefited from the MMP electoral system since the 2002 elections because it had won almost all the

constituencies, made sure that it would benefit through this provision. The LCD's top leaders, who had hitherto only been elected on the FPTP ticket, now had the opportunity to secure the NIP's PR seats.

The alliance was simply a vote-pooling strategy as the two parties had nothing in common other than a bird as an electoral symbol. It was widely speculated that the symbols – a dove and an eagle – had confused rural voters in the 2002 elections because in both symbols the 'birds' were in a flying mode, with their wings spread wide. Thus it was possible that supporters of the LCD might have voted for the NIP in error (Kapa 2008, p 349). This apparent confusion resulted in an unusually large number of votes for the NIP, which had enabled the party to secure five PR seats while its performance in previous elections had been insignificant (Kapa 2008, p 349). The LCD only used the NIP as a strategic partner to maximise its chances of winning more parliamentary seats. Indeed, some members of the executive suffered humiliating losses in the election but went to Parliament through the alliance with the NIP, with the two parties claiming a total of 82 of the 120 seats (LCD 61 and NIP 21).¹

The 'Big Five'

The 'Big Five' alliance, which was formed after the 2007 elections, consisted of the ABC/LWP, BNP, the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) and the ACP. The motivation for the alliance was to allow the parties to elect an official leader of the opposition so the position would not go to the deputy leader of the NIP, which, by virtue of its alliance with the ruling LCD, had 21 PR seats in the National Assembly against the ABC's 17 seats. Neither the ABC nor the NIP qualified for the opposition leader position as it requires a party or a coalition of parties to have at least 25% or 30% of National Assembly seats.²

Using their collective numerical strength of 33 seats, the 'Big Five' nominated the ABC leader for the post but this move was frustrated by the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ntlhoi Motsamai (who was also a member of Parliament, representing the Hloahloeng Constituency under the banner of the ruling LCD). Motsamai ruled that the alliance should have been formed prior to the elections. This decision caused considerable disquiet among the opposition ranks and justifiably so, for the Speaker quoted in her ruling Section 3 of the Members of Parliament Salaries Act, 1998, which not only defines the official leader of opposition but actually recognises such an office (Kapa 2008, p 351).

1 The LCD later won a by-election in Makhaleng Constituency No 45, where there had been a failed election earlier.

2 The ABC and NIP had 14.2% and 17.5% respectively.

What implications did the alliance phenomenon have for the party system, democratic consolidation, national cohesion and state governability? The next section considers this question, focusing exclusively on pre-2007 election alliances.

ALLIANCES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

The alliances did not break the old 'Congress-National' divide that has been a feature of Lesotho's politics; they entrenched this two-party system characterised by Congress parties (BCP since independence until 1997, and the LCD since 1997 until 2012) on the one hand, and the BNP on the other. In line with this dichotomy the ACP grouped some of the 'Congress Party family members', namely, the BAC, LPC, and a faction of the BCP (which are all offshoots of the BCP), while the BNP joined forces with its own splinter party, the National Progressive Party (NPP). The only variation was the ABC/LWP alliance – although the ABC is also an off-shoot of the BCP, it opted to work with the LWP, which does not have a clear history with either of the Congress or National parties. Thus parties with a common history coalesced. The alliances distorted the MMP system, turning it into a *de facto* parallel system (Matlosa 2008, p37), thereby undermining the spirit of proportionality in the allocation of parliamentary seats and the inclusivity of Parliament.

By distorting the electoral system the alliances effectively altered inter-party relations in and outside Parliament and perpetuated the dominance of the ruling LCD. This happened against the background of an already volatile environment in which the 1997 LCD usurpation of power through a 'parliamentary coup' was probably still fresh in the minds of the opposition parties. Relationships between the LCD/NIP and the opposition both in and outside the Seventh Parliament were marked by tensions (2007 to 2012) as shown below.

The tricky issue was that although the LCD/NIP and ABC/LWP alliance partners contested elections as alliances, in each case they had submitted joint PR lists to the IEC, but under the names of the junior partners – the NIP and LWP respectively. This raised problems for the IEC with regard to the allocation of the PR seats. The IEC resolved to treat these alliance partners as separate entities for the purposes of allocation. The MFP and other opposition parties protested, arguing that they had lost seats that would have gone to them had the MMP model been applied, as it had been in the 2002 elections. Their concerns may have been legitimate, given that each would have received additional PR seats, as follows: the ACP four seats instead of two; the Basotho Batho Democratic Party (BBDP) two instead of one; the BCP three instead of one; the BNP eight not three; the ABC/LWP would have had 12 not 10; the New Lesotho Freedom Party one instead of none; the LCD/NIP one, not 21; and the Popular Front for Democracy (PFD) four, not one (Matlosa 2008, p 39).

The MFP took the case to the High Court, which took more than 15 months to pass judgement on this crucial case although section 104 of the National Assembly Election Order Act of 1992, which was in force at the time, provided for a maximum of three months for the settlement of election-related disputes. The High Court dismissed the case on two technical grounds rather than on merit, namely that the MFP, which had lodged the case, did not have the *locus standi* or legal right to do so and that the court itself had no jurisdiction over the case (Kapa 2009, p 6). This ruling led to intractable conflict, which warranted the mediation of the Southern African Development Community and later of civil society organisations under the Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organisations in partnership with the Christian Council of Lesotho.

The result of the alliance formation was that the party system changed because inter-party relations were altered significantly both in and outside of Parliament. Consequently, the legitimacy of members of Parliament (MPs) who were elected in terms of the PR list of the alliance partners was seriously questionable and opposition MPs called for them to be replaced. Parliament became deeply polarised, to the extent that, although the Lower House could easily pass Bills due to the numerical preponderance of the governing party buttressed by the NIP, the opposition objected to some key Bills and staged frequent walkouts.

The Senate also prevented the passage of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution Bill, 2008, which was intended to make it possible to appeal election-related disputes, while the Constitution provides that the High Court is the final arbiter in such matters. The ruling party sought this constitutional amendment so that the case, which was before the High Court on the allocation of 40 PR seats, could be heard by the Court of Appeal. This was a very sensitive case with the potential to cost the LCD a total of 21 seats, leaving it with a slim majority of 62.

The senators' argument was that the Bill should wait until the High Court had made its ruling, lest it be construed as an attempt to pre-empt the outcome of the case. They further argued that passing the Bill at that stage would be tantamount to the abuse of power by the ruling party, designed to manipulate the Constitution in order to protect the government (Kapa 2013, p 81). All these developments poisoned relationships between parties in Parliament, resulting in destructive conflict instead of a healthy and competitive interaction and this adversely affected parliamentary business.

ALLIANCES AND GOVERNABILITY

Alliances had no significant impact on the governability of the state (invoked, in this context, to include, among other factors, the pace of governmental decision-making and policy coherence both at the formulation and the implementation

stages). For various reasons the ability of the state to govern remained largely unchanged from the pre-alliance period. One reason is that the LCD/NIP alliance ensured a parliamentary majority of 82 of 120 seats, making it easy for it to pass any legislation except where the Constitution mandated a two-thirds majority in both the Lower and Upper houses. This majority was used to pass even the most controversial of Bills, including the Land Act Bill, 2010, which sought to change Lesotho's land tenure system from customary tenure to private ownership, which would allow foreign enterprises to own land.

The second controversial piece of legislation was the Public Meetings and Procession Bill, 2009, the thrust of which was to require any groups wishing to hold public meetings or embark on public processions to apply for permission either from the police or from chiefs of concerned areas (Kapa 2013, p 79). These officers were empowered to grant, refuse and even cancel any permit issued for these purposes. The opposition and some civil society organisations, which regarded the Bill as an infringement of freedom of association, could do no more than complain, Parliament passed the Bill regardless.

Alliances did not help democratise Parliament itself, at least in the sense of promoting an environment of genuine debate. They only benefited those who formed them in terms of gaining parliamentary seats. Although the LCD and the NIP were in alliance, their agreement was not designed to give the NIP Cabinet positions, it merely entitled it to parliamentary seats on a 50/50 basis, thereby serving only to perpetuate the LCD's domination of the political system. The protracted conflict between the LCD/NIP alliance and the government, on the one hand, and the joint opposition on the other, in which the IEC and the High Court were also embroiled, ultimately stalled the process of democratic consolidation. Instead of these key institutions operating in ways that would engender the trust and confidence of all political actors, democratic values were in question.

ALLIANCES AND NATIONAL COHESION

Lesotho is a largely homogeneous society devoid of features that characterise other African societies such as ethnicity, religion and race – political party affiliation has historically been the key divisive element. All conflicts that have threatened national cohesion have had their roots in party affiliation. The 2007 election results threatened national cohesion. The government and opposition parties became embroiled in conflict, which culminated in protests staged by the opposition, among them massive stayaways and demonstrations, arrests, abductions, torture by the military, the exile of some opposition supporters and the declaration by the police of a curfew (Ambrose 2007, p 11). All these developments would probably not have occurred had it not been for the alliances and their effects on

the allocation of the PR seats. What of the post-2012 election coalition of the ABC, the LCD and the BNP?

THE 2012 ELECTION OUTCOME

The May 2012 polls transformed Lesotho's political system and heralded a new era for the country's democratisation, arguably pushing it further on the path of consolidation. The elections were conducted in terms of the new National Assembly Electoral Act, 2011, which had effectively replaced the 'two-ballots-two-votes' that had been applied in 2002 and 2007 with the 'one-ballot-two-votes' principle. While two-ballots-two-votes encouraged the formation of alliances, this further electoral reform protected the letter and spirit of the MMP system. The polls produced an unprecedented hung Parliament, with the newly formed Democratic Congress (DC) obtaining a total of 48 seats (41 FPTP and 7 PR), short of at least 61 seats to form a government. It was followed by the ABC (30 seats), the LCD (26) and the BNP (5). Section 87(2) of the Constitution of Lesotho, 1993 provides that:

The King shall appoint as Prime minister the member of the National Assembly who appears to the Council of State to be the leader of the political party or *coalition of political parties* that will command the support of a majority of the members of the National Assembly [our emphasis].

This provision has not been used since the return of the country to multiparty politics in 1993 because elections have always been won by single parties. The BCP won the 1993 polls by 74.7%, taking all 65 parliamentary seats; in 1998 the LCD won 60.7% and 79 of 80 seats and, in 2002, in terms of the FPTP component of the MMP system won 54.8% (79 seats). In 2007 the LCD won again, but with a reduced majority of 62 seats. It was, however, able to increase this majority through its alliance with the NIP.

Soon after the IEC released the election results opposition parties, including the ABC, LCD, BNP, PFD and MFP, held a joint press conference in Maseru, where they declared their intention of forming a government in response the press statement made by the deputy leader of the DC that his party was preparing to form a minority government (Rakuoane 2013). In the midst of these developments the Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, tendered his resignation to the king in preparation for the installation of the new government. All the main political parties began negotiating behind closed doors with a view to forming a coalition government.

Although it had received the highest number of seats, the DC failed to convince other parties to form government with it. Thus the ABC, which held the second-highest number of seats, formed a government with the LCD and the BNP, based on a slim majority of 61 seats (Shale 2013, p 46). Based on an Agreement to Form a Coalition Government of Political Parties, signed in June 2012 by the parties' leaders, Motsoahae Thomas Thabane (ABC), Mothetjoa Metsing (LCD) and Thesele Maseribane (BNP), Thabane became prime minister, Metsing deputy prime minister and Maseribane senior minister. Consequently, on 8 June 2012, at the National Setsoto Stadium in the capital, Maseru, Lesotho witnessed an incredible, unprecedented, smooth and peaceful transfer of power from the outgoing prime minister, Pakalitha Mosisili (who had been in office for 14 years) to his successor, Motsoahae Thomas Thabane. On 14 June Cabinet ministers were appointed, completing the process of forming a government unique in the history of Lesotho.

The coalition government was formed on the basis of the outcome of the popular vote, rather than cobbled together by domestic political elites with assistance from external actors, as was the case, for example, in Zimbabwe after the 2008 elections and in Kenya after the 2007 elections. The phenomenon of a democratically elected coalition government together with the peaceful alternation of power from one government to another has been dubbed an 'enigma' in both Lesotho and in African politics (Kapa 2012). Whether or not the coalition will work according to its letter and spirit is unclear. What exactly did the parties agree on?

The coalition agreement

The parties agreed to work together in Parliament and government; to form an inclusive government, allocating key positions in proportion to the number of seats each party had in Parliament; to form a Joint Monitoring Implementation Committee composed of two competent members of each party to ensure the implementation of the Agreement and to collaborate with the Bloc or other parties. The Bloc is not fully integrated into the coalition government, it sits between the coalition government and the opposition DC in Parliament and its constituent members retain their individual identity as distinct parties, just as the coalition members have done.

Although the leader of the PFD has been appointed Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly the Bloc has decided to support the coalition government in principle but also criticise it as necessary.

There are no legal and constitutional provisions governing the post-election transition period and the formation of a new government. In addition, Lesotho has had no history of coalition governments and there was little time for it to

consult and learn from countries which had such experience. Section 82(b) of the Constitution provides that Parliament should meet within 14 days after an election, leaving little or no time for inter-party consultation and negotiation about the formation of coalition government should the elections produce a hung Parliament, as was the case in 2012. This means that the political system becomes highly volatile, unpredictable and dangerous. This was the context in which the ABC, LCD and BNP coalition was formed.

The Agreement has been criticised by an official Commonwealth expert (whose services were solicited by the coalition government to advise on ways of strengthening the coalition) for having focused on the allocation of Cabinet portfolios and other senior positions in government rather than on the policies and programmes of coalition partners aimed at providing services to Lesotho's citizens. The expert correctly notes that:

in the absence of a focus on a policy programme and on clearly communicating the direction of the Coalition to the public, an impression has been created that the Coalition Government is 'territorialised', is developing in silos based on the allocation of Ministries to coalition Parties, and is taking too long to get started on the programme to prosperity, inclusivity and transparency the electors voted for.

Prasad 2013, p3

The above quotation is instructive in explaining the situation on the ground in Lesotho since the 2012 elections and the implications of the coalition arrangement for state governability, the party system, democratic consolidation and national cohesion.

COALITION AND GOVERNABILITY

Although it is still early to make a conclusive assessment, it seems that the effect of the coalition phenomenon on the governability of the state has been largely mixed: positive in some respects and negative in others. In his inaugural speech on 8 June 2012 Prime Minister Thomas Thabane highlighted the key challenges confronting Lesotho. These included poverty reduction and shared economic growth and employment creation; the building of effective governance institutions; infrastructure development for facilitation of trade and access to services; investment in education; increased access to improved health facilities; improvement of agriculture and food security; effective and efficient dispensation of justice; escalation of the fight against corruption and all forms of crime (Thabane 2012a, pp 20-21).

The coalition government took some time to come up with a broad policy outline and its areas of focus: land allocation; poverty; the creation of employment; economic growth through the establishment of a National Planning Board to coordinate economic and development planning and utilisation of natural resources; education, health and social development; the fight against crime and corruption; youth, sports and gender equity; justice, public safety, employment, and media; foreign affairs (coalition government policy, nd). However, it did not outline coherent and explicit policies and not much has been achieved in these areas in the two years it has been in power. Problems such as poverty, unemployment, crime and corruption, access to health care and justice remain pressing.

However, three months after taking office, the prime minister declared a state of emergency with regard to food security and called upon development partners and friends of Lesotho to assist in redressing the situation, while also indicating the commitment of the government to play its part by providing subsidies to the farmers (Thabane 2012b). The government was able to implement a swift policy on food production in the 2012/2013 cropping period by increasing subsidies by about 43% on the 2011/2012 summer cropping period, for basic food stuffs to reduce hunger and starvation (Ketso 2013, p19). This move indicates some degree of cohesion among the parties.

There has also been some movement in the fight against corruption. The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), a state agency mandated to combat corruption and economic offences, seems to have acted against suspected corrupt individuals since the coalition government took over, suggesting some degree of support and political will from the government. The DCEO has investigated and publicised its efforts with regard to cases of fraud, including those in which former and serving ministers as well as some senior government officers have been implicated (see, eg, *Public Eye*, 5 July, 26 July, 23 August 2013). The outcome of these investigations is yet to be seen.

With regard to education, the government continued with the Free Primary Education Policy introduced by its predecessor, but revoked the policy of the previous government on the funding of higher education by increasing the quota of students to be funded by the government in local and foreign institutions of higher learning. This move has given more students than was previously the case continued access to higher education. In other areas, however, there has been slow progress and an apparent lack of cohesion / agreement between and among coalition partners.

A clear example is the higher education sector, which has been hit by incessant instability and industrial action by staff and strikes by students in response to what they regard as bad management and delays by the government in the payment of student bursaries since the last two years of the previous government. Institutions

affected include the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, the Lerotholi Polytechnic and the Lesotho College of Education.

Given that this sector falls under the Ministry of Education and Training, which was allocated to the LCD under the Coalition Agreement, Prasad (2013) seems to be correct when he speaks of 'territorialisation of the government and the development of silos'. Solutions to these problems seemed to elude the coalition government as a whole and the LCD in particular. The government seems to be constrained by the fact that the sector falls into the LCD's 'territory'. This is not surprising because government seems to fit the description of a 'fragmented government', 'ministerial government' or 'model of coalitions, where power is dispersed among individual ministers rather than being concentrated in the office of the prime minister, and the principle of mutual non-interference in the affairs of other ministries by all ministers is adhered to' (Müller 2008, pp 196-197). The minister responsible for this sector seems to have been unable to resolve the problems.

The coalition appears to have divergent views on ways to resolve these problems. The ABC leader repeatedly stated at his political rallies before the elections and in the media afterwards that the cause of the problems, particularly at the NUL, was an expatriate vice-chancellor who had been recruited during the previous government, of which the LCD was part, with a specific mandate to restructure the institution. Although the restructuring process was highly controversial among sections of the population, particularly the university staff, the LCD was adamant that the vice-chancellor must stay.

Another apparently divisive issue has been the implementation of Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, in terms of which Lesotho sells water to South Africa. It provides for the construction of dams in addition to the two completed under the first phase and for the generation of electricity for Lesotho. These two components of the project were negotiated by the LCD government in 2011, but have not been implemented. The current prime minister is reported to have been unhappy about the lack of progress and has decided to have the project transferred from the ministry headed by the LCD to his office, a move that is reported to have angered the LCD's executive committee because, in terms of the Agreement, such a decision should have been made by the coalition rather than the prime minister alone. The LCD's executive committee is reported to have instructed its party leader (the deputy prime minister) to write to the prime minister demanding a public reversal of this decision or the LCD will reconsider its position in the coalition government (*Lesotho Times*, 19 September 2013) – a clear threat to the survival of the government.

In a press statement the prime minister said the move had been made because the project was at a stage where it was necessary for the heads of state of the two countries to administer it and that it will be run by a sub-committee of ministers drawn from all coalition partners and chaired by Timothy Thahane, which reports to the prime minister (*Lesotho Times*, 19 September 2013). This statement seems to have appeased the LCD and prevented it from reconsidering its position in the coalition government.

The law-making process in Parliament has also been extremely slow. Since it opened in June 2012 it has considered only six Bills and passed only two (Rakuoane 2013). This is in sharp contrast with its predecessor, which passed 205 Bills and 196 motions during its tenure (Kapa 2013, p 80). However Rakuoane attributes the relatively large number of Bills passed by the previous Parliament to the pressure exerted on Lesotho by the American government, which pushed it to pass several Bills in order to smooth the implementation of the Millennium Challenge Account scheme, under which Lesotho received development assistance in several sectors. Some members of the Senate have expressed great concern about the lack of parliamentary business since the coalition government took office, lamenting that the Senate has considered only two Bills in more than a year (*Public Eye*, 13 September 2013).

The coalition has brought to an end the generally one-party-dominated Parliament and also created an unprecedented and very strong parliamentary opposition. However, this is not without challenges. For instance, in terms of Section 78 of the Constitution the law-making process entails a Bill going through a number of key stages and readings. These are the 'first reading', which is basically the introduction of the Bill, followed by the 'second reading', which involves debating the principles of the Bill. The third stage is the 'committee stage', where the finer details are dealt with. It is before and during the committee stage that the portfolio committees engage thoroughly with the Bill (Shale 2009, p 178).

The potential problem with the current situation is that the law-making process may oscillate between fast and slow depending on the strength of the coalition. If the coalition is not properly managed the disagreements will be seen at the committee level, where some partners may feign robust debate while they *ipso facto* asphyxiate progress as they use the law-making process as their bargaining tool. On the other hand, the process may go more smoothly and faster if the coalition partners agree on most issues. It is, however, difficult to assess the performance of the opposition in Parliament given that there has so far been limited parliamentary business, except that the quality of debate whenever there are issues is robust (Rakuoane 2013).

COALITION, PARTY SYSTEM AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

The formation of the coalition government led to polarisation and reconfiguration of the party system. Polarisation became visible especially between the DC and the coalition partners. The DC leadership held rallies around the country, informing party supporters that it was not the coalition but the DC that had won the elections and that the DC had not been given time to negotiate with other parties and form a government.

The coalition, through the minister of communications, responded to these claims by effectively banning coverage by state media of DC rallies, arguing that the DC was threatening national stability. The relationship between the DC and its coalition partners has generally been acrimonious but that between the LCD and the DC has been even worse. Polarisation also affected the LCD itself in that some of its members were unhappy about being left out when government positions were distributed among coalition partners. They accused their party of having abandoned them after they had spent their personal resources campaigning for the party during the 2012 polls. They also complained that the positions had been allocated by nepotism and petitioned the party to call a special conference to consider a motion of no-confidence in some key members of the executive committee. The executive committee reacted by disbanding the executive of its Youth League (*Public Eye*, 26 April 2013). There were also some concerns among BNP Youth League members that the party had disregarded the candidate preferred by the executive committee and had appointed Felile Makeka as Lesotho's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (*Public Eye*, 24 May 2013).

Reconfiguration of the party system became manifest in that the Bloc declared its support for the coalition of the ABC, the LCD and the BNP, while the DC found a partner in the minuscule Basotho Batho Democratic Party (BBDP), which has one PR seat in Parliament, thus projecting three grouping of political parties.

In sum, the coalition has led to alternation of political power. Without it power would have remained in the hands of Mosisili and his DC. The development has changed the course of Lesotho's politics towards coalitions and has broken the 19-year chain of one-party dominance, thus taking the country a step further towards consolidation of democracy, irrespective of future trends.

THE COALITION AND NATIONAL COHESION

Although it was hastily created without any mandate from the general membership of the coalescing parties, the coalition has arguably contributed to national cohesion. For the first time Lesotho has three political parties from both sides of the national-congress political divide and the Bloc. This means that,

although proximity has been forced by the election outcome rather than their own free will, parties are closer than they have been at any other time. Unlike in past elections where the leaders of losing parties would fan post-election troubles and whip up the emotions of their supporters by alleging all sorts of irregularities, inciting them to engage in actions that threatened national cohesion, the post-2012 elections period has so far been unprecedentedly peaceful and tranquil.

This situation may be explained largely by the inclusive nature of Lesotho's political system, which has been able to accommodate many of the leaders in Parliament, thanks to the electoral and constitutional reforms the country has undergone since the post-1998 election crisis. Yet the parties' manipulation of the MMP electoral system through what is seen as unethical alliances indicates their unwillingness to accept these reforms. These notwithstanding, Basotho appear thus far to be a cohesive nation.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to assess political party alliances and coalitions and explore their causes as well as to examine their consequences for party systems, democratic consolidation and the governability of the state. We have argued that the formation of the pre-2007 political party alliances can be explained in terms of vote-pooling strategies and office-seeking theory. The alliances had some impact on the country's party system, leading to relationships characterised by conflict between parties inside and outside Parliament, as well as effectively changing the proportional electoral system into a parallel one in violation of the spirit of the MMP system.

However, the alliance phenomenon did not necessarily change the governability of the state in that it effectively perpetuated one-party government and the domination of the country's political system by the LCD. The post-2012 coalition, on the other hand, was purely a product of the fact that the elections produced a hung parliament.

The impact of the coalition on the party system, the governability of the state and democratic consolidation is yet to be fully determined. At this stage it appears that governability has been negatively affected in that the pace of policy implementation has been slow and that the party system has been both polarised and reconfigured, while national cohesion has been strengthened. It will be interesting to see whether the Lesotho authorities will be able to manage the coalition arrangement for the good of the country, which we strongly feel they must, since it seems that no one party will, in the near future, win sufficient parliamentary seats to govern alone.

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