

ETHICS IN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

A Critical Reflection on Lesotho's 2022 Elections

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ABSTRACT

This study is a critical reflection on how the positive impact of ethics in Lesotho's political elections and democracy could be amplified for lasting peace and political stability. It is based on secondary data from available literature against the background of Lesotho's existing, mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system. The MMP system has given birth to the political phenomenon of inconclusive electoral results and unstable coalition governments in recent years. This political phenomenon emanates from intra- and inter-party conflicts, which often led to undesirable and premature dissolutions of parliament and snap elections. Here, ethics should be understood as an essential component of a healthy process in electoral democracy and a practice necessary for arresting the enduring political instability in Lesotho.

Keywords: Lesotho, ethics, elections, democracy, electoral democracies

INTRODUCTION

The positive influence of ethics in advancing democracy in modern political elections cannot be overstressed, as attested by numerous scholars (Mozumder 2022, pp. 821–835; Bagg & Tranvik 2019, pp. 1-40; White 2018, pp. 1–17)). Lindberg hails political elections as 'the hallmark of democracy' (2006, p. 139) and the cornerstone of democratic dispensations in viable and vibrant electoral democracies.

Despite the fact that ethical behaviour is expected of political elections in electoral democracies, ethical issues continue to present a challenge in political elections to the detriment of democracy ((Bagg & Tranvik 2019, pp. 1-40; White 2018, pp. 1–17). For instance, in some electoral democracies, political elections continue to attract 'calls for increased regulation in response to what is dubbed an "arms race" in elections' (Anderson & Tham 2014, p. 84). In political elections,

such a metaphorical arms race refers to ‘a cost explosion in electoral expenditure driven by the competitive dynamic of elections’ (ibid.).

Unfortunately, the disconcerting status quo in the political elections of some electoral democracies is that:

Existing approaches to campaign ethics fail to adequately account for the “arms races” incited by competitive incentives in the absence of effective sanctions for destructive behaviors... [political] elections present even more difficult challenges than other adversarial contexts, because no centralised regulation is available to halt potential arms races.

(Bagg & Tranvik 2019, p. 973)

The absence of appropriate regulation in political elections, particularly in most of Africa’s modern-day democracies, negatively impacts ethical integrity as a building block of ethical conduct in political elections, making ‘elections appear to be a fading shadow of democracy, endangering the fragile democratic project itself’ (Adejumobi 2000, p. 59). Adejumobi further argues that ethically run political elections ‘constitute an important element in [electoral] democracy’ (ibid.). This is because political elections in electoral democracies are a ‘viable means of ensuring the orderly process of [political] leadership succession and change [and serve as] instruments of political authority and legitimation’ (ibid.). Sadly, however, the continued presence in some African countries of thriving undemocratic regimes masked in democratic garb is hurting the democratic project in Africa, and political elections are the victim as they simply become ‘a fading shadow of democracy’ (Adejumobi 2000, pp. 59–73).

In this paper ethics in relation to political elections is understood to embody the normative ideals, principles, or standards of conduct or behaviour that those involved in political elections should strive for and are expected to display. This is to maintain the ethical integrity of the electoral process, system, and practice, irrespective of the electoral outcome. For example, there could be an inconclusive election outcome resulting in the formation of often short-lived coalition governments, as in the case of Lesotho in recent times. The collapse of coalition governments in Lesotho raises ethical questions about the normative considerations that inform or guide such arrangements in relation to the conduct of politics or the behaviour of politicians in coalition governments (White 2018, pp. 1–17; Atkinson & Bierling 2005, pp. 1003–1028). Thus, the role of ethics in shaping the political values of those involved in coalition politics, and therefore, their political behaviour in coalition governments, is of critical importance for advancing a thriving and viable democracy in electoral democracies like Lesotho.

Since 2012, the political landscape of governments in Lesotho has changed dramatically as coalition politics entered the political space because of inconclusive elections. The advent of coalition politics gave birth to coalition governments, as political parties were forced to form coalitions to govern the country. However, these coalition governments were often short-lived and they collapsed before they could finish the normal five-year parliamentary term. The unwarranted intra- and inter-party conflicts of those in coalitions often triggered the collapse of the coalition governments, leading to undesirable, premature dissolutions of Parliament and snap elections with huge costs to the public purse.

Although Lesotho has had coalition governments since 2012 and has a coalition government now after the 2022 elections, it seems that the ethics of political leadership in coalitions has not yet evolved to ensure the stability of such governments. Against this background the article embarks on a critical reflection of the positive impact of ethics in Lesotho's political elections and democracy under the auspices of coalition governments. The article also considers how this could be amplified for lasting peace and political stability. The article is broken down into five sections. The first section outlines how the article is structured, giving its contextual background. The second section presents the history of political elections and coalition governments in Lesotho. The third section provides perspectives on Lesotho's 2022 elections against the backdrop of coalition government led by the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP), speculating on challenges, opportunities, and promises. The fourth section explores the RFP-led coalition government's clean governance mantra and speculates on how this could be amplified for desirable lasting peace and political stability in Lesotho. The fifth and final section concludes the article, arguing that ethics is a vital and neglected resource necessary for healthy electoral democracy process and practice in Lesotho.

HISTORY OF ELECTIONS AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN LESOTHO

In Africa, political elections as 'a critical ingredient of democracy' (Matlosa 1997, p. 93) started with the era of independence from colonial rule (Willis, Cheeseman & Lynch 2021, pp. 1–25). Indeed, it was during the early period of independence in the 1960s that Africa first experienced political elections (Young 1993, pp. 299–312). It was during this time that Africans determined the 'democratically elected political leaders of their newly-independent states in the process of nation-building and democratisation' (ibid.). As such, political elections in nation-building and democratisation in most African countries are a phenomenon of the post-

independence era that was eagerly expected to 'play a crucial role in deepening and sustaining democratic governance' (Matlosa 2003, p. 80).

In Lesotho, as in many African countries, the history of political elections dates to the early 1960s (Matlosa 1997). When Lesotho became independent in 1966 as a newly founded electoral democracy, it inherited the British electoral system dubbed 'first-past-the post (FPTP) or single-member-constituency' (Matlosa 2003, p. 84). This electoral system works on the cardinal principle of a simple majority, in which the majority wins simply by winning more than half the seats, even if it receives a minority of the popular vote. All political elections in Lesotho held between 1960 and 2002 were based on the Westminster FPTP system. Instead of bringing peace and stability, the aftermath of general elections using the FPTP system in Lesotho since 1960 has been characterised by conflicts over the election outcome (Matlosa 1997) prompting the need for electoral reform to address the undesirable 'deficiencies of political representativity in the FPTP system' (Matlosa 2003, p. 86).

Indeed, the FPTP fallacy of political representativity prompted amendments to Lesotho's constitution and electoral law (Matlosa 2003), paving the way for the adoption of a mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system in 1998. The MMP electoral system was officially adopted to address representativeness in electoral system as 'a major democratic deficit in Lesotho's political landscape' (Matlosa 2003, p. 95). As an electoral system adopted by Lesotho, MMP combines elements of first-past-the-post (FPTP) and proportional representation (PR) systems, resulting in 'a dual ballot system in which each voter casts two votes – a constituency vote and a party vote' (Matlosa 2003, p. 91). One of its more admirable and positive attributes is to work for the deepening and sustaining of democratic governance in terms of improving political accountability and representation. Typically, 'in comparison with other systems, MMP electoral systems are said to keep legislators more accountable and to maximise the representativeness of the legislature' (The Electoral Knowledge Network, para.2).

MMP was first used by Lesotho as an electoral system in the 2002 elections, which, according to Elklit (2002, p. 1) resulted in the country being known as:

the first African country to test the MMP electoral model in a parliamentary election... the elections went very well, and the results produced by the new MMP system represented a significant political and democratic achievement, [and]... the level of disproportionality between vote and seat shares declined dramatically compared to previous elections.

Elklit adds that ‘the level of disproportionality would have been even lower, however, had it not been for some of the decisions taken regarding the number of seats in two categories: the surplus seats and the electoral threshold’ (ibid.). Nevertheless, Lesotho’s legislature benefitted from the use of the MMP electoral system as it improved proportionality and broadened representation of political parties (The Electoral Knowledge Network).

Despite its well-documented performance in the 2002 elections, the MMP results in the 2007 elections were violently contested by several political parties (ibid.). The bone of contention by political parties was the way in which seats were allocated or distributed by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) following the coalitions that the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and All Basotho Convention (ABC) had formed with the National Independence Party (NIP) and Lesotho Workers Party (LWP) respectively (ibid.). Their argument was that ‘[the]... IEC should have taken into consideration that LCD and NIP were in fact acting as one party (as were ABC and LWP) and should be treated as one party. They argued that treating these coalitions as a single entity would have significantly changed the seat allocation.’ (ibid.).

Whether or not there was merit in their argument, it was clear that coalition politics had entered Lesotho’s political landscape, signalling the need for better management in a way that would ‘avoid instability arising from the manipulation and misunderstanding of the MMP electoral system in Lesotho’ (ibid.).

The 2012 general elections in Lesotho took place under the MMP electoral system, making a significant impact on the political landscape of the country (Weisfelder 2015; Kapa & Shale 2014). By producing no outright parliamentary majority winner, the 2012 elections fast-tracked the advent of coalition politics in Lesotho’s body politic that started in 2007 with the LCD/NIP and ABC/LWP pre-election coalitions (Weisfelder 2015; Kapa & Shale 2014). The advent of coalition politics gave birth to Lesotho’s first coalition government, led by the ABC with 61 seats in the 120-member National Assembly. This ABC-led coalition government consisted of the ABC, the LCD, and the Basotho National Party (BNP), following the inconclusive 2012 elections (Weisfelder 2015; Kapa & Shale 2014).

The ABC-led coalition government was, however, short-lived. It collapsed in 2014 following the defection of the LCD from the coalition causing ‘political instability that culminated in an attempted coup d’état and intervention by external third-party mediators’ (Banerjee & Rich 2017, p. 2). The collapse of the ABC-led coalition government paved the way for the snap elections in 2015, which saw the formation of the Democratic Congress (DC)-led coalition government comprising seven parties and controlling 66 seats in the 120-member National Assembly. Like its predecessor, the DC-led coalition government was short-lived

as it also collapsed 'due mainly to splits in the leading alliance partners [resulting in] dissolution of parliament and proclamation of 2017 elections' (EISA 2017, p. 6).

As in previous elections under the MMP electoral system, the 2017 general elections produced no outright parliamentary majority winner to form the government (EISA 2017, p. 38). However, based on its pre-election pact, the ABC-led coalition government was formed with the BNP, the Alliance of Democrats (AD), and the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL). They controlled 63 seats in the National Assembly, two more than the 61 required to form a government (EISA 2017). The ABC-led majority government fell apart in 2020. All coalition partners withdrew their support for the initial four-party coalition government that came into power following the 2017 elections, due to unresolved intra- and inter-party conflicts.

The collapse of the ABC government majority led to the resignation of Thomas Thabane as Lesotho's prime minister and his replacement by the finance minister Dr Moeketsi Majoro, under the banner of the ABC's new coalition with the opposition Democratic Congress (DC). The premiership of Dr Moeketsi Majoro remained unscathed until the 2022 general elections that resulted in the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP)-led government in coalition with the Alliance of Democrats (AD) and the Movement for Economic Change (MEC). This was despite the ABC splits in Parliament in 2022 resulting from infighting in the party over the prime minister's post, which Dr Majoro continued to occupy although he had lost the leadership contest within the party.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND PROMISES AFTER THE 2022 ELECTIONS

On 7 October 2022, the much-anticipated general elections were held in Lesotho against the backdrop of years of unstable coalition politics, a string of rickety coalition governments, and endemic political instability. Ushering in the populist RFP-led coalition government with the AD and the MEC, the 2022 elections gave a glimpse of hope to the ordinary Basotho that the next five years would bring about much-needed urgency to the country's elusive 'developmental agenda' (Moyo 2022). As soon as they had taken the reins of government after winning the 2022 elections, the RFP-led coalition government lost no time in broadcasting opportunities for change and made promises to provide much-needed ethical political leadership for the country. In this regard, the RFP-led coalition government vowed to uphold 'clean leadership' and to provide 'lean and clean government' (Moyo 2022; Mohloboli 2022) geared towards Lesotho's development.

As presented in its 'clean governance' plan for the next five years, the RFP-led coalition government promised to lead on a platform of eradicating corruption

(Mohloboli 2022). Indeed, the pervasive scale of corruption in Lesotho, particularly in the public sector, is alarming (Rakolobe 2019, pp. 1013–1108; Toeba 2018, pp. 397–431). In order to tackle corruption in all its manifestation, the newly-formed coalition government ‘promised to do away with rampant corruption [with] focus on economic growth’ (Mohloboli 2022, para. 4). In this regard, the RFP-led coalition government tasked itself with ‘tackl[ing] crime and eradicating [its associated] corruption with the first 100 days in office’ (Mohloboli 2022, para. 6).

Mindful that Lesotho has been marred by political instability for the past decade, the RFP-led coalition government promised to push through outstanding political reforms aimed at strengthening political stability (France24 2022). In this regard, the government admitted that it was aware that ‘The outgoing parliament failed to pass a law aimed at strengthening political stability’ (ibid.). The much-anticipated law ‘would ban lawmakers from switching party allegiance within the first three years of their tenure’ (ibid.). Put differently, the law would have prohibited lawmakers from switching party allegiance within the first year of their mandate. To end the string of rickety coalition governments that had resulted in Lesotho’s political instability, the RFP-led coalition government vowed that ‘pushing through this reform will be part of its agenda in its first 100 days in office’ (ibid.).

Coupled with curbing the graft to stop a rampant embezzlement of public funds, the pro-business RFP-led coalition government promised to ‘reform a public service to make it more efficient, transparent, accountable and effective’ (Africanews 2022, para.7). This reformation of the public service was probably expected to involve ‘depolicitising the public service’ (Rakolobe 2019, pp.1013–1108; Ntaote 2017) and ‘cutting down on government expenditure [to improve] the delivery of government services’ (Moyo 2022). It is an open secret that runaway government expenditure is a direct consequence of the politicisation of the public service through the practice of political patronage (Rakolobe 2019; Ntaote 2017). Cognisant of the root cause of runaway government expenditure, one of the immediate tasks of the incoming RFP-led coalition government was to manage government expenditure cost effectively through best practice in procuring goods and services.

Closely linked to having a tight rein on runaway government expenditure, the business-oriented RFP-led coalition government promised ‘to stabilize the economy in its first 100 days in office to arrest widespread poverty and stubborn unemployment’ (Senoko 2022). Poverty and unemployment remain rife, chronic, stubborn, persistent, and pervasive in Lesotho (Hapazari & Loubser 2021; Kali 2020; Hapazari 2019; Damane & Sekantsi 2018); and one of the government’s priorities is its inclusive approach to stabilise the economy, which is good news for the ordinary Basotho (Kali 2020; Hapazari 2019; Damane & Sekantsi 2018).

Hapazari (2019, p.1) notes that ‘poverty and unemployment are rife’, making them ‘ticking timebombs’ ready to explode at any time (Mohloboli 2021) if not strategically addressed, as they are at the head of [socio-economic] malaises (Mokhatla 2004). Thus, the political intent of the RFP-led coalition government to address poverty and unemployment through the stabilisation of the economy is a welcome move in a country like Lesotho, which is plagued by widespread poverty and unemployment with devastating effects for the country’s ailing economy.

On the promise of drastically altering the way the country had been governed by previous coalition governments, the action-oriented RFP-led coalition government delivered on its promise of slashing the country’s bloated cabinet (Mohloboli 2022). They dramatically reduced ‘the country’s bloated cabinet to just 15 members including the prime minister and the deputy prime minister with a provision of 15 principal secretaries [but] no deputy ministers’ (ibid.). This was an enormous political decision by the business-minded RFP-led coalition government in a country which had been known for its political patronage and excessive cabinet appointments since the first coalition governments, at huge cost to the public purse. For instance, the ABC-led coalition governments of 2012–2014 and 2017–2020 had 27 and 35 cabinet personnel respectively, including ministers and deputy ministers (ibid.). The DC-led coalition government of 2015–2017 had 35 cabinet personnel including ministers and deputies (ibid.). The reduction of cabinet positions by the RFP-led coalition government was a huge relief to the country’s overstretched national fiscus, which was reeling from wasteful expenditure by previous coalition governments.

RFP COALITION GOVERNMENT VOWS CLEAN GOVERNANCE

Upon assuming the reins of government in Lesotho, the RFP-led coalition government vowed to give the country clean governance as it rallied the nation around what it dubbed ‘a developmental agenda’ (Moyo 2022). By vowing to have clean governance in running the country, the RFP-led coalition government provided a reason for optimism for the ordinary Basotho, and that the post-2022 elections had at last given Lesotho principled political leadership geared towards the functioning of democracy. Indeed, in an extraordinary political move, the RFP-led coalition government has given the Basotho hope that upholding clean leadership in government is indispensable for the consolidation and functioning of electoral democracy in Lesotho (Moyo 2022; Mohloboli 2022).

The renewed optimism and hope that the RFP coalition government would lead Lesotho to a ‘clean’ governance trajectory ‘comes against a backdrop of loss of [public] confidence [and trust in the current crop of the country’s] political elite [and its] electoral democracy’ (Kurtz 2021, p.1). The fragile ABC and DC-led

political coalitions that preceded the RFP-led coalition have unfortunately given the Basotho no reason to continue believing in the country's electoral democracy. Since its independence in the 1960s, Lesotho's electoral democracy has regularly produced what could be dubbed a 'crisis of ethical political leadership' (Mayanja 2013, p. 113) that has grossly undermined and inhibited the country's democratic consolidation (Kali 2022; Fogelman & Aerni-flessner 2019). This crisis of ethical political leadership is responsible for Lesotho's current political governance crisis or problems: a string of rickety coalition governments, years of unstable coalition politics, and endemic political instability. Cultivating ethical political leadership in Lesotho's politics is tricky given the familiar quagmire of political scandals, party splits and leadership battles in coalitions that have benefited political elites rather than the public.

Can ethical political leadership of the RFP-led coalition government restore public confidence and trust in Lesotho political leaders? The resounding answer is yes, but with the proviso that the RFP-led coalition leaders in government are committed to principles of clean governance by word and deed and keenly interested to walk the paths of Mohlomi and Moshoeshoe as ethical leaders in Basotho history (Mofuoa 2022, pp. 64–81; Prozesky 2016, pp. 6-16; Mofuoa 2015, pp. 21–35). In a recent article titled 'Can ethical political leadership restore public trust in political leaders', Mozumder (2022, p. 821) writes that:

ethical leadership practices can restore public trust in political leaders... being a moral person, an ethical political leader sets good examples of behaviour, sets the tone at the top and challenges those who do not behave ethically, as well as encourages, supports and rewards those who perform and conduct themselves well.... As result of [ethical leadership practices], the level of public trust in political leaders is likely to increase gradually).

Here, ethical political leadership in government is understood to refer to 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making' (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120). In electoral democracies, ethical political leadership is accepted as 'a socio-political process where [political] leaders are duly elected, guided by [ethical] principles, motivated by public values and trust, and act within the socio-legal framework to impact the lives of citizens' (Mozumder 2022, pp. 824–825).

The dilemma of Lesotho is the absence of the ethical political leadership necessary for the country's consolidation and the proper functioning of electoral democracy and governance. Absence of ethical political leadership is a clear and

present danger confronting the country, and it has been the bane of socio-economic and political development in Lesotho. The major inhibition of development in Lesotho in the absence of ethical political leadership is basically what Bayart (2009) calls 'the politics of the belly' or what Commey (2014) dubs 'Stomach politics' and what Mkhize (2016) similarly names 'politics of the stomach'. This phenomenon is manifest in the body politic of the country driven by 'Leqe-Leqe', literally meaning 'Eat-Eat' ethics popularised some years ago by Monyane Moleleki, the former AD leader and a renowned political veteran in the country's politics. There is no doubt that the now infamous 'Leqe-Leqe' ethics in the country's political lexicon has opened the door to a new way of doing politics in Lesotho.

The ugly face of the 'politics of the belly' has shown itself in what, economically speaking, has become a popular African expression, or political jargon: 'What is in it for us' (Commey 2014, p. 1). This unfortunate phrase drives the formation of political alliances and coalitions by political elites (Mkhize 2016; Commey 2014; Bayart 2009) for the purposes of '[political] careerism and economic opportunism' (Mkhize 2016, p. 2). In this regard, Kapa and Shale (2014, p. 96) wrote that 'the only convincing explanation for the formation of alliances [or coalitions in Lesotho] seems to be office-seeking motives of or by political elites'. Unfortunately, these office-seeking motives of political elites are often driven not by ideology nor policies (*ibid.*). In the absence of ideological or policy orientation, such motives can only be motivated by the sheer 'politics of the belly' that fosters 'ineffective, stagnant or counterproductive political leadership' (Mkhize 2016, p.3) whose only motive for seeking office is 'to feed [their stomach] on the state' (Mayanja 2013, p. 14) driven by 'Leqe-Leqe' ethics.

With the incoming era of clean governance under the RFP-led coalition government, it is hoped that the political contests that characterise Lesotho politics will not degenerate into the 'politics of the belly' (Fan 2017) and/or 'politics of the stomach' (Mkhize 2016). What is reassuring in this regard is that the positive signs immediately after the 2022 elections (that is, the public acceptance of regime change) indicate increasing Basotho confidence in the RFP-led coalition government and public support for democracy. That being the case, however, the RFP-led coalition government is yet to demonstrate that it can deepen and sustain democratic values and governance for Lesotho's evasive political stability. So far, their assurances and promises offer hope for the public to believe in the future of coalitions in Lesotho politics as positive vehicles for electoral democracy and political stability.

Prospects for clean governance, as professed by the RFP-led coalition's political leadership, are expected to restore public confidence and inspire public support. The RFP-led coalition government's moral commitment to clean governance has been characterised by a crackdown on corruption and an

adherence to fiscal discipline to ensure that government secured value for money in its spending. This has received and continues to receive widespread public approval. What remains to be seen now is whether this coalition government will deliver on its commitment to clean governance in its administration in the coming five years. The biggest political question for the RFP-led coalition administration in the next five years is whether it will use its hard-earned administrative authority in a more decisive and bold manner. Put differently, recognising that it is in a powerful position to institute its clean governance agenda, would the RFP-led coalition administration seize the moment and provide the much-needed ethical political leadership necessary to fix Lesotho's ailing economy as well as its persistent political instability?

Effectively addressing the rampant corruption in all spheres of Lesotho's public service is the first acid test for the RFP-led coalition administration. The administration needs the moral authority to direct the public conscience towards corruption in the public service. The war against corruption in Lesotho's public service can only be won through concrete, bold, and principled actions by the RFP-led government. One such action would be to improve the anti-corruption legal framework and systems (Toeba 2018, p. 424), and strengthen anti-corruption bodies by ensuring their independence in the execution of their mandates (Toeba 2018, p. 417). Principled anti-corruption actions of this nature will speak volumes about the extent to which the RFP-led coalition administration is serious about tackling corruption in the public service by providing the insulation from political interference that it badly needs in order to function for the good of every Mosotho, irrespective of her or his political affiliation and inclination.

Strengthening governance systems across Lesotho's public service machinery to improve service delivery is another acid test for the incoming coalition administration. It is no secret that Lesotho's public service is cluttered with well-envisioned public service policies gone wrong (Lebakeng 2021, pp. 205–222). These policies are adopted but badly executed, or at worse, fall prey to corruption and ineptitude due to the absence or lack of governance supporting systems. More often, governance problems in Lesotho's public service machinery has revealed itself in many ways (*ibid.*). These include but are not limited to corruption, misaligned policy objectives, regulatory and administrative capture, the unintended effects of badly thought-through policies, nepotism, incompetence, and difficulties with long-term planning (*ibid.*).

Thus, the poor quality of systems supporting governance in the public service results in policy failures or policy inefficiency that 'negatively affect service delivery' (Lebakeng 2021, p. 205) causing 'considerable lack of service delivery' (Matsieli 2020, p.16). Commitment to strengthening governance-supporting systems in Lesotho's public service machinery through concrete deeds would go

a long way in demonstrating the RFP-led coalition administration's intention to improving service delivery. This is an area that demands the political attention and commitment of the RFP-led coalition administration if public service delivery is to be improved during the next five years.

Attracting potential foreign investors to invest in Lesotho's ailing economy amid its perennial political instability is another acid test for the incoming administration. Since independence, Lesotho has favourably attracted investors (Makhetha & Rantaoleng 2017; Malefane 2007). It has recorded 'a substantial increase in levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, part of it prompted by trade privileges' (Malefane 2007, p. 99). In addition to the trade privileges that the country enjoyed, Lesotho's economy 'benefited from a more export-oriented investment promotion strategy [that country effectively runs]'. In fact, Malefane and Odhiambo (2016, p. 211) argue that 'the increasing role of international trade in the economy of Lesotho has become evident, particularly with the impetus from the country's export sector'.

Although open to foreign investment, Lesotho has 'critical issues that must be addressed if the country is to attract more FDI and retain existing investors' (Malefane 2007, p. 99). According to Malefane, 'These issues pertain to bureaucratic red-tape, corruption and political instability'(ibid.). Here, Makhetha (2008, p. 153) agrees that these issues 'are associated with very low levels of investment and economic growth'. Makhetha further argues that '[they hinder] domestic investment and foreign direct investment, therefore retarding economic growth'. He argues further that '[they generate] inefficiently high inflation, which hinders investment, reduces welfare and retards economic growth'.

Effectively attracting and managing international development aid and assistance to boost Lesotho's ailing economy and fiscus during its perennial political instability is another acid test for the RFP-led coalition administration. As a least developing country, Lesotho is historically one of the largest recipients of international development aid and assistance from the international donor community, according to Johnson (2016, p. 473) who asserts that 'Since independence in 1966 the country attracted a lot of [international] aid interventions in most of its development programmes'. Historically, Lesotho has used and continues to use international development aid and assistance to boost its ailing fiscus to finance development projects, and potentially attract investors as much of the aid is directed towards development.

According to Hongli and Vitenu-Sackey (2020, p. 79), however, 'the undermining factors hindering aid-growth relationships in Africa, [including Lesotho] are high levels of corruption, political instability, and poor institutional quality'. Indeed, Lesotho's widespread corruption, well-recorded perennial political instability and poor institutional quality over the years have negatively

impacted on the political accountability and good governance of international development aid and assistance. These factors require urgent attention and commitment from the RFP-led coalition administration in Lesotho in order to improve 'political governance - voice and accountability and political stability - no violence, economic governance - regulation quality and government effectiveness, institutional governance - rule of law and corruption control, and general governance - political, economic, and institutional governance' (Asongu & Nnanna 2019, p. 807).

Effectively propagating growth and development in Lesotho under its 'developmental agenda' is another acid test for the RFP-led coalition administration. Lesotho is not new to developing and implementing growth and development programmes and policies (see Monaheng 2016, pp. 31–46; Rantso 2015, pp. 2651–2661). After years of investment in growth and development since independence, however, Lesotho does not seem to be 'a success story in the neoliberal "Africa Rising" narrative' (Fogelman & Aerni-flessner 2016 p. 1). The authors argue that 'Despite post-Millennium development programs like Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), most Basotho still live in poverty' (ibid.).

Hence, these authors suggest that 'the now-public critique of development only benefiting the well-connected in Lesotho be taken seriously', and 'addressing this has the potential to help rebuild trust in government' (ibid., p. 2). In this context they ask: 'Can Lesotho survive more development?' This is an interesting, timely, and urgent question for the RFP-led coalition administration if its much-propagated 'developmental agenda' for Lesotho is anything to go by 'in making development more effective [and relevant for most Basotho]' (ibid., pp. 2–3). They add:

Real development [for most Basotho] would address the labour and border policies of South Africa that contrive to keep out Basotho workers, focus aid on raising household income for the poor and otherwise vulnerable, provide direct health and education services with fees eliminated, and provide an opportunity for substantive poverty reduction and increased life expectancy in Lesotho.

It is this kind of development that is 'more important to Lesotho's economic viability' (ibid.), and it should take the lion's share of the developmental agenda of the governing RFP-led coalition administration in the next five years. All the Basotho require to implement this kind of development is that the governing RFP-led coalition administration should have ethical and courageous leaders who put the good of the people before their own interests, and are not in government for

their 'bellies' or 'stomachs' as it is often the case in Lesotho's politics. The Basotho need this calibre of ethical political leadership which unfortunately has become a rare commodity in Lesotho since independence.

The dearth of ethical political leadership demonstrated in the recent serial collapse of coalition governments is a clear and present danger for Lesotho. Indeed, the decades since independence have seen the Basotho forced to endure an erosion of ethics in political leadership in government. It is this void, this absence of ethical political leadership in government that the governing RFP-led coalition administration is expected to fill through its much publicised 'developmental agenda'. There is a critical need for ethical political leadership to address governance ills confronting Lesotho. As such, cultivating the culture of ethical political leadership in government must be central to the 'developmental agenda' of the governing RFP-led coalition administration in the next five years.

In Lesotho, it is no secret that ethical political leadership practices are essential in building trust and confidence in the governance of the country, and in implementing effective ethical standards in government. No one can deny that there is an ethical and political failure of leadership facing Lesotho that needs addressing. By both acting ethically and setting the ethical standards for others, the governing RFP-led coalition administration is in enviable position to effectively address the endemic problem of 'dirty hands' in Lesotho's politics that negatively impacts the governance of the country. Since independence, the Lesotho democratic experience has not resulted in the much-expected good governance necessary for development. The problem of dirty hands in the county's politics is a roadblock to a strong electoral democracy in Lesotho and poses a major threat to the consolidation of democratic governance.

Can the governing RFP-led coalition administration address the endemic problem of 'dirty hands' in Lesotho's politics? The resounding answer is yes, the governing RFP-led coalition administration can do so if it can ride the current tide of public trust and confidence by seriously 'taking politics as a vocation' (Kure 2022, pp. 1–9). Here, for the governing RFP-led coalition administration, political vocation means delivering on the promises of developmental agenda, clean governance, and service delivery they have made to the Basotho people. The signs in Lesotho's politics indicate that political leaders can no longer be wishfully blind to the ethics of the political promises they make. The days are gone when dishonest political behaviour in Lesotho was considered as not having anything to do with morality but more as being a function of political cost-to-benefit ratio. In a Weberian sense, the time has come for political leaders in Lesotho 'to face the ethical irrationality of the world and take responsibility for its bearing on political action in pursuit of an ethical good in politics' (Gane 1997, pp. 549–550). This will undoubtedly take Lesotho on a new political trajectory where the pursuit

of ethical excellence becomes a norm in politics and a sought-after quality in the quest for political leadership in the future for the country's political aspirants.

CONCLUSION

Neglecting ethics as a vital resource necessary for a healthy and vibrant electoral democracy is holding back the political development of Lesotho. The urgency of cultivating ethics in the political leadership of Lesotho at all levels across the political landscape is clearly evident, given the political instability the country has experienced since independence. Remarking on the absence of ethics in the political leadership of Lesotho, Kapa and Shale (2014, p.111) were moved to write, 'Yet the parties' [political leadership] manipulation of the MMP electoral system through what is seen as unethical alliances indicates their unwillingness to accept [electoral and constitutional] reforms'. Lamenting the unethical behaviour of Lesotho's political leadership in conducting their political affairs, these authors added:

the formation of the political party alliances [in Lesotho] can be explained in terms of office-seeking theory, 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.

Addressing the urgent need for ethics in fixing the crisis of principled leadership in politics, Fox (2020, p. 37) writes that [the] 'importance of ethics in all human activities [including politics] cannot be overstressed'. He emphasises that 'Ethics is a must in all human activities [because] if a leader is not an ethical person, things will go wrong' (ibid.). Specifically referring to the importance of ethics in the political leadership of countries like Lesotho, Fox adds that

One of the most important human activities is politics since politicians manage whole countries. [Politics] is the field where leaders can do their best for their societies and the human race or they can do the greatest harm, as leaders like Hitler did harm to his country and to the whole world.

Writing passionately about the enormous moral responsibility that political leadership has in the public affairs of countries across political systems, Fox (ibid.) further notes that :

Political leaders have a tremendous task in a wide spectrum because of social, economic, legal, [political], security challenges – in short, solving all the problems of coexistence is part of their job. When we are talking of coexistence, it includes everyone sharing the very same existence, the same community, the same planet; that is why ethics is the most important issue here.

Stressing the importance of ethical leadership in the political systems around the world, he adds (2020, pp. 111):

I strongly believe the bright future of the human race rests on ethics, and anything lacking ethics can be a curse. Take scientific progress for example: in the hands of greedy or evil persons it will hurt humanity. However, the very same knowledge employed by ethical people will do much good.

Much the same can be said about politics as Fox's comments about scientific progress. If the country's government in any given political system is in the hands of greedy elites, it will hurt the citizens of that country. However, if ethical political leaders run the political governance of the country, politics will do much public good for the citizenry.

Political leaders in Lesotho can take positive cues for ethics in political leadership from Fox (2020, p. 38), who commented that 'to realise the political governance of their respective countries, political leaders need a flight chart and a moral compass'. He explains, 'The flight chart is the government's plan for the time [political leaders] are in office and beyond, [and] the moral compass – or ethical GPS, to reference a more modern tool – consists of the principles and qualities required to be an ethical leader' (ibid.). In this regard, it remains to be seen whether or not the governing RFP-led coalition administration has 'a flight chart and ethical GPS' to navigate the uncharted waters of Lesotho's political, economic, and institutional governance for the benefit of the Basotho people. Firstly, they need to tackle the country's dearth of ethical political leadership for the benefit of the Basotho people now and in the future. Secondly, they should lead the country on a new socio-economic and political trajectory in pursuit of ethical good.

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