

SCREENING POLITICAL PARTY CANDIDATES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

The Case of the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) in Lesotho's 2022 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

The formation of the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) party in March 2022 has radically altered Lesotho's political landscape. Apart from the new calibre of political leadership, the party has, in line with its name, revolutionised some of the traditions long held by Lesotho's political parties. Contrary to the closed primary elections that most parties use, the RFP introduced a combination of centralised and technocratic approaches in determining the list of party candidates for the October 2022 elections. With the former, the party reserved candidacies in eleven constituencies for persons appointed by the leader. Four front runners in the primary elections in the remaining constituencies would be subjected to various screening methods with the final determination to be made by the party leadership. The detractors have mocked the RFP's approach as undemocratic and undermining the will of the people. The party also experienced internal resistance that led to it being taken to the law courts where some decisions were reversed. Using various data collection methods, this paper discusses the strategies used by the RFP and shows that much as they are not common in Lesotho, these strategies are not entirely new in politics as they are used in other democratic systems. An examination of the October 2022 elections results shows that despite the court challenges, the RFP's candidate selection strategies had a positive impact on the party's performance as well as on the profile of the resultant National Assembly.

Keywords: candidate screening, Revolution for Prosperity, electoral performance, Lesotho

INTRODUCTION

The formation of the Revolution for Prosperity party (RFP) by business mogul Samuel Matekane marked a turning point in Lesotho's politics ahead of the October 2022 general elections. Prior to the formation of the RFP, Matekane had not been known to have any interest in politics, at least publicly. He was better known as the country's most successful businessman and for his philanthropic deeds. These became most apparent during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when he spent millions of Maloti (Lesotho's currency) helping the country fight the pandemic. In an unexpected move, Matekane was joined by other prominent businessmen and notable individuals including Dr. Retselisitsoe Matlanyane (former Governor of the Central Bank of Lesotho), Justice Nthomeng Majara (retired Chief Justice), and Lebona Lephema (business tycoon).

In line with its name, the Revolution for Prosperity 'revolutionised' Lesotho's politics and deviated from a number of conventional practices in the country. One such deviation was the selection of party candidates for elections. Normally, candidates in Lesotho's elections are elected through primary elections organised by individual parties. However, RFP chose a completely different strategy. In June 2022 the party issued a directive that Matekane and the other ten founding members of the party should automatically represent the party in their respective constituencies without undergoing primary elections. Aspiring candidates in the remaining 69 constituencies (Lesotho is divided into 80 constituencies) would nonetheless have to undergo primary elections. In addition they would have to fulfill other rigorous criteria including checks on their educational backgrounds, and being interviewed by Mr Matekane himself to assess their fitness to represent the party (Zihlangu & Mohloboli 2022). According to the party hierarchy, all the screening processes were made in line with the principle of meritocracy to ensure that the most suitable candidates occupied positions in the party and possibly later in government.

The RFP's unfamiliar methods of candidate selection were described by many – particularly members of rival parties – as undemocratic and the party was ridiculed for having forced candidates on the constituents. One of the objections to the RFP's selection criteria was that it would deter followers and cost the party in elections.

This article sets out to unpack the principle of candidate screening in elections and shows that, much as it might be unfamiliar in Lesotho, the principle is used in other parts of the world. The article also focuses on the results of the October 2022 elections to determine if the screening of candidates had any impact on the performance of the RFP. The paper uses a mix of primary and secondary material, as it is based on both interviews and a literature review. It consists of a

conceptual framework, the formation of the RFP, the October 2022 elections, and the performance of the RFP, as well as the conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Representative Democracy and the Selection of Representatives

The key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people's will to be expressed (Garner et al. 2012, p. 242). Elections have become a common feature of modern states because huge populations and vast geographical boundaries make it difficult for citizens to participate directly in public affairs. It is for this reason that representatives are elected to represent the views of their respective communities in different structures of the political systems. In any election, thousands of persons could choose to stand for election, but it would be nearly impossible for voters to make an informed choice from so many. Furthermore, there would be serious logistical and administrative challenges in organising an election with such a huge number of competitors. Political parties therefore act as gatekeepers by narrowing down the list of candidates to a manageable pool.

Through their own internal rules political parties decide who will be on the ballot paper as their recommended candidate(s). The main difference in the rules pertaining to the selection of political party candidates is premised on the levels of centralisation and participation. Centralisation implies that 'what level in the party – local, regional or national – controls the candidate selection, while participation is about who – ordinary members or top leadership – controls the process at the level where the decision is taken' (Electoral Knowledge Network 2000). Below is a detailed description of how these two central concepts apply in the selection of candidates.

Centralisation

In an extremely centralised system, a national party agency would decide on the candidate selection without any involvement by the local branches of the party. At the other end of the scale would be a system where the most local branches of the party would decide on candidates without any approval or participation from the national level.

Participation

Candidate selection is not only important for candidates and their parties, but also for the resultant legislatures and their performance. Candidate selection

influences the balance of power within the party, determines the personal composition of parliaments, and impacts on the behaviour of legislators (Hazan & Rabat 2010; Vandeleene & van Haute 2021, p. 1). It is highly probable that a parliament consisting of members who have undergone a rigorous candidate screening processes is likely to have a better calibre of membership than one where candidates were elected simply through primary elections.

A situation with extremely low participation would be if the party leader alone would decide on the candidates. The other extreme would be if the ordinary members of the party would decide without any participation or involvement of the party leaders.

(Electoral Knowledge Network 2000)

Like many other issues related to elections, the processes of selection (most often election) of candidates has attracted the attention of scholars. For instance, the International Republican Institute (IRI) commissioned the study that

explored candidate selection processes and practices across a dozen countries in Europe, as well as the United States to better understand how political parties navigate the challenges and opportunities of promoting democratic representation and supporting strong contenders to win elected offices.

(Muzergues & Scaduto 2022)

The following points are from a summary of these findings:

- Political parties cannot rely on one-size-fits-all or silver bullet solutions to improve candidate (s)election processes. Parties must explore context-specific options to determine the best solutions for each circumstance.
- While the past 30 years have witnessed the democratisation of candidate (s)election processes across the transatlantic space, a new trend is now developing towards more technocratic solutions that view candidate (s)election processes as a technical issue that necessitates a professional, HR-based approach.
- Centralized processes of party candidate (s)election allow greater control, but often leave parties vulnerable to dynamic outside contenders. Voters may lose interest in parties that exercise opaque candidate (s)election processes (ibid.).

In their work titled *Standing Out from the Crowd Political Parties: Candidate (s)election in the Transatlantic World*, Muzergues and Scaduto (2022) discuss a number of

types used for candidate (s)election. The authors note that each of these types has its own limitations and strengths. The three types relevant for this paper are summarised below.

Closed party/centralised

This type involves high degrees of centralisation where the party headquarters maintain ultimate control over who becomes the party's candidate. Without doubt, this might seem to compromise democratic tendencies. However, it can also have some merit by imposing changes and enlarging the profile of candidates so that the party more faithfully resembles the constituency it aims to represent (ibid.).

Election or selection in a closed ballot

This method involves closed primaries in which members of the party at the lowest levels (mostly through representatives of the branches) elect the party's candidate. While it has some democratic characteristics and may create a sense of owning the process for the rank and file of the party, the method 'risks party entrenchment or stagnation as party membership choose candidates that may stick to party orthodoxy but are not suitable to expand the party's appeal to those always elusive "independent" or "centrist" voters' (ibid.).

The technocratic approach

This approach is relatively new to politics and consists of outsourcing the candidate selection process to an independent, sometimes professional structure to adopt recruitment tactics similar to those found in the private sector. This selection method has the merit of introducing a meritocratic approach to politics but is also less democratic and runs the risk of de-politicising a process that is itself highly political by nature.

Candidate vetting

Candidate vetting is one of the strategies used in the technocratic approach to the selection of candidate vetting. This is a preventative measure that central party agents use to subject their aspiring candidates to background scrutiny and to reject applicants deemed likely to spark negative publicity for political parties. Marland (2021, p. 573) suggests that:

in Canada a wave of vetting arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to concern about political ethics, and again around 2008 with the growth in the influences of social media. Many election

candidates were resigning when confronted by moral outrage over their indiscretions that were exposed by media.

And in what might appear undemocratic:

central party officers encroach on the role of local party members in the candidate selection process to protect the party's brand and its election prospects. Implications of screening candidates range from rooting out political extremists to fortifying the leader's authority.

(ibid.)

FORMATION OF THE REVOLUTION FOR PROSPERITY

As noted earlier in the paper, the formation of the RFP came as a surprise to most of the Basotho nation. It is almost impossible to discuss issues related to this party without talking about its founder, Ntsokoane Samuel Matekane. Because of his centrality his name dominates discussions in the following sections. In announcing the formation of the party, Matekane provided the reasons leading to his unexpected move. He detailed that as a businessman, he never dreamt of venturing into politics but believed his role was assisting Basotho society to develop. There is no doubt that he did assist his society in numerous ways. Apart from turning his mountainous village of Mant'sonyane into a small town through numerous infrastructural and agricultural projects, Matekane has made a philanthropic contribution to the welfare of the Basotho nation through various corporate social responsibility activities. He also played a leading role in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. His initiatives in this regard include purchasing ICU equipment for some hospitals as well as leading a private-sector project named *Sesiu sa Let'soele le beta poho* (fund of 'Unity is power') that procured vaccines for the nation. Matekane received a rare continental recognition for his efforts, and won the Forbes Best of Africa Award in 2021. This recognition is under the auspices of Foreign Investment Network (FIN) in partnership with Forbes Best of Africa for leading persons in business, politics, innovation, leadership and economics of Africa (Senoko 2021).

The socio-economic situation in Lesotho has continued to decline in recent years. This has led to the current situation that, according to Matekane, pushed him into politics – what he reports never having dreamt of doing previously. Narrating how his assistance had been in vain, and how the situation ultimately pushed him into politics, Matekane compared his initiatives in helping the country to those of a man 'who is busy cleaning a sinking ship'. He reiterated that he decided to join politics and take a lead because he realised that the 'ship

is sinking and needs a strong-willed captain to save it' (Seme 2022a). As was to be expected, there were mixed reactions within Basotho society about the formation of this new party. While some Basotho were delighted about the move Matekane had taken, others felt he was tainting his business image by being politically active and taking a lead in politics. Amongst the commentators was the country's renowned academic Professor Motlatsi Thabane, who was not impressed by the formation of the RFP. In a newspaper article titled, 'Revolution for Prosperity: Wealth and state power' Thabane wrote that:

What is abundantly clear, though, is that the RFP party is only a quantitative addition to the over-40 liberal, free-market formations that call themselves political parties in Lesotho. This is to say, there is nothing qualitatively different that the leaders of RFP are proposing to change for the better the lives of Lesotho's poor citizen. ... At all times, the wealthy's pursuit for power is undesirable and not inevitable. Similarly, the powerful's pursuit of wealth is undesirable and not inevitable.

(Thabane 2022)

Upon its formation, the RFP attracted members from different walks of life in Lesotho. As is always the case with any social organisation, members joined the RFP with different motives. For instance, just few months after the party's formation 'already many high-profile people, including some former cabinet ministers had dumped their parties in the hope of riding on the RFP bandwagon to either resuscitate or prolong their political careers' (Zihlangu & Mohloboli 2022). A similar observation is shared by Sithetho (2022) who wrote that 'it was later realised that the goal of the well-known politicians for joining the party was to be granted an opportunity to stand in the constituencies in which they stood for elections in the past'. Most notable of the new defectors were the Alliance of Democrats (AD)'s secretary general Mahali Phamotse (also a former Minister of Sports, Gender and Recreation), AD treasurer and former Development Planning Minister Tlohelang Aumane, and former Deputy Minister of Health, Manthabiseng Phohleli (also from the AD).

The RFP's sudden attraction for so many people became evident through the huge attendances at its rallies, particularly during its manifesto launch in June 2022. The extent of the financial muscle associated with the party became apparent in a number of ways. For instance, contrary to the normal practice in many parties, RFP offered membership cards free of charge. The party also engaged in expensive campaign strategies by flying its banners across the country on helicopters owned by its founders. The exodus of voters to the RFP sent shockwaves through many

established political parties which reacted in different ways. For instance, in April Limpho Tau disbanded his Democratic Party of Lesotho (DPL) and joined the RFP, arguing that the latter was preaching the same message that the DPL had preached since its formation in 2016, which is economic enhancement (Lesotho Tribune 2022). Meanwhile, AD leader Monyane Moleleki raised his fear that the RFP was decimating more established parties, including his own. Furthermore, Moleleki raised fears that if elected, an RFP government ‘could connive to divide lucrative tenders and economic opportunities amongst themselves, thus blocking new people from venturing into and consolidating themselves in business’ (Zihlangu 2022).

Machesetsa Mofomobe of the once-iconic Basotho National Party (BNP) was equally unimpressed and sounded threatened by the formation of the RFP. He criticised Matekane and his colleagues for venturing into politics, saying they were ‘greedy and insatiable despite the huge wealth they had accumulated over the years as beneficiaries of government tenders’ (Zihlangu & Mohloboli 2022). What became obvious, as Seme (2022a) correctly surmised, was that ‘since its establishment two months ago, RFP has stirred the political scene in Lesotho with many of the traditionally dominant parties in Lesotho redefining their policies and countering the RFPs coming in as a substitute instead of talking to their own policies’.

CANDIDATE SCREENING

As previously indicated, one of the RFP’s fundamental points of departure from Lesotho’s established parties was in relation to the (s)election of candidates for the October 2022 elections. The tradition amongst Lesotho’s parties has been the use of a closed ballot in the primary election whereby the leadership allows members of the party to conduct the election¹. In these primary elections only the representatives of branches within the concerned constituencies are allowed to cast their votes. Primary elections are regarded to be a good sign of democracy, and as Muzergues and Scaduto (2022) argue, ‘have the added benefit of empowering the party base and giving value to party membership, something increasingly important in an age where more and more citizens are reluctant to get involved in a political party’. However, such praises hardly apply to the primary elections in Lesotho.

The use of primary elections in Lesotho has not only divided parties ahead of elections but has also contributed to the poor calibre of legislatures, in which some members can barely comprehend the business of the legislature due to their

1 The IEC accepts candidates presented to it by political parties without asking for details of how such candidates have been selected.

limited educational background. A deep analysis of Lesotho's politics shows that open primary elections have produced legislators elected largely because of their popularity based on social considerations other than political competence. Many of these candidates can barely speak English yet most of the legislature's business is conducted that language.

The RFP was probably aware of the challenges associated with primary elections and opted for the mixture of the closed party/centralised and technocratic approaches discussed above. In a circular issued on Monday 27 June 2022 the party indicated that 11 constituencies would not hold primary elections. Instead, according to this circular, the party's leadership had chosen candidates based on their knowledge of national issues, their background in development, and their educational achievements (Liphoto 2022). This unfamiliar move was justified on the grounds that the eleven candidates were chosen to represent the party because they were an 'embodiment of the RFP's founding principles of meritocracy' (Zihlangu & Mohloboli 2022).

It is worth reiterating that despite the views of detractors, centralised candidate selections have merit. They have worked fairly well in Europe and the United States where personalities have come to matter as much as, if not more than ideologies and manifestos. For instance, for the 2016 and 2020 national elections in Lithuania:

the parliamentary candidate list of the Peasants and Greens Party was ranked by the party council and confirmed by the party board. Similarly, in Polish PiS it is the district board which proposes a list of candidates, and the district council which evaluates it. But the final decisions are taken by the central authorities.

(Muzergues & Scadatu 2022)

Vetting of candidates is necessary to avoid the controversies that might come to haunt the party when the unpleasant past of the candidates is revealed. Focusing specifically on Canadian parties, Marland (2021, p. 573) states that 'often controversy is generated by opponents who conduct American-style opposition research and provide findings to the media'.

In Lesotho's polluted politics, which are characterised by mediocrity and failure, it is easy to believe that Matekane and most founding members embodied the change that was so badly needed. This change mattered more than any democratic rhetoric associated with primary elections within political parties. It was understandable then, under the circumstances, for them to be selected by the party leadership for candidacy without having to undergo primary elections. Looking at the 11 candidates that the RFP selected, it is easy to understand the

argument by Muzergues and Scaduto (2022) that centralised approaches have some merit in imposing changes and enlarging the profile of candidates in the interest of the party. The candidates were mostly new to politics and without any political baggage. Most importantly, they were in general literate people of reputable social standing who have improved the image of the party and can easily learn and comprehend the business of parliament. Table I below shows the constituencies that were to nominate candidates without primary elections, as well as the names of selected candidates.

Table 1: Constituencies spared from holding primary elections

Constituency name and number	District	Candidate	Candidate's profile
Hololo # 02	Butha-Buthe	Mr. Lejone Mpotjoane	Educationist with specialities in finance and governance
Thaba-Phatšoa # 08	Leribe	Mr. Thabo Maretlane	Businessman and organisor of the annual Moshoeshoe Walk
Teya-Teyaneng # 24	Berea	Mr. Lebona Lephema	Multi-sector business tycoon
Lithabaneng # 40	Maseru	Mr. Mokhethi Shelile	Businessman
Maseru Central # 33	Maseru	Justice Nthomeng Majara	Retired Chief Justice
Thetsane # 35	Maseru	Ms. Nthathi Moorosi	Independent consultant in communications
Qalabane # 57	Mafeteng	Dr. Retselisitsoe Matlanyane	Former Governor of the Central Bank of Lesotho
Mohale's Hoek # 61	Mohale's Hoek	Mr. Cloete Mdlokovana	Transport businessman
Moyeni # 65	Quthing	Mr. Thabo Mofosi	Prominent farmer
Lebakeng # 70	Qacha's Nek	Ms. Nt'siuoa Sekete	Media and communications expert and a former employee of the Pan-African Parliament
Mantšonyane # 72	Thaba-Tseka	Mr. Sam Matekane	Country's most prominent businessman and philanthropist

A closer analysis of Lesotho's politics and a look at some of the individuals who joined the RFP will prove that the party's vetting was not a necessary process. It would have been suicidal to subject such a young party to such divisive processes as primary elections that have proved to be sources of conflict even in established parties. Some of the individuals had a bad political reputation from their previous parties which they were likely to bring into the RFP if left unchecked, while others joined to revive their fading political careers, and not necessarily because they shared the party's vision. The need to protect the party from such characters as these is acknowledged by Zihlangu & Mohloboli (2022) when they write that 'although controversial, the decisions to select the 11 unopposed candidates and thoroughly vet the remaining ones could actually save the party from chancers. Lesotho's politics are notorious for opportunists who often defect to other parties as soon as they sense an opportunity to further their own interests'. The fit-for-purpose for political candidates was thus a strategy intended to check whether those nominated candidates could understand the party's philosophy and that they would be able to live by it if elected (Sithetho 2022).

A look at some prominent politicians who defected to the RFP shows why the claim of needing to save the party from 'chancers' is not unfounded. Tlohelang Aumane and Tsepo Lethobane of Semena and Thaba-Putsoa constituencies respectively, are some of the individuals that fit the description of 'chancers', having joined the RFP from other parties. Aumane has a long history of nomadic tendencies in politics having reportedly been a card-carrying member of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Democratic Congress (DC), and Alliance of Democrats (AD) (in chronological order) before joining the RFP (Moleko 2022). He is infamously known in Lesotho politics for crossing the floor immediately after being sworn-in as an MP in 2017, and joining the AD from the DC, under whose banner he had won the Semena constituency. This was after the AD, which was part of the new coalition government, had enticed him with a ministerial post.

True to the nature of his nomadic political life Aumane remained in the RFP for only three months. He dumped the RFP in July 2022 and joined the Socialist Revolutionaries party (SR), the sixth party of his political career, when he failed to secure a ticket to stand for the RPF in the October 2022 elections. Tsepo Lethobane on the other hand joined the RFP after he had previously, and unceremoniously, left the Basotho National Party (BNP) for which he was secretary general. His departure followed the accusations of misappropriating funds collected from the party's property rentals (Mohloboli 2021). The influx of such characters, and lack of proper screening of candidates, made it possible for the primary elections to produce candidates that were well known 'but not suitable to expand the party's appeal to those always elusive "independent" or "centrist" voters' (Muzergues & Scaduto 2022).

MERITOCRACY UNDER FIRE

It is axiomatic that the RFP's emphasis on the principle of meritocracy, and specifically the resultant screening strategies, was never going to be without criticism and challenges. As Muzergues & Scaduto (2022) warn, 'this selection method has the merit of introducing a meritocratic approach to politics but is also less democratic and runs the risk of de-politicizing a process that is itself highly political by nature'. This was soon to happen in the RFP when some of its strategies were challenged in the courts of law.

The RFP's criteria for selecting election candidates caused discomfort among some members. When the party's leadership held a press conference in Maseru to explain the new requirements, disgruntled members picketed outside the venue, hoisting placards expressing their disgust. Despite obvious signs of discomfort from some members, the party pressed ahead with its decision. Following the party's Circular 0018/2022 dated 27 June 2022, primary elections were held on the 10 July 2022 in the 69 constituencies that were excluded, as shown in Table 1 above. Considering that the party was still very new with few structures in the constituencies, it was no surprise to see primary elections turn into a shambles in some constituencies. As directed by the circular, after the primary elections the names of the four top candidates in each constituency were sent to the party's headquarters in preparation for the interviews that would determine the final candidates following the approval of the party leadership.

The interviews went ahead as planned, and when the final list was released it emerged that candidates who had the highest scores in primaries in 30 constituencies had been substituted. There were mixed reactions from this group with some accepting their fate while others vowed to challenge the outcome of the interviews. Notable among those that accepted their fate (though it turned to be temporarily) was Dr. Mahali Phamotse, a former cabinet minister who had earlier defected from the AD. Phamotse has had her share of controversy as she has a case of corruption hanging over her head. In February 2020 she was charged in the Maseru Magistrate Court 'with corruption for allegedly influencing the awarding of a 2015 high schools textbooks tender to Epic Printers and Molumeli Pty (Ltd)' (Phakela 2020). She was minister of education at the time. As a show of commitment to the party, Phamotse and other losing candidates attended the party's rally held in Thaba-Tseka just two days after the interviews. Explaining her stance, Phamotse indicated:

I attended the Thaba-Tseka rally in solidarity with the RFP because even though I didn't pass my interview, I remain cognizant of the principles which led me to the RFP. The party is working for a better Lesotho for all citizens. I admire Sam Matekane's leadership qualities.

He is an implementer who has done so much for the country even before he ventured into politics.

(Mohlomi 2022)

While Phamotse and others appeared to have accepted their fates, there were five others who kept pushing for recognition as the party's candidates based on their winning primaries in their respective constituencies. After lengthy and unsuccessful deliberations with the party's leadership, the five candidates filed a lawsuit arguing that the party had acted illegally by snubbing them despite their victories in the primaries. The court nullified the party's decision on the grounds that the selection of candidates by the party's leadership would infringe on the applicants' rights to participate in public affairs, and that would be a violation of the country's constitution (*Moloi Ralentsoe & 4 Ors v Motjoka Toloane & 7 Ors LSHC 215 CIV, 01 September 2022*). The party was thus ordered to install the five as the legitimate party candidates.

Immediately after the court had ruled in favour of the five applicants, 17 of the 25 who had appeared to accept the outcome of the interviews wrote to the party asking to be considered in the same way as those five in whose favour the court had ruled. However, the leadership responded by saying that it would execute the court judgement only in respect of the five who had successfully challenged the selection of the party in court. At this point the 17 decided to approach the court as the judgement had convinced them the party had acted illegally.

Explaining the sudden change of heart and deciding to challenge the party's decision despite earlier having accepted it, one of the candidates stated that they had initially accepted the party's decision to snub them in favour of the people they had beaten in the primaries. This after the party had told them this was an entirely new way of doing things 'on the basis of merit as opposed to conventional rules of democracy' (Phakela 2022).

The judgement of their case was handed down on Saturday 10 September 2022 with the judge ruling in favour of the applicants and confirming them as the rightful candidates. Approached for comment, Dr Mahali Phamotse was 'magnanimous in victory, saying even if they had lost, they would have remained in the party as their aim was to work for its growth' (ibid.).

It is noteworthy that the previous day, Friday 9 September, was the nomination day for candidates and the RFP, like other parties, had presented its candidates for the nomination process. Thus, the implication of the judgement was that the party had to write to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and substitute the nominated candidates that were affected by the judgement. Table 2 below reproduces Circular 0022/2022 that the party issued to its structures to communicate these changes.

Table 2: RFF Circular 0022/2022: Report on the change of candidates

District	Constituency number	Constituency name	Initial candidate	Replacing candidate	Reasons for replacement
Butha-Buthe	01	Mechachane	Tumo Molefe	Letlotlo Ramaboli	Court decision
Leribe	11	Matlakeng	Kenny Ntoane	Mahali Phamotse	Court decision
	12	Leribe	Mofero Selupe	Khotso Motseki	Court decision
	14	Tsikoane	'Mantsali Yengane	Mabote Malefane	Court decision
Berea	19	Mosalemane	Jonase Petrose Mokete	Matabane Mosese	Court decision
	20	Makhoroana	Koena Marabe	Mphelela Khaoli	Court decision
	21	Bela-Bela	Lekese Matsoso	Teboho Malataliana	Court decision
	23	Khafung	Thabang Rapapa	Chopho Lekholoane	Court decision
	25	Tsoana-Makhulo	Mojalefa Phomane	Teboho Notsi	Court decision
	28	Khubetsoana	Peter Morolong	Lekhotsa Mafethe	The candidate has joined another party
Maseru	30	Motimposo			Court decision
	32	Stadium Area	Palesa Matobako	Mampho Alina Tjabane	Court decision
	35	Tsolo	Talenta Masoatsa	Malothoane Mathiba	Court decision
	38	Lithoteng	Lebohang Letsoela	Kobeli Rethabile Letlailana	Court decision
	43	Machache	Thabiso Lekhotla	Motheo Rali-tapole	Court decision
	44	Thaba-Putsoa	Sheriff Mothopeng	Tsepo Joseph Lethobane	Court decision
	47	Qeme	Malehlanye Ralejoe	Sello Hakane	Court decision
	50	Makhaleng	Motjoka Toloane	Moloi Ralent-soe	Court decision
	51	Maletsunyane	Peete Fusi Mahlaku	Mabahlako-ana Tebello Tau	The candidate remains a civil servant

Mafeteng	53	Phoqoane	Taunyane Tsoeunyane	Matankiso Tekane	The candidate is contesting as an independent candidate
	54	Matelile	Malebohang Sefali	Mmamako Mohale Lerata	Court decision
Quthing	66	Sempe	Lebona Mphatsoe	Monontsi Makiehe	Court decision
Qacha's Nek	69	Qacha's Nek	Maatang Chaka	Maphathe Doti	Court decision
Thaba-tseka	73	Thaba-Moea	Pokello Mahlomola	Puseletso Lejone	Court decision

While it might have been premised on the good intention of shielding the party from self-seeking opportunists and improving the profile of the party, the RFP's policy of candidate screening spelled disaster when the party was dragged to the courts of law and lost the cases, as discussed above. Furthermore, the process of vetting was rushed, leading to insufficient background checks that later necessitated the replacement of other candidates for reasons not necessarily related to the judgement. For instance, the candidate for Maletsunyane constituency had to be replaced on the grounds that he had remained a civil servant when nominated. This is prohibited by Section 40(2)(c) of the Lesotho National Assembly Electoral Act, 2011 as well as Section 143(1) of the Lesotho Constitution.

In yet another case of an inadequate background check, Taunyane Tsoeunyane passed the interviews and was selected for Phoqoane constituency. He was later approached by some of the party's elite and asked to withdraw his candidacy because the party found that he could not afford to run his own constituency campaigns as was required by the party (Seme 2022 b). He was thus asked to support his competitor 'Matankiso Tekane. Though he obliged and resigned, Taunyane ultimately left the party and contested elections as an independent candidate. The challenges to the centralised selection criteria and resultant court cases must have confused the party's prospective voters and possibly affected the party's performance in elections. Whether or not this was the case is to be seen in the following sections.

ELECTIONS AND RFP PERFORMANCE

Elections were held on Friday 7 October 2022 and the day was declared a public holiday in order to allow citizens an opportunity to cast their votes. Different parties had used the two weekends prior to 7 October to hold their final rallies. For instance, the RFP held its final rally on Saturday 1 October while ABC and DC

held theirs a day later. Judging by the sizes of the rallies it became apparent that the contest between the RFP and DC would be neck and neck, followed by ABC and the Basotho Action Party (BAP). While there was no doubt that the RFP's rally was by far the largest, this attendance would not necessarily translate into votes, given the activities lined up for the rally. The party had brought some famous musicians from South Africa and had also organised an air show consisting of Matekane's jets and some smaller planes that were seen for the first time in Lesotho. As a result, the rally had attracted multitudes of young people. Youth are normally known to be unreliable voters hence some detractors – mostly from rivals ABC and DC – were heard on radio stations mockingly labelling the RFP's rally as a 'festival'. Their prediction – later proved wrong – was that the RFP's performance would not be proportional to the huge attendance at its rally.

A total of 52 parties contested the elections with the RFP fielding candidates in all 80 constituencies. When the ballot counting was concluded it emerged that the RFP had won 56 out of 79 constituencies contested on the day. Overall, the RFP had received 199 867 out of the 515 018 votes cast on the day (EISA 2022). This translated to 38.81% of the national vote. The RFP's final allocation of seats remained 56 as the party did not qualify for proportional representation seats because its percentage of the constituency seats surpassed its percentage of national vote. DC was placed second with a total of 29 seats (18 constituency and 11 PR seats). In line with the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) model that Lesotho uses, only party voting took place in the Stadium Area constituency, following the death of one of the candidates. By-elections were to be scheduled for a later date to determine who represented the constituency in the National Assembly. However, the results of the party votes gave a clear indication that the RFP's candidate would also win the constituency as the party had scored the largest number of votes.

Further analysis of the performance of the RFP is based on three categories. The first is the 11 constituencies that did not hold primary elections, the second relates to the 24 constituencies affected by court decisions emanating from the screening processes, and the third is based on the 45 constituencies whose primary election victors were endorsed by the NEC after interviews.

Table 3: RFP performance in the 11 constituencies that did not hold primary elections

Constituency name and number	Candidate	Result	Party votes	Total votes	Party's vote %
Hololo # 02	Mr. Lejone Mpotjoane	Won	2 405	5 640	42.6

Thaba-Phatšoa # 08	Mr. Thabo Maretlane	Won	2 751	7 760	35.5
Teya-Teyaneng # 24	Mr. Lebona Lephema	Won	4 414	8 236	53.6
Lithabaneng # 40	Mr. Mokhethi Shelile	Won	3 752	6 768	55.4
Maseru Central # 33	Justice Nthomeng Majara	Won	3 138	6 013	52.2
Thetsane # 35	Ms. Nthati Moorosi	Won	2 580	4 619	55.9
Qalabane # 57	Dr. Retselisitsoe Matlanyane	Won	2 870	6 809	42.2
Mohale's Hoek # 61	Mr. Cloete Md- lokovana	Won	3 624	7 190	50.4
Moyeni # 65	Mr. Thabo Mofosi	Won	3 076	7 622	40.4
Lebakeng # 70	Ms. Nt'siuoa Sekete	Lost	1 894	6 386	29.7
Mantšonyane # 72	Mr. Sam Matekane	Won	4 629	7 059	65.6

Source: Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission

Analysis of the RFP's performance, as depicted in Table 3 above, shows that the party won ten of the eleven constituencies that were excluded from holding primary elections. This translates to a 91% win. Nt'siuoa Sekete, the only loser in this category, managed to win only 29.7% of the Lebakeng constituency votes. There are various possible explanations for Sekete's poor performance. Of all the 11 candidates she was the least charismatic and popular in terms of social status. Educated as she is, Sekete is young and not well known in the remote mountainous Lebakeng constituency as she had spent most of her time in Maseru. Furthermore, her constituency was in the Qacha's Nek district which is home of the former Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili. Mosisili's party, the DC, has for a very long time dominated the district and that dominance continues as it has still won all the constituencies in the 2022 elections.

The RFP scored more than 50% of the votes in six of the 11 constituencies, a remarkable performance considering the margins in other categories. The slimmest victory came from the Thaba-Putsoa constituency where the party scored 35.5% of the votes. The largest victory was in Mantšonyane where the RFP's leader

Matekane received a massive 65.6% of the constituency vote. Matekane's huge margin came as no surprise considering the level of charisma he commanded, not only in the Mantsonyane constituency, but in Lesotho in general. It might not be far-fetched to argue that the performance of the party in general can be attributed to a great extent to him as a leader.

Table 4: RFP Performance in constituencies affected by court decisions

Constituency Name and number	Initial candidate	Replacing candidate	Reasons for replacement	Result	% of the constituency vote
Mechachane # 01	Tumo Molefe	Letlotlo Ramaboli	Court decision	Lost	28
Matlakeng # 11	Kenny Ntoane	Mahali Phamotse	Court decision	Win	36.7
Leribe # 12	Mofero Selupe	Khotso Motseki	Court decision	Win	30.6
Tsikoane # 14	'Mantsali Yengane	Mabote Malefane	Court decision	Win	42.4
Mosalemane # 19	Jonase Petrose Mokete	Matabane Mosese	Court decision	Lost	17
Makhoroana # 20	Koena Marabe	Mphelela Khaoli	Court decision	Lost	21.2
Bela-Bela # 21	Lekese Matsoso	Teboho Malataliana	Court decision	Win	31.4
Khafung # 23	Thabang Rapapa	Chopho Lekholoane	Court decision	Win	35.8
Tsoana-Makhulo # 25	Mojalefa Phomane	Teboho Notsi	Court decision	Win	30.2
Khubetsoana # 28	Peter Morolong	Lekhotsa Mafethe	The candidate has joined another party	Win	50.3
Motimposo # 30			Court decision	Win	45.8
Stadium Area # 32	Palesa Matobako	Mampho Alina Tjabane	Court decision	Failed election	
Tsolo # 35	Talenta Masoatsa	Malothoane Mathiba	Court decision	Win	51.5

Lithoteng # 38	Lebohang Letsoela	Kobeli Rethabile Letlailana	Court decision	Win	42.6
Machache # 43	Thabiso Lekhotla	Motheo Ralitapole	Court decision	Win	43.2
Thaba-Putsoa # 44	Sheriff Mothopeng	Tsepo Joseph Lethobane	Court decision	Lost	27.6
Qeme # 47	Malehlanye Ralejoe	Sello Hakane	Court decision	Win	34.4
Makhaleng # 50	Motjoka Toloane	Moloi Ralentsoe	Court decision	Lost	25.3
Maletsunyane # 51	Peete Fusi Mahlaku	Mabahlakoana Tebello Tau	The candidate remains a civil servant	Lost	18.3
Phoqoane # 53	Taunyane Tsoeunyane	Matankiso Tekane	The candidate is contesting as an independent candidate	Win	36.6
Matelile # 54	Malebohang Sefali	Mmamako Mohale Lerata	Court decision	Lost	27.3
Sempe # 66	Lebona Mphatsoe	Monontsi Makiehe	Court decision	Lost	30.0
Qacha's Nek # 69	Maatang Chaka	Maphathe Doti	Court decision	Lost	26.7
Thaba-Moea # 73	Pokello Mahlomola	Puseletso Lejone	Court decision	Win	59.6

Source: Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission

As seen in Table 4 above, 24 constituencies were affected by the court decisions arising from the party's selection processes. Party votes took place in 23 constituencies as party elections in the Stadium Area were declared failed following the death of one candidate. The RFP won 14 and lost 9 constituencies in this category, a performance that translated to a 60.87% win. Of the nine lost constituencies, the party's worst performance was in Mosalemane (17%) while the best was in Mechachane (28%). The party won T'soana Makhulo with the lowest score of 30.2% while the highest winning margin was at Thaba-Moea where the party registered 59.6%. Of the 14 constituencies they won, only three were won with more than 50% of the constituencies' votes.

The third category is that of the constituencies in which the victors at the primary elections were endorsed by the NEC and remained the same even after the interviews. There were 45 such constituencies, of which the RFP won 32 and lost 13. This indicates a 72.8% win rate. Of the lost constituencies, the party registered the lowest performance in the Motete constituency, scoring a paltry 11.8% of votes. The largest losing performance was recorded in the Phamong constituency with 33.9% of the total vote. The slimmest win was recorded in Pela-Tsoeu where the party won with 27.2%. The widest winning performance was gained at Moselinyane where the party amassed 60.7% of votes.

A closer analysis of the RFP's results shows that the party performed best with a 91% win in the category of constituencies where the selection of candidates remained the prerogative of the party NEC. The second highest performance was recorded in those constituencies in which the NEC approved the winners of primary elections. In this category the party had a 72.8% win. The party's lowest win performance was 60.87% in the constituencies that challenged the decisions of the NEC. Holding all other factors constant and focusing purely on candidate selection as a sole variable for performance in the three categories, it is safe to infer that voters were impressed by candidates who were products of the RFP's screening processes, hence good performance in the two categories. It is also safe to infer that the court cases challenging the RFP's screening process might have divided the party's potential votes, hence the bad performance in the affected constituencies.

The results have also confirmed the assertions of Muzergues and Scaduto (2022) that centralised candidate selection methods are less democratic and run the risk of de-politicising a process that is itself highly political by nature. These methods indeed seemed to compromise democratic tendencies as they led to the court cases that eventually depoliticised the political process. Despite this flaw, there is no doubt that the screening methods had merit as they imposed changes and enlarged the profile of party's candidates, and subsequently also of the National Assembly that resulted from the October 2022 general elections.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown how businessman Samuel Matekane and other prominent persons in Lesotho formed the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) party with the aim of reversing the economic downturn that the country has been going through in recent years. The formation of the RFP attracted mixed reactions from different corners of Lesotho and indeed the Basotho nation. While some saw the party as a sign of hope, others took it to be no different from other political parties. The RFP deviated from the conventional practices of other parties in a number of ways, including issuing membership cards free of charge and organising expensive and

entertainment-filled rallies. Most fundamentally, the party spared some selected constituencies from holding primary elections and decided to leave the candidacy for the October 2022 elections in such constituencies to individuals appointed by the leader. Furthermore, the party introduced strict vetting mechanisms through which four leading candidates in the constituencies that had held primary elections would be subjected to interviews by party leadership in order to determine final candidates. The political record of some of the individuals who defected to the RFP justified why the party was right in vetting candidates for the 2022 elections. While this is uncommon in Lesotho, candidate screening strategies are common in parts of Europe and North America.

Apart from criticism by rival parties, the RFP's candidate screening attracted resistance from within the party, and some disgruntled candidates took the party to the courts of law. Ultimately the courts ruled in their favour and the party was ordered to field them as its candidates. Despite the challenges, RFP captured most seats, 56 out of 120, in the National Assembly following the October 2022 elections. The party's best performance came from the category of constituencies that did not hold primary results, followed by those constituencies in which the winners of the primary elections were endorsed by the leadership after interviews. The constituencies whose candidates were fielded following court interventions performed least well. Through its strategies, RFP was generally able to produce high calibre members of parliament.

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