

THE IMPACT OF INTRA-PARTY CONFLICTS ON THE ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF THE ALL BASOTHO CONVENTION IN LESOTHO'S 2022 ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The literature on Lesotho's politics and political parties, particularly after 2012, focuses on their alliances and coalitions, their relationships with the military and the seemingly instability of coalitions. There is less focus on intra-party instability and its impact on political party electoral performance. This article uses a critical literature review to analyse the poor electoral performance of the All Basotho Convention (ABC) in the October 2022 elections and how this is a consequence of its internal conflicts. The ABC experienced intra-party conflicts that increased with the removal of its leader, Prime Minister Thomas Thabane, in 2020. The argument advanced in this article is that the ABC experienced a dramatic decline in electoral support in October 2022, with the drastic loss of forty seats, as a result of its internal conflicts. The party's support had grown gradually since its formation in 2006 but dropped suddenly and dramatically in the 2022 elections. This article will contribute to the scholarship on the analysis of the electoral performance of political parties in the continent.

Keywords: All Basotho Convention, splinter groups, floor-crossing, elections, intra-party democracy, Lesotho

INTRODUCTION

Lesotho's electoral politics have been widely studied, documented and analysed from various vantage points (Kapa 2009; Letsie 2015; Nyane 2016, Kadima 2018 & Nyane 2019). The key issues arising from this body of scholarship include: no clear basis for coalition making among political parties; the collapse of coalitions due to malfeasance; and the role of the military in politics. The scholarship is

thus more about inter-party relations and less about intra-party characteristics such as the parties' lack of institutionalisation, the function of ideology, and internal democracy keeping the party coherent, relevant, agile and sustainable. Lack of these qualities could contribute to problematic inter-party relations and consequently the collapse of coalition governments.

At each stage since 1997, governance has been negatively affected whenever there has been an intra-party conflict in the governing parties of Lesotho, as with the case of Basotho Congress Party (BCP). Within this identified gap, the article analyses the intra-party conflicts of the All Basotho Convention (ABC) and how they impacted the party's performance in the 2022 elections. One stubborn and persistent view emerging from this body of literature is the assumption that attributes the emergence of coalitions in Lesotho, which are seemingly unstable, to the electoral reforms of 2007. Instead, these coalitions should be attributed to the lack of institutionalisation of political parties, lack of clear ideological orientation, and lack of intra-party democracy in Lesotho. To substantiate this argument, the analysis focuses on the ABC and its poor performance in the 2022 elections.

The ABC has been one of the key political parties in the Kingdom of Lesotho since its formation in 9 October 2006 (ABC Constitution 2006). With hindsight, it has become clearer that it was not so much the party as its former leader, Thomas Thabane, who was a key political figure and a cornerstone of the party. His removal as prime minister in 2020 led to the dramatic loss of electoral support in the 2022 elections and near death of the party. He formed the ABC in 2006 as a breakaway from the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), which was the governing party winning elections in 1998, 2002, and 2007 (Likoti 2008). It was Thabane's ABC that brought the LCD's electoral dominance to a halt and ushered in coalition governments characterised by 'peaceful transfers of power after elections' after the 2012 elections (Fogelman & Aerni-flessner 2020). The ABC's dramatic loss of electoral support in 2022 was not unexpected. Thabane had hinted at this possibility in 2018, when he stated that 'he hoped the party would grow so that it could govern on its own, but ...this won't be possible if the challenges facing it are not immediately addressed' (*Mail & Guardian* 2018). Without realising it, Thabane was talking about the party's challenges, and overlooked how his own role weighed heavily on the party's progress and its lack of functioning as an institutionalised party.

Thabane was the party's cornerstone and this was both a blessing and a curse as the 'strongman' phenomenon Barack Obama warned Africans against (Obama 2009). Thabane apparently managed the organisation's electoral fortunes in the period between 2012 and 2017, while leader of the party, until his removal in 2020. What is apparent is that it is how his removal was managed, not necessarily his removal per se, that was responsible for the ABC's dire electoral misfortune

in 2022, and in particular the political wrangling that ultimately resulted in his removal. Although Thabane reigned supreme as a focal figure of the ABC's misfortunes in the 2022 elections, this article concentrates on the ABC in totality and examines the internal party dynamics which precipitated the party's poor electoral performance. This analysis is hinged on the assumption that 'political parties require, among other things, internal cohesion, democratic and visionary leadership, intra-party democracy and constructive management of internal conflicts as well as mutually beneficial inter-party relations if they are to add value to representative democracy' (Matlosa & Shale 2006, p. 2).

Political parties require these attributes not only to add value to representative democracy, but also for their sustainability and continued electoral support. In the political setting of Lesotho, where coalition government has been the order of the day since 2012, these attributes are sacrosanct. If the parties in a coalition government do not have these attributes, they could disrupt and collapse the functionality of the coalition government. In fact, Thabane, as a party leader, was supposed to be the epitome of all these values and steer the party away from issues that could negatively affect its electoral performance.

The lack of institutionalisation of political parties is not unique to the ABC but cuts across the spectrum of political parties in Lesotho. This phenomenon may be linked to the poor electoral performance of those parties in the October 2022 elections. Although the focus of this paper is on the ABC and its internal factions, an important point is that key competitive political parties in previous elections in Lesotho also registered poor electoral performances in the 2022 elections. Looking at the results of top five, in no particular order, compared to the 2017 election results: the ABC received 37 553 votes down from 235 729, the Democratic Congress (DC) 128 105 down from 150 172, and the Alliance of Democrats (AD) received 20 798 votes down from 42 686. There are new entrants in the top five: the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) party with 199 867, and Basotho Action Party (BAC) with 29 118. These two parties replaced both the LCD and the Movement for Economic Change in the top five political parties (EISA 2012; EISA 2015; IFES 2017; IEC 2022). The RFP did not only become one of the top five, but also accumulated a substantial number of votes. Some reporters even claimed that these fortunes are conditioned by the fact that the current prime minister Sam Matekane is a billionaire and because of his wealth he did not struggle with criss-crossing the country during the campaign season (*Mail & Guardian* 2022).

This picture could give credence to the argument that Lesotho's politics needs a change, coupled with a generational change of the country's leadership. Following the retirement from active politics of Pakalitha Mosisili, a friend and rival of Thomas Thabane, the question loomed large: 'do the leadership shuffles portend long-awaited generational change that will lead to better outcomes

for Basotho, or will Lesotho politics stumble along in a familiar quagmire of scandals, party splits and leadership battles?' (Fogelman & Aerni-flessner 2019). This curious question was inspired by 'the emergence of two 41-year-old leaders at the helm of opposition political parties – the Movement for Economic Change (MEC) and the Democratic Congress (DC) – in the wake of Mosisili's retirement' (ibid.). What intrigued Fogelman and Aerni-flessner, and was possibly the basis for their approximation of the hopeless future of the country's politics, was the fact that the winds of change did not blow 'on the other side of the parliamentary aisle' when Thabane had announced plans to retain power until 2027 when he would be 88 years old. Perhaps Thabane was ignoring the writing on the wall, signalled by both the dynamics in his own party and the changes taking place in the opposition parties. He had failed to stop Nqosa Mahao from becoming his party's deputy leader although he was visibly opposed to Mahao's candidature. The leadership of the country had been contested by Mosisili and Thabane from the 2007 elections until 2017. The dominance of politics by these two leaders is a lesson for Lesotho's political parties, and that imposing a term limit on leaders, especially those leading the party, would help ensure that succession is forced on the political parties. A term of limit for holding the office of prime minister would not serve the purpose, given the unstable nature of Lesotho's politics and the stubborn reality of coalition governments. Thabane has had his two terms as prime minister disrupted by the collapse of coalition governments and the involvement of the military in Lesotho's political battles.

The analysis of the impact of intra-party wranglings within the ABC and its linkage to the party's electoral performance of 2022 is paralleled with other political parties on the continent. This analysis is aimed at deducing, in a generalised manner, the internal and external factors that drive the dominance and decline of political parties. The analysis examines the causes of fissures and fractures within the ABC; the impact of splinter groups coupled with the phenomenon of floor-crossing; the role of internal party democracy in its sustainability; and the role of ideologies in maintaining party discipline. These are the key aspects of this article's analysis.

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties and politics have evolved over the years, conditioned by national and international dynamics. These dynamics are crucial to understanding the nature and state of national politics and political parties. The post-World War II era was dominated by the so-called 'Cold War' between 1945 and 1989. Those years were characterised by a sustained ideological battle between the Union

of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (the Soviet Union) and the West led by the United States of America (US). The post-Cold War era has been characterised by liberal democracy. The rise of China economically, in global politics, has added a new dimension and different challenges to the dominant liberal democracy, and observers have characterised this as a 'China challenge' (Cao & Poy 2011; EIU 2022). In each epoch, global dynamics have set the scene for national politics and political culture. In analysing the post-Cold War era and predicting its political outcome, Francis Fukuyama (1989, p.3) famously proclaimed:

The twentieth century saw the developed world descend into a paroxysm of ideological violence, as liberalism contended first with the remnants of absolutism, then bolshevism and fascism, and finally an unupdated Marxism that threatened to lead to the ultimate apocalypse of nuclear war. But the century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an end of ideology or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.

Fukuyama had to clarify his conception of 'the end of history', as he believed that he had been misunderstood for arguing that '...events would somehow stop happening, or there would be perpetual peace' (Fukuyama 1995, p. 28). His view is that the triumph of liberal democracy would not have its competitiveness and emerging alternative conceptions of political systems and development. This description of the post-Cold War era helps to understand the evolution of politics and political parties in the 21st century, and that the political events in this epoch should be understood as a continued deepening of liberal democracy and a search for its alternative. This deepening of democracy, or search for its alternative, rests on the programmes, policies, ideologies and leadership of political parties as vehicles for the accomplishment of these political ideals. The assumption that emerged with the notion of liberal democracy as a universal political system, was that only political parties that are not on the left, would advance development and prosperity while pursuing the consolidation and deepening of democracy. However, this myth was dismantled by the rise of China with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the helm. In its 2021 Democracy Index report, the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022, p. 3) observed that:

How much of a challenge does China pose to democracy, the model of governance to which most people in the world have aspired for the past century? The potency of this political challenge is inextricably linked

to China's incredible economic success over the past three decades. The Chinese economy has grown at almost triple the pace of the US economy in nominal GDP terms since 1990, turning China from a poor developing country into an economic superpower with the second largest GDP in the world. China's rulers have become more confident about promulgating the alleged superiority of their system over that of the West, and COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated this trend.

The same report acknowledges that China's rise is capitalist, but not democratic. This is where the major challenge lies regarding the rise and prosperity of authoritarian capitalism. On the African continent, a potential China could be Rwanda under Paul Kagame, which has a democracy ranking of 126 but the fastest economic growth rate projected at 6.9% and 7.9% respectively in 2022 and 2023 (EIU 2022; AFD 2022). The argument advanced here, is that the end of history has not been reached and it continues to encounter competition in a form of the 'China challenge', basically the rise of an authoritarianism inimical to liberal democracy. It would be amiss to analyse the nature of a political party and its electoral performance outside of what characterises global politics in the 21st century. The analysis of the ABC is situated within these analytical parameters.

In the context of this evolution of international politics, a few points could be attributed to the political system in Lesotho since 1993's democratic transition. Firstly, the BCP had, since its formation, positioned itself in the fold of liberation politics which were unfortunately categorised in the eastern bloc under the USSR. But the BCP was best described by the politics of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), aligned with neither the USSR nor the West, but seeking national liberation. It subscribed to Pan-Africanism as a political ideology. Thus, it was not a catch-all party, but a liberation party. As a liberation party, its major purpose was to fight for the independence of Lesotho, leading the national agenda for self-determination. This national agenda reverberated with most of the Basotho. Hence the ABC was victorious in the 1970 elections, due to its popularity and status as a party that agitated for Lesotho's right of self-determination. With this purpose, it was not designed to compete in popular elections. However, it is not evident how it continued in government after the elections of 1993. Secondly, the apparent reincarnation of Cold-War politics in the form of rivalry between China and the US has narrowed the space for political parties to articulate their ideological positions. This has created the problem of ideologically incongruous members, with factional battles aimed at party leadership rather than policy outlook. It has also reduced political parties to catch-all mass parties, with no political programmes to develop party cadres. Arising out of this is the phenomenon of presidential authoritarianism or the strongman phenomenon. The net effect of

presidential authoritarianism or the strongman phenomenon in political parties is the stifling of internal party democracy and breakaway/splinter groups. All these issues are at the core of why political parties, in Lesotho and worldwide, do not have a stranglehold over the government, or why dominant political parties are experiencing declining electoral support.

Lesotho's electoral reform in 2007 did not only usher in a period of coalitions in government, but also helped the country rank higher in the EIU democracy index. In the 2007 report, Lesotho was ranked at 71 out of 167 ranked countries, and in the category of flawed democracies (EIU 2008) Lesotho scored 7.42 out of 10.1 in the variable of electoral process and pluralism, signalling good management of elections and openness of the electoral system (*ibid.*). In the 2021 report, Lesotho is ranked 64 out of 167 countries, also in the category of flawed democracies (EIU 2022). Again, the strongest feature of Lesotho's democracy is the electoral process and pluralism, with a score of 9.17 out of 10.0 (*ibid.*). The 2021 report indicates a poor score, only 4.14, for the functioning of government variable (EIU 2022). In the 2007 report, however, functioning of government scored 6.07 (EIU 2008). This means the functionality of government in Lesotho has deteriorated, although there has been more openness and competition in the electoral politics. This points to the net effect of unstable coalition governments since 2012. In the ten years between 2012 and 2022, Lesotho held four national elections. These elections were not followed by disputes on the results, nor were they plagued by a lack of credibility or unfairness. But the point is that instead of holding national elections just twice in the space of ten years, the instability of coalition politics resulted in snap elections and the dissolution of Parliament. In order to understand these unstable coalition governments it is necessary to take a closer look at one of the dominant political parties, the ABC, which had intermittently led the coalition governments.

FISSURES AND FRACTURES WITHIN THE ABC

Specific issues within ABC were both contentious and responsible for the party's poor performance in the 2022 elections. Firstly, the breakaway or splinter group led by Nqosa Mahao. Secondly, the perceived meddling in both the party and state affairs by Thabane's wife, Maesiah. Thirdly, preferential business treatment for Mr Stone Shi, in the wool and mohair industry. Fourthly, the removal of Thomas Thabane as prime minister (*The Post* 2022).

Mahao left the ABC during dramatic developments because of Thabane's attitude, as Thabane did not hide the fact that he no longer wanted Mahao in the party. Responding to Mahao's allegations that Thabane was orchestrating a plot to oust him from ABC, Thabane commented: 'tell him I said he is speaking

nonsense and disrespecting me because he is a child to me. I am not his agemate, you can tell him that' (Kabi 2021). Clearly the feud between Thabane and Mahao was not political but personal and irreparable.

The battle between Mahao and Thabane symbolises what Peter Anyang' Nyong'o qualifies as 'presidential authoritarianism' (Nyong'o 2021, p. 18). He argues that:

... I do believe that the instability, the fragility, the continuous fractioning and the high tendency towards personalising the leadership of political parties is not simply the outcome, or function, of tribal politics as is popularly narrated (I would hesitate to call it 'explained'). It is more a function of the culture of authoritarian presidential politics that easily survives by weakening political elites so as to institutionalise that authoritarian hegemony. Presidential authoritarianism is antithetical to the institutionalisation of political party politics.

(Nyong'o 2021, p. 18)

This phenomenon of presidential authoritarianism is not unique to the ABC, but it also plagues other political parties in Lesotho. This could explain why a change of leadership brought about electoral misfortunes for the BCP in 1998 and the LCD in 2012. What is common to the electoral misfortunes of these three political parties is that they performed badly in the elections after a splinter or breakaway party had been formed and led by their incumbent leader. The BCP suffered the catastrophic effects of Ntsu Mokhehle's breakaway LCD in the 1998 elections. In the 2012 elections, the LCD lost 35 seats due to a breakaway by party leader Pakalitha Mosisili, who formed the DC. This was paralleled by the smooth transition of leadership evidenced by Mosisili in 2019, and the DC's performance in 2022 elections. The DC experienced a slight decline in the 2022 elections; 128 105 in comparison to the 150 172 votes in the 2017 elections (IFES 2017; IEC 2022). Clearly, this is not as catastrophic as the consequences of Thabane's forced exit from the ABC.

If indeed, the assumption of Nyong'o holds true that 'presidential authoritarianism is antithetical to the institutionalisation of political party politics', then what are the indicators of an institutionalised political party, and what are its politics? How do the answers to these questions relate to the party dynamics of political parties in Lesotho? What obtains from the body of scholarship on political parties as institutions are some interesting observations. In a study titled *Measuring party institutionalisation in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties*, Basedau and Stroh (2008 p. 3) '...understand the institutionalisation of political organisation as progress in four dimensions:

roots in society, level of organisation, autonomy, and coherence'. They argue that political party institutionalisation is a process in which individual political parties that participate in elections experience an increase in organisational stability and value (ibid.). A political party's stability is informed by external and internal factors, its rootedness in the society and its level of organisation. Its value lies in its autonomy and coherence to both external and internal factors. Basically, an institutionalised political party is one that survives external and internal contradictions.

A measure of political party rootedness in society lies in its electoral performance. This is an external factor, but it has a direct correlation with the party's level of organisation and coherence, which are internal. It has to do with how the society views a political party, and how it manages its internal contradictions. In Lesotho, the phenomenon of breakaway parties is symptomatic of the failure to manage internal party contradictions, and to greater extent the party's lack of institutionalisation. Two important aspects in this regard are internal party democracy, and political party ideological orientation. Internal party democracy relates to how debates are managed within the party, and whether there is space for the competition of ideas without any persecution of those party members holding a dissenting view from the party's leadership or dominant faction. Ideological orientation helps with fostering party coherence and avoiding incongruent members. Basically, this is a tool for developing a new cadre of the party's leadership and membership to pave the way for succession and the party's autonomy.

In terms of its organisational structure, the ABC's constitution leaves much to be desired regarding the functionality needed to ensure party coherence. It has structures which are important for its internal coherence, such as the National Executive Committee, Executive Working Committee, Conflict and Dispute Resolution Committee, National Women's Committee, National Youth Committee, *Komoto ea Khokahanyo ea Ntlafatso ea Setereke*, Disciplinary Committee, Branch Committee which includes Branch Committees Outside the Country, and Constituency Committee which includes these committees: *Likomiti tsa Mabatooa a ka Ntle ho Naha (Ho Kenyeletsa: Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga, Foreisetata, Kapa le Natala, Kimi tea Lebatooa ea Mafumahali, Kimiti ea Lebatooa ea Bacha, Likimiti tsa Mabatooa a Kantle ho Naha tsa Bacha)* (ABC Constitution 2006). The party's coherence is linked to its level of organisation. However, its functionality relates to party politics. If the party's politics are not democratic, this would mean a rise of presidential authoritarianism and, in the context of Lesotho's broader politics, a party's breakaway or splinter group.

The application of the four dimensions of political party institutionalisation presents a correlation between poorly institutionalised political parties, with

presidential authoritarianism and polarised electoral politics in Lesotho. Nonetheless, a body of literature on the electoral politics of Lesotho since 2012 attributes the reality of coalitions to the electoral reform of 2007. What obtains from the analysis of political party institutionalisation seems to differ from this widely-held view. While electoral reforms did contribute to polarising votes, the electoral reform laid bare the link between political party institutionalisation and electoral performance. Mwangi (2016) argues that, 'Lesotho can be considered as a fragile state due to its weak governance institutions like the electoral system, which produces persistent and perverse political conflicts'. Instead of blaming the country's political instability on the electoral system, the onus should be on political parties and their lack of institutionalisation, societal rootedness, level of organisation, and autonomy and coherence.

The last factor that contributed to the ABC's electoral misfortune of 2022 is how Thomas Thabane stepped down as party leader. The controversy that implicated him in the killing of his estranged second wife Lipolelo, by his third wife Maesiah, did not help the party to handle the transition smoothly. Someone of Thabane's stature within the party, with his control over the party for nearly 14 years, would inevitably create discontent among party members and followers. Added to this, he was forced out of government as prime minister. Not only did his removal signal the end of presidential authoritarianism, but it also signalled to the Basotho that Thabane enjoyed some immunity, which led to the withdrawal of the charges against him and Maesiah, and a miscarriage of justice for Lipolelo Thabane.

SPLINTER GROUPS AND FLOOR-CROSSING

One of the defining features in the downfall of political parties in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, is the phenomenon of splinter groups or breakaway political parties. This is normally followed up by floor-crossing in Parliament. These partially account for the catastrophic decline of political parties in the country. Although these two variables account for the ever-changing political dynamics in Lesotho, literature points to the fact that the political parties that have dominated the political scene since independence of many countries in southern Africa generally had a life-span of no more than 20 years in power. Their decline is due to various factors including internal dynamics; factions; the sins of incumbency; stifling internal democracy; and the dominant leader syndrome.

In addition, external dynamics included the wave of democratisation; the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the end of bipolarity in international politics. The African National third Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and Zambia's United National Independence Party (UNIP) are examples of parties that are declining because

of these issues. UNIP is unique in suffering the consequences of the third wave of democratisation. ZANU-PF presents an interesting case of a party that has tried to halt its decline through the tight control of state machinery and by acting against its opponents and those party members holding critical views about its leadership and policy positions (Kriger 2005).

Lesotho is spared these issues; however, the common trend that erodes the electoral competitiveness of political parties is the phenomenon of breakaways or splinter groups coupled with floor-crossing in parliament. This started with the BCP in 1997, followed by the LCD in both 2001 and 2006 and now the ABC haemorrhaging into two splinter groups: the BAP and Basotho Patriotic Party (BPP). In 1997, the BCP lost its leader, Ntsu Mokhehle, who formed the LCD. The LCD suffered the same fate in 2001, when the then deputy prime minister, Kelebone Maope, formed the Lesotho People's Congress (LPC). LCD suffered another blow when Thomas Thabane broke away and formed the ABC in 2006. Most of these breakaway parties were bolstered by members of parliament migrating to join new formations. This would have a long-term effect on the political parties losing members and seats in Parliament.

Floor-crossing, a constitutionally permissible migration of members of parliament from one party to the other, strengthened the impact of splinter groups within Lesotho's political parties. BCP had won 65 seats in the 1993 elections in a clean sweep (Matlosa & Shale 2008). This dramatically changed when Mokhehle formed the LCD in 1997 and crossed the floor with 40 members, thus becoming the new ruling party. The formation of the LCD had a lasting effect on the electoral performance of BCP in the subsequent elections, as it failed to gather enough parliamentary seats even to become the official opposition after the elections of 1998 and 2002 (Matlosa & Shale 2008). The LCD also suffered the same fate as BCP, haemorrhaging 20 parliamentary seats in 2001 to its splinter group, LPC.

The decline of ABC's electoral support is similar to that of the BCP. In 1998, Ntsu Mokhehle broke away from the party he had established, the BCP, to form the LCD. This was a catastrophic blow for the BCP, as its fortunes declined and it became a minority party. In 2006, Thabane led a breakaway that did not completely annihilate LCD's electoral support but became the main competitor as the second biggest party with parliamentary seats. The ABC did not only mount intense electoral competition to the LCD, but also made it challenging for the LCD to govern after the 2007 elections, raising key issues that resulted in electoral reform and ushered in the first coalition government in 2012. The EISA report (2007, p. 4) describes the post-electoral scene of 2007 thus:

The post-election political atmosphere was characterised by controversies, conflicts and complaints. The opposition parties decried

the state of the voter's roll on the polling day, the allocation of the PR seats and the perceived patron-client relationship between the IEC and the ruling LCD.

What is observable and interesting about these two breakaways is that they changed the political scene, and also broke away in a form of floor-crossing in Parliament. These breakaways were led not by political novices, but by key political figures with their own considerable influence. Ntsu Mokhehle founded BCP in 1959 and mounted a serious challenge to Chief Leabua Jonathan from the time of independence until the coup of 1986. He continued to be a towering figure until his death in 1999, having been prime minister from 1993 until 1999 (Edwards 1999). The BCP won the elections in 1970 and Mokhehle should have become the first prime minister of Lesotho. He was, however, thwarted by incumbent Prime Minister Chief Leabua Jonathan who 'refused to relinquish power, suspended the constitution, declared a state of emergency, annulled the election results and detained Mokhehle for two years' (Edwards 1999, p. 1).

Like Ntsu Mokhehle, Thomas Thabane is charismatic and popular with the Basotho electorate, hence the continued political competition between the ABC-led coalitions and Democratic Congress (DC)-led coalitions between 2012 and 2017. The results of 2022 elections indicate that Thabane dominated the party's popularity. His removal, coupled with the breakaway of the Basotho Action Party (BAP) led by ABC former deputy president Nqosa Mahao, resulted in the dramatic electoral decline of ABC. Mahao's BAP accumulated 29 118 votes from the 2022 elections, becoming the fourth largest political party in terms of electoral performance (IEC 2022).

In a nutshell, floor-crossing is a legalised parliamentary coup d'état. Repealing the act that legitimises floor-crossing, or broad electoral reform, could serve the political landscape of Lesotho well and refocus political parties on developmental issues, rather than state power and zero-sum political games. It could also help reduce the phenomenon of splinter groups, as they would not have to gain parliamentary seats through floor-crossing but would be required to run election campaigns that would earn them seats. These common bedfellows, i.e. breakaway parties and floor-crossing, could also account for the poor functioning of government due to unstable coalitions.

ABC'S IDEOLOGICAL DISORIENTATION

One of the key features of political party sustainability is its ideological orientation. If the party has no clearly defined ideological standing, then it become amorphous, basically, a 'catch-all party' (Hague, Harrop & McCormick, 2019). Catch-all

parties, or amorphous parties, are a dominant feature of liberal democracies. In this system:

no longer do parties seem to be energetic agents of society, seeking to bend the state towards their supporters' interests. Instead, they appear to be at risk of capture by the state itself. They also often seem to be less concerned with offering voters alternatives than with promoting their own interests, and competing for power for its own sake. As a result, parties have lost much of their attraction to the politically engaged, who seem to be increasingly disillusioned with achieving democracy through competing political parties.

(Hague, Harrop & McCormick 2019, p. 272)

Catch-all parties seek to govern in the national interest, rather than as representatives of a social group or groups, thus need no unique ideological programme (ibid.). The top five political parties in Lesotho are mainly catch-all parties vying for electoral support instead of development founded on ideology. By characterising ABC as *Kobo-Tata ea Basotho* in its constitution, the party clearly denotes its ideological posturing and falls under the category of catch-all parties with no clear ideological programme. Secondly, to denote the character of an amorphous party in its constitution, the ABC states its objectives thus, 'ho kopanya baahi bohle ba kahare le kantle hon aha tlas'a Lekhotla le le leng la lipolotiki ka sepheo sa ho loantša le ho fenyā Tlala, BOFUMA, MAFU LE TLHOKAHALO EA TSEBO; Ho apesa Basotho bohle kobo-tata e akaretsang Banna, Bacha, Babolli, Barutehi, Batho ba litumelo ka ho fapana, tlas'a leano le le leng la LESOTHO FATŠE LA BO NTATA' RONA'.

It could be argued that Lesotho has no history of social or political cleavages of ethnicity, racism and religious fundamentalism, thus no need for a cadre and mass parties. It is inevitable that a party standing against hunger and poverty, 'Tlala le BOFUMA', needs a radical ideological programme in order to identify the systemic roots of these challenges. Hunger and poverty are systemic consequences of the country's political and economic policies. Thomas Piketty in *Capital and Ideology* (2020, p. 1), makes this compelling observation;

Every human society must justify its inequalities; unless reasons for them are found, the whole political and social edifice stands in danger of collapse. Every epoch therefore develops a range of contradictory discourses and ideologies for the purpose of legitimizing the inequality that already exists or that people believe should exist. From these discourses emerge certain economic, social and political rules, which

people then use to make sense of the ambient social structure. Out of the clash of contradictory discourses – a clash that is at once economic, social, and political – comes a dominant narrative or narratives, which bolster the existing inequality regime.

Although Piketty focused on inequalities, his observation that a social condition needs to be justified or else it threatens the political and social edifice can be applied to how political parties discuss and resolve issues such as hunger and poverty. These are the main points of the ABC in line with its constitution, and a resolution of these social conditions is founded on the party's ideological programs. The ideology of a political party does not necessarily diminish its electoral support, nor does it guarantee its longevity, but it functions as the basis of party discipline and foundation of policy. This is to manage the membership and hold the leadership accountable. It also assists in developing a new cadre for the party's leadership and managing leadership succession. The lack of succession planning within the ABC was catastrophic for the BCP. Pule (1999, p. 2), when writing about the power struggles in BCP between 1991 and 1997, notes that:

chief among the problems was the insufficient attention given to issues of leadership and succession. The advanced age and failing health of the party leader, and the single-most dominant personality in the party's history, Ntsu Mokhehle, gave rise to intense jockeying for position as different factions anticipated his inevitable departure from public life.

Using the same script but in altered circumstances, the ABC did prepare the next cohort of party leaders, but failed to protect the apparent successor, Mahao, from the fury of the elderly Thabane. Secondly, it was apparent that the controversy around the killing of Thabane's first wife would have a catastrophic effect on the party, but this was also not handled properly to ensure a dignified and seamless transition of leadership. The lack of ideological orientation of the ABC is the main reason why the political differences between Thabane and Mahao were not properly managed and were catastrophic for the party. The electoral support that Mahao's party, the BAP, garnered, arguably included former ABC members. Mahao rose to be Thabane's deputy at the ABC conference against Thabane's wish and thus commanded the support of the party membership.

In the larger scheme of things, the ABC's lack of clear ideological orientation and tendency to be a catch-all party is a consequence of the global move towards liberal democracy. What is characterised as a third wave of democratisation, was in fact, a force towards liberal democracy. Lesotho too was swept up in this

wave. The overthrow of Lesotho's military junta, which had reigned between 1986 and 1993, came on the back of the third wave of democratisation (Mothibe 1999). Demonstrating the importance of ideological clarity, a left-leaning and pan-Africanist BCP reigned between 1993 and 1997, but collapsed due to internal dynamics. It was not dogmatic in its approach, and thus enjoyed electoral support of Basotho. Unlike the BCP, the instability of the ABC did not threaten the stability of democracy in Lesotho; on the contrary, it enhanced it by allowing space for new players, the RFP and BAC.

STIFLING INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY

Nqosa Mahao rose to the rank of deputy leader of the ABC after some conflict, but his departure was symptomatic of the stifling of internal democracy within the party. In addition, the lack of term limit on the leader of the party also contributed to the stifling of internal democracy, particularly as the leader of the party was not prevented from leading in government. Although Thabane had led the party in government between 2012 and 2020, with interruptions, it should have been made clear to him that the party would not support his candidature in 2022, in order to prepare for his departure. He was set to retire from active politics only in 2027 (Fogelman & Aerni-flessner 2019).

Internal party democracy is interwoven with party ideology. Ideology as a fulcrum lays the parameters of and justifies what is acceptable and not acceptable within the party. The ideology provides a basis for the party's traditions and processes, programmes and membership recruitment – basically the party's internal democracy. Ideology gives the party both a sense of character and a role in society. In the words of Piketty, 'social and political rules' to make sense of the social structure. So a party with no ideology would inevitably stifle internal democracy and be riddled with policy inconsistencies.

One of the ABC's objectives in its constitution, in line with the party proclaiming itself to be a democracy, '*ho thehela Basotho bohle Lekhotla la bolokolohi le oho lona bohle ba tlahlahisa maikutlo a bona, ho se khethollo le khethollano*'. However, Nqosa Mahao was victimised for expressing this principle, and was not supported by the party's national executive committee. Mahao's case demonstrates the party's inconsistency in its supposed internal democracy and democratisation.

The party's internal democracy should also be in harmony with the country's democratic culture. This is facilitated by the country's constitution, and is applied to political party constitutions. In the case of Nqosa Mahao, simply approaching the country's High Court could have provided him with political recourse. This principle applies to the country's constitution allowing for floor-crossing, which has become a political tool for splinter groups.

Allowing a floor-crossing process in a multiparty democracy is undemocratic. In a representative democracy like Lesotho, political parties vie for seats in Parliament through the elections. It could lead to instability, as in the case of the post-2007 splinter of LCD from BCP. What this illustrates is that internal party democracy could strengthen the country's deepening consolidation of democracy, and the inverse is true for political parties. To substantiate this observation, the score of Lesotho on the democracy index report of 2022, particularly on the variable of political culture, is 5.63 out of 10.0. The political culture and the function of government are the two variables that contributed to Lesotho's ranking as one of the most flawed democracies in the world. The report takes stock of five key variables in the rankings: electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. These same variables are helpful in assessing a political party's adherence to liberal democracy. They reflect the country's democratic culture, and also extend to political parties as entities that serve as vehicles for the deepening and consolidation of democracy in any country.

CONCLUSION

This article took a close glance at the ABC as a former governing party in Lesotho. It presents the mismanagement of internal democracy and the lack of ideology as key variables for the party's poor electoral performance in the elections of 2022. The party's national leadership was oblivious to clear signs of what was imminent, and ignored learning lessons from the BCP's electoral misfortunes in 1998. Among others, the party did not prepare itself for its future without its founder Thomas Thabane, and took for granted the impact on its electoral fortunes of a splinter group led by Nqosa Mahao.

The article adds to the body of scholarship on political parties in Africa and analyses how a party, through its leader, is a dominant force to reckoned with. The article also lays bare the intricacies of Obama's thesis, that Africa must forgo the phenomenon of the strongman in terms of political power, in preference to strong institutions. Ideally, this is how political parties should conduct their business, but in practice it is difficult and almost always comes at a great cost to the party.

One of the lessons emerging from this analysis is the fact that political parties need, for their own sustainability, to balance between building a new cadre for the future and a mass-based, sometimes amorphous party for electoral purposes. Building a cadre would help to maintain the party's ideological outlook, while a mass party appeals to the national interests and interprets these interests in line with its own ideology. Integral to this process is the function of political education as a process both to build new cadres in the party and create awareness

of the myriad policy challenges of political parties driven by both national and international dynamics. Thomas Thabane, a leader with formidable credentials, sank his party with him, exacerbated by the controversy around the killing of his wife. He presents a classic example of a strongman over a strong institution. His political demise and the decline of his party provide a case for the inquiry and analysis of political parties and their electoral performance in Africa. He, like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, represented their political parties' fortunes and misfortunes. Although ZANU-PF appears to be recovering from Mugabe's downfall, the ABC does not seem to be recovering from the aftermath of Thabane's exit from active politics.

A final point of reflection, not related to the internal dynamics of the ABC, is the supposed nature of Lesotho's politics as a zero-sum game, whereby the state is the centre of accumulation and contestation. The arrival of a business mogul in politics, Sam Matekane, may prove this argument still to hold true or it may change the nature of Lesotho's politics.

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