

The Youth's Perceptions of and Expectations From the 2022 Coalition Government of Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

Lesotho voted into power a political party which was only six months old. This was because the nation was tired of poor service delivery, poorly performing economy, political instability and a general lack of direction for the nation in all aspects by successive coalition governments. Power alternated between predominantly two political entities, mainly the congress and nationalist movements although in various shapes and under different names and coalition formations. The nation was tired of career politicians running the affairs of the nation to the ground. They settled on a political party made up of and led by the economic elite and their legal heavy weight allies. The six months old party garnered majority seats in parliament but could not make up the two thirds majority that could have enabled the party to form a single-party government. This study sought to establish the perspectives of the youth on the delivery of electoral promises by the government considering how much hope the party offered to the youthful constituency during the campaign trail. The study is qualitative in nature as it solicited the youth's views from a critical analytic perspective. Interviews were carried out with influential youth in civil society, business and academia. The findings were presented and analysed thematically.

Introduction

Lesotho went for a general election on 7 October 2022. The six months old Revolutionaries for Prosperity (RFP) political party led by businessman Ntsokoane Samuel Matekane won 56 of the 100 contested parliamentary seats (Mohloboli, 2022). However, these seats were not enough to reach the two thirds majority threshold to enable the RFP to form a single party government. This led the Matekane led party to form a coalition government with two other partners: the Alliance of Democrats (AD) and the Movement for Economic Change (MEC). The RFP was launched on 22

March 2022.

The RFP led coalition government succeeded another coalition government led by the All Basotho Convention (ABC) whose partners were the Democratic Congress (DC), the Basotho National Party (BNP), the Alliance of Democrats (AD) and the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL). The predecessors to the 2017 ABC led coalition government were another coalition of seven political parties. It was led by the DC who worked along with the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Lesotho People's Congress (LPC), Popular Front for Democracy (PFD), National Independent Party (NIP), Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) and Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). Before that was the 2012 coalition government of the ABC, LCD and the BNP.

The successive coalition governments from 2012 to 2017 collapsed for various reasons leading to votes of no confidence in the governments by parties in parliament. The 2012 ABC led coalition government collapsed after disturbances by the Lesotho Defense Forces which the then prime minister Thomas Thabane labeled as an attempted coup against his government. The 2015 coalition government collapsed due to allegations of corruption in government awarding of business tenders. Even with the 2017 Thabane's ABC led coalition government, there were problems. Prime Minister Thabane had to be replaced by the leader of the ABC party Moeketsi Majoro because the ABC no longer had confidence in Thabane as prime minister. Lesotho was therefore a troubled polity for a decade before the birth of the RFP in March 2022 and its coming to power in October of the same year.

This study sought to establish the perceptions of the youth on the performance of the RFP government in fulfilling the electorate's expectations. The study is qualitative in nature.

Background

The situation with the leading political parties in the land made it easy for the RFP to succeed within a short period of time after the party was launched. For example, the state of the ABC as the leading party in the coalition government into the 2022 elections was not favourable. Prime minister Majoro was not contesting the elections even though he was still a member of the ABC. He lost the position of leader of the ABC to Nkaku Kabi months before the general election. This situation divided the party further and intensified the divisions within an already fragmented ABC. Nkaku Kabi as the new leader of the ABC fought to remove Majoro from the prime minister's office so that he could be prime minister for the remainder of the ABC and partners' term in office. It was counterproductive because Majoro resisted successfully. That did not benefit Kabi. Majoro succeeded Thabane as both ABC leader and prime minister in May 2020. Thabane as prime minister was a suspect in the murder of his estranged wife Lipolelo together with his current wife Maisaiah Thabane. There were factional fights in the ABC pitting Thabane and loyalists against the ABC's National Executive Council. Kabi was endorsed by Thabane, and his wife and he continued fraternizing with suspicious characters. The electorate was sceptical about Kabi because of his fraternizing with Famo gangsters to the extent of giving them prominent seats in the VIP section of the tent during campaigning for the 2022 election (Mohloboli, 2022). The Thabane family's alleged involvement with the Famo gangsters and suspected involvement in the murder of Lipolelo Thabane discredited Kabi and the ABC. This was compounded by confusion and factionalism characterising the ABC. The ABC was unmarketable, and the RFP fortuitously arrived on the scene.

Before the October election, the DC was highly regarded to be the new government after the 2022 general election. That was before the birth of the RFP. Zihlangu and Mohloboli (2022) write that the DC followers were shocked when the RFP triumphed with such a huge margin. However, some analysts identify Mathibeli Mokhothu's lack of appeal, lack of vision and lack of focus on serious issues which led to the DC's loss. Mugari (2022) writes that the electorate was angry with the ABC and DC for years and the 2022 general election was time for retribution. The electorate therefore found the opportunity to revenge on the old political parties' years of poor governance during the election. In other words, the RFP cropped up when Lesotho was in political and economic dire straits

due to the wastefulness and recklessness of career politicians, and business moguls who became rich from government tenders capitalised.

Theoretical framework

The study is framed by two theories: the public opinion theory and the youth bulge theory because it is based on considering the youth's public opinion in politics in the light of the youth bulge factor. Public opinion refers to the collective way of thinking on topics or voting intention in alignment with societal expectations. The youth bulge theory looks at the restive nature of the youth and the subsequent consequences of unpredictable action of youth when dissatisfied with the socio-political and economic status quo of a nation.

In the debate on whether the public is competent enough to contribute to governance issues, skeptics question the competency of the public to participate in governance affairs at all. Perceiving the public to be clueless about governance, they adopt the Platonic elitist approach that governance should be left to philosopher kings. The philosopher kings will therefore choose and decide what is best for the nation (Moy, 2013). The rise in levels of literacy in eighteenth century Europe by the bourgeoisie class and other classes led the people to start questioning the feudal structures of power (Price, 1992). These were based on the absolutism of royal authority. This form of public consciousness led citizens to express themselves in political matters, exerting pressure on the authorities to be cognizant of the common will of citizens in governance. This resulted in the dissolution of absolute monarchical power as the crown(s) and their opponents alike adhered to the principles of public opinion as a source of authority and legitimacy (Price, 1992). The theory of public opinion therefore advocates for the consideration of the common will of the majority rather than the feudal Platonic approach that the elite know it all and therefore will have to decide what is good for the public in governance matters.

Youth bulge is a concept derived from a demographic pattern whereby the bigger part of a population is made up of children and young adults (Inayatullah, S. 2016). Studying the youth bulge is important in planning for the future of a country because young people's progression and transition into adulthood is determined by the circumstances under which they grow up. The economy and politics under which young people grow shape the future of that generation. Future conflicts are therefore abated with careful planning that is informed by the youth bulge concept.

Literature review

Poor service delivery, despite electoral campaign promises, is identified as one of the major causes of protest action by the youth of South Africa (Managa, 2012). Managa wrote on the issue of protests that could get more violent in South Africa if service delivery and the standard of living for the youth of South Africa did not improve in 2012. Violent protests characterized by xenophobic attacks and looting have since been witnessed ever since. Poverty and social inequalities were exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic and were the root causes of political protest, xenophobia, and looting in parts of South Africa (Mathe and Motsaathebe, 2022).

In the emerging democracies of post-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a tendency of political power getting concentrated in the hands of a few elites with the majority of ordinary citizens relegated to mere voters (Baba, 2014). These ordinary voters are forgotten as soon as the voting process is executed as far as governance and running of state affairs is concerned. The practice of free and pluralist elections is prevalent in greater parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Diop, 2021). However, in most cases, the democracy ends with voter participation as the elite do not consult with the electorate on governance issues post elections. As a result, conflict ensues as disgruntled constituencies rise and rebel against the inequalities created by the elites after they hijack the people's will.

Statement of problem

A new government was voted to power in October 2022 in Lesotho with hope by the nation to take the country out of the incompetence and decadence after years of carrier politicians in power.

However, a few months after the new government's promises, the situation looks subdued with the youth questioning whether the economic elite who took up the reins of power will deliver on their promises. The problems of infighting by the leading party in the coalition government are characteristic of the other coalition governments that came before it from 2012 to October 2022. The youth who were hopeful for job opportunities are still waiting. Those who had hopes for infrastructural development are still waiting for improvements in that sector. The problem, therefore, is that the government has not taken significant steps in delivering on the electoral promises that brought hope to the nation, especially the youth.

Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach to gather information, present and analyse the findings. According to Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest and Namey, (2005), qualitative research is a type of scientific research which consists of an investigation that:

- Seeks answers to a question.
- Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question.
- Collects evidence.
- Produces findings that were not determined in advance.
- Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study.

Moreover, qualitative research seeks to establish the understanding of participants of a topic or problem from the perspective of their real life or lived experiences. It therefore is rich in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of populations (Mack et al, 2005).

The study employed purposive sampling for selecting the interviewees. The purposive sampling technique is described by Tongco (2007) as a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within it. This study solicited for inciteful information on the perceptions of the 2022 government of Lesotho's fulfilment of electoral promises to the youth demographic constituency. The youth interviewed are from academia and civil society. Purposive sampling was therefore the most appropriate technique for choosing the interviewees.

The study conducted qualitative exploratory interviews on a one-on-one basis with participants. The interaction allowed the participants to tell their story about the electoral campaigns, promises made and outcomes from the participants' experiences. The interview type allowed the participants to thoroughly describe their interpretations of their experiences with the campaigns of the past election.

Findings

One respondent said that the RFP came when most people had lost hope in politicians, therefore the fact that it was formed by a business mogul and other rich people led the party to be more appreciated. It was believed to be different. "I expected that infrastructure (roads mainly) will be made instantly as the prime minister promised to use his own machinery to make roads. The M6.1 billion that was alleged missing I had faith this government would have recovered by now and suspects arrested. I truly cannot tell what it that the government has done specifically for the youth is. Some projects that are new are done by government MPs in their constituencies not at national level. The government has to create jobs or projects for the youth rather than forcing youth to volunteer and give them stipends. Scholarships must also be accessible to those who want to further their studies. So far expectations by the electorate have not been met. The usual delay of salaries and pensions still happens. Crime (killings) rate is still high. The textiles factories the prime minister promised to open are still closed. He practices nepotism as well (hiring at roads department). He threatens rule of law for his government when courts of law rule against him. He claims judges to be biased (case of Principal Secretaries). No job creation so far. His cabinet members never miss the chance to speak ill

of the media (the finance minister when international students wanted her intervention as well as communication minister in her speech during world radio day). The recent issue of WASCO and LEC is a clear sign of reactive than proactive government”.

Another respondent said that what was appealing about the RFP to the youth was its promises, which were inclusive of employment generation among the youth after the party’s victory. This attracted many young people who without hesitation turned their backs on their old parties that were declared unable to create jobs for the youth for a long time. It was also a rarity during the time of the old parties that youth representatives would be seen in parliament, so with RFP, the youth hoped they would have young people to represent them in parliament so that their needs could be easily met, and an example of those who joined the party because of the reason are those in Mokhotlong. One more reason that led the party to win was that most youthful people went for it due to its leader being the most prominent and successful businessman in the country. They therefore hoped that he will strive for the success of their own newly formed businesses via responsible governmental stakeholders. Besides, they joined the party because they hoped that the newly voted government would in various ways, restructure and improve Lesotho, which has for ages been lagging behind in terms of service provision and infrastructural development. The expectations of the youth about the new government were therefore mainly about benefiting from the wealth and promising vision of the RFP leadership to bring prosperity to Lesotho. The youth expected to be employed in big numbers, to be assisted with funds to start new businesses through the responsible government offices. The expectation was also that this is a government that was going to listen to the people, unlike all the previous governments. However, the government has not started fulfilling our expectations. So far, I have not seen any changes regarding employment, business opportunities, or restructuring of Lesotho.

However, with infrastructure, the government has started by working on filling up potholes on the roads and as far as I am concerned, that is not much. I expected the government to have started working on big road construction projects. The government has started identifying people hired through connections in some government ministries and departments, and I congratulate the government for that. Some people were hired to positions without requisite qualifications at the expense of those qualified to take up the job positions. The RFP should strive to fulfil all its campaign promises. They should work towards helping the youth through funds so that they can start their own businesses, keep on ensuring the start of development projects in Lesotho so that the unemployed can get jobs, instead of just filling up potholes, increase the number of roads in areas where it is possible in order to reduce crises like traffic congestion and accidents. The RFP should complete the reforms process quickly so that the nation focuses on other important issues. The RFP government should also establish a development bank to help farmers and other development minded citizens of Lesotho.

Another youth respondent said, “As a youth, I am losing hope towards our new government. This is mainly because I do not think they have got the knowledge of what they are supposed to be doing as government or what they want to achieve. I was hoping that they were going to be different from previous governments, but I was wrong. For instance, what is happening with delays in payments to Home Affairs taught me that we might still be in the same cycle but with a different government. It really is very scary because when we elected the RFP, we hoped that things will be done differently. I believe that they still need time to recover all the losses by previous governments and that it might take long since fixing the mess by the previous governments is not an easy task. I understand where we are all coming from. However, we want change, and we want it to be done as soon as possible. My worry is that people are fast losing patience with the prime minister and his team before they have started implementing any positive change to the country. The view by most youth is that all political parties in Lesotho are a scam; whether they are led by the rich or poor. Everyone who gets into power forget every promise they made and start doing things differently. It is very easy to promise people change before getting into power, but once they occupy the seat of power, you realize that it is very difficult to lead a broken generation. We are quick to seek change because that is what we want. We have been lied to before and we no longer have patience. We thought this was a

government that will eventually deliver jobs for the youth, the party that will avail funding for youth entrepreneurs; we expected a whole lot from this government but up to now we have not seen any developments from the time they got into power”.

Another respondent said that for starters, there is anecdotal evidence that young people voted the RFP in large numbers for the simple reason that career politicians were/are no longer appealing to the youth. Having read this country’s history, at least from 1993, there has always been orators and charismatic leaders until the 2022 National Assembly elections which ushered in different characters, that is wealthy and aggrieved people with resources to run a political campaign. From the RFP government, my expectations were:

- Establishment of Youth Fund to cater for young people’s businesses.
- Establishment of the National Youth Council and enactment of the National Development Bill.
- Continue with allowing unemployed students to further their studies despite them owing the National Manpower Development Secretariate (NMDS).
- Amend the Mines and Minerals Act of 2005 and delete clauses or even the entirety of the Members of Parliament (Amendment of Schedule) 2022 which entitles Members of Parliament to M5 000 tax free petrol allowances.

The government has only promised to work on the aforementioned but has not delivered on these promises. Implementation is critical. The youth have shown that there is power in their vote. There is absolutely nothing besides being able to deliver on key promises especially basics such as having jobs for the youth. The government should be warned and take heed of the promises it made during campaigns towards the elections.

Analysis/discussion

Political parties and party leadership make the mistake of practicing politics without reference and consideration of the human beings they are supposed to serve. This is informed by the belief that the political elite, having been elected to office by the people, morphs into a separate kind of elitist human beings. As a result, the purpose of getting elected to leadership positions to serve the people is lost. Ideas no longer come from the people for direction that the country or affairs of state should take. Instead, it becomes a dictatorship of the elite rather than a democracy steered by the aspirations of the electorate. The evidence of such disregard by the elected politician of the electorate’s aspirations is in the deliberate unfulfillment of electoral promises. The electorate is therefore used as a steppingstone by the electorate when they seek legitimate entry into office through elections. After they are ensconced in power, the electorate are not a factor anymore until the next round of elections and the vicious cycle of campaign promises over and over.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the think tanks in the RFP should carry out surveys nationwide periodically to capture the mood of the electorate and align their delivery to the expectations and aspirations of the people.

Conclusion

The study explored the explosion of the RFP on the political scene in Lesotho and swept to power within six months of its formation. It discovered that the RFP made electoral promises that attracted the vote of the youth who have suffered unemployment due to poor performance by previous governments. The youth are however dissatisfied with the progress by the RFP so far in fulfilling their electoral process. The RFP should work in constant consultation with their constituencies in order to always stay in touch with the grassroots of their support.

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