

# AFRO BAROMETER

Afrobarometer Paper No.13

## **CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND POLITICAL CRISIS IN LESOTHO**

by John Gay and Thuso Green\*

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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## **Abstract**

Lesotho has been governed in many different ways since its founding as a nation in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, including episodes of both democratic and authoritarian rule. This history is reflected in the ambivalence shown by Basotho in response to questions on an Afrobarometer questionnaire administered in early 2000. Almost half the sampled population were unable to define democracy, a figure higher than in any other southern African country. Roughly half did not support democracy, and only slightly over half felt that the recent election was conducted in a proper way, figures which also diverged from the more positive experience with democracy of most other countries in the survey. Party affiliation is a major determinant of attitudes toward democracy, reflecting the polarization of the country after the contested 1998 election and the subsequent riots and destruction of buildings in major cities.

## BACKGROUND

Over the last two hundred years, the Basotho people have lived under at least twelve different political systems. They are as follows:

- i. **Clan-based autonomy.** Before 1800, the various clans that eventually made up the Basotho nation lived in relative isolation across much of what is now the Free State. The clans, which still retain their meaning to present-day Basotho, governed themselves with authority held by wealthy cattle-owners and elders. Inter-clan warfare was common, usually sparked by cattle raiding.
- ii. **Anarchy.** The clan-based system yielded in the very early nineteenth century to a period of desperate confusion and hunger, called the *lifaqane*. Inter-clan fighting escalated into general warfare as a result of drought, population growth, the movement of Griqua and Trekboers across the Orange River, the rise of the Zulu nation under Shaka, and pressure from ongoing slave-trading on the Mozambique coast. There was little in the eastern highveld that could be called “government” while starving bands of people, each fleeing from the other, moved across the land in search of safety and food.
- iii. **Participatory centralism.** Moshoeshe I, with the help of far-sighted missionaries and councillors, brought order out of chaos and created a nation out of the hungry and confused bands of refugees which had crossed the Caledon River and the Drakensberg mountain range. He regularised the familiar tradition of the *pitsso* or gathering of the people to discuss communal issues, and did so in a way that was based on both popular and authoritarian approaches. Decisions were made after real consultation with the nation, which was at that time sufficiently small that a large proportion of adult Basotho males could meet to discuss issues.
- iv. **Feudal monarchy.** As Moshoeshe aged and the population of Lesotho grew and expanded out of the lowlands into the foothills and mountains, democratic centralism was no longer possible. Moshoeshe created a network of chiefs and sub-chiefs, which he placed in key places in the expanding nation. Most of these were members of his own family, but in certain areas he had to yield authority to leaders of clans only distantly related to Moshoeshe’s own *Bakoena* clan. He and later, his sons and grandsons, ruled over a political structure which came to be identified as a monarchy, but with authority spread out among the area chiefs in a way that resembled feudalism.
- v. **Protectorate.** Under heavy pressure from land-hungry invaders with the help of sub-chiefs and missionary advisors, Moshoeshe made a strategic decision to place Lesotho under British protection. At the same time as establishing authority over the refugees who made up the Basotho nation, he had to give up increasing portions of land to encroaching Afrikaners. Treaty after treaty was made and then broken, as pressures for land by the Orange Free State government pushed the Basotho back into the rough terrain across the Caledon, an area that could be defended, if only temporarily. Moshoeshe realised that he had to give up independence for survival. He asked Queen Victoria to allow the Basotho to guarantee the safety of what remained of Basotho territory in 1868.
- vi. **Colony.** The debate continues as to whether Lesotho was ever a colony of Britain, or only a protectorate with complete internal self-government. In fact, Britain sub-contracted the administration of Lesotho to the Cape, which attempted to make Lesotho into part of its Colony. The effort did not succeed, largely because of the so-called Gun War of 1880-81, in which Lesotho defeated the attempts by the Cape administration to forbid Basotho to own guns. The consequence of the war was that Lesotho again came to be administered as a protectorate directly from London. Most internal matters were decided by Basotho under the ongoing feudal monarchy, while the British controlled external relations and finances.

- vii. **Westminster-style constitutional monarchy.** The winds of change finally blew as far south as Lesotho, with full political independence within the British Commonwealth being granted in 1966. First-past-the-post elections for a parliament and Prime Minister were held in 1965, and were won by the Basotho National Party (BNP) by a narrow margin over the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). Chief Leabua Jonathan became the first Prime Minister, with Ntsu Mokhehle as leader of the opposition. King Moshoeshoe II made a vain effort to be more than a figurehead constitutional monarch, but was defeated in his attempt to rally traditionalist Basotho. This phase of Lesotho's political history lasted for four years, until the election of 1970.
- viii. **Direct rule under a suspended constitution.** The election of 1970 was won by the opposition Basutoland Congress Party, but the outgoing Prime Minister Jonathan, with the support of *apartheid* South Africa, declared the results null and void, and suspended the constitution. He ruled by decree until 1986, though nominally through a parliament consisting solely of loyal party members and a few co-opted opposition voices. All decisions for the nation were made within the upper ranks of the Basotho National Party. Opposition figures were repressed, jailed, beaten, exiled, and even killed, while at the same time the formalities of parliamentary rule were given nominal recognition.
- ix. **Military rule.** South Africa had grown increasingly unhappy with the Jonathan regime, both because it supported the African National Congress and because it was establishing close relations with communist countries. Finally, in January 1986, South Africa closed the Lesotho border. Within a few days Jonathan had resigned in favour of a military government led by Major-General Metsing Lekhanya. Lekhanya and his council of military advisors followed the established pattern of rule by decree, but now in ways that pleased Pretoria. As initial euphoria gave way to general discontent, a second coup took place in 1991, with Lekhanya being replaced by his subordinate general Ramaema. Ramaema sensed correctly that the public was fed up with top-down authoritarian military rule, and so he spent his two years in power preparing for a general election.
- x. **Constitutional monarchy again.** Westminster-style elections were held in May 1993, with great rejoicing and high voter turnout across the nation. The Basutoland Congress Party under the leadership of the veteran (and now ageing and ailing) politician Ntsu Mokhehle took every seat, even though a substantial minority of voters (nearing 40%) favoured the opposition Basotho National Party. The consensus of informed observers is that the elections were reasonably free and fair, and that the failure of any opposition candidates to be elected was due to the uniformity of support for the BCP across every one of the 65 constituencies. Unlike 1965 and 1970, there were now no major regional differences. Thus parliamentary democracy had to proceed without the presence of any opposing voices in the parliament. There was a widespread feeling that the lack of effective opposition, and the obvious illness of Prime Minister Mokhehle, bred inactivity in the government.
- xi. **Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary confusion.** Opposition within parliament grew because of dissent within the BCP, which then split into two parties in 1996. The majority of the BCP crossed the floor to become the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), while a minority (which had wanted to unseat the party leadership in favour of a younger group) remained within the BCP. The discontented non-parliamentary opposition mounted a coup attempt in 1994, seeking to make Moshoeshoe II's son, Letsie, the head of government with BNP and monarchist politicians guiding his actions. This intervention died a quick death after the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations presided over a very effective national stay-away.
- xii. **Rule by divided authority.** A second election was held in May 1998, the result of which was almost identical to that of May 1993. The now-ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy, under a new Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, took 79 of the 80 parliamentary seats, even though once again the opposition parties took nearly 40% of the popular vote. The situation was exactly as it has been in 1993, with the winner-take-all electoral system and the breadth of support for the political incumbents undermining opposition efforts to win legislative seats. The opposition parties (now 13

in number, though only the BCP and the BNP had any real following) protested vigorously that they had been cheated. Sober assessments of the election rate it as reasonably free and fair, given the first-past-the-post system, but that it did not at all represent the feelings of a substantial minority of the nation. This led to increasingly vociferous protests, and in the end an attempted coup, which failed only because Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) forces, spear-headed by the South African army, with Botswana back-up, guaranteed the position of the LCD government. The international intervention led to the creation of an Interim Political Authority (IPA), whose mandate was to create a political system that would satisfy everyone. The IPA was composed of two members each from all the 14 parties that had contested the 1998 elections. The LCD government continues to govern, the IPA continues to hold the power to change the system of government, and the South Africans continue to exercise an unspoken veto power over whatever the LCD and the IPA between them might decide.

It is perhaps no wonder that there is confusion in the minds of Basotho over democracy. Most people know the history described here, and they recognise that the golden age of Basotho self-rule under Moshoeshoe I is long since past. This report will explore present-day attitudes of Basotho to democracy, politics, and development. The report will an incredible lack of clarity on the part of the interviewees as to what democracy might mean. But, perhaps remarkably, some people do have a vision of a democratic future for their country.

## **SAMPLING AND FIELD WORK**

The Round 1 Afrobarometer survey in Lesotho took place between 29 March and 7 June 2000, with a total of 1,177 persons interviewed in 150 Enumeration Areas chosen randomly to represent the national adult population. The original goal had been to interview 1,200 persons, 50% male and 50% female, but problems arose toward the end of the survey period that resulted in the loss of 23 interviews. The 150 Enumeration Areas were selected in such a way that the urban and rural sub-samples in each of Lesotho's 10 districts would be proportional to the populations recorded in the 1996 census. Proportions were adjusted to allow eight interviews to be carried out in each Enumeration Area, thus avoiding over-clustering within the sample.

Within this sampling design, 150 Enumeration Areas were listed. The next step was to find them on the available maps. Unfortunately, the maps produced for the census by the Bureau of Statistics were not available, and so it was not possible to find every one of the Areas on the existing 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 maps. In a few cases, therefore, the next or previous Area on the sampling list was chosen and villages were identified within these Areas for field work. A further constraint was that certain Areas were simply inaccessible within the time and budget allotted to the study. Lesotho is a rugged mountainous country, and as a result many villages can only be reached on horseback (sometimes as far as two days ride from the nearest motor road), by aeroplane or helicopter. In such cases, it was necessary to find Enumeration Areas that were closer to a four-wheel-drive track. The resulting list of Areas was only marginally different from the original list, and it was felt that there had been no serious threat to randomness, with the possible exception that truly remote people might have had different views from those who were nearer to a dirt track.

Once the Areas and the villages within each Area had been chosen, teams were dispatched to the Areas, one team in the north of the country and one in the south. Their procedure required each team of four interviewers and a supervisor to attempt to do two Areas in one day. In most cases, this was quite feasible, but in some remote Areas it did not prove possible because of distances and difficulty travelling between Areas. Once a team had reached an Area, the team leader would consult the chief of the main village, and describe the study. Only in one case did the chief refuse permission, and in that case the team went to a nearby village.

Once permission had been obtained, the team supervisor would choose a starting point (or more than one starting point in the case of very small villages), and set the interviewers to work in four directions. In theory these were north, south, east, and west of the starting point; but in most Basotho villages, these directions were significantly modified due to the rough terrain. Team members would stop at the fifth house on the right side of the path or direction for the first interview. If the interview could proceed, all present members of the household were listed and one chosen randomly, subject only to an alternation rule that required selecting a male in the first house, a female in the second, and so on. If the interview could not proceed in that household, either the interviewer would return for a second try or he/she would proceed to the next house and repeat the random respondent selection procedure.

Eventually, 1,177 returns were brought back to Sechaba Consultants offices in Maseru for data entry. The data sheets were scanned electronically into an SPSS system file using the Teleform program. Closed-ended questions were marked on the pre-coded data sheets in the field, while open-ended questions were coded and entered in the Sechaba office prior to scanning.

There are slight differences between the demographic characteristics of the sample for the Afrobarometer survey of political opinion and the households selected for Sechaba Consultants' 1999 poverty survey, which is probably more accurate than the 1996 census. Males in the 1999 survey were 46.8%, while they were 50.4% in the Afrobarometer survey. The distribution across districts was very similar, however, as shown in Table 1.

<b>District</b>	<b>% in opinion survey</b>	<b>% in 1999 poverty survey</b>
Butha-Buthe	6.5	6.9
Leribe	14.4	15.3
Berea	11.6	10.8
Maseru	26.8	26.0
Mafeteng	9.6	11.3
Mohale's Hoek	12.6	9.9
Quthing	6.9	6.4
Qacha's Nek	2.7	4.5
Mokhotlong	5.4	4.4
Thaba-Tseka	3.0	4.5

**Table 1. Percentage of population by district in opinion survey and poverty survey**

The educational levels in the two surveys are also quite similar, as shown in Table 2.

<b>Educational level</b>	<b>% in opinion survey</b>	<b>% in 1999 poverty survey</b>
No schooling	14.7	13.9
Less than standard 7	58.7	59.0
Standard 7 completed only	17.0	16.7
Up to and including JC	18.1	16.7

**Table 2. Percentage of population by educational levels in opinion survey and poverty survey**

Finally, the percentage with formal work in the opinion survey is 16.6, while the percentage with formal work in the poverty survey is 15.8, again quite similar.

An important independent variable that is central to analysis within this paper, cannot be compared with information from any previous survey. We are referring to the respondent's political party affiliation.

Almost half (49%) of the population did not state a party preference, either because they don't belong, don't know, or are not willing to say. Of the remainder, one third (35%) say they identify with the LCD, 11% to the BNP, 5% to the BCP, and only 1% to other parties. We highlight these differences because they explain a good deal of variation in political attitudes in Lesotho (see below). In short, people who identify with political "winners" (in this case the LCD) are much more likely to be supportive of the prevailing political arrangements than people who identify with parties that lost the 1998 election.

## THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

This section provides answers to three questions:

- What do people understand by "democracy"?
- To what extent do people support democracy?
- How well do they think democracy actually works in Lesotho?

### What do people understand by "democracy"?

Interviewees held many different interpretations of democracy. Even asking the question was difficult, since there is no simple word for democracy in Lesotho. As a result, and in accordance with Afrobarometer practice, we used the English word. The only alternative would have been to use a phrase which can be translated "government by the people and of the people", and which is in itself one of the possible explanations of the word democracy.

The people to whom we spoke gave 92 different answers to the question. These can be grouped under 14 headings, as shown in Table 3.

Response	Number of cases	Percentage
Don't know	491	42.1
Government of people, by people, for people	251	21.5
Freedom	164	14.1
Nothing	81	6.9
Social and economic development	76	6.5
Unity	39	3.3
Peace and safety	38	3.3
Good governance	31	2.7
Human rights	29	2.5
Something bad	29	2.5
Something political	24	2.1
Change in government	16	1.4
Independence	14	1.2
Freedom of speech	13	1.1

**Table 3. Popular meanings of democracy**

Most notable about Table 3 is the large proportion, almost half of those who were interviewed, who say either that they "don't know" what democracy means or that it means "nothing" to them. The history of failed or imperfect attempts to bring western-style governments into Lesotho since independence may partially explain the seeming indifference to the concept of democracy, but there is doubtless more to the story than that. We will attempt to explore this phenomenon in what follows. As a small hint of the

difficulty in understanding democracy, a placard protesting against land acquisition for urban development is reported to have said: “Why is the nation tortured under democratic rule?”<sup>1</sup>

The explanation that democracy is government of, by and for the people, is what might be expected to be the dominant view. In Lesotho the expression is *muso ke muso ka sechaba*, meaning “government is government by people”. It is surprising that not even 20% of the sample gave that explanation. Various aspects of freedom come next, with 17% speaking of freedom, human rights, free speech, and independence. Political goods, including unity, peace, security, good governance, change of government and other political matters, make up just over 11% of the responses. Issues related to social and economic development are next, with about 6% of the responses. Only 2% cited negative features of democracy.

As pointed out in a six-nation comparative report<sup>2</sup> (hereafter *Afrobarometer WP No. 7*), Lesotho’s score on this question was very different from that of the five other nations, namely; Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Namibia. If responses identifying democracy as government by the people, civil liberties and personal freedoms, and voting systems are combined, Lesotho’s total is only 39%, while the remaining totals are: Malawi 98%, Namibia 85%, Zambia 84%, Botswana 71%, and Zimbabwe 52%.

Whereas, in Lesotho, 42% could not attach a meaning to democracy, the percentages were radically lower in all other countries: Namibia 27%, Botswana 22%, Zimbabwe 17%, Zambia 17%, and Malawi 8%. An explanation may lie in part in national political histories. None of the other five were nations before the colonial period. Namibia and Botswana were created as national entities by an external power, although Botswana had the Ngwato as a dominant clan at its core, with Khama I as a potential national unifying figure. Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi were all composed of separate clan and ethnic groups before the British united them into a Federation. Thus in every case the independence struggle involved creating nations where there had been none, and uniting the people in a fight against a colonial power. It thus seems likely that a longing for, and at least a partial understanding of democracy would have been higher in the other five countries than in Lesotho, where the unification process began much earlier and the nascent participatory democracy under Moshoeshoe I had to yield to a variety of undemocratic alternatives.

Understanding democracy is strongly related to age, gender, income, age and employment status. Education makes by far the biggest difference: only 29% of those without schooling can offer a meaning for the term, compared to 38% with less than primary school, 61% who have finished primary school, and 88% of those who have finished high school. The pattern of meaningful responses by educated respondents is almost the same as for the whole population, with government of and by the people at the top, followed by aspects of freedom. The other demographic variables have less impact on being able to explain democracy, but there is a significant tendency for men, young people, wealthier people, and employed people to be able to articulate what democracy means.

Party affiliation makes a slight difference, with 48% of LCD members giving an explanation of democracy, but only 55% of the remaining respondents. There was no difference between members of BNP or BCP and those who did not give a party affiliation.

The dominant response, namely, government of the people and by the people, is significantly more often given by those who frequently discuss politics with their friends, and those who say that they follow what is happening in government

To further probe this issue, interviewees were asked a series of eight questions concerning the components of democracy, on a scale of 1 to 5, as follows:

- 1 absolutely essential
- 2 important
- 3 not very important
- 4 not important at all

Table 4 gives the percentages who believe that a particular feature of democracy is either absolutely essential or important, by educational level, gender, and income level. Age, employment, and home region do not lead to clear group differences.

	All	Less than primary school	Primary school and above	Female	Male	<M550 monthly income	>= M550 monthly income
Jobs for all	64%	60%	70%	59%	69%	62%	76%
Basic needs satisfied	60%	57%	65%	56%	65%	59%	69%
Equal schooling for all	56%	53%	61%	53%	60%	55%	67%
Majority rule	41%	39%	45%	35%	47%	40%	48%
Freedom to criticise govt	39%	35%	46%	34%	44%	38%	52%
Low gap between rich and poor	37%	37%	36%	34%	40%	36%	48%
A least two political parties	35%	33%	40%	31%	39%	34%	51%
Regular elections	32%	29%	37%	28%	36%	31%	47%

**Table 4. Features of democracy by education, gender and income**

Jobs, basic needs, and schooling are the highest signifiers of a “democratic society” for the people we interviewed. These features of democracy are followed by two political features, then the gap between rich and poor, and finally by two more political features. It is striking that the four political items are low, both as compared with the other three social priorities, and as compared with scores in four of the other five countries. Only Namibia has comparable scores, and is actually lower on the question of freedom to criticise and the need for at least two parties.

### **Commitment to and Support for Democracy.**

A fundamental question for the consolidation of a political regime is whether people prefer a democratic to a non-democratic government. Respondents were given three options:

- Democracy is always preferable
- Non-democratic government can be preferable under certain circumstances
- To people like me, it makes no difference what form of government we have

Respondents were also asked about their willingness to accept forms of government other than democracy. Six possibilities were presented:

- One party only to stand for elections
- Decisions to be made by elders and traditional leaders
- Rule by the army
- Prime Minister to make all decisions
- Economic experts to make all decisions
- Country return to colonial rule

As was also true for people's understanding of democracy, the level of commitment to democracy depends significantly upon education, gender and income. Table 5 gives the percentage of people in each group

who take a pro-democracy position. Percentages which are in parentheses are not statistically significant, while those without parentheses are significant at better than the .01 level.

	All	Less than primary school	Primary school and above	Female	Male	<M550 monthly income	>= M550 monthly income
Against rule by army	70%	(69%)	(70%)	67%	72%	(69%)	(77%)
Against rule by PM alone	69%	(67%)	(72%)	66%	72%	68%	78%
Against colonial rule	65%	(63%)	(67%)	63%	66%	63%	77%
Against rule by chiefs, elders	59%	(58%)	(60%)	(56%)	(62%)	(58%)	(66%)
Democracy always preferable	51%	47%	59%	43%	59%	50%	56%
Against one-party rule	51%	47%	56%	(47%)	(54%)	49%	66%
Against rule by experts	49%	51%	46%	50%	47%	(49%)	(49%)

**Table 5. Commitment to democracy by education, gender and income**

Strikingly, only half (51%) of all Basotho interviewed support democracy. At the same time, they say that they find most non-democratic alternatives unpalatable. Opposition to army rule is strongest (70%), but opposition to unrestricted rule by the Prime Minister was a close second. It is interesting that return to colonial rule is a less offensive option than either army rule or one-man rule. Rule by traditional leaders is next, while preference for democracy, multi-party rule, and non-expert rule are at the bottom, with about half in favour and half against.

Men and wealthy people are generally more opposed to rule by the army, the Prime Minister, the colonial regime, and traditional rulers than women and poor people. Education makes no significant difference at this point. Men, wealthy people, and educated people are more supportive of democracy and more opposed to one-party rule than their opposite numbers. However, it is striking that women and the poor are most likely to oppose rule by economic experts.

### **How well does democracy work in Lesotho?**

Are people satisfied with the way democracy actually works in Lesotho? In this instance, only a minority expressed satisfaction: 39% said they are either very satisfied or fairly satisfied. Importantly, LCD members were more satisfied, with 56% expressing satisfaction, while only 28% of BCP members and 20% of BNP members are satisfied with democracy in Lesotho. Here also Lesotho was below Botswana (75% satisfaction), Namibia (64%), Zambia (59%), and Malawi (57%), but well above Zimbabwe (18%).

Respondents were also asked about their perception of the extent of democracy in Lesotho. Overall, only 36% ventured that the country had a democratic government at the time of the survey (March-June 2000). However, there were again strong and significant differences between members of the different parties, with 54% of LCD members believing Lesotho has a democratic government but only 28% of BCP followers and a very low 15% of BNP members. There are no significant differences based on age, education, or income. On this matter, Lesotho was again below Botswana (82%), Namibia (71%), Zambia (62%), and Malawi (62%), but well above Zimbabwe, only 27% of whose respondents felt that the country was democratic.

We also asked respondents to compare conditions under Lesotho's present democratic regime with those under the preceding military regime. Table 6 lists these questions and for each one shows the percentage

of respondents who feel that conditions are better (or much better), about the same, and worse (or much worse) than the previous government.

	<b>Better or much better</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>Worse or much worse</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Free to vote as desired	66%	12%	8%	14%
Join any political party	63%	13%	9%	15%
No fear of arbitrary arrest	59%	17%	9%	15%
Speak freely	56%	13%	16%	15%
Equal treatment of everyone	47%	17%	18%	18%
Access to basic necessities	46%	19%	20%	15%
Adequate living standard	42%	20%	23%	15%
All Basotho are equal	40%	23%	21%	16%
Safe from crime and violence	40%	16%	30%	15%

*Table 6. Changes in life conditions from military to democratic regimes*

Not surprisingly, members of the LCD have a much more optimistic view of all of these conditions than do members of the BNP and BCP. In most cases the BCP has the most negative view of all the parties.

Income makes no difference to the answers. Education affects the view of living standards and safety from crime and violence by making respondents less sanguine about recent developments. Gender affects all except the freedom to vote and the feeling of safety, with women taking more extreme positions, both positive and negative, than men, who are more likely to believe things have remained the same as they were under the military.

In its popular assessments of recent changes in life conditions, Lesotho is on a par with the other SADC, not being significantly lower or higher on any scores. Only with regard to fear of arbitrary arrest does Lesotho rank near to the bottom in the region, along with Botswana.

## **STATE LEGITIMACY**

This section turns from popular perceptions of rapidly changing political regimes to citizen attitudes towards the permanent institutions of the state. We ask first about state legitimacy in general, followed by discussions of trust in state institutions, and the extent to which such institutions are seen to be responsive and free of corruption.

### **Legitimacy of the State**

We asked four questions about the state's right to rule:

- Was the government elected by accepted procedures?
- Does the government exercise power in an acceptable way?
- Does the constitution express the aspirations and values of the Basotho?
- Should government have ultimate authority even if people disagree?

There are no significant differences in the answers given by people of different educational levels, gender, and income levels. However, as might be expected, there are strong differences between adherents to different political parties. Table 7 shows the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with each of these statements. LCD loyalists clearly extend legitimacy to the state, although it is interesting that

they are less enthusiastic about government having ultimate authority than they are about, say, the acceptability of the 1998 elections. BCP and BNP members are about half as likely to view state authority as legitimate.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Election used accepted procedures	75%	39%	30%	50%	46%	54%
Government exercises power in acceptable way	71%	33%	29%	42%	41%	50%
Constitution expresses Basotho values	66%	44%	36%	67%	39%	49%
Government should have ultimate authority	57%	32%	27%	58%	39%	44%

**Table 7. Perceived legitimacy of the state**

Given the controversial 1998 poll and the subsequent national political crisis, Lesotho scores the lowest of all six SADC countries surveyed on the acceptability of procedures used in their most recent election. The highest score was Botswana with 82%, followed by Namibia at 78%, Zambia at 70%, and Malawi at 65%. Even Zimbabwe’s percentage was higher than Lesotho at 58%. But Zimbabweans are less accepting than Basotho regarding the exercise of state power, while residents of the other countries are more accepting. On the question of the authenticity of the constitution, Lesotho falls in the middle of a ranked SADC list.

It is quite surprising, therefore, that Basotho are the most permissive of all Southern Africans in extending the right to government to make decisions with which the people may not agree. This may help explain Lesotho’s low ratings on knowledge of, and support for, democracy. Perhaps the legacy of military and unconstitutional rule have led Basotho to be more readily accepting of top-down authority.

The combined scores for the four questions in Table7 comprise a scale of state legitimacy. The result is strongly polarized, with 12% of the respondents giving the minimum possible score, and 30% giving the maximum. Of those at the minimum end, 77% belong to the main opposition parties or no party. On the other hand, 61% of those at the maximum end belong to the LCD. As such, the issue of state legitimacy in Lesotho has become, not only vigorously contested, but also highly politicised.

### **Trust in State Institutions.**

We asked respondents about the amount of trust they place in various particular institutions in the state and civil society. These included the Prime Minister, the Parliament, local government, the army, the police, law courts, the Independent Electoral Commission, Radio Lesotho, government newspapers, and independent newspapers.

As Table 8 shows, the most trusted institution is Radio Lesotho (53% say they trust it “all” or “most” of the time) and the least trusted is local government (18%). As might be expected, better-educated persons tend to be more sceptical of the Independent Electoral Commission, Radio Lesotho, and government newspapers than the less-educated persons. Of course, members of the different political parties display markedly divergent levels of trust. Not surprisingly, the LCD partisans are more likely than opposition supporters to trust the Prime Minister, the Parliament and the Independent Electoral Authority. The opposition parties give higher scores to the police, the army, the law courts, and the independent newspapers.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Radio Lesotho	62%	52%	38%	75%	49%	53%
Prime Minister	62%	28%	20%	42%	32%	41%
Police	38%	50%	32%	42%	43%	41%
Law courts	46%	52%	31%	42%	37%	40%
Parliament	43%	28%	23%	33%	23%	40%
Army	39%	54%	39%	25%	38%	39%
Government newspapers	41%	41%	30%	25%	34%	36%
Independent newspapers	28%	43%	35%	42%	34%	36%
Independent Electoral Authority	47%	28%	19%	33%	25%	32%
Local government	22%	28%	13%	17%	16%	18%

**Table 8. Trust in state institutions**

Lesotho ranks in the middle of the six SADC nations on trust of the chief political executive (in this case, the Prime Minister), the Parliament, the police, the public broadcasting corporation, and the government press. Notably, however, Lesotho's rank on trust in local government, the army and the independent newspapers are the lowest of all countries.

Has trust in the state changed from the past to the present? In general, 36% of the respondents said that the government was more trustworthy now than in the past, and 30% said it was less trustworthy. However, there is a wide gap between the political parties, with 60% of LCD supporters now finding it more trustworthy, compared to only 20% of BCP and 7% of BNP supporters respectively. Moreover, only 26% of those who would not or could not name a party, as well as only 17% of those who belong to small parties, felt it was more trustworthy in Lesotho's post-1998 environment.

### **Responsiveness of State Institutions**

A series of questions was asked about the extent of government interest in and responsiveness to national and personal concerns:

- Is the Prime Minister/Parliament/local government interested in your well-being?
- Is the government more interested today than earlier?
- Is the government interested in the social group with which you identify?
- Is a democratically elected government able to deal with inherited problems?

On one hand, Basotho seem to consider that a democratically elected government will be able to respond to inherited problems and that the post-1998 political crisis is not a reason to change to a form of government other than democracy. Remarkably in the light of the country's polarized politics, adherents of all political parties seem to concur on this point.

Otherwise, party affiliation to a large extent determines people's opinions, as shown in Table 9. The supporters of the LCD are strongly convinced that the Prime Minister, the Parliament, and today's government are more interested than members of the previous government in their well-being. Clearly, however, members of the other parties or of no party are not persuaded. Local government is less well thought of by the LCD, but has a better place in the eyes of the opposition groups. None of the parties think that government takes special interest in their own groups, which suggests that there is still a good degree of both homogeneity and alienation in the nation.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Government can deal with problems now	65%	60%	65%	33%	54%	59%
Interest of Prime Minister in your well-being	62%	22%	17%	25%	33%	40%
Interest now greater than in former government	62%	28%	7%	17%	28%	37%
Interest of local council in your well-being	39%	29%	29%	25%	33%	34%
Interest of Parliament in your well-being	47%	25%	18%	25%	26%	32%
Interest of government in your group	21%	15%	13%	8%	8%	18%

**Table 9. Responsiveness of government**

**Official corruption.** The question of corruption can be divided into two natural groups: perceived corruption, which refers to the opinion of the respondent about the corrupt practices of various leadership groups, and actual corruption, which is a behavioural measure of how frequently the respondent has personally experienced a corrupt act by an official and participated in it.

Table 10 gives the percentage of respondents who believe all or most of the individuals in each group are involved in corruption. It shows that civil servants are perceived to be more corrupt than parliamentarians, who in turn are seen as more corrupt than local government officials. This finding is hard to reconcile with the result that local government is the least trusted of all state institutions. Perhaps “small fry” local officials are held to have fewer opportunities for rent-seeking or bribe-taking than the “big fish” at the top of central government hierarchy.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Civil servants involved in corruption	27%	41%	31%	17%	30%	30%
Corruption more now than in previous regime	17%	48%	50%	17%	24%	26%
Parliamentarians involved in corruption	11%	33%	26%	42%	24%	20%
Local government officials involved in corruption	8%	24%	15%	25%	11%	11%

**Table 10. Official corruption**

As usual, party identification is a key explanatory factor. The contrast between the ruling LCD and the other parties is strong and significant. Supporters of the LCD admit there is some corruption, but that it is less widespread than supporters of other parties think. The contrast is most stark when the previous regime is compared with the present government; almost half of the BCP and BNP members believe that corruption has risen, whereas only 17% of LCD members see an increase.

It is important to note that Basotho have a much better impression of the honesty of their government than the residents of other SADC countries. Zimbabwe is uniformly the highest on a scale of perceived corruption, followed by Zambia, Malawi, and Botswana. Namibia, on the other hand, is lower than Lesotho on all counts except corruption in local government, where Lesotho is the lowest.

To track actual (as opposed to perceived) corruption we asked respondents about their personal involvements. Had they ever had to pay a government official to get a job, a loan or pension, a water or electricity hookup, or access to housing or land? Or had they ever claimed undeserved government benefits, avoided paying property or income taxes, or received services without paying the bill?

Strikingly few people admit to having done any of these things. At the high end, 6% admit to paying government officials in order to get a job. Another 5% admit having claimed undeserved government benefits. Otherwise, no more than 2% of the population cites involvement in corrupt acts. It may be that certain actions are simply not considered to be corrupt. The numbers are surely incorrect concerning the acquisition of urban building plots, for which people routinely pay the local chief for land which should not be allocated under the 1979 Land Act. Another possibility, of course, is that people in Lesotho by and large respect the law, but that possibility somehow contradicts the opinions expressed concerning the high level of corruption by government officials.

In assessing these data on personal corruption, it should be kept in mind that the situation is not much different in the other countries included in the survey. Only Zimbabweans admit to a high level of abuse of the law, followed by Namibia. Batswana acknowledge an even lower level of personal corruption than Basotho.

## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Respondent assessment of government performance fall under three general topics:

- Expectations of government
- Performance of government in specific policy areas
- Overall government performance

### Expectations of Government

People were asked to indicate what problems they expect government to solve. They were allowed to state up to three issues. A total of 82 different issues were raised, which we have combined in 16 categories. Table 11 arrays these categories in frequency order. The sum of the percentages is greater than 100, because most people gave two or three responses.

Jobs	Crime	Hunger	Transport	Poverty	Health	Water	Economy
64%	29%	20%	10%	9%	8%	7%	5%
Welfare	Farming	Politics	Violence	Governance	Development	Services	Environment
4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%

**Table 11. Principal problems to be addressed by government**

There are a few differences across population groups. It is not surprising that jobs are most important for the poor, especially those who say they are looking for work. Two quite different groups emphasize crime as an issue: employed people who are financially well-off are concerned about crime, as are poorer, self-employed mountain people, doubtless because of the high prevalence of theft of livestock in the remote parts of Lesotho. Hunger is stressed by those with less formal schooling, older people, unemployed people, and mountain residents. As expected, there is a strong emphasis on better transport by mountain dwellers. The wealthy and employed also place great importance on transport, most likely because they need it for business. Health is mentioned more often by the poor. The numbers of people reporting the other items are too small for differences between groups to be significant.

Interestingly, supporters of the various political parties express essentially the same list of problems, with the same priorities. We might have expected from the radically different assessment of the performance of the government in various areas, as reported above, that people would focus on different problem areas. One is that the complaints made by opposition figures are not based so much in the reality of their concerns as in political expediency and a quest for partisan advantage.

Lesotho's list of problems diverges from the list in other countries. Only job creation is at or near the top of the list in every country. Crime and security are also high on the list in Malawi (28%), are somewhat lower in Botswana (12%), but are not major concerns in the other countries. Food shortage is high on the Malawi list (26%), but is not mentioned elsewhere. Issues of importance in other countries, but of less importance in Lesotho, are AIDS (24% in Botswana and 14% in Namibia), health (41% in Zambia, 29% in Malawi, 18% in Namibia, 18% in Zimbabwe, and 15% in Botswana), education (46% in Namibia, 31% in Zambia and 20% in Botswana), the economy (74% in Zimbabwe, 48% in Malawi, and 20% in Zambia), and agriculture (26% in Zambia, 14% in Botswana, and 13% in Malawi). It is common in surveys that issues that are salient at one time or in one context, may be low-profile on another occasion. It is important therefore not to take these lists as determinative of policy priorities, but rather as indicative of public opinion at a particular point in history.

### Performance of Government in Specific Policy Areas

In Afrobarometer interviews, respondents are asked how the government is handling problems in nine specific policy areas, as listed in Table 12. The figures in the table are percentages who consider that the government has done "well" (i.e. "fairly well" plus "very well").

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Addressing educational needs	71%	52%	32%	42%	53%	56%
Improving health services	62%	37%	34%	33%	47%	50%
Reducing crime	56%	32%	24%	33%	41%	44%
Creating jobs	52%	22%	17%	33%	36%	38%
Managing the economy	50%	24%	18%	50%	31%	36%
Delivering basic services	48%	33%	19%	33%	30%	35%
Ensuring sufficient land to everyone	44%	20%	17%	25%	28%	32%
Keeping prices stable	26%	15%	11%	17%	18%	20%
Building houses	15%	11%	3%	17%	12%	12%

*Table 12. Assessments of government performance in specific policy areas*

Overall, the government receives relatively high marks for its delivery of social services like education, health, and crime control. It is regarded as having done less well with regard to macro-economic management tasks like creating jobs, distributing land, and keeping prices stable.

There are very few significant differences between population groups in their assessments of policy performance. However, as with many other evaluations among Basotho, policy performance is viewed through partisan lenses. They are regarding the same record of government performance, but their appraisals are deeply coloured by their political affiliation.

On this matter, Lesotho again holds a mid-position among the six SADC nations, in all areas except for construction of houses, where it is the lowest of all. However, it must be remembered that Lesotho has done little by way of public housing, largely because people generally build their own homes. Government may provide some infrastructure, particularly roads, but often this is long after houses are constructed. All rural settlements and most urban and peri-urban settlements are unplanned, and simply grow up as people enter the area and build their accommodation.

## Overall Government Performance

Respondents were asked the general performance of government and its component elements. According to Table 13, the current government is seen to be performing better than its predecessor. Within the government, the Prime Minister receives a higher performance rating than the Parliament and higher still than local government.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Prime Minister has performed well	68%	26%	23%	50%	45%	49%
Parliament has performed well	54%	28%	22%	33%	32%	38%
Current government more effective than former	57%	22%	5%	42%	26%	34%
Local government performs well	27%	32%	19%	33%	21%	23%

*Table 13. Opinion of government performance*

On the first three items, the rating the LCD government receives is favourable by its own followers. But LCD supporters believe that local government performs poorly, while the other parties, especially the BCP, think it is performing well. This discrepancy probably arises from the fact many local government structures were set and staffed by the BCP government before the party split.

## ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Five questions dealt with this issue, as follows:

- Satisfaction with present economic conditions in Lesotho
- Comparison with conditions a year ago
- Economic expectations for a year from now
- Satisfaction with your own personal economic conditions
- Satisfaction with economic conditions of your own group

The most notable feature of Table 14 is that the public in Lesotho is not satisfied with the country's economic condition. Only 13% said they were "satisfied" (i.e. "fairly satisfied" plus "very satisfied"). Moreover, only one-fifth (20%) thought that economic conditions had improved over the past year, with only slightly more (26%) expecting that improvements would occur over the year ahead. Moreover, most people seemed to think that they personally, both as individuals and members of identity groups in society, were worse off economically than their fellow Basotho (15% and 29% respectively).

As might be expected, education and wealth increase the likelihood that individuals will feel better off than others. And there are small, but significant, differences between the members of the political parties on matters of economic satisfaction. LCD adherents report lower monthly incomes than BCP members, which helps explain the larger proportion of BCP members who think their economic conditions are better than those of others. However, it must be admitted that the optimism of a relatively poorer section of society for improvement in their economic fortunes seems to relate more to party loyalty than to reality.

	<b>LCD</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>None/ Refused</b>	<b>Total</b>
Your group's economic conditions are better	19%	30%	23%	25%	19%	29%
Economic conditions will be better next year	32%	18%	14%	17%	25%	26%
Economic conditions have improved in a year	23%	11%	13%	17%	20%	20%
Your personal economic conditions are better	14%	15%	17%	17%	14%	15%
Satisfaction with Lesotho's economic conditions	12%	9%	12%	8%	12%	13%

**Table 14. Opinion of economic conditions**

On economic conditions, Lesotho scores better than Zimbabwe on all counts. However, Lesotho scores lower than any of the other four SADC countries and, objectively, has a higher ranking on poverty scales.

Economic attitudes seem to underpin popular assessments of democracy. A scale of economic satisfaction can be composed by adding the answers to the five questions in Table 14. This scale has a strong positive correlation to assessments of democratic changes listed in Table 6. People were also asked how often they or their family suffered deprivation, defined as “going without” food, cash income, shelter, clean water, electricity, fuel, medical treatment, and personal security in their homes. A scale of household deprivation (created by adding these item scores together) is also strongly and significantly correlated with perceptions of the impact of democratisation (except for safety from arrest and freedom to vote, see Table 6). At face value, economic considerations seem to influence the way Basotho view democracy.

## **CITIZENSHIP**

The consolidation of a democracy requires active citizens who participate in the political life of their country. To measure the extent of citizenship in Lesotho we asked whether people were well informed about politics, whether they felt politically effective, whether they join voluntary associations, and whether they vote in elections and take political actions between elections. Finally, we wanted to know if they would stand up and defend democracy if, as has happened in their country, it came under threat.

### **Political Information.**

To determine levels of political information, respondents were asked to identify the names of their political leaders and to report on access to media and other sources of political information. The results are presented in Table 15. For example, whereas 72% can identify the Prime Minister, only a shockingly low 1% know the name of their Member of Parliament. And whereas 55% get news from the radio, only 10% read newspapers. It is therefore not surprising that only one-third of all Basotho (31%) claim to find public affairs understandable.

In this case demographic characteristics matter as much as political affiliation. Table 15 gives the percentages who can name the individuals correctly by education, gender and wealth group, who use each of the media for news, and who follow political matters. Non-significant differences are indicated by use of parentheses.

	All	Less than primary school	Primary school and above	Female	Male	<M550 monthly income	>= M550 monthly income
Prime Minister	72%	66%	82%	65%	78%	(71%)	(80%)
Minister of Finance	7%	5%	10%	(5%)	(9%)	6%	17%
Member of Parliament	1%	(1%)	(1%)	(1%)	(1%)	(1%)	(0%)
Local councillor	11%	(11%)	(10%)	(9%)	(12%)	(11%)	(10%)
Gets news from radio	55%	48%	66%	50%	59%	53%	74%
Gets news from television	12%	6%	20%	(11%)	(12%)	9%	30%
Gets news from newspapers	10%	5%	17%	6%	12%	8%	20%
Discusses with friends	13%	(11%)	(16%)	9%	16%	(13%)	(12%)
Knows what is happening	31%	(30%)	(34%)	24%	39%	(31%)	(39%)

**Table 15. Knowledge of public affairs by education, gender, and income**

In most cases better educated people, men, and wealthier people have more knowledge of public figures, and keep in closer touch with the news.

Table 16 gives comparative figures for members of the various political parties.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/Refused	Total
Prime Minister	79%	60%	69%	90%	69%	72%
Minister of Finance	7%	11%	4%	8%	7%	7%
Member of Parliament	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Local councillor	16%	18%	8%	27%	7%	11%
Gets news from radio regularly	56%	51%	55%	58%	50%	55%
Gets news from television regularly	12%	17%	9%	8%	12%	11%
Gets news from newspapers regularly	10%	13%	11%	8%	9%	10%
Discusses with friends regularly	45%	53%	45%	42%	33%	39%
Knows what is happening regularly	59%	50%	53%	50%	40%	49%

**Table 16. Knowledge of public affairs according to political parties**

Lesotho compares well in the top row of Table 16 with the other six countries, for whom the equivalent to the Prime Minister would be the Vice-President. Namibia and Zambia fall below Lesotho and the others are above it. However, knowledge of the Minister of Finance is very low, compared to other countries. Only Botswana at 14% is near Lesotho, and in Zimbabwe the figure is a high 42%. Similarly, no other country is anywhere near as low as Lesotho, where only 1% of its citizens know their Member of Parliament. Likewise only 11% of Basotho know their local councillor, while more than half the citizens of Zimbabwe and Botswana are able to name the local councillor.

Similarly, Lesotho has the lowest percentage of people in the SADC region who listen regularly to the radio and read newspapers regularly. Lesotho slightly exceeds Malawi in the proportion who get news from television, but is far below the other four countries. Basotho also discuss politics with friends less frequently than those in the other five countries.

## Political Efficacy

Table 17 shows the answers to questions about the influence that citizens believe they have over their own lives and over politics. Related questions probe the efficacy of voting and elections in determining who exercises political power and how they exercise it.

There is a marked difference between the widespread sense of personal efficacy that Basotho feel over their own lives (58%) and the low proportions who feel well informed and competent to understand politics (13% and 15% respectively). Ironically, however, despite expressing limited political efficacy, a majority of respondents nevertheless feel that their vote makes a difference in determining who is elected to office. This last opinion tends to confirm that the protesters who questioned the results of the 1998 election were a small minority.

The only significant demographic difference between population groups is on the question of being able to say what one wishes in political matters. The more educated the person the more the person feels free to speak his or her mind without fear of the consequences.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
I am able to control what happens to me in life	59%	61%	59%	67%	58%	58%
I have enough information about political life	15%	15%	16%	8%	12%	13%
I am able to understand political affairs	17%	13%	14%	16%	13%	15%
I don't need to be careful speaking out	13%	17%	12%	33%	16%	14%
My vote will improve things	67%	58%	57%	42%	52%	58%
It matters who is in power	56%	53%	55%	42%	42%	49%

**Table 17. Assessment of personal control over matters according to political parties**

Table 17 reveals few differences between members of the different political parties on issues of political efficacy. If anything, there is a tendency for members of other parties to be more cynical about the electoral process than members of the main parties, who generally believe that voting is important and it matters who is in power.

Respondents in all the other SADC countries believe they have more information about politics, more understanding of public affairs, and less fear of the consequences of speaking on political issues than Basotho. Basotho are more optimistic than citizens of Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in their belief that voting can make things better, but they are lowest on the scale of thinking it matters who is actually in power.

## Voluntary Association

Respondents were asked about how active they are in six types of local and civic organizations. In almost every case the level of participation in voluntary associations in Lesotho falls below that in any of the other countries. Only in Malawi is attendance at meetings of trade unions lower than in Lesotho, and in Botswana membership in community development groups. In Lesotho 21% attend the meetings of church groups often or at least a few times each year, excluding worship services. As for other groups, 18% participate in community development groups, 13% in self-help associations, 12% in other groups concerned with local affairs, 8% in business associations, and 6% in labour unions. In Lesotho men are more active in the last four categories, while wealthier persons are more active in the just the last two

categories. There are no significant differences according to the amount of schooling or according to political party membership.

### **Political Participation**

The vitality of democracy can also be tracked in terms of popular political participation. One important indicator is “who votes?” Fully 80% of those who said they are members of political parties voted in the 1998 election, while only 58% of those who either refused to give their party affiliation or do not belong to a party voted in the election.

Overall, however, only 54% of the respondents said that Lesotho’s 1998 national elections were free and fair, either completely or with minor problems. In this instance, 74% of the members of the LCD said the elections were free and fair, in contrast to 40% of BCP members and 36% of BNP members. Significantly more men than women felt that the elections met acceptable standards, while education and income made no difference. In cross-national perspective, the Lesotho elections were judged to be of poorer quality than the most recent national elections in Botswana (83% free and fair, perhaps with minor problems), and Namibia (78%). Lesotho’s elections were seen to be on a par with those in Malawi in 1999 (53%) but much higher than Zimbabwe’s 1997 presidential elections, whose rating was a very low 31% free and fair (including with minor problems).

As for participation between elections, respondents were asked about ten different forms of political action that they might have taken, as listed in Table 18.

More often than women, men have contacted public officials or other influential persons for help to solve a problem, assembled with others for collective action, and worked for political candidates or parties. Educated people have been active in addressing community problems, writing letters to newspapers, and attending demonstrations or protest marches. Otherwise there are no major differences by population group.

Table 18 breaks down these activities by political affiliation. The percentage figures represent a grouping together of those who have ever done the action with those who would be willing to do it if they had the chance. There is no real difference between members of the various the political parties on any of these participatory acts.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Contacted government or party official	17%	11%	15%	33%	11%	14%
Contacted any other influential person	17%	20%	18%	0%	16%	16%
Addressed or would address community issues	84%	85%	78%	92%	76%	79%
Attended or would attend election rally	63%	57%	59%	58%	46%	53%
Worked or would work for political party	62%	48%	48%	67%	45%	52%
Wrote or would write a letter to newspaper	58%	50%	48%	50%	46%	50%
Attended or would attend demonstration, march	29%	34%	34%	25%	26%	28%
Boycotted or would boycott services and taxes	12%	17%	7%	33%	11%	11%
Partook or would partake in sit-ins, disruptions	7%	9%	9%	33%	8%	8%
Used or would use force or violence	4%	7%	6%	8%	6%	5%

**Table 18. Political actions taken or considered**

Basotho have contacted government officials at a higher rate than Batswana and Malawians, but less frequently than those in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Zambia. Only the Batswana are lower than Basotho in level of contact with other influential persons. Basotho also attend election rallies and write to newspapers far less often than citizens of any other SADC country. On the other hand, their level of working for political candidates or sharing with others on important community issues is about the same as that in other countries. Only in Zimbabwe and Namibia has there been a significant level of sit-in or disruption or use of force and violence, while Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, and Malawi show comparably low levels of these activities. Nevertheless, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Basotho are relatively inactive politically when compared to their neighbours in the SADC region.

### Defending Democracy

In this section we look at actions people might take in the event that the government reneges on its democratic commitments by shutting down independent media outlets, dismissing judges who rule against the government, banning political parties, or suspending parliament and cancelling elections.

No significantly different reactions arise to these scenarios because of education, gender, and wealth. Table 19 lists the percentage in each political party of those who would oppose such violations of democracy.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Shut down newspapers, radio, and TV stations	79%	89%	80%	83%	82%	81%
Judges dismissed who ruled against government	76%	82%	80%	91%	75%	76%
Parliament suspended and elections cancelled	77%	78%	76%	83%	67%	72%
Political parties banned	69%	82%	70%	75%	59%	65%

**Table 19. Opposition to violations of democracy**

The differences are small, with only a tendency for the BCP to take the most democratic stand on these issues, and for the BNP and LCD to take almost the same position. It is disturbing that up to a quarter would be willing to support any of these actions. In particular, only two-thirds of those interviewed would oppose the banning of political parties. It is also disturbing that there is no relation between preference for democracy and opposition to these actions.

Basotho are not significantly different from citizens of the other five countries in their attitudes toward closing of the media or dismissing of judges. Botswana, Zambia and Malawi have higher levels of objection to these anti-democratic actions, while Namibia and Zimbabwe take a more tolerant position. On the other hand, Basotho are the most willing of all the nations to accept the banning of political parties and the suspension of the constitution. Here also, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi are the most vigorously opposed to either of these moves.

Table 20 lists the actions that Basotho would take in the case any of these actions were taken by government.

	<b>Closing media</b>	<b>Dismissing judges</b>	<b>Banning parties</b>	<b>Suspending parliament</b>
Nothing	51%	54%	54%	55%
Speak to others	15%	13%	15%	14%
Write to newspapers	10%	11%	10%	10%
Contact officials	11%	10%	9%	9%
Join demonstration	9%	8%	8%	8%
Phone radio/TV	5%	5%	6%	5%
Don't know	9%	10%	8%	9%

**Table 20. Actions to defend democracy**

Importantly, the proportion who would “do nothing” is higher in Lesotho than elsewhere in the region, followed closely by Malawi. Zambia would have the highest level of active protests of any of the six countries, followed by Botswana. There is therefore plentiful reason for concern that Basotho would not defend democracy if it came under attack. On the contrary, as the next section shows, elements within the population are prone to protest *against* democratic rules that put them at a political disadvantage.

## **THE 1998 POLITICAL CRISIS**

The political protests of August 1998, which led to violence and widespread property destruction in Maseru, Mafeteng, and Mohale’s Hoek are a test case of Basotho public opinio. Table 21 provides answers to four questions about these events:

- What is your attitude toward the protests and subsequent violence?
- What is your attitude toward the intervention by SADC?
- What is your attitude toward the Interim Political Authority?
- What is your attitude toward Lesotho becoming part of South Africa?

	<b>LCD</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>None/ Refused</b>	<b>Total</b>
Protest actions were good and necessary	3%	28%	27%	0%	8%	9%
Protest actions were necessary but badly done	19%	32%	33%	33%	25%	24%
Neutral	1%	0%	1%	0%	4%	2%
Protest actions were unnecessary but helpful	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Protest actions were unnecessary and badly done	43%	22%	16%	50%	24%	30%
Protest actions violated Lesotho's constitution	24%	7%	5%	17%	13%	16%
Don't know	9%	11%	19%	0%	24%	18%

**Table 21. Attitudes to the 1998 political protests**

The polarities of Lesotho's current politics are clearly displayed in Table 22. More than half the members of the main opposition parties believed the protests were necessary, and were almost split evenly between feeling the actions were well done or not. On the other hand, two-thirds of LCD members and members of other minor parties felt the protest actions were either bad and unnecessary or a violation of the constitution.

Table 22 looks at the next stage of the evolving crisis, namely, the intervention of SADC armed forces led by South Africa. Here the situation is partly reversed. Three-quarters of the LCD supporters believe the SADC intervention was necessary, and over half believe it was well done. On the other hand, the attitudes of the BNP and BCP members are split between those in favour and those against the intervention.

	<b>LCD</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>None/ Refused</b>	<b>Total</b>
SADC intervention was good and necessary	58%	24%	19%	33%	27%	37%
SADC intervention necessary but badly done	20%	32%	23%	25%	26%	24%
Neutral	1%	0%	2%	0%	4%	2%
SADC intervention was unnecessary but helpful	4%	4%	4%	8%	4%	4%
SADC intervention unnecessary and badly done	6%	18%	23%	17%	13%	12%
SADC intervention violated constitution	5%	13%	15%	8%	6%	7%
Don't know	5%	9%	15%	8%	18%	13%

**Table 22. Attitudes to the SADC intervention**

Finally, Table 23 examines attitudes toward the Interim Political Authority. Two facts stand out. First, more than half the members of every party or of no party do not know what to say about the Interim Political Authority. Second, the BCP has the most favourable impression of the IPA of all the parties.

	<b>LCD</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>None/ Refused</b>	<b>Total</b>
IPA is good and necessary	19%	33%	22%	17%	14%	18%
IPA is necessary but badly done	7%	9%	7%	8%	9%	8%
Neutral	2%	2%	2%	8%	4%	3%
IPA is unnecessary but helpful	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%
IPA is unnecessary and badly done	7%	0%	4%	8%	4%	5%
IPA violates Lesotho's constitution	6%	6%	1%	0%	3%	4%
Don't know	57%	50%	64%	58%	64%	61%

**Table 23. Attitudes to the Interim Political Authority according to political parties**

Table 24 brings the discussion back to the core issue of this paper, namely, popular attitudes toward democracy. We have noted frequently above that the citizens of Lesotho have the least positive attitude toward democracy of all the countries discussed in Southern Africa. Table 24 shows the relation between popular support for democracy and approval for the actions taken in September 1998.

	<b>Democracy always preferable</b>	<b>Non-democratic government can be preferable</b>	<b>Makes no difference</b>
Protests were good	32%	0%	35%
Neutral	1%	6%	2%
Protests were bad	59%	27%	41%
Don't know	8%	17%	20%

**Table 24. Evaluation of 1998 protests by attitude toward democracy**

In general, people who favour democracy are against the protest actions of 1998, while those who do not care about Lesotho's form of government are more favourable towards the protest actions. The history of Lesotho's various political dispensations has not moved the country consistently toward democracy; nor do the attitudes of people display a deep and abiding understanding of democracy. September 1998 was the crucible; not only was Maseru's business district burned to the ground, but Lesotho's political reality was revealed to be one of deep polarization. This polarization has been latent ever since Moshoeshe I's sons inherited a colony which was not a colony, an ethnic unity of only very recent formation, a religiously divided nation, and a nation which has lived throughout its history in a deeply ambivalent relation to its large neighbour South Africa.

This raises the final question, namely, mass attitudes toward incorporation into South Africa. Table 25 gives the attitudes toward union with South Africa by political affiliation.

Strikingly, just over one-third of respondents (35%) believe that Lesotho should remain an independent country. The remainder apparently favour a closer relationship with South Africa.

A further third (29%) of the people we interviewed believe that Lesotho and South Africa should be one country. Of that number 50% believe Lesotho should be a new province, 11% believe Lesotho should be part of the Free State, 35% believe the Free State should be part of Lesotho, and 4% don't know. Sentiment in favour of Lesotho joining South Africa is strongest among the members of minor parties, next among LCD members, and least among BNP members, though differences here are not strong or significant.

	LCD	BCP	BNP	Other	None/ Refused	Total
Both countries under one government	29%	26%	21%	42%	31%	29%
Freedom of movement between countries	32%	30%	36%	8%	26%	30%
Total independence	35%	41%	36%	50%	33%	35%
Don't know	4%	4%	7%	0%	9%	6%

**Table 25. Attitudes to union with South Africa**

The remainder (32%) would prefer to have the best of both worlds, perhaps in the form of some sort of economic union of independent states whereby Lesotho would retain its political sovereignty but free movement of labour would be permitted between the countries. There is some evidence that attitudes to political sovereignty are shaped by economic attitudes, as indicated earlier in another context. Some 34% of those respondents who believe that economic conditions have deteriorated over the past year, and 37% of those who feel that conditions will further deteriorate in the future, would like Lesotho to join South Africa, as opposed to 29% of the remaining respondents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The data from an Afrobarometer survey conducted in Lesotho in early- to mid-2000 indicate that Basotho do not strongly support democracy and that they have low levels of participation in politics. They are also disinclined to take action against violations of democracy perpetrated by authoritarian government. The data indicate that most people consider civil liberties as the most important aspect of what democracy has to offer in Lesotho. It is also clear that people expect democracy to lead to an improvement of economic performance and thus also job creation and improved public services. The fact that Lesotho made very little progress in economic development and the improvement of social services in the late 1990s means that Basotho already tend to see the latest experiment in democracy as having failed them. This is largely so because their expectations have not been met, not only during 34 years of independence, but since the transition to multi-party democratic rule in 1993.

As indicated at the outset, efforts to introduce democracy in Lesotho have always been very turbulent. Many lives have been lost due to the civil strife that has consistently surrounded national elections. For example the 1970 elections resulted in extensive reprisals, many deaths, and substantial population dislocation. Subsequent governments have made no attempt to reconcile political opponents. Thus there is still a great degree of mistrust and vengeance among the people, which makes it difficult to attain peace and unity.

The political crisis that followed the disputed 1998 election – involving weeks of violent opposition protest, an incipient military coup, armed intervention by SADC, and the immolation of the national capital by frustrated citizens – indicates the fragility of peace in Lesotho. Furthermore, at the time of writing, the failure of the Interim Political Authority to reach consensus on the mechanism to be used for elections implies the persistence of a big rift between political parties. Although one would wish that this rift were superficial and limited to the politicians, it is clear from the Afrobarometer data that political polarisation extends to the electorate. Unfortunately, partisan differences are largely artificial since the political parties do not have policies to address economic decline and poor social service delivery, problems that all respondents recognise regardless of party affiliation. Instead, political divisions in this socially homogenous country are whipped up by ambitious politicians.

The situation in Lesotho presents a major challenge for democracy. Two major questions have to be asked in this context. First, will Basotho ever enjoy the good things that they expect democracy to bring? Second, how can the cycle of electoral violence be broken? Clearly democracy will not flourish in a context of imperfect elections and reprisals that follow elections. Clearly then, there is a need to look at

how Lesotho can defuse the tension that is brought by political differences. It seems clear that at this point, Basotho should not continue to seek the elusive democratic outcome of elections since the foundation, which is trust, does not exist. Instead the Basotho might create a plan including the following:

- **A government of national unity for a period of 6 years.** This model has been used in a number of other countries including Lesotho's neighbour South Africa. This will allow a period of cooling-off during which a number of initiatives to reintroduce democracy should be started.
- **Civic education for politicians.** There is undoubtedly a very low standard of awareness among the politicians in Lesotho about the requirements of public service. A long legacy of repressive government has not provided a conducive climate for the breeding and nurturing of responsive politicians. Thus there is a need for a programme that is specifically directed at educating politicians in democratic principles. It must be a condition that it is only those politicians who have been through the mill who should be allowed to stand for elections after the 6-year period of government of national unity. After their training, the politicians should practice in their constituencies. This should be a monitored process to ensure that the politicians have grasped the concept. Based on experience of the IPA, it would be necessary to have the commonwealth or UN oversee the process and act as the referee. It is inconceivable that an internal mechanism would work. Furthermore, it would be inviting trouble to ask SADC to take the role of a referee as it has been tainted by its poor handling of the Langa Commission report and the subsequent intervention.

Education to politicians should include courses in reconciliation and peace making. In many cases, politicians are the ones who incite people to take violent actions. At present the attitude of some politicians is reflected by their speeches, as rallies court violence and confrontation. This makes it difficult for the electorate to reconcile and bury the hatchet. It is clear that these politicians are not aware of the consequences of their acrimonious behaviour.

- **Civic education of the electorate.** The electorate has to be taught to demand democratic practice from their leaders. This should be done through a programme of democratic local governance. In recent years local governance through chieftainship has largely been autocratic and village development councils (VDCs) have not been effective because they have lacked authority, which has remained in the hands of the chiefs, symbolised by the village stamp. Clearly central government has to have a very clear picture of what local government should be. At present central government has abdicated its responsibility on the pretext that the VDCs are the ones that have to direct local initiatives, but central government, has not ensured that the VDCs have the means to do so. Over the period of a government of national unity, democratic principles should be promoted among the people to ensure that they will be able to insist that the same principles be upheld when political parties take power. The major issue that has to be entrenched is that fanaticism should be replaced by responsibility and accountability. Elected people must be judged by what they do and not what they say they will do and by their party affiliation.
- **Review of the electoral system and the constitution.** During the period of government of national unity, there should be an extensive review of the electoral system, especially to eliminate the distortions of dis-proportionality and un-representativeness that mar the current first-past-the post system. This would be the continuation of the work of the IPA. Once there is agreement on the system to be used, it should be tried at local government level to ensure that it works and to identify any shortfalls. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that the chosen electoral system provides incentives for elected representatives to attend to their constituents, thus correcting a representation gap that seems to be wider in Lesotho than anywhere else in Southern Africa. Furthermore, there should be a thorough, consultative review aimed at amending the constitution, including the role of the monarch.

- **Development of a reconciliation mechanism.** Lesotho's dirty, hate-filled political past has to be addressed if there is to be any future tolerance and trust. There are many unresolved issues that must be addressed to allow people to heal and pave the way to reconciliation. Although Lesotho does not necessarily have to take the same route as South Africa, a mechanism should be developed which will seek a similar outcome.
  
- **Entrenching conflict resolution and peace mechanisms in society.** Efforts must be made during the period of government of national unity to entrench mechanisms of conflict resolution, peace-making and peace-keeping among the Basotho. The days are gone where conflict can be resolved by fighting and killing each other (*khang ea banna e khaoloa ke letla*). There has to be an extensive national programme of conflict resolution whose main aim is to teach all sectors of the society the principles of conflict management.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Moholi, Felilie. 2000. "Communities protest against removal." *The Age*, vol. 1, number 5. 21-27. July 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Mattes, Robert, et al. 2000. "Public Opinion and the Consolidation of Democracy in Southern Africa." *Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 7*. p. 11.