

HOW PARTIES FARED IN THE 2007 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN LESOTHO: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF THE ELECTION OUTCOME

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ABSTRACT

Lesotho like other less developed countries has embarked on the route towards democratisation. In this process holding of free and fair elections is one of the tests the country must go through. Elections have been recognised as one of the most important institutional mechanisms for shaping the nature of both political participation and competition. The role of elections in a democracy is but one of its fundamentals, albeit a vital one. Since the 1998 election in Lesotho, one party appears to be not only dominating the political landscape, but also winning every election. The Lesotho Congress for democracy (LCD), won the 1998, 2002 and the 2007 snap elections. This was despite the fact that it fragmented twice into two parties, the Lesotho Peoples' Congress in September 2001 and the All Basotho Convention (ABC) in October 2006. Nonetheless, in 2007 LCD formed an election pact with National Independent Party (NIP). In analysing the 2007 LCD victory, the paper has adopted four voting models; sociological model, party identification model, patron-client relationship model and the rational choice model, in order to explain this seemingly continuing LCD triumph. While there are various voting models, the paper argues that rational choice model appears to come closest in explaining the 2007 LCD success. It however, does not claim that rational choice model will provide a definitive answer to this project, but it will attempt to reflect patterns that may appear to reveal some similarities with the model. Conversely, this would not mean that, by testing this model on LCD policies the model is beyond criticism since rational choice model is noted for its complexities when applied to empirical cases.

Introduction

Elections are events intrinsic to democracy building, but do not determine whether the country is democratic or not. The delivery of regular, competitive, free and fair elections where all political parties compete unhindered in their quest to win and form a democratically elected government is one of the standards, by which a country's commitment to democracy is judged. In fact, democracy is not possible without political parties. This is because, "political parties constitute an important element of modern government" (Nnoli1986: p139). It is only political parties within society, among other social groups, which are able to form modern governments, which

translate voters' interests into national policies. It is for this reason that parties compete for power. Similarly, for political parties to "win elections they must attract support from many different groups in the electorate" (Crew 1993: p83). According to Heywood (1997), they normally adopt a broad issue of focus in addressing each of the major government policy. In fact, parties are brought together by shared political vision and preference.

In contemporary society, parties shape peoples thinking and perceptions. They have capacity to appeal to an ever-widening electorate with the aim of representing them in parliament and shaping public policy. It is the goal of each party to broaden its membership and constructing a wide electoral base in order to win elections. As representatives of the people, the modern political parties such as those obtains in Lesotho,

adopt a catch-all strategy and therefore place pragmatism before principle and market research before popular participation. The prevalence of such parties in modern politics gave considerable force to arguments based on rational choice models of political behaviour like those of Joseph Schumpeter and Anthony Down, which portray politicians as power-seeking creatures who are willing to adopt whatever policies are likely to bring them electoral success (Heywood: 1997; p232).

This description of political process appears to be similar to the one adopted by political parties in Lesotho during the 2007 elections. These parties appear to have followed the approach of Schumpeter and Down in responding and articulating the views of their members and voters in general in order to win political power. According to Anthony Down's (1957) thesis, political parties themselves lack power because power resides with the consumers, the voters. He contextualised political market as analogous to the economic market. Therefore, in such a political market, "politicians act essentially as entrepreneurs seeking votes, meaning that parties behaves very much like businesses" (Heywood:1997;p234).

Background

The 2007 election was won by the LCD notwithstanding the fact that it had been labelled as a party with a poor service delivery record in 2006 (*Public Eye2006*). This inefficiency even forced the ABC leader to form his own party and thus disassociated himself from the LCD (*Public Eye 2006*). Like the past three elections in Lesotho,

they were conducted in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. In fact, they were declared free and fair by most observers. What was worthy of note also was the role of Independent Electoral Commission in ensuring that voters and parties alike, have access to unrestricted information regarding this election. For the first time since 1993, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) appointed a three man Media Monitoring Panel (MMP) to facilitate free access for all political parties to the national media. The Panel ensured that all contesting political parties have equal access to the public media as provided for in the National election laws especially section 47 K (1) of National Assembly Act 1992 which states that:

„, every political party shall have the right to have the substance of its campaign propaganda reported on news broadcasts of Government-owned national media and in any newspaper in circulation in Lesotho; (National Assembly Election Act 1992).

A series of election development policy debates on both state control radios and television (February 3 & 10 2007) among the Leaders of seven (7) major political parties which had nominated more than 40 candidates for the 2007 elections were facilitated to provide even more coverage for eligible voters to understand different parties manifestos (Santho, Likoti and Sello 2007). The television debates were carried out live on Lesotho television and Radio Lesotho. The purpose was to ensure that voters understand thoroughly what political parties were saying so that they can make informed choices. This was equally important because the 2007 election was a snap election. Therefore, voters had to be assisted to have unrestricted access to a free and fair media that provided them with alternative impartial information.

The Lesotho 17th February 2007 election was undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary in recent Lesotho history. This was so for four reasons; first, for the first time in the political history of Lesotho, the country was faced with snap elections as a direct consequence of fragmentation of the ruling party in parliament. Following this fragmentation in October 2006, the Prime Minister of Lesotho was forced to call snap elections. The breakaway party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), left the government of Pakalitha Mosisili with the slimmest of majorities in the 120-member chamber. The ABC was formed with 18 members of all former LCD parliamentarians who had gained access to parliament through First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. This crossing of the floor by the ABC motivated the governing party that was left with 62 members of parliament to call for snap election.

Second, the ABC was led by former Communications Minister Thomas Thabane who was popularly known as “Mr delivery” within the LCD government and in some quarters. Thabane was able to generate unprecedented interest among prospective voters and injected ‘developmental issues’ into the campaign, a new feature in Lesotho politics. Third, this was an election that provided a rare competitive challenge to the party that has ruled the country for a decade with no credible challenger around. The LCD hegemony appeared to be facing a determined onslaught from its splinter party the ABC.

Finally, this was the election, which had the poorest voter turnout in the past three elections (1993, 1998 and 2002). For instance, out of a population estimated at 2.2 million people, 916230 had registered to cast their votes. However, only less than half of the registered voters managed to cast their ballots in 2552 polling stations around the country, a disappointing figure of 442,963. Despite this apparent voter apathy the LCD, went on to win with 61 out of 80 constituencies. Furthermore, out of 19 political parties that had registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), only 14 contested elections. This was another clear reflection that it was not only the voters who were apathetic even political parties lacked interest to participate in this election. To the consternation of the opinion pollsters, like ‘*Work for Justice* and the *Public Eye* newspapers,’ whose findings throughout the campaign had predicted an ABC, victory over the LCD, these predictions were proved wrong. The LCD secured a conformable 61 seats, and its alliance partner the NIP got 21 proportional seats that accounted for 82 seats in parliament. The LCD/NIP alliance accounted for 68.9 percent while the ABC and its coalition partner the Lesotho Workers Party (LWP) got away with 17 constituencies. The Lesotho Workers Party got 10 proportional seats, which came to 27 seats.

The Basotho National Party (BNP) a traditional rival of the LCD emerged fifth with a poor showing of 3 proportional representation seats. The LCD victory surprised many because of the then unfriendly circumstances that made this victory unfeasible as the above pollsters had predicted. The major question therefore, is why voters continue to vote for LCD in these elections? Theories of voting behaviour perhaps might give us the answer. Table 1 below illustrates the scale of LCD victory in three elections;

Table1: The 1998, 2002-2007 Lesotho General Elections

| Year | Main Parties | No. of Votes | %of Votes | No. of Seats |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1998 | LCD | 355,049 | 60.7 | 79 |
| | BNP | 143,073 | 24.5 | 1 |
| | BCP | 61,793 | 10.5 | 0 |
| | MFP | 7,460 | 1.3 | 0 |
| Total | | 582,740 | 100.0 | 80 |
| 2002 | LCD | 304,316 | 54.8 | 77 |
| | BNP | 124,234 | 22.4 | 21 |
| | LPC | 32,046 | 5.8 | 5 |
| | NIP | 30,346 | 5.5 | 5 |
| | BAC | 16,095 | 2.9 | 3 |
| | BCP | 14,584 | 2.7 | 3 |
| | LWP | 7,788 | 1.4 | 1 |
| | MFP | 6,890 | 1.2 | 1 |
| | PFD | 6,330 | 1.1 | 1 |
| | NPP | 3,985 | 0.7 | 1 |
| Total | | 554,386 | 100.0 | 118 |
| 2007 | LCD/NIP | 229,602 | 68.9 | 82 |
| | ABC/LWP | 107,463 | 22.7 | 27 |
| | BNP | 29,965 | 2.5 | 3 |
| | ACP | 20,263 | 1.7 | 2 |
| | PFD | 15,477 | 0.8 | 1 |
| | BCP | 9,823 | 0.8 | 1 |
| | MFP | 9,129 | 0.8 | 1 |
| | BDNP | 8,783 | 0.8 | 1 |
| | BBDP | 8,474 | 0.8 | 1 |
| | NLFP | 3,984 | 0.0 | 0 |
| Total | | 442,963 | 100% | 119 |

Source: Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission.

There are many theories, of this nature such as the sociological model, which emphasises the social groups voting patterns. The party identification model, stresses the individual psychological attachment to his environment. Patron-client model which posits that in emerging democracies such as Lesotho, voters choices are based on patron-client power relations and less on policy preferences as such. Finally, the rational choice model which argues that voters are rational and vote according to their preferences (Denver1989, 1992, Dunleavy1990, Miller 1990). It is this model that the paper will focus upon in analysing the LCD victory in 2007 elections.

The sociological model stresses that "social groups will vote for the party that serve their interests"(Dunleavy; 1990:p46). The model argues that individual's decisions do not contribute towards their individual's choices but reflect group interests which they are members. Therefore, they vote for they party that they think represent their class interests (Crewe 1993). In contrast, voters in Lesotho lack this voting consciousness. Basotho vote as individual's party supporters not on the basis of class or groups and their votes in most cases reflect individual interests not groups or class interests as the model posits. In fact, even during campaigning, voters are mobilised not as blocks of groups but as mass voters who exercise their individual votes. As much as voting on the basis of group interests is concerned, it can be argued that "different social groups have different interests and hence different needs"(Denver; 1989:p26). Nonetheless, the model fails to explain deviant voters which in some cases forms large minorities who fails to form a group, this model "tends to give the impression that party choice is a sort of spontaneous effect or social location and ignores the active role that political parties play in mobilising and structuring the electorate"(Denver; 1989:p26).

As a low income country without a solid industrial base, Lesotho cannot be classified as a class base country like highly industrialised countries such as Britain which have political parties with a class base support. Denver (1989) argues that in Britain, Labour party in particular, has been said to draw its support from public sector workers who have interest in voting for it at all costs. Furthermore, middle class public sector is also less pro-Conservative than the rest of the middle class. Voting in this regard has been associated with social and political factors. These social groups are based on sex, region, religion, class and industrial sector. The voting patterns in Lesotho is a mixture of these factors but cannot be identified solely with one factor as in Britain where black and white people can be identified with a certain party or with any region or religion. In fact, religion does not feature at all in Lesotho voting patterns. If religion was a factor, the BNP could be winning elections all the time since it has Catholic inclinations and majority of christians in Lesotho are Catholics. Therefore, the model comes short in explaining why the LCD won the elections as opposed to ABC and other parties.

The party identification model refers to the formation of psychological attachment which the voter develops in their early years. The model stresses the long-term factors as most important in determining party identification and "the social

position that an individual occupies affects the kinds of influence that he or she will encounter in interacting with family friends, neighbours, work mates and so on" (Dunleavy; 1985:p4). Therefore, voting is strongly associated with social and political factors. This long-term associations are decisive in determining how an individual vote and identify with his party. As a result of the above, an individual association tends to develop a certain party identification. These environmental pressures are seen more "in a heavily class-structured society, the schooling of children and the sort of people who become their friends also exert a strong influence "(Dunleavy; 1985:p4). On the other hand, in a developing country like Lesotho, electorate is not heavily class-structured but more egalitarian. In such environment the model does not provide an accurate assessment of election outcomes. While party identification is also a factor in Lesotho polity there are also other factors that can be said to explain voting pattern such as political leaders personality cult of Ntsu Mokhehle (LCD) and Leabua Jonathan (BNP) (Matlosa 1999).

Furthermore, voting and party identification do not always converge. While most voters identify with their party this does not mean that they cannot vote for another part. In this case the model assumes a lot when it comes to voting since people use secret ballot. The individual may identify with LCD but vote for ABC. Therefore, a substantial number of voters, but not all, identify self consciously with the party which meets their interests. This pattern occurred in various cases in Lesotho, for instance, a BNP supporter living in a constituency in which the party has no realistic chance of winning such as Tsoelike and Qachas'nek might decide to vote ABC while remaining a BNP supporter. Like the sociological model above, party identification does not shed much insight about why LCD won the 2007 elections.

Patron-Client relationship model

The system of patron-client relationship according to Randall and Theobald (1985) is one of social relationship outside kinship. It emerges once the kinship fails to deliver necessities of existence such as social protection and security among others, mostly in agrarian societies like Lesotho. It is therefore an exchange between a superior patron or patron group and an inferior client or client group. In most developing countries and especially in Africa, the ruling party act as a patron and voters becomes an inferior group which votes on expectation of some rewards from the patron (ruling party). Developments in these countries depend on patron-client relationships.

The patron-clientelism relationship once established is perpetuated overtime by adding more favours until client is obligated to patron for life and over generations if the client is unable to extricate himself out of the forces of life. This relationship occurs, “in societies where the state is underdeveloped, where state institutions are virtually non-existent at the village level so that there is a marked gap between centre and periphery” (Randall and Theobald: 1985; p54). This situation obtains in Lesotho in some respects more especially in the far rural areas of the country. In this situation the client had no choice but to bind himself to a patron as the only means of articulating his interests.

In Agreeing with Randal and Theobald, Barkan (1995) argued that, in agrarian societies, people live close to each other and they are attached to the place where they live, love their neighbours and tend to vote for the same party. This pattern is also similar to Lesotho, because most rural voters since the birth of LCD in 1997 appeared to have voted for the same party, the LCD. They voted for the patron regardless whether the patron policies were good or bad (Barkan1995). The rural voters therefore, vote for parties and candidates who have provided services to their constituencies or who have potential to provide constituency services after elections. According to Barkan, when these communities vote,

they focus on the basic needs of their local community and surrounding region-whether they have adequate water, schools, and health-care facilities, whether there is a farm-to-market road, whether the producer price for the agricultural commodity grown in the area yields a fair return to local farmers, and so on. Inhabitants of a particular rural area usually have a common set of political interests, and they vote for accordingly. This explains the high geographic concentration of the vote for competing parties in the recent round of multiparty elections in Africa (Barkan: 1999; p107).

Most rural voters in Lesotho appear to vote in a similar pattern described above. With the introduction of free education and old age pension for the elderly, the level of rural communities’ dependency on state-sponsored patronage appears to be overwhelming. Therefore, the ruling party and its Members of Parliament (MPs) become patrons that provide means of livelihood to the rural population (fee

education and pension policies). While these policies fall within the area of social protection to assist the poor, they may also fall under patron and client relationship. This explains why in Lesotho, rural communities tend to vote overwhelmingly for the same party.

Similarly, Weingrod (1968) describes patron-client relationship as a process whereby political leaders distributes rewards and other resources in exchange of various kinds of favours. They may be public jobs, grants, support and most definitely, votes, for the patron party at the next general elections by the client (voter). In the USA this phenomena is called machine politics, whereby public jobs were given to clients in exchange for votes (Randall and Theobald 1985). This voting pattern explains a high concentration of votes among different parties. While this trend might be slightly similar to Lesotho in 2007 election, the difference has only been that, the LCD did not only perform well in rural areas but in urban areas too. Furthermore, the above two policies while they appeared to have struck a cord with the rural voters, they were not only targeted at the rural population only but the nation as a whole.

In fact, while the LCD lost 17 Constituencies from some urban areas it was not a complete washout. It managed to win some constituencies too in some urban areas. In all these constituencies where the party lost elections, this was despite the fact that the above two policies were also available as intimated above. For that reason, the theory of patron-client relationship while insightful in explaining some voting patterns of rural voters in Lesotho and accounting for the LCD victory, it comes short in actually explaining why in some constituencies that party did not receive the same victory as in other areas. We therefore need more explanation to this effect.

The Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice model (RCM) which goes with various names such as “issue voting model, a value model, rational choice theory, rational action theory, a prospective model (if votes fit best with attitudes towards party policies for the future), a retrospective model (if votes fit best with attitudes towards the government’s past record in handling the economy, for example, or a leader personality model’ (Miller1992: p53). RCM is the dominant theoretical paradigm in microeconomics. It is also central to contemporary political science thinking. In

recent years, the theory has been increasing being used in political science, sociology and other academic disciplines than economics. The theory is a paradigm, a hypothesis or a framework used for understanding and often modelling a political (social), and economic behaviour of individuals. It has had far-reaching impacts on the study of political science, especially in fields like the study of interest groups, elections, behaviour in legislatures, coalitions, and bureaucracy (Dunleavy, 1991).

Most models have additional assumptions. Proponents of rational choice models do not claim that a model's assumptions are a full description of reality, only that good models can aid reasoning and provide help in formulating falsifiable hypotheses, whether intuitive or not. Successful hypotheses are those that survive empirical tests (Dunleavy, 1991). It has been in this context that the model is used in this paper to analyse the 2007 LCD election victory. In fact, Models that rely on rational choice theory often adopt methodological individualism, the assumption that social situations or collective behaviors are the result of individual actions.

While most models of rational choice are very diverse they share one thing in common. They all assume that individuals choose the best action according to stable preference functions and constraints facing them. This choice is exercised whenever a voter is confronted with a decision, whether the snap election or choosing among various parties, the model assume that given this diversity of choices the voter will still be able to exercise his or her choice by ensuring that he or she derive the most maximum benefits from the choice made.

Anthony Downs (1957), in his celebrated work, 'An Economic Theory of Democracy', argued, that parties were political firms in business of selling packages of policies in order to maximise votes so as to be able to win and enjoy the fruits of government office. While on the other hand voters were political consumers, using their votes as political currency to purchase the public policies on offer at a general election. These voters were not tied to any party but they were rational, maximising, free-thinking and were determined to gain maximum return by voting for a party of their choice. These voters elect a party that offered them the best policy package at the lowest tax cost. As it will become clear in this paper, most of the rural voters from 61 constituencies out of a total of 80 in 2007 Lesotho election, elected LCD probably on the basis of Downs's observations above.

The RCM applies same assumptions used by economists in analysing voting behaviour. The model argues that a consumer " operating in an economic market has a

finely divisible stock of money to distribute over a wide variety of goods in order to express his or her preferences in a sophisticated and gradual way" (Dunleavy 1985: p.12). This consumer has only one vote to spend to a party that comes closest to his choice and he buys a basket full of policies. The model does not address the question of where voters got their attitudes of voting from or how they got them, but focuses on their attitudes and choice in voting. It claims "Voters make up their own minds about issues, performance and personalities and then vote for the party that comes closest to delivering the policies and performance they want" (Dunleavy, 1990:p53). The voters individually act rationally when choosing to vote for a particular party and maximise their vote to derive most benefits available from their vote.

Voters have clear knowledge of past record of party's and " are as volatile as shoppers choosing between supermarkets constantly in search of a better product" (Crewe 1993: p.110). The voters have enormous information at their disposal. This information provides them with various alternatives in comparing their parties' preferences and helps them in reaching their voting decisions. The voters therefore, "after comparing parties with their own preferred outcomes, they choose the party closest to their preferences" (Dunleavy 1985: p.13). The rational voters' views are clearly consistent with political issues. They know roughly what options are available by ranking these issues and choosing the one which best suit voters. Therefore, voters, according to this model are egoistic and entirely self-interested.

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2007), Rational decision making entails choosing an action given one's preferences, the actions one could take, and expectations about the outcomes of those actions. Actions are often expressed as a set, for example a set of j exhaustive and exclusive actions: $A=\{a_1, \dots, a_i, \dots, a_j\}$. For example, if a person is to vote for either Roger, Sara, or abstain, her set of possible voting actions is: $A = \{Roger, Sara, abstain\}$. Individuals can also have similar sets of possible outcomes. Rational choice theory makes two assumptions about individuals' preferences for actions. First, is the assumption of completeness, that is, that all actions can be ranked in an order of preference (indifference between two or more is possible). Second, is the transitivity, the assumption that if action a_1 is preferred to a_2 , and action a_2 is preferred to a_3 , then a_1 is preferred to a_3 . Together these assumptions form the result that given a set of exhaustive and exclusive actions to choose from, an individual can rank them in terms of his/her preferences, and that his/her preferences

are consistent (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_choice_theory). Nevertheless, there are many formulae for this model.

The LCD Election Campaign Approach

It would appear that, the key to the LCD success, centred on the party's ability to convince sufficient voters that both the pension and education policies especially free education policy were extremely important provided that the incumbent government remained in office. According to *Work for Justice* (2006), the government of Lesotho in 2004 introduced an Old age pension of M150 per months paid to over 70 year old elderly people, the bulk of which live in rural areas. This pension scheme became a campaign tool for the LCD for the 2007 elections (2007 Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). The elderly men and women who can no longer help themselves were also promised to be paid M200 per months an increase of M50 if they re-elect the LCD. The manifesto argued that the party values them greatly because they still possess a lot of wisdom and insights. The party also promised to deliberate on how the facilities at Pay-Points can be improved in order to facilitate the elderly easy access (2007 Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). It can be assumed for that reason that, most rural people in the 2007 election appeared to have voted according to their economic interests, which were primarily influenced by the above LCD manifesto.

The LCD has always popularised the old pension scheme. Majority of the beneficiaries of the pension scheme have not contributed to it. Most of them have never worked for government before. On the other hand, retired civil servants are not entitled to receive this old age pension. It has been tailor made exclusively for those who were not earning any pension before. This scheme has succeeded in raising individual expectations, a factor that can be attributed to the LCD electoral success. The pension scheme, despite its shortcomings, among other issues remained the main attraction among rural voters. Eventually "one way in which this pocket-book effect is manifested, is through the level of optimism that people exhibit about their financial prospects"(King; 1992:p.177). The critical question, of course, is how far these changes in individual economic expectation might have affected the popularity of the LCD government. There are certainly good reasons for supposing that they may have done so.

In assessing the rational choice model for the above period it was evident that there was an emerging pattern in support of the model among different groups. The

LCD achieved a decisive shift of votes from voters who voted on their economic preferences, more especially on pension factor, which strongly favoured the party. Aided by some of the sympathetic National radio station like MoAfrica FM and Radio Lesotho earlier before the Election Day was declared, the LCD made pension a major issue. This was congruent with RCM theorists who always “draw attention to the significance of issue voting and argue that issues do matter precisely because policy preferences determines the direction of vote choice and not the other way around”(Dearlove and Saunders; 2000:p164). It is clear that both pension and free education policies were important issues among the voters, more especially the rural voters in Lesotho where LCD won all constituencies.

While the LCD has been widely criticised for failing to deliver on promises of job creation, economic growth and success against HIV/AIDS (the ABC Manifesto2006), it has urged voters to back it with plans to increase old age pensions. Many studies of relationship between economics and political support have distinguished between

sociotropic’ and ‘egocentric’ motivations. Voters act sociotropically to the extent that their political judgement depends on their assessment of whether the government’s economic performance has been good or bad for the country as a whole (Sanders1993: p.179).

The pension scheme in Lesotho is indicative of this statement. It was clear that no matter how the government record had been, this was not an important factor to the voters. What was important was the economic status regardless of how meagre the monthly pension of M150 was. Their expression was unequivocal in the voting booth, ‘I feel good about my own prospects, therefore, I feel good about the LCD government, irrespective of what other parties have been saying’. The LCD government has also been able to maintain inflation at 5 percent and anticipated 3.5 percent economic growth during this fiscal year (*Public eye*2007 February 23). It was primarily for economic reasons that the voters rewarded the party in office with their votes. They saw it as better than other parties in managing the economy, producing economic prosperity, a sense of well-being, and the feel-good factor.

According to RCM, voters are prepared to re-elect the government if they feel that it manages the economy in such a way that their future and their children future will be bright. Former British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, from the Labour party in 1968, argued that, “all political history shows that the standing of the government

and its ability to hold the confidence of the electorate at a general election depend on the success of its economic policy”(Dearlove and Saunders; 2000:p168). The LCD in Lesotho appears to have done just that.

The LCD government had earlier aimed to provide equitable universal basic education to all. In 2000, it introduced a programme of free primary education, which was to be implemented gradually for over a seven-year period. For the 2007 elections, the party (LCD) also promised to expand free education for secondary school pupil and provide books for student from poor backgrounds. Free education remained as popular as ever among the poor peasants in the country (Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). This is because when stakes are high rationality kicks in, this was evident in the 2007 snap elections. Stakes are always high in every election, hence why most people thought they were going to loose both these policies if they voted a different party.

The defining feature of rational choice theory is that people always try to maximize their interests when it comes to things like whom to vote for or whether to volunteer politically. It was for this reason that both the pension and free education policies remained high among the rural voters. The approach has many variants. Decision theory, for example, centres on cost-benefit calculations that individuals make without reference to anyone else's plans. It can be assumed maybe correctly that voters based their decision centered on cost-benefit analysis.

Furthermore, government has since 2000 financed free primary education programmes, which saw the first cohort graduate at the end of 2006. In fact, in order to strengthen the improvement of education at all levels, the LCD government further promised to allocate M88.4 million to finance activities in the education sector, including provision of infrastructure for the 2007 financial year (Thahane 2007). The above situation was similar to that of Britain in the early 1990s, where it was found that “voters would support the party that would put most money into their pockets. This notion of pocketbook voting, or economic voting, is a more closely specified version of issue voting” (Dearlove and Saunders; 2000:167). The rural voters in Lesotho perceived themselves as making a lot of serving from LCD policies. First, they did not have to pay fees for their children at primary school level. Second, they were being promised not to pay for books for their secondary school children as well. Third, they were still enjoying the M150 monthly pension. Finally, they were promised a further increase of M50 for their pension. It can be argued strongly that

RCM was very much at work in Lesotho during the 2007 election. Voters saw LCD government as going to put more money in their pockets.

Among other achievements that the LCD government praised itself of during the election campaign were the following; it had entrenched democracy, empowered women in local government, helped to introduce 10 private radio and television stations, built rural roads and created 30,000 new jobs in the past five years (Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). The party also argued that in recent years garment manufacturing has been the key driver of growth, recording sharp growth of 53 percent in 2001 and maintaining strong pace until 2004, before stalling in 2005, as a result of strong competition from Asia and the appreciation of the Rand/Loti (Thahane 2007). Government took steps to counteract the loss of jobs. In particular, to improve the financial position of firms, a supportive tax regime was introduced in 2006/2007(Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). This action on its own was an indication that the government economic management strategy, was improving and this made most voters optimistic about their future economic well-being about their economic prospects. Firm level training was also introduced to bolster employee productivity. Strong support was also received from US importers who have developed innovative programmes for improving production and reversing the effects of HIV and AIDS, and continuing imports from Lesotho producers (Thahane 2007).

The LCD has pointed toward its foreign policy success even though this item did not form a major campaigning issue. Lesotho is currently a chair of SADC and it has sent both police and military observers in Darfur Sudan. Lesotho under the government of LCD is also a member of African Union Security Committee. The Prime Minister is on record for pointing out that his party has brought peace and stability in the country (Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). As Chair of the SADC region, Lesotho is driving a process of scaling up regional economic integration. In less than one year, the SADC will launch a Free-Trade Area (FTA) within which member states will trade with each other duty-free and quota-free. This will raise significantly the Intra-SADC trade, which now stands around 25 percent. With a population of over 235 million, this would present Lesotho with a huge market that would drive its economic growth rate to a sustainable 7% per annum (Election manifesto of the LCD, 2007). These were some of the associated factors which might have assisted the party even though they did not feature prominently during the campaign unlike the two policies discussed above. This paper therefore, is an attempt

to understand why this party has been winning so many elections (1998, 2002 and 2007) despite noticeable political challenges in Lesotho as explained below.

Circumstances around the LCD's Electoral Triumph

The LCD's success was achieved in most unfavourable circumstances. First, Lesotho was in a grip of the longest unemployment rate since the early 1980s. The ABC manifesto argues that, unemployment was rampant and stood at "45 percent, with high child labour, 50 percent of the population live below the poverty line and the United Nations has described 40 percent of the population as ultra poor, meaning that they cannot afford food" (ABC 2007:p.5). In fact the Minister of Finance in his 2007 budget speech corroborated the ABC claim that the country was facing an economic catastrophe of major proportion,

this unprecedented deterioration in the land and its people has ushered in a crisis in the social and moral fabric of our society. Unemployment is high, and poverty is deepening; stock theft and armed robbery have become the order of the day; corruption and nepotism are spreading like a cancer in our institutions; and there is no doubt that life is becoming harder by the day for an increasing number of our people (Lesotho Government Budget speech 2007:p.3).

Furthermore, traditional sources of household incomes, agriculture and migrant work, had been declining. Migrant Labour had also declined from 126,000 in 1987 to 52,000 at the end of 2006. Prospects for agriculture as high yielding enterprises were also threatened by drought and climate change (Lesotho Government Budget speech 2007). In fact, Lesotho, according to the Finance Minister, has been losing the global race for jobs, high, broad-based and sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication to other countries in SACU, SADC, Africa and Asia (Lesotho Government Budget speech 2007). Despite these economic hardships, the LCD still won the election.

Second, The Prime Minister had earlier castigated civil servants for not being loyal to the government, saying that they appeared to be attending opposition parties rallies. He lamented that the government master sufficient support in the country and as such he did not depend on Civil servants votes (*Public Eye*2006: p.10,). He boldly made this statement even though there is no way of knowing whether they voted for him or not in the last election (2002). This outburst was precipitated by concerns that

the government was not delivering services. The civil servants were, therefore, singled out as scape-goat for government failure to deliver services (ABC 2007).

Third, the government had earlier introduced what appears to most people the most unpopular policy that was meant to benefit the Ministers and Senior Government Officials (*Public Eye2006*: p.2). This policy, allowed the government Ministers to purchase Mercedes Benz luxury cars for M4000.00 and Toyota Camries for civil servants in statutory position for M2000.00 (Government of Lesotho 2006). The Imperial Fleet Services Company previously loaned the vehicles to the government. These vehicles were supposed to be sold to these officials after three years in government operation. The vehicle scheme furore appears to have left a legacy of resentment in a large proportion of the urban voters. This can be deduced from the fact that, for the first time since LCD was in power, it lost most constituencies in the capital Maseru. Subsequent to the above outcry, the government dispatched a group of senior Ministers to the national television in August 2006. They were to defend the above decision as a legitimate government policy. This was notwithstanding the fact that the benefits that went to twenty-six Ministers appeared to be meagre, in comparison with world standards. Lesotho with a small economy and with economic growth (real GDP growth) of 4.5 percent for 2006 (FAO, 2007) and nowhere near macro-economic target of 7percent per annum these benefits were perceived as substantial.

In retrospect, around November 1998, Rakoro Phororo, had published an article in the local Newspaper, *Mopheme-The Survivor*, where he strongly disagreed with Prime Minister (PM) Mosisili's government policy of granting the then Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle a Mercedes Benz under what now appears to have been similar circumstance. He wrote,

...in a poor country such as Lesotho, this precedent will ever be the main motive for political leaders to aspire to premiership at all costs, even at the expense of sacrificing principles, conscience, political values, and reconciliation. The dilemma of mediocre political leaders that Lesotho is presently experiencing will thus get worse in the years ahead (*Mopheme-The Survivor*1998 Tuesday October27-November 02)

Phororo predictions couldn't be far from correct. The irony is that, Phororo has been appointed a Minister of Agriculture (in the current 2002 cabinet), and was now part of a group, which allocated vehicles to senior civil servants and Ministers. During the

above television interview, one of the Ministers in reply to questions put to him by journalists was dismissive about the whole furore.

Despite several public protestations regarding the manner in which the above vehicles were acquired, the PM, in one of his utterances in March 2006, informed the public gathering in Berea that some people appear to be making unnecessary noise about the government vehicles scheme. He went on to argue that "Ketla Ba Busa Ho Fihlela Ba Tloaela. Ea Belelang a eo bollella Khaitseli ea Malom'ae". (Meaning that I will reign on you until you are accustomed to my premiership. Whoever is in doubt should protest to his uncle). What appears to have been unfortunate on the part of the government has been its failure to acknowledge that government property cannot be transferred to individuals in such a manner. The government is not a corporation but a public entity. Government properties are normally auctioned publicly and proceeds derived thereof channelled to the public purse, not kept for the benefits of some individuals in powerful positions. Minister Phororo in his article above in relation to this government policy of the current PM, lamented in 1998 that:

if I was a leader of a government that is sensitive to human misery and national economic tragedy, such as has befallen Lesotho, I and my colleagues would humbly approach our predecessor (PM Mokhehle) and plead with him for us to at least postpone granting of an expensive car until the economic situation improves. (*Mopheme-The Survivor* 1998 Tuesday October 27-November 02,).

Since Phororo wrote the above article in 1998, economic misery in Lesotho has become worse to say the least. He was against the granting of one car, yet he has become mute about the allocation of twenty six Mercedes Benzes to Ministers of which he has recently become a member and over ten Camry cars to senior civil servants. He did not suggest for the postponement he eloquently advocated when Mokhehle was given a car. He did not even persuade his colleagues that what they were doing was wrong despite the current economic wretchedness that has befallen Lesotho. This vehicle scheme led to the creation of a popular perception which Bratton and Van de Walle equated to that which prevailed in the early 1990s whereby citizen opined that those "with access to political power were living high on the hog while ordinary people suffered" (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997: p99).

Despite the above factors, the LCD defied the odds and won again the 2007 elections as it did in 1998 and 2002 elections reflected in Table 1 above. The question

still remains why the LCD won despite the above limitations. The LCD victory may be explained by borrowing some of the important aspects of the rational choice model above. In his analysis of the RCM, Crew (1993) argued that, the model involve three different judgments about political parties. For instance, the issue of unemployment make voters to judge parties by their policies for job creation (policy voting), by their degree of emphasis on the problem at hand (priority-voting) or by their past record on unemployment (performance-voting). The LCD has been vocal in pointing out the fact that it has been able to relieve the poor by providing free education and pension for the elderly (Policy voting). It also placed much emphasise on going to increase monthly pension (priority-voting) if voted into power again and of course the fact that it has been able to create many jobs (performance-voting) during the their tenure. These similarities appeared very close to Crew analysis above.

The LCD had exploited every possible means available to increase voters' confidence in the party and also being able to convince enough electorates that it was competent in managing the economy than other parties. It would appear that ABC and other major opposition parties like the Basotho National Party (BNP) and Alliance of Congress Parties (ACP) were not trusted. This was similar to 1983 and 1987 situation in Britain whereby Labour party and other Alliance parties were defeated by Conservative party because they were seen as divided, adventuristic and despite their good policies, voting for them was seen as a waste vote. In the same manner, the ABC had just fragmented from LCD four months before polling day as a result of intra-party conflict. Similarly, the BNP had just experienced a split into Basotho Democratic Party (BDNP), while ACP was a coalition of former congress parties of which one of them broke away from LCD before. It can be argued therefore, that voters did not have confidence in the leadership of these parties, instead, decided to vote for the party that they saw as capable in managing the economy, just as the British voted conservative party in 1992 instead of Labour party on assumption that Conservative was more capable to run the economy than Labour. LCD also managed to raise voters' expectations of being better off under the LCD government because expectations played a significant role in determining the level of support for the government during the 2007 period.

Nevertheless, the rational choice model like all others has some problems. It explains very little about class and partisanship dealignment. This model is too theoretical and very difficult to apply in practice because of the nature of voters'

unpredictable decisions. The major problem has been that it is often hard to ascertain whether a particular attitude is a cause of certain behaviour or these attitudes constitute rationalisation. When rational model is closely scrutinised its case of cause and effect becomes very weak. It can only be said that this pocket-book voting might have likely created conducive conditions for the LCD to win 2007 general elections, but the evidence available has not been compelling enough to justify this conclusion.

Furthermore, the case of the ABC has been a relative one, even though hunger its main issue was high in its manifesto, it does not appear to have translated into a major swing throughout the country except the capital city alone where it won nine constituencies (IEC 2007 results). What was significant in this period was that the rise in unemployment to 45 percent during 2002 parliament did inflict a small amount of damage on government's electoral fortunes, though clearly not enough to prevent its re-election. The 2007 election reflected a new pattern of attitudes in voting, "more voters treated elections as an occasion for personal choice, not class or parental loyalty "(Budge1993: p.100) among parties in Lesotho. Nevertheless, the LCD policies appeared to have been instrumental in influencing voters' preferences.

Nonetheless, the party, which is likely to win elections, is evaluated on its "performance or party program" (Peele et al 1992, p64), more especially during the by-elections or by frequently holding the government accountable on all fronts. It is fair to assume that the LCD apart from articulating the above policies has been able to keep the momentum unlike other parties in contesting every by-election. This has enabled it to make its supporters not to forget it. Table two that follows illustrates the scale of the LCD victories in all by-elections.

Table2: Lesotho Parliamentary by-elections from February 2003 to February 2005

| Constituency | Election | Parties Participated ¹ | Registered | Total | Voter | Winner |
|--------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------|-------|-------|--------|
|--------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------|-------|-------|--------|

1 Parliament of Lesotho is composed of 10 parties, this was because other smaller parties were left outside parliament. Most of these parties, National progressive party [NPP], Basotho National Party [BNP], Basotholand Congress Party [BCP], Basutoland African Congress [BAC], Marematlou Freedom Party [MFP,] Lesotho Congress For Democracy [LCD], Lesotho Workers Party [LWP], Popular Front For Democracy [PFD], Lesotho People's Congress [LPC] and National Independent Party {NIP}, participated in by-elections with remarkable irregularity. Among these parties, the major opposition party, the BNP did not take part in all these by-elections. Two smaller parties outside parliament; Sefate Democratic Congress [SDC], United Party [UP], Social Democratic Party [SDP], Lesotho Education Party [LEP], Kopanang Basotho Party [KBP], New Lesotho Freedom Party [NLFP]

| | Date | | voters | Votes | Turnout | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| Motete | 15-Feb-2003 | MFP, PFD, LCD, BAC, INDEPENDENT*2. | 11,768 | 3,945 | 34% | LCD |
| Qhoali | 23-Aug-2003 | LPC, LCD, PFD, MFP. | 10,929 | 3,516 | 32% | LCD |
| Khafung | 23-Aug-2003 | PFD, LCD, LPC, NIP, LWP, BCP, MFP. | 11,391 | 4,280 | 38% | LCD |
| Thaba-Putsoa | 24-Jan-2004 | MFP, LCD, PFD, LWP, UP. | 13,319 | 3,353 | 25% | LCD |
| Motimposo | 24-Apr-2004 | NIP, BCP, PFD, LCD, NLFP, MFP, LWP. | 13,125 | 1,712 | 13% | LCD |
| Mohobollo | 5-Jun-2004 | PFD, MFP, LCD, NIP, INDEPENDENT*2. | 9,999 | 1,690 | 17% | LCD |
| Qhoali | 16-Oct-2004 | BCP, LCD. | 11,820 | 3,155 | 27% | LCD |
| Koro-Koro | 12-Feb-2005 | LCD, NIP, PFD. | 9,186 | 2,542 | 28% | LCD |
| QALO | 04-OCT-2005 | LCD, PFD, NIP INDEPENDENT*4 | 7,291 | 856 | 14% | LCD |
| LEBAKENG | 22-APR-2006 | LCD | 3,867 | Unopposed | Unopposed | LCD |

Source Independent Electoral Commission 2003-2006

Judging from several by-elections held since 2002 and the recent general elections, voters' participation has drastically declined. The apparent LCD victory in these by-elections as illustrated by table 2 is a reflection of the party strength of its past record, a feature which also fit the rational choice model. Some major opposition parties have boycotted these by-elections, this gave LCD more mileage over these parties and more especially on minor opposition parties which did not post a serious challenge to the party. For instance, on the 25th April 2005, a member of the ruling LCD for Lebakeng constituency was sworn to parliament as a new MP. What was significant about the swearing in of Mr. Tse'mane Sekatle was that he got into parliament unopposed. While these bye-elections were won by the ruling LCD, it was nevertheless with a very low margin as illustrated above because there was no credible contender.

and National Democratic Party [NDP], also participated in by-elections on the 21st January and 24th April 2005 respectively. Eight (8) Independent candidates also took part in three (3) by-elections as well.

Conversely, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that ruling parties have a mileage over opposition parties not only during by-elections but in general election as well because of the incumbency access to state resources. Most governments in Africa and Lesotho in particular, have been notorious in using state resources in order to attract short-term benefits such as votes as opposed to opposition parties which do not have access to state resources. This practice is more pronounced in countries like Lesotho where the political code of conduct does not make this practice illegal. It has been an open secret in Lesotho for instance, that, in all the above by-elections, the state paved roads and provided food and other developments in all these constituencies just a few weeks before by-elections take place.

It has been this incumbency advantage that has disadvantaged opposition parties. Consequently, these parties saw no point in contesting elections in such an environment. While this view is valid in the case of none contesting parties, it is equally not valid completely to other parties except for Lebakeng constituency where all parties did not field candidates. On the other hand, other parties contested these by-elections. Nevertheless, the incumbency argument still benefits the ruling party than opposition parties whether they contest or not contest by-elections. Therefore, the LCD access to state resources places it in a more advantageous position than other parties. It can be argued that it was for this reason that the party had been winning every by-election.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of state resources for political legitimacy and the promotion of clientelism have been pervasive in most African countries including Lesotho. There are several aspects of neopatrimonial rule and patron-client relationship in Lesotho. These strategies have been used at some point to solicit votes for the ruling party. However, where this practice has been done it was in a very small scale to influence voters to vote for the patron. Furthermore, the policies which the ruling party used during the campaign were benefiting people across the country even where the LCD lost. They were not targeting the LCD supporters only but the citizens as a whole without discrimination. This brings us to the conclusion that the voters voted on the basis of rational choice model not sociological or party identification models.

While there are varied explanations for this LCD victory, the rational choice theory appears to come closest in providing a plausible explanation of this victory and

in illuminating patterns of voting behaviour in Lesotho. By the same token it should not be assumed that the model is problem free. All in all, criticisms of the flowering rational choice research program are not completely without merit, but neither are they debilitating. Given the heterogeneity of the political science profession, it would be surprising if any one approach won general acceptance. The approach itself remains debated by all scholars and in some cases such as Lesotho, it has been relatively insightful while in others it has provided less than plausible explanation about LCD victory. The paper is therefore, part of the on-going debate about the theory in explaining elections.

In conclusion therefore, I will argue that there is evidence, which indicates that rational choice model had been applied in the 2007 elections. Most voters among rural voters in Lesotho still regard the LCD as competent in managing the economy than other parties, hence they prefer to vote for this party on assumption that they would be better off under the LCD administration which advocates pension for the elderly, free education and economic prosperity. Therefore, rational choice model still play a major role in voting more especially in 2007 elections. Rational choice model comes closest in explaining why the LCD won the 2007 election.

It is also safe to conclude that the two LCD policies; the pension scheme and free education paid dividends to the party. These policies appear to have attracted most votes especially the poor rural peasants who find education expenses too high and pension scheme as supplementing their near zero income from their poor subsistence farming. These rural voters regard free education as a relief to their dire economic status, thus pocket book voting was the main factor that made them to vote for the LCD. Indeed, they voted for the party that put more money in their pockets and they used their votes as political money to buy policies of the party they preferred as Downs (1957) argued above.

It is of course, as rational to vote for an income as for a pension that you did not contribute towards it since majority of voters in the rural areas are unemployed and depend to a greater extent to both the monthly pension and free primary education or for poverty reduction policies that improve their economic conditions as the LCD manifesto promised. In fact, rational choice theorists would probably regard voting for the party best able to advance one's family's economic prosperity as rational voting par excellence.

Recommendations

From the above discussion it is clear that political parties must mount civic education to inform people about what to expect from political parties and how to hold parties accountable. When the voters know their rights, they will vote in a more informed manner. An informed voter is likely to make sound judgement about who to vote for and why. This entrenches democracy in agrarian societies like Lesotho whereby voters vote on the basis of patron-client relationship and where the likelihood of voting wrongly is high.

Secondly, political parties in Lesotho depend heavily on paltry contributions from members. This means that they cannot undertake their party programmes effectively because these subscriptions tend to be unreliable. Financial weakness is one of the main limitations of opposition parties. Some parties have cited lack of funds as a reason for non-participation in by-elections².

Seven opposition parties have no permanent offices except the main opposition parties. Nonetheless, these parties since 2002 election have not maintained offices in all three regions of the country including its districts. The above situation since 2002, has changed only in respect of the ruling LCD because it had maintained secretariat services at the constituency level including LPC constituency. The LCD has been able to service its constituents unlike most opposition parties which lack these facilities. It is therefore important that political parties must have access to party funding so that they may be able to run their affairs and compete in by-elections where the ruling party appears to be unfairly benefiting from its status of incumbency. It is not easy for opposition parties to be able to mobilise extensively for both the general elections and by-elections without this fund. The continued absence of party funding will ever give more mileage to the ruling party as opposed to other parties. Legislation governing party funding is required which must also take account of party representation in the national parliament and the percentage vote attained during the general elections. Therefore, party funding is crucial for political parties to function efficiently and effectively

Finally, Lesotho needs a sound political code of conduct which regulates activities of both the ruling party and opposition parties. The code is very important to

² That notwithstanding, six opposition parties participated in Motimposo by-election despite the above claim. However, they were also joined by one party outside parliament. Motimposo is a constituency situated within the capital Maseru, where all political party's leadership resides.

provide a levelling playing field for all contesting parties and to ensure that ruling parties do not have unfair advantage more especially because they have access to state resources. The paving of roads and delivery of food parcels during by-elections and during elections must be strictly regulated by the political code of conduct.

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