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**POLICY ENGAGEMENT ACTION FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES**

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## **Why Lesotho Needs a 5% Electoral Threshold**

**By [POLICY ENGAGEMENT ACTION FOR CIVIC EDUCATION (PEACE)]**

In a thriving pluralistic democracy like Lesotho, where over 40 political parties actively contest elections, the introduction of an electoral threshold—specifically a 5% threshold—has become a necessary reform to stabilize and strengthen democratic processes. Lesotho has recently experienced prolific growth in political parties. Judging from the 2022 National elections, the number of political parties has grown substantially.

Pluralism, by its nature, reflects political diversity and active participation, and Lesotho's multi-party system is indeed a testament to this democratic ideal. However, the absence of an electoral threshold has allowed a proliferation of minor parties, many of which fail to gain even 1% of the national vote. Rather than enhancing democracy, this has led to political fragmentation, voter confusion, and ineffective governance.

### **Political Culture and Voter Behavior**

Lesotho's voter behavior illustrates a complex blend of parochial and subject political cultures. The average voter is aware of political processes but often casts ballots for parties with little or no chance of electoral success. This behavior, which lacks rational calculation and strategic voting, leads to what scholars call "wasted votes." Instead of supporting viable contenders, voters distribute their support thinly across a myriad of small parties, many of which exist only for one electoral cycle.

In fact, when citizens lack trust in government and political institutions, they are less likely to engage meaningfully in the political system. Lesotho's case exemplifies this: voters continue to support fringe parties not out of belief in their ability to govern, but due to a lack of confidence in the broader system. This leads to a vicious cycle of ineffective representation and political instability.

### **Many New Political parties with new manifestos**



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The entry of these new parties has been the most significant impediment to electoral coordination by voters. These new political parties have contributed to more significant voter confusion in utilising productively his vote. It has been argued that this high magnitude of political party's entry into the electoral contest impeded voter coordination of these parties. Therefore, this has made the voter unable to exercise his choice. These new parties with new manifestos featuring many issues have a high propensity of creating more confusion for the voter and ultimately mudding the electoral playing field. These are some of the factors that have made electoral choices by voters more challenging. In this electorally polluted context, successful votes coordination by a voter is less likely. This environment impedes individual voters' ability to assess which parties are viable.

**The Case for a 5% Electoral Threshold**

Implementing a 5% threshold would serve as a filter to eliminate micro-parties that dilute the democratic process. Under such a system, only parties with genuine national support would gain seats in Parliament. Based on the 2022 national elections, only four parties—Revolution for Prosperity (RFP), Democratic Congress (DC), All Basotho Convention (ABC), and Basotho Action Party (BAP)—would have met this threshold. The remaining parties, despite some winning seats, garnered less than 5% of the vote, thus failing to reflect a broad mandate from the electorate.

<b>Party Leader</b>	<b>Vote %</b>	<b>Seats</b>
RFP Sam Matekane	38.89%	57
DC Mathibeli Mokhothu	24.81%	29
ABC Nkaku Kabi	7.30%	8
BAP Nqosa Mahao	5.65%	6

If Lesotho had adopted at least 5% threshold only four political parties could be in parliament today. Without a threshold, Parliament becomes crowded with minor parties that lack the



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organizational capacity and public support to govern or contribute meaningfully to policy-making. Their presence muddies the political landscape, making it harder for voters to make informed choices and for parties to form stable coalitions. In fact, 14 of the parties represented in 2022 were less than three years old—many founded merely to participate in that election cycle.

### **Voter Confusion and Electoral Pollution**

With new parties regularly emerging and presenting varied manifestos, voters face an overwhelming and confusing ballot. This phenomenon, known as electoral pollution, makes it difficult for voters to assess party viability, leading to further fragmentation. It undermines democratic choice and weakens voter influence on national outcomes. When no clear majority or viable coalition emerges, governance becomes more about compromise and survival than delivering meaningful change.

### **Conclusion: Strengthening Democracy through Reform**

The introduction of a 5% electoral threshold is not about suppressing political voices—it's about ensuring those voices are representative of substantial public support. By reducing the influence of fringe parties, Lesotho can encourage strategic voting, enhance voter confidence, and foster a participative political culture that rewards trust and engagement in the political system.

For Lesotho to move forward, strengthen its fragile democracy, and ensure that each vote counts toward effective governance, electoral reform in the form of a threshold is essential. A 5% threshold will not only reduce wasted votes but also streamline Parliament to reflect the will of the majority, not just the noise of the many.