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**POLICY ENGAGEMENT ACTION FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES**

**LESOTHO TIMES VOL 18, ISSUE 12. JUNE 19-25. PAGE 19.**

## **Understanding the Power of Voting: Avoiding Wasted Votes in Lesotho's Elections**

**By PEACE (Policy Engagement for Civic Education).**

Voting lies at the very heart of any democracy. In Lesotho, like in many democratic societies, the ballot is a sacred tool through which the citizenry exercises its will and shapes its future. The phrase *"Your vote is your power"* is not just a slogan—it is a call to responsibility, strategy, and introspection. And yet, despite this awareness, every election cycle in Lesotho sees a significant portion of votes effectively wasted.

The importance of voting necessitates that, when a voter casts his ballot, he must consider its implications so that it is not a wasted vote. Voting requires careful introspection on the voter to ensure that is not a wasted vote.

### **Voting: A Powerful Choice, Not a Symbolic Gesture**

In a democratic system, political parties compete like firms offering products—policies, manifestos, and leadership visions. Voters, on the other hand, are the consumers. With their votes as political currency, they choose among the options to "purchase" the policies they believe will benefit them and the nation. But like any market, not every choice yields value.

Lesotho operates under a Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) system. While this aims to balance constituency-based and proportional representation, it also increases the chances that votes cast for parties with little national support may not significantly impact the outcome. A vote is considered wasted if it does not contribute to electing a candidate or party with a realistic chance of winning.

For a voter to vote for a party that appears less likely to win would be to waste his ballot since the contest is really between major parties. In a multiparty system like in Lesotho, with over thirty political parties competing, it is clear that to vote for party number three or thirty, the scale of vote wastage amongst the voters is colossal. Basotho voters must re-evaluate their voting



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patterns in order to avoid this vote wastage. The reason has always been that the election is usually reduced to a contest between the two most popular political parties or candidates.

**2022 Elections: A Case Study in Wasted Votes**

Lesotho’s 2022 national elections highlighted this pattern vividly. The newly formed Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) led by Sam Matekane emerged as a dominant force, securing 38.89% of the vote and 57 seats, while the Democratic Congress (DC) secured 29 seats with 24.81%. In contrast, several other parties—some with less than 1% of the national vote—managed to gain seats through the proportional system, but not enough to challenge the leading parties.

Here's a breakdown of notable parties and results from the 2022 elections:

<b>Party</b>	<b>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
AD	Monyane Moleleki	4.02%	5
MEC	Selibe Mochoboroane	3.34%	4
LCD	Mothetjoa Metsing	2.38%	3
Others (Each below 2%)	Various	—	1-2 each

Despite the presence of numerous parties on the ballot, only a few were realistically positioned to lead or shape government. Votes cast for parties that secured just one or two seats, or none at all, reflect the systemic issue of "wasted votes"—votes that had little to no impact on the formation of government.

**The Strategic Voter: Choosing Impact Over Idealism**



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While every voter has the democratic right to vote for their preferred party, democracy also demands strategic thinking. Political scientists argue that voters tend to support parties with a credible chance of winning. In Lesotho, however, many voters continue to support minor parties out of loyalty, identity, or idealism—often at the cost of actual political influence.

This trend, if continued, can fragment the political landscape, dilute policy influence, and lead to unstable coalitions. Had more voters consolidated their support behind the leading contenders—particularly the RFP or DC in 2022—the nation could have avoided many wasted ballots.

### **The Role of Civic Education**

The issue is not merely about political choice, but about **voter awareness**. Many Basotho do not fully appreciate the impact of voting for a party with little national traction. Civic education programs must be intensified to help voters understand the structure of the electoral system and the importance of casting votes that count—votes that contribute meaningfully to shaping the government.

Voter education must emphasize:

- The mechanics of the MMP system.
- The realities of party competitiveness in different constituencies.
- The implications of casting votes for parties with limited national appeal.

Civic education is needed to make voters aware that voting for a third party has a high propensity to waste votes. It was better to vote for a party with a high realistic chance of winning National elections than for parties with few prospects of winning.

### **Conclusion: A Call to Conscious Voting**



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As Lesotho looks toward future elections, voters must recognize the power and responsibility of their vote. While it is essential to uphold the principles of free choice and political diversity, it is equally critical to ensure that votes are used wisely and strategically.

Voting for a party unlikely to win may feel principled—but in practical terms, it often amounts to surrendering political influence. To build a stronger democracy, Basotho must align their votes not just with their ideals, but with the realities of political competition. Only then can the nation avoid the costly burden of wasted votes.