

A Theoretical Perspective on Prospects For Democratic Stability in Lesotho

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Lesotho's losing parties' tradition of disputing electoral results reflects the fragility of the country's democracy. Yet, not only is Lesotho's democracy fragile, it also faces formidable obstacles. Although various theoretical explanations, including the historical, modernisation and personal rule arguments have been offered as the causes of democratic decadence, this paper argues that the crisis of democracy in Africa in general and Lesotho in particular is rooted in the weakness of the economy. Economic underdevelopment spawns and exacerbates unemployment, scarcity and poverty. Under conditions of scarcity, the state inevitably becomes both the channel and the source of accumulation. Competition for the control of the state thus becomes keen. The incessant practice of vanquished parties in Lesotho disputing electoral results is a manifestation of the struggle among political elites to control the state. The fragility of Lesotho's economy thus remains the greatest challenge to democratic stability. This notwithstanding, Lesotho has the potential to establish a durable democracy. This optimism is premised, among other things, on the country's homogenous character, the potentially positive role of the country's monarchy, the tolerant culture of the Basotho, as well as the potentially positive contribution of South Africa. In the final analysis, however, Lesotho will still need to address the critical questions of unemployment and poverty, which are traditional catalysts for conflicts.

Introduction

Lesotho's nascent post-independent democracy remains fragile. Since the first democratic elections which instated the Basotho National Party (BNP) as the ruling government in 1965, democracy in the mountain Kingdom has demonstrated extreme enfeeblement, marked by incessant conflicts and

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contestation over electoral results and once punctuated by military intervention (Sekatle, 1999). Developments in the aftermath of the 1998 general elections in which the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) won a landslide victory further revealed the crisis in Lesotho's democracy. The victory of the LCD in this particular election was seriously contested by some opposition parties, including the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), the Basotho National Party (BNP), and the Marema-Tlou Freedom Party (MFP). These parties cried foul and, appealing to the King, called for the annulment of the electoral results, the dissolution of the LCD government and the establishment of a Government of National Unity (GNU). As these demands failed to dislodge the LCD, the opposition parties resorted to protest marches, stay-away strikes and for nearly two months occupied the gate of the Royal Palace. In time, these protests boiled over into full-scale conflicts between government and opposition supporters. The intensity of the conflict and the accompanying lawlessness and insecurity brought economic life in the capital city, Maseru, to a standstill. Paralysed and incapable of containing the escalating conflict, the ruling LCD requested the military intervention of South Africa whose troops were later joined by those from Botswana under the auspices of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The intriguing, sometimes ugly, events such as looting and the burning down of some of the country's commercial centres that unfolded in the wake of, and after, the SADC intervention have been well documented and analysed and need not detain us here (Makoa, 1999; Matlosa, 1999). At a deeper level, however, those incidents underscored the fragility of Lesotho's tenuous democracy.

Yet Lesotho is not the only African country to witness such acrimonious contestations over electoral results. Electoral results have at various times been disputed in Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and lately Malawi, to mention just a few. There seems, therefore, to be a recurring trend of disputing electoral results in Africa. What is significant about Lesotho's case, however, is that although intense and prolonged protests failed to reverse the results or topple the LCD, the opposition coalition nonetheless won at least three major concessions unprecedented in African politics. First, after some period of reluctance on the part of the parties, particularly the opposition coalition, the South-African-led peace negotiation under the chairmanship of the Safety and

Security Minister, Mr. Sydney Mufamadi, finally took off. This is sharply contrasted with the intransigent and hardened postures of disputing parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and Sierra Leone, for example. Second, the LCD agreed to shorten its original term of office from five to two years. This was a significant compromise borne out of concessions from both sides - the opposition coalition dropped its initial demand for the dissolution of the government and the formation of a GNU, while the LCD retracted from its earlier insistence of being mandated to govern for five years. Third, government-opposition talks culminated in the formation of an Interim Political Authority (IPA), a 24-member body whose duty, among other things, was to prepare the grounds for the country's next general elections in 2000. The creation of the IPA was critical since it was not only dominated by the opposition, but ideally it also provided a platform for the participation of the opposition in the country's immediate post-crisis politics. The significance and perhaps uniqueness of the concessions are appreciated against the background of the fact that in most countries, opposition protests against electoral results have mostly fallen on deaf ears and largely swept underneath the carpet.

Given the practice of contesting, sometimes rejecting electoral outcomes by vanquished constituencies, democracy and the electoral process in particular seem to face an uncertain future not only in Lesotho but also in Africa. With the post-1998 election conflict as the main, though not exclusively the only, point of reference, this paper attempts to unravel the theoretical explanations for the inability of Lesotho to nurture durable democracy. The paper also assess the chances of the country's democratic stability. It argues that democratic instability in Lesotho results from the weaknesses of the economy. The country's dependent posture and its fragile economy unleash severe pressures that create formidable obstacles for sustainable democratic development. It argues further that unlike most African states, Lesotho nevertheless possesses considerable potential for long-term democratic stability. It is imperative, therefore, to reconstruct some of the popular theoretical explanations for the failure of democracy in Africa.

The problems of democracy: some theoretical explanations

A myriad of distinct and interrelated explanations has appeared in the literature for the dismal performance of democracy in Africa. Dominant among these are the historical, the modernisation, the personal rule, and the economic arguments. Although we will argue that the economic argument is the most credible, it is appropriate to review, albeit cursorily, the central assumptions and the apparent weaknesses of each of the paradigms. The historical explanations for Africa's inability to sustain democracy are varied but all focus on the paralysing legacies of colonialism. According to one variant, colonialism bequeathed strong authoritarian traditions which the new African leaders subsequently patronised (Callaghy, 1986: 40). From this perspective dictatorship and intolerance of dissent which militate against sustainable democracy are historical and traceable to colonial rule. Another perspective argues that the granting of political independence was hasty and because few or no Africans served in government, they were left practically inexperienced to assume the complex art of governance, particularly managing the intricacies of western-style democracy (Chazan et al, 1988: 43). A further version of the historical argument opines that the post-colonial state was characteristically incompatible with stable democracy. The carving out of states, the argument goes, was arbitrary as it parcelled out homogenous groups into different states while simultaneously regrouping different, often mutually hostile, entities within the same territorial boundaries. This process established or exacerbated conditions for disagreements and conflicts among constituencies. It is in this context that African states are characterised as artificial (Wiseman, 1990: 14). They are artificial creations because in contrast to western states, which evolved over long periods of time, African states were overnight creations, lacking organic evolution from within civil society. In metaphorical terms, then, the typical African state was built upon a sandy foundation as a result of which it became incapable of supporting democracy. A last variant, which is to some extent akin to the economic argument, traces democratic decadence to conditions of dependency established by colonialism for Africa on the West. A logical extension of the argument is that such dependency imposed severe constraints on socio-economic development and democracy.

Yet, as a theoretical explanation, the historical argument requires some interrogation. In the first place the paradigm cannot explain why as a result of incessant conflicts Ethiopia and Liberia which were never formally colonised failed to sustain their respective democracies, while colonised states like Botswana or Tanzania have been relatively stable. Moreover, it is puzzling why socially homogenous countries like Somalia and Lesotho witnessed intense intra-state conflicts while heterogeneous countries like Tanzania and Senegal have been relatively peaceful. Elsewhere in North America and Europe, a large number of countries, including Canada, the United States and Belgium, which have built strong and stable democracies, are multi-racial or multi-ethnic. Thus while the historical explanations provide useful insights into the complexities of African societies, it can scarcely offer a holistic explanation for the crisis of democracy in Africa.

The modernisation paradigm, another popular argument, locates the problems of democratic development in the nature and the fragility of Africa's political institutions. According to this classic 1960 proposition, African states are characterised by parochial political cultures, dramatised in low political participation and fragile institutions. These factors are compounded by the prevalence of such divisive centripetal forces as the tribe and clan, which compete with the state for the allegiance of citizens (Huntington, 1968). Since they lack effective restraining mechanisms on the quest for power, politics with weak institutions are, as a rule, vulnerable to instability. Also, in such societies the chances of military and societal politicisation are high, a trend that poses serious threats to democracy. The prognosis of the modernisation thesis is, however, fundamentally flawed since it cannot display consistent patterns of correlational linkages between parochial cultures and instability. There are a few African countries that have been relatively democratic over reasonable periods of time with parochial cultures and weak institutions. More generally, the modernisation paradigm is descriptive rather than analytical. It does not, for example, explain the origins of institutional decay which is so central to its analysis but merely assumes an endless tautological cycle of cause and effect: democracy fails because of institutional decay, and there is institutional decay because of the absence of democracy.

The personal rule argument, in a broader sense, an extension of the modernisation analysis, is premised on the predisposition of Africa's political elite to personalise power and to cling to it for as long as possible. They do this by creating and maintaining supportive constituencies with the use of material rewards and sinecure appointments, while at the same time using a mix of repression and co-optation to suppress dissent. The symbiotic relation between the leader and his clients ensures the strength and longevity of the former, who increasingly becomes less amenable to institutions and the constitution. Consequently, personal rulers abuse office with impunity thus compromising the tenets of democracy. Moreover, given its visible trappings, loyalty to the strongman becomes a crucial avenue for accumulation (Jackson and Roseberg, 1982; Hodder-Williams 1984). This process generates considerable disaffection among constituencies lacking access to the ruler and the political system, who are frequently tempted to resort to unconventional methods to dethrone the strongman. In general, personal rule undermines democracy because it privileges selected constituencies and defies the prescriptions of established institutions. Like the modernisation theory in which it is rooted, the argument is not entirely persuasive as it fails to specify the origin of the phenomenon.

The crux of the economic argument, which is presented here as the most plausible explanation for democratic failures, is that prospects for democratic sustainability are higher in strong and growing economies than in weak and fragile economies; that economic growth leads inexorably to democratic stability. Two levels of explanation can be adduced for this. The first level, theoretical and evident in the neo-liberal literature, entails two components. The first component proceeds on the logic that a growing economy produces winners and losers. The former coalesces to defend their newly attained opportunities while the latter form groups to seek improvements in their conditions. The emergence of multiple groups provides a base for political pluralism. There is thus a certain degree of inherent automaticity in the linkage between a flourishing economy and democratic sustainability (Fukuyama, 1989). The second component argues that economic development promotes democracy in the sense of decentralising power from the state. A thriving economy bears a strong middle class, which amasses and controls economic power thereby ensuring separation between political and economic power. The latter becomes a counterweight to the former thus

preventing the emergence of political dictatorship (Friedman, 1962: 9; Robison, 1988: 57). This logic is implied in Moore's (1966) popular but succinct dictum: "no bourgeoisie, no democracy". Lipset (1960: 49-50) is even more lucid in stating that: "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy." In other words, a society without a thriving economy, and a strong middle class is shaky and susceptible to political dictatorship and instability.

On the second, more practical, level a fledgling economy unleashes pressures in the form of scarcity and poverty, which undermine the basis of compromises, exacerbate social tensions, and intensifies distributional conflicts, all of which are anathematic to democracy. The correlates of a weak and declining economy - scarcity, unemployment, poverty, inflation and harsh economic conditions - pose serious threats to democracy in a variety of ways. In the first place, impoverished people are generally more preoccupied with basic economic survival than with agitation for democratic rights. Since for such people the pursuit of fundamental human rights is a secondary issue, in fact a luxury, they tend to be apathetic towards governance. Such apathy provides congenial grounds for the pursuit of undemocratic practices by the political elite and the consequent emergence of dictatorship.

Secondly, people who are poor and hungry and who for long periods hardly attain minimally acceptable standards of living are pliable to manipulations and deception by military adventures making vain promises of better economic conditions. The impoverished and unemployed are often the first to rally behind military generals and self-styled revolutionaries who subvert constitutional rule. Similarly, economic adversities exemplified in protracted periods of unemployment, skyrocketing inflation and plummeting real wages, exhaust public patience and in time degenerate into protests. Over time, such protests can be sufficiently intense as to translate into armed opposition against the state and thus undermine the constitutional order. Thus, a democratically elected government runs the risk of confronting political turbulence if economic pains and uncertainties continue to take a toll on the population.

Further, under conditions of scarcity and austerity, as is the case in Africa, the

state inevitably becomes a channel of accumulation. Competition for the control of the state and its shrinking resources grows keener and often generates intense conflicts. This has adverse implications for democracy and the electoral process. The holders of political power become increasingly reluctant to relinquish it for risk of losing their source of wealth and accumulation; they cling on to power by fair but most often by foul means, thus undermining popular faith in the country's electoral process. As a logical response, constituencies outside the corridors of power, resort to unorthodox methods, since the electoral process can no longer be trusted, to capture state power. Under such conditions, competition for control over the state no longer depict politics as a game of winners and losers, but rather as warfare of victors and vanquished. The political game becomes an issue of survival, literally a matter of life and death. Thus, writing about the developing world, Diamond and Linz (1989) note that economic crisis presents the greatest threat to democracy. Generally, weak democracies lack strong institutional checks on the abuse of political power. Corruption in high places becomes a norm, exerting additional strains on the economy. A weakened economy in turn leads to the further weakening of democracy. Thus, at a general level, an economy in decline is both a cause and an effect of democratic decadence. It can thus be plausibly argued that although the historical and modernisation explanations provide some insights into the problems and complexity of democracy, the economic explanation seems more credible not only for Africa but Lesotho in particular. Lesotho's post-election conflict must therefore be understood against a background of the pressures unleashed by a fledgling economy dramatised by a scarcity of resources and competition.

Lesotho: the political economy of a fragile democracy

Key indicators of Lesotho's economy reveal both its fragility and potential to impart adversely on democratic stability. With a land area of 30,335 square kilometres (11,720 sq. miles), Lesotho has a population of 2,089,892. The country is landlocked and yet with only one neighbour - it is eclipsed by South Africa. This geographic attribute has left the country heavily dependent on South Africa. For example, the bulk of Lesotho's trade is with South Africa and obtains virtually all its electricity from its big neighbour. Recently, however, Lesotho has completed the first phase of a multi-billion dollar Lesotho Highlands Water

Project (LHWP) which will enable it export water to South Africa and also become self-sufficient in its power needs. As well, Lesotho relies on South Africa for much of its security needs. Such dependence has pinned Lesotho to a corner where its foreign policy choices have become constrained by the preferences of South Africa (Swatuk, 1988).

In terms of physical terrain, the country is mostly mountainous with only 11 percent of arable land. It has no forest and woodland but has about 66 percent of permanent pastures. According to a 1993 estimate, Lesotho has only about 30 sq. kilometres of irrigated lands although 86 percent of its resident population is engaged in agriculture. Farming and other agriculture activities in the country are thus nearly entirely dependent on the mercies of the largely erratic rains. This environmental adversity is compounded by occasional droughts, which have forced settlement on marginal lands thus causing overgrazing, severe soil erosion and soil exhaustion. As a result over 80 percent of the country's food and agricultural requirements are obtained externally and mostly from South Africa. Lesotho has few natural resources besides water. It has a fragile industrial base with most of its small-scale industries owned by South Africans, Chinese and Indians. Industrial production growth rate was estimated in 1995 at paltry 19.7%, a rate that is grossly inadequate to march the country's population growth estimated at more than 2%. Consequently, Lesotho faces an acute unemployment problem - about 45%, second only to Mozambique (47%) in the whole of Africa (Africa Information Centre, 1999).

Against a backdrop of weak agricultural and industrial bases, Lesotho has a narrow revenue base. The main sources of its revenue have historically been custom duties, migrant remittances, foreign aid and, to a lesser extent, tourism. Custom duties remain a major source of revenue to the country. In the 1993/94, 94/95 and 95/96 fiscal years, for example, custom revenue accounted for 59.1%, 88.5% and 53.9% of the government's total revenue respectively (Central Bank of Lesotho, 1997: 33). Similarly, migrant remittances have remained a key source of revenue. Since the 1960s Lesotho has had about quarter of its working age population (approximately 100,000) employed in South Africa, mostly in the mines (Matlosa, 1996). In 1990, migrant remittances added 67% to the country's GDP. The number of Lesotho migrant workers has, however, declined steadily

since 1991 following massive retrenchments in the South African mines. Consequently, migrant remittances to Lesotho have plummeted. In 1996, for example, remittances added only 33% to GDP. Like many Sub-Saharan African countries, Lesotho has relied heavily on foreign aid, which has increased its indebtedness. Although Lesotho's current external debt of \$462 million (Central Bank of Lesotho, 1997: 40) is small compared to other African countries, it is nevertheless huge given the small size and the fragility of the country's economy. The above attributes clearly give a picture of a country located precariously in economic terms, a country in which the broad mass of the population is at best surviving on the margins; where resources are scarce and where competition for them is keen.

The negative impact of Lesotho's fledgling economy on its democracy has been recognised by many observers who have been following political trends in the tiny Kingdom. Either directly or indirectly these observers see the post-election conflict in Lesotho essentially as a struggle for resources. For example, analysing its causes Matlosa (1999), argues that the contestation among political constituencies in the post-election period reflects Lesotho's deep structural and institutional crisis marked by a resource poor labour reserve economy, landlockedness, the heavy dependence of the country on South Africa, and the predominantly state-based accumulation trajectory. In his view the conjuncture of these interrelated factors created inauspicious economic conditions under which the state became the channel of accumulation. The post-election conflict was therefore not superficially over the electoral results per se, but reflected another manifestation of the struggle among various constituencies for control over the state.

Arguing in the same tradition, Sekatle (1999) suggests that the culture of controverting the outcome of polls and in particular rejecting electoral defeat by parties, which has characterised Lesotho's electoral politics, results from power struggle in a poor country where the control of power means the control of state resource. These struggles are exacerbated, and frequently complicated, by the partisan rather than neutral postures of certain key state institutions, including the military, the monarchy, and the country's ecclesiastical establishment. Increasing the tendency for the rejection of electoral results is the "first past the post"

electoral system practised in Lesotho, which by definition does not provide for representation for a wide section of the voters. Thus a more inclusive electoral system such as proportional representation may eliminate or minimise the scale of future election-related conflicts.

While tacitly alluding to the role of the country's fragile economy in generating conflicts, Makoa (1999) goes further to suggest that the causes of Lesotho's political instability are partly attributable to the country's political leaders. Focusing on the post-election conflict of 1998, he notes the intransigence of Basotho political elite and, in particular, its persistent failures to strive for domestic solutions to internal disputes. At a deeper level, however, such elite-centred arguments underscore the conventional resource-focused argument, which emphasises on the struggle for control of state power and resources. Against a backdrop of the intense struggle for power, the elite will naturally be inclined towards external solutions that facilitate the maintenance of the status quo than internal settlements that may necessitate the granting of concessions in the form of power sharing. In a sense, then, all the arguments are rooted in the intense competition for state control. As it became clear, the IPA which represented a compromise institution but which invariably became a political constituency, engaged in long hours of debate with the government over accommodation for its members and budgetary allocation (Lentsoe La Basotho (24 December 1998 - 6 January 1999, p. 2). The economic explanation thus underlines the enormous challenge facing the country's democratic experiment. Yet, this is not to paint a pessimistic picture for Lesotho in its drive towards democratic stability. On the contrary, compared to most African states, Lesotho possesses enormous potential for democratic consolidation.

Prospects for democratic stability in Lesotho

It was opined earlier on that despite its precarious economy, which contributes significantly to the intensification of competition among political the elite, Lesotho stands a chance of becoming a democratic model for Southern Africa. This proposition is premised on a number of factors, which are briefly elucidated in the following analysis. First, Lesotho ranks high among the few sub-Saharan African states that boast of national homogeneity. Although there is no

conclusive correlation between a homogenous society and stability (at least as demonstrated by Somalia's inter-clan wars in the early 1990s), ideally a society with few or no ethnic differences would be less prone to conflicts than one with multiple lines of division. Nigeria with close to 500 tribes, superimposed by religious differences, for example, will face far greater difficulties in arriving at national consensus than Lesotho, with fewer and less pronounced lines of division. The homogeneous character of the Basotho nation thus gives it a unique advantage of being in a position to resolve differences with minimal efforts than would cost multi-ethnic societies. However, this is not to suggest that homogenous societies are totally absolved from differences and conflicts. On the contrary, such societies are frequently marked by other cleavages such as religion, ideology and political affiliation, which are easily exploited and manipulated by ambitious and opportunistic politicians. Such non-tribal cleavages have largely defined Lesotho's political crisis. In the absence of effective institutional mechanisms to mitigate tensions generated by such sub-cleavages, the political system will most certainly face political tremors. Given its homogeneity, Lesotho has higher chances of containing its domestic conflicts.

Second, along with formal state institutions, Lesotho's monarchy can play an effective mediatory role in times of disagreements among political constituencies. In doing this the monarchy will not be setting a precedent. Indeed, the Japanese, Thai and Swedish monarchs have at various points facilitated the resolution of conflicts among political players in their respective countries. The Lesotho monarchy does not require extraordinary constitutional powers to be effective in mediation. Rather, what it needs is simply the ability to command popular confidence to act impartially. This will in turn entail the ability to refrain from acts that may suggest partisanship in conflicts. However, the monarchy will require double efforts to convince sections of its increasingly sceptical subjects of its ability to be neutral in conflicts given its apparently partisan postures in previous conflicts (Sekatle, 1999). Indeed, some have attributed the immediate cause of the post-election conflict to the controversial role and partisan position of the King (Hoohlo, 1999). Hoohlo argues further that, the Monarchy has not only aided certain political parties to achieve by foul means what they could not achieve by fair means, but it has also contributed to the demise of established regimes, including popularly elected ones as were the cases in 1986 and 1994.

Indeed, the monarchy's protection of demonstrators who occupied the palace for days confirmed suspicions that it was pitting itself not as an ally but as a rival of the government. In spite of these negative perceptions about it, the monarchy can still constitute a catalyst for conflict resolution and democratic development. The basic tool in this regard is for the monarchy to project itself as a sacrosanct institution, dedicated to the cause of justice and fairplay. This way, it also strengthens its mediatory capacity, a requirement needed for Lesotho's long-term stability.

Thirdly, in contrast to many African countries, the Basotho society appears accommodative of dissent, tolerant of opposition and generally conciliatory. This was reflected in the government's long patience with many weeks of protests. Typical African regimes like Sani Abacha's, Arap Moi's or Robert Mugabe's, for example, would have descended mercilessly on even a day's protest. Moreover, the post-conflict inter-party talks are indicative of the ability of the contending parties to reconcile. Few countries, which have gone through similar or graver conflicts, could agree at short notice to sit around a conference table. Although the scale of the Lesotho post-election conflict could neither match that in Angola nor in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), these war-torn countries can still provide some basis for comparison in terms of warring parties' ability to reconcile. Both Angola and the DRC epitomise the real difficulties in bringing warring factions into reconciliation. The ability of Lesotho's contesting parties to agree to talks is indicative of the culture of tolerance in the society, a culture which is a key requirement for democratic stability. Also, the on-going inter-party conferences aimed at evolving a new electoral system, as opposed to the current first past the post system, will go a long way to increase representation for non-winning parties and ultimately limit the incidence of election-related conflicts.

Finally, the geographical location of Lesotho, specifically, its encirclement by South Africa provides mixed blessings for democracy in the former. Depending on how the big neighbour responds to internal conflicts in Lesotho, the former may help build and strengthen democracy in the latter. For economic, political and security reasons South Africa has considerable interest in Lesotho's long-term stability. As the 1998 Lesotho crisis showed, South Africa will be the first to respond if stability in the mountain Kingdom is threatened. Pretoria thus has

compelling reasons to help stabilise future political turbulence in Lesotho. One way it can do this is to provide swift non-military resources (in the form of negotiating teams and platforms) when conflict drums begin to beat in Lesotho. This, however, has to be done in a way that does not compromise Lesotho's sovereignty. At the same time, South Africa's response to future crisis in Lesotho will also depend on the nature of the conflicts and, in particular, the rapidity of the turn of events. Aware of the considerable disaffection the Pretoria-led military intervention has caused among a large proportion of the Basotho, and having exposed its inconsistent postures in foreign policy as far as involvement in regional conflicts is concerned, South Africa will be more cautious with its future interventions in Lesotho. In other words, South Africa will weigh its options more carefully rather than engage in a hasty intervention. It will, for example, attempt to use dialogue rather than engaging in the onerous task of mobilising regional contingents to undertake forcible stabilisation. If Pretoria adopts the latter option, the floodgates will be opened not only for an enduring relationship between South Africa and Lesotho, but it will also ensure real possibilities for stability in the latter.

Conclusion

Clearly the trend of disputing the results of electoral polls does not only undermine the electoral process, but it also strikes at the core of democracy. But the practice of controverting electoral outcomes and refusing to accept defeat is symptomatic of the absence of a true democratic culture. What has been polemical is the cause of democratic decadence. A myriad of explanations has attempted to unravel the secrets to the problems of democracy. However, as the paper has shown, the economic argument is the most persuasive of all. Like most African countries, Lesotho has a fragile economy, marked by scarcity, unemployment, poverty, and competition, all of which are formidable hurdles for democracy. Thus, the practice of disputing electoral results reflects the struggle over the control of the state, which has become the avenue for survival in a country of increasing scarcity. However, compared to most African countries, Lesotho has the potential to consolidate its democracy. This optimism is fuelled by the convergence of factors, including the country's homogenous character, the existence of a monarchy, the culture of tolerance and accommodation displayed

by Basotho, and the positive role South Africa is capable of playing towards Lesotho's democratic stability. These factors are helpful in the short term in mitigating disruptive conflicts. However, like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Lesotho will have to address poverty, unemployment and scarcity, which generate and intensify conflicts, as a long term solution to its perennial political crisis.

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