

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Lesotho

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td></td> <td>8</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	8	8	0	<b>Democ:</b>	8	8	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Durable:</b>		8		<b>Tentative:</b>		No		
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
<b>Polity:</b>	8	8	0																						
<b>Democ:</b>	8	8	0																						
<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0																						
<b>Durable:</b>		8																							
<b>Tentative:</b>		No																							
SCODE	<b>LES</b>	CCODE	<b>570</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 June 2011</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	2	3																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date	15 May 1998		Begin Date	5 June 2002																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	2 April 1993																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	King Letsie III; initial reign, 1990-95; reinstated 7 February 1996 Prime Minister Pakaltha Mosisili (LCD); first elected by parliament in June 2002; re-elected in February 2007																								
<b>Legislature</b>	Bicameral: National Assembly (120 seats; 80 directly elected, 40 proportionally elected; most recent elections, 17 February 2007) Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD): 62 National Independent Party (NIP): 21 All Basotho Convention (ABC): 17 Lesotho Workers' Party (LWP): 10 Other parties: 10 Senate (33 seats; 22 traditional chiefs, 11 appointed by king)																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	High Court																								

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)**

Lesotho achieved independence from Britain in 1966 and immediately fell prey to the authoritarian impulses of the conservative Basotho National Party (BNP) and its leader, Chief (Prime Minister) Leabua Jonathan. Following a 1970 election in which the BNP was apparently defeated, Chief Jonathan proclaimed a state of emergency, suspended the constitution and severely curtailed the powers of the king. Under increasing pressure by the government of South Africa to limit the activities of the African National

<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Congress within its borders, Chief Jonathan was ousted in a coup led by General Lekhanya in January 1986. In the wake of the coup, state executive and legislative powers were given to King Moshoeshoe. Under this system the King was to act on the advice of Lekhanya and other military officers on the self-appointed Military Council. However, by early 1990 a power struggle had emerged between Lekhanya and King Moshoeshoe. When King Moshoeshoe demanded an immediate end to military rule the Military Council stripped him of his executive and legislative powers and replaced him with his son, King Letsie III. In a subsequent power struggle within the Military Council, Colonel Ramaema ousted General Lekhanya in April 1991 and ushered in a period of political liberalization that culminated in the multi-party parliamentary elections of 1993.

In the 1993 elections the Basotho Congress Party (BCP) won all of the seats in the National Assembly and Dr. Ntsu Mokhele became prime minister. While these elections were viewed by most independent observers as being “free and fair,” the Basotho National Party (BNP), which was supported by members of the former military regime, protested the outcome of the polls. Adding to the already fragile political situation in Lesotho during the early 1990s were factional struggles within the military, unrest by members of the police, and an increasing sense of lawlessness by the population in general. By August 1994 a loose coalition of forces involving factions within the military, supporters of ex-King Moshoeshoe II and the BNP pressured King Letsie III to dismiss the BCP-led government, dissolve the National Assembly, and return the throne to his father. Violent protests by BCP supporters led to the political intervention of troops from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Under intense pressure from these states to resolve this political crisis, the BCP government of Dr. Mokhele was reinstated in September 1994 and, in January 1995, King Letsie abdicated his throne in favor of his father. Under this new political system, however, the powers of the king were significantly reduced.

In 1997 Prime Minister Mokhele broke from the BCP and established a new party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy Party (LCD). As a result of this move, in which he took a majority of BCP parliamentarians with him, the BCP became the minority opposition in the National Assembly. Refusing to accept its opposition status, remaining members of the BCP refused to attend Assembly sessions and organized widespread opposition to LCD rule. Despite this opposition, in May 1998 the LCD, under the new leadership of Pakalitha Mosisili, won all but one seat in National Assembly elections. Claiming that these elections were rigged, opposition parties engaged in a series of violent street protests to destabilize the government of Prime Minister Mosisili.

Despite the fact that in the wake of the 1998 parliamentary elections over one hundred citizens were killed in acts of political violence, these elections were considered to be “free and fair” by international observers. While opposition parties claimed that the Lesotho Congress for Democracy Party (LCD) had engaged in widespread fraud in their landslide electoral victory, these claims could not be substantiated by independent observers. By all objective accounts it was the structure of the first-past-the-post electoral system, not fraud, which produced the massive electoral victory of the LCD. In these elections the LCD won seventy-eight out of eighty seats in the National Assembly despite winning only sixty percent of the popular vote.

The 1998 crisis was similar to the crisis of 1993-94 in that in both cases opposition party members alleged electoral malpractice by the government, recruited disgruntled army factions to support their cause with military action and, in the end, tried to persuade King Letsie (who re-ascended to the throne after the death of his father in 1996) to dissolve the National Assembly and install a government of national unity. However, unlike the scenario of 1994, in 1998 the King did not take an active role in the opposition campaign. The political violence of 1998 was effectively controlled with the intervention of troops from Botswana and South Africa. In an effort to end the violence in this country the LCD agreed to hold new elections within 18 months. In order to pave the way for these elections an Interim Political Authority (IPA) was established. The IPA, established in December 1998 and consisting of two members from each of the country’s twelve main political parties, was empowered to make significant reforms of the political system by functioning as a parallel government.

After a prolonged period of foot-dragging by the LCD government, national elections were finally held in May 2002 under a new system designed to give smaller parties a greater voice in parliament. Despite the establishment of this new electoral system, the ruling LCD won in a landslide. The LCD won seventy-nine out of eighty directly contested seats in the 120-seat parliament while the Basotho National Party (BNP) secured twenty-one seats in a parallel proportional representation vote. International observers declared the vote to be free and fair and, in June 2002, Prime Minister Mosisili was sworn in for a second five-year term. Despite their protests of electoral misconduct, the opposition agreed to take up their seats in

parliament. The subsequent elections, originally scheduled for May 2007, were moved forward to February by the king, on the advice of Mosisili. Despite significant losses in the 2007 parliamentary elections the LCD remained in power with a narrow margin, and Mosisili secured a third term as prime minister.

**Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)**

While Lesotho has a long history of political instability and authoritarian rule, nevertheless, democracy continues to survive, albeit precariously, in this poor, land-locked country. Under the new democratic political system established in 1993, executive power was to be vested in a prime minister who would be directly accountable to the National Assembly (although in 1994 King Letsie briefly assumed executive dominance in an unconstitutional seizure of power). Despite the parliamentary dominance of the Basotho Congress Party (1993-1997) and the Lesotho Congress for Democracy Party (1997-present) throughout much of the past decade the executive authority of Lesotho's prime ministers has been quite limited. While legislative and judicial constraints on executive action in Lesotho remain weak, nevertheless, the exercise of executive authority remains constrained by the autonomous actions of the military, the royal family, and traditional clan structures.

In an effort to increase the degree of horizontal accountability within the political system in the wake of the 1998 electoral disaster, the IPA increased the number of seats in the National Assembly to 120. Moreover, eighty seats in this expanded parliament are filled through a first-past-the-post system while the remaining forty seats are allocated by a system of proportional representation voting. The 2007 elections saw an increase in opposition seats, apparently limiting the power of the LCD to act unilaterally.

**Political Participation: Factional Competition (7)**

Political competition in democratic Lesotho has been marred by political instability and factionalism. Despite the resolution of the 1994 crisis, political competition in Lesotho remained factional in nature. While the 1998 elections were conducted in a reasonably democratic manner, nonetheless, the resulting political violence produced a power-sharing arrangement in Lesotho and the creation of the Interim Political Authority. While this power-sharing body was successful in conducting the parliamentary elections of May 2002, nevertheless, factional tensions remain high. Political power in this country is highly concentrated in the hands of a few tribal/political leaders. The lack of intraparty democracy suggests that party members have little or no real control over their political leaders. At present, the primary factions are: (1) a coalition of the LCD and the National Independent Party (NIP), led by Prime Minister Mosisili; and (2) an opposition coalition of the Ali Basotho Convention (ABC) and Lesotho Workers' Party, led by Tom Thabane. Thabane, who served as a high-ranking minister in all three of Mosisili's governments, has galvanized opposition to Mosisili by forming the ABC and is credited with leading the defection of many LCD candidates, causing in no small part the opposition gains in the 2007 elections.

On 22 April 2009 a failed assassination attempt was made on the life of Prime Minister Mosisili. A former bodyguard of opposition leader Tom Thabane was implicated in the botched effort to kill the Prime Minister. The indictment of a Thabane associate in the murder plot is an indication of the deep factional rift within Lesotho politics and the persistence of political tensions stemming from the controversial 2007 legislative elections and the subsequent 2008 by-elections. The opposition has claimed that both elections were won by fraud and have actively sought to overturn the results. Negotiations between the two sides stalled in 2009 after the government refused to participate any longer in talks headed up by the Southern African Development Community.