

# Political Party Youth Exclusion: Case of Lesotho

*Senate Rapitse, Tawanda Mukurunge, Takura Bhila*

**Abstract** - Politics is facing the crisis of citizens lacking faith in government in general and participation in political activities in particular. Voter apathy characterises polities across the globe. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Southern Africa as a region. Apart from voter apathy, the emergency and existence of too many political parties in one political environment has brought to the fore the dispensation of coalition governments which struggle to last a single five year term, as evident in Lesotho between 2012 and 2022. In an environment characterised by too many political parties, splits and fragmentation of the existent major political parties, new political parties continue to emerge to congest the already crowded political space. In this situation, the youth are restive, demanding for jobs and expressing their disgruntlement at exclusion through street protest organised by movements such as #bachashutdown. This study therefore seeks to establish the youth of Lesotho's perceptions of the issue of coalition governance, youth voter apathy and youth reluctance to join mainstream politics and poor governance leading to political instability and economic stagnation in Lesotho. The study also sought to establish the extent to which the youth are included or excluded in decision making by the mainstream political parties. The study collected, presented and analysed the findings qualitatively because the main focus is on perceptions of youth on the political situation, space for participation and voice granted the youth by the main political players in the country.

**Keywords:** youth exclusion, restive youth, activism, youth participation, mainstream politics, youth in governance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the fact that the population of young people is growing the world over, disregarding this factor in mainstream political developments can prove to be perilous to any nation state. It is therefore inevitable for polities to develop enabling structures of inclusion in order for the youth to participate in mainstream politics. It is in light of the observations above that this study embarked on establishing the perceptions of the youth in Lesotho on their inclusion or exclusion in serious decision making in the politics of their nation. The study was carried out qualitatively; engaging with the youth on a one to one face to face interaction through interviews to establish their opinions and to glean their suggestions on the way forward. The findings were presented and analysed thematically.

## II. BACKGROUND

When it comes to mainstream political participation such as becoming card carrying members of political parties, registering to vote and actual participating in voting itself, Kali (2014) says there is evidence of apathy by the youth of Lesotho. Citing the example of Basotho youth students at the National University of Lesotho, Kali say that their levels of student activism are high but this, unfortunately, does not translate to mainstream political party participation. This is not a healthy scenario considering that student activism can translate to active participation by the youth in democratization processes at national level. A case in point is the student activists of the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), which saw, in 1999, student activists, Civil Society, Labour, academics and all other democratic minded citizens coming together to form the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), one of the strongest political movements to grace the political space of Zimbabwe and to mount significant challenge to the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) Zimbabwe's ruling party since 1980.

The youth in Lesotho are trapped in the tensions between tradition and postmodernism; that is traditional ethos versus democratic values of human rights in politics, posit Thakaso and Preece (2018). Tradition dictates respect for age in politics or leadership where seniority is honoured and revered yet the youth, due to their exposure to western type of democracy learnt at school, they are sensitive to issues of their rights and makes them aware of what they want for their generation politically. They therefore do not understand and appreciate politics from the perspective of bowing to the elderly as the leadership of choice. The traditional set up of Lesotho therefore does not appear to elevate the youth in positions of influence in the mainstream political party structures.

## III. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In a country populated by younger generations, national politics is dominated by citizens who are mature or in the senior citizen category. The problem is therefore that the interests of the future of the country are determined by leaders who are almost or actually retired pensioners who are long past their prime. Consideration should therefore be given for younger generations to chart the best way forward for the

country because they are the future. The youth of Lesotho through, for example the #bachashutdown have already started displaying that they have become restive yet the major political parties are carrying on without paying special attention for the call by the youth who are clearly spelling out what they want.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided/viewed through the focal lenses of the youth bulge theory propounded by Gunnar Heinsohn in the mid-1990s which is characterized by a youth prominence at the same time challenged by limited resources and, specifically, a lack of influential roles for excess young people (Fluckiger & Ludwig, 2017). The youth bulge theory says this negligence of the youth who make up the majority of the population is one of the causes for future conflict in societies suffering gross inequalities. Lesotho's population is dominated by the youth generation (40% of the national population according to the Human Development Indices, 2015) (UNDP, 2015) yet the national party politics is led and dominated by citizens way above the age range of the youth.

#### V. Literature review

In most political spaces, the youth are more geared for activism than voter electoral processes. In Africa, the youth are, in most cases, regarded more as foot soldiers that run the errands for the political elite; canvassing for votes for their elders. Worse still, in politically volatile environments, the youth are used as cannon fodder; fighting physical violent battles for the political elite for very little gain. Fisher (2012), in the context of the United States of America, however provides an illustration of how the 2008 election witnessed youth participation in politics transitioning from activism to actual voter participation. She says that the 2008 election youth voter turnout was established to be one of the highest ever recorded. This was attributed to the Obama campaign which harnessed the youth and their presence on the Internet.

From studying youth political participation and governments' will to incorporate youth in politics in nine Central African countries, Zukane and Tagang (2017) established that most of the governments were only committed on paper and nothing practical was being implemented. They could not establish where practical young people and their organizations influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions at national level over resources which affect them and society as a whole. The main problem, according to Zukane and Tagang is that there is no sufficient willingness by the political elite to empower younger generations politically. In Africa, Rwanda is one of those few countries who actually try to implement what the youth policy document recommends (Malunda, 2011).

Youth involvement in governance and mainstream national decision making processes can lead to more effective democratization and faster development efforts particularly for African countries, Wani (2016) writes. The main challenge is that most African countries do not make serious and sustained efforts to include youth in mainstream political participation.

#### VI. METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of the study; the context of Lesotho politics and youth participation during the era of the 10 years of coalition governance as well as the period of National Reforms and the build up to the 2022 national election, information gathering methods were qualitative. Interviews were therefore deemed the best method of gleaning and gathering information from youth sources. Qu and Dumay (2011) say that interview objectives are imbedded in the context of the study setting, and that the interview approach creates the opportunity of providing additional insights into subject matter under study. Information was therefore gathered through face-to-face interviews with randomly chosen youth, both male and female aged between 18 and 35 years, from Maseru city. Face-to-face interviews were preferred due to the complex nature of the questions. The questions ranged from an in depth understanding of the youth on issues of coalition governance, youth voter apathy, and the transitioning of youth from activism to mainstream political participation. This therefore required the interviewers to explain the questions further to the interviewees so that the questions would be clearer (Schroder, 2016).

#### VII. FINDINGS

##### Respondent one

I believe youth participation in politics is beneficial in that, youth have more enthusiasm and innovative ideas towards the betterment of society especially when they are in leadership positions.

For integration of youth in positions of power in politics, I think youth should be involved more in implementation and decisions made, in order for them to be exposed and know everything they need to know as future leaders.

I think at least 80 percent of parliamentary seats should be occupied by the youth because I believe if there are more young people in parliament, they will have more influence on the older generation.

I think ministry of communications, science and technology should be led by youth. Also ministry of small businesses,

cooperatives and marketing should be led by youth. I also think ministry of sports and recreation should be led by youth.

**Respondent two**

Coalition governments have brought a lot of uncertainty since the electorate decided to offer different parties a role in governing the country. African Union observer mission under Raila Odinga in 2017 advised that the biggest parties should be given an opportunity to form government. This only says that the constitution should be explicit in also giving time frames and how government, coalition, should be formed.

Positioning the youth as a form of affirmative action should be promoted thus the need to have a generational mix in parliament.

Youth voices particularly in political parties has all been about defending the leader and party and not about advancing their own development as youth and occupying leadership spaces.

Affirmative action policies need to be adopted in a bid to advance youth participation.

20 percent of parliamentary seats should be allocated to the youth as per National Youth Policy on the National Reforms.

20 percent of cabinet positions should be allocated to the youth as per the Policy and Position paper.

**Respondent three**

The coalition government system seems to be delaying development of the country because in a period of 10 years, we have had four governments that blame each other for lack of delivery and corruption happening in government departments. It has been a war of who gets into power and victimize opposition. Political parties failed to implement their manifestos and blame coalition government to be a cause as they and their partners had different manifestos. Even coalition agreements were implemented as within a short time coalition partners fought. However, I believe coalition government can become challenging as it was for the first time ever existing in Lesotho. The laws had to be amended to accommodate it. Now that for the first time the parliament lasted for five years but only government changed, probably Lesotho begins to understand coalition government.

Youth are not given fair representation in all spheres of government. In their parties they are normally party leaders' puppets for they cannot voice their opinions even from youth leagues. Some youth leagues may voice their opinions against their party leaders or members but will be forced to withdraw their statements. Most youth leagues work to cover for their

parties instead of working for the betterment of youth's lives. When it comes to jobs and top positions, youth representation is very low. Youth are not given well paying jobs but are given some short time jobs. Our security forces are polluted by rulers who use nepotism to politically compensate their followers. All parties do not have exact numbers or policies of youth representation though they have for women representation.

Youth voices are not heard in Lesotho. They have no government supported bodies that deal with youth challenges like youth parliament, for instance. Government, through the Lesotho Mounted Police Services (LMPS) block youth protests. Few of protests that grab public and international attention have been permitted in Lesotho. The government always act as if it is answering youth concerns but as time progresses such initiatives amount to nothing as no real action is taken except politicking about youth challenges. They need to be empowered. Youth empowerment should not just be in the form of educating them but must be in employment so that they have money. The vulnerable economic state of youths being poor makes it easier for rulers to use them by giving them money so they can act against truth and the youth movement. Unless youth are empowered economically, they cannot be fully independent to purely push the youth agenda.

I suggest that in parliament youth representation should be 40 percent as they are the majority of the population though they themselves seem to lack interest in politics and elections. Probably when they have such representation they might start being active in politics.

To start with, there has to be constitutional number of cabinet members so that we avoid a bloated cabinet that is made to secure power for those in government. I would love our cabinet to be made up of 31 members at most and with 10 youths in it. Ministries like Gender, Youth and Sports should be allocated to youth as youth are the ones partaking in sports. The second ministry should be education as well as development as they directly deal with youth. The other ministry could be Tourism as most artists are youth. Lastly, we are living in the era of technology so the Ministry of Technology should be run by the youth as they understand technology better than old people.

**Respondent four**

What should be done is that there should be a number of youth in each one of the positions of power, so that as youth we have our voice in the decision making.

Youth should be allocated 60 percent of parliament seats because they are the future. They should be the ones doing all the work in the parliament. The 40 percent left should be

adults as they are experienced. They should be there just to guide the youth.

Youth should have at least 10 cabinet posts. The ministries that should be allocated to youth should be: Development planning, Gender, Sports and Recreation, Labour and Employment, Public Services, Public Works, Small businesses, cooperatives and Marketing, and Trade and Industry. Youth know what needs to be done for the betterment of the country; job opportunities, talent search in sports and creation of jobs, gender equality. The youth are better educated and have a better understanding.

#### **Respondent five**

Since our nation implemented coalition government from 2012 to date, the problem of non-fulfilment of promises on development is worsening. The governments are just remaining inactive as some are even toppled before the lapse of five years following political instability perennially experienced in Lesotho. Their inactivity towards improving the lives of Basotho in general also results from the fact that they prioritize regular reshuffling of both ministers and prime ministers before they can even fulfil the set goals during their swearing in. These regularly reshuffled individuals entertain this because they all, from different parties within the coalitions, only want to enjoy the benefits coming along with ministerial positions. Corruption is even worse within the ministerial positions as compared to the era before the coalition governments because every individual just wants to enjoy the benefits coming along with illegal acts like embezzlement of public funds within the time they are in office. Lesotho has therefore suffered a lot under coalition governance. The ruling parties in the coalition governments have a problem of fighting among themselves. Some of the partners would want to give the impression that they deliver better than their partners yet in reality they will be doing very little. This therefore ends up sowing the seeds of suspicion and disillusionment with each other and then service delivery to the citizens suffers.

I recommend youthful people to take up positions of influence in mainstream political parties in Lesotho because, in comparison with the majority of the aged who are leading these parties, they have fresh and new ideas regarding the development of the nation. Therefore, after their being positioned there, Lesotho is going to be successful, with the youth creating jobs for their peers as they will listen to the voices of colleagues whose challenges they are familiar with.

The ministry of labour and employment should be headed by the youth as they will understand a challenge of high unemployment rate facing Basotho youth, and they will therefore strive to ensure that mostly absorbed people in

labour absorptive centres in Lesotho be it private or public, are youth. The ministry of finance also should be headed by the youth as they will ensure while allocating funds for every ministry that the ministry of youth is being allocated enough financial resources to enable youth to start income generating projects like pig rearing in order to curb the increasing yet already high unemployment rate in the country's youth. With such projects, the youth can generate income for themselves and at the same time create employment for others. This can only be achieved with the youth presiding over the affairs of the ministry of youth. The youth will therefore make sure that the interests of the youth come first in the allocation of resources. The ministry of sports, youth and recreation should also be led by youth who will ensure the smooth running of all that has to be done by the ministry for the youth such as the construction of sports fields across Lesotho, regular hosting and financing of tournaments for the youth and more. The youth are more active in sports than the elderly mothers and fathers who have always been assigned to lead the ministry. Sports can be converted to lucrative employment for the youth with proper infrastructure put in place or with an overhaul of the infrastructure currently in place. We can successfully groom the local talent for sports participation at international level.

#### **Respondent six**

Knowing Lesotho and the leaders that we have had and still have, it will be a breath of fresh air to have young people taking on leadership and leading the country to green pastures because, to be honest, it has not been that good with all the leaders we have had and still have because all they did and still do is feed us lies and more lies.

Nothing should be done for the youth, they need to stand up and start fighting for what is right. What kills the youth of today is that we are not honest enough to just stand together and fight for that seat in parliament. This is because we are lazy and afraid of what people might say, or that if we start fighting we might lose our jobs or positions that have been provided to us by those old politicians.

To be honest, the youth should be given 80 percent of parliamentary seats, it is high time the old generation go for pension and allow young blood to start working and reinvent everything they have destroyed. This will only happen if a few old people are just remaining in parliament just for direction, apart from that, I believe in the youth and the strength they have.

If it were up to me, I would say all cabinet posts should be headed by the youth, except for the ministry of small businesses, ministry of health and ministry of education where experience matters the most.

**Respondent seven**

From my own perspective, I feel as the youth of this country we are not considered at all when it comes to Lesotho politics. I think politicians only need us to use us to spread the word for them while they just relax in their offices.

Youth should be allowed to speak freely so that they plan ahead into becoming the next prime ministers. We need young people to take up leadership because we have been let down too many times.

98 percent of seats in parliament should be reserved for the youth. We are the future and given the opportunity we can do better than we see today.

In cabinet, youth should be given to lead the ministries of education, business and health. These are the ministries which need young blood because so far they are under performing. There is high unemployment among the youth and students still have to fight and get killed for their financial rights. The most recent example is the murder of a National University of Lesotho by the authorities as students demonstrated for finances that they had the right to receive but deliberately withheld by unscrupulous authorities for no reason.

**VIII. ANALYSIS**

The youth in Lesotho is politically conscious. However, there is reluctance by the youth in participating in mainstream politics because there is lack of faith in mainstream politics because of too many disappointments with the political system. For instance, with the situation of coalition governments of the past 10 years, politicians focused too much on jostling for government positions as witnessed by betrayals and counter betrayals by the coalition partners. Senior politicians specialised in the craft of outwitting each other in the political chess game at the expense of creating employment opportunities for the youth. The youth identify that the political elite only turn to the youth to use them as campaign personnel and compensate them with minute financial rewards or lowly paying jobs mainly in the civil service or in the state apparatus structures such as the military or police service. The youth need more hence their reluctance to join the ranks of the foot soldiers that are used by the politicians. The youth know what they want and the state should ensure that the youth quarters of 20 percent parliament seats and 20 percent cabinet posts recommended by the youth is implemented in the next government in order to include the youth. This will be the beginning of integrating the youth into mainstream politics and they will have a say in governance at national level. That way, the state will be taking the first positive steps to curb the negative consequences of the youth bulge factor.

The youth in Africa have always been politically conscious and productive in helping the people achieve their political aspirations. Liberation movements across the continent achieved independence for their countries through the sacrifices and selfless efforts of the youth, only for the political elite to sideline them after independence. Nationalist movements such as Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) had youth leading and executing the war of liberation at the front such as Lookout Masuku, Dumiso Dabengwa, Solomon Mujuru (Rex Nhongo) among others whilst the elderly politicians would be in exile far from the war front (Chung, 2006). The same can be said about Umkonto we Sizwe with youth guerrilla commanders such as Chris Hani executing the struggle militarily with the political elite in relative comfort in exile far from the war zone. At the same time, the youth in Africa and elsewhere have been witnessed taking the reins of power and transforming their national economies. Examples are Thomas Sankara of the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) who became president at the age of 33 (Degbotse, 2016, Yesufu, 2022), Muammar Gaddafi of Libya aged 27 (Garcia, 2018), and Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana aged 32 (Kpesa, 2011); all labelled radical by the exploitative west because their pro-people policies went against the grain of the capitalist world. Sankara, Gaddafi and Rawlings transformed their countries' economies and improved their citizens' lives at young ages. Most senior African leaders can hardly point out developments they brought to their countries better than those youthful leaders. The United Kingdom itself had William Pitt as prime minister at the age of 24 and he led the empire through a very troubled era plagued with war (Rose, 1911). France's current president, Emmanuel Macron got into the highest office of that land at the age of 39. It therefore is a myth that only old people have the knowledge to take up leadership positions which is more of a curse when it comes to Africa. The energy of the youth has to be harnessed and effectively utilised for national development, hence the advocacy by this study for the youth of Lesotho to be integrated into parliament and cabinet to develop the country. The past 10 years have proven beyond doubt the pointlessness of recycling old politicians who are wasteful of the nation's time and resources in petty political squabbles that result in the fragmentation of political parties and the mushrooming of ineffective too numerous political parties for the simple reason that some political personalities are too egotistic to succumb to the leadership of their colleagues. The youth therefore have to be given an opportunity to take control of their own affairs and their future. It is time for the youth to be integrated and groomed on the job for more responsibilities in governance as they are preparing to take over. The recycling of political deadwood; a burden to the nation for a long time, should be gradually eased out of the system.

## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the youth be granted the recommended 20 percent parliamentary seats and 20 percent cabinet posts for the first five years of the next government then review the numbers upwards. This should be done gradually till the youth; the majority of the citizens, have big enough numbers of between 50 and 60 percent of parliamentary seats and cabinet posts in the next fifteen to twenty years. This should be incorporated in the national constitution.

The study also recommends that political parties should start integrating youth into leadership structures as outright high office holders as well as understudies to the current elderly, mature and more experienced leaders in order for the youth to be properly groomed over longer periods of time in the positions of responsibility. This should reflect in the political parties' constitutions.

The study also recommends for the youth to be more pro active and participate in contesting for positions of authority within mainstream political parties instead of waiting for power to be handed over to them by well wishing established politicians.

## X. CONCLUSION

The youth of Lesotho are politically conscious and they know what they want from governance. It therefore is most ideal for the political elite to incorporate the youth in decision making by placing youth in key decision making positions in government. The youth should be given at least 20 percent quarter of parliamentary seats and 20 percent cabinet positions as per the youth's recommendations.

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