

Changing Attitudes Toward Democracy in Lesotho

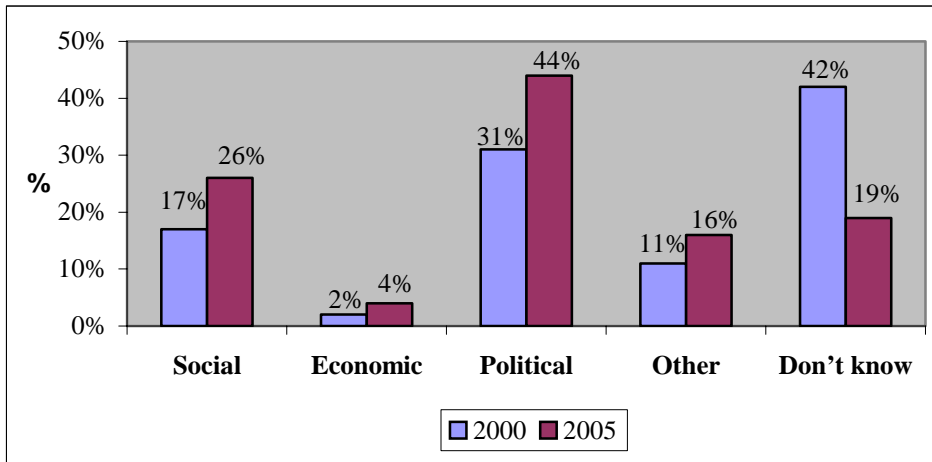
INTRODUCTION

The Afrobarometer, conducted three surveys of political attitudes and values in Lesotho in the years 2000, 2003 and 2005. The Afrobarometer survey was also carried out one or more times in Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

This briefing, describing changes in democratic attitudes in Lesotho, is based on a survey of 1,161 Basotho who are 18 years of age or older, administered between 6 July 2005 and 17 August 2005. The survey was conducted in 145 villages, in census enumeration areas selected by a random process proportional to population, with the help of Lesotho’s Bureau of Statistics. Every district was represented in proportion to its population. A precise method was developed for finding random households within each village. Men and women were selected in alternation in successive households, so that in the end the sample consisted of 580 men and 581 women.

Many of the questions which were asked in the 2005 survey were also asked in the 2000 and 2003 surveys, which allows changes in public opinion to be tracked over time.

Figure 1. Meanings of Democracy by Year



CHANGING UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

The dates 2000 and 2005 are important in Lesotho’s history, because the earlier survey took place after the disputed 1998 elections and while a political settlement was being negotiated with the help of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Tensions were still running high in the early part of 2000, when the first Afrobarometer survey was held in Lesotho, and the Interim Political Authority still had not completed negotiations for an alternative electoral system. A new Independent Electoral

Commission was not in place until mid-2000, after the completion of the survey. It is no wonder, therefore, that attitudes toward and understanding of democracy were unclear and confused.

The new system was finally put in place in 2001 and elections under a mixed electoral system were held without serious problems in May 2002. The method finally chosen was for each constituency to elect its Member of Parliament by direct vote, but each voter would also vote for a party. The results of the latter vote would be tallied and MPs selected proportionally to the votes received by each party. Each party drew up a list of candidates for these latter seats, and MPs were taken from the top of the lists. In the end the Parliament more fairly represented the nation than before, with most minority parties having at least one seat to give them a role in the legislative process.

The resulting Parliament had 77 members from the Lesotho Congress for Democracy, which had won 55% of the vote, 21 members from the Basotho National Party, 6 members from the Lesotho People's Congress, 5 from the National Independence Party, 3 from the Basutoland African Congress, 3 from the Basutoland Congress Party, and 1 each from four smaller parties. The LCD still is able to dominate all legislation, but the other parties now have a platform.

Interviewees were asked in 2000 and again in 2005 what they understand by democracy. . Figure 1 summarizes the views on the meaning of democracy in the two surveys. Answers have been combined to allow easier comparison into five headings, political answers, economic answers, social answers, other answers, and lack of knowledge of the meaning of democracy.¹

What is most obvious from the graph is the rising proportion able to state a meaning for democracy. There was a strong increase in all areas, reflecting the perceived increase in democracy after the introduction of the new electoral system.

The data show that education, wealth and gender significantly affect the ability to state a meaning for democracy. Giving a meaning for democracy was possible for 99% of those with post-secondary education, 87% with secondary education, 67% with only primary education, and 53% of those with no schooling. Similarly, 80% of those in the wealthiest category, as judged by access to food, clean water, fuel, medical care and income, were able to give democracy a meaning, as opposed to only 53% of those without access to most of these necessities. 75% of men could define democracy in some way, as opposed to 64% of women.

CHANGING ACCEPTANCE OF DEMOCRACY

Before 1998, many people in Lesotho probably favored, or at least accepted, one-party rule, military government, methods other than elections for choosing leaders, and weak limitations on the power of leaders. . Even in the disturbances of 1998 there were Basotho who called for the restoration of the monarchy or the military, and even supported the violence and destruction. Yet the surveys of 2000, 2003 and 2005 show a strong increase in support for parliamentary democracy and the electoral process over those years.

Table 1 shows the change in attitudes on these major issues, listing the percent that favor the democracy rather than one-party or military rule, and the percent that don't know.

¹ Political answers were government by, for and of people; voting and elections; peace, unity and power sharing; equality and justice; governance and rule of law; national independence and self-determination; corruption and abuse of power; civilian government and politics; change of government.

Social answers were civil liberties and personal freedom; mutual respect; working together; conflict and confusion. Economic answers were social and economic development; social and economic hardship.

Table 1. Acceptance of democratic institutions 2000-2005.²

	2000		2003		2005	
	Yes	DK	Yes	DK	Yes	DK
Reject military rule	70%	7%	85%	3%	83%	2%
Democracy preferable	24%	25%	50%	16%	51%	7%
Keep multi-party rule	51%	12%	61%	2%	70%	2%
Choose leaders by election	36%	10%	66%	3%	76%	0%
Parliament make laws	69%	8%	56%	7%	60%	2%

By increasing rejection of military rule and accepting multiparty elections, Basotho show growing acceptance of democracy. They also show a marked decline in the percentage unable to give an opinion on the matter. People are more willing to give an opinion, and with respect to four out of five regimes or institutions, public opinion favors the growth of democracy.

The fifth opinion needs more analysis. The decline in support for parliamentary control of the legislative process seems surprising. The alternative, as stated in the questionnaire, was for the Prime Minister to have a free hand in passing laws, without worrying what Parliament may think. The logic of these shifts in opinion seems to be the following. First, military rule is strongly rejected by a very large majority (83% in the latest poll). Then democracy itself receives a modest plurality (51% in 2005). Within democracy, multi-party rule receives a 70% majority by 2005, and election as the way of choosing leaders by the end of the five years between the uncertainty of 2000 and the peace of 2005 is approved by over three-quarters of the survey population.

Military rule - no. Democracy – a modest yes. Multi-party government - yes. Elections - yes. But once the election is over and done, then it seems that a substantial proportion are willing to allow the head of government, the Prime Minister, to make the laws which will guide the nation. .

² The answers give the percentage of people who made the following statements:

The army comes in to govern the country (disapprove/strongly disapprove)

Democracy is preferable to any other form of government (agree)

Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office (disapprove/strongly disapprove)

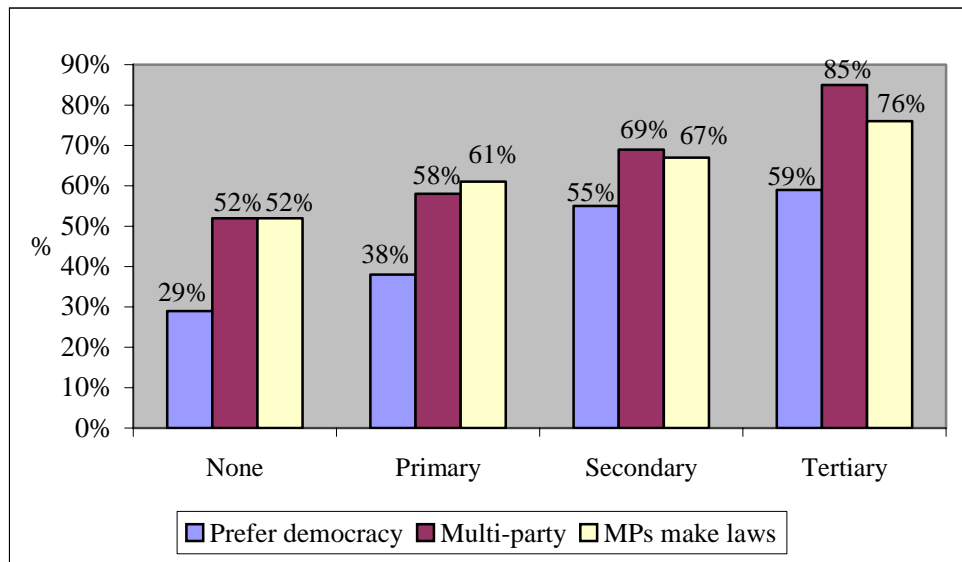
We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections (agree very strongly/agree)

In 2000 the comparable question was: When democracy does not work, some people say democracy is always best. (agree somewhat/strongly agree)

The members of parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the Prime Minister does not agree (agree very strongly/agree)

In 2000 the comparable question was: If parliament and political parties were abolished, so that the Prime Minister could decide everything (strongly disapprove/disapprove)

Figure 2. Support of democratic institutions by school level



Similar distributions of opinion across sectors of the population apply here. Figure 2 gives a striking example, reflecting the opinions of people at different levels of schooling. There is a strong increase in support for these features of democracy by educational level. What is important here is the reversal of the trend mentioned above for acceptance of the Prime Minister making laws instead of the Parliament. The less schooling, the more likely the person is to give the Prime Minister legislative authority.

The next question concerns the quality of the democracy practiced by the government. Here, even though people in theory increasingly approve of democracy as the preferred way to govern, their confidence in the actual performance of democracy has declined since reaching a high point in 2003. Table 2 gives the proportion believing that Lesotho is a democracy, even though with minor problems, and the proportion satisfied with “the way democracy works” in Lesotho.

Table 2. Extent of and satisfaction with democracy in Lesotho 2000-2005³

	2000		2003		2005	
	Yes	DK	Yes	DK	Yes	DK
1998 or 2002 election completely free and fair or free and fair with minor problems	37%	17%	NA	NA	61%	11%
Lesotho full democracy/democracy with minor problems	36%	33%	48%	18%	44%	19%
Very/fairly satisfied with way democracy works in Lesotho	39%	27%	48%	15%	40%	14%

³ How do you rate the freeness and fairness of the most recent election? Fully or partly free and fair or not at all
 How much of a democracy is Lesotho today? Full democracy, minor problems, major problems, not democracy
 How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho? Very satisfied, fairly, not very, not at all.
 Answers were combined to include the top two in each case as favorable

There was strong dissatisfaction with the election in 1998, as reflected in the above opinions for the year 2000. The election of 2002 was broadly accepted, as reflected in the high approval rating of and satisfaction with Lesotho's democracy in 2003 and the sharp increase in perceptions that elections were free and fair. The appraisal of democracy then declined by 2005

There is a mixed reaction to Lesotho's democracy by different groups. Educated people tend to be more skeptical of Lesotho's commitment to democracy, but that may be due to the inability of those with less schooling to answer the question. There is little real difference between rural and urban residents, or between men and women. Younger people are more favorably inclined toward democracy in Lesotho than older people. There is also an understandable and significant tendency for those who believe Lesotho is a democracy to have voted in the most recent election.

An important finding is that people who have paid employment, whether in the informal or the formal sector, are more likely to believe that Lesotho is a true democracy. Unemployed people are a source of dissatisfaction in any country, and in particular in Lesotho there is evidence that the disturbances of 1998 were given strong support by people without jobs.

POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND INVOLVEMENT

An important aspect of political life is the involvement of citizens in the affairs of the nation. This begins with discussion of issues and moves from there to taking personal action in events that matter to them. Table 3 compares the frequency of discussion of politics across social groups, including those defined by education, well-being, rural or urban residence, and gender. Each pair of comparisons is significantly different at the .000 level.

Table 3. Discussion of political issues by social categories⁴

	Never	Occasionally	Frequently
No schooling	63%	25%	12%
Post-secondary	47%	26%	27%
Poorest	52%	25%	23%
Wealthiest	70%	23%	6%
Rural	58%	27%	14%
Urban	63%	25%	11%
Female	65%	23%	11%
Male	54%	30%	15%

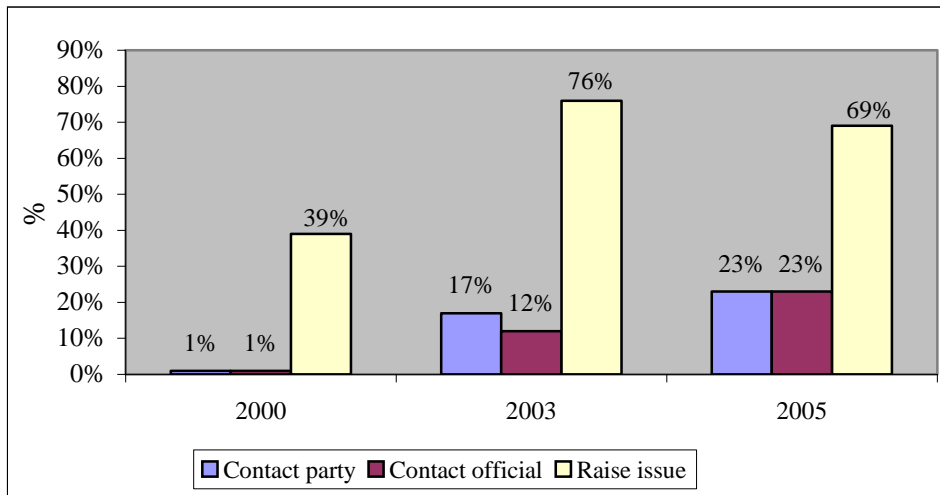
Table 3 lists row percentages for ease of presentation

It appears that men and people with more schooling are more likely to discuss political questions, as might be expected, but it also appears that being poor and living in a rural area also tend to encourage politics as a topic of conversation. There was a sharp increase in the proportion of people talking about politics with their friends from 40% in 2000 to 59% in 2003 but then a drop back to merely 20% in 2005. This may mean that politics were topical in the 2003 era but that in 2005 there was simply less to talk

⁴ When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never.

about. Certainly Basotho were confused in 2000, and then hopeful in 2003 following the successful election. Most likely, the decline after 2003 can suggest a loss of interest in politics during a quiet and uneventful period. One may think of this as the normalization of politics in Lesotho.

Figure 3. Political actions by year



Political involvement, of course, goes beyond talk to include action. Figure 3 shows the changing proportion of people involved in political action. In the troubled year of 2000 very few people contacted national government officials or political party leaders. Likewise less than 40% were willing to raise an issue publicly. The proportion raising a public issue went up after the 2002 elections, and then went down slightly in 2005.

As expected, the more schooling a person has received, the more likely he or she is to contact an official in government or party. As before, men are significantly more politically active than women. Even though poor persons and rural persons are more likely to discuss politics than their wealthier and urban counterparts, they are significantly less likely to contact officials. Not surprisingly, rural residents, along with older persons, are far more likely to contact traditional rulers than urban residents or young people.

Another major difference is that 67% of those with employment have raised political issues, as opposed to only 54% of those without work. Whereas Table 3 showed that poorer persons are likely to talk about politics among themselves, this fact suggests that they are less likely to put their concerns into action.

One striking result concerns voting in the most recent election. Compared to those who did not vote, almost twice as many people who voted in this election joined other people to raise an issue (59% versus 35%) Voting therefore would appear to be closely tied to political activism of other sorts, including between elections. This too can be considered a sign of political normalization, perhaps political maturity, to the extent that voting and lobbying are complementary aspects of citizenship. On the other hand, those who did not vote in the election were significantly less likely to have contacted officials in government or the political party. The next step is clearly to persuade more people that voting and interacting with political figures go together.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

There is a broad popular consensus that Lesotho is a freer and safer country now than in the past. Table 4 lists a number of ways in which citizens see Lesotho to have grown more open and more tolerant of diverse opinions between 2000 and 2005.

Table 4. Areas of increased freedom in Lesotho 2000 to 2005⁵

	2000		2003		2005	
	Better/much better	DK	Better/much better	DK	Better/much better	DK
Freedom to say what you think	56%	15%	68%	5%	71%	2%
Freedom to join any political organization you want	63%	15%	78%	4%	82%	2%
Freedom to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured	66%	14%	77%	4%	81%	3%
Safety from crime and violence	40%	15%	51%	6%	57%	3%

The trend in Table 4 is both clear and encouraging. The growth of democracy is linked to being free to speak out, to join any organization one wishes, to vote without hindrance, and to feel safe from crime. It is also important to note a steady decrease in the proportion of people who feel they can't answer the question. To a large extent the private radios have contributed significantly to open debates about politics, especially MoAfrika radio.

However, there is a negative side to the story as well. Table 5 lists areas in which problems remain despite the growth in democracy since 2000. The question is the same as in Table 4.

Table 5. Areas which remain problematic in Lesotho 2000 to 2005

	2000		2003		2005	
	Better/much better	DK	Better/much better	DK	Better/much better	DK
Freedom from being arrested when you are innocent	60%	15%	62%	9%	59%	6%
Equal and fair treatment of all groups by government	47%	18%	42%	9%	42%	5%

That the feeling of freedom from arbitrary arrest has remained roughly constant over the past five years is discouraging. Fewer people feel safe from arrest among those with post-secondary education, women, those in the 18-30 age group and those without employment. It is also true that those who did not vote in the most recent election feel less secure from arrest than those who voted. These same groups also are more likely to fear unequal treatment in society than those with less education, women, older people, employed persons and those who voted in the election. That women, young people and unemployed people are afraid is clear, but that people with some tertiary education are also afraid may reflect the risk

⁵ Are these items worse or better now than a few years ago? Much worse, worse, same, better, much better

of competing at the upper levels of power.

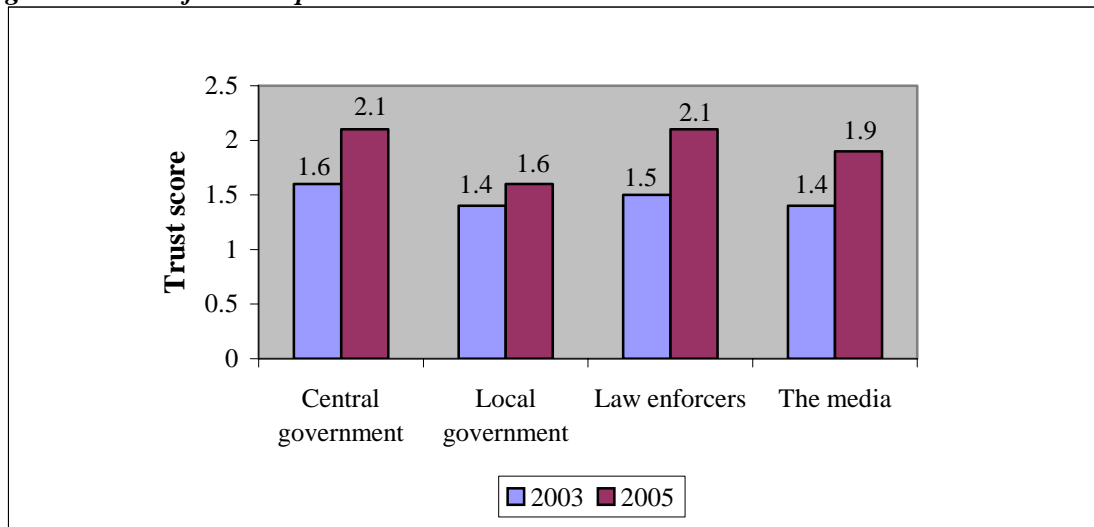
An important measure of confidence and fear is trust in government. There is a marked increase in trust in major institutions over the years since 2000, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Trust in Government Institutions 2000 to 2005⁶

	2000		2003		2005	
	Trust	DK	Trust	DK	Trust	DK
Prime Minister	41%	15%	58%	9%	79%	2%
Parliament	30%	22%	49%	10%	62%	4%
Military	39%	15%	50%	5%	66%	2%
Police	41%	9%	51%	3%	66%	2%
Law Courts	40%	18%	58%	5%	74%	4%

The strong increase in trust in government is clear from the table. The Prime Minister has the highest trust rating, followed by the law courts, the police and the military, with the Parliament in last position. This difference may help to explain the tendency for people to leave legislation in the hands of the Prime Minister rather than the Parliament.

Figure 4. Level of trust in political institutions



Four factors can be composed from the data, each on a scale from 0 to 3, where 3 represents a high level of trust, as shown in Figure 4. Central government includes the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament, Independent Electoral Commission, the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy, and the government broadcasting service. Local government includes village and district development councils. Law enforcers include the police, the army, the law courts and the traditional chiefs. The media include

⁶ How much do you trust each of the following? Not at all, just a little, somewhat, a lot

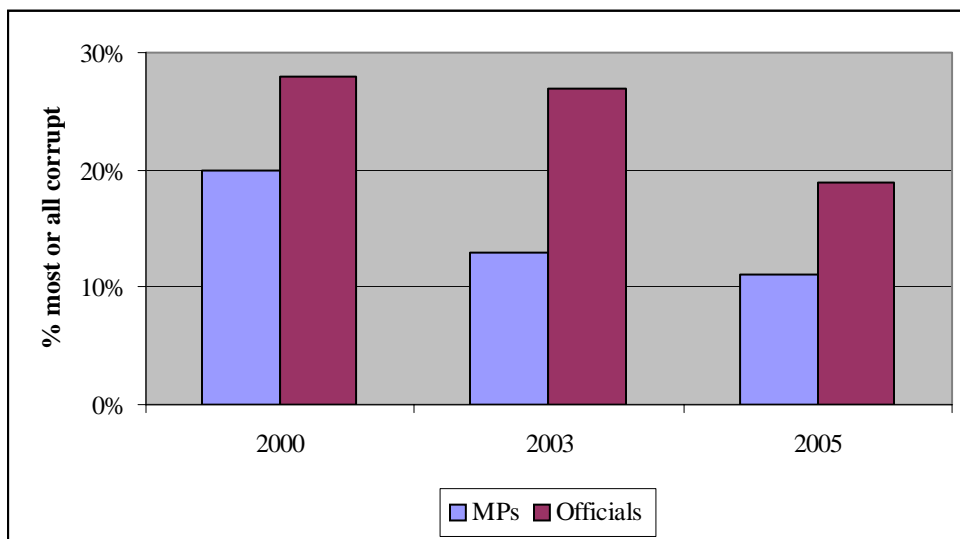
independent broadcasters, government newspapers and independent newspapers. Assessment of some branches was not included in the 2000 survey, and so the overall trust score can only be calculated for the 2003 and 2005 surveys. The results show a strong overall increase in all four areas of trust between the two surveys. The only group to have a relatively low level of trust in both surveys is local government, which, not surprisingly, has a high level of trust in rural areas than in the towns. Local government was not operational by the time of the study

Figure 5. Trust in government by education and wealth



Important differences exist by education and wealth, but in opposite directions. Those in the wealthiest group have a higher mean trust in government than the poorest, while those with the most education have sharply less trust in government than those who have not been to school. This difference may arise from the strong level of distrust of educated people who cannot find work. Figure 5 shows that the combination of poverty and at least secondary school education leads to the lowest level of trust.

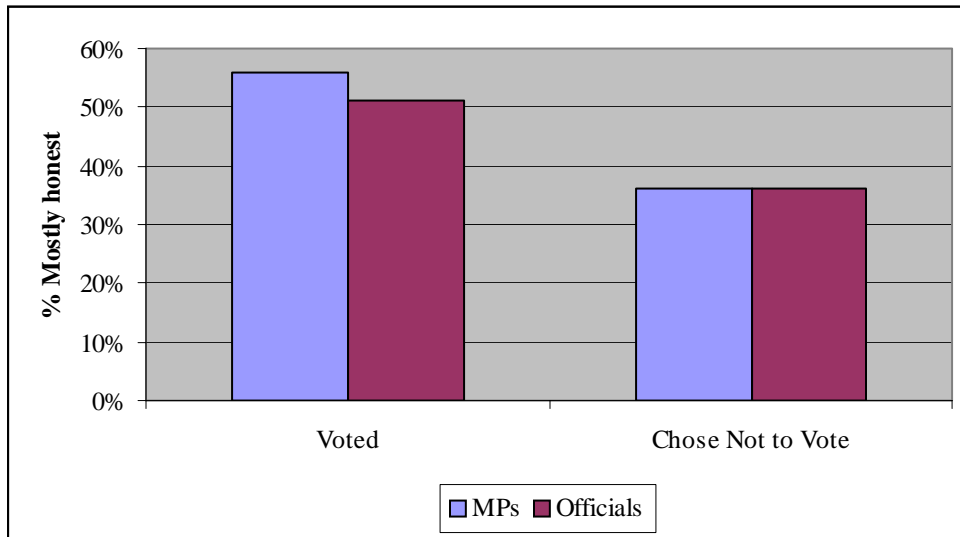
Figure 6. Perceived corruption in government



Trust is closely related to belief that the institution is free of corruption. There has been a significant decrease in perceived corruption, paralleling closely the previous findings. As shown in Figure 6⁷, 20% of those who were interviewed believed that most or all MPs were corrupt in 2000, dropping to 11% in 2005. Similarly, perceived corruption in national government officials dropped from 28% in 2000 to 19% in 2005, a significant improvement during this time of stability and increased confidence in government.

The only significant difference within groups is shown in Figure 7. Of the 4% of those surveyed who chose not to vote in the most recent election, only 36% believed most or all government officials and MPs were honest, while, of the 46% who voted, the corresponding figures are 56% believed MPs are honest and 51% believed most or all officials were honest. It is not surprising that there is a significant connection between choosing to vote and belief that the government officials are honest enough to deserve election. The 50% who did not vote for some other reason are not included, because their reasons for not voting included such factors as being unable to find the polling station, being prevented for some reason and not having the time to vote.

Figure 7. Whether to vote based on perceived honesty of officials



CONCLUSION

Overall Lesotho's government, led by a strong majority of seats held by the Lesotho Congress for Democracy, comes out of the first half-decade of the twenty-first century looking strong and politically stable. Politics has become a more normal, perhaps even routine, matter after the hectic and confusing period of reconstruction at the turn of the century. People have settled into what may be a comfortable relation between themselves and their leaders. Issues are raised, officials are contacted, but protests have declined. Democracy is seen to be a good thing, worthy of support, and alternatives such as military rule and one-party government, are no longer given much consideration. Personal freedoms have increased, even though there may still be a lingering fear of arbitrary arrest. There is a high and increasing level of trust in government and other public institutions, and concern about corruption, while still present, is decreasing.

⁷ How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Some of them, most of them, all of them, don't know

This report was prepared by John Gay of Sechaba Consultants

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