



**Contesting  
and turning over power:  
Implications for consolidation  
of democracy in Lesotho**

By Libuseng Malephane



## Introduction

Since its transition to electoral democracy in 1993, Lesotho has experienced a series of upheavals related to the electoral process. Election results were vehemently contested in 1998, when the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) won all but one of the country's constituencies under a first-past-the-post electoral system, and a military intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was required to restore order.

A mixed member proportional (MMP) model introduced in the run-up to the 2002 general elections resulted in more parties being represented in Parliament. The MMP model also led to the formation of informal coalitions as political parties endeavoured to maintain or increase their seats in Parliament in the 2007 elections (Kapa, 2007). Using a two-ballot system, with one ballot for constituency and another for the proportional-representation (PR) component, the elections preserved the ruling LCD's large majority in Parliament and precipitated another protracted dispute between the ruling and opposition parties over the allocation of PR seats.

Mediation efforts by the SADC and the Christian Council of Lesotho led to a review of the Constitution and Electoral Law. The resulting National Assembly Electoral Act of 2011 provides for a single-ballot system that allows voters to indicate their preferences for both constituency and PR components of the MMP system (UNDP, 2013).

Meanwhile, the new All Basotho Convention (ABC), which had broken away from the LCD in 2006, became the largest opposition party in Parliament after the 2007 elections. Factionalism in the LCD again came to the fore in 2011, culminating in Prime Minister Mosisili's breakaway to form the new Democratic Congress (DC) to contest the May 2012 elections. While the DC won the largest number of votes and seats, it fell short of a majority, and the other three major parties in Parliament – the ABC, the LCD, and the Basotho National Party (BNP) – formed the first coalition government in Lesotho, bringing to an end the LCD's long-running hold on government.

This paper examines what effect, if any, this electoral history has had on Basotho views and perceptions of democracy. Using data from five Afrobarometer surveys going back to 2000, it asks whether the country's regular contestation and recent turnover of power have changed citizens' commitment to democracy.

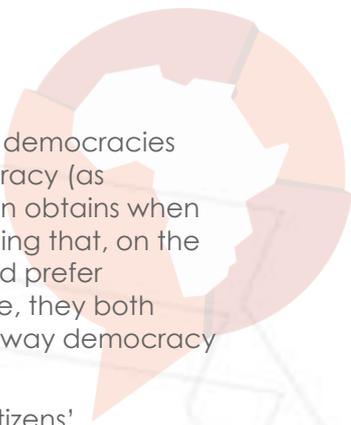
## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200-2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult Basotho in each of five surveys – 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2012. Samples of this size yield results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

## Theoretical framework

A democracy is considered consolidated when there are no significant actors attempting to achieve their objectives through non-democratic alternatives, a majority of the citizens believe that democracy is the only viable alternative, and democratic institutions and procedures are universally accepted (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Regular free and contested elections are a necessary condition for the consolidation of democracy.



Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) go further and argue that democracies are consolidated only when the demand and supply sides of democracy (as perceived by citizens) are present at equally high levels. This condition obtains when more than two-thirds of citizens are committed to democracy, meaning that, on the demand side, they both reject authoritarian forms of government and prefer democracy to any other form of government whilst on the supply side, they both consider that their country is a democracy and are satisfied with the way democracy works.

Prospects for a consolidation of democracy can be influenced by citizens' experiences of past regimes, i.e. through positive or negative learning by national populations (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). Positive learning occurs when people experience functioning democratic institutions.

Another aspect of democratisation in Africa is the role of power alternations, which can bring winners and losers closer in their perceptions and attitudes about democracy. According to Cho and Logan (2009, p. 2), the experience of regime change "widens the pool of those who feel that they have a strong stake in the system, since the opposition parties in the short term may nonetheless have hopes of becoming the ruling party in the future. Secondly, it reminds power holders that they may actually be held accountable by voters for their actions and decisions, and could face real challenges to their hold on power if they do not satisfy public demands and expectations." When the incumbent knows that being voted out of power is a real possibility, it is more likely to act in a transparent and accountable manner; this is not necessarily the case where one party or one person is almost guaranteed to stay in office indefinitely because citizens do not believe they have a viable alternative (as in the case of weak opposition parties or a dictatorship).

In studies using Afrobarometer national survey data, Cho and Logan (2009) and Moehler and Lindberg (2007) have shown that electoral turnovers on their own have a moderating effect on the citizenry by reducing gaps between winners and losers in perceptions of institutional legitimacy and of the durability of democracy, which in turn have favourable effects on a country's prospects for the consolidation of democracy.

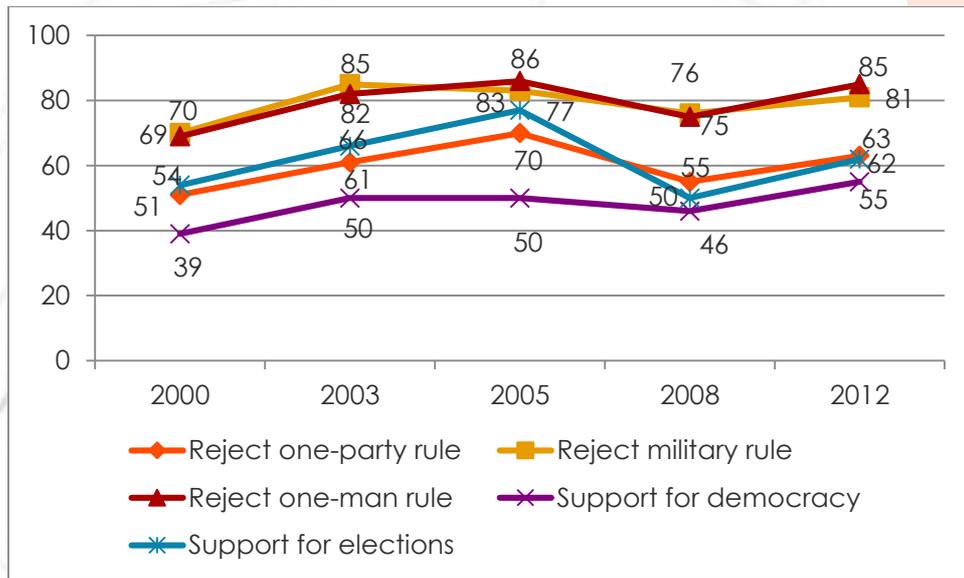
The present analysis compares trends in perceived demand for democracy, perceived supply of democracy, and trust in governance institutions between 2000 and 2012.

### **Demand for democracy**

Popular demand for democracy is measured through responses to three questions about rejection of authoritarian (one-party, military, and strongman) rule and two questions about support for democracy and elections.

From 2000 (after the 1998 elections) to 2012 (after the 2012 elections), all indicators of the rejection of authoritarian forms of government and support for democracy moved upward by between 8 and 16 percentage points (Figure 1). All indicators dipped in the 2008 survey (after the disputed 2007 elections), with particularly low levels of support for democracy (46%) and elections (50%), then moved upward again in the 2012 survey. It is noteworthy that over all five surveys, the rejection of one-party rule and support for democracy registered relatively low scores compared with rejection of military rule and rejection of one-man rule. Nonetheless, the upward trend over time is clear. Following the 2012 elections and turnover of party control of government, Basotho registered the highest level of demand for democracy ever measured on three of the five indicators.

**Figure 1: Rejection of authoritarian forms of government and support for democracy | 2000-2012**



**Respondents were asked:** *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?*

1. Only one party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
2. The military comes in to govern the country.
3. Elections and Parliament are abolished and the prime minister can decide everything.

(% saying "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")

*Which of these three statements is closest to your opinion?*

Statement 1: *Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.*

Statement 2: *In some circumstances, non-democratic government can be preferable.*

Statement 3: *For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.*

(% saying "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

*Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*

Statement 1: *We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.*

Statement 2: *Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other means for choosing this country's leaders.*

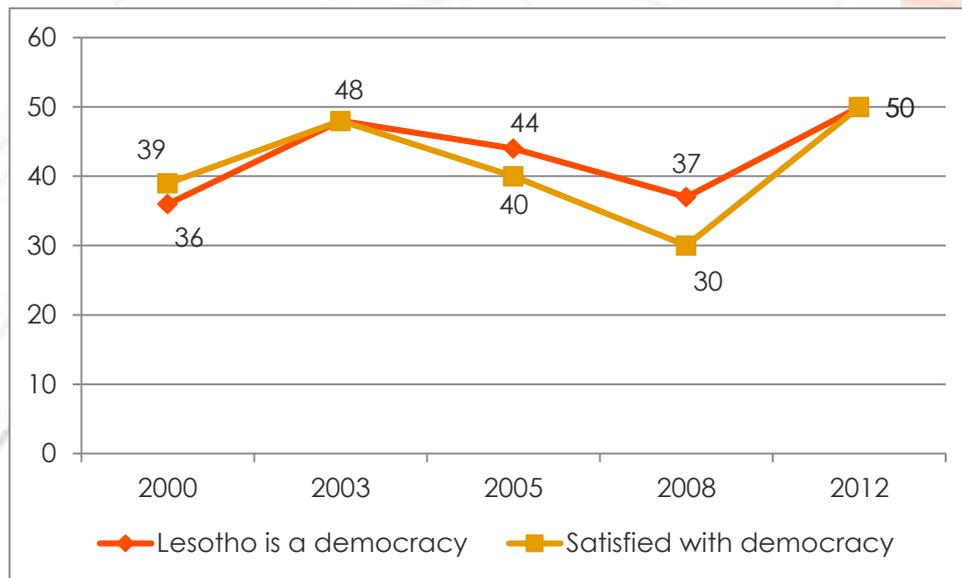
(% saying "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

## Supply of democracy

The perceived supply of democracy is measured through responses to two questions about the perceived extent of democracy and satisfaction with democracy in Lesotho.

As with demand for democracy, the perceived supply of democracy increased substantially from 2000 to 2012, with a similar dip in 2008 (after the disputed 2007 elections). The proportion of citizens who said Lesotho is "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems" rose from 36% in 2000 to 50% in 2012. Those who were "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way democracy works increased from 39% in 2000 to 50% in 2012. The highest responses registered following the 2012 elections.

Figure 2: Perceptions of the supply of democracy | 2000-2012



**Respondents were asked:**

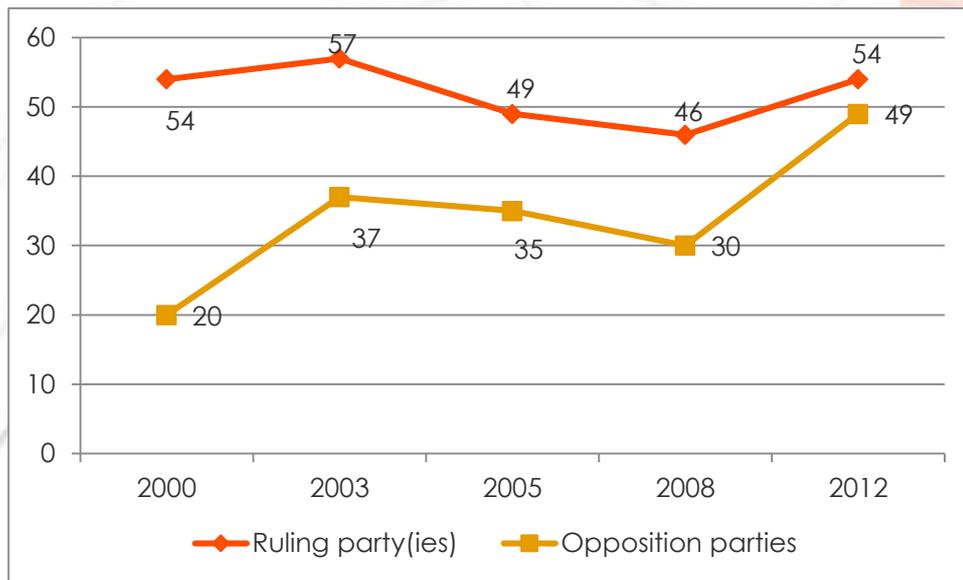
*In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Lesotho today?  
(% who said "a democracy with minor problems" or "a full democracy")*  
*Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho?  
(% who said "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")*

**Change in winner/loser perceptions of democracy supply**

In addition to increased perceptions of the supply of democracy, the 2012 survey results show a marked narrowing of the gap between perceptions of respondents who are close to the winning side and those of respondents who are close to the losing side in the previous election.

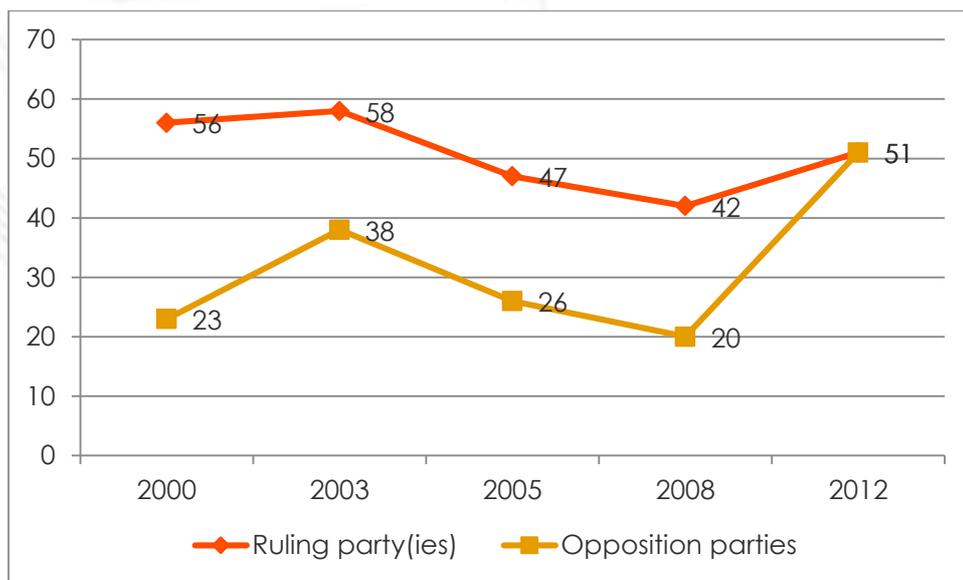
As can be seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the perception gap between winners and losers is greatly reduced for both measures of perceived supply of democracy. The gap is largest in 2000, after the disputed 1998 elections; it is smallest in 2012, after the regime-changing 2012 elections. For the extent-of-democracy question, the gap is reduced from 34 percentage points in 2000 to 5 points in 2012; on the satisfaction-with-democracy question, the gap shrinks from 34 points to 0 (Figure 5).

**Figure 3: Perceptions of extent of democracy by party affiliation | 2000-2012**



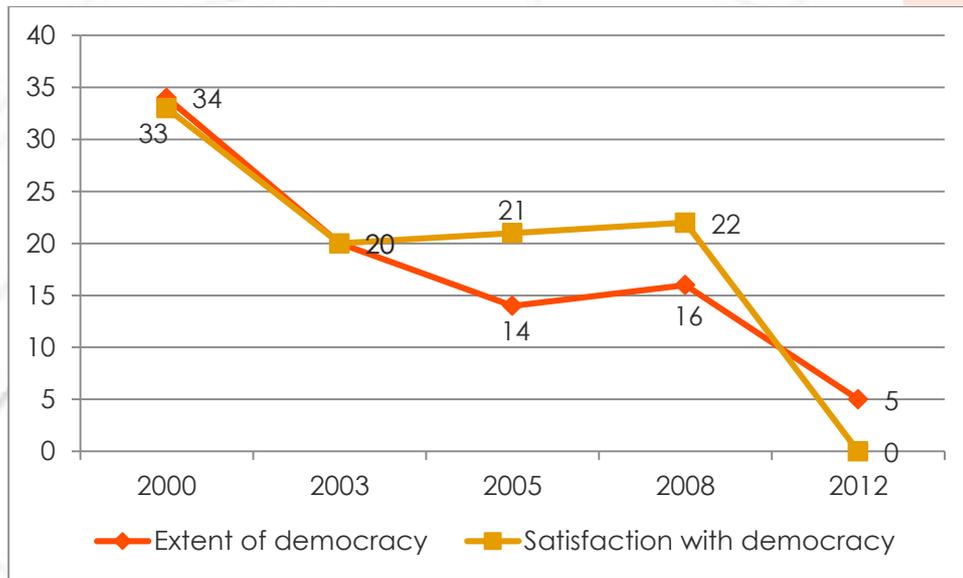
**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Lesotho today? (% who said "a democracy with minor problems" or "a full democracy")*

**Figure 4: Satisfaction with democracy by party affiliation | 2000-2012**



**Respondents were asked:** *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho? (% who said "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")*

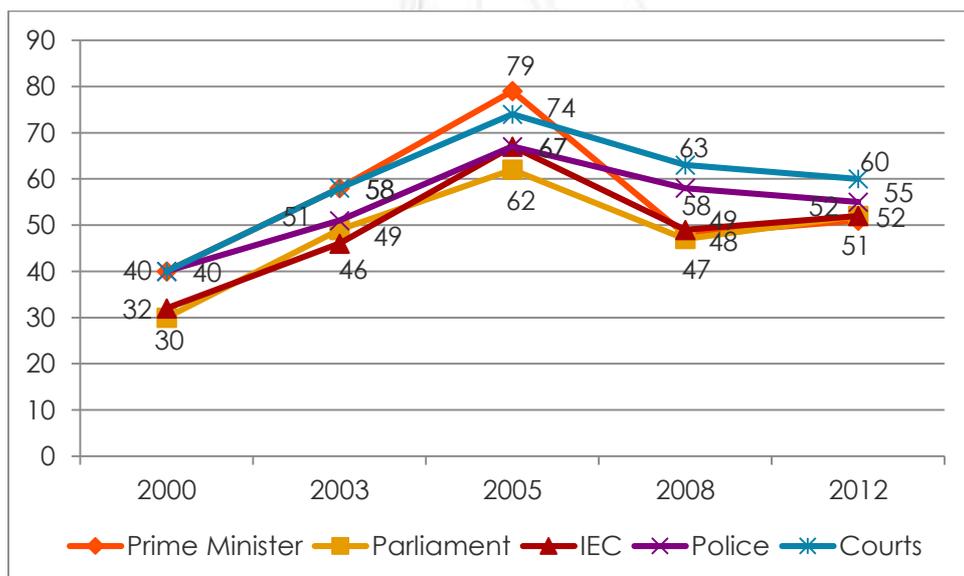
**Figure 5: Summary of perception gap on supply of democracy between ruling and opposition parties | 2000-2012**



### Trust in governance institutions

Institutional trust is measured through responses to questions on trust in five governance institutions: the prime minister, Parliament, Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), police, and courts. As with demand for democracy and perceived supply of democracy, measures of public trust in these institutions increased remarkably from 2000 to 2012, though peaking in 2005 and dipping after the 2007 elections before climbing again in 2012 (Figure 6). In 2000, the proportion of survey respondents who said they trusted these institutions "somewhat" or "a lot" was between 30% and 40%; in 2012, it had increased to 51% to 60%.

**Figure 6: Public trust in governance institutions | 2000-2012**

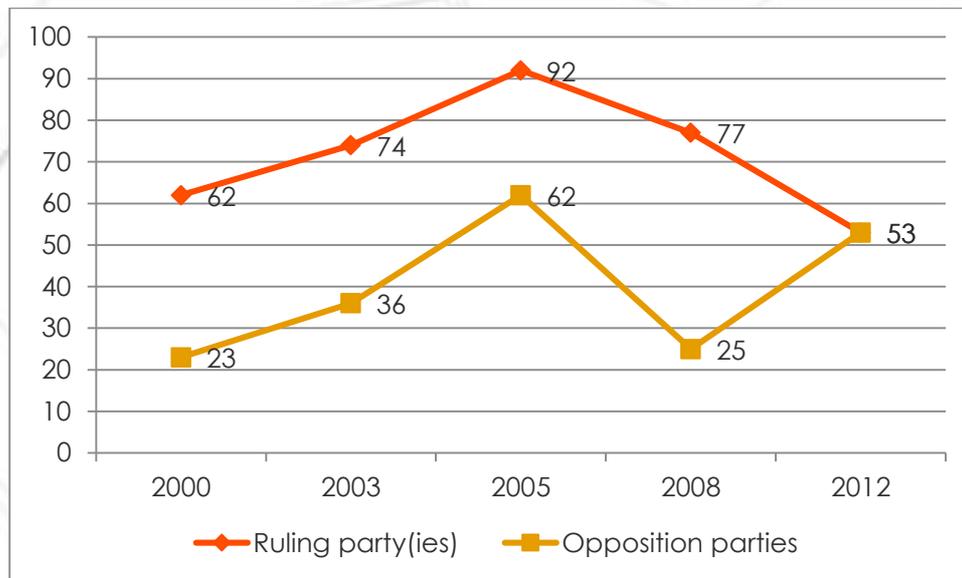


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who said "somewhat" or "a lot")

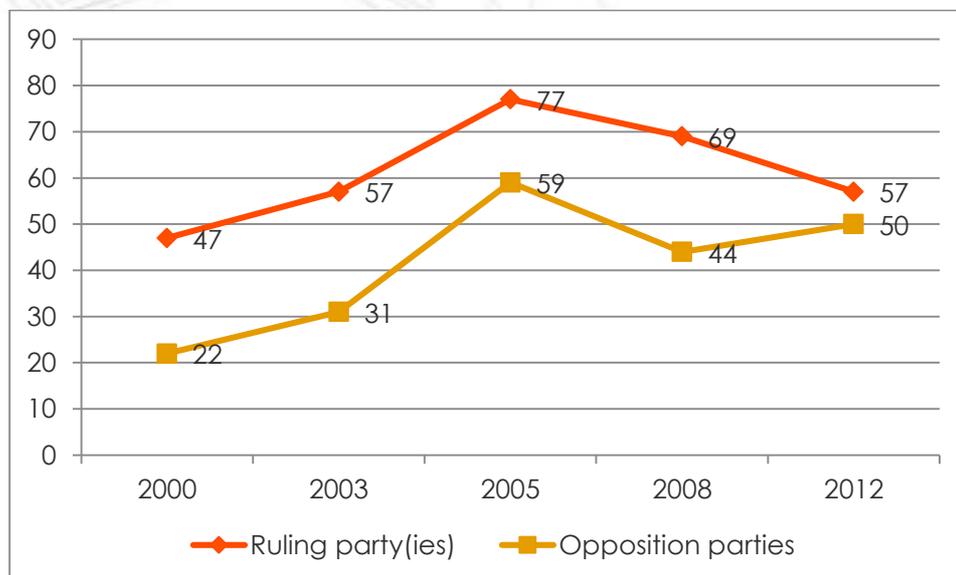
### Change in winner/loser gap in trust in institutions

Differences in trust levels between supporters of the winning (ruling) side and supporters of the losing (opposition) side are dramatically smaller in the 2012 survey (after the regime-changing 2012 elections) than in earlier surveys for all institutions except the courts. The gap reduction from 2000 to 2012 is greatest for the prime minister (from 39 percentage points to 0) (Figure 7), the IEC (from 25 points to 7) (Figure 8), and Parliament (from 18 points to 5) (Figure 9).

**Figure 7: Trust in prime minister by party affiliation | 2000-2012**



**Figure 8: Trust in IEC by party affiliation | 2000-2012**



**Figure 9: Trust in Parliament by party affiliation | 2000-2012**

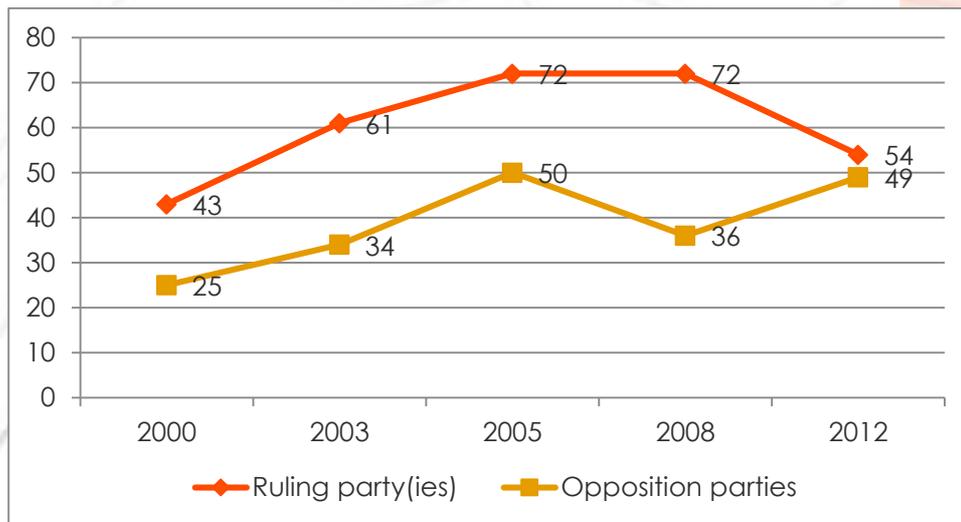
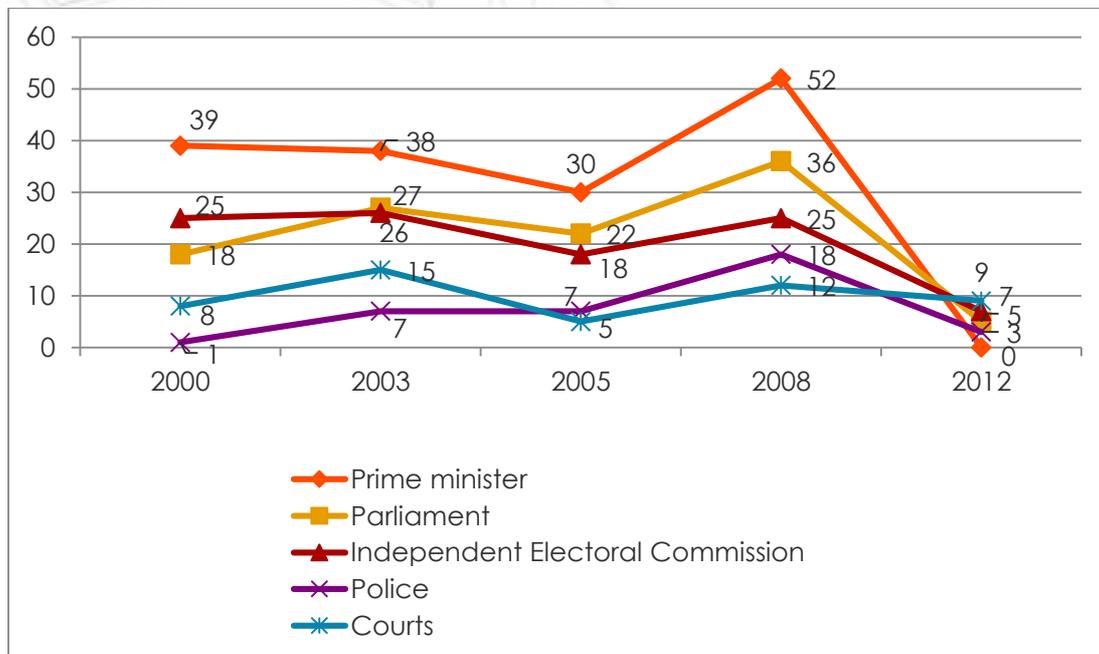


Figure 10 illustrates the reduction in the gap in trust between the winning and losing parties for all institutions except the courts. The largest gap occurred in the 2008 survey, just after the 2007 elections and the dispute over the allocation of parliamentary seats. The persistent gap in trust in the courts may be related to a perception of politicisation of the judiciary after well-publicised disputes over the leadership of the Appeal Court and the High Court that led to the retirement of the chief justice and the dismissal of the president of the Appeal Court (see a recent Freedom House Southern Africa report on “Politics of Judicial Independence in Lesotho”).

**Figure 10: Summary of gap in institutional trust between ruling and opposition parties | 2000-2012**



## Conclusion

Between 2000 and 2012, citizen demand for democracy and perceived supply of democracy have increased in Lesotho. This increase is paralleled by increased levels of trust in important governance institutions. Despite these steps toward the consolidation of democracy, demand for democracy is still relatively low, with a sizeable proportion of the population still not rejecting a one-party state or still saying that in some instances, non-democratic forms of government may be preferable.

Higher levels of trust in institutions, demand for democracy, and perceived supply of democracy seem to follow elections with greater credibility and less turmoil over results, whereas highly disputed elections (as in 2007) appear to lower trust, demand, and perceived supply. Dramatically reduced perception gaps between the winning and losing sides in elections appear to confirm a moderating effect of a turnover of power, with consistently large gaps dropping to below 10 percentage points after the regime-changing 2012 elections.

This could mean that the turnover of power after 15 years of rule by one party has had the beneficial effects, as described by Cho and Logan (2009), of showing Basotho that they can vote politicians out of office if they don't satisfy public expectations and giving party supporters hope that even if they lose one election, there is a real chance that they can be the winners next time. This could contribute to a more transparent and accountable government and thus move Lesotho further toward democratic consolidation.

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# AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

**Libuseng Malephane** is project manager for Advision Lesotho, the Afrobarometer national partner in Lesotho.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

Contact: [advision@ecoweb.co.ls](mailto:advision@ecoweb.co.ls)

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