
THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT CHANGEOVER ON PUBLIC POLICY MAKING: LESOTHO'S E-GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE

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Abstract; In Lesotho in recent years, government changeover has become a topic of interest among the electorate, journalists, foreign missions, civil organizations and beyond. Similarly, election commentators, political analysts and researchers have discussed 'who climbs to power' and 'how do they ascend to' or 'descend from power'. Significantly less efforts have been focused on the effects of a new administration. This paper attempts to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the relationship between a change of government and the priorities in policy. This is achieved by examining the implications for change of the executive power on the policy making in Lesotho. Using the e-government experience of Lesotho based on the changeovers of 2012, 2015 and 2017, it was found that executive turnover has a direct, yet antagonistic effect on policies. The results show that a new administration often goes slowly with or discontinues the predecessor's policies, programs and projects. This widens the policy-implementation gap as service delivery is interrupted, leading to a lapse in solving societal problems. It also creates uncertainty, not necessarily about who comes to power, but what policy direction they will pursue.

Keywords: change of government, policy-making, e-government, turnover

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INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Lesotho, officially known as Lesotho, is a sovereign constitutional monarchy within a parliamentary system. The 1993 Constitution of Lesotho (the Constitution) provides a legal framework for the government structure based on the Westminster system. In Section 44 (1) of the Constitution, the King is a constitutional monarch and the Head of State. The Prime Minister (PM) is the head of government and derives his democratic legitimacy and executive powers from the parliament to which he is accountable. The frequency of

succession to the throne of the King is not as rapid as the turnover rate to the PM office. The changeover to the office of the King is based on the primogeniture principle ('Nyane, 2019), which is customarily followed after the death of the sitting monarch, and the authenticity of the legitimate holder of the office is rarely contested (Chikerema & Nzewi, 2021). The PM, who happens to be the leader of the political party or coalition of political parties holding the majority of seats in the National Assembly, is appointed by the King on the advice of the Council of the State (Government of Lesotho, 1993). Ordinarily, the term of the National Assembly is five years.

The Parliament of Lesotho, a legislative organ of government, is bicameral, consisting of the Lower House (National Assembly) and the Upper House (Senate). The Senate of Lesotho comprises 33 members, 22 of whom are the principal chiefs and their membership is hereditary. The other 11 members are the appointees of the King as stated in Section 55 of the Constitution. The National Assembly of Lesotho is composed of 120 members who are elected to the parliament using the mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral model, with 80 members elected by the first-past-the-post (FPP) system and the remaining 40 chosen under the compensatory proportional representation (PR) system (LCN, 2022).

The Executive Authority of Lesotho (the executive), which is the focus of this study, comprises cabinet members including the PM, deputy prime minister (DPM), ministers and deputy ministers. The King appoints all executive members except for the PM by the advice of the PM from among the members of the National Assembly and from those 11 senators nominated to the Senate by the King under Section 55 of the Constitution. Although governmental power is shared among the three organs of the State, namely, the legislature, the judiciary and the executive, the latter, which is the only organ typically referred to as the government, tends to be the most dominant organ (Matlosa & Shale, 2008) and the succession in this branch is the most dramatic of all (Helms, 2020). Furthermore, despite the principle of separation of powers between the three branches, members of the executive branch are not only drawn from the parliament but also remain members of parliament (MPs), hence they play the central role in not only managing policy implementation but also in policy formulation.

While the executive's tenure is typically aligned to that of the parliament, which is ordinarily five years as previously stated, the past years have certainly seen an upsurge in the executive changeover. For example, in a period of five years (2012-2017), Lesotho witnessed the swearing in of three different governments following successful elections ('Nyane & Kapa, 2021). These extraordinary changes that hypothetically contributed to the depth of the policy standstill and governance decay in the country motivated this study. The very concept of the executive is used interchangeably here with the concepts of government and public administration, to denote an institution that holds the executive power to manage policies (Nag, 2018) and "public leadership of public affairs directly responsible for executive action" (Appleby, 1947, p. 93) respectively. Similarly, a change of government is operationally

defined and used interchangeably with government turnover/changeover and change in public administration to denote the change of the PM and his cabinet as a direct result of either the national general elections or the national assembly's lack of confidence in the ruling party or coalition of governing parties. The purpose of this paper is to ask: to what extent does a change of government impact public policy making?

Literature is replete with studies investigating the impact of change in public administration focusing on different perspectives. For example, Milanovic et al. (2010) looked at whether a change in government encourages the establishment of the rule of law. Boyne et al. (2008) examined whether or not government changeover makes any difference to the performance of the public sector. Rooney & DiLorenzo (2021) assessed how political changeover influences investment behavior. In recent years, several international studies examined the impact of government turnover on public policy. For example, Alaysa & Musa (2020) examined the Palestinian government changeover and its effect on the sustainability of government policies. Noyes (2020) assessed economic and political reforms in Zimbabwe after Mugabe. Some other studies have shown that a government change influences public policy. For instance, Horowitz et al. (2008) found that a change in public administration is a basic source for change in government policies. Bunce (1980) argued that discontinuity in ruling governments implies discontinuity in policies. Andina-Díaz (2018), however, noted that a change of government is an effective way of ensuring that the predecessor's policies remain. The supporting argument for this finding is that a regular government replacement does not give the new incumbent enough time to propose, adopt and execute major policy changes. Akhtari et al. (2020) concluded that a change in public administration could negatively affect policy implementation, but only when the bureaucracy is not safeguarded against the political processes.

While most existing studies have examined the impact of a change of government on public policy in developed countries, empirical studies exploring this in developing countries are rare. This study aims to contribute knowledge to the existing literature by examining this issue from the experience of Lesotho, a developing country in sub-Saharan Africa. Recently, change in public administration has become a topic of interest among the electorate, journalists, foreign missions, civil organizations and beyond in Lesotho. Literature is replete with substantive discussions about 'who climbs to power' and 'how do they ascend to' or 'descend from power' (see, for example, Mohlamenyane, 2018; Moseme, 2017; Ndebele, 2022; Ngatane, 2020). Significantly less efforts have been focused on the effects of a new administration. This paper attempts to make an input by extending beyond the questions of who won the elections or which party or coalitions of parties form a government. This paper's central concern is the relationship between a change in public administration and policy priorities. Thus, this paper aims to examine the impact of change of the executive power on public policy making, using Lesotho's electronic government (e-government) as an illustration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Policy Making: A Conceptual Framework

Public policy is perceived as the government's decisions and actions to intervene in societal problems to improve its citizens' future conditions and quality of life (Cloete, 2018). Cochran et al. (2015) state that such actions and decisions must be embodied in official regulations and laws, public statements “or widely accepted and publicly visible patterns of behavior” (p. 1). Akwei et al. (2020) and Khan (2016) conceptualise public policy as a framework of governmental resolutions translated into various activities, programs, and projects. Hill & Varone (2021) believe that if policy makers would respond to societal problems and changing circumstances with appropriate policies, the desired societal changes would be achieved.

While public policy making has been accepted as complex and multidimensional (Mueller, 2020; Selase & Gaewu, 2015), its complex nature has generally been attributed to the public policy making process, which is political and involves power and numerous actors. Hill & Varone (2021) state that public policy-making involves publicly employed professionals, political party leaders, civil servants, academic experts, judges, international organizations, pressure groups, journalists, non-governmental organizations, elected politicians and the public. Cairney (2019) points out that policy-making politics is about several players with different agendas and preferences, using power to influence and acquire what they want. Swilling (1992) emphasizes that policy is about power, and its making is like organising political and social life. This suggests that any deliberation of the policy process requires a thorough understanding of the nature of power in the State. This is particularly true because while actors in favor of the policy choice advocate for its adoption, it is likely that they may have neither the authority nor coalition support to legislate the policy decisions nor the resources to implement policy programs and projects implied by the policy decisions (Crosby, 1996). In this line of thought, it is strongly believed that powerful people determine the policy direction.

Although the diverse nature of actors involved in making public policies is widely acknowledged, the evidence of the significant role played by government authorities is unmatched. For instance, Peters & Pierre (2006) state that national political institutions and structures offer much in developing public policies. According to the institutional model of public policy analysis, public policy is the outcome of the interactions and deliberations of the formal structures and institutions of government with other societal stakeholders. (Cloete & de Coning, 2018). In line with this view, Hogwood & Gunn (1984) argue that for a policy to be ‘public policy’ it is compelling that for the most part it must have been designed or at least be processed within the realms of governmental agencies, influences and procedures. Cairney (2019) contends that public policy is ‘the total of government action, from signals of intent to the final output’ (p. 10). Hence, public policy is overemphasized as

an interplay of commitments, decisions and actions undertaken by those who occupy government positions of power and authority (Gerston, 2014).

Similarly, one group of government actors whose role has been considered most pivotal is the elected politicians. Speaking based on democratic states, Cloete (2018) points out that this group not only represents the masses in the legislature, but is also entrusted and mandated to advance their views and needs through policies. Althaus et al. (2020) contrast that although other officials in the public sector such as public servants may offer support and analyse the choices made by elected politicians, the decisions are made by the very same politicians. To this end, it is understood that a major policy change is highly possible only to the extent that a particular issue or problem has caught the attention of the elected politicians.

In the same breath, the issue of politics in shaping the elected officials' choices has also been firmly stressed in the literature. Peters & Pierre (2006) point to conflicting ideologies. They argue that governments from different ideological backgrounds tend to have disagreements not only about the nature and cause of the problems facing society but also about choices relating to the government priorities, the ideal solutions to societal problems and how the government should mobilise and allocate resources. Keating (2010) points to a type of government. He argues that while elected politicians under a single-party government usually have control over the policy process and have clear and uncontested policy choices, the opposite is true about parties in a coalition government that need to negotiate support for their choices.

Nonetheless, the dominant role played by the executive branch of the government in the public policy making process cannot be overemphasized. Cloete (2018) states that the executive branch has a great deal of unlimited power to control the State resources and can decide who should do what, how, when and with what resources. All this illustrates the complex nature of the policy environment. It suggests that the public policy making process cannot be understood in isolation from economic, cultural, social, administrative and political factors.

Several models have been used to simplify, describe and analyse public policy making. Yu (2022) states that it is believed that policies formulated in democratic nations are commonly analysed by applying the policy process or stages model, as the policy making process occurs in a step-by-step fashion and most importantly is then made public for their participation and scrutiny. Because policy environments vary, policy stages vary from country to country and change over time while the fundamental essence remains the same. Nonetheless, Cairney (2013) has observed that a widely applied framework of policy stages identifies the policy process as a cyclical system of "agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimation, implementation, evaluation, and policy maintenance, succession or termination" (p. 1). The key argument of policy stages models is that they see the policy making process as cyclical

and ongoing rather than a once-off event. Cloete & de Coning (2018) assert that a policy cycle model embodies a series of systematic, linear and orderly steps that must be accomplished by whomever the decision maker is to establish a logical and effective policy.

However, the process model has been criticized for emphasizing cycles or stages. Keating (2010) argues that while the breakdown of this model into stages might be of great importance in helping to understand the fundamental aspects of policy making, such an arrangement “is not necessarily helpful in the world where policy makers do not control the cycle” (p. 7). He contends that in the Westminster system, the cycle is influenced and controlled by elections and parliamentary tenures of five or four years, within which the incumbent administration executes their mandate and promises made during the election campaign. It sounds highly improbable that this will tally with the policy life cycle, which stretches beyond five years of government term, as policies require time to develop, execute, and make an impact. Instead, Thomas & Grindle (1990) propose an alternative model that focuses on the conflicts and reactions evoked in society by a policy reform and the bureaucratic resources and political support needed to sustain a policy or determine its future. Rap & Wester (2013) assert that policy making is interactive and continuing but needs strong network support to overcome opposing forces. This means policy making cannot be understood separately from the political context in which the process of making policies takes place within a specified time.

Government Changeover, 2012–2017: Contextual Background

While the purpose of this paper cannot be overemphasized, it is difficult, if not impossible, to talk about Lesotho’s current policy making context without referring to an increasing change of government, especially in the context of coalition politics. To date, political party coalitions have been the linchpin in Lesotho (Ndebele, 2022). The country has struggled to improve economic, social, and political stability for the masses under different coalition governments (Mashinini, 2020). ‘Nyane & Kapa (2021) describe the era of party coalitions in Lesotho as the watershed in the country’s political arena, not only dismantling the ideological traditions of political parties and agitating inter- and intra-party clashes but also parachuting changeovers in government institutions, including the parliament, the judiciary and the executive, causing political instability and economic uncertainty.

Letsie (2021) describes party coalitions as temporary arrangements that usually occur when two or more political parties rally and form a government, particularly when the election outcome has produced a hung parliament. Mwangi (2021) shows that coalition formations are based on two key theories: office-seeking and policy-seeking. On the one hand, Kadima (2006) contends that office-seeking theories are “based on the assumption that the main goal of the political parties is to access power” (p. 5), and have a fair share of cabinet portfolios and maximum control of the executive. On the other hand, Mwangi (2021) states that “policy-seeking theories of coalition formation argue that policy preferences are the most important

determination of coalition formation. The theories emphasize that parties that form a coalition are ideologically compatible along a policy dimension” (p. 17). Concerning Lesotho, there is a strong consensus that coalitions are not based on policy, ideology or nation building (Kapa & Shale, 2014; Letsie, 2013; Mako, 2014; Pherudi, 2021; Shale, 2021). Mashinini (2020) contends that coalitions have rather been conceived of as a political ‘business transaction’ that is made by and for the benefit of MPs of the coalescing partners and the few party elites, while the consequences are inflicted upon the populace that is already in dire social and economic conditions. Despite that, coalitions in Lesotho are instituted in line with the country’s Constitution, Section 87(2) (Mosito, 2021).

Since the return of democratic elections in 1993 following years of autocratic and military regime (Sejanamane, 2016) until 2012, Lesotho has experienced a one-party dominated government (Matlosa, 2021). During this period (1993–2012), “Elections were just five-year constitutional rituals to confirm the *status quo*” (Nyane, 2022, p. 1). But 2012 has not only ended a single-party era but also the dominance of Pakalitha Mosisili’s ‘one-man show’ which endured for about fourteen years between 1998 and 2012 (Letsie, 2015). Since then, every election has brought a change of political leadership. This trend has continued since the recent elections of October 7, 2022 (‘Nyane, 2012). However, while the breakthrough of coalition politics was an after-effect of the 2012 elections, ‘Nyane & Kapa (2021) argue that there were already signs of an end to a dominant single-party system since the advent of the MMP model in the 2002 elections, which ultimately ushered ten political parties into the National Assembly.

Returning to the context of this paper, the first government turnover, now understood as a coalition government, emerged in 2012. This government which lasted from 2012–2014 occurred as a direct result of a hung parliament due to the absence of an absolute majority winner following the general elections of May 2012 (Moseme, 2017). Shale & Makau (2021) state that this tripartite coalition government was comprised of the Basotho National Party (BNP), the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), and the All Basotho Conversion (ABC). It was led by ABC’s leader, Thomas Thabane and deputized by the LCD’s leader, Mothejoa Metsing. Letsie (2013) contends that the formation of this coalition was influenced by the drive to oust Mosisili, and it received overwhelming support from the populace who wanted a change from his long reign. Sejanamane (2016) argues that this euphoria was not based on careful consideration of whether or not this coalition would last or had a better vision and programs for the nation, but more on emotions. Moreover, because this coalition had no ideological bases but was rather driven by an access-to-power attitude (Likoti, 2021), it then broke down within two years due to misunderstandings and internal arguments, especially between Metsing and Thabane, dipping the country into a new dispensation of political uncertainty. Weisfelder (2015) states that “Thabane continued to make controversial decisions that raised LCD hackles” (p. 65). According to Metsing, Thabane’s unilateral decisions failed “to observe and adhere to the good faith and democratic principles”

(Zihlangu & Ntaote 2014, p. 1). Nevertheless, the extant literature argues that signs of a collapsing structure were apparent soon after this coalition's inauguration (Letsie, 2015) when the coalition partners "contested the ministerial spoils" (Pherudi, 2021, p. 200).

The second government changeover was in 2015 (2015–2017) following the snap elections in February of that year, two years before the constitutionally arranged election time, after an early dissolution of the previous parliament (Mokhethi, 2017). Similarly, these elections were inconclusive and resulted in a spectacular return of Mosisili as the PM and deputized by Metsing not long after transferring power to his ABC rival, Thabane (Mohloboli, 2015). Mohlamenyane (2018) reports that Mosisili's Democratic Congress (DC) joined forces with small parties, namely the Popular Front for Democracy (PFD), the National Independent Party (NIP), the LCD, the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP), the Lesotho's People's Congress (LPC), the DC, and the Basotho Congress Party (BCP) to form a government. However, Gary Van Staden, a senior political analyst at NKC African Economics had expressed a strong opinion that "A coalition of multiple parties in an unsettled environment such as that in Lesotho is doomed to fail, it is just an issue of when and what the consequences will be" (Moonstone, 2015, p. 1). As predictive as the Van Staden analysis was, the new government suffered from an acrimonious split that propelled the demise of the first coalition government. Likoti (2021) states that the government collapsed within two years, resulting from a successful no-confidence motion in Prime Minister Mosisili, moved by Monyane Moleleki. This followed in-fighting within Mosisili's DC that saw the faction of Moleleki, who was then Mosisili's party deputy leader, jumping ship to form the Alliance of Democrats (AD), consequently crossing the floor and leaving the government with minority seats (Mokhethi, 2017). Letsie (2015) sums up that like the previous tripartite coalition, the seven-party coalition's demise came from a failure of the government to address institutional and constitutional reforms that would solidify coalitions and guard them against recurrent breakdowns.

The third changeover occurred in 2017 (2017–2020) following the early elections of June 3 2017. The ushering in of a new government saw the return of Thabane as PM, two years after handing over power to Mosisili. Mohloboli (2019a) reports that the Thabane-led government comprised his ABC, Deputy Prime Minister Moleleki's AD, Thesele's BNP and Keketso Rantšo's Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL). Like the other two coalition governments, this administration was affected by conflicts that brought it to its knees. Mohloboli (2019b) points to intra-party politics within all four coalescing partners, stating that the worst wrangling was within the ABC whose dramatic behavior was exacerbated by the elective conference of February 2019 that elected Nqosa Mahao as deputy party leader against Thabane and his faction's wish. Shale (2021) states that "the faction of the leader did not only lose the battle, but the coalition government collapsed, the leader himself was removed from the partnership, and the party entered into a new coalition in 2020 led by a non-executive committee member", (p. 191), Moeketsi Majoro.

Overview of Lesotho's E-government

The case study in this paper focuses on Lesotho's e-government. In 2005, the Government of Lesotho adopted Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy to harness the achievement of the national development goals of a united nation, a country with advanced technology, a well-managed environment, a prosperous nation with a strong economy, a stable democracy, a peaceful country, and a country with a well-developed and healthy human resource capacity (Government of Lesotho, 2005). The policy identified ten strategies that would be catalysts for achieving its goals, of which e-government is one. Lesotho, like other countries around the world, adopted e-government as a strategy and a tool to reinvent government and transform governance processes to build a better nation, thereby enabling the government to be more effective, efficient, responsive, interactive, inclusive and accountable, and providing citizens, particularly the previously marginalized groups, with a new opportunity to conduct business with the government with more ease, cheaper and faster (Matsieli & Sooryamoorthy, 2021). Notwithstanding this, despite the launch of e-government in Lesotho almost two decades ago, the Basotho are yet to benefit fully from the opportunities brought by e-government. One of the concerns attributed to a lack of citizens and businesses to exploit and take advantage of these opportunities has been the lack of policy and legal frameworks to address the issues of trust, privacy and security when interacting and making transactions online (Kulehile, 2017). The Government produced the Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce (E-transactions and E-commerce) draft bill to address these issues in 2013. The account is at a standstill and has received little or no attention in recent parliaments. Upon enacting this bill, the E-transactions and E-commerce Act would promote the use of e-government services, provide for the regulation and facilitation of transactions and communications happening online and ensure the safety and security of the private data of the consumers (ITU, 2013).

METHOD

This study used a case study approach to develop a perspective on the impact of change of government on public policy. As Bunce (1981) observed, social science researchers generally use case studies and quantitative analyses to specify and assess linkages among variables, and choosing one methodology over the other is not uncommon in studies of public policy. The rationale for applying a case study methodology is based on the proposition that this study had no intention of generalizing the findings, which is a strength of quantitative methodology. The case study approach has been employed primarily because of its ability to provide contextual information. Crowe et al. (2011) affirm that case study research is particularly significant for producing an in-depth understanding of a composite, multi-layered phenomenon or issue in its real-life context. In this study, e-government in Lesotho has been selected for evaluation. Because of its complex and multifaceted nature, e-government is fit to acquire some knowledge and understanding of the extent to which a new

public administration impacts government priorities.

The study conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into the matter under investigation. Twelve informants from the Ministry of Development Planning and the Ministry of Communication, Science and Technology participated in the study between September 18 and September 26, 2019. These officials and their departments were selected using judgemental or purposive sampling techniques based on their direct involvement with national policy and strategic planning and e-government projects respectively, in terms of organizational, administrative, and technical terms. The interviews conducted in a mix of Sesotho and English languages were audio recorded and the data collected were later transcribed, translated into English and analyzed by applying thematic analysis. The issues of confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all the informants.

FINDINGS

This section presents and analyses the findings. These findings show that while change is inevitably part of human life, any change in the executive power adversely affects government policies and priorities. It was found that this change often causes discontinuity in government projects and programs.

Discontinuity

The findings point to the relationship between change in public administration and public policy. They show that the executive changeovers have become a prime issue that bedevils public policy making in Lesotho. The results show that e-government is no exception. One participant expressed that:

“E-government is not immune to the problems relating to change of public administration that are confronting other projects in the country. Government changeover has suffocated us all. For instance, we were funded by the International Telecommunication Union some years ago to support the establishment of cyber, e-commerce, and data protection laws. We were at advanced stages with the processes because stakeholders such as security agencies, the army, and local banks had already made their submissions. But due to new phenomenon of government turnover in every two years, you find that the new government does not go ahead with the bills of the previous administration. Because of that, we still do not have such laws. Occasionally when new administration may find it compelled to continue with such policies, they want to start the processes fresh. This becomes challenging because technocrats and stakeholders alike are intolerant of doing same thing more than once”.

Another participant stated:

“When a minister changes, principal secretaries and directors change as well. Thus, change in such strategic positions means a sweeping change in the whole system. Many things are at a halt in this department due to the changes we are referring to. The problem, which I always find puzzling, is why it seems so difficult for new leadership to understand the importance of continuing with the ongoing projects especially when proper assessment has not been conducted to inform termination decisions; I mean process and impact evaluations. You would not be surprised that most abandoned projects were or are still relevant, desired and necessary”.

The above views illustrate a significant underlying tendency of a new administration to not continue with the policies and projects of its predecessor. As Akwei et al. (2020) observed, policies, programs and projects are prematurely halted or abandoned, while it is often taken for granted that once a decision has been made, it will be carried through smoothly and the intended outcomes achieved. This has often created a policy-implementation gap, which arises when a policy decision is confronted with challenges that prevent it from realising the objectives that policy makers set out to achieve.

While it would not be uncommon to question the rationale of a new administration to go slow or terminate policy and programme reforms of the previous government before achieving the intended outcomes or originally stated endpoints, two issues became prominent in the data. These are the issues of competing priorities and the desire to do new or ‘own’ things. On the one hand, evidence from the data shows that different parties or governments set out different priorities. This has been supported by one of the participants who averred that *“if the incumbent government prioritises youth and technology, you will find that the next administration rather pushes the agenda of stock theft and crime prevention”*. This suggests that a policy that runs contrary to the manifesto or priorities of the governing party may suffer from a lack of administrative and financial support.

On the other hand, the culture of discontinuity has been attributed to the desire of the new administration to establish their ‘own’ policies or programs, or in the case where there may be chances of continuity with the initiatives of the predecessor, the incumbents rather demonstrate their ambitions to start the processes over again. This is an unfortunate situation particularly if, and only if, the task has never been given much thought, or even when thousands or millions of money have already been spent on the inputs (resources) and processes, or if stakeholders and beneficiaries are expecting results at a given time. However, the reasons for the discontinuity culture may not be far-fetched. It emerged that new administrations usually want to create a name for themselves. The participants supported this view, and one stated: *“politicians are obsessed with elections. They can terminate good programs of the predecessor to start their programs so that they can opportunistically*

use them to campaign in the next elections". This explains and supports the participants' initial conclusion that e-government is just one of many projects in the country that are unreasonably abandoned, or adversely affected by the change of political leadership.

DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that a change of government has a significant impact on public policy making. This finding is consistent with Bounce (1980) who found that government turnover unequivocally dictates policy change in democratic nations. Given this scenario, it would seem inevitable that government stability can generally sustain policy initiatives. The validity of this submission can be seen in Krause et al.'s (2016) findings which echo that policy abandonment is rare when the government is stable. Unfortunately, the analysis has presented a case where there had never been stability in the Government of Lesotho between 2012 and 2017 and beyond, which makes the findings interesting in two fundamental respects. First, the analysis shows that a persistent lack of stability has seen Lesotho holding elections three times within five years, equivalent to one government term in normal or stable situations. Second, these governments (changeovers of 2012, 2015 and 2017) were coalitions, a new phenomenon in Lesotho's political and policy making history.

Nascent literature argues that coalition governments are 'marriages of convenience' (Letsie, 2015) waiting to collapse (Pherudi, 2021). With this acceptance of the fragile nature of coalitions which instantly creates instability in government, it seems apparent that policy and program abandonment or termination in Lesotho would be more pronounced than policy maintenance. Indeed, policy making is an interactive and ongoing exercise, hence the decision to terminate, just like the decision to continue with the plans made earlier, or to have incremental modifications, can happen at any stage of the policy life cycle. However, such changes must be rational and purposeful and be guided by appropriate models of policy change. It is clear in the data that new administrations can terminate the predecessors' projects to start their 'own' projects, ironically with similar policy objectives at times. While this behaviour is uncalled for, it is not peculiar to Lesotho. Commenting on the housing project for soldiers and police officers in Ghana, Sabantu joe (A.M) [@sabantujoe] (2022, November 22) lambasted in his tweet: "The previous government of Ghana put up this housing project but instead of completing it, the current government thought it's not prudent to complete it but would sell it to an unknown private investor and use the proceeds to initiate a whole new project". It is clear from the viewpoint of the citizens hereafter that it is irrational to terminate uncompleted projects based merely on ego or a desire to make own 'mark'. Ongoing projects must be modified to realise the original policy goals. Hence, politicians must not see change in public administration as an opportunity for political gain or a window through which to garner political capital, but rather as an important transition

period where the incumbent's policy initiatives can run parallel to those of the predecessor to widen the coverage of the needs of the people and maintain a national policy direction.

The analysis reveals that government changeover, which in turn results in discontinuity in policy, increases the gap between policy intentions and policy outcomes and impacts. According to the Government of Lesotho (2005), Lesotho, like many countries around the world, has embarked on e-government as a strategy to improve the quality of government service delivery and as an instrument to empower citizens and encourage their participation in policy and government affairs. A stagnant pace of e-government implementation is increasingly sabotaging government objectives and commitment to good governance and seamless service delivery through innovative technologies. This view echoes the World Bank's (2009) findings, which state that well-managed and routinely continuing e-government implementation can contribute to the realization of many government policies and priorities, including the promotion of equity in service provision and enhancement of the government's ability to improve the lives of the previously marginalized communities, while the opposite is true regarding disrupted and incoherent implementation.

Not only does a change of government contribute to the highly corrosive living conditions of the people. The analysis shows that it also creates political uncertainty. Herein, political uncertainty is broadly understood to mean uncertainty about the government's future actions (Jens, 2015). This finding resonates with the argument raised by Alesina & Perotti (1996) that political uncertainty usually occurs as the proclivity of a change in the executive power, either by constitutional or unconstitutional means. The analysis shows that political uncertainty in Lesotho is more inherent in the constitutional apparatus-democratic processes, particularly free elections. Since free elections are central to the institutional structure of democratic governments and connect citizens to their representatives, they create uncertainty over the electoral outcome.

Because new administrations hardly keep up with the programs of the predecessors, the analysis depicts the elections to present uncertainty, not necessarily about who the winner will be, but about which policy direction those who form the government will take and how long they might stay in power to achieve the policy goals. The basis for the concern about policies and attaining their objectives is embedded in the transformative nature of the policy. Therefore, a successful government is judged on its ability to continue and expand policy efforts to improve the living conditions in society. This does not present political uncertainty as an end in itself. Political uncertainty is a serious malaise harmful to public policy. While bureaux are tasked with planning and implementing policies through programs and projects, the analysis suggests that this would be challenging and difficult for them without any degree of certainty that a new or the next government would continue with ongoing projects and support future developments. This is also true about funders. When a policy environment is unpredictable, funders become concerned and hold back their financial support until there is stability. Rather, they move on to another country where the environment is stable (Baker

et al., 2016; Bhattacharya et al., 2017; Buti, 2018). To build sustainable development, realize inclusive growth and good governance, and lead a state that is functional and capable of transforming the lives of its citizens through policy, the government must ensure stability and the bureaucracy is insulated from political meddling.

CONCLUSION

This paper revealed the relationship between government changeover and public policy making. It established that while a change of government in the form of electoral outcome or parliamentary processes may not be dealt lightly with in democratic nations such as Lesotho, its implications for public policy are detrimental beyond a simple transfer of political power. It was found that a change of government is a pervasive constraint that interferes with the effective implementation of government policies, consequently delaying citizens from benefiting from what has been promised to them thereby worsening the poor living conditions. Citizens could not imagine a better life without a government proactive or reactive approach to policy making to adapt and meet the pressing needs in the society. However, government decisions and actions must be carefully considered and evaluated.

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