

Abstract

The study carried out in the context of the PEV-SADC project has revealed that every election in Lesotho has been followed by disputes, which have driven the country into a context of instability and violence. In Lesotho, as elsewhere in the SADC region, heightened electoral competition between political parties has led to cases of electoral-related conflicts. The use of security agencies by political elites, as highlighted in the research, has led to the constricting of democratic space for citizen participation, as well as to the infringement on fundamental freedoms. This state of affairs partly explains the SADC's multiple political interventions in Lesotho. In other terms, electoral competition in Lesotho has become increasingly virulent, highlighting the deep-rooted deficiencies identified within the research. While electoral democracy is expected to contribute to durable peace and social stability, which are prerequisites for sustainable human development, elections have regrettably not added any real value to Lesotho's democratisation project. Instead, given the multiple conflicts that have arisen, they have proven costly to the nation. Lesotho celebrates 50 years of political independence at the end of 2016 but, because of the challenges raised by the research, the liabilities regarding elections, democracy and governance seem to outweigh their assets, so far. As noted in the research, it is important for Lesotho to accept that elections are not per se a panacea to the socio-economic and political ailments that characterize the country.

Elections are just one aspect and there is much that lies beyond them. The respondents to the research article were unanimous that more work is needed in addressing these problems. These other areas require further research in order to visualise the way forward and future activities. Out of the 32 recommendations that were produced, the three main elds that require attention with a view to the possible February 2017 elections are: i) Effective and strategic voter education targeting the youth is of cardinal importance in the ght against electoral con icts; ii) Politicized army, police and intelligence services have consistently taken sides in political contests and acted as vectors through which violence is used for political battles. This should be mitigated through security and public sector reform; iii) Lesotho should create, transform and democratize institutions of governance capable of driving socio-economic development in a stable political environment.