Rebellious civil society and democratic consolidation in Lesotho

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Abstract
Civil society’s efforts to push democratic transitions and deepen democracy are influenced by the political context in which they operate. This study examined the role of civil society in consolidating democracy in Lesotho. Specifically, it explored the tactics employed by the unions to defend human rights and deepen democratic practices. The author conducted a face-to-face interview with the key informants and used content analysis to understand the mechanisms used by the unions to bargain and defend the interests of their members. This study established that unions in Lesotho play a significant role in consolidating democracy through diverse activities such as advocacy, aggregation of interests and checks and balances. However, their civility and cooperative habits are undermined by the irresponsible government of Lesotho. Hence, they resort to social protests in most cases for the government to respond. Though protests seem effective when offsetting the injustices and violation of people’s rights, they open up a Pandora’s Box since they lead to loss of life in Lesotho. The security forces in the country often unleash disproportionate force and kill some protesters. Hence, efforts to consolidate democracy are largely undermined by police and army brutality.

Keywords Civil society · Unions · Democratic consolidation · Structural functionalism · Protests

Introduction
When civil society is strong, it can easily lead to a democratic transition, drive the transition to the end, and complete democracy. From the beginning of the transition to democracy to the installation of a democratically elected regime, the contribution of civil society is of paramount importance (Stepan and Linz 1996). This means that starting from the struggle against an authoritarian regime to the consolidation of democracy, the role played by civil society is indispensable. Hence, Diamond (1994) asserts “a vibrant
civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than for initiating it” (p. 7). Nevertheless, it is unproven whether this holds for Africa.

In the 1990s Africa experienced what Huntington (1991) referred to as the “third wave” of democratization which came after long protracted decades of military regimes. Since the third wave of democratic transitions, African countries are no longer wrestling with democratization. They are fighting a losing battle with democratic consolidation (Freedom House 2017). They are trying to make their democracy irreversible and secure. Superficially, they are not succeeding to make their democracies immune to authoritarianism and the threat of democratic regression. They cannot make their democracy to be “the only game in town” (Schedler 1998, p. 91). In Lesotho, civil society managed to push democratic transition but immediately reverted to political party affiliations just after democratization (Selinyane 1997). Hence, it is worth examining their contribution to democratic consolidation.

Since several African countries are abandoning their dictatorial tendencies, research is moving towards democratic consolidation instead of democratic transition. Nonetheless, several African countries’ democracies are largely blemished and only a few show some signs of consolidation (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2011). Political parties contribute to democratic transitions but the vast extant literature accords more credit to civil society (Diamond 1997). Holm et al. (1996) noted that in several countries, civil society preceded democratization, accelerated the pace of establishing elections and other important components of democracy.

**Methodology**

This study is one of the few that expressly assesses the role of civil society in Lesotho. Its findings are based on the analysis of newspapers, reports and interviews from civil society in Lesotho. Between November 2020 and January 2021, the author engaged in face-to-face key informant interviews with directors of 12 unions. The civil society organizations interviewed are Transport Security and Alight Workers Union (TSAWU), Independent Democratic Union of Lesotho (IDUL), United Textile Employees (UNITE), Lesotho Workers Association (LEWA), Student Union, Khathang Tema Baits’ukuli, Progressive Association of Lesotho Teachers (PALT), Lesotho Teachers Trade Union (LTTU), Lesotho Schools Principals Association (LSPA), and Lesotho Teachers Association among others. All interviews were conducted in Sesotho, recorded and transcribed. All the participants were requested to sign a consent form upon which their rights concerning the study were expressed. To keep the participants anonymous, the article uses pseudo names. The data collected was coded and classified into themes and analysed based on content analysis.

This study aims to understand the role played by civil society to deepen democracy. To this end, it asks the following questions: What is the role of unions in democratic consolidation in Lesotho? What mechanisms do unions use to defend human rights? What challenges do they encounter when assuming their responsibility? This study draws from structural-functionalism to explain the role of civil society. The first section of this paper is an introduction while the second is a methodology section. The third section examines the relationship between civil society and democratic consolidation. The fourth section explains the role of civil society from the structural-functionalism lenses while the fifth section examines the role of civil society in Lesotho, mechanisms it employs and challenges it encounters when contributing to democratic consolidation. The final section is the conclusion and recommendation.
The conceptual review and the nexus between civil society and democratic consolidation

The notion of civil society is traceable to the enlightenment era. Political thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) regarded it to be synonymous with a political community (Hock 2004). Also, John Locke did not make a clear distinction between a state and civil society (Locke 1980). For him, civil society was no more than a legitimate political order. Equally, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith considered civil society as an entity entangled within the market (Smith 1976; Reichardt 2004).

Contrary to John Locke, Francis Hutcheson and Adam Ferguson considered civil society to be an entity that safeguards individual freedoms against the state’s arbitrary use of power (Locke 1980; Ferguson 1995). Scholars began to make a distinction between a political community and civil society. The latter was seen denoting the free associational life meant to countervail the intrusion of a government in people’s privacy and freedoms (Edwards and Hulme 2014). Thus, it was regarded as an entity endowed with the responsibility to act as a watchdog (Fatton 1995).

Conversely, philosophers attempted to make the concept of civil society a bit distinct in 1821 (the nineteenth century). Before Friedrich Hegel’s writings, it was used interchangeably with the state until Hegel introduced the distinction between state and family and implied that it represents a particular sphere (Hegel 1991). It refers to a sphere or civic space where citizens learn group action, social solidarity and social interdependence (Hegel 1991). Such values are essential for motivating political participation and action. Therefore, civil society denotes a sphere of learning or school of democracy that inculcates important values in individuals.

The term “civil society” in academic discourse is usually simplified to mean the sum of private voluntary associations and institutions and less is said about their contribution to civic goals. The World Bank (2013) defines civil society as the broader array of non-governmental institutions and non-profit organizations that engage in public life to express their values and of others, based on political, cultural, religious, or philanthropic considerations. In other words, civil society refers to a wide array of organizations such as NGOs, community groups, indigenous groups, faith-based organizations and labour unions. In this study, civil society refers to the aggregation of collective civic action in a public arena by groups whose pursuit is not political power and profit but the attainment of societal demands.

Democratic consolidation was originally a term meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies sustainable. It involves efforts to extend democracy’s life expectancy beyond the short term and to make it immune to the risk of authoritarian regression. Democratic consolidation project seeks to construct walls against possible reversal waves. Its goal is to avoid instability, reversibility, vulnerability, fragility, uncertainty and the demise of democracy (Schedler 1997). Democratic consolidation aims to attain democratic continuity, resilience, survival, permanence, persistence, sustainability, entrenchment, endurance and irreversibility (Schedler 1998).

Democratic consolidation has several connotations. For one to begin talking of democratic consolidation there has to be a freely and fairly elected government that contested elections and subsequently lost and accepted defeat (Linz 1990). As this happens, scholars talk about the transfer of power test. However, this definition is not without shortfalls because countries like Botswana and South Africa have not realized regime change since independence. Their political systems are characterized by one party-dominant system.
spite of being in power for so long, their level of democracy is highly esteemed (Freedom House 2017).

For this deficit in the explanation of democratic consolidation, some scholars suggest a simple longevity or generation test to be used to define democratic consolidation in a one-party dominant system. For us to talk of democratic consolidation in such a system, a regime has to take at least four terms in an office. It should continue to win regular and competitive elections while respecting the rule of law (Schedler 1997). This implies that it is not a matter of losing in this case that counts, but the adherence and habituation to democracy (Mtimkulu 2009).

When a ruling party in a one party-dominant system competes in transparent and honest elections and wins, there is no reason to doubt that democracy is consolidating. Habituation to competitive elections and rule of law entrenches democratic values and makes it unlikely for political actors to think of undemocratic means to replace leaders (Beetham 1994). The deficit that rests within this approach is the failure to predict the behaviour of a dominant party when it loses elections. Nobody knows whether it values democracy because it is winning or it honestly regards it as the best system of governance. One is uncertain of its chances of accepting defeat. Notwithstanding, this study defines democratic consolidation as the entrenchment of democratic values among the significant political actors. It encompasses all the efforts applied to complete democracy, starting from when the democratic transition ended.

The nexus between civil society and democratic consolidation is pronounced when the former provides checks and balances to promote good governance. Prominent philosophers who explained the role of civil society are Aristotle, Friedrich Hegel, Antonio Gramsci, John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville and Robert Putnam (Solioz 2011). The latter two scholars contend that the role of civil society is to construct social capital and shape ideas and values that affect government decisions directly or indirectly (Solioz 2011). Philosophers designed a typology demonstrating how they expect civil society to behave in different political regimes. In undemocratic regimes, civic groups are not strong in providing checks and balances to hold leadership accountable. They are weak in protecting individual rights and emancipating the citizens from a despotic government. Conversely, in a democratic society civil society has to set an agenda, manage its quality and monitor acts that violate human rights (Solioz 2011). The aforementioned typology anchors on the assumption that a vibrant civil society can promote democratic values and accelerate the pace of democratic consolidation (Diamond 1994).

There is a connection between democratic consolidation and civil society. The latter is considered to be a mechanism for countervailing state power (Kaldor 2003). Apart from that, Putnam believed that civil society reinforces civility. Contrarily, Edwards and Foley (1998) argued that Putnam misinterpreted Alexis de Tocqueville by not capturing the fact that civil society can be destructive in some instances. The writings of Putnam on civil society underwent substantial criticisms from several scholars. Also, Tarrow (1998) blamed Robert Putnam for misinterpreting Italian History. Tarrow argues that Putnam construed the reverse of the sequence put forward by the Tocqueville. Putnam mistakenly thought that it is the government that shapes civil society whereas it is the latter that shapes the former. In other words, Putnam failed to realize how socio-political context can restrain civil society. Evidence demonstrates that contextual factors such as the environment, corporatism, state mobilization efforts and repression affected civil society in Latin America and by so doing they conditioned its potential to contribute to democracy (Olvera 1997).

Civil society plays a significant role in facilitating democratization and consolidation. Stepan and Linz (1996) argued that a vibrant civil society helps begin a transition
and assists in resisting regression to authoritarianism. The contribution of civil society to democratic consolidation has been fairly appreciated in the literature. For instance, Yassin and Robert (2019) observed that they played an essential role during the Arab uprisings to prepare a stage for social movements and political reforms.

Civil society plays an essential role in enhancing democracy. It spots shortcomings of a government and sensitizes its citizens to encourage them to hold their leaders accountable. It defends citizens’ rights and restrains the government’s abuse of power (Merkel 1999). It shapes views to assist in the formulation and implementation of government policies. It can break down undemocratic regimes and push for democratic transition. This came to pass in South Africa, China, South America and Middle East (Zaidise 2004). In most cases, protests were crucial for toppling down authoritarian regimes.

A civil society performs numerous roles to deepen democracy. First, it stimulates civic activity (Şahin 2013; Kwaleyela 2015). Second, it acts as a channel of representation for crosscutting or overlapping cleavages of membership (Mexhuani and Rrhanmani 2017). Third, it encourages social participation, integration of citizens and cooperation with a government (Putnam 1993; Caroline 2003). Fourth, it countervails state power and ensures checks and balances (Stepan and Linz 1996). Fifth, it acts as a voice for the voiceless in society since it advocates for the marginalized groups (Maundeni 2004). Lastly, it lobbies politicians to protect the interests of citizens. These roles played by civil society are better summarized in Table 1.

**Structural Functionalism and civil society**

This study is informed by structural-functionalism to explain the functions of civil society in society and the role of institutions of government. The role of the institutions like the police and judiciary and their relationship and practices with civil society constitute order in society. Each of these entities is indispensable for the existence of others and society as a whole (Durkheim 1893). The needs of each entity and those of the system as a whole are important. The stability of the system depends on those needs.

This theory considers social change to be an adaptive response to some tension within the system. When some parts of an integrated social system change, tension is created between those parts and others in a system. To resolve this tension or conflict, others have

| Roles of civil society | Explanation |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Civic education       | It instils values of trust, democratic behaviour, democratic attitudes, tolerance, citizenship, cooperation, leadership and teaches citizens on important subjects such as electoral observation, and civic and political rights. |
| Advocacy              | It acts as a watchdog by representing the interests of marginalized groups and their members. |
| Partnership           | It partners with the government in service delivery in certain sectors such as health, poverty alleviation, and education among others. |
| Lobbying              | It influences the policies of government on behalf of their members, individuals, and other groups. |
| Checks and balances   | It enhances transparency and accountability of the state by acting as a watchdog. |
to adapt to the change initiated by others. So parts of a system are interdependent and this interdependency imposes structure on the behaviour of institutions and their members (Parsons 1968). The interrelations between the parts of society contribute to social unity or an integrated system with a life of its own. Equally, the interdependency of institutions regulates much of social and individual life (Britannica the Editors of Encyclopaedia 2010).

According to structural functionalism, parts of a system are interrelated and interdependent. The successful functioning of society requires collectivism. Parsons (1967) sought to understand how society can persist even when each of its members pursues his or her own goals. The philosopher believed that people are somehow goal-oriented and constrained. Similarly, Emile Durkheim held that societies are reflections of the collective consciousness in which people internalize the shared norms and standards in society. The core values of individuals and groups in society express themselves through values and norms. The general values of society determine the order in society (Durkheim 1893).

Order in society or stability of a system depends on the social interactions and motivations of actors in society. The social interactions depend much on the normative standards which integrate members of society (Parsons 1967). In other words, social order is produced by the successful integration of individuals and adherence to the normative standards which serve to uphold the social structure. This theory informs this study because it accounts for different functions assumed by unions, security forces and the judicial system in a country for the government to function well. The change in the union’s demands requires the whole system to adapt and curb tensions. When one of the parts of the system such as the police is reluctant to adapt to the change in the demands of unions, conflict ensues and one way to maintain social order is to seek equilibrium.

Unions’ role in democratic consolidation in Lesotho

The country’s civil society dates as far back as the colonial period. One of the earliest civil societies was the Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA) which was founded in 1907 (Pule and Thabane 2002). It was mostly constituted by the intelligentsia or the educated Basotho graduates. BPA constantly attacked colonialism and criticized it although with a moderate tone and agitated for independence and democratic rule.

Equally, teachers founded a union in 1943 that they named Basutoland African National Teachers’ Association (BANTA) which fought colonialism. It was like an African nationalist union in nature (Pule and Thabane 2002). BANTA was a vocal union formed from a conglomeration of two teachers’ associations in 1947 (Selinyane 1997). It was made up of Catholics and Protestants who joined to challenge the colonial administration (Pule and Thabane 2002). The president of the BANTA drew some members from the association to form the first modern political party named Basutoland African Congress in 1952 which was later renamed Basutoland Congress Party. In 1966, Lesotho gained independence from Britain but it was bedevilled by military regimes from 1970 to 1993 when it democratized (Matlosa and Sello 2005). Since the inauguration of a democratic regime in Lesotho, unions have been grappling with issues of human rights violation.

Lesotho has a plethora of civil societies. The unions in Lesotho are registered under the Law Society. Societies Act 1966 regulates the registration of civil society in the country. According to the Act, they can be registered as long as they have at least ten members (Government of Lesotho 1966). During registration, the unions are lumped together with NGOs by Law Society hence the institution can hardly track their operations to know how
many are extinct. In 2011, Law Society registered 505 organizations, 713 in 2012, 470 in 2013, 350 in 2014, 562 in 2015, 493 in 2017, 600 in 2018, 446 in 2019 and 403 in 2020. This brings us to a total of 5304 registered civil society organizations. Figure 1 illustrates the aforementioned figures.

Despite the significant plethora of civil society in the country, democratic consolidation is very sluggish. Despite the efforts of civil society to check on the state’s abuse of power, corporate corruption and violation of human rights are prevalent. Out of 180 countries in the world, Lesotho is ranked 78 in transparency index (Transparency International 2018). Again, according to Kali (2020), 59% of Basotho are not satisfied with the way democracy works. Human rights violations are commonplace in Lesotho. Police brutality is as rampant as the disrespect of civic virtues. Coups are as common as assassinations (Aljazeera 2014; Freedom House 2017; Kali 2019, 2021). What is evident is that the state is perpetuating most of the crimes and human rights violations that civil society has to defend.

It is more than half a century that Lesotho gained independence and it is more than two decades that Lesotho ended its transition to democracy. Despite these achievements, citizens are not yet enjoying individual liberties and freedoms as one would expect. According to Freedom House (2017), Lesotho is partly free in terms of respect for political and civil rights. It is either civil society is weak to pressure the government to accelerate the pace of democratic consolidation or the state institutions are weak.

In June 2011, Lesotho trade unions, together with the Journalist Union of Lesotho, Lesotho Teachers Trade Unions, and Lesotho College of Education Union protested against the state policy that sought to reduce the student intake for universities. Bohlokoa explained, “We intended to organize a national protest if the government decided to ignore our petition. We challenged the government to make it accountable and committed to its education for all policy”. This move was an attempt by unions to manifest their uncompromising element which in part demonstrates their commitment to upholding respect for human rights in the country. The well-functioning of the government of Lesotho in terms of accountability depended on unions’ influence.

![Fig. 1 Civil society organizations registered from 2011 to 2020. Source: Developed by the author](image-url)
Equally, student unions in Lesotho often demonstrated and confronted the government headlong during their protests. “We suspended classes in April 2017 because the student representatives were engaged in negotiations with the government to pay for our tuition fees. We headed to Statehouse and gave Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili two days ultimatum to pay our tuition fees” explained Thabang. The students’ demands were expressed in a petition presented to the Prime Minister on 30 March 2017 by the student union (Lesotho Times, 2017). During the protest, a student was shot dead on the head by the police and this is reminiscent of the 2009 protest where another student was shot to death (Mpaki 2017; Motsoeli 2009).

In 2018, unions aggregated the interests of workers so that they all take to the streets to challenge obsolete government policies. They sought to make the government more responsive to public needs. To this end, workers convened in the capital city and headed to Prime Minister Dr. Thabane Motsoahae’s office to hand over their petition on 25 June 2018. According to Lesupi, “The protesters comprised factory workers, security guards and general workers. We all wanted the government to amend the minimum policy wage to increase factory workers’ wages by 15%”. Apart from their immediate mutual need, they wanted the government to sack the Labour Minister, Keketso Rantso for failing to be meticulous about the welfare of workers. Subsequently, violent protests ensued in Maputsoe and Maseru and protesters looted and vandalized property. These findings are in line with those of Wolfsfeld et al. (2013) that show that protests are important for bringing about reforms since their demands were met. According to Pule:

We organized many protests in Lesotho in the previous years. Workers used to earn between M1200 and M1300 but our protests helped them to yearn around M2000. Together with other unions, we spearheaded many protests. Most of them started as lawful demonstrations but ended up not abiding by the law because the workers destroyed properties. One of the remarkable protests was held in 2018 and led to the salary increment of M2020. The employers wanted to give factory workers an increase of 4% but as the unions, we rejected it because we requested for 20% increment. Our target with the demonstration is the minimum wage. Every year in April, the government is supposed to review workers’ salaries.

Equally important, the student union of the National University of Lesotho organized a protest on 21 August 2018 (Motsoeli 2018). During the demonstration, students interrupted the classes and blocked the roads and caused traffic congestions. Relebohile contended, “We protested because NMDS (National Manpower Development Secretariat) delayed releasing our stipend”. The students held that they protested to challenge government bureaucracy services that are poor but the university debunked their allegations. “The NUL (National University of Lesotho) management wants the public to know that the orchestrated anarchy which started on Tuesday the 21 August 2018 was not because NMDS delayed the release of the funds, but was rather organized by anarchists” (NUL Senior Management Team 2018). In this regard, social capital seems to have been used to pursue a negative course instead of making a government accountable.

Besides, student unions’ protests, labour unions engage employers to better the working conditions of workers. Seriti explained:

We once fought for the rights of the employees of G4 Cash Security and Maseru Candle Company who were underpaid. We also advocated for Ts’epung health workers and fought for their rights under various circumstances because they were not paid according to the private-public partnership agreement. LEWA organized many
social protests in 2017 and 2018 in an attempt to influence the government gazette. We acquired permits and demonstrated lawfully.

Besides textile and apparel industry unions, teachers unions engaged in several protests. For instance, LTTU, LTA and LSPA once joined efforts to raise their concerns against the government of Lesotho. After prior refusal, they eventually obtained permission from the Directorate of Disputes Prevention and Resolution to strike. They clamoured for salary augmentation and for more teachers to be recruited because of the recently introduced curriculum. “We also wanted the government to secure teaching material and textbooks for learners, among other things” Thabelo explained. The collaboration between unions and the Directorate of Disputes Prevention and Resolution manifested how different parts of the system play different roles for the survival of the government.

In most cases, the government of Lesotho is unresponsive to civil society demands and compels them to either protest or seek recourse from the courts. Teachers unions sued the government in some instances while they chose to protest in most cases. The government retaliated by declaring “no-work no-pay” to punish the protesters of the massive demonstrations experienced in 2018. Eventually, LTA continued suing the government on a series of events until it won many cases. These findings are in line with those of Şahin (2013) and Yassin and Robert (2019) that maintain that civil society is powerful in leading protests to bring reforms as was the case with the Arab Spring.

Most organizations follow the same procedures to defend human rights. To assist the teachers whose rights have been violated by the management, PALT assesses the situation of those who are, for instance, dismissed. It then takes such identified cases to court. Most of the cases in which PALT intervened have to do with the unfair dismissal of teachers. Some cases had to do with salary structure review. The organization was once allowed to develop or review the salary structure of teachers after winning court cases. Thus, the essence and existence of the court are to play a complementary role to unions to pressure the government to function well for democracy to consolidate. This interdependency is expressed through structural functionalism.

In 2020, unions were confronted with a huge challenge as their members lost their jobs. According to The Post (2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 800 factory workers employed by Global Garments and Nien Hsing were retrenched in Lesotho. The secretary-general of NACTWU by the name of Sam Mokhele admitted that all their efforts to save the workers’ jobs failed. Besides these companies, others sent back thousands of workers due to lockdown regulations and the inability to source their materials and export their products to the United States of America. Mokhele argued that the unions tried to negotiate with the Ministry of Labour and Trade and the parliament but the employers said that they lack money. Therefore, they were obliged to reduce their staff. In 2021, labour unions protested again. They clamoured for an increased minimum wage and at least 12 were injured during the demonstration while one was shot dead by the army. “Instead of resolving the dispute by announcing new wages, the government is resorting to the use of excessive force”, Makamo asserted (Chua 2021).

Also, transport unions aired their disgruntlement against the unfair justice system. The Maseru Region Transport Operators (MRTO) called for a demonstration against the government’s mobile court known as Iveco. They decided to suspend public transport for seven days provided that the government does not withdraw the mobile court which they considered to be reducing their incomes through exorbitant spot fines issued against traffic offences (Kabi 2020). The union’s chairperson Mokete Jonase argued “Our vehicles are operating legally but the mobile court is always demanding money from us on numerous
“pretexts”. Eventually, Mosito Moqhekoana who is the Prime Minister’s attaché, said that the cabinet has resolved to indefinitely suspend the mobile court (Kabi 2020). Hence the protest compelled the government to be responsive.

Most unions in Lesotho prefer facilitating democratic consolidation through the mobilization of the citizens and social protests. Protests have been crucial for democratization. They led to the demise of despotic and military regimes, for example, the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the Arab Spring in 2010 were stimulated by civil society. Social capital underscores the power of voluntary association and demonstrates how unions can push a country to be more democratic. In the same way, the Student Representative Council of the National University of Lesotho, teachers unions, taxi unions and workers’ unions organized a series of protests against the government since 2017 (Lesotho Times 2017). They sometimes blocked the roads, caused traffic congestion and marched to the Prime Minister’s office to hand over a petition. They protested in many instances to challenge poor bureaucratic services and to hold the public officials accountable for their actions (Lesotho Times 2011).

Unions in Lesotho aggregate the interest of workers to advocate for them. They mostly follow the following patterns to defend the rights of their members and facilitate democratic consolidation: interest aggregation and articulation, advocacy and provision of checks and balances. However, demonstrations prove to be the leverage of unions to compel a regime to reassess its decisions. Protests are essential for pressuring regime change and promoting democratic norms that facilitate democratic consolidation. Where civil procedures and dialogue prove futile, unions mobilize people to protest and influence policy. This mechanism proved productive in Lesotho, Tanzania, Egypt and the Arab Spring (Mlambo et al. 2019). Notwithstanding, the main obstacle to deepening democracy in Lesotho has to do with police brutality. Unions and the police are important in a country and play different functions which if well-coordinated can help deepen democracy. Hence, future research has to examine the extent to which state repression hampers the efforts of civil society to expedite democratic consolidation.

Conclusion and recommendations

In Lesotho, civil societies often engage the government when their members are not satisfied with some policies that may include things like the minimum wage and school fees. When the talks are not effective, they either rely on litigation or protests. The government is relatively responsive and eager to be redirected by civil society although this must be done through protests or resorting to litigation. The police and the army are the obstacles to democratic consolidation because civil society strives to assume its place in the country by performing its roles. During protests, the security forces violate civil and political rights on an unprecedented scale hence they render democratic consolidation sluggish.

The civil society in Lesotho helps to consolidate democracy through the aggregation of interests and advocacy. Through these techniques, it contributes immensely to policy dialogue and policy change. It provides checks and balances to hold policymakers accountable. It represents the interest of the voiceless marginalized groups and creates platforms for the vulnerable to express themselves. Civil society in the country has the right mechanisms in place hence it is in the right direction to assist in democratic consolidation. However, the government has to reconsider its activities and review the way it manages protests.
and handle human rights issues. The state apparatus tends to infringe on civil and political freedoms and disrespect democratic norms. This hampers the efforts and results that civil society is supposed to achieve hence democracy remains sluggish in Lesotho.

For democracy to consolidate in Lesotho, the government has to be responsive to unions’ demands. The government should refrain from being adamant until the unions resort to protests. Equally, it has to discipline the police, so that they refrain from unleashing disproportionate force on protesters. Also, unions should prioritize nonviolent measures and preserve social order. They can attain this by avoiding illegal demonstrations and making sure that there are no confrontations between citizens and security forces during demonstrations as this will reduce causalities and deaths. Lastly, they have to encourage their members to refrain from looting during protests.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author avers that there is no conflict of interest and that all the data used have been referenced accordingly.

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