



Zimbabwe  
Gender  
Commission

# WOMEN IN POLITICS & DECISION MAKING IN ZIMBABWE

OCTOBER 2018

# WOMEN IN POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING IN ZIMBABWE



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## INTRODUCTION

The lack of women's participation is a worldwide issue in all spheres of life, but the lack of women's political participation as both voters and candidates is glaring despite efforts to level the playing field and demonstrated ability. The struggle for women's recognition within the political space dates back to the 1820s with the Women's Suffrage Movement which began in the United States of America where women were fighting for the right to vote and to run for office.<sup>1</sup> Women were fighting against what was termed "Cult of true Womanhood" that characterized women as 'pious, submissive wives and mothers concerned exclusively with home and family'. The suffrage movement was made popular by an English woman, Emmeline Pankhurst, who along with others was frustrated by the lack of progress in women's participation, decided more direct action was required and founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Members of WSPU were determined to obtain the right for women to vote by any means necessary and campaigned tirelessly and sometimes violently to achieve their goal. These women felt that they were not making progress with peaceful methods and decided that a different, more radical approach was needed.<sup>2</sup>

This struggle lasted for nearly 100 years and the right to vote was only granted to American women in 1920 through a constitutional amendment. The movement spread to other parts of the world with New Zealand granting women the right to vote at the national level in 1893, Australia giving women the right to vote and to stand for Parliament in 1894 and Great Britain giving women a limited right to vote through the Eligibility Act in 1918<sup>3</sup> and full, equal rights in 1928 through the Equal Franchise Act.

The movement spread to Africa in the 1940s with Cameroon and Djibouti being the first to grant women the right to vote in 1946.<sup>4</sup> In 1960 the first female head of State was elected, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Ceylon and Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup> Despite the gains for women's participation and representation over the years, all over the world their numbers remain low.

The United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 66/130 from 2011 states that "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women".<sup>6</sup> Although there are no legal barriers to inhibit women's political participation, there are institutional, political, cultural and religious reasons that still make it difficult to participate. Globally, women are reluctant to join politics because of a number of inter-connecting and overlapping factors including the below:<sup>7</sup>

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1. <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/the-fight-for-womens-suffrage>

2. <https://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startsuffragette/>

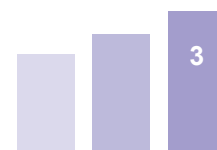
3. <http://www.historynet.com/womens-suffrage-movement>

4. [http://womensuffrage.org/?page\\_id=203](http://womensuffrage.org/?page_id=203)

5. <http://time.com/money/4362191/female-heads-of-state/>

6. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/130](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/130)

7. <http://www.weduglobal.org/what-prevents-women-from-participating-in-politics/>



- **Patriarchy and misogyny**

Women are not viewed as equal to men and therefore do not get equal opportunities in leadership positions. Harmful cultural practices have a negative impact on women's rights in defiance with the law. The patriarchal and misogynistic attitude towards women in politics results in a skewed leadership scale unfavourable to women. People who hold on to the patriarchy sees women as incapable of handling power and responsibility, in any leadership position. They portray women as weak and refuses to acknowledge that women can make decisions that are contributing to a society.<sup>8</sup>

- **Religion**

Religious practices and beliefs are used to confirm oppression against women and have a negative impact on gender equality and women's leadership roles.<sup>9</sup> Religion is a way of life for many African women and their thinking and behaviour is heavily influenced by it.<sup>10</sup> Women keep themselves out of politics so as not to go against their religious beliefs, a practice that is being reinforced by the cultural and patriarchal attitudes.

- **Domestic responsibilities**

Women have, according to social structures, greater family responsibilities looking after the household, including caring for children, the elderly and the infirm.<sup>11</sup> With these social demands, it is difficult for them to dedicate themselves to their political careers as this would require them to be away from home for long periods campaigning and carrying out the duties of political office.

- **Portrayal by the media**

Media often mirrors the patriarchal attitudes in society, relaying negative messages on women in politics. There is often unequal representation of men and women in politics in mainstream media, with men more often receiving positive coverage and women negative.<sup>12</sup>

- **Low access to information**

Information about politics and electoral processes is often in a language and format that is not easily accessible to women, who in most cases have lower levels of education and thereby difficulties reading and writing.<sup>13</sup>

- **Access to documentation**

Women are more likely to not have identity documentation and they are thereby disenfranchised right at the onset as they cannot participate in politics and elections as voters or candidates.<sup>14</sup>

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8. <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/knowledge-library/opinion-pieces/patriarchal-barrier-women-politics>

9. Wangila, M *Religion and Women in Politics: The Kenyan Experience*

10. Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. 1999. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*,

11. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books.

12. <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/discuss/e-discussions/creating-work-life-balance-women-politics>

13. <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/media-analysis-of-womens-participation-in-politics-2165-7912.1000183.php?aid=25513>

14. Sindhuja P and Murugan, KR (2017) *Factors impeding women's political participation - A literature review International Journal of Applied Research* pages 563-565

- **Lack of education**

Although more women and girls are educated today than previous, there are still barriers that keep girls out of school such as child marriage<sup>15</sup> and teenage pregnancy, poverty, gender-based violence, harmful gender stereotyping and unsafe education structures.<sup>16</sup> The rights to quality education for all<sup>17</sup> and gender equality in all fields<sup>18</sup> have been accepted by the international community and should be upheld. Women are often considered to not hold the educational qualifications necessary to take up political office.

- **Lack of confidence in themselves to join politics** (it's a male dominated space)

Many women are interested in politics and want to participate but they don't have confidence in their ability to succeed.<sup>19</sup> This is made worse by the fact that there are not many female role models in politics. With mentoring<sup>20</sup> and coaching, as well the possibility to interact with successful female politicians,<sup>21</sup> this is a barrier that can be overcome.

- **Inadequate political networks**

It is difficult for women to develop political networks outside of their family and close friend circles, which they need if they are to succeed in politics.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to develop these networks because of the barriers outlined in this paper but efforts are being made through civil society organisations, women's wings and parliamentary women's groups to bring together aspiring women in politics for mentoring, coaching and interaction with other politicians.

- **Political party gate keepers**

Politics have always been a male domain, and many want to keep it that way. To do so they like to maintain the obstacles that women face. The way political parties are structured, with women's wings and youth wings is a form of gatekeeping which keeps women and young people away from mainstream politics.<sup>23</sup> This gatekeeping plays a major role, particularly in effecting change for equal representation, i.e. the quota system. These obstacles are not insurmountable and can be overcome, especially with the support of gender sensitive men in the political arena.

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15. [http://www.zimstat.co.zw/sites/default/files/img/Women\\_and\\_Men\\_Report\\_2016%5B1%5D\\_0.pdf](http://www.zimstat.co.zw/sites/default/files/img/Women_and_Men_Report_2016%5B1%5D_0.pdf)

16. <http://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen>

17. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26*

18. *Sustainable Development Goal 5*

19. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ella-gonzalez/women-in-politics\\_b\\_4077687.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ella-gonzalez/women-in-politics_b_4077687.html)

20. *RAU (2014) Does Encouraging women to vote make a difference*

21. *WIPSU (2015) "We can do it" Research on Women's Political Participation in Zimbabwe*

22. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/womens-political-networks-defining-leadership-breaking-barriers-and-fostering-change>

23. *Dahlerup, D. Political Parties as Gatekeepers to Equal Political Representation Paper for the Session MT 07.239 Political Parties and Democratization, International Political Science World Congress, at Fukuoka, Japan, July 9-13 2006.*

- **Lack of faith in the political process**

Women, more than men, do not have faith in political processes and, as a result, are less likely to enter politics. Studies have shown that women have different political interests to men and enter politics to bring about change rather than for political power. This means that where they do not see possibility for making change they will not participate.<sup>24</sup>

- **The sexualisation of women**

People who hold on to patriarchy often perpetuate female politicians as immoral and promiscuous.<sup>25</sup> The media plays a large role in this as it often focuses on irrelevant aspects of female politicians, such as their bodies and clothing, instead of their politics.

- **Lack of resources/finances for campaigning**

Women often have inadequate financial resources to sustain a political campaign. More often than not, do women have to rely on their spouses and family members for financial support, which may be difficult to secure if there is no support for the political career.<sup>26</sup> Many women also lack the adequate skills to fundraise for their campaigns.

- **Violence (both real and perceived);**

Violence against women in politics, through hate speech, cyber bullying, and physical and sexual violence etc., is perpetrated to deter women from seeking political positions. Violence against women is both physical and psychological.<sup>27</sup> When a woman who seeks leadership is considered “domineering”, calling her names is a way of discouraging the electorate from voting for her. Sexist comments about a woman in politics is an effective tool to keep women out of leadership as a study has showed that such comments hurt them in the polls even if they ignore the comments and do not react.<sup>28</sup> Name calling is damaging, particularly in the rural area where women often already face difficulties going against culture and religion. Violence against women in politics, irrespective of type, is common and works as a deterrent not just for other women candidates but even for ordinary supporters and voters.<sup>29</sup> The effect of violence has seen many aspiring female candidates give up as it touches on their professional and personal lives. While violence in politics is well acknowledged, most research has failed to consider the specific forms and consequences that women face compared to men.<sup>30</sup>

- **The lack of rule of law**

The issue of violence is related to the lack of rule of law. Perpetrators of violence against women in politics and elections are not adequately prosecuted and sentenced, which subsequently affects women’s participation.<sup>31</sup> The confined political participation of women is a global problem and individual states should take measures in accordance with international law to end impunity for violence against women.

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24. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/impactoverview.pdf>

25. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/impactoverview.pdf>

26. <https://www.bigsr.co.uk/single-post/2017/10/28/Big-Saturday-Read-the-sexualisation-of-women-in-Zimbabwean-politics>

27. [https://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/sites/default/files/shauna\\_shames\\_-\\_barriers\\_and\\_solutions.pdf](https://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/sites/default/files/shauna_shames_-_barriers_and_solutions.pdf)

28. <https://aidsfreeworld.org/commentary/2018/8/31/politics-hate-speech-and-violence-against-women-mugabes-lasting-legacy-for-zimbabwean-politics>

29. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/28/top-women-politicians-still-peppered-with-gender-specific-slurs>

30. RAU (2010), “When the going gets tough the man gets going!” Zimbabwean Women’s views on Politics, Governance, Political Violence, and Transitional Justice. Report produced by the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU], Idasa [Institute for Democracy in Africa], and the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ]. November 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

31. <http://genderlinks.org.za/news/cyber-bullying-an-emerging-threat-to-female-leadership/>

Only 11 out of the 157 countries that elect their leaders have women heads of states, representing 7.2 percent.<sup>32</sup> When considering all 193 UN member countries, there are still only 11 women heads of governments, amounting to only 5.7 percent. Out of 278 speakers of parliaments all over the world, only 53, or 19.1 percent, are women. From a total of 595 deputy speakers of parliament, only 158, or 26.6 percent, are women.<sup>33</sup> Approximately only 23 percent of the world’s politicians are women. As seen in figure 1, most countries have never had a female leader. Despite the fact that many countries, Zimbabwe included, recognise the right to gender equality.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 1



32. UNDP & UNWomen (2017) *Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide*  
 33. International Foundation on Electoral Systems. *Violence Against Women in Elections: An IFES Assessment*. 2018  
 34. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/4/women-in-politics-2017-map>



Barriers to women's political participation are often magnified in post-conflict societies.<sup>35</sup> These societies are often characterised by militarism, a volatile security situation, the political dominance of a small group of (typically male) elites, the absence of well-established political parties, the failure to include women in peace negotiations and the bodies created for peace implementation, as well as other limiting factors.<sup>36</sup> The United Nations and other international, regional and national organisations have identified practical measures to dismantle barriers hindering further progress of women's political participation. They are also gathering evidence on the influence of women in powerful positions, in order to increase the number of women in politics, but the progress is very slow.<sup>37</sup>

Section 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that every individual has the right to participate in the governance of their country and should do so without impediments. The lack of women's participation is not a lack of interest in politics, which is evident by the success of female leaders around the world. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Joyce Banda (Malawi) and Catherine Samba-Panza (Central African Republic), Angela Merkel (Germany), Theresa May (UK) and Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand) are all examples of women in politics who have taken up the highest office in their respective countries. These successful female politicians are seen by some as not feminine or perceived as taking on male characteristics and considered 'honorary men'. A high-profile woman in politics in recent time is Hilary Clinton who, through her campaign for presidency in the United States, raised the issue of lack of women in politics to a global stage. By showing that it can be done, she inspired many women across the world to take steps to enter politics, starting from community level all the way to the presidential office.

Although progress has been made, women are still underrepresented in politics worldwide and further actions are needed to remove the obstacles that women face. One of the ways to achieve this is through the introduction of a quota system. For example, the parliaments of Rwanda<sup>38</sup> and some Scandinavian countries<sup>39</sup> took the crucial step to remove institutional barriers for women's political participation. Such efforts should be appreciated, and while it is true that specific laws or policies can be taken as immediate measures to strengthen the political empowerment of women, it must go hand in hand with promoting and improving female education in order to address underlying gender inequality. If women are assured the same education as men, they will have more confidence in their abilities as well as higher earning power, which will allow them to participate more in activities of their choice without relying on their spouses or families for financial support.

## WOMEN IN POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING IN ZIMBABWE

During Zimbabwe's struggle for liberation from colonial rule, women played a key and influential role.<sup>40</sup> They fought equally side by side with men against the economic and racial oppression that they had been subjected to by the Rhodesian government, a role affirmed by former president of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe who stated the following:

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35. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

36. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/women-leaders-around-the-world/>

37. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter3.htm>

38. For example in Liberia, women forced the then President, Charles Taylor to attend peace talks in Ghana and in Zimbabwe in the negotiations for the Global Political Agreement in 2008, only one woman participated.

39. <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2017/nov/29/female-political-leaders-women-change>

40. Bauer, G and Burnet, J "Gender quotas, democracy, and women's representation in Africa: Some insights from democratic Botswana and autocratic Rwanda" *Women's Studies International Forum* Volume 41 part 2 November -December 2013 pages 103-112

*Not only do women feed the front by carrying war material to it from the rear, but they also fight on the front and become exposed to the enemy's bullets in the same way as men. Our women have scored numerous victories alongside men. They have demonstrated beyond all doubt that they are as capable as men and deserve equal treatment both in regard to training and appointment.* <sup>41</sup>

Between independence and 2013, Zimbabwe made great strides to raise the status of women through legislative means,<sup>42</sup> the introduction of a women's ministry<sup>43</sup> and encouragement of a growth of the women's movement.<sup>44</sup> Despite the progress made, further achievements are needed as shown by the tables below on women's representation in Parliament since independence. At independence, women made up 7.5% of parliamentarians, which marginally increased over the years, reaching its highest in 2005 with 36%. Zimbabwe has not yet had a female head of State, but it did have its first female vice president in 2004, Dr. Joice Mujuru, who was later dismissed in 2014, because of succession wars within the ruling ZANU PF party.

**Table 1. Zimbabwe parliament: Bicameral Senate<sup>45</sup>**

Elections and Appointments	Seats	Men	Women	%Women
1980	40	37	3	7.5
1985	40	37	3	7.5
2005	66	42	24	36.36

**Table 2. Unicameral Parliament**

Elections and Appointments	Seats	Men	Women	% of Women
1990	150	133	17	11.3
1995	150	129	21	14
2000	150	136	141	9.3
2005	150	126	24	16

The low representation of women in parliament correlates with the low numbers of women in cabinet. In 1980 there was one female minister and two female deputy ministers in a thirty-six-person cabinet. Today, 31 percent of President Emmerson Mnangagwa's 45-member executive (including ministers, deputy ministers and ministers of State) are women, and Zimbabwe has its first ever female Minister of Defence, Honourable Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri.<sup>46</sup>

41. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/saadia-zahidi/what-makes-the-nordic-cou\\_b\\_4159555.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/saadia-zahidi/what-makes-the-nordic-cou_b_4159555.html)

42. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~chiba20l/classweb/wp/>

43. Thomas, C. 1982. *Women in The National Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe: An interview with Naomi Nhiwatiwa. Women's Studies International Forum. Volume 5. Issue 3-4. Pg 247-252*

44. *The Legal Age of Majority Act, of 1982, Matrimonial Causes Act No 33 (1985), the Domestic Violence Act(2007) and the Sexual Offences Act(2013) just to name a few*

45. *The Ministry was set up in 2005*

46. *Before independence there were associations of women but many women's organisations were formed in the 1980s and 1990s, e.g. Women's Action Group, Musasa, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association*

In 2013 Zimbabwe adopted a new constitution that was considered highly progressive in terms of promoting gender equality. Section 17 places an obligation on the State to promote full gender balance in Zimbabwe through promotion of full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society and to take all measures, including legislative, to ensure this. Section 56 guarantees women the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.<sup>47</sup> Section 80 states that every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men and this includes equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities. In addition, the constitution introduced in section 124, a gender quota which added 60 parliamentary seats reserved for women based on the system of proportional representation.

Zimbabwe has also signed and committed to several regional and international instruments such as the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Although these international instruments were signed and ratified, they have not been fully implemented.

Low political participation and representation of women in Zimbabwe is attributed to a number of factors. Societal patriarchal views with a negative approach to women in leadership roles is one.<sup>48</sup> Empirical research has shown that women want to participate in politics at different levels, however the biggest deterrent is societal perception of a woman's role.<sup>49</sup> Politics is considered a man's domain and women who try to enter it are subjected to stereotyping. They sometimes get viewed as prostitutes or considered too 'outspoken' which in some cultures is considered disrespectful. A report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) noted that in the pre-2018 elections women received a large number of cyber-attacks related to their perceived failure to fulfil social norms regarding marriage and childbearing and for alleged sexually promiscuous behaviour, provocative dress and scandalous mongering. Women coming under scrutiny included the Chairperson of Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Justice Priscilla Chigumba, who was accused of having an extra-marital affair and Advocate Fadzayi Mahere whose marital status was constantly questioned and used to measure her competence for political office.<sup>50</sup>

Research has shown that Zimbabwean women, of all ages, are interested in politics: they want to run for office and make a difference in their communities and at national level.<sup>51</sup> They, especially young women, are deterred by the barriers mentioned above that discourage women from taking leadership roles.<sup>52</sup> During its 38 years of independence, Zimbabwe has made several advancements for gender equality. However, the country is now regressing in women's political participation. In the 2018 elections women's participation went down, despite gender equality being enshrined in the Constitution. Various advocacy efforts have been made by the women's movement, most notable the launch of the Women's Manifesto by the Zimbabwe Women's Parliamentary Caucus in March 2018. The Manifesto called on relevant authorities to promote policies and practices that advance women empowerment in decision making positions.<sup>53</sup>

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47. <https://www.parlzim.gov.zw/about-parliament/publications/history-of-women-parlamentarians>

48. WIPSU 2018

49. <https://thisisafrika.me/womens-political-participation-not-act-charity/>

50. Research and Advocacy Unit and Institute for Young Women's Development. 2018. "Survey on Young Women's Political Participation. Her Right of Way, Give Way."

51. *When the going gets tough???*

52. International Foundation on Electoral Systems. *Violence Against Women in Elections: An IFES Assessment*. 2018

53. RAU (2010), *Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis*, Report produced by Idasa (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), and the Women's' Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). May 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit;

Women are still seen as responsible for the household and taking on leadership roles is not considered compatible with this by some. Politics has always been considered a male domain and not something women should get involved in.<sup>54</sup> Several women lack adequate access to information, particularly on politics and decision making, be it in print, radio or television. According to the Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), about 30 percent of men and 18 percent of women read a newspaper at least once a week, while 57 percent of men and 45 percent of women listen to the radio. About 37 percent of women do not access any media on a weekly basis, with the majority of them residing in rural areas.<sup>55</sup> Another barrier is the timing of when the political messages are delivered. During peak hours, which is mornings and evenings, women are usually occupied by domestic duties and during midday when they might have more time at their hands, programmes relating to politics are normally not aired as this is not considered peak period.

In Zimbabwe, politics has historically taken on a violent nature, including hate speech as well as physical violence.<sup>56</sup> This violence generally discourages women from participating in politics. Women have been on the receiving end of brutal violence in previous elections such as in 2008 where a number of women were subjected to politically motivated rape as a result of their direct involvement in politics or as a result of their association to a (usually male) relative involved in politics.<sup>57</sup> The 2018 elections witnessed a new form of violence, cyberbullying. In an electoral assessment report, it was observed that there was rising use of social media to threaten, humiliate and coercively deter Zimbabwean women from taking on active roles in politics and civic life. Findings showed that 60% of violent discourse and related content in the political space was directed at women from January 2013 and April 2018. It was further found that women were the object of nearly three times the amount of physical violence-related online sentiment than men. A failure to grant the women justice and resultantly a lack of trust in the legal system gives weight to violence as a major obstacle to women's political participation. Despite these challenges, thousands of women have been involved in politics and continue to do so. This year several new faces at all levels of politics emerged which particularly encourages the emergence of professional women.<sup>58</sup> Civic participation by women is generally low in Zimbabwe. Research indicates that women will vote,<sup>59</sup> but few will attend a campaign rally or meeting, and even fewer will work for a candidate or political party, particularly in the urban areas.<sup>60</sup> It has been shown that older women are much more active citizens than the young.<sup>61</sup>

Religious beliefs also play a large role in discouraging women from politics.<sup>62</sup> Biblical verses are quoted to emphasise that a woman's place is in the home. By taking on leadership roles women are said to be interfering with the order, as stated by some churches, where women are encouraged to be submissive and allow the male figures to lead. Zimbabwe is a predominantly Christian country and attending church is an integral part of the lives of many women.

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54. RAU (2016), *Zimbabwean politics: Very Constrained and Confined. The lack of middle-class young women's voices in political discourse*. September 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

55. Zimbabwe Women Parliamentary Caucus. *Women's Manifesto 2018 to 2023*.

56. <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2017/09/22/raising-women-participation-politics-issues-consider/>

57. [http://www.zimstat.co.zw/sites/default/files/img/publications/Health/MICS2014/MICS\\_REPORT\\_Final\\_2014.pdf](http://www.zimstat.co.zw/sites/default/files/img/publications/Health/MICS2014/MICS_REPORT_Final_2014.pdf)

58. RAU (2010), *No Hiding Place. Politically Motivated Rape of Women in Zimbabwe. Report produced by the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU] and the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights [ZADHR]*. December 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2010), "When the going gets tough the man gets going!" *Zimbabwean Women's views on Politics, Governance, Political Violence, and Transitional Justice. Report produced by the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU], Idasa [Institute for Democracy in Africa], and the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ]*. November 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

59. *No Hiding Place*

60. IFES

61. RAU (2018), *Women and Social Capital in Zimbabwe: 2012 to 2014. January 2018. Research & Advocacy Unit (in press)*.

62. <https://africanarguments.org/2018/05/16/reigning-men-where-are-all-the-women-in-this-new-zimbabwe-women/>

Political parties also play a role as a barrier for women's political participation. They function as gatekeepers to political office as candidates are fielded through them. However, women are often excluded or pushed out in the nomination process and the primary. At the launch of the Women's Manifesto in March 2018,<sup>63</sup> various parties signed the gender parity pledge committing to promote gender equality in fielding of candidates. This pledge was not honoured when the time came to nominate candidates for the 2018 elections as shown by the figures presented in table 3.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that the parties with the largest number of candidates, ZANU PF and the MDC Alliance did not sign the gender parity pledge. This is part of the reason why the 2018 elections failed to reach equal representation.<sup>65</sup>

**Table 3: Frequency of nominated female candidates in political parties** <sup>66</sup>

Party	% of total candidates	% of female candidates
ZDU	2%	30%
NCA	4%	29%
BZA	3%	26%
CODE	3%	23%
ZIPP	8%	20%
MDC-T	7%	20%
NPF	6%	12%
ZANUPF	13%	10%
INDEPENDENT	15%	10%
MDC ALLIANCE	13%	8%
ZAPU	2%	5%
PRC	10%	3%

Other barriers include lack of or limited opportunities to education as well as lack of financial resources. If a family has economic challenges preference is often given to boys over girls in terms of who to send to school. This leaves girls disadvantaged and with low confidence when having to compete in the future against their educated, male counterparts. Elections are commercial activities that require money all through the process, from nomination to campaigning. Inadequate financial resources discourage women from participating in political processes and women, especially the young, who lack skills are discouraged from fundraising and sustain campaigns.

## 2018 HARMONIZED ELECTIONS

The 2018 harmonized elections witnessed a significant improvement from the previous 2013 elections, in the levels of participation of women as both voters and candidates. The 2008 elections were characterized by violence and intimidation which had an adverse effect on women's participation in the 2013 elections. Since 2000, women had gradually withdrawn from participating actively in elections due to high levels of violence and feelings of insecurity.<sup>67</sup> In response there were various efforts at both national and local level

63. RAU (2017), *Citizenship in Zimbabwe: A preliminary investigation of changes over the period 2004 to 2014*. June 2017. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

64. <https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/between-jesus-generals-invisibles-e-win-jass-sna.pdf>

65. <http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/live/2018/03/06/5050-advocacy-campaign-and-womens-manifesto-launch-6-march-2018/#liveblog-entry-878>

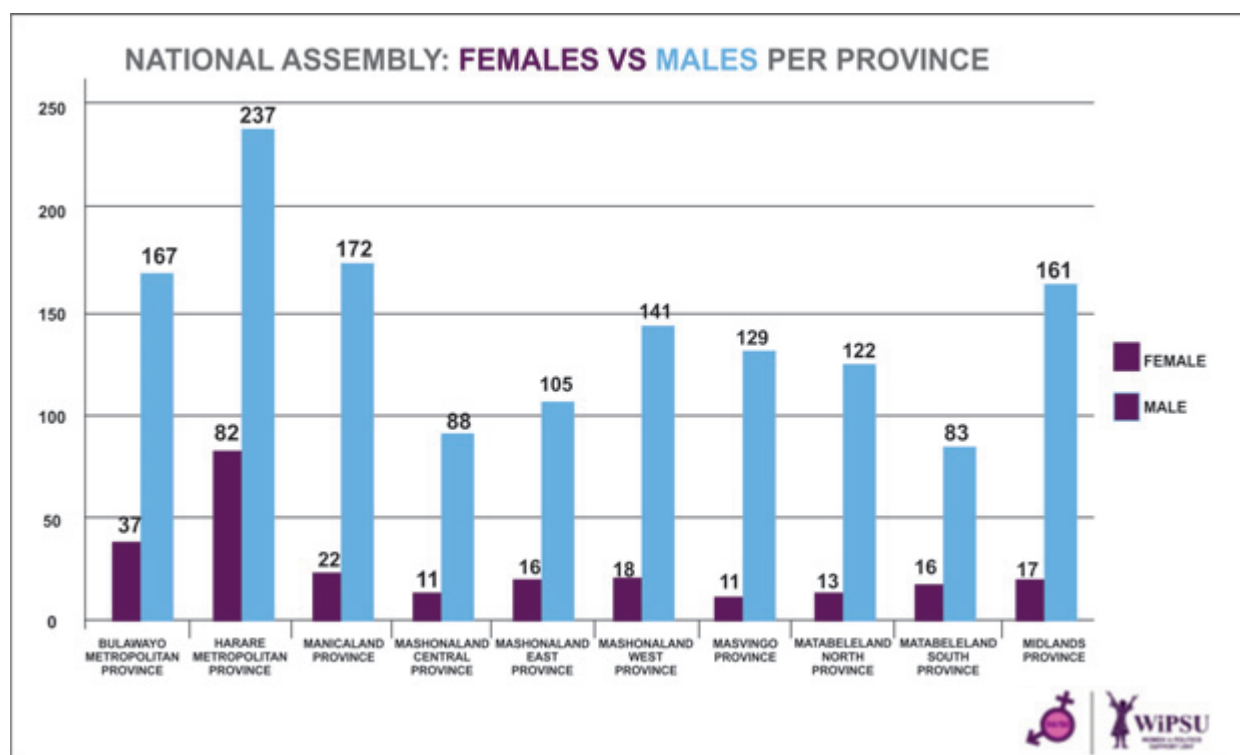
66. <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/when-will-a-woman-lead-zimbabwe-opendemocracy/>

67. <https://www.herald.co.zw/editorial-comment-zim-falls-short-on-gender-equality/>

aimed at increasing women's presence in decision making spaces. At national level, the new constitution came into force in 2013 through which a gender quota was introduced as mentioned previously. The number of women in the National Assembly doubled from 16% in 2008 to 32% in 2013. Section 120 (2) of the new constitution provides for election of Senators under a party-list system of proportional representation. The party-list system should use zebra listing whereby female and male candidates are listed alternatively, with a woman heading every list. As a result, female representation reached 48 percent within the Senate in the 2018 elections. There were also various campaigns at local level such as the Vote for a Woman Campaign spearheaded by the Women in Politics Support Unit which was mobilising the electorate to vote for female candidates, and Simuka Zimbabwe by the Women's Trust which was encouraging women to register to vote and vote for a woman. The progress was more limited in the executive with three women being appointed as ministers and two women as ministers of state.<sup>68</sup>

In the 2018 elections, only 242 (15%) out of 1648 National Assembly candidates were female (graph 1). Additionally, only 1176 (17%) out of 9796 local government candidates were female. It is worth noting, however, that despite the heavily imbalanced numbers in favour of men there were notable increases in the number of female local government candidates from 899 in the 2013 elections to 1176 in the 2018 elections. For Senate 146 out of 290 candidates were female. For the first time in Zimbabwe, 38 years after independence, there were four female presidential candidates.<sup>69</sup> Although they were not successful, it is evident that at the highest level the interest is there.

Graph 1.



68. RAU 2018

69. <http://forums.ssrc.org/african-futures/2013/07/31/women-and-the-2013-zimbabwe-elections-a-voice-from-the-field/>

In the aftermath of the elections the number of female parliamentarians elected into the 9th parliament stands at 31%.<sup>70</sup> At local government a decrease was witnessed from 16% elected councillors in 2013 to 13% in 2018.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the continued positive developments observed in the 2018 elections of the increase in female candidates and in the number of female members of the executive, it is still far from the desired 50/50 that is enshrined in the constitution. The 2018 elections were evidently not successful in reaching equal representation.<sup>72</sup>

## LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

### International and Regional Policy Framework

Zimbabwe is party to, and has committed to, a number of conventions on gender equality including:

- **Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991).**  
Article 7:

*State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and in particular shall ensure to women on equal terms with men the right; [...]*

*(b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.*

- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** which encourages governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision making.
- **The Sustainable Development Goals (2015) Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.**
- **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003).** Article 9:

*State parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action.*

## ZIMBABWE CONSTITUTION

In 2013 Zimbabwe adopted a new constitution which was considered a great victory by the women's movement. After extensive lobbying the final document included provisions that recognised gender equality as a founding principle and value and called for affirmative action to remedy imbalances. **Section 17** of the constitution states that:

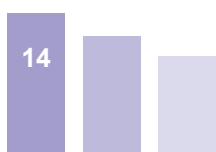
- (1) *The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society and in particular-*
  - (a) *The state must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men;*

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70. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/womens-participation-in-politics-remains-marginal/>

71. WIPSU 2018

72. *Ibid*



- (b) *The state must take all measures including legislative measures needed to ensure that-*
- (i) *Both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level;*
  - (ii) *Women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under the Constitution or an Act of Parliament.*
- (2) *The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past policies and practices.*

As progressive as **Section 17** is, it speaks about gender equality in general and not explicit terms. It talks about the need for promotion of full participation of women in all spheres and obligates the State to ensure the representation of both genders at every level, however it does not address the “how” part. There is need for further legislation that operationalises this provision into actions that can be implemented. As we have come to realise changing laws in favour of women, without women accessing political resources may not be adequate in transforming patriarchal norms against women’s participation in politics.<sup>73</sup>

**Section 56 (1)** states that women have the right to equal treatment including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. It goes on to emphasise that no one should be discriminated against based on gender and that the State must take reasonable measures to promote the achievement of equality and to protect people who have been disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.

**Section 80** reiterates the right to equal opportunities in all aspects of life and it states that all laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe on the rights of women conferred by the Constitution, are void to the extent of the infringement.

Although the Constitution is clear about gender equality, the reality on the ground is that it is not being adhered to, especially with regard to women’s political participation. Zimbabwe has failed to meet the 50/50 representation at the Presidium (0%), cabinet (33%), and legislature (35%).<sup>74</sup> This is despite engagement by the women’s movement with political parties and the State.

However, **Section 124 (b)** has been adhered to. This section provides for a gender quota which adds 60 seats in parliament reserved for women based on proportional representation. It came about largely due to intense lobbying by the women’s movement during the preparatory process for the amendment of the Constitution. They were seeking to include special measures that would facilitate gender balance in the political and governance sphere. The resultant provision stated that;

*The National Assembly consists of-*

*[...]*

*For the life of the first two Parliaments after the effective date, an additional sixty women members, six from each of the provinces into which Zimbabwe is divided, elected under a party-list system of proportional representation based on the votes cast for candidates representing political parties in a general election for constituency members in the province.*

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73. *Ibid*

74. *Research and Advocacy Unit and Institute for Young Women’s Development. 2018. “A Gender Audit of the 2018 Elections.”*





This addition of the 60 reserved seats had the effect of doubling the percentage of female MPs from 16 percent in 2008 to 32 percent in 2013. It serves as a symbol to women that they can break the barriers they face in entering the political space and those interested in participating are shown that it can be done.

Although the quota increased the number of women in Parliament a study has shown that it has come with a number of challenges and shortcomings. It was discovered that the number of women directly elected decreased as a result of the quota. In 2013 the number of directly elected women MPs went from 32 to 25. It was reported that within the political parties, women were being discouraged from contesting in primary elections because they already had reserved seats. The study further cited the lack of constituency as a factor that immobilises the quota women. Parliamentarians draw their authority and power from the constituencies that vote them in and because the 60 women are not elected by a constituency this renders them powerless. It was further established that the MPs on the quota system and elected MPs themselves did not have an understanding of what their roles entailed, demonstrating that this was a reflection of the manner in which the process was rushed and improperly thought out. The 60 women are also subjected to verbal harassment and stigmatisation by fellow elected MPs and are referred to as 'Baccossi', because they are perceived to not have worked as hard as the elected MPs to enter Parliament.<sup>75</sup> Section 124 fell short of what the women's movement was looking for. Although a permanent quota was being lobbied for, the end product was a provision with a sunset clause that comes to an end with the 2023 elections. 2018 was thereby the last election with the implementation of the quota.

A lesson that can be drawn from Zimbabwe's affirmative action policy is that, the way it is adopted has an effect on the performance of the MPs and interaction between the elected MPs and themselves. It is therefore important to consider these two factors when coming up with future affirmative action policies. Quotas have worked in other countries in Africa, i.e. Uganda (34.3%), Burundi and Tanzania (36.4%) and Rwanda, where constitutional provisions established quotas for women's representation, with Rwanda having the most success globally, with 56.3%.<sup>76</sup> Zimbabwe could also learn from Mauritania's electoral system and its specific measures for gender equality where, in the National Assembly, 115 members are elected in single- and multi-member constituencies and 40 members are elected through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve five-year terms. Election lists in two-member constituencies must include one candidate of each gender. In larger districts, a female candidate must appear in either first or second place, and genders should alternate throughout the list. Of the 40 seats elected at the nationwide level, 20 seats are reserved for females.<sup>77</sup>

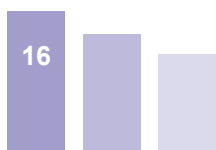
There seems to be consensus in Zimbabwe, especially amongst women in politics, for a constitutional amendment on the quota, but strong disagreement on the how. Other groups state that Section 124 (b) should not have a time limit and exist as it is in perpetuity; other groups state that the fielding of the 60 women should not come from political parties but any woman can stand and be selected to represent women; others want the quota to come from the 210 constituencies, with 105 being reserved for women, i.e. any political party contesting must field a woman in these constituencies.<sup>78</sup>

75. WIPSU 2018

76. <https://www.herald.co.zw/editorial-comment-zim-falls-short-on-gender-equality/>

77. Zungura M and Nyemba E, *The Implications of the Quota System in Promoting Gender Equality in Zimbabwean Politics International Journal of Humanities and Social Science; The Special Issue on Contemporary Research in Behavioural and Social Science 2013*

78. WIPSU (2018)



A major oversight of section 124 was to not mandate the quota system at local government level. In 2013 women representatives were at 16.2%, which has decreased to 13.3% after the 2018 elections.<sup>79</sup> There has been a gradual decline of female representation in local government since 2008. This must be reversed by means of introducing affirmative action at this level.

## THE ELECTORAL ACT

The Act currently states in section 3 (b) every citizen has the right —

- (i) *to participate in government directly or through freely chosen representatives, and is entitled, without distinction on the ground of race, ethnicity, gender, language, political or religious belief, education, physical appearance or disability or economic or social condition, to stand for office and cast a vote freely;*

There is need to look at the Electoral Act with a gender lens and make the necessary changes.

Further, Zimbabwe's elections have always been marred with violence, which is one of the impediments for women in elections, in contravention with the wording of the Electoral Act. For the July election, the police<sup>80</sup> and political parties<sup>81</sup> publicly stated that there would be a zero tolerance towards violence, particularly towards women. Although there was considerably less physical violence in this election, there was an increase in cyberbullying with a strong leaning to women. The Act should be interpreted in a way that makes it possible for these offences to be brought before the electoral court. The implementation of this, however, fell short for the July 2018 elections and this is an area of improvement for 2023.

## ZIMBABWE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

Zimbabwe has a National Gender Policy that provides a framework for addressing through policy, gender disparities found in many sectors, including in politics and decision making. It outlines Zimbabwe's vision for a gender-just society and gives guidance on how Zimbabwe should strive towards this. The most recent National Gender Policy of 2013-2017 recognises the importance of women taking part in decision making for the purposes of sustainable development and good governance. The policy objective under the Gender, Politics and Decision-Making cluster is to create a supportive environment for gender parity in politics and decision-making positions. The policy goes further to recommend policy strategies for achieving this goal which are:

- I. *Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and carry out periodic gender audits on representation and participation of men and women in politics and decision-making positions.*
- II. *Develop and strengthen policies, legal provisions and programmes to ensure attainment of a 50/50 representation of men and women in politics and other key decision-making positions.*
- III. *Formulate and implement capacity building programmes for sitting and aspiring women leaders and support initiatives, including resource mobilisation efforts, that seek to promote women in politics and other governance structures.*

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79. RAU. (2016) *Participation But No Voice: A Preliminary Report on Proportional Representation in Zimbabwe*. Research and Advocacy Unit.

80. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>

81. <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/214/35>

- IV. *Invest in programmes aimed at enhancing effectiveness and leadership confidence in young girls to ensure equal participation in leadership in schools, tertiary institutions and junior parliament.*
- V. *Lobby for affirmative action measures in areas where sharp gender disparities exist.*
- VI. *Lobby for the elimination of cultural and traditional customs that inhibit equal participation of men and women in traditional governance and other grassroot structures.*

The policy strategies are comprehensive in trying to address disparities from grassroot structures all the way to national level. What is needed is effective implementation which can be enhanced through partnerships between government, independent institutions and civil society organisations. Their various strengths and abilities towards achieving the policy goal and the overall goal of the National Gender Policy, which is to achieve a gender just society in which men and women enjoy equity and contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country, can be harnessed.

## POTENTIAL INTERVENTIONS FOR EQUITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN POLITICS

While men and women are biologically different, they are considered equal before the law and it should not be suggested that one is “better” than the other. The discussions about equity and equality usually result in a battle of the sexes with gender roles being the main contention. It is important to understand that gender roles are learnt and therefore can be changed, but our biological make up cannot. Therefore, men and women being equal does not mean that men and women are the same. In fact, men and women are different but should be treated as equals. Thus, if men and women provide the same skill at the same level in the workplace, their benefits and pay should also be the same.

Mostly equity and equality are disputed in the private and domestic sphere while in the public space the equality of men and women is more accepted. Despite this, there are still many examples of inequality, i.e. the pay gap,<sup>82</sup> and the treatment of women in politics.

As mentioned above, women in politics are generally treated differently and unfairly. This is manifested in the portrayal of women in the media,<sup>83</sup> where the focus is on their domestic lives, appearance, how they speak, how they are not emotionally prepared to take on public office, sexist language and pitting them against each other.<sup>84</sup> Working with the media is critical as it is an important tool in positively influencing and managing perceptions about women in leadership. Social media, including Facebook and Twitter play a critical role in shaping voters interest in, and attitudes about, an election and about candidates. The women politicians need to counter how the mainstream and social media portrays them.<sup>85</sup> This, requires that female politicians have a certain technical knowledge as cyber violence can be severely damaging to their political careers.<sup>86</sup>

Equal participation of women and men in politics is important for effective democracy and good governance. Women and men tend to bring different qualities to politics and decision making.<sup>87</sup> Due to socialisation, male politicians tend to focus more on conflict, defence and finance, and female politicians tend to focus on

82. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/women-call-for-quota-system-extension/>

83. WIPSU 2018

84. <https://www.voanews.com/a/zimbabwe-police-vow-zero-tolerance-for-election-violence/4360936.html>

85. <https://www.ifes.org/publications/new-assessment-violence-against-women-elections-zimbabwe>

86. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/equal-pay>

87. McIntosh *Women and Politics in the Media Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition 2013 Volume 6, Issue 2, pp. 99-104*

what is considered as “soft issues” such as health care and education. For a well-functioning society, it is important that all aspects are given adequate consideration. While this socialisation should be addressed in itself as it is based on stereotypes and constrains individuals, it is part of today’s reality and must to some extent be taken into consideration. If there were more women in politics, there would be more results in the governance of this country, as was seen by the generally better attendance by women in both the past and the present parliament.<sup>88</sup> The Parliamentary Women’s Caucus is an example of an efficient platform where members put political differences aside to jointly focus on what is best for women in general. Despite motivation among women to get involved in there has been a drop in the numbers joining political parties over the years. There is need for women to be active citizens by engaging more in their communities and not only be voters.<sup>89</sup>

The inclusion of women in politics is critical to successful democracies. It is not possible to have a democracy while ignoring the needs and views of half the population. The inclusion of women is essential for peaceful, developed and sustainable societies. Men and women need each other in politics.

Apart from strengthening and enhancing the democratic system, the participation of more women in politics and decision-making has many positive effects on society that can help improve the lives of women and men. Benefits include more equitable societies and inclusive governance; higher standards of living; positive development in education; health and infrastructure; and, a decrease in political corruption.

One way to address issues of equity between men and women is to introduce education on gender and politics into the schools’ curricula.<sup>90</sup> If children are taught about equality and equity in schools, they will bring this way of thinking home and influence their parents and communities, this way the learnings will reach further, and the children will accept equality and equity as the norm when they are adults. The teaching of politics and governance will bring about the realisation that men and women are equally important in decision making and necessary to achieve democracy.

Political parties have a very important role to play in bringing about equity in politics. This is where it is possible to determine how conducive it is for women to be candidates and which post they decide to run for. It is within political parties that the marginalisation of women’s rights, skills and experiences has been most visible, particularly in the last election. Cronyism and patronage were mentioned as issues in this election, particularly in the two major political parties,<sup>91</sup> and women were marginalised as a result. These are institutional barriers in the middle of the selection process that affect women who are interested in running for office. The level at which political parties as an institution promote or constrain women’s selection is undoubtedly important as parties are the main channels through which women can be elected as representatives. Both internal and external constraints guide party decisions and actors, and consequently affect the selection of women. For example, the type of electoral system, the presence or absence of regulations such as national quota for women, how the quota is perceived, or a gender equality legislature are of importance, together with stereotypes of women.

The internal party selection rules and regulations, and informal practices of the party as an institution also play an important role. The presence or absence of a gender equality perspective in the internal

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88. <https://africanarguments.org/2018/07/11/boys-allowed-7-faces-zimbabwe-patriarchy/>

89. <http://www.herald.co.zw/the-role-of-social-media-in-politics/>

90. <https://koliwemajama.co.zw/cyber-violence-makes-internet-use-gendered-issue/>

91. [http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/resistance\\_to\\_womens\\_political\\_leadership\\_problems\\_and\\_advocated\\_solutions\\_by\\_catherine\\_watuka.pdf](http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/resistance_to_womens_political_leadership_problems_and_advocated_solutions_by_catherine_watuka.pdf)

statutes and the presence, or absence of a supportive framework for promoting women dictates the levels of women's participation. Political parties outlined their commitment to gender equality by endorsing the Women's Manifesto in March 2018.<sup>92</sup> This was however not adhered to during candidate selection and the submission of names to the nomination court, in contravention of the parties' own gender policies.<sup>93</sup> This shows that the opinions of the party leadership on gender equality, as well as their style of decision-making have a big impact, especially during the selection process.<sup>94</sup>

Political parties are commonly identified with their leaders. This makes it harder for women to emerge as political leaders as the strong man syndrome is very evident, especially in Africa. The current position in Zimbabwe presents opportunities to institute changes in the political structure and culture that ensure the recognition and realization of women's right to participate fully and equally in politics. These opportunities need to be harnessed, especially for the inclusion of young women.

The amendment of section 124 of the Constitution needs to be foregone by national consultation as there is no consensus on what the next step is. Some are of the opinion that the quota should fall away in 2023 while others think that the 60 seats should be incorporated in the existing 210 and make it a permanent quota. The women's wings in the different political parties should be engaged to spearhead this. In the past they have struggled to bring their issues into the mainstream politics, they tend to get stuck within the wings. It is however necessary to push for the full recognition of the women's wings to ensure that their needs are met at party level.

The Gender Commission should focus its efforts on maintaining the quota system by working primarily with political parties and ensuring that they are on board and have measures to increase women's representation at party level. Below are some best practices from different political parties around the world that could assist:

- Adoption of quotas guaranteeing women's participation within political parties internal decision-making structures. For example, Rule 6 of the African National Congress (ANC)'s constitution states that with the aim of full representation of women in all decision-making structures, the party will implement a programme of affirmative action including a quota of no less than 50 percent in all elected structures.<sup>95</sup>
- Establishment of fundraising networks and organisations for women candidates which can provide important seed funds to women in the early stages of seeking the party nomination – EMILY's (Early Money is Like Yeast) List in the USA. <sup>96</sup> This is a funding network that enhances access to funding for progressive Democratic women in American politics.
- Public funding of political parties which can be regulated in such a way as to encourage parties to address women's political empowerment, e.g. Burkina Faso where a 2009 law established candidate quotas and included substantial monetary incentives for parties that elected women candidates. A 50 percent increase in the amount of public funding is provided to parties if 30 percent of elected candidates are women.<sup>97</sup>

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92. Dube, R (2013), *Parliamentary Performance and Gender*. November 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2015, *Occasional Visitors Re-Visited: Attendance in the First Session of the 8th Parliament of Zimbabwe*. April 2015. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

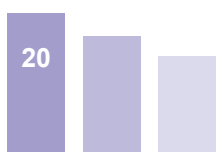
93. RAU (2017) *Women and Active Citizenship in Zimbabwe: A preliminary investigation of changes over the period 2004 to 2014*

94. <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2014/09/05/compulsory-political-education-is-a-must-if-we-are-to-stem-the-flow-of-disengagement-from-politics/>

95. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625183/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625183\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625183/EPRS_BRI(2018)625183_EN.pdf)

96. <https://www.herald.co.zw/mudenda-launches-womens-manifesto/>

97. WIPUSU



- In Australia the Labour Party through its own “EMILY’s list” has established a capacity building mentorship programme where first time candidates are paired with more experienced politicians.<sup>98</sup> This has had positive impact on the numbers of women in the party.

Ultimately, there is need for a national consultation on the amendment of Section 124 to ensure equal representation in politics and decision-making processes.

## **MULTI SECTORAL APPROACH TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ON EQUAL REPRESENTATION**

In order to strengthen the implementation of the legal and policy framework, the Government cannot work alone. There has to be comprehensive consultation to come up with a feasible and multi-faceted approach as well as a time-bound workplan which clearly stipulates the roles each player will take. Individuals will also have to take an active part to ensure the implementation of the national frameworks on political participation. The main strength of a multi-sectoral approach is that it creates a mechanism for information sharing and coordination, supporting the inclusion of all major stakeholders in society, regardless of their sector or work and their organisational affiliation.

### **Women:**

- It is important for women to stand as candidates by either joining political parties or as independents;
- Be visible in the media and in their community so that the electorate gets to know them and what they stand for;
- Participate in mentoring and coaching inter-generational sessions with experienced politicians.

### **Independent Commissions:**

- All chapter 12 institutions should be involved with the Gender Commission and the Electoral Commission taking the lead to ensure that there is equal representation in politics;
- These commissions should lead by example, i.e. their composition and operations should reflect gender equality in line with their mandate as stated in the legal framework.

### **Civil society organisations:**

- Identify and support women willing to run for office;
- Provide confidence building training and other types of support for women candidates;
- Lobby to ensure issues of special concern to women are addressed in party platforms, i.e. the 50/50 campaign;
- Lobby for legislative adherence to advance women’s participation;
- Develop inter-party networks of women;
- Develop inter-generational networking opportunities for women in politics;
- Develop and disseminate gender-sensitive messages for voter and civic education;
- Advocate improved media coverage of women’s issues and women candidates;
- Persuade international donors to support projects aimed at advancing women’s political participation;
- Work with religious and traditional leaders.

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98. [http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/resistance\\_to\\_womens\\_political\\_leadership\\_problems\\_and\\_advocated\\_solutions\\_by\\_catherine\\_watuka.pdf](http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/resistance_to_womens_political_leadership_problems_and_advocated_solutions_by_catherine_watuka.pdf)

**Political parties:**

- Adopt internal democratic structures;
- Make certain that women are fully represented in party leadership and policy committees, not just in the women's wings;
- Equal value must be given to the issues brought by the different wings, i.e. women's and youth wings;
- In proportional representation systems, place women contenders high enough on the candidate lists to ensure they will be elected, including through mechanisms such as zebra lists;
- Provide support and resources to ensure the election of women candidates, including a quota for young women;
- Clearly identify the advancement of women and issues of special concern to women as priorities in their platforms.

**Parliament:**

- Ensure conducive engagement of women in parliament business; heckling should not be to demean and humiliate the person;
- Debate and enact gender sensitive legislation in keeping with the Constitution;
- Promote women's issues with the aim of achieving equal representation.

**The media:**

- Provide gender-sensitive coverage of elections, avoiding negative stereotypes and presenting positive images of women as leaders;
- Provide women candidates with at least as much airtime and print space as that given to men;
- Focus attention on issues of special concern to women in news programming;
- Undertake voter and civic education programmes aimed specifically at women.

**Local Government:**

- Guarantee a safe environment where women are able to fully participate without fear or favour;
- Consider advocating for proportional representation, as in the Senate;
- Work to promote and protect the rights of women at council level by adhering to the Constitution.

**Government:**

- Adhere to the national Constitution;
- Guarantee a safe environment where women are able to fully participate without fear;
- Ensure that political party laws and other election-related legislation do not indirectly disadvantage women;
- Consider legislation requiring political parties to adopt democratic procedures for their internal operations;
- Consider the 50/50 campaign requiring political parties to have 50 percent representation of women at all levels;
- Provide incentives for political parties to promote women candidates, including resources, training and increased access to broadcast time;
- Ensure the national broadcaster is impartial and gender neutral;
- Providing increased airtime for women in politics between elections as this may advance women's participation by enabling voters to make informed assessments at election time of the overall performance of political parties, including their support of women who have been elected as representatives.

## Private Sector

- Establish networks where women within the private sector can offer financial support to women wishing to pursue a political career. This will help in overcoming the challenge of lack of resources that women face when campaigning and will help in building solidarity.

## International community:

- Provide advice on legislation, electoral systems and best practices that can advance women's participation in the electoral process;
- Assist in the training of women candidates;
- Provide training to political parties, journalists, security forces and others to convey the importance of women's political participation and gender sensitivity;
- Help establish and support cross-party cooperation among women;
- Provide support and training through civil society to women who have been elected to office to enable them to function more effectively in their new roles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for political parties to commit themselves to gender equality both on paper and in reality. Since Zimbabwe is a signatory to CEDAW, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as the SADC Gender Protocol, it is important for the political parties to ensure that they adhere to the principles of gender equality as stated in the human rights instruments. Some progress has been made, but this needs updating as new political parties have emerged, and the playing field is different with the enacting of the amended Constitution, which has strong gender provisions. The recommendations below should be affected at all levels of participation, but more so at local government level as this is the entry point for taking on public office, and it is fundamental to the socio-economic and political development of the nation.<sup>99</sup>

- **Policies aimed at promoting women's leadership**

The government should ensure that there are policies aimed at promoting women's leadership in all spheres of society, not just in politics. This should start in the school system with equal opportunities being presented to boys and girls. Normalising women in leadership will eventually create a gender equal society. This can be done by way of introducing effective affirmative action policies at all levels of government, particularly at local government level where there has been a steady decline in women's representation since 2008, due to the absence of such policies. The policies must be favourable to the performance of their duties and to the relationships between themselves and their peers.

- **Party constitutions and policies**

In order to ensure women's participation in electoral processes must begin with gender sensitive and responsive political parties. Zimbabwe has progressive laws which are not implemented; a phenomenon that should not be replicated by political parties. The call for parliament or government to be 50/50 cannot be reasonably expected if this is not practiced in all structures of the parties. For example, in Denmark the gender quota was adopted in the 1970s, but it has since been abandoned as no further stimulus is needed.

The constitutions of political parties should deal with issues of the internal operations that protect women from the ills such as abuse, verbal and physical, including how to deal with politically motivated violence. It is further important to introduce and uphold sexual harassment codes to protect women



from unwanted attention in their political parties.

- **Adherence to the Legislation**

Zimbabwe could follow the route taken by other countries to sanction political parties that fail to comply with gender quotas. See below the suggested amendments of the Electoral Act and the Political Parties Finance Act.

- **Amendment of the Electoral Act**

The amendment of the Electoral Act should include a provision that obligates political parties to submit 50 percent male and 50 percent female candidates at both national and local government level in accordance with Section 17 of the constitution. Further, the Electoral Act should be amended to include the 50/50 representation at political party level. A party bringing a nomination list of less than this will not be able to participate in elections.

- **Constituency, council ward and resource allocation**

The allocation of constituencies and council wards should be done in a fair manner. Having half the candidates being female doesn't mean equal representation if the women are allocated constituencies and council wards where they are likely to lose, while men are 'protected' and enjoy the safety of traditional stronghold constituencies. Women should be given conducive and winnable constituencies and council wards. And, provided with adequate resources to campaign. The party leadership should make sure resources for campaigning are distributed equitably between both female and male candidates, regardless of where they are contesting. Efforts can further be channelled towards equipping women with fundraising skills to enable them to raise their own campaign funds. Political parties could also offer women candidates financial assistance for campaigning, as well as waive membership fees, and other campaign expenses to increase women's participation in politics.

- **Engagement with the media**

The power of media cannot be overstated. For any meaningful change to occur, particularly with behavioural change, the portrayal of women in the media needs to change. In most instances, the formal rules governing media coverage of candidates appear non-partisan and gender neutral. However, in reality, media regulations and practices may indirectly disadvantage women, regardless of their political affiliation. This is where social media becomes vital as the candidates are in control of their own pages and can balance what is conveyed in the mainstream media.

- **Working with religious and traditional leaders**

This is necessary to change the mindset of the Zimbabwean public, which is influenced by cultural and religious beliefs that continue the subjugation of women, particularly women in leadership.

- **Political party leadership**

Political parties say the right words when speaking about gender equality, but they are not doing enough to turn it into practice. Even the political parties with female presidents do not have women in equal numbers within their senior decision-making bodies. As gatekeepers, political parties play a key role in promoting women's participation and must therefore form and adhere to gender policies. The investment political parties make in women should be based on feminist theories in order to assure adequate understanding of women's issues and thereby have more success with attempts to increase the numbers of women. There has to be commitment from women in political parties to encourage other women to vote or stand as candidates alongside the political parties commitment to make the political

space conducive for the ordinary women. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and civil society can provide support such as civic and voter education with a women's rights-based approach, however the political parties must carry the major part of the responsibility.

Political parties must ensure that they are selecting candidates that are competent, understand governance and have shown community engagement, especially for those contesting local government seats. The candidates, particularly for local government, should know the issues and reside in the communities they are contesting for.

Political parties need to invest in mentoring and coaching programmes for women who want to enter politics as candidates. A frequent criticism is that the quality of women candidates is low and therefore they perform badly in decision-making positions. Women may be less educated than men in politics currently, but this is set to change due to education and the investments that civil society has been doing within this area. Coupled with feminising the political space, more professional women will enter, and a definite shift will be seen in the level of engagement.

- **Economic incentives for compliance for political parties**

An introduction of economic incentives for gender equality compliance could be adopted for political parties through the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission or through the Political Party Finance Act (Chapter 2:11). This has worked in Ethiopia where women's representation increased and has resulted in a 50/50 cabinet in Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government, and more recently, they have elected their first female President, Sahle-Work Zewde.

- **Young women**

Political parties need to consider fielding young women for candidacy during elections in order to have balanced parliament and councils with both older women and young women. This will create a setting for intergenerational transfer of skills.

Support can be sourced from civil society to advocate that, within the National Assembly proportional representation quota for women, a certain percentage should go to young women. The same can be advocated for at local government level. Civil society can additionally support capacity building, mentoring and coaching programmes for new political actors. Democracy cannot be considered successful if an entire demography is not adequately represented in decision-making.

Inter-generational mentorship is required in politics. The older generation should avail themselves to mentor young women. A way to ensure this is to impose a mandatory two term maximum for all MPs and councillors, and each MP and councillor should mentor aspiring candidates that can replace them once their term is over.

- **Engagement of male gender champions**

Women should not be speaking only to themselves about women's political participation and gender equality. The gatekeepers are men and they are generally reluctant to give up power. Men should be compelled to include women in their spaces because, men are the majority in leadership positions.

- **Participation of women during voting period**

In order to increase the participation of women in politics, it is important to consider gender sensitisation training for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, including the secretariat.

The election period requires spaces and officials that are conscious of the needs of women. As they



wait in the queues; special preference must be given to pregnant women and women with young children, and, in the same manner, the elderly and disabled. This was not much of an issue in 2018 as it was in other elections, but there were reported isolated incidences where this was not adhered to.

- **Responsive Justice system**

There is need to ensure that the justice system is responsive to women who have been victims of violence, whether it be physical, sexual, verbal or cyberbullying and that perpetrators are appropriately dealt with. Women need to have faith in the justice system and be assured that in cases where they might fall victim to violence, the case will be dealt with seriously and appropriately, in order to feel safe

## CONCLUSION

The quota system, which had the effect of increasing the number of female parliamentarians, comes to an end in 2023. In light of the challenges and barriers that still exist for women entering the political space, there will be a great regression in the number of female leaders once it comes to an end. It is therefore important to note that action needs to be taken immediately. This is particularly acute at local government level where female representation is decreasing with every election. A holistic approach is required, the government, independent commissions, political parties and civil society need to work together to ensure that women's representation progresses instead of regresses. It is equally essential that there are transformational programmes aimed at changing the way women in leadership are viewed in society and portrayed in the media. Additionally, by addressing gender equality and other issues of special concern to women, political parties can increase their relevance to women voters and provide a greater incentive for women to become involved in the political process.

The political parties in Zimbabwe are advised to engage with the Gender Commission in order to advance in the area of gender sensitivity. A number of political parties did not field any female candidates in the 2018 elections. It is important to feminise the political system to make it conducive for women to participate. Only by making the electoral process inclusive will we achieve a legitimate political system and hence, a democratic Zimbabwe. In the spirit of democratic governance, it is essential and key to ensure that women have a voice that is representative of their total population in matters of national importance.

