



Zimbabwe
Gender
Commission

NATIONAL STUDY
ON **VIOLENCE**
AGAINST WOMEN
IN **POLITICS**
IN ZIMBABWE





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FOREWORD

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) is one of the five Independent Commissions supporting democracy and established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The Commission is further operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act (Chapter 10:31). Section 246 of the Constitution and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act outline the mandate and specific functions of the Commission and chief amongst these functions is to monitor gender issues and ensuring compliance with gender equality provisions espoused by the Constitution as well as regional and international normative frameworks on gender. The Zimbabwe Commission takes a keen interest in elections as this is one of the many ways in which gender equality can be actualised. Therefore, electoral processes are key in the realisation of inclusive governance. Recognizing the importance of electoral processes in the fulfilment of gender equality commitments, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, in fulfilment of its monitoring mandate, commissioned a study on Violence Against Women in Politics.

The focus of the study is on assessing obstacles to women's political participation, including the experience of violence, magnitude, forms of violence, risk and protective factors, help seeking behaviour and consequences it may have on women's health, well-being as well as their political participation and leadership. The study also assesses the national and sub-national legislative and policy frameworks on women's political participation and VAWP, to identify entry points for strengthening the monitoring, normative and institutional framework on VAWP.

The study was overseen by a team from UN Women Country Office in Zimbabwe. A technical team based at UN Women's headquarters in New York and the regional office in Nairobi provided indispensable inputs into the design of the study, development of the survey questionnaire, analysis and structuring the findings.

The study was implemented by the research organization Primson Consultancy led by Professor Sunungurai Chingarande- Team Leader; Commissioner Netsai Mushonga- National Gender Expert, Dr Eve Nyemba- Team Members; Ms Tendai Dengezela- statistician and Hazvinei Myambo- Project Manager.

The study would not have been possible without the participation of the 2023 women candidates for parliamentary elections who answered the survey and took part in focus groups and in-depth interviews. We are deeply grateful for their time and for sharing their experiences with us. Special gratitude also goes to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Parliament of Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe Gender Commission secretariate and all Government Ministries and CSOs who were members of the technical working group for their support for their partnership. The survey was made possible thanks to the generous contributions of the Embassy of France, Embassy of Japan, European Union through the ZIMECO project.



Commissioner M. Mukahanana -Sangarwe
Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission

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ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EMB	Electoral Management Body
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDI	In-depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
MPLC	Multi-Party Liaison Committee
MoWACSMED	Ministry of Women Affairs Community Small and Medium Enterprise Development
PMS	Primson Management Services
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USA	United States of America
VAWP	Violence Against Women in Politics
VFU	Victim Friendly Unit
VFS	Victim Friendly System
WCoZ	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
WPC	Women's Parliamentary Caucus
WPP	Women's Political Participation
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZGC	Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZHRC	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZPP	Zimbabwe Peace Project
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the experiences and findings of the National Study on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Gender Commission had a series of stakeholder consultations on VAWP in Zimbabwe involving engaging with various individuals, groups, and organizations relevant to preventing, mitigating, or responding to VAWP in Zimbabwe through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and a survey targeting parliamentary female candidates of the 2023 general election and key informant interviews with stakeholders who have a role in elections programming in Zimbabwe. The stakeholders include civil society organizations, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, the Zimbabwe Republic Police, and Chapter 12 Commissions among others. These consultations aimed to gather insights, perspectives, and recommendations from stakeholders to inform research, policy development, and intervention strategies aimed at addressing VAWP.

Highlights of findings

Acts of VAWP

Female candidates to parliament experienced different forms of violence at all stages of the 2023 electoral cycle. The study revealed that 92% of the female candidates to parliament that responded to the survey experienced one or more types of violence during the 2023 election. One main challenge was deterrent nomination fees of US\$1000 in an economy where access and control over productive assets and resources is skewed towards men. Sexual harassment, physical violence, cyber bullying, economic violence, vote buying, emotional and verbal abuse, including destruction of campaign material were the main types of VAWP experienced by respondents during both primary and general elections. During the post-election period, exclusion from development initiatives was cited as common for female candidates and their campaign teams. VAWP was regarded as one of the reasons behind the decline in the numbers of female candidates and such experiences lead to discouragement and fear by the candidates, their family and friends.

Use of the Media to Campaign

Use of the media was common among female candidates. However, social media was considered a double-edged sword as it was used to tarnish the candidates' images and reputation. On the other hand, because it can reach far and wide, some candidates managed to secure support as a result of their presence on social media. The challenges of data, network coverage and lack of smart phones in the rural areas hindered some rural female candidates from using the social media, hence their experience with online VAWP was limited.

Family and Political Party Support

The experiences with family and political party support were varied. Some candidates received moral, financial and in-kind support from their families, including both immediate and extended families, while for others the experience was different, with threats to be disowned especially by in-laws because of their candidature. Generally, political parties offered moral and, in some cases, financial support to female candidates. Factions and internal party rivalries have affected the ability of the political parties to effectively support female candidates. Some women candidates experienced intra-party violence. Women candidates experienced 72.03% psychological violence and 29.66% sexual violence from within their political parties. The main perpetrators of intra-party violence were mostly men who were senior members of the political party or leaders. Perpetrators of intra-party VAWP included senior party members and or leaders at 73.20%, other candidates (56.45%) and fellow party members (61.54%).

Reporting and Help-Seeking Behaviours

A culture of lack of reporting of acts of VAWP to both the police and the political parties was reported. This was attributed to impunity by both parties. Help was mainly offered by NGOs, the church and family.

Reporting and Help Seeking Behaviours Study findings reveal that 81% of women candidates did not seek for any support after experiencing incidents of VAWP. Those that sought support mostly sought psychological counseling (46%) followed by those that sought medical and health check-ups (41%) and 27% sought for legal aid. Candidates who go through VAWP rarely share the information publicly as only one candidate did this. The other shared the information with family members, close friends, party leaders, other members of the political party and others. This is due to fear of victimisation, loss of party position or nomination and the need to maintain an image of dignity and respect with the electorate.

Conclusion

VAWP is rampant throughout the electoral cycle in Zimbabwe. This violence is both intra- and inter party and the direct perpetrators are both men and women. The women are mobilised by powerful men for their own agenda. This is mostly because women are part of a patriarchal system that undermines female leadership to maintain male dominance. The culture of impunity, coupled with the assumption that within political parties there are established structures that deal with issues of discipline, have deterred survivors of VAWP from reporting acts of violence against them, hence VAWP continues to be a defining characteristic of both primary and general elections. Families of the female candidates usually offer support, both financial and moral, which sometimes is lacking from political parties.

Recommendations

Legal and Policy Reform

- a. Implement legislation and policies that address VAWE and hold political parties accountable to gender equality and women empowerment commitments.
- b. Align the Electoral Act to the Constitutional provisions of gender equality and gender balance.
- c. Enact and enforce laws that specifically criminalize violence against women in politics, covering both physical and psychological forms of violence, physical harassment, threats, and online abuse.
- d. Strengthen existing laws addressing gender-based violence and ensure that they also apply to political environments, for example by updating electoral laws, introducing political party regulations and a gender sensitive Code of Conduct.

Introduce clear sanctions and consequences for political parties, candidates or officials involved in perpetrating violence against women through political party Regulations.

The Police

- a. Strengthen the capacity of the Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) to respond to all the protection needs of women around the electoral cycle, especially VAWP.
- b. Conduct thorough Investigations on reports of acts of VAWE and arrest perpetrators.
- c. Provide training and awareness among police on VAWE issues.

Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development

- a. Provide leadership training, mentorship programs and capacity building for women in politics to help them navigate the political environment and mitigate risks of VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness among citizens of the issues of gender equality and equity at a national level to shift the mind-sets of citizens to accept female leadership and breakdown the patriarchal mind set in women and men, boys and girls by educating them on the importance of supporting women leaders.
- c. Collaborate with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, to include issues of gender equality in the education curriculum so that girls and boys grow up knowing about the gender provisions in the constitution and what is expected of them.

Chapter 12 Institutions

- a. Strengthen the mandate and accountability to protect women against VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness on the complaint's mechanism among women politicians so that they can seek remedies when they experience VAWE.
- c. Mobilise resources to implement protection mandate of women.
- d. Raise awareness among women on the Cyber Security Act, the roles of the ZHRC and the ZGC in handling cases of VAWP.
- e. Strengthening the mandate and operating budget of the ZEC to properly monitor campaign spending and hold political parties to account.
- f. Hold public campaigns to shift public attitudes and reduce the social acceptance of violence against women both in politics and beyond.
- g. Raise awareness on reporting mechanisms for VAWP and change of social norms throughout the electoral cycle.
- h. Capacitate women with knowledge, skills, access to the media and its use as well as campaign finance to campaign for the FPTP seats.
- i. Lobbying and advocate initiatives for the adoption of legal mechanisms that include:
 - a. Specific measures on campaign finance for women and gender equality.
 - b. National legislation on political campaign finance and parties' expenditure that coincide with international conventions and agreements that promote gender equity in political participation.
- j. Advocate with political parties to put in place measures to dedicate a certain proportion of their budget towards women's campaign financing. *(This should be legislated, and public funding of political parties should be conditional upon meeting specific quotas for women. This funding can also be used to train women candidates and support their campaign efforts in election times. For this to be effective, it is important to have accountability and enforcement mechanisms to monitor the implementation of such initiatives).*

Women's Rights NGOs

- a. Provide psychosocial counselling for women victim/survivors of VAWP.
- b. Capacitate and raise awareness among female youth candidates on the pitfalls in politics e.g. sexual abuse and sexist labelling such as "MAHURE" (prostitutes), so that they able to transcend this violence and everyday micro-aggressions.
- c. Create platforms for female candidates to share and support each, hold each other's hand and learn to be in solidarity as women in responding to issues VAWE.
- d. Engage inclusive community dialogues among women so that they can respond to the issues of VAWP at that level.

Political Parties

- a. Establish internal codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit violence against women, including intimidation and harassment. These codes should outline clear procedures for reporting and addressing complaints which are gender sensitive.
- b. Promote inclusive leadership and actively promote women's participation and ensure that women are placed in leadership positions where they can influence policy decisions.
- c. Ensure that women have access to safe and confidential channels for reporting violence. This may involve setting up independent oversight bodies to handle cases of VAWP.

The Electoral Management Body - ZEC

- a. Conduct awareness programmes to sensitise political parties, candidates and voters about VAWP. *(This awareness programme should also cover laws and policies that deter VAWP among the candidates in terms of the constitutional laws of Zimbabwe).*

- b. Ensure candidates sign a strengthened Code of Conduct that they commit not to sponsor, participate or promote any form of violence including VAWP.
- c. Strengthen multi-party liaison committees for them to effectively respond to VAWP.

The Media

- a. Traditional media (both print and broadcast media) should be sensitised regarding GEWE in general and issues of positive and effective coverage of female candidates and other stakeholders around the electoral cycle and VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness and mobilise media personnel on issues of VAWP.
- c. Develop gender policies and action plans that are aligned to the constitutional provisions of GEWE.
- d. Strengthen skills to ensure proactive promotion of the positive portrayal of women in leadership and decision-making positions.
- e. Transform editorial processes through policies and training of media personnel to reduce the negative publicity of female candidates.

Traditional and religious leaders

- a. Engage in awareness raising activities that promote women's political participation and leadership and negative consequences of VAWP.

Parliament

- a. Replicate structures of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) at Provincial and District levels and include aspiring candidates from each election cycle. This platform can be used to advocate for the political rights of women and to share their grievances and strategize on how to overcome them.

1. BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) impedes and deters women from effective participation, thereby impeding free, fair and credible electoral processes. VAWP is categorized as discrimination based on gender and a form of gender-based violence that infringes on the participation of women in politics.¹ VAWP has become a widespread issue that undermines democracy, human rights, gender equality and a barrier to women's empowerment.² It constitutes a breach of human rights that restricts women's involvement in political affairs and electoral processes. VAWP manifests in many different forms, such as intimidation, sexual harassment, physical violence, and online abuse, to stifle women's voices and prevents them from engaging in public life. Attacks, intimidation, and stigmatization are used to silence and discredit assertive women in leadership roles, especially female candidates, and to deter them from exercising their right to vote and run for office. Victims and survivors of VAWP include political office holders, women candidates and aspirants, political supporters, voters, election workers and observers, public officials, and civil servants.³

The Zimbabwe VAWP study mainly focuses on aspiring and successful women candidates to the national assembly and senate in the 2023 harmonised elections.

International and Regional Conventions on VAWP

Zimbabwe is a signatory to various international and regional conventions that seek to reduce and prevent gender-based violence such as VAWP and to promote gender equality in leadership and governance.

Zimbabwe is party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1991, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol 2006); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1991, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

VAWP violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979), among other human rights instruments.⁴ VAWP excludes women from participating in democratic processes and undermines their human dignity and equal rights by not recognizing women as equal citizens with an equal stake in politics. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provides for gender balance in decision-making. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)s which had near universal adoption in 2015, provide for gender equality (Goal Number 5) and reduced inequalities (Goal Number 10). The SDG goals further provide for the full and effective political participation of women at all levels of decision-making in their countries in accordance with Target 5.5, UN Women.⁵ Target 5.2 obligates states to "eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation".⁶ SDG 11 also addresses Violence Against Women (VAW) by seeking to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".⁷ SDG 16 seeks to

¹ UN Women (2021), Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. Guidance Note. New York, July 2021.

² UN Women (2019), Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations:

³ UN Women (2021), Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics.

⁴ UN Women (2021), Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. Guidance Note. New York, July 2021.

⁵ UN Women (2021), Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. Guidance Note. New York, July 2021.

⁶ UN Women (2021), Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. Guidance Note. New York, July 2021.

⁷ UN Women. (2017). "Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide.

“promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”⁸

Regionally, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), addresses VAW at the regional level but does not address VAWP specifically.⁹ The 2016 Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development provides for the protection of women and children during armed and other forms of conflict.¹⁰ In addition, the SADC GBV Strategy and its Framework of Action 2018-2030 was approved by the SADC Ministers responsible for Gender Equality and Women's Affairs in 2018.¹¹

1.1.1. National Frameworks on VAWP

Zimbabwe has passed policies and legislation aimed at recognizing the rights of women, that are aligned to global and regional provisions on prevention on VAW. However, these policies and national frameworks do not specifically address VAWP. These include:

- i. Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013). Sections 17, 56 and 80 focus on promoting gender balance, non-discrimination and equal representation of women in all political institutions in Zimbabwe.
- ii. Electoral Act which has provisions aimed at promoting women’s participation in elections and addressing politically motivated violence. Section 17 of the Act provides for the reservation of seats for women.
- iii. Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31] 2016. The Act established the Zimbabwe Gender Commission to perform specified functions, including the investigation of and making of recommendations on the removal of barriers to the attainment of full gender equality.
- iv. Women’s Quota Policy consists of the proportional representation system in which 60 seats are reserved for women in the national assembly. Similarly, 30% of local government positions are reserved for women in accordance with section 277 (4) of the Constitution.
- v. The National Gender Policy (2023-2030), which is rooted on mainstreaming gender in all sectors and promotes equal advancement of women and men.
- vi. National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence which provides a guiding framework for GBV implementers on preventing and responding to GBV in Zimbabwe. The vision of the strategy is premised on the realisation of “A gender-just society free from all forms of GBV and Harmful Practices by 2030”. Its goal is to achieve a 30% reduction in the prevalence of all forms of Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices by 2030.
- vii. The Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] 2007. The Act make provision for the protection and relief of victims of domestic violence.

1.1.2. Women in Decision-Making Positions at National Level

Women constitute 54% of Zimbabwe’s population yet their representation and leadership in decision making positions in politics, the public and private sectors remain low. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Gender equality and the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic, and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration,

⁸ UN Women. (2017). “Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide.

⁹ UN Women. (2017). “Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide.

¹⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2021). SADC Recognises Prevention and Reduction of GBV as Catalyst for Peace and Security. 6 Dec 2021.

¹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2021). SADC Recognises Prevention and Reduction of GBV as Catalyst for Peace and Security. 6 Dec 2021.

and sustainable development in all areas of life. Limited women political participation and leadership is not only a violation of the rights of women, but effectively drowns women’s voices, aspirations and needs in a patriarchal system that creates political spaces dominated by men.

The number of women participating as election candidates for the First Past the Post Seats (FPTP) in the national assembly has been going down with each election since 2013. The 2023 election has seen a drop in female candidates from the 2018 election. In the 2018 election male candidates outnumbered female candidates by 83%, while in the 2023 election, they outnumbered women by over 88%. One of the reasons for the limited participation of women as candidates was the high nomination fees, which was US\$20,000 for presidential candidates up from US\$1,000 in 2018; and US\$1,000 for parliamentary candidates compared to US\$50 in 2018. As of 2023, 30% of national assembly seats, 45% of senate seats, and 12% of local government seats were held by women.¹² There has been a decrease in the number of women in political decision making from the 2013 to the 2023 elections: from 33% of women in the national assembly to 30% in 2023, and 48% in senate in 2013 to 45% in 2023 and from 14% in 2018 to 12% in 2023 for women in local government.¹³ The figure 1 below shows the trend in women’s participation in politics between 2018 and 2023.

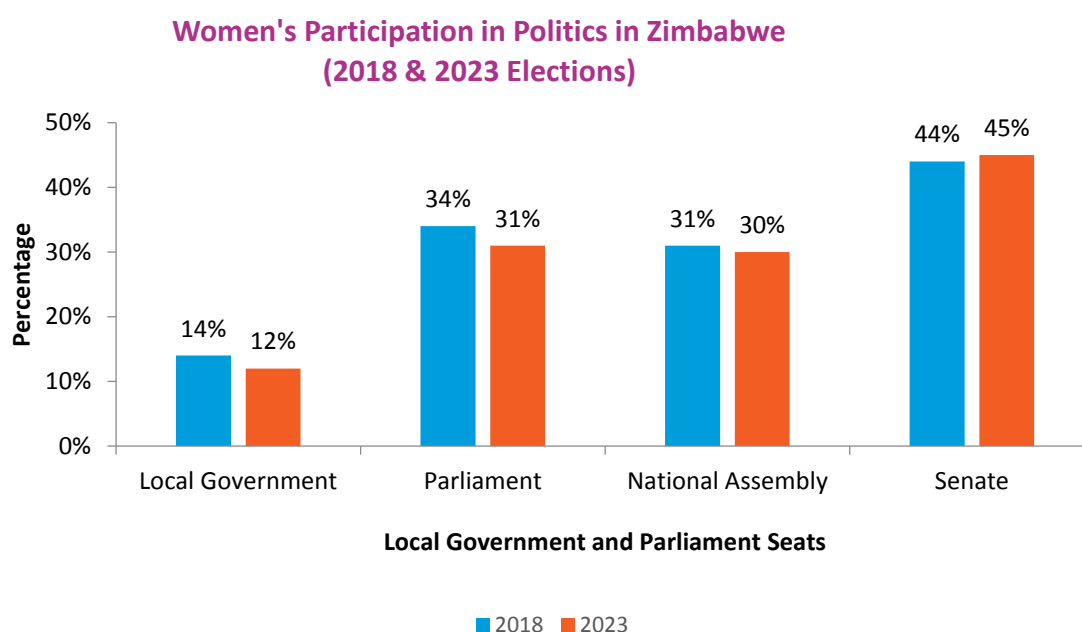


Figure 1-1: Trend in Women’s Participation in Politics

The rights of citizens to participate at all levels of politics are guaranteed in the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which is the supreme law of the land. These rights include section 67 sub-section 1a which enshrines the right to free, fair and regular elections for any elective public office established in terms of the constitution or any other law.¹⁴ Zimbabwe holds general elections once every five years for council and municipalities, the national assembly, the senate, presidential post, the disability quota and the chief’s council positions. Subsection 1b gives citizens the right to make political choices freely in any election and this means that

¹² Zimbabwe Electoral Commission 2023 General Elections Report to Parliament

¹³ Zimbabwe Electoral Commission 2023 General Elections Report to Parliament

¹⁴ The constitution of Zimbabwe accessed on <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6427>

citizens should be able to choose who they want to vote for without being coerced by their spouses, intimate partners, immediate and extended family as well as other community members and institutions.

Sub-section 2a extends the right to form, join and to participate freely in the activities of a political party or organisation of their choice.¹⁵ Sub-section 2b also gives citizens the rights to participate in peaceful political activities and subsection 2c gives citizens the rights to participate individually or collectively, in gatherings or groups or in any other manner in peaceful activities to influence, to challenge or support the policies of the government or any political or whatever cause.¹⁶ The 2013 constitution, section 67 sub-section 3a gives Zimbabwean citizens who are 18 years and above the right to vote in all elections and referendums and to perform this duty in secrecy. Section 67, subsection 3b gives citizens the right to stand for election for public office and if elected to hold such an office.¹⁷ The 2013 constitution implicitly promotes the safety, security and well-being of citizens as stipulated in section 51 that guarantees the right to human dignity, section 52 the right to personal security, section 53 freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, section 56, equality and non-discrimination, the right to privacy in section 57 and the freedom of assembly and association in section 58.¹⁸

The Constitution of Zimbabwe and subsequent amendments have measures to promote the equal representation of women in politics through quotas in parliament and national councils. These include prescription for senate party lists which is headed by a woman and alternates between a man and a woman to allow for improved representation of women prescribed in section 120, subsection 2b. Section 124 (1) b gives women a 60 seats quota in the national assembly elected through proportional representation in the first four parliaments since 2013. Ten of the 60 women must be youths below the age of 35 years and political parties are encouraged to include women with disabilities. Section 124 (1) c of the Constitution introduces a youth quota of 10 seats and male and female candidates should be listed alternately on the list.

1.1.3. Violence Against Women in Politics

Women in Zimbabwe face various forms of VAWP. These include physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence that takes place both online and offline.¹⁹ Several factors predispose women to politically motivated violence.²⁰ These include patriarchal cultures, gender stereotypes, political polarization, intersectional discrimination, lack of legal protection and accountability and lack of support are some of the factors that predispose women to violence in politics.²¹ While both men and women are victims of political violence, women suffer high rates of violence because of gender factors and other identity-based norms of patriarchal societies that disadvantage and oppress them.²²

During the 2023 harmonised elections women candidates of Zimbabwe experienced online VAWP as evidenced by online content. Online VAWP in Zimbabwe increased by 60 per cent from January 2013 to April 2018.²³ The violence is often faced by women politicians and activists who utilize online platforms, this deters them from maximising the use of these platforms for their political work. Several forms of violence, including

¹⁵ The constitution of Zimbabwe accessed on <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6427>

¹⁶ The constitution of Zimbabwe accessed on <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6427>

¹⁷ The constitution of Zimbabwe accessed on <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6427>

¹⁸ The constitution of Zimbabwe accessed on <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6427>

¹⁹ Terms of Reference on National Study on Violence Against Women in Politics in Zimbabwe (2024)

²⁰ Zengenene, M. and Susanti. (2019), Journal of International Women's Studies: *Violence Against Women and Girls in Harare, Zimbabwe*. Volume 20, Issue 9 Gender Relations, Equity, and Inclusion in Indonesia: Contradictions, Complexity, and Diversity.

²¹ Ibid

²² Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, September 2023

https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/zimbabwe_-_nehanda.pdf

²³ Bardall, G., Murombo. G., Hussain. T. and Greg-Obi. O. (2018) Violence Against Women in Elections in Zimbabwe: An IFES Assessment.

sexual, physical, and psychological violence, were experienced to render women in politics invisible and incompetent.²⁴

With the adoption of the constitution in 2013, Zimbabwe instituted a gender quota, reserving seats for women through proportional representation. Women's representation increased in the National Assembly and Senate from 14 to 32 per cent and 33 to 48 per cent, respectively, from 2008 and 2013; but, after that, it decreased to 31 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, in the 2018 elections.²⁵ The representation of women in parliament doubled as a result of the quota system in 2013, however the number of directly elected women declined from 34 in 2008 to 26 in 2013.²⁶ The 2018 harmonized election results reflected that a lot still needs to be done to enhance the participation of women in politics in Zimbabwe.²⁷ Although 54 per cent of registered voters were women, very few people voted for female candidates in the 2018 harmonized elections.²⁸ The proportion of women's representation in decision making processes is on the decline as evidenced by the 2023 harmonized election results. Women in the National Assembly constitute 30 per cent (85 out of 280) which is a decrease from the previous election term.²⁹ In the Senate, there are 36 women out of 80 (45 per cent) and this is also a decrease from the previous election.³⁰ Many factors contribute to the decreased participation and representation of women in politics, with VAWP being a major aspect.

With respect to special seats, the quota system requires that the lower house reserves 60 of its 270 seats (22%) for women. The upper house is to appoint 60 of its 80 senators from a list that alternates female and male candidates, called the zebra list. The following table shows the number of candidates by level of election and sex. Overall, female candidates constituted 19% of all the 2023 election candidates.

Table 1.1: Nominated Candidates for the 2023 Elections

Election level	Female	Male	% Female
Presidential	1	10	9%
National assembly	70	566	11%
National assembly (women's quota)	138	-	100%
Youth quota	21	21	50%
Senate	72	72	50%
Local authority contested	755	4191	15%
Local authority unopposed	10	80	11%
Provincial council	100	100	50%
Total	1167	5040	19%

Source: Zimbabwe 2023 Harmonised Elections Report

The subject of VAW in politics has not been thoroughly explored globally, in Africa and specifically in Zimbabwe to understand the types of VAWP, the magnitude, its nuances, prevention and mitigation strategies as well as recommendations in the immediate, medium and long term to eliminate this challenge. It is against this backdrop that UN Women Zimbabwe Country Office, in partnership with Zimbabwe Gender Commission and Zimbabwe Electoral Commission commissioned a countrywide VAWP study to record the experiences of aspiring and successful female candidates to the national assembly and the senate and generate evidence that can be used in designing VAWP programming. The focus is on assessing obstacles to women's political

²⁴ Mtero, S. Parichi, M. and Madsen, D. H. (2023) Patriarchal Politics, online violence, and silenced voices: *The Decline of women in politics in Zimbabwe*.

²⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments

²⁶ Research and Advocacy Unit (2020). Quotas or Proportional Representation? A Selective Review of the Evidence.

²⁷ Zimbabwe National Review Report (2014-2019)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ UN Women (2023) Local Government Country Profile: Zimbabwe. New York. UN Women.

³⁰ Ibid

participation, including the experience of violence, magnitude, forms of violence, risk and protective factors, help seeking behaviour and consequences it may have on women's health, well-being as well as their political participation and leadership. The study also assesses the national and sub-national legislative and policy frameworks on women's political participation and VAWP, to identify entry points for strengthening the monitoring, normative and institutional framework on VAWP.

Objectives of the Study

The national study of VAWP in Zimbabwe aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Strengthening the evidence base on women's political participation experiences and obstacles, notably VAWP, in Zimbabwe, as candidates to the national assembly and senate, including on regular seats and through women's quotas.
- ii. Contribute to the development of a global model for measuring and monitoring VAWP.
- iii. Identify entry points and provide recommendations for strengthening the monitoring, prevention, and response to VAWP in Zimbabwe.

Legislative and Policy Framework

There are several laws that govern the conduct of elections in Zimbabwe and some of these speak generally to the issues of politically motivated violence. The Electoral Act Chapter 2:13³¹ is not very strong on issues of VAW in politics. The Zimbabwe Electoral Act prohibits politically motivated violence, including the use of threatening language or inciting violence. The Act prohibits any form of violence and threats against a voter and prohibits anyone to force a voter to reveal the identity of the candidate that they will have voted for. The Act also mandates candidates to refrain from political violence and ensure that their supporters do not commit acts of politically motivated violence before, during and after an election. Candidates are also required to sign the code of conduct at the behest of the EMB and adhere strictly by it. However, the Electoral Act falls short in that it does not specifically prohibit Violence Against Women in Politics and mention issues of violations that are usually specific to women such as sexual harassment and rape. For example, section 133G mandates political parties, candidates and election agents that they:

- a) shall take all appropriate measures to prevent politically motivated violence and any electoral malpractices before, during and after the election period; and
- b) shall, in the case of an office-bearer of a political party, take effective steps to discipline all members of the party who engage in politically motivated violence or who commit any electoral malpractice before, during or after the election period; and
- c) whenever called upon to do so by the Commission, shall publicly undertake to abide by the code of conduct for political parties and candidates set out in the Fourth Schedule.

Section 133H mandates the appointment and functions of a special police liaison officer during every general election and by-election and their roles are to expeditiously investigate cases of politically motivated violence or intimidation within that province which come to the attention of the police, a multiparty liaison committee, the Commission or the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission during the election period. It is clear that the police do not get a specific mandate to investigate VAWP and its dimensions during each election period.

Sections 133J sections 3 and 4 spell out the roles of the Judicial Service Commission who are mandated to designate one or more magistrates in each province in which the election is to be held, to try cases involving politically motivated violence and intimidation, and the magistrates so designated shall give priority to all such cases and ensure that they are brought to trial and completed as expeditiously as possible. The Prosecutor-General shall ensure that during all election periods sufficient competent prosecutors are provided to ensure that all cases of politically motivated violence and intimidation arising within the area in

³¹ https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Electoral%20Act%20%28Consolidated%20as%20at%2019-07-2023%29.pdf

which the election is being held are processed quickly and brought to court as soon as possible before the magistrates designated in terms of the law.

According to the Electoral Law, the electoral Court is established under section 162h of the national constitution of Zimbabwe to preside over electoral disputes and conflicts.³² Suffice it to say that the legislative provisions on elections are not specific to VAWP and women who become victims/survivors have to use other pieces of legislation such as the Electoral Act to get redress.

The Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 was passed in 2007 to prevent and mitigate cases of violence in households³³ and in domestic relationships. Some acts of **VAWP may occur within the household, but because of women's engagement in politics** Therefore, women have the opportunity to utilise the Act if they are abused or violated by people residing in the same homestead as them such as parents, husbands, intimate partners, children or the extended family. Women have reported that sometimes they need permission from their spouses and extended family to participate in politics. If this permission is not given the situation can deteriorate into violence and abuse.

Women living in rural communities can make use of the traditional leadership i.e. chiefs, headmen, and village heads who are mandated under the Zimbabwe Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) to preside over conflicts. Although the Traditional Leaders Act does not explicitly refer to GBV conflicts, Section 16 of the Domestic Violence Act stipulates that the Council of Chiefs (including the police, the Ministries responsible for justice; gender or women's affairs; health and child welfare; social welfare; education; representatives of private voluntary organisations concerned with the welfare of victims of domestic violence, children's rights and women's rights; and representatives of churches) may constitute the Anti-Domestic Violence Council.³⁴ The roles of the Council include monitoring the application and enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act, promoting research and the establishment of safe houses for the purpose of sheltering the victims of domestic violence among others.

The government of Zimbabwe has provided protection and redress for online VAW by passing the Cyber and Data Protection Act of Zimbabwe Chapter 12:07. The Media Institute of Southern Africa notes that women politicians, election administrators and journalists are protected under this law as they have been victims/survivors of cyber-bullying and harassment.³⁵ The Act also prohibits the transmission of intimate images without women's consent, a form of harassment that has been used against women politicians and election administrators. Therefore, the Cyber and Data Protection Act presents a good start for protecting women from online VAW.

The National Gender Policy 2013 to 2017 recognises that gender-based violence, in particular, violence against women, constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to women's participation in decision-making and severely limits their ability to participate in economic and social activities.³⁶ The gender policy has become a guideline in gender mainstreaming for governments, semi-governmental and non-governmental organisations. It has provided policy guidance to governance institutions including the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and political parties in upholding the rights of women in politics and governance.

The Zimbabwe National Gender Based Violence Strategy 2023-2030 focuses specifically on gender-based violence and abuse. However, the strategy notes that **women lack security in politics and identifies the various types of GBV associated with politics in the country.** It also identifies politics as one of the drivers of GBV and the need to begin to address this facet of the problem. The inclusion of politics as a driver of GBV

³² <https://www.law.co.zw/download/political-parties-finance-act-chapter-211/#>

³³ <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/146>

³⁴ Zimbabwe Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] Act 14/2006

³⁵ Section 16, Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] Act 14/2006

³⁶ Zimbabwe National Gender Policy accessed on

<https://catalogue.safaidz.net/sites/default/files/publications/2013%20national%20gender%20policy%20-%20final%20april%2020th.pdf>

begins to open prospects of addressing VAWP in Zimbabwe more effectively through legal and policy prescriptions. Future GBV and Electoral legislation, policies and guidelines can include strategies to address VAWP, linking closely with the National GBV strategy to present a unified approach to the challenge of VAW at all levels of the society.

Electoral Systems and Processes

Electoral systems are defined as the rules that govern the way elections are conducted, and votes are counted and seats allocated (Zimbabwe Electoral Commission). According to the SADC Gender and Development Monitor 2022, the choice of an electoral system for the national assembly and local elections has a major bearing on the level of representation of women in governance and political decision-making.

Zimbabwe has a mixed electoral system that combines the first past the post (FPTP) and proportional representation electoral systems in the national assembly and senate. This has ensured the increased representation of women in the national assembly and senate. The First Past the Post Electoral System is used to select the Members of the National Assembly for the 210 seats since 2013. This system has been a game of diminishing returns for women of Zimbabwe as the number of women candidates has steadily declined over the years. Unfortunately, the reservation of seats for women, for example, the 60 seats reserved for women in the national assembly tends to have a negative effect on the overall representation of women in the long term. Political parties which are male dominated will tend to expect women candidates to stand in the reserved seats only and women are eliminated slowly in the first past the post seats.

The FPTP electoral system is combined with the proportional representation system for the 60 seats women's quota in parliament. The 60 seats quota is allocated proportionally from the votes cast in the FPTP seats of the national assembly for the first four parliaments since 2013. The 60 seats were introduced as a temporary measure to improve the representation of women in the national assembly. Another youth quota was introduced in a later constitutional amendment, and this is a 10 seats quota for the youths in the national assembly.

The proportional representation system is also applied for the 60 seats of the senate, where six senators are selected from each province based on proportional representation. The proportion of seats that is allocated to each political party and is calculated based on the provincial returns of votes for parties fielding candidates in the National Assembly FPTP elections. To qualify for seats allocation political parties must file a party-list nomination form for the election under the PR system. The party list must be headed by a woman candidate and alternate between the sexes (zebra list) to ensure the inclusion of women. This PR electoral system has ensured that the senate becomes the institution with the highest representation of women in Zimbabwe which stands at an impressive 49.3% compared with 28.1% in the national assembly. The remaining 20 seats in the senate are 16 members from the national chiefs' council, the president and vice president of the national chief's council and two policy makers with disabilities elected through the electoral college of people with disabilities.

It would seem that the current combination of electoral systems for the national assembly has not been able to yield the required results. The gradual decline of candidates and elected representatives under the FPTP seats points to a real dilemma that needs an urgent solution. It would seem that there is a need to overhaul the electoral systems in parliament to improve the representation of women and possibly deliver a gender balanced national assembly.

General Obstacles to Women's Political Participation

Women face a host of obstacles in their quest to lead in governance and political participation. These include both informal and formal barriers that make it difficult for women to attain leadership positions in politics. Zimbabwe is a highly patriarchal society where most men occupy public spaces and women are relegated to private life. Violence against women is institutionalised and normalised in electoral and political party

systems.³⁷ The problem begins in the home where women lack support to engage in politics. Furthermore, women are exposed to political violence as political parties do not have policies that protect candidates against, physical abuse, hate speech and sexual harassment. Single women who engage in politics are victimised on the basis of their marital status.³⁸ Such patriarchal attitudes are meant to discourage single women from participating in politics.

The informal barriers include patriarchy that manifests in cultures of gender domination, religious beliefs that downgrade the social status of women and traditions that tend to limit the roles of women into the domestic sphere. Women are often viewed through the narrow patriarchal lens of traditional gender roles, reinforcing gender stereotypes, and fostering social exclusion.³⁹ Women who seek political office are widely considered as people of questionable character and morals who are most likely to be single or divorced and lacking a man's guardianship.⁴⁰ Those who are married have their husbands being taunted as weak men who are not able to keep their wives in check. Women, who are courageous to hold public office, must be able to withstand the intense scrutiny and pressure of doing so. Women candidates are usually scrutinised on irrelevant issues such as the manner in which they dress, present themselves and their marital status and the character of their children.⁴¹ There is rarely an interest in their political ideology, their contributions or their commitment to governance and public office.

Other obstacles advanced for the under-representation of women in political spaces include **the creation the “boys club” in politics where male leaders collude and support each and deliberately keep women out.** On top of this there is stereotyping of politics as a “dirty game” meant for “real men” only and women are deemed not strong enough to stand for political office. Other obstacles include the lack of structures to ensure 50:50 representation in constituencies at party level. Women find it difficult to balance their gender roles and the demands of political office as they are expected to handle most of reproductive roles in the family. Women also tend to stay away from political leadership roles due to the violence and intimidation they face within their own political parties and during the campaign for the general election.

Another huge obstacle to the equal participation of women in politics is the **high cost of campaigns around the election cycle.** Women generally lack enough campaign resources to challenge men at the level of the primary and general elections where one might need some two years to build a profile within their political party and more resources to campaign in general elections.⁴² **Women own 10% of communal land and hold only 20% leases in the commercial farming and resettlement areas making it difficult for them to achieve economic independence.**⁴³ This puts them at a disadvantage as they have a high dependency on men and have little to no control over productive resources. Much of the research on one of the greatest hurdles women faces is financing the process of gaining a nomination in their political party. The cost of nomination campaigns has proved to be crucial to women's participation in electoral processes. Women's performances in the early stages of campaigning will largely define the number of women running and being elected. Such costs tend to be considerable during the electoral period. Building a reputation and recognition among constituencies as well as among party members requires continuous work with significant amounts of time and money spent by potential candidates. There are also hidden costs in communication (telephone, postage, transport), interviewing (travel to meet constituencies, clothes for public events and interviews, overnight and weekend accommodation, attending training sessions and party meetings), organising a campaign team, the expectation of the constituents to receive hand outs and family-related expenses are all mentioned as barriers to women's political participation.⁴⁴

³⁷ Padare. (2020). Policy Brief On Women's Political Participation in Zimbabwe.

³⁸ The Nordic Africa Institute. (2023). Patriarchal politics, online violence and silenced voices: The decline of women in politics in Zimbabwe.

³⁹ EU 2016 Zimbabwe Country Gender Profile. Harare.

⁴⁰ GIZ 2023 Gender Analysis of the Good Governance in Local Authorities Project. Harare.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ballington 2005 Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. IDEA.

After nomination, financial support from the political party, where it is available, may kick in and greater visibility may attract additional sources of funding. Lower economic status and lack of economic independence, therefore, effectively place barriers for women's participation in politics. Financial resources are a prerequisite for successfully competing in elections. As long as women continue to have limited access to resources and by extension, campaign funding, men will continue to dominate public institutions such as parliament and local councils.

A study by Germany Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in 2023, titled Gender Analysis of the Good Governance in Local Authorities project revealed several barriers to women's meaningful participation in public decision-making in Zimbabwe that can be generalised to participation at the level of the national assembly and senate.⁴⁵ Even though the candidates have been chosen by the parties, the final choice is in the hands of the voter. The challenge for women in this system is that voters may have their own traditional biases against women which may cause them to reject female candidates.⁴⁶

The Political Parties Finance Act Chapter 2:11 provides for the funding to political parties in Zimbabwe but the Act is very dry on gender issues in that it does not have any provisions for gender sensitivity and the use of the resources to promote the effective participation of women and tackle the discrimination and abuse of women in politics.

Women in general still have fewer links to both the formal and informal networks that influence campaigns. **Women lack links to the business and professional communities that supply campaign funds, are more likely to be excluded from male-dominated networks within parties** that might otherwise help new candidates gain a foothold through contacts, funding and other essential resources and they lack resource mobilisation skills. The gaps in women economic empowerment, therefore, have a bearing on women's political participation.

CSOs have been a source of support for aspiring female candidates however this channel has its own loopholes. The 50-50 campaign programmes have supported female candidates with campaign materials such as t-shirts, flyers, banners, cash, mentorship, capacity building and media campaign among others. This type of support has significantly contributed to the success of election campaigns by female candidates. Some CSOs have supported candidates' debates and manifesto presentations by female candidates. The major challenges related to funding from CSOs include late start of election campaign support programmes, failure to support female candidates throughout the whole electoral cycle and funding mostly disbursed to candidates in kind not cash and if it is in cash it was tied to specific actions.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ GIZ 2023 Gender Analysis of the Good Governance in Local Authorities Project. Harare.

⁴⁶ GIZ 2023 Gender Analysis of the Good Governance in Local Authorities Project. Harare.

⁴⁷ Hivos 2020 Challenges Faced by Women Candidates in Accessing Campaign Financing in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This section presents the methodological approach for the study on VAWP in Zimbabwe. It covers the study design, scope, data collection methods, challenges and data analysis approach.

2.1. Study Design

The research adopted feminist and gendered-centred principles. The approach – deliberately and purposefully challenges existing power structures, and actively embeds feminism into every element and phase of the research process more specifically. In line with the feminist/gendered approaches to research, the study deliberately brings about structural challenges affecting women’s political participation highlighting issues that

women themselves identify as critical to securing their rights. The study amplifies women’s voices by strategically placing them at the centre of the study by ensuring that all the data on women’s experiences is collected from women-only focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and narratives.

Defining VAWP

Violence against women in political life is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and or by the State.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

The study primarily focused on Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE) which is an intrinsic part of VAWP. VAWE is defined as “a form of violence against women intended to impact the realization of women’s political rights in an electoral context”.⁴⁸ VAWE is perpetrated against women who participate as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials. VAWE manifests in various forms, including psychological abuse and intimidation, sexual attacks and physical violence. This study explores the barriers that women face in political participation in the form of VAWE as candidates and propose interventions to reduce and eliminate the identified challenges. A candidate survey of all candidates at national assembly level who submitted nomination papers to be elected as directly elected representatives or were on the party list as quota members was conducted.

The study was conducted in two phases: preliminary research and the main study. The preliminary research was conducted to provide contextual knowledge on VAWE and inform the development of data collection tools and the scope of the study. It was conducted in Harare and Mashonaland Central provinces while the main study was conducted in Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Manicaland provinces. The main study took advantage of parliament sessions in Harare at the parliament building to meet up with study participants from the rest of the provinces that could not be visited physically.

Focus Group Consultations:

Focus group discussions were conducted with randomly sampled female candidates who participated in the 2023 parliamentary elections. They were aimed at documenting the following data to inform the scope of the entire national study:

⁴⁸ UN Women and UNDP. (2017). Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Preventing-VAW-in-elections-en.PDF>.

- i. Risks and protective factors, including defining who are the perpetrators, when and where VAWE is taking place, and what consequences of violence.
- ii. Specific acts of violence experienced by women candidates and suggest specific phrasing that could be used when designing the data collection tools
- iii. Recommend which violent acts are perceived as most sensitive and therefore, be placed at the end of the interview guide.

A total of 12 FGDs were conducted for both the preliminary and main studies. Three instead of four focus group consultations were conducted in the two provinces that were sampled for the preliminary study. The turnout of female candidates in Harare was low, with only six turning up for the process, resulting in the administration of one FGD instead of two in this province. In Mashonaland Central, each FGD had 5 participants leading to the 2 FGDs that were conducted in the province. The target for FGDs was therefore missed by one.

For the main study, eight FGDs were conducted, five were conducted virtually and the remaining three were conducted physically. The table below presents the FGDs conducted.

Table 2.1: FGDs

Candidates Category	National Online		Physical		Total	
	Target	Reach	Target	Reach	Target	Reach
National Assembly	2	2	1 (Bulawayo)	1	3	3
Senate	2	1	1 (Manicaland)	1	3	2
Women's Quota	2	1	1(Matabeleland North)	1	3	2
Youth Quota	2	1			2	1
Total	8	5	3	3	11	8

Individual In-Depth Interviews:

These were conducted among some of the 300 female candidates and were split by the following categories:

- i. Lower House (National Assembly) including Independent Candidates
- ii. Upper House (Senate)
- iii. Women's Quota
- iv. Youth Quota

A total of 33 in-depth interviews were conducted for both the preliminary and main studies. For the preliminary research, the plan was to have a total of 14 female candidates' in-depth interviews from the four categories and across the two provinces. Table 2.2 shows the total number of interviews that were targeted, and the numbers actually conducted. A 71% achievement rate was registered on individual in-depth interviews. The target for Harare was not met due to low turnout of female candidates who had confirmed their availability for the interview. All the interviews for the preliminary research were conducted physically and aimed at providing in-depth knowledge on the experience of violence, magnitude, forms of violence, risk and protective factors, help seeking behaviour and consequences it may have on women's participation in politics, health, and well-being.

Table 2.2: Preliminary Research In-depth Interviews

Parliamentary Seat	Province			
	Mashonaland Central		Harare	
	Target	Reach	Target	Reach
National Assembly	1	1	2	2
Senate	1	2	2	1
Women's Quota	2	1	4	2
Youth Quota	1	1	1	-
Total	5	5	9	5

For the main study, a total of 23 in-depth interviews were conducted against a target of 26.

Table 2.3: Main Study In-Depth Interviews

Candidates' categories	Target	Reach
National Assembly (Lower House)	7	7
Senate (Upper House)	7	7
National Assembly Women's Quota	9	6
Youth Quota	3	3
Total	26	23

In-depth Key Informant Interviews:

The series of interviews with key informants was aimed at providing information on existing types of VAWP, mechanisms to report, prevention and response to VAWP, reported cases, and services available to women who experience violence.

The preliminary and main studies targeted 34 key informant interviews with stakeholders that are specifically involved in electoral processes. Of these 15 were targeted for the preliminary research and 19 for the main study. For the preliminary research, 7 key informant interviews were conducted due to the non-availability of the key informants during the preliminary phase of the study as presented in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Key Informant Interviews

Stakeholder	Number of Stakeholders	
	Target	Achieved
Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission	1	-
Zimbabwe Gender Commission	1	1
Zimbabwe Media Commission	1	-
Ministry of Justice (Judiciary)	1	-
Ministry of Home Affairs (ZRP)	1	-
Ministry of Women Affairs	1	1
Ministry of Youth	1	-
Parliament	1	1
Political Parties	4	3
CSOs involved in supporting women aspirants and candidates	3	3
Grand Total	15	9

For the main study, 11 out of 17 targeted key informant interviews were conducted. The Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) which had been initially targeted as a respondent for the study highlighted that they deal only

with domestic violence cases and not specifically VAWP. The VFU referred the data collection team to the Law-and-Order Department whose officers were not available for an interview at the time of writing the report.

Table 2.5: Main Study Key Informant Interviews

Stakeholder	Target	Reach
Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)	1	1
Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission	1	-
Zimbabwe Gender Commission	1	1
Zimbabwe Media Commission	1	1
National Peace and Reconciliation Commission	1	-
Judiciary Service Commission	1	-
Ministry of Home Affairs (ZRP)	1	-
Ministry of Women Affairs	1	1
Parliament	1	1
Political Parties	4	4
CSOs involved in supporting women in Politics	4	4
Grand Total	17	13

Candidate Survey:

A telephonic and physical candidate survey was conducted for the main study. Kobo Collect was used to enter the candidates' responses for easy data management. The survey targeted 301 candidates for the 2023 election. The target was, however, affected by the fact that six of the candidates were deceased. Of the 295 candidates eligible to participate in the survey, the enumerators reached 235. The remaining 60 could not be interviewed due to either their lack of interest to participate in the study, or invalid contact details.

2.3. Methodological Challenges

- i. There was a low response rate to the candidate survey, which extended the data collection period to 7 days. Initially, the survey was supposed to be completed within 3 days.
- ii. The targeted elected and non-elected candidates were often unavailable during the day for both physical and telephonic interviews, as they were engaged in their own business activities. The elected candidates were frequently involved in parliamentary business, including sittings and attending workshops in various locations.
- iii. Some candidates scheduled interviews for times they expected to be available, but when the time came, they rescheduled to another date. This hindered the enumerators' ability to meet their target.
- iv. While candidates generally preferred responding to the telephonic survey, some of their contact numbers were unavailable due to network connection issues. Others did not answer their phones, and some would hang up or end the call once they realized it was the survey team calling.
- v. FGDs and IDIs generally took one and a half hours to conduct. As had been proposed that from FGDs, some candidates with compelling stories to share would be requested to participate in in-depth interviews, some candidates who had participated in FGDs were not willing to be part of the in-depth interviews due to the duration of the process. They expressed that the process felt repetitive and that they had already answered the same questions during the survey interviews. Candidates who had initially agreed to participate in virtual interviews confirmed their availability for FGDs, but when the time for the discussions came, they were unavailable, leading to a low number of participants.
- vi. The participants felt that the study was very sensitive, and due to the political situation in the country, they were afraid to disclose information that would get them into trouble with their political party.

2.4. Methodological Lessons Learned

Ensuring Sensitivity and Confidentiality

Carrying a study on violence against women is a sensitive issue especially when covering the aspect of politics. Participants may be hesitant to be involved in the study and to know that they have provided their views and experiences. The researchers are therefore supposed to ensure strict confidentiality and ensure that the protocols for confidentiality are in place. The protocols may involve training enumerators and research assistants on how to handle sensitive information, reassuring participants of their privacy, and avoiding questions that may cause distress.

Diversification of Data Collection Methods

The participants may prefer different methods of engagement depending on their availability or comfort level. Multiple methods of data collection through physical and virtual (via phone) interviews will be required. The flexibility increases participation, especially for those in public offices. The study team faced this scenario during data collection as those candidates who were elected were having parliamentary sittings and workshops to attend to. Some of non-elected candidates were unavailable as they hold public offices in different institutions, and they will be doing their own business during the day.

Consider Timing and Scheduling

Women who are involved in politics often have demanding schedules, making it difficult to arrange interviews during regular working hours. Interviews need to be scheduled at times that suit the respondents, even outside regular work hours, and allow for rescheduling when necessary. Most of elected candidates were difficult to reach in their constituencies, hence, the physical surveys were scheduled to be done at parliament before sitting sessions and most of the female parliamentarians were able to respond to the survey. They came for the survey during their own convenient time and the enumerators had to wait even up to lunch hour without interviewing any participant.

Stakeholder Engagement

Cooperation with various stakeholders, including political parties, government ministries, and non-governmental organizations, is essential for gaining access and ensuring the legitimacy of the study. Engaging stakeholders early in the process facilitates access to participants. The support of these stakeholders can help address potential barriers to data collection. For this study, letters requesting support were sent before data collection; however, at the time of data collection, the key informants identified for interviews were unavailable, with some stating they were not in a position to participate in the interviews.

Plan for Low Response Rate

In a study of this nature, a low response rate can occur due to political sensitivity, fear, or busy schedules. There is a need to develop creative strategies to encourage participation, such as collaborating with trusted intermediaries as well as adjusting timelines. The participation of elected candidates, including parliamentarians, was facilitated with the help of the Zimbabwe Women's Parliamentary Caucus officials, who assisted in mobilizing female parliamentarians. Despite their busy schedules, they were encouraged to participate in the study and were informed of the importance of sharing their views and experiences. Non-elected candidates were mobilized through their political parties by members of the women's wings. Those willing to participate made themselves available and were eager to contribute to the study.

Challenges of Network and Connectivity

Data collection was done using both virtual and physical means. If virtual interviews are conducted, technical difficulties like poor network connection can disrupt data collection. There is need to have backup communication methods in place. These may include using alternative platforms such as phone calls for in-depth interviews instead of internet-based tools like Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp.

Creating Safe Spaces for Respondents

Female candidates were very open on their personal lived experiences with violence against women in politics. Having female only FGDs and female only research team provided a safe space for such unfettered conversations.

Although the focus was on the 2023 election experiences, in their contributions, those that contested in other elections brought out pertinent issues and trends from all the elections that they participated in, revealing systemic and structural issues that should be addressed.

Due to political polarization in one province, combining candidates from different political parties in one focus group discussion proved to be difficult as there seemed to be tensions and divisions between the political parties. Party specific FGDs were therefore conducted. In other provinces there was no such challenge, candidates from different political parties engaged freely in focus group discussions, taking that platform as an opportunity to learn what happens in other parties.

Language Makes a Difference

Appropriate language is very important during research and engagements on VAWP. The candidates and stakeholders might not even realise that what they have gone through or witnessed are acts of VAWP hence it is important in communications and in questionnaires to speak broadly about women's experiences, obstacles and challenges in the electoral cycle so as to get a clear picture of VAWP.

3. STUDY FINDINGS

3.1 Motivation to Stand as A Candidate

Women were motivated to stand as candidates in the 2023 harmonised elections primarily because of several factors chief among them, the need to advance women’s rights in the country. Some were driven by the need for nation building, community development, promotion of democracy, patriotism, political backgrounds and a desire to promote the rights of the underprivileged, including the rights of minors (children) and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Some women passionately spoke about an impetus to advocate for an end to child marriages and female subordination in politics. Some of the driving forces for women to participate as candidates in the elections are highlighted below.

Motivation to Stand as A Candidate

<p>“ Women are the most affected by economic hardships. I wanted to bring their issues to parliament. IDI 14</p>	<p>“ I wanted my voice to be heard since women lacked representation and are not in decision making positions. IDI 14</p>
<p>“ There are too many men in leadership, and they fail to push the issues of women and girls and I also realised my potential and capacity. IDI 7</p>	<p>“ The youth are left behind, and after graduating from the National Youth Service in 2006, I began to understand more about politics. IDI 10</p>
<p>“ My mother inspired me to get into politics. IDI 13</p>	<p>“ I am motivated to advance the cause of PWDs since they are excluded. FDG 7 R3</p>
<p>“ I had a background of being a student leader, hence my involvement in politics. FDG 8 R3</p>	<p>“ My parents were war veterans but we struggled. We did not benefit in any way from this status. I had grievances that needed to be pushed forward. FDG 8 R2</p>
<p>“ We need to speak out to push forward the agenda of democracy. FDG 8 R1</p>	<p>“ I want to bring change in Zimbabwe. FDG 7 R5</p>

3.2 VAWP Experienced by Female Candidates During the 2023 Election

Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that VAWP was prevalent among female parliamentary candidates that participated in the 2023 election in Zimbabwe. It is imperative to highlight that although the 2023 general elections were generally peaceful, there was a high percentage of VAWP in the 2023 general elections. Quantitative data shows that 92.40% of the female parliamentary candidates that participated in the survey experienced one or more types of violence during the 2023 election as Figure 3.1 shows. The high incidence of VAWP can be attributed to the fact that women do not usually report VAWP incidents as is consistent with the findings of this study. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission and the Zimbabwe Media Commission noted that they were hardly any reports of VAWP during the 2023 electoral cycle. Findings from in-depth interviews indicate that most women were not aware of the fact that violence can be psychological, economic or media related. The study unearthed the many salient types of VAWP which illustrate that VAWP is astronomically high when taking into account all forms of VAW. There is a tendency within the Zimbabwean

context to assume that violence is of a physical nature when they are other forms of violence which women in politics experience.

Overall Violence Against Women Candidates in 2023 Election

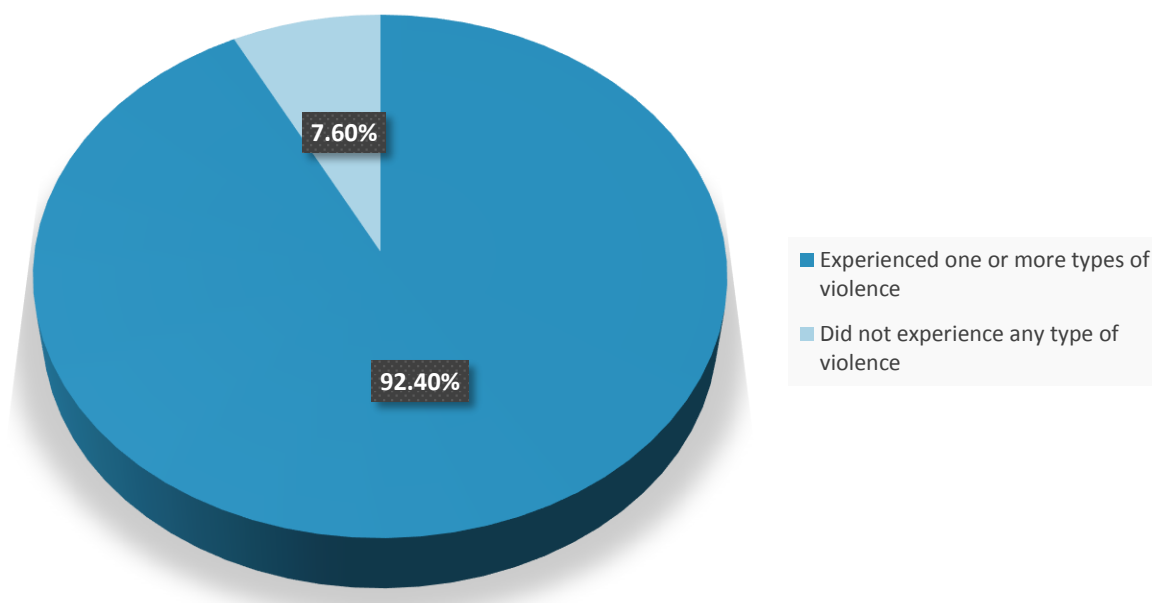


Figure 3-1: Experience of Violence by Female Candidates in 2023 Elections

Table 3.1 reveals a significant prevalence of various types of violence among the surveyed population, with an overall 92.4% of individuals reporting experiences of violence from any of the categorized types where one individual experienced one or more types of violence as depicted in table below. This comprehensive overview underscores the widespread and multifaceted nature of violence in the community, highlighting an urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems. Notably, community violence emerged as the most frequently reported, affecting 88.56% of respondents. Intra-party violence was also prominent, with 72.46% exposure. Traditional media violence was reported by 57.20% of participants, while social media violence affected 41.10%. Family violence, although less common, still impacted 22.03% of those surveyed.

Table 3.1: Overall Violence Divided by the Types of Violence

Type of Violence	Freq.	Percent (n=236)
Community Violence	209	88.56
Family Violence	52	22.03
Traditional Media Violence	135	57.20
Social Media Violence	97	41.10
Intra-party violence	171	72.46

Figure 3.2 indicates that the highest experienced violence occurred in the Senate party list, where an overwhelming 97.92% of candidates reported experiencing violence. Conversely, the lowest rate of violence was noted in the Youth Quota, where 94.74% of candidates reported no violence experienced.

VAWP by Candidacy

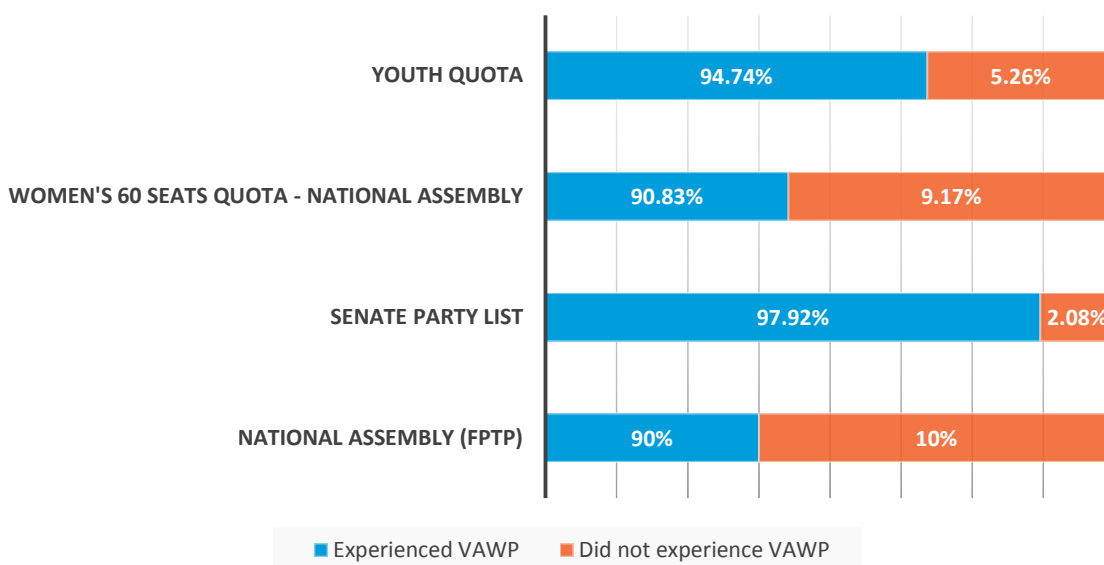


Figure 3-2.2: Prevalence of VAWP by Candidacy

Out of a total of 38 candidates reported that they have a disability, 35 (92.11%) reported experiencing violence during elections, while only 3 (7.89%) did not experience any violence. This indicates a significant prevalence of violence among women candidates who have a disability.

Table 3.2: Experiences of Violence

Experience one or more types of violence	Have a disability Total (n=38)
Did not experience violence	3 (7.89%)
Experience violence during elections	35 (92.11%)
Total	38 (100%)

The experience of VAWP by married women was higher, 45% compared to single women, who could either be unmarried, widowed or divorced.

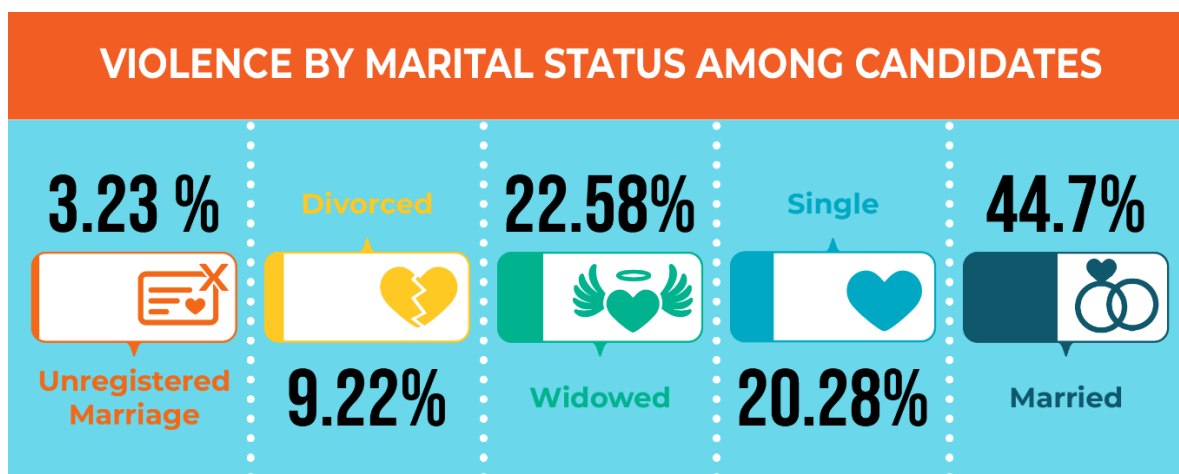


Figure 3-3: Violence by Marital Status

The explanation could be to incite husbands and other relatives to discourage women from participating in politics. Results point to the immense support that married women receive for their political careers from their husbands, hence violence against married women would compel husbands to discourage their wives from contesting as election candidates. KII4 said, IDI2 lamented that:

“I was framed for sleeping with another man and it was in a newspaper with national coverage. Luckily for me the day they said this happened, that night my husband was with that man, and he automatically knew it was a lie because this one was really targeting my marriage, I don’t know how I was going to explain that it was a lie. The paper in question didn’t even verify with me before publishing the article”. IDI2

IDI1 stated that:

“I had a female supporter who faced verbal abuse. She was pregnant and was told that the pregnancy didn’t belong to her husband. We wanted to sue them, but they stopped when they realised that we wanted to sue them”. She went on to explain that, “my child passed on due to intoxication around the time of my campaign and people accused me of ‘kuchekeresa mwana’ (killing my son for rituals). It was so disturbing as a mother”. IDI11

Considering the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society and the role men are expected to play in marriages, attacks on the wife in general and her sexuality in particular would be an attack on the husband and his masculinity. According to KII4:

“Marriages are shaken. Sometimes your husband can be a source of pressure because you are exposing the family. Once you get into politics you are considered a loose person. Marriages are breaking because of politics”. KII4

IDI11 remarked:

“My in-laws would tell my husband negative things about me because I am affiliated to a different party that they do not support”. IDI11

“I am a married woman and my in-laws did not support my campaign. They threatened that if my husband was harmed in any way due to my participation in politics then they would take their revenge on me.” FGD1

3.3 Acts of VAWP During Primary Elections

Research findings reveal that significant acts of violence and micro-aggressions are experienced by female candidates during primary elections. Female candidates reported that primary elections were marred by vote buying, requests for sexual and monetary favours, maligning and labelling of women candidates and lack of intra-party democracy as candidates were imposed by influential figures in political parties. Women had to brave undemocratic spaces in their political parties, and this was cited as one of the reasons why women then opted to stand as independent candidates as their parties elbowed them out of their preferred constituencies.

IDI13 summarises this aptly when she said,



“Politics is a jungle. It’s like you are in the Serengeti National Park where it’s eat or be eaten alive! Political parties should make sure that they have policies to protect women and that internal party grievance handling systems and procedures are both effective and gender sensitive.” IDI13

Figure 3.4 indicates that both men and women are perpetrators of VAWP, with percentages ranging from 58 % among supporters of from other parties to 73 % among members of their own party. This data highlights the complex dynamics of VAWP, where women can both be survivors and active participants, while men in security roles are more consistently positioned as perpetrators.

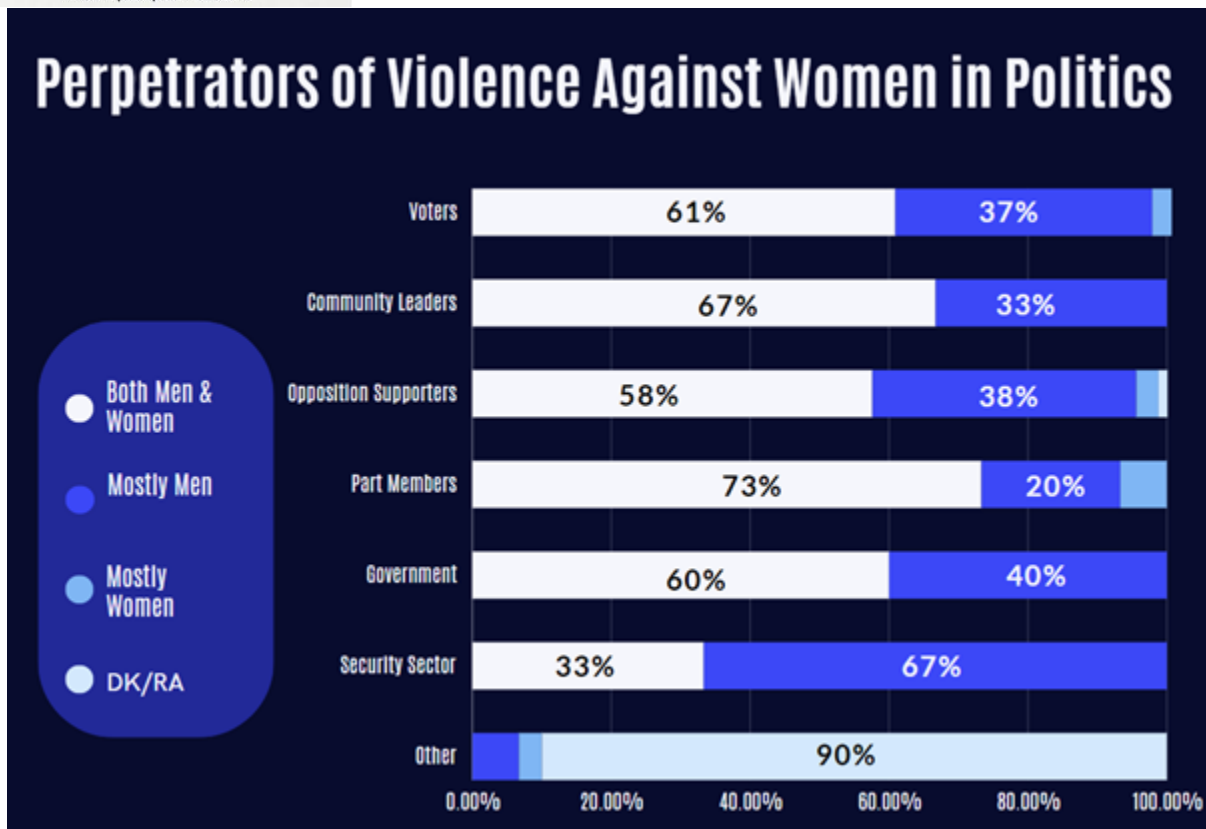


Figure 3-4: Perpetrators of VAWP

3.3.1 Undemocratic Primary Elections

Vote buying was considered common during primary elections and female candidates felt this was unfair as they did not have resources to do the same. IDI11 observed that in her own experience women generally are not financially strong and this affects their campaign activities. The electorate is now conditioned to being paid in some way during the campaign and the majority of women were in no position to do that in a sustained manner. FGD4 respondents noted that vote buying was a reality during primary elections and it swayed the votes of the electorate.

As IDI11 remarked,

“Food humpers would be distributed to households at night with a small paper with the name of the candidate inside. Some would give money to the electorate. The chairwomen of the women’s wings were at the forefront of distributing the hampers and cash and mobilising women against female candidates.” IDI11

Respondent IDI7 lamented the fact that the electorate has no appreciation of how important it is to put women in positions of leadership and what difference it can make. She noted that the electorate usually votes in response to the size of gifts they receive from a candidate such that the person who gives out the most gifts usually wins especially at the level of primary elections.

3.3.2 Patriarchal Cultural Norms

Respondent IDI14 and IDI15 noted that in Zimbabwe it is a cultural norm that women are supposed to be led by men. This reveals that patriarchy, the belief that men are stronger and better leaders and the opposite is true for women is very much alive in the country. IDI15 says in this culture men believe that they should be the leaders not women and they say,

“Vakadzi chimbogara pasi (Women stop competing for leadership positions) If it was not for the quota there would be very few women in the parliament of Zimbabwe, really few.”

FGD6 respondents narrated how the electorate discouraged her from participating telling her that her capacities as a leader were way inferior to her male competitors. She however focused on her campaign, and she prevailed.

“I was discouraged because of being a woman and they said I cannot do anything as compared to male candidates. However, I did many developments in the area.” FGD6

Yet another candidate narrated how she was bullied and discouraged from running. In her experience male candidates would literally leave no stone unturned in order to ensure that their female opponents step down from the campaign trail. This includes threats of bodily harm and claims that women do not have adequate resources to compete.

However, patriarchy as a culture is not sustained by men only but by women as well who are socialised to believe the same. Women begin to believe that they are not good leaders and delegate leadership positions to men and do not support women leaders. IDI11 noted that women in the party insist on getting men to be elected instead of women due to rampant stereotyping which sees men as better leaders. This was confirmed by IDI15 who said:

“And these things were not said by men only but other women as well. Vaiti ava ngavachigara pasi papinde munhurume isusu madzimai hatizvigone zvekungamirira izvi” (this woman should withdraw, and we put a man in this position, us women we do not know how to lead.”

3.3.3 Manipulation of results and change of policies and procedures

It would seem that the male and female leadership of political parties will go to great lengths to ensure that the candidates that they support win in the primary elections. This leads to the subversion of policies and procedures to suit the choices of the leadership.

According to IDI13:

“Policies are changed overnight to suit the needs of influential men in our political parties (Mitemo inochinjwa overnight) I was transferred to another constituency just two weeks before the elections. Ndakaendeswa ku constituency kwandisingazikanwi (I was transferred to a constituency where I was not known). The constituency boundaries were moved. As if this was not enough, in that constituency was my name sake as a candidate to confuse the electorate. On the election day, I had over 3000 votes against my name sake’s 12 votes. Surprisingly on the party list based on zebra style, my name was at the bottom of the list and my name’s sake with 12 votes was at the top. People complained about this, but nothing changed.” IDI15

Respondent IDI 11 concurred with this when she said,

“I feel like I was unfairly treated and if you report, no one listens and there won’t be any correction. I won the primary election, but my votes were switched with those of a female senior party member who had lost. She stole my votes and position because she had many senior positions within the party. She was therefore contesting with me, someone who didn’t have any seat or position in the party hierarchy/structure. I feel like this is happening in other political parties as some senior women party members win the election without failure every time and I think they manipulate the system to get the desired result.” IDI11

Respondent IDI11 shared her experience where another senior party member tried to take her position on the senate party list. Fortunately, she protested, and this was addressed.

“A political party female opponent tried to change the order from the party that candidates for primary elections must be listed according to seniority. A senior female party member in 2023, tried to put aside this directive from headquarters. I was the most senior in my province, but I was placed on number 3 on the senate party list and my opponent placed her name first. They went on to submit the list on their own without notifying me and I protested and fortunately this was addressed.” IDI11

Yet IDI6 indicated that she won the primary election, but her seat was given to a younger woman who was a favourite of the male leadership.

“I won in my district. I was senior but they gave my seat to a younger woman.” IDI6

3.3.4 Maligning, Labelling and Name-Calling of Women Candidates

Six respondents in individual in-depth interviews shared how they had been maligned, labelled and name called as female candidates. IDI14 indicated that in her own experience men were not ready to recognise female candidates in Zimbabwe and they automatically label them prostitutes. The most common name calling and labelling was calling the female candidates prostitutes or “HURE” in vernacular. This was designed to attack the morality and integrity of the candidates and ensure that they lose credibility among the voters, the majority of whom are women who would be instigated to feel that their marriages would be threatened by having such women leadership positions. IDI7 says she experienced negative reactions during the primary elections and noted that almost all female candidates were labelled prostitutes including herself. IDI8 who is single was labelled on that and called a prostitute as well.

“I am a single mother. People would say that they didn’t want to support single women or “hure”. People look down upon you.” IDI8

It would seem that women candidates who are looking good on the campaign trail and have adequate resources to campaign such as IDI13 and IDI16 are accused of getting favours by sleeping with party bosses or that they are labelled sell outs who got the funds from political opponents or are being foreign funded. The women candidates indicated that this was humiliating and demoralising for them after they would have made many sacrifices to get the resources. IDI16 said she had to close one of her shops and use the resources to fund her campaign but,

3.3.5 Misogyny and Sexual Abuse

Respondents IDI 11 and IDI10 indicated that there was rampant misogyny within political parties and men perceive women as sexual objects. The two indicated that men openly solicit for sexual favours and sometimes sexually assault women in the party. IDI11 added that,

“Men in the party use sex to cause havoc (they promise marriage to the person they sleep with) and women fight among themselves at the instigation of the male leader. Women get impregnated especially the youth and they are forced out of politics.” IDI11

Candidates reported that when you refuse the sexual advances you begin to hear talks that the bosses do not like you so you will not win. This does not come from them directly but its spoken in the political party.

3.3.6 Intersectionality and VAWP Experiences

The experience of youthful female candidates is also unique in that they have the disadvantage of being women and being young. This puts them at a disadvantage during the primary elections in male dominated political parties where patriarchy is rife and the female party members do not believe in the leadership of women. IDI10 competed for a Youth Quota seat with 4 male youths and she went through various types of violence to clinch the seat. She reported that she rejected the old politics of vote buying and instead opted for solid promises of supporting youth development in her area. She says she refused to buy anyone.

“It was a very tough experience as I was looked down upon starting in my zone. My male zone leader did not stand with me and he said “Please give in to the boys,How can you compete and win against men. Ungavagone here varume vese avo,Une mari here iwewe” (How can you compete with and beat these men, Do you have any money?) IDI10

Mature candidates also have unique experiences with VAWP. IDI15 narrated her ordeal when she put her name forward for the senate party list after serving before as a councillor. She says that she created a campaign committee, and her party supported her and mobilised for rallies. However, she received negative comments from her party members with people noting that she was now on the council board and she should not seek another leadership position.

“Because I had been a councillor for before there were comments such as, “Vaakuita zvaaMugabe kuramba munhu achingotonga. Madzimai vaakungoti pese pese vanoda kungotonga.” (She is now behaving like the former president who stayed in power for a long time. Now women want to be leaders everywhere.) IDI15

Due to her age IDI15 said that people thought she was too old to become a policy maker. She indicated that male candidates no matter how old they are do not receive the same comments that came her way. She would receive comments such as,

Some respondents reported that the ethnicity card was played against them when it was campaign time. In the Zimbabwe culture when a woman gets married, she moves to the home area of the husband and in many cases, she therefore does not carry the original ethnicity of the area that she moves to. When such a woman wants to run as a candidate the ethnicity card can be played against her with claims that she is foreign to an area. This can easily derail a campaign at primary level.

“Ethnicity is also very strong here and it is used against strong female candidates to ensure that they lose support. I am not originally from this area and when campaign time came my origin is flashed and made public to discredit me. This ethnicity card is used against female candidates and not male candidates.” IDI15

According to respondent IDI15 women who compete in the FPTP seats seem to have it worse than other candidates as there is now a general perception that women belong to the 60 seats quota and other PR positions. There is evidence that there are progressively lower numbers of women candidates with each election since 2013. The PR system, from this perspective, is working against women in general, and against young women and those who are not senior in political parties, as seniority is used by parties for PR seats. IDI15 said that,

“What men now do is to monopolise the FPTP seats and tell the women, Madzimai endai kuQuota ye 60 seats or list rekusenate. (women go for the 60 seats quota seats or the senate list). The FPTP is now for male candidates.” IDI15

IDI8 agreed with these sentiments noting that,

“Men no longer want us to contest in the FPTP and want us to go to the Women’s Quota and PR seats.” IDI18

IDI13 indicated that male candidates use crude methods to retain the FPTP seats for themselves. This can include hiring gangs who then harass the female candidates, intimidate or physically assault them until they give up. She said,

“They hire thugs to harass you and some women aspiring candidates end up leaving the race because they cannot handle the beatings.” IDI13

It was further revealed that those who have occupied PR seats do not want to relinquish those seats. As KII11 revealed,

“PR seats should be used to expose women to politics in general and how parliament works. During those five years, these women should be able to learn how to navigate this political space, after which they contest to be constituency MPs. It has become very unfortunate that PR MPs tend to serve the interests of their political parties not those of fellow women. The concept that PR MPs represent women is rubbish because there is no defined role for them. Parliament and political parties should clarify the roles of PR MPs.” KII11

3.3.7 Lack of Adequate Economic Resources

Almost all respondents indicated that funding for running the primary election is a huge challenge for women aspiring candidates. This is because they are expected to fund their campaign at 100%, have access to several vehicles for the campaign and use their homes or company premises as campaign bases. FGD6 respondents cited lack of financial resources as one of the main obstacles in running a successful primary election campaign for female candidates. IDI 18 revealed,

“Primary elections are the toughest phase for us women because they demand a lot more resources than other phases. At this stage because the contest is within your party, party financial support is not there. You are completely alone. After winning the primary elections, some parties come in with campaign finance.” IDI 18

For the senate party lists campaign this was doubly difficult as the aspiring senators had to campaign in three constituencies to get support.

“It was very tough as my campaign was 100% self-funded. I used my own company premises”. I had to close one of my shops and use the resources to run the campaign. The electorate expected food and other benefits whenever there was a meeting and that was expensive. If you do not have a car as a candidate, you cannot win the election as you need to move in the constituency.” IDI7

IDI8 indicated that lack of resources was a challenge, and a prospective candidate should have money to win an election. She said,

“You should have money. You can’t speak to people if you do not have money.” IDI8

Respondents agreed that male candidates at all levels usually have more resources to run a campaign and they had access to all types of vehicles including lorries to ferry supporters to rallies. They revealed that men would bring thousands of t-shirts, posters/flyers, and could buy people food worth thousands of dollars and they would bring food items to distribute to the people like beans, maize, vegetable seeds and rice. These were distributed to individuals. The majority of female candidates did not have access to such items.

VAWP increases the cost of participating in elections as aspiring candidates have to increase their investment in security before, during and after elections.

3.3.8 Threats directed towards women candidates

Respondents reported that they faced threats of physical violence from their male opponents. The opponents threatened to physically assault them if they campaign in certain geographical areas. Candidates also faced verbal and psychological abuse on the campaign trail especially from male opponents.

“There was no physical violence, but we received threats, they said if we see you in a certain area we will beat you. But it did not deter me, I continued with my programme and no harm was done on me. Everything went on smoothly.” FGD6

The people carrying out the threats were hired youths who included majority of men and a few women. These people were asked to say negative things and threaten female candidates in exchange for goodies including money.

Quantitative data revealed that the most common type of violence experienced by female candidates was psychological (89%), followed by sexual harassment (comments towards a person that are uncomfortable and sexual) [58%], followed by sexual violence (acts like rape and touching) [36%] and lastly economic violence (32%).



Figure 3-5: In-Person Type of Violence

Sexual harassment in this study was defined as comments towards a person that are uncomfortable and sexual while sexual violence is defined as acts like rape and unwanted touching.

3.4 Acts of VAWP during Nomination

The nomination process is arduous for aspiring women candidates. Women experience VAWP during nomination because of the nature of the nomination procedures in Zimbabwe. Candidates vying for posts in Zimbabwe are nominated by their party with the exception of independent candidates. Figure 3.6 illustrates that 96% of women candidates who participated in the candidate survey were party nominated whilst 4% were self-nominated.

Nomination is characterised by stiff competition within the party which begins during primary elections and ends when the nomination court closes. The 2023 elections were depicted by a nomination process that culminated in court proceedings that almost encroached into the polling day and resulted in the late printing of the ballot paper.

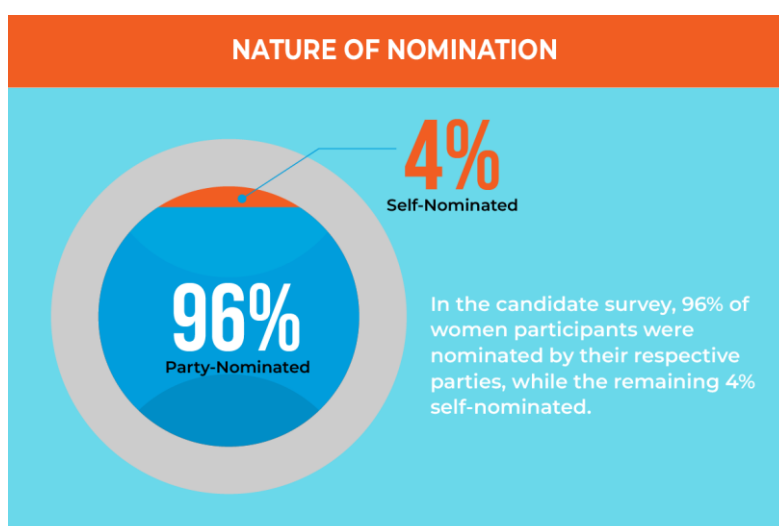


Figure 3-6: Nature of Nomination

IDIs revealed that women across the political divide experienced VAWP during the nomination process with economic violence and candidate imposition being the most acute. The high nomination fees of US\$1000 was a major challenge to most female parliamentary candidates. All respondents cited it as the most formidable type of VAWP they had encountered during the nomination process.

Candidate imposition was another common challenge faced by some of the female candidates during the 2023 general elections. Women candidates were either replaced by a female or male candidate during the nomination process. Some women aspiring candidates are forced into intimate relationships with male influential politicians to guarantee their nomination as candidates. In some cases candidates names are replaced by *“You’ll constantly be sabotaged with your name missing from the official papers because your position would have been given to an influential man’s girlfriend and you can’t get it changed anywhere. These women don’t participate in anything, but their names just appear on the official papers.”* IDI3

Women struggle to be nominated even if they are qualified to contest for a seat. The study revealed that 27.23% of female candidates who were nominated were provincial level party leaders, 23.66% were leaders of their party’s women’s wing and 20.54% were the national level party leaders. Table 3.3 below shows that most women who took part in the survey were qualified for nomination since all had a leadership position.

Table 3.3: Position in the Political Party Before Nomination

What was your position in the political party before nomination?	Freq.	Percent
I was part of a campaign group	5	2.23
Leader of the Women's Wing	53	23.66
Leader of the Youth Wing	12	5.36
Member of the party's highest national structure	25	11.16
National Level Party leader	46	20.54
New member of party (less than 1 year by the time of election)	2	0.89
Old member of party (more than 5 year by the time of election)	20	8.93
Provincial Level Party leader	61	27.23
Total	224	100%

Apart from the leadership positions women held, they were also strong candidates for nomination based predominantly on their level of experience in politics. The percentages of women candidates who had run for elections in the past were 87.50% for the youth quota, 58.30% for women candidates on the senate party list, 47.30% for women candidates on the women’s quota list for national assembly and 36.70% for women

candidates contesting for the FPTP National Assembly seats. Figure 3.6 illustrates the level of experience women had in politics as they contested in the 2023 harmonised elections.

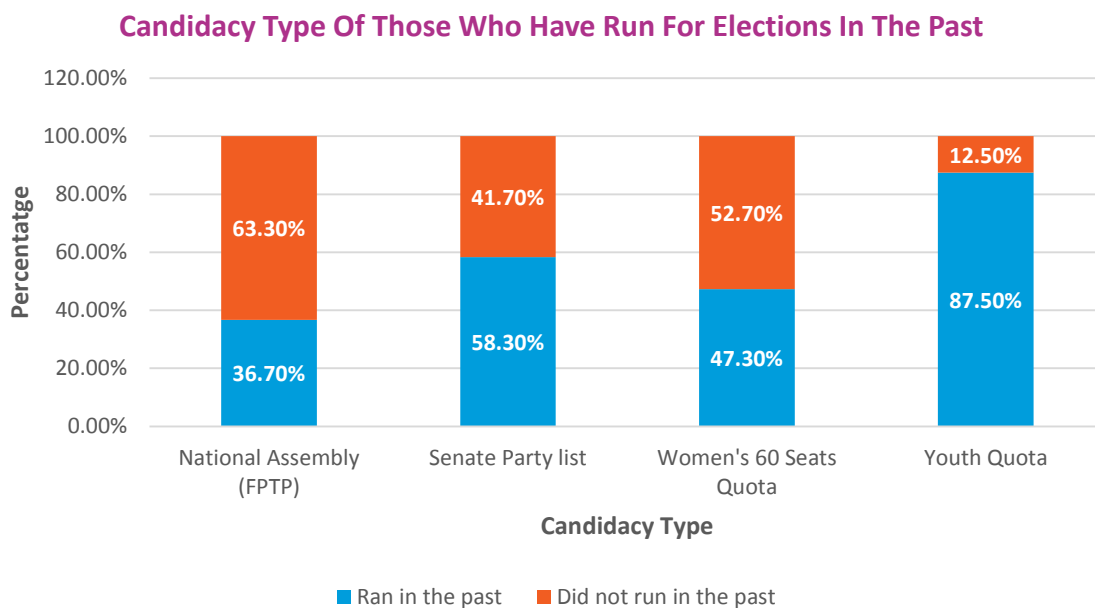


Figure 3-7: Candidacy Experience in Running for Elections

Women candidates were professionals in their own right with only 11.30% who were unemployed. 23.50% were in business and the private sector in particular, while 20.90% worked for a political party, 8.90% were in the civil service and 7.30% in the educational sector as is illustrated in Figure 3.8.

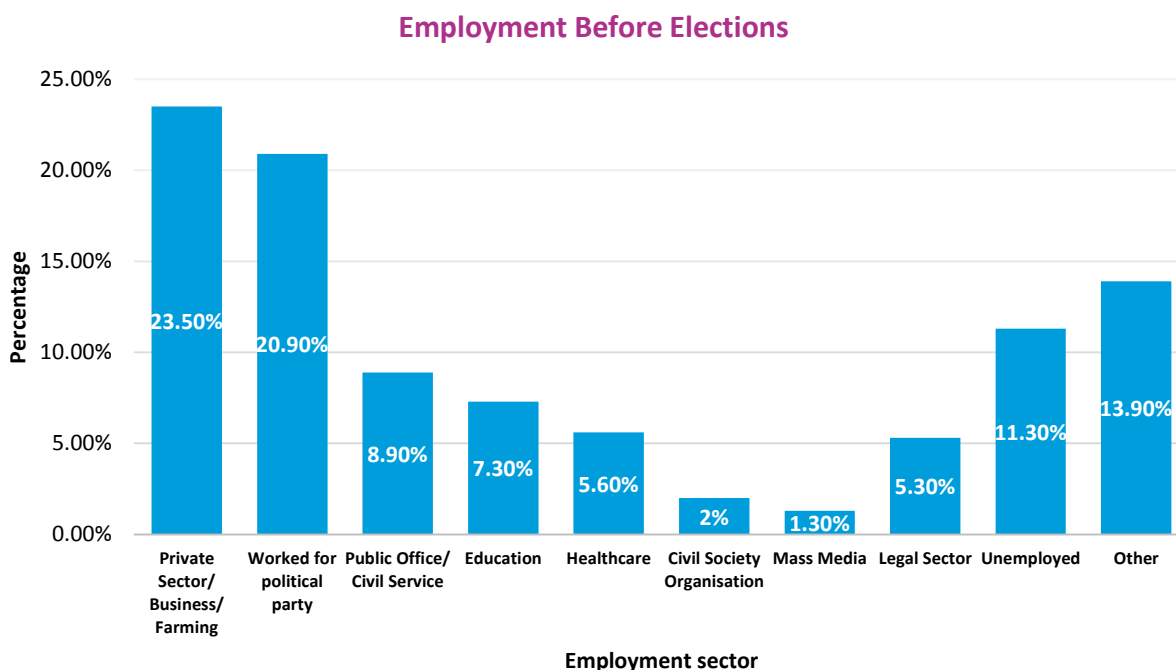


Figure 3-8: Employment Before the Elections

Most women were educated and subsequently good candidates vying for leadership positions in the 2023 general election. Statistics show that 61.28% of women had attained secondary level education, 17.02% a university degree, 7.23% vocational training and 6.81% a postgraduate degree. Only 3.83% had no formal education.

Notwithstanding women's experience in politics, leadership skills, employment status and educational qualifications, few women were nominated to contest in the 2023 general elections. One key informant observed that male candidates are usually pitted against female candidates should they be considered strong candidates.

KII4 highlighted that,

"There was an incident where a sitting female councillor wanted to run again. The political party mobilised a male candidate against her." KII4

Another respondent decried the fact that when women are successful in politics, regardless of their qualifications and experience,

"You always get the negative sentiments. People will think that you slept with someone to get a place. I was number 1 on the list. Young women have seen me rise up and are inspired." IDI14

Women are perceived to be weak candidates and therefore, to remove them from positions of power, male candidates are usually mobilised against them. KII3 was one of the female candidates running for the 2023 elections. She stated that,

"There was a lot of ridicule because I was a female candidate. Some people, were however, supportive of my candidature." KII3

One political party noted that its female candidates had been obstructed from the nomination process and were given a few days to contest after being involved in court cases. KII3 opined that,

"We had to battle for the right of our female candidates to contest." KII3

KII5 elaborates that the process of candidate selection is antagonistic and not conducive to achieve equal representation of both sexes as candidates in elections.

Female candidates also reported that policies and positions are changed overnight to suit some influential party members' needs. One candidate recounted how she woke up to the news that her party had decided that she was no longer going to contest for the First Past The Post seat but for the proportional representation seat.

Most female candidates were pushed out of the FPTP seats due to fear of violence, internal party manoeuvring and lack of resources. Figure 3.9 illustrates the nature of candidacy most women who took part in the survey settled for during the 2023 elections. The majority of women, 46.20% to be precise, were nominated for the women's quota, whilst 25.40% were selected to contest for the FPTP National Assembly seats. The senate party lists had 20.30% of women in comparison to the youth quota which had only 8.10% females.

Nature of Candidacy

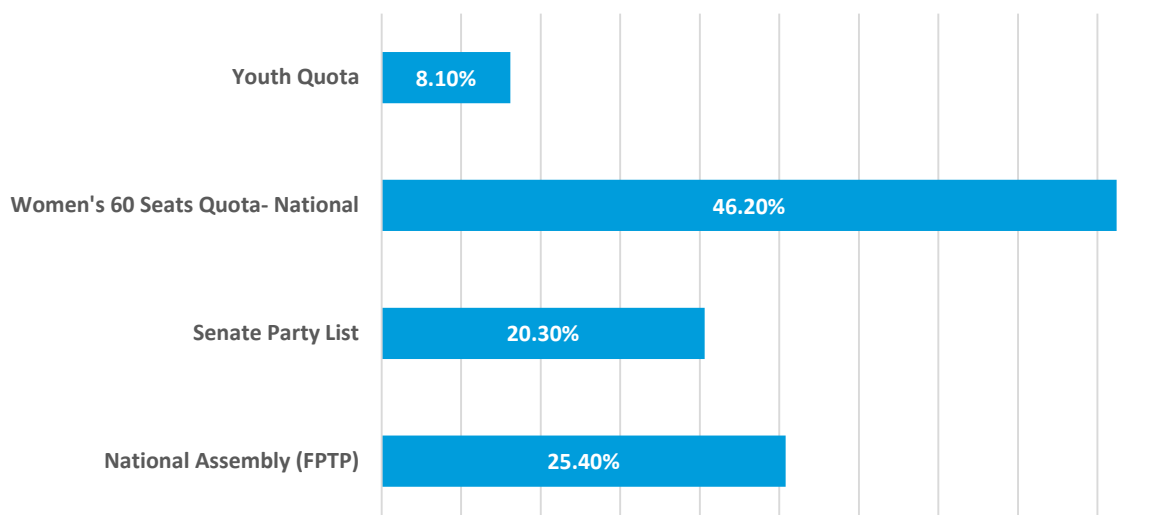


Figure 3-9: Nature of Candidacy

Age was a factor militating against the nomination of young women in politics. The average age of female respondents in the survey was 51 years with the minimum age that participated pegged at 24 years whilst the maximum was 79 years. Table 3.4 shows that youth female candidates were a paltry 12.02% whilst the majority of candidates were in the 56-79 age bracket.

Table 3.4: Age of Respondents

Age Range	Freq.	Percent
24-35	28	12.02
36-45	46	19.74
46-55	72	30.90
56-79	87	37.34
Total	233	100.00

Most respondents that participated in the KIIs, IDIs and FGDs cited age as a daunting challenge in the nomination of youth female candidates. A respondent from FGD7 pointed out that,

“The women’s quota focuses on seniority and if you are a youth, you will not win. Those who have been there for a long time, are usually put back.” FGD7

It is noteworthy that some political parties have begun to make deliberate efforts to be more inclusive of youth female candidates. A participant in FGD 7 stated that,

“Parties differ. At our party, we were told that at least one person had to be below 35.” FGD7

3.5 Acts of VAWP during Campaigning for General Elections

VAWP was a major deterrent to women during the campaign period, particularly, candidates who were vying for the First Past the Post seats. The competition was fierce, and most women found safer spaces in competing for the Proportional Representation (PR) seats. Sexual harassment, physical violence, cyber bullying, economic violence, vote buying, emotional and verbal abuse were the main types of VAWP experienced by respondents.

Women’s campaign materials such as posters were vandalised and property destroyed. IDI3 stated that,

“My property was destroyed, and my child was hit by a car due to my involvement in political activities.” IDI3

Some female candidates were physically attacked. IDI3 highlighted that,

“A group of women supporters in (name withheld) were abducted and tortured during the campaign period. They were beaten and some were forced to drink sewage water for supporting a female candidate. These candidates did not receive any form of assistance.” IDI3

It is important to note that some respondents highlighted that they had received protection from law enforcement agents when they faced physical violence. KI13 noted that,

“We experienced violence at a rally in our town centre. However, in one of the suburbs we had police representatives who stepped in to protect us. It was very much appreciated because it was proactive.” KI13

Name calling and the use of derogatory language were used to belittle women during campaigning. The common term that was mentioned by almost every respondent as having been used to refer to female candidates was “Hure”, which means “prostitute”. The label was given to most female respondents regardless of their marital status.

Cyberbullying or online violence was another type of VAWP which was experienced by women in the 2023 general elections. IDI1 opined that,

“I had a female supporter who faced verbal abuse. She was pregnant and was told that the pregnancy didn’t belong to her husband. We wanted to sue them, but they stopped when they realised that we wanted to sue them”. She went on to explain that, “my child passed on due to intoxication around the time of my campaign and people accused me of ‘kuchekeresa mwana’ (killing my son for rituals). It was so disturbing as a mother.”

IDI1

“I got a note wrapped around a stone thrown into my backyard during the campaigning season. The note was written siyana nazvo waita mwana mudiki (Stop being involved in politics. You are too small).” IDI1

3.6 Media and Acts of VAWP

Female candidates used either print or social media to campaign. They had coverage from online, community radio stations and private newspapers. The candidate survey shows that women are adapting to the use of social media in their campaigns, and some have attracted funding as a result of their presence on social media.

Traditional media were quite popular with 46.2% of the women participating in debates using traditional media such as television and radio. Figure 3.9 illustrates that 68.33% of female National Assembly candidates vying for the FPTP seats in parliament, made the most use of traditional media as compared to 43.75% (senate), 33.03% (women’s quota National Assembly) and 57.89% (youth quota) candidates.

Debates and Traditional Media Participation by Candidacy

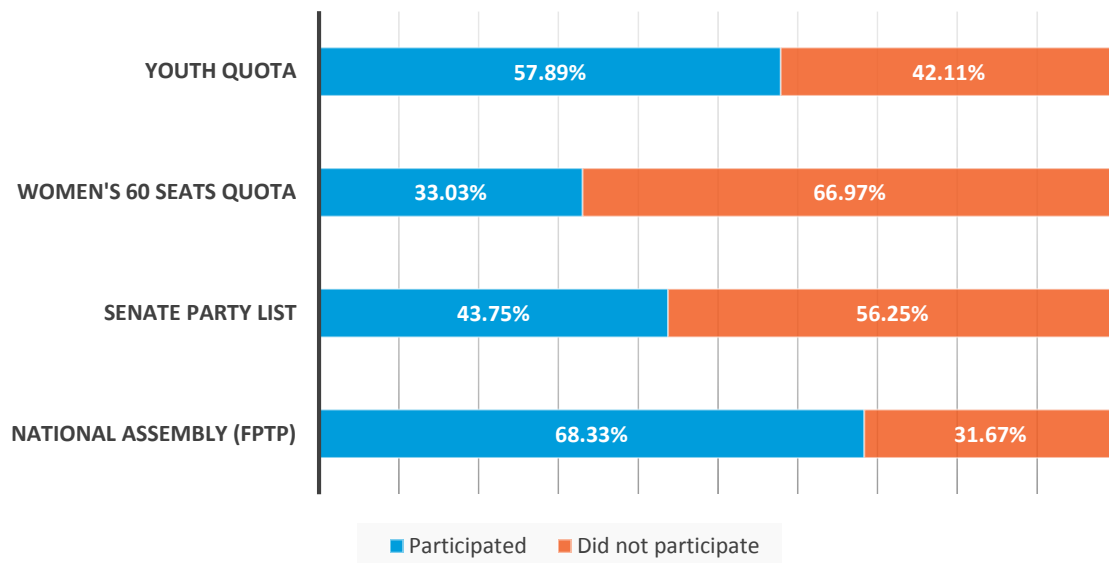


Figure 3.9: Participation in Traditional Media and Debates by Candidacy

The survey further highlights that a staggering 66.67% of women who were self-nominated made use of debates and traditional media as compared to 45.37% who were party nominated. This seems to depict some high degree of independence of self-nominated candidates to use traditional media than party nominated ones. Further, it is important to note that during interviews, 53% of women experienced psychological violence from journalists/ hosts and/or moderators using traditional media. Consequently, the study found out that the percentage of women who suffered psychological violence from social media campaign was lower at 36.4%.

Some respondents complained of unfair media coverage during the campaign period. IDI4 noted that, *"We were not happy as women with the biased coverage. We refused as a political party to be interviewed because we wanted them to address the problem of biased media coverage."* IDI4

Some candidates had negative experiences with the media. The candidate survey indicates that 30.5% of women experienced psychological violence from false information which was printed in newspapers, magazines and television.

IDI2 lamented that,

"I was framed for sleeping with another man and it was in a national newspaper. Luckily for me the day they said this happened, that night my husband was with that man and he automatically knew it was a lie because this one was really targeting my marriage, I don't know how I was going to explain that it was a lie. The paper in question didn't even verify with me before publishing the article." IDI2

About 26.3% of women who participated in the candidate survey suffered psychological violence and sexual harassment during their social media campaign. The sexual harassment included sexual comments and false information about their private life. IDI4 stated that:

About 7.14% of respondents noted that body shaming was another instrument of online violence used against women in the 2023 general elections.

About 25.9% of the women suffered psychological violence from ICT-related communication which explains the choice of some female candidates not to use social media at all. The survey indicates that online violence deterred 24.32% of the participants from participating in media debates and events, whilst 23.2% of female candidates avoided using social media altogether.

3.7 Perpetrators of online VAWP

Table 3.5 highlights that the major perpetrators of online VAWP were from another party whilst 12.31% could be attributed to internal party members. 38.46% of abusive online comments from another party candidates were sent by phone or emails to the prospective candidates. It is important to highlight that 12.31% of candidates did not know who their attackers were. The survey reveals that 10.77% of perpetrators of online VAWP were random people. Voter education is crucial to de-escalate online VAWP and mobilise political parties to find ways and means to support female victims/survivors.

Table 3.5: Perpetrators of Online VAWP

Who posted online such comments or sent you by phone or emails	Percent n=65
Anonymous	4.62
Community member	6.15
Cyber bullying	1.54
Don't know	12.31
I am not comfortable mentioning them	6.15
Journalist	1.54
Members from another party	38.46
Random people	10.77
Someone within my political party	12.31
Someone within my political party and others from opposite parties	4.62
There was a circulating picture nude picture with my face on it which had hurtful speech	1.54
Total	100.00

The majority of the perpetrators of traditional media VAWP were both male and female as illustrated in the table 3.6 Women perpetrators were slightly more with 16.98% as compared to men at 15.09% which is consistent with findings from the in-depth interviews which seem to suggest that women are used to fight other women by men. Female candidates are used as pawns against other women by men to ensure that males maintain their positions of dominance and power in the political system. One respondent from FGD7 opined that,

Table 3.6: Perpetrators of VAWP - Traditional Media

Who were these people?	Percent (n=53)
DK/RA	11.32
Mixed/ Both	56.60
Mostly men	15.09
Mostly women	16.98
Total	100.00

3.8 Intra-Party VAWP

The candidate survey, interviews and FGDs revealed that whilst women received support from their political parties, they also experienced intra-party violence. Women candidates experienced 72.03% psychological violence and 29.66% sexual violence from within their political parties. The main perpetrators of intra-party violence were mostly men who were senior members of the political party. Perpetrators of intra-party VAWP included senior party members and or leaders at 73.20%, other candidates (56.45%) and fellow party members (61.54%).

Perpetrators of VAWP Within the Party

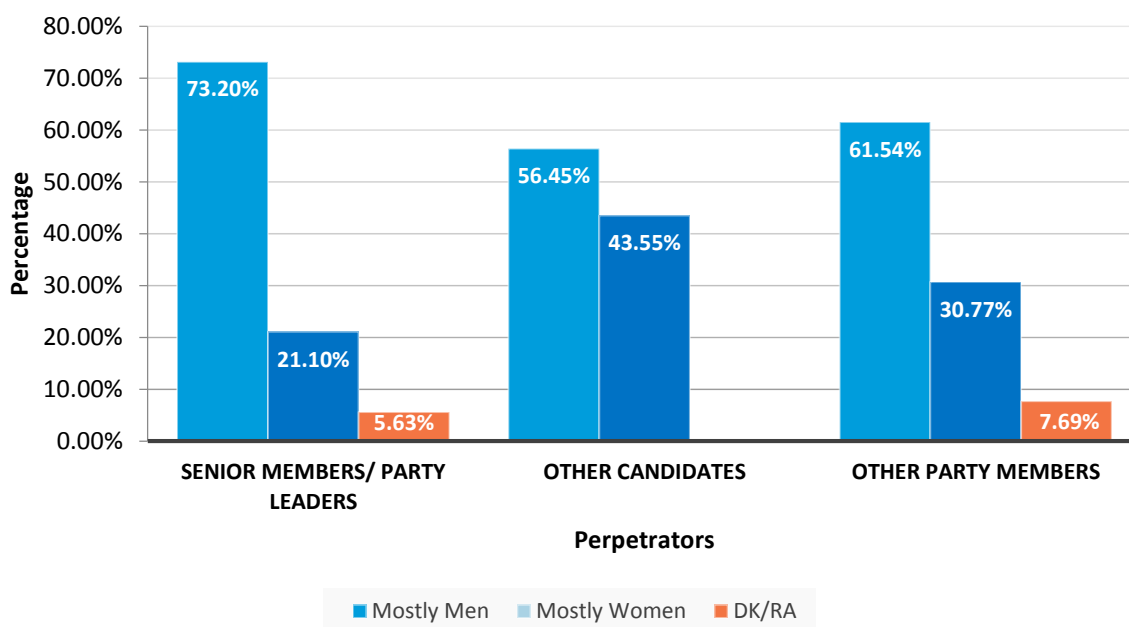


Figure 3-10: Perpetrators of Intra-Party VAWP

Women were also perpetrators of intra – party VAWP albeit on a lower scale as compared to their male counterparts. Whilst 73.20% of male senior members or party leaders committed intra-party VAWP, only 21.10% of women in the same positions were associated with intra party violence as illustrated in Figure 3.9 above. Whereas 56.45% of male candidates were responsible for intra-party VAWP against their fellow female candidates, 43.55% of women candidates were liable for similar offences. Similarly, 61.54% of other male party members engaged in internal party VAWP, only 30.77% of their female counterparts were perpetrators of political violence.

While women were also perpetrators of VAWP it should be underscored that 76.70% of female party colleagues stood up for the female candidates in their party as compared to 17.48% male party members as illustrated in the table below. Conversely, 53.92% of male party leadership stood by women candidates experiencing VAWP in contrast to 39.22 of female leaders who defended women candidates who were victims of VAWP.

Table 3.7: Who in the Party Stood Up for You?

	Party leadership n=102	Party colleagues n=103
DK/RA	6.86	5.83
Mostly men	53.92	17.48
Mostly women	39.22	76.70
Total	100.00	100.00

Factions and internal party rivalries have affected the ability of the political parties to effectively support female candidates.

One of the independent candidates who participated in the interviews indicated that she received most of her support from her family and community. IDI3 stated that,

“I received help from a lot of volunteers in communities who would campaign for me and distribute my posters.”

3.9 Acts of VAWP on the Polling Day

The polling days were generally reported as being peaceful by the respondents. Voting was conducted peacefully on both polling days. About a quarter of the female candidates that were interviewed indicated that despite the peaceful environment, they experienced VAWP on polling day. Table 3.8 indicates that the VAWP experienced on polling was generally low at 22.65%. The violence committed against female candidates was mainly psychological, sexual and physical.

Table 3.8: Psychological/Sexual and Physical Violence

Did someone attack you, verbally, sexually or physically on the polling day?	Freq.	Percent
No	181	77.35
Yes	53	22.65
Total	100.00	100.00

Polling agents were victims of violence on polling day as illustrated in Table 3.9. The survey shows that 21.03% of polling agents were attacked psychologically, sexually and physically on polling day.

Table 3.9: Psychological/Sexual and Physical Violence

Did someone attack verbally, sexually or physically the poll agents working for you	Freq.	Percent
No	184	78.97
Yes	49	21.03
Total	233	100.00

Despite these challenges, voting remained peaceful throughout the country. Most female respondents that participated in IDIs, KIs and FGDs were agreeable that there was generally a peaceful environment on polling day as compared to the campaign period.

3.10 Family and Political Party Support

The majority of candidates who participated in the survey received significant support from their families. The table below shows that 64.5% of candidates received 100% family support during the 2023 electoral cycle.

Table 3.10: Family Support on a Scale of 1 to 10

Overall, during the elections, how supportive was your family on a scale	Freq.	Percent
0	1	0.43
2	1	0.43
3	3	1.28
4	4	1.71
5	5	2.14
6	3	1.28
7	8	3.42
8	24	10.26
9	34	14.53
10	151	64.53
Total	234	100.00

Most female candidates who were interviewed mentioned that their family, particularly, their husbands and children were supportive of their candidature and involvement in politics. IDI4 stated that,

“My husband, mum and dad stood by me the most. Even my in-laws and extended family. They would take care of the kids. My husband is supportive. He is an IT person, and he helps me a lot.” IDI4

For some candidates, particularly, FGD1 children were involved in their mother’s ward groups and they assisted and kept them up to date on developments in the area. IDI2 noted that,

Despite the fact that family support was relatively high, 20.34% of female candidates suffered psychological violence at the behest of their family as illustrated by Table 3.11 below.

Table 3.11: Violence by Family Members

Family Violence	Percent (n=235)
Psychological Violence	20.34
Economical Violence	8.47
Physical Violence	5.08
Sexual Violence	2.97

The survey denotes that 19.85% of the people who committed family violence were other relatives as compared to spouses (5.34%), children (4.58%), in-laws (6.87%) and parents (1.53%). This implies that close relatives were generally supportive of female candidates' campaigns as is depicted by the responses from most responses from IDIs with female candidates.

Lack of family support of female politicians during elections can lead to family upheavals.

The interviews showed the willingness of family members to support female candidates running for elections. The main reservations were on the safety of their family and their relative who was contesting as a candidate. Some families were torn apart when female candidates chose to run as candidates for political parties. Other family members did not support.

The chart below shows that a whopping 81% of women received support from their own political party.

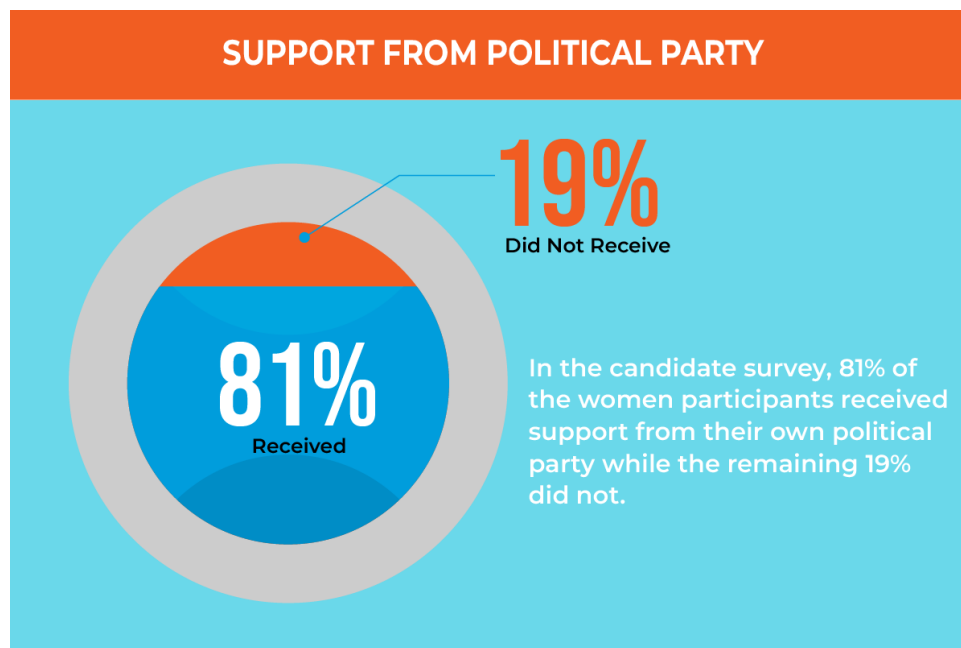


Figure 3-11: Political Party Support

3.10.1 Types of Support

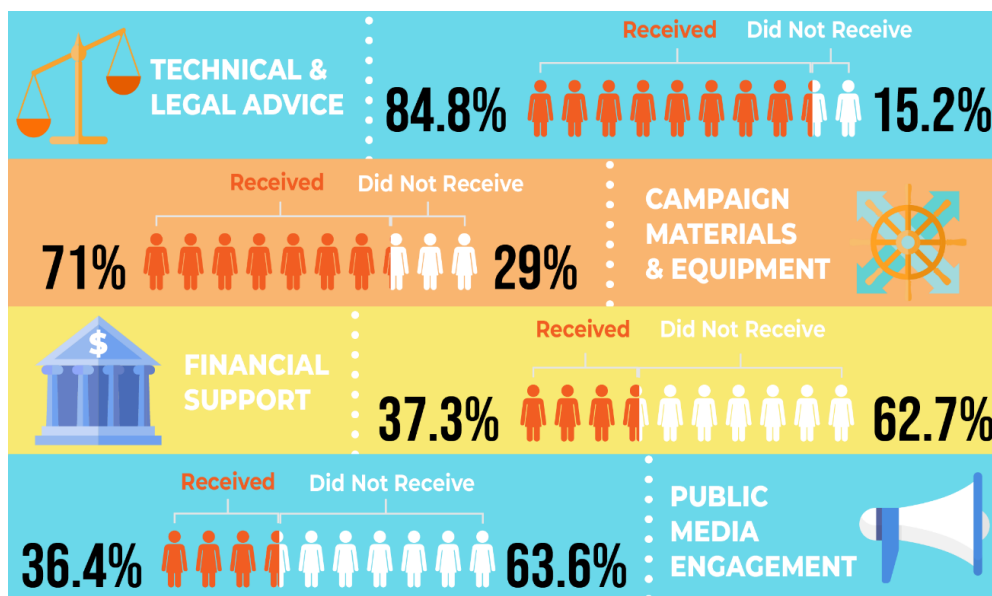


Figure 3-12: Type of Party Support Received

Figure 3.12 above shows the type of support that female candidates received from their political parties. They received 84.80% technical and legal advice, 71% campaign materials and equipment, 37.30% financial support and 36.40% public media engagement support. The statistics corroborate with the findings from the FGDs, KIIs and IDIs which depict financial and media engagement support of women as low. Moral support was regarded as quite high and it was in the form of advice. Although support for campaign material and equipment was high, the FGDs conducted with female candidates from the Senate and the Youth Quota denote that this was ancillary funding targeted at FPTP candidates who were mostly male.

3.11 Acts of VAWP during the Post- Election Period

3.11.1 Witch Hunt After Elections

The responses of the female candidates in the 2023 general elections reveals that the tensions and rivalries of the polling phase spills into the post-election period. This supports the argument for programming on Women Political Participation (WPP) around the electoral cycle. Some political party members make a headcount of people who claim to be their members versus the actual votes that they received. They then seek to identify who might not have voted for them.

They use crude methods to try and identify those who did not vote for their political party and such people may be denied free benefits distributed by the government. These include food handouts, agricultural inputs or free livestock schemes carried out by the government. Single and widowed women are already vulnerable and can be easily lumped into this group with negative consequences on their socio-economic welfare.

3.11.2 Women Divided Along Political Party Lines

FGD1 respondents reported that in the post-election period, women were divided along partisan political lines at the community level and tensions continued to simmer. They reported that in some cases their names were also not included in the Food for Work programmes carried out during years of drought ostensibly because of the political party they belong to.

3.11.3 Lack of Respect for Female Policy Makers

A youthful female policy maker shared that she is not accorded the respect and honour that she deserves as a policy maker. She is ignored, not introduced in meetings and generally just pushed aside by her own political party. This can be demoralising for a female policy maker and might result in her losing confidence as a leader.

3.11.4 MPs Recalled from Parliament

Soon after the elections 20% of the female candidates that were interviewed reported that they already faced the pressure to resign, or someone tried to reorder their candidacy.

Did you have any pressure to resign or were you requested to sign a resignation?

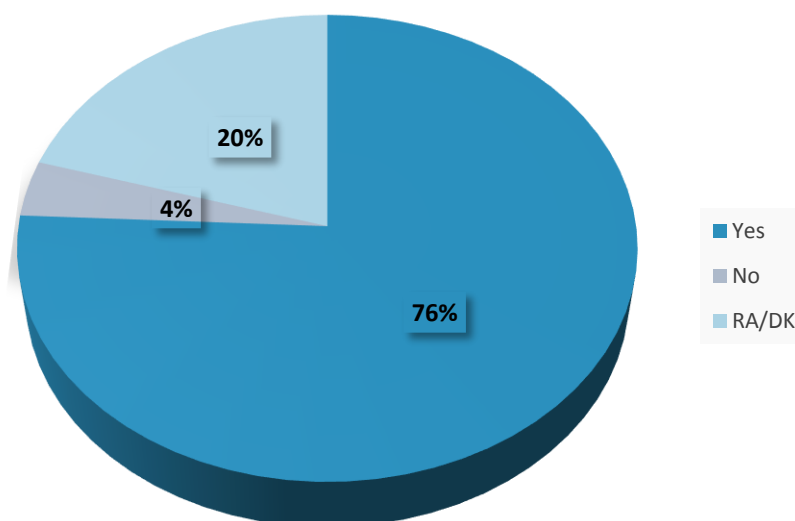


Figure 3-13: Pressure to Resign

When candidates were asked if they felt the pressure to resign or someone tried to re-order their candidacy the results are shocking. Thirty-eight per cent (38%) of the interviewed candidates felt the pressure to resign or someone tried to re-order their candidacy on the party lists. Sixty per cent (60%) of the candidates did not feel this pressure.

IDI16 and IDI14 are two female MPs who were recalled from parliament, and they feel they were targeted because they are women PR members of parliament and they were easy to replace. They claim that they did not know the person who was recalling them and felt that they had been treated very unfairly.

3.11.5 Lack of Access to Constituencies and Resources For PR List Policy Makers

The policy makers on the 60 seats women quota, the senate and youth quota lamented the fact that they have restricted access to constituencies. They claim that the FPTP policy makers are the legitimate authority in their constituencies, and they have no freedom to walk into a constituency and hold activities or implement development projects. They have to first liaise with the FPTP MP to get permission or work closely with them. Secondly, they have no access to resources to carry out development projects. The FPTP policy makers have access to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) which they use to support development projects round the constituency. The PR seats policy makers reported that they had no control over the use of the CDF funds and a FPTP policy maker can include them at their own volition. They also reported that FPTP policy makers were wary of them going into their constituencies for any activities. Usually, they had to notify the FPTP policy makers if they were visiting their constituency for any engagements.

“CDF funds only go to FPTP policy makers and not to PR seats and we have no say in how they are used. Some FPTP policy makers can include a PR seat member as a signatory to the CDF account but you are not entitled to this.” FGD2

3.12 Reporting and Help Seeking Behaviours

The research findings reveal that 81% women candidates did not seek for any support after experiencing incidents of VAWP.



Figure 3-14: Help-Seeking Behaviour

Those that sought support mostly sought psychological counselling aid, 46%, followed by those that sought medical and health check-ups 41%; 27% sought for legal aid.

Table 3.12: Type of Support Services Received

What support services did you seek?	Percent (n=37)
Legal aid	27.03
Medical and health check-ups	40.54
Psychosocial counselling	45.95
Other	21.62
I did not seek support services	10.81

Candidates who go through VAWP rarely share the information publicly as only one candidate did this. The others shared the information with family members, close friends, party leaders, other members of the political party and others.

To Whom the Information on VAWP Was Shared Informally

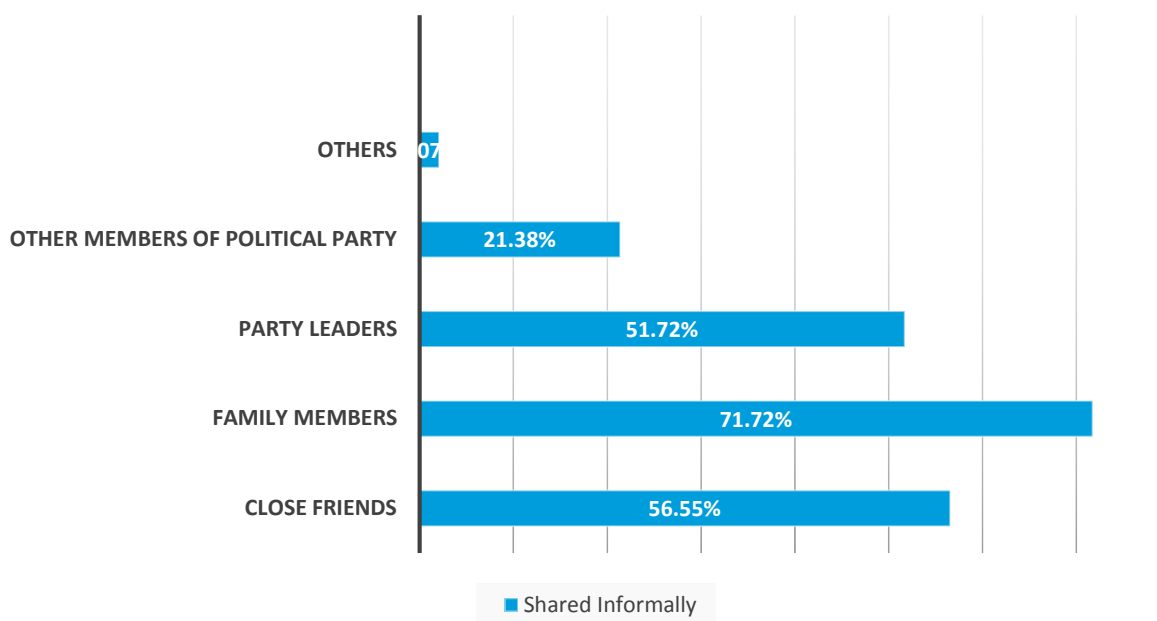


Figure 3-15: Information Sharing on VAWP Experiences by Candidates

Many women candidates reported that they were not aware of the electoral court and its role in resolving electoral issues. However, a few reported that their political party has taken issues to the electoral court and a result was received.

3.12.1 Reporting to the Police

A respondent summarises the expectations of women from the stakeholders they report to

“The police must deliver justice by arresting perpetrators without fear or favour, the political party must listen to both sides and help women and the courts should rule fairly on cases of VAWP.” IDI12

The respondents indicated that women are scared to report VAWP because of the backlash that usually occur. For this reason, 63% of the female candidates reported that they did not lodge a formal complaint, while 26% did.

Table 3.13: Filing of Formal Complaint

Did you ever file a formal complaint in response to any of those instances?	Percent n=104
No	63.46
Not applicable	10.58
Yes	25.96
Total	100.00

Women with disabilities experience discrimination from the political party and the police. It is very difficult for them to go and report stigmatization. Female candidates with disabilities suffer double discrimination on the basis of gender and disability. This is one of the main reasons for low participation of women with disabilities in politics.

Despite the lack of confidence in the law enforcement agency, 50% of complaints were reported to them. Women respondents also indicated that for internal party issues the police seem to be wary on intervening, so they usually record the case, but they do not see further action after that.

Table 3.14: Reporting Mechanisms

To whom did you report?	Percent (n=26)
Law enforcement agencies (police, electoral court)	50.00
Court	19.23
Prosecutor General's Office	0
Political party leadership	30.77
ZEC	19.23
Other	11.54
Refused to answer	7.69
Total	100.00

Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that in the majority of cases, no action was taken after lodging the complaint. Survey results show that no action was taken on 58% of the cases that were reported.

It would seem that some cases of intra-party harassment, primary elections malpractice, and body shaming fall through the cracks when they are reported to the police. FGD1, IDI1 and IDI2 and IDI3 and IDI5 narrated how they reported cases of intimidation within the party to the police but an investigation did not ensue. They indicated that they had not received the expected solution and perpetrators went unpunished. FGD1 indicated that they had reported some cases of harassment and intimidation by political opponents from another political party to the police and they did not get the outcome that they had expected.

IDI6 and FGD4 indicated that their political party addresses the reports of harassments and abuse brought by any internal party member. However, the police and courts should also address big cases that cannot be solved within the party when these are brought before them.

3.12.2 Reporting at the Level of the Political Party

The second common platform after the police that women used to report cases of VAWP was their political parties, 31%. At the level of the political party the disciplinary measures and procedures are not clear on everyday micro-aggressions and violence such as sexual violence, hate speech, maligning an opponent, threatening violence, physical violence, vote buying and de-campaigning. Women fear to report because the issue is usually not resolved fairly, and the women usually ends up being blamed and stigmatized.

IDI2 reported that she was targeted with hate speech, and unfair practices were used in the selection of candidates to a Proportional Representation party list. The other candidate was well to do, and they used vote buying to win the primary election. She reported to party seniors and no action was taken because they were the ones who allowed the malpractice in the first place. She analysed that the problem with reporting at the party level is that the provincial and national leadership responsible for the primary elections are the ones who preside over complaints and it, therefore, defeats the whole purpose of getting justice.

IDI4 and IDI12 indicated that women don't report cases because there is ignorance about where to report, there is no action that is taken towards perpetrators if they report internally.

IDI14 said the women's wing could be a good advocate for the rights of women but, *"The political party has a women's wing, but it has no power and resources, and it acts more like a welfare department."* IDI14

Women candidates indicated that the general culture of silence around VAW prevailed in cases of VAWP. In this culture women are exhorted to keep party issues private, and they should not air dirty linen in public. Women also learn that reporting does not help them in many cases as the perpetrators are protected and the victim/survivor is blamed for the violence.

Perpetrators of VAWP seem to go freely according to the reports from the women candidates. The political parties seem to prefer to sweep the violence under the carpet and maintain a clean name rather than deal with the perpetrators of VAWP.

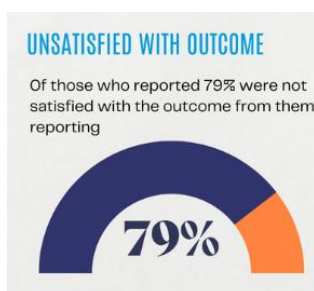
Yet another candidate reported a case of being maligned and labelled and she was told this was typical of the campaign era and she had to be strong. Absolutely nothing was done by the political party.

IDI12 confirms that women candidates who report incidences of VAWP rarely get justice or sympathy. Rather women experiencing VAWP and talking about it results in stigmatisation of the victims/survivors. The process is so long such that the victim might even suffer another violation before the previous one has been resolved

3.12.3 Reporting Through the Multi-Party Liaison Committee

According to the national constitution of Zimbabwe the ZEC activates the Multi Party Liaison Committee (MPLC) when an election has been proclaimed. This platform brings together political parties at the national, provincial and constituency level. IDI7 indicated that she had reported a case of VAWP to the ZEC through the Multi-Party Liaison Committee (MPLC) and the case was tabled in the MPLC meeting and nothing further was done because of how the structure works, through consensus. She said in previous elections she would report cases but stopped because she saw no tangible action at the MPLC platform. She feels that the platform should be capacitated further to respond to VAWP.

3.12.4 Reporting Through ZHRC and the ZGC



Respondents did not mention reporting to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) or the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC). Many women were not aware of the presence of these independent commissions. The two institutions highlighted that they had received very few reports which were not VAWE related. These two institutions are mandated by the constitution to receive, investigate and resolve cases of gender discrimination or human rights abuses.

Of those that reported to various platforms, 79% were not satisfied with the outcome as the table below shows.

Table 3.15: Level of Satisfaction

How satisfied were you with the outcome of your complaint?	Percent (n=24)
Not satisfied	79.17
Satisfied	4.17
Somewhat satisfied	8.33
Very satisfied	8.33
Total	100.00

The lack of satisfaction is attributed to the lack of action taken after having reported the cases. 58% of the female candidates reported that no action was taken.

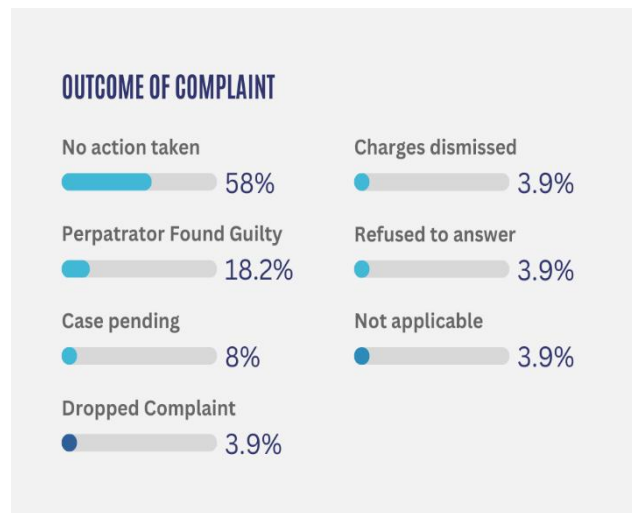


Figure 3.16 Outcome of the Complaint

Table 3.17: Summary of Reporting and Help-seeking Behaviours

Factors Influencing Reporting Behaviour	Help-Seeking Behaviour	Barriers to Help-Seeking
<p>Knowledge or the lack thereof of Legal Protections: Understanding available laws and legal frameworks (e.g., the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act) can empower women to seek help. Referral Pathway is not clear.</p>	<p>Informal Help: Many women first sought support from friends, family, or community leaders before approaching formal institutions.</p>	<p>The lack of satisfaction is attributed to the lack of action taken after having reported the cases. 58% of the female candidates reported that no action was taken.</p>
<p>Access to Information: Availability of information on reporting mechanisms and support services influences whether women decide to report incidents of violence.</p>	<p>Many women were not aware of the presence of such institutions as the ZHRC and the Gender Commission.</p>	<p>Lack of information at the Party level on reporting VAWP Lack of legal support to sustain a case until the conviction of the perpetrator. Portrayal of women in the political arena by the Media (social) hindered the urge and confidence to report.</p>
<p>Perceived lack of Efficacy of capacity of established formal institutions Trust in Authorities: Women’s confidence in law enforcement and judicial systems to handle their cases effectively impacted their willingness to report. Fear of Retaliation: Concerns about potential backlash from perpetrators or political entities can deter women from coming forward.</p>	<p>The best places where they found support was their church and NGOs Reporting through multi-party liaison committees (MPLC). Reporting cases to MPLCs and the Police.</p>	<p>Lack of Confidence in Services: Women doubt that authorities will take their complaints seriously or that they will receive adequate protection. Most perpetrators go scot free, there are few success stories of convictions of the perpetrators known to victims. MPLCs by their nature depend on building mutual beneficial consensus amongst Political parties feuding. Limited Access to Services: Geographic, economic, and</p>

Factors Influencing Reporting Behaviour	Help-Seeking Behaviour	Barriers to Help-Seeking
		logistical barriers can hinder access to support services, especially in rural areas.
<p>Societal Support</p> <p>Community Attitudes: Societal norms and attitudes towards VAWE can affect whether women feel supported in reporting violence. Communities that stigmatize victims may discourage reporting.</p>	<p>Informal Help: Many women first sought support from friends, family, or community leaders before approaching formal institutions.</p> <p>Support Networks: The presence of supportive friends, family, or colleagues can encourage women to seek help and report incidents. Victims also found other victims/survivors and came together to support each other.</p>	<p>The Issues around Patriarchy in communities hindered the use of social support at the primary level.</p> <p>Lack of inter-party and intra-party victim collaboration to enhance reporting of cases.</p> <p>Stigmatization and fear of victimization.</p>

3.13 Consequences of VAWP

VAWP has significant consequences on women and their families. It was noted that VAWP does not come to an end after the polling but is experienced in all phases of the electoral cycle, during campaigning, voting and after the candidates are elected to different positions. This means that VAWP has long term impact on reducing the participation of women candidates in politics.

FGD4 respondents observed that VAWP deters women from participating in politics in general at any level of elections. They noted that women leaders begin to distance themselves from politics as they will feel not ready to face the different types of abuse be it physical, verbal and psychological abuse. The representation of women will be limited as many positions will be occupied by men who are regarded as fit to be involved in politics.

The decline in the numbers of female candidates in the FPTP was attributed to the experiences of female candidates with VAWP. Such experiences lead to discouragements by family and friends who fear for the candidate's wellbeing.

IDI 5 who is a rural candidate shared how her opponents destroyed her crop in retaliation for her support for a party that they did not like. As a result, she did not have adequate food in her household that year.

IDI16 shared how she was maligned and labelled in the newspapers, and this affected her children who begun to believe the lies that were being spread. It was painful to see her children suffering because of the verbal abuse targeted at her.

Respondents indicated that the stress and violence that they suffer results in health problems including high blood pressure and other chronic health problems. A female respondent indicated that her son was assaulted by her opponents, and he temporarily went blind.

Another respondent shared that they did not have counselling after being recalled from parliament, but they had found the experience harrowing.

FGD6 respondents indicated that women become scared of VAWP and the lack of support from the family and party members and as a result they withdraw from politics altogether. They indicated that the young women are most affected by the VAWP while the older mature women are used to the situation. They said,

3.14 Mitigation and Prevention Measures

Respondents who had suffered discrimination and VAWP indicated that the best places where they had found support was their church and NGOs. These two had given them moral support through counselling. It would seem the police can respond if it is physical violence, but the other micro-aggressions should be addressed at the level of the political party. Respondent ID15 indicated that she did not report the abuse she faced but rather,

“I sought for health services for my child who had been beaten during the campaign period. The hesitation to report is because some women do not know about the existence of these services.” ID15

Other candidates who had faced injustices confided in their families and they also found other victims/survivors and came together to support each other. This group indicated that they check up on each other regularly as a way of showing solidarity.

Respondents in FGD6 confirmed that women candidates usually seek solace through counselling from supportive family and female party members. In some cases, they get support from political leaders/structures which can be gender sensitive. Women candidates also shared that they expected women’s rights organization to be there for them, supporting them during the electoral processes and giving counselling and other support. They complained that in the 2023 election some women NGOs were not visible, they were not there to help the women to prevail over the challenges they were facing.

CONCLUSION

VAWP was rampant among female candidates throughout the electoral cycle in Zimbabwe's 2023 election. This violence is both intra- and inter party and the direct perpetrators are both men and women. The women are mobilised by powerful men for their own agenda. This is mostly because women are part of a patriarchal system that undermines female leadership to maintain male dominance. The culture of impunity, coupled with the assumption that within political parties there are established structures that deal with issues of discipline, have deterred survivors of VAWP from reporting acts of violence against them, hence violence continues to be a defining characteristic of both primary and general elections. Families of the candidates usually offer support, both financial and moral, which sometimes is lacking from political parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal and Policy Reform

- a. Implement legislation and policies that address VAWE and hold political parties accountable to gender equality and women empowerment commitments.
- b. Align the Electoral Act to the Constitutional provisions of gender equality and gender balance.
- c. Enact and enforce laws that specifically criminalize violence against women in politics, covering both physical and psychological forms of violence, physical harassment, threats, and online abuse.
- d. Strengthen existing laws addressing gender-based violence and ensure that they also apply to political environments, for example by updating electoral laws, introducing political party regulations and a gender sensitive Code of Conduct.
- e. Introduce clear sanctions and consequences for political parties, candidates or officials involved in perpetrating violence against women through political party Regulations.

The Police

- a. Strengthen the capacity of the Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) to respond to all the protection needs of women around the electoral cycle, especially VAWP.
- b. Conduct thorough investigations on reports of acts of VAWE and arrest perpetrators
- c. Provide training and awareness among police on VAWE issues

Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development

- a. Provide leadership training, mentorship programs and capacity building for women in politics to help them navigate the political environment and mitigate risks of VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness among citizens of the issues of gender equality and equity at a national level to shift the mind-sets of citizens to accept female leadership and breakdown the patriarchal mind set in women and men, boys and girls by educating them on the importance of supporting women leaders.
- c. Collaborate with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, to include issues of gender equality in the education curriculum so that girls and boys grow up knowing about the gender provisions in the constitution and what is expected of them.

Chapter 12 Institutions

- a. Strengthen the mandate and accountability to protect women against VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness on the complaint's mechanism among women politicians so that they can seek remedies when they experience VAWE
- c. Mobilise resources to implement protection mandate of women
- d. Raise awareness among women on the Cyber Security Act, the roles of the ZHRC and the ZGC in handling cases of VAWP.
- e. Strengthening the mandate and operating budget of the ZEC to properly monitor campaign spending and hold political parties to account.
- f. Hold public campaigns to shift public attitudes and reduce the social acceptance of violence against women both in politics and beyond.
- g. Raise awareness on reporting mechanisms for VAWP and change of social norms throughout the electoral cycle.
- h. Capacitate women with knowledge, skills, access to the media and its use as well as campaign finance to campaign for the FPTP seats.
- i. Lobbying and advocate initiatives for the adoption of legal mechanisms that include:
 - a. Specific measures on campaign finance for women and gender equality.
 - b. National legislation on political campaign finance and parties' expenditure that coincide with international conventions and agreements that promote gender equity in political participation.

- j. Advocate with political parties to put in place measures to dedicate a certain proportion of their budget towards women's campaign financing. *(This should be legislated, and public funding of political parties should be conditional upon meeting specific quotas for women. This funding can also be used to train women candidates and support their campaign efforts in election times. For this to be effective, it is important to have accountability and enforcement mechanisms to monitor the implementation of such initiatives).*

Women's Rights NGOS

- a. Provide psychosocial counselling for women victim/survivors of VAWP
- b. Capacitate and raise awareness among female youth candidates on the pitfalls in politics e.g. sexual abuse and sexist labelling such as "MAHURE" (prostitutes), so that they are able to transcend this violence and everyday micro-aggressions.
- c. Create platforms for female candidates to share and support each other, hold each other's hand and learn to be in solidarity as women in responding to issues VAWE.
- d. Engage inclusive community dialogues among women so that they can respond to the issues of VAWP at that level.

Political Parties

- a. Establish internal codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit violence against women, including intimidation and harassment. These codes should outline clear procedures for reporting and addressing complaints which are gender sensitive
- b. Promote inclusive leadership and actively promote women's participation and ensure that women are placed in leadership positions where they can influence policy decisions.
- c. Ensure that women have access to safe and confidential channels for reporting violence. This may involve setting up independent oversight bodies to handle cases of VAWP.

The Electoral Management Body - ZEC

- a. Conduct awareness programmes to sensitise political parties, candidates and voters about VAWP. *This awareness programme should also cover laws and policies that deter VAWP among the candidates in terms of the constitutional laws of Zimbabwe.*
- b. Ensure candidates sign a strengthened Code of Conduct that they commit not to sponsor, participate or promote any form of violence including VAWP.
- c. Strengthen multi-party liaison committees for them to effectively respond to VAWP

The Media

- a. Traditional media (both print and broadcast media) should be sensitised regarding VAWP in general and issues of positive and effective coverage of female candidates and other stakeholders around the electoral cycle and VAWP.
- b. Raise awareness and mobilise media personnel on issues of VAWP
- c. Develop gender policies and action plans that are aligned to the constitutional provisions of VAWP.
- d. Strengthen skills to ensure proactive promotion of the positive portrayal of women in leadership and decision-making positions.
- e. Transform editorial processes through policies and training of media personnel to reduce the negative publicity of female candidates.

Traditional and religious leaders

- a. Engage in awareness-raising activities that promote women's political participation and leadership and the negative consequences of VAWP.

Parliament

- a. Replicate structures of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) at Provincial and District levels and include aspiring candidates from each election cycle. This platform can be used to advocate for the political rights of women and to share their grievances and strategize on how to overcome them

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ANNEX

VAWP Action Plan for Constitutional/Chapter 12 Commissions

The study provided several recommendations, which were used to draft the action plan outlined below for various Chapter 12 commissions and other government ministries.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: TO PROMOTE PREVENTION OF ALL FORMS OF VAWP

Thematic area	Strategic activities	Indicator	Timeframe	Lead organisation	Collaborating organisations
1. Legal framework	Enact a Gender Equality Act that demands gender balance within political parties, among candidates to an election and criminalise VAWP comprehensively.	Gender Equality Act Passed	2025-2026	Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWACSMED)	Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and Parliament
	Amend the Electoral Act and align it with Section 56 (2) of the constitution on gender balance. Amend the Electoral Act to clearly define the role of PR MPs outside parliament.	Electoral Act Amended	2025-2026	Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	ZGC, ZEC, MWACSMED and Parliament
	Amend the Electoral Act to give ZEC monitoring status of primary elections and stop the elections if there is violence and disqualify candidates or a political party perpetrating violence.	Electoral Act Amended	2025-2026	Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	ZGC, ZEC, MWACSMED and Parliament
	Strengthen the Code of Conduct to regulate political parties on issues of VAWP	Strengthened Code of Conduct	2025-2026	ZEC	Political parties
	Amend the Political Parties Finance Act to ensure women benefit from the resources	Political Parties Finance Act amended	2025-2026	Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	ZEC, ZGC and Parliament
	Amend Electoral Act to include provisions to register political parties with gender equality provisions	Electoral Act Amended	2025-2028	Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	ZEC and ZGC
	Amendment of the Criminal Codification Act for inclusion of election related SGBV.	Amended Criminal Codification Act	2025-2028	Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	ZGC and MWACSMED

Thematic area	Strategic activities	Indicator	Timeframe	Lead organisation	Collaborating organisations
2.Awareness raising	The police should sensitise all candidates before an election on the provision of the law regarding politically motivated violence and VAWP. They should include this topic in the sensitisation that they already hold with political parties.	Sensitization meetings held	2025-2028	Zimbabwe Republic Police	Political parties and civil society
	Leadership training, mentorship programs and capacity building for women in politics to help them navigate the political environment and mitigate risks of VAWP.	Leadership sessions held	2025-2028	Ministry of Women Affairs, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWASMED)	Civil society and political parties
	Transformative gender training for communities.	Transformative gender awareness training held	2025-2028	MWASMED	Civil society and political parties
	Include leadership and politics training in the higher education curriculum.	Leadership and gender training included in the curriculum	Long term	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Innovation, Science and Technology Development	Higher education institutions
	Create a curriculum, train and orient youths in politics	Youths oriented in politics	2025-2028	MWASMED	Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Recreation, civil society, political parties
	Chapter 12 institutions to carry out awareness campaigns on gender, women and leadership	Awareness campaigns held	2025-2028	ZGC	MWACSMED, ZHRC and Civil society
3.Capacity strengthening	Support a series of workshops and programmes on capacity building for prospective female councillors on campaigning, public speaking, resource mobilization and financing.	Capacity strengthening workshops conducted	2025-2028	MWACSMED	ZGC and civil society
	Mobilise resources for Female Youths in Politics	Fund for Female Youth in Politics established	2025-2028	MWASMED	Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Recreation, civil society, political parties

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: VAWP RESPONSE-PROTECTION, CARE AND SUPPORT

Thematic area	Strategic activities	Indicator	Timeframe	Lead organisation	Collaborating organisations
1.VAWP Sensitization	Sensitise media on VAWP and the need to cover women candidates in a positive manner.	Media sensitised on gender sensitive reporting	2025-2026	ZMC	Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC)
	Sensitise the VFU of the police to respond effectively to VAWP	VFU sensitised on VAWP	2025-2026	ZGC	Civil society
	Media houses have regular slots on election related SGBV measures.	Slots on election related SGBV	2025-2028	ZMC	ZGC
	Media houses to support prospective female candidates through slots for showcasing in different media spaces	Slots for prospective female candidates	2025-2028	ZMC	ZGC
2.Gender capacity strengthening	Media Houses should be mandated to have gender policies and action plans to increase gender sensitivity	Media houses have gender policies and action plans	2025	ZMC	Gender and Media Connect
	Media monitoring by the ZMC should have a strong gender component.	Gender sensitive media monitoring realised	2025-2026	ZMC	ZGC
3.VAWP reporting mechanisms	Political parties to craft internal Codes of Conduct which condemn VAWP and have clear reporting mechanisms for victims.	Political parties craft codes of conduct	2025	ZGC	WCoZ
	Establishment of a multi-party liaison office by ZEC at ward, district, and provincial levels to address issues related to Sexual Gender Based Violence.	Multi-party liaison offices at ward, district and provincial levels	2025	ZEC	Political parties

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMMING: DATA, INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Thematic area	Strategic activities	Indicator	Timeframe	Lead organisation	Collaborating organisations
VAWP Tracking tools and guidelines	Chapter 12 institutions to create tools to track VAWP	Tools to track VAWP created	2025-2026	ZGC	ZHRC and civil society
	Develop national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess policies and programmes, including VAWP preventive and response strategies	National M&E mechanisms in place	2025-2026	MWACSMED	ZGC, ZHRC and civil society organisations



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