



The Impact of Structural Violence on Women's Capacity to Fully Participate at Candidate and Electoral Management Levels in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article focuses on 'hidden' institutional violence, also known as structural violence, and gender divisions in electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Structural violence occurs when one category of people is accorded an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. The main argument presented in the paper is that, in Zimbabwe, structural violence renders the implementation of gender equality in electoral governance nugatory. Political party structures and systems are designed and conveniently used to exclude women from political participation. The article analyses selected cases involving women's involvement at the candidate and electoral management level. The study made use of interviews, particularly key informant interviews, and semi-structured interviews, as its main data-gathering methods. Focus group discussions were also utilised. The findings revealed that a myriad of structural and institutionalised constraints prevent women in Zimbabwe from fully participating in political and electoral processes. These institutionalised structures have a disproportionately negative impact on women's political ambitions compared to men's. The article concludes that promoting gender equality in the area of politics and decision-making as well as in society as a whole is a long and complex process. Any initiatives to remedy these inequalities must be strategic and long-term oriented.

Keywords: women, gender equality, structural violence, political participation

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Résumé

Cet article porte sur la violence institutionnelle « cachée », également connue sous le nom de violence structurelle, et les divisions entre les sexes dans les processus électoraux au Zimbabwe. La violence structurelle se produit lorsqu'une catégorie de personnes se voit accorder un statut différent de celui d'autres catégories de personnes. L'argument principal présenté dans le document est qu'au Zimbabwe, la violence structurelle rend inopérante la mise en œuvre de l'égalité des sexes dans la gouvernance électorale. Les structures et les partis politiques sont conçus et opportunément utilisés pour exclure les femmes de la participation politique. Le document analyse une sélection de cas de participation des femmes tant dans les candidatures que dans la gestion électorale. Comme principales méthodes de collecte de données, l'étude a utilisé des entretiens, en particulier avec des informateurs clés, et des entretiens semi-structurés. Des discussions de groupe ont également été mises à contribution. Les résultats ont révélé qu'une myriade de contraintes structurelles et institutionnalisées empêchent les femmes au Zimbabwe de participer pleinement aux processus politiques et électoraux. Ces structures institutionnalisées ont un impact négatif disproportionné sur les ambitions politiques quand on les compare à celles des hommes. Le document conclut que la promotion de l'égalité des sexes dans le domaine de la politique et des instances décisionnelles ainsi que dans la société dans son ensemble est un processus long et complexe. Toute initiative visant à remédier à ces inégalités doit être stratégique et orientée dans le long terme.

Mots-clés : femmes, égalité entre les genres, violence structurelle, participation politique

Introduction

The concept of structural violence is rarely considered in discussions of the Zimbabwean political process; instead, direct violence has been viewed as the primary form of violence (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2014). Structural violence may be conceived of as the infliction of psychological harm and physical harm or deprivation through violent socioeconomic or political structures (Gilman 1983). Additionally, structural violence is seen as 'the physical and psychological harm that results from exploitative and unjust social, political and economic systems' (Gilman 1983). In other words, 'structural violence is a by-product of the historical process of social, economic and political change'.

Whereas direct violence involves the use of visible force, structural violence does not require one to see the harm in operation or to say that someone intended its use (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Among

the features of structural violence is its embedding in socioeconomic and political systems.

Many human rights reports on political participation in Zimbabwe have focused on direct violence because the perpetrator is easy to identify and the extent of damage measurable (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2014). Direct violence, which includes organised violence and torture, denotes the use of physical force and is typified by intimidation, murder, torture, rape, arrest and detention, among other forms of abuse (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2014). Both before and after independence in 2018, Zimbabwean societies faced the threat of organised violence and torture during electoral processes. The problem has not diminished, despite efforts made by different stakeholders, such as human rights organisations and human rights systems, and the existence of regional and international human rights conventions (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2014).

Although Zimbabwe has signed and ratified a number of international and regional instruments that call for gender equality in all aspects of life, the country has not fared well in advancing the participation of women in politics in spite of these instruments. This is despite the fact that women in Zimbabwe constitute the majority of the voters, mobilisers, campaigners and political party members. According to Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube (2015), this discrepancy between the perceived and actual reality of women's participation in politics is not accidental but founded on a systemic and calculated manoeuvre by politically dominant males to open up the political space when necessary and convenient for them. Maphosa *et al.* (2015) further argue that the participation of women in politics has been more an issue of manipulation than a genuine attempt to promote gender equality and equity, and that there is a glass ceiling for women in terms of how far they can go up the political ladder.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees everyone's right to participate in the government of his or her country without discrimination on the basis of gender. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) article 12 provides for a 50 per cent threshold for women in decision-making positions. The Zimbabwean Constitution section 56(2) states that women should have equal opportunities to those of men in all spheres, including political participation. Zimbabwe still lags behind in advancing the participation of women in governance, as this paper will show. Maphosa *et al.* give an example of this in a speech attributed to the late former president, Robert Mugabe, who when commenting on the then Zimbabwean vice president Joice Mujuru's purported political ambitions, said:

We are experiencing it for the first time in ZANU-PF and for that matter it's a woman who is saying, 'I want to take over that seat'. (Maphosa 2015, quoting Reuters 2014)

In this article, we argue that power dynamics and power relations at multiple and interconnected levels are among the factors that underpin inequality and gender disparity in political participation, in general, and specifically in standing as a candidate. We further argue that despite the marked progression in equality legislation, current implementation of the legislative frameworks does not pay sufficient attention to women's political needs at candidate and electoral management level, resulting in structural inequality, which is augmented by an inherent structural violence within political processes and procedures.

The article is mainly in four parts: The first part conceptualises structural violence and women's participation in political processes in Zimbabwe. The second part is a description of the methodology and data collection methods. The third part presents and discusses the findings of the research, focusing on the primary fault lines of women's exclusion from electoral processes and how these are gendered, as well as lessons learnt from other jurisdictions. Lastly a discussion on prerequisites for creating greater inclusion in political participation concludes the paper.

Structural Violence and Women's Participation in Political Processes in Zimbabwe

Structural violence refers to a form of violence whereby some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from satisfying their basic needs (Ouedraogo and Ouedraogo 2019). The phrase 'structural violence' was coined by Johan Galtung in his path-breaking 1969 article, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'. He described it as a pervasive form of violence that is 'built into' structures, institutions, ideologies and histories (Galtung 1969; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2014). In analysing women's experiences within the political arena, the theory of structural violence provides a useful framework for identifying and understanding the violations of women's right to political participation. Galtung asserts that 'Structural violence, as opposed to personal or direct violence, is indirect in that there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure.' The violence is built into a structure and manifests as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances (Galtung 1969).

Structural violence theory provides a nuanced structuralist analysis of the relationship between structures and agency. 'Violent' structures result in an unequal distribution of resources, which actively constrains agency (Winter

2012). For structural violence theorists, the distribution of power through structures, whether it is called exploitation or violence, enhances the agency of some but at the expense of the agency of others (Winter 2012). This was described by Mahatma Gandhi as the ‘worst form of violence’ (Rodgers and O’Neill 2012).

According to Winter (2012), unequal access to resources, political power, education, health care and legal standing counts as structural violence. Equally, when society’s social institutions are characterised by exploitation, political exclusion and unequal access to resources, the structural forces often create a system of winners and losers in which the losers can only hope for redress (Rowson 2012).

In Zimbabwe, systematic deprivation results in conflicting preferences and interests between the winners and losers competing for the same resources. Structural violence is embedded in the socioeconomic and political arrangements of the day, which provide unequal access to resources, political power, education and health care. Structural violence often manifests in power inequity, poverty and the denial of basic human rights (Ho 2007). One pervasive form of structural violence is discrimination against women, an issue that has been tackled at various levels—international, regional and local—but which, despite measures to eliminate or at the very least ameliorate its adverse effects on women’s lives, remains embedded in the fabric of social, political and economic life.

Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls upon state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. CEDAW generally affirms the importance of equal participation and the full involvement of women in all efforts and the need to increase women’s role in decision-making. Gender equality in political participation and decision-making at all levels is thus a fundamental aspect of modern democratic governance (Cheeseman and Dodsworth 2019). Political participation can be defined in terms of the extent to which citizens can exercise their constitutional right to engage in political activities (Maphosa *et al.* 2015). This paper perceives political participation as any ‘activity that has the intent of effect of influencing government actions either by directly affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make the policies’ (Sidney, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

It is crucial to observe that there are different types of participation. Functional participation occurs when people take part in decision-making processes and are likely to contribute to discussion. Active participation

occurs when people contribute more or less directly to decision-making process via negotiation procedures. Passive participation occurs when people are not involved in decision-making processes but are merely informed of decisions (Maphosa *et al.* 2015). In the light of this conceptual framing of participation, this paper examines the conceptual and material bases of women's exclusion from the mainstream political structures, despite their clearly demarcated constitutional and legal entitlements to be active participants in these structures and in decision-making. While the paper recognises the broad nature of political participation and its multidimensionality, it however restricts its analysis to women's involvement at the candidate and electoral management level.

Methodology

The study from which this paper is drawn was framed within a rights, sex and gender paradigm. The 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution¹ has comprehensive human-rights provisions that assert, emphasise and protect women's rights. In terms of section 2 of the 2013 Constitution, all laws in conflict with the Constitution are invalid to the extent of their inconsistency with the Constitution. This is amplified by section 56, which outlaws discrimination on multiple grounds. With regard to sex and gender, section 80(1) re-emphasises the equality of women and men in all spheres and section 80(3) provides 'that all laws, customs, traditional practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by this Constitution are void to the extent of the infringement'. What this study sought to do was ascertain how and why, despite such clear constitutional provisions, women's political rights remain severely curbed and circumscribed.

To uncover the hidden barriers to women's full and effective political participation, our main methodological approach was based on women's law. Women's law is a form of feminist jurisprudence that focuses on the content of law, its deconstruction and analysis, to ascertain how, against what are frequently prevailing male standards, women fare in the world of work and life in general (Stewart 2011). This approach explores the reality of women's lives and, from this perspective, it investigates and interrogates the law (Bentzon, Hellum and Ncube 1998).

The women's law approach takes women as the starting point, exploring their experiences in relation to law and their rights, with a view to explain, understand and analyse women's legal rights in order to improve their legal position in life. The women's law approach involves the collection of empirical data about women's lived realities (Bentzon *et al.* 1998). This study utilised a qualitative methodology that was geared towards capturing

the perceptions and experiences of female politicians, with the ultimate aim being to examine the impact of structural inequalities on their capacity to fully participate in politics as candidates. The study made use of interviews, particularly key informant interviews, and semi-structured interviews, as its main data-gathering methods. Focus group discussions were also utilised. The interviews were carried out between October 2019 and May 2020.

Key informant interviews were used to gather information from selected political party members, civil society organisations and commissions. The selection for political party interviews was based on the informants' position within their political parties, their level of influence in their political parties, and the issues they raised during parliamentary debates. This method was also used to involve those who were uncomfortable contributing to group discussions, as well as to follow up on key people who had valuable contributions to make and to gain an in-depth understanding of issues raised that required further detailed discussion for clarification.

The civil society organisations that were selected were those involved in electoral processes, such as voter education and the capacitation of women to actively participate in politics. The rationale behind their selection was their perspective on women's participation. The Gender Commission (ZGC), Human Rights Commissions (ZHRC) and National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (ZNPRC) were selected because their mandate is to monitor electoral processes and thus they had an important perspective on women's participation.

Focus group discussions were used to gather data from the main political parties' women's wings, to gain a clear understanding of the structures within their political parties and how those structures either support or are against the active participation of women. The pitfall of this method is that political parties are often governed by the party whip system; thus in a group set-up the tendency is to give politically correct responses rather than reflect the prevailing situation. This method was therefore complemented by other methods, such as individual interviews and the methods discussed below.

Data collection was slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Zimbabwe's lockdown measures started on 30 March 2020. The researchers had to adapt by making use of online meetings and telephone interviews, since face-to-face interviews were restricted. Data collection was thus continued using alternative methods of engagement. These methods proved to be, in terms of content, as useful as face-to-face interviews, as evidenced by the data obtained. However, what was missing was the ability to view the interviewees' facial and bodily reactions to the questions asked, and to visually assess the responses that were given.

Findings: Primary Fault Lines of Women's Exclusion in Electoral Processes and how they are Gendered

Due to a myriad of structural and institutionalised constraints, which include a complicated electoral system, economic power imbalances between men and women, patriarchal social relations and the gendered violence that has characterised election periods, women in Zimbabwe have not been able to fully and equally participate in political and electoral processes. This has had a disproportionately negative impact on women's political ambitions compared with men's. Political representation by women, particularly in Parliament and local government, has been limited, which is contrary to the provisions in the 2013 Constitution. According to the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC), although women constituted the majority of voters in the 2018 general elections, their participation as candidates was limited. At primary election level for different political parties, only 15 per cent of the female candidates succeeded in representing their parties at the National Assembly elections. In the actual election, only 12.4 per cent were elected outside the women's quota for the National Assembly. This situation prevails in Zimbabwe despite the country being party to the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, under the auspices of which it was agreed that there be a balance between women and men in decision-making so as to strengthen democracy. It is also a requirement under article 13 of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that women have equal opportunities with men in political representation and other decision-making positions.

The electoral processes in Zimbabwe are characterised by exclusion and gender inequality. Since independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean population has experienced eight general elections in which women, on the whole, have had little involvement apart from their traditional role as the electorate. Women's representation in elected office in any given country is determined and influenced by a number of factors. Key among these are the design of the political and electoral systems, the degree to which decision-making processes are institutionalised, and the broader economic and cultural developments in society (Mlambo, Kapingura and Meissner 2019). However, modern democracy is still dominated by political parties. Thus, political parties and the processes by which they are governed play a key role in determining the degree to which women participate in political and public life and the quality of their engagement. For this reason, political parties are often referred to as the 'gatekeepers' of women's political participation. Factors that affect the supply of female politicians are institutional. Chief among them are political systems that

operate under rigid daily and weekly time schedules and do not take into consideration women's domestic responsibilities (Mlambo, Kapingura and Meissner 2019).

Women's electoral participation is often hindered by a variety of political, legal, social, economic and cultural barriers. A consultative dialogue held at the offices of the Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe on 13 July 2017, on the common constraints women face in their bid to be actively involved in electoral processes, revealed that even after selection as candidates, women seeking decision-making positions can be constrained by different factors. These include a lack of financial support and time for campaigning, because of difficulties in balancing family and public life, a lack of confidence about relevant skills, and fewer connections to politically relevant networks. Additionally, the 'working' environment of state political institutions is not 'gender-friendly', for example, in the sitting times in Parliament, inflexible schedules of political party meetings and the lack of childcare facilities, which deters some women from considering entering political life. This is discussed in more detail below.

Political Environment

Electoral Violence

Political violence, institutionalised intimidation, a 'thugocracy', lawlessness and the inability to accept defeat have marked Zimbabwe's political landscape (Zengenene and Susanti 2019). Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines Violence against Women (VAW) as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'. VAW therefore can have many different manifestations that may affect women's active participation in the political realm. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives, and to have a right of equal access to public service in his or her country. Understanding the dynamics of violence, politics and gender is critical to protecting that right (Bardall 2018). According to Bardall (2018), political violence defines political institutions and power relations not only between competing ideological groups but also between the sexes.

The nature of electoral competition, particularly the extent of violence accompanying elections and how the electoral system is organised, determines how far women can go as candidates. As feminist scholars have long argued, political systems are often patriarchal, resistant to change and violent when challenged (Brechenmacher 2017). The impact of physical political violence in driving women out of political competition is a factor that deserves and has been the subject of special studies of its own. However, it falls beyond the purview of this study. In Kenya, for example, post-election violence in 2007 included sexual violence, which in some cases targeted women politicians. Important to note is that even the violence perpetrated against women outside the electoral realm in the private sphere, such as domestic violence, serves to instil in women the chilling message that if they do not remain silent they will be harmed. While politicians of all genders encounter threats and intimidation, the research shows that female candidates and politicians face unique risks. They are often targeted because of their identity as women (Brechenmacher 2017).

Section 133K² of the Zimbabwe Electoral Act, Chapter 2:13 on 'Special penalty for politically-motivated violence or intimidation' provides for penalties to be imposed on any person who is involved in politically motivated violence or intimidation. 'Intimidation' is defined in section 133A as follows:

- (a) Inflicting or threatening to inflict bodily injury upon a person; or
- (b) Abducting a person or detaining a person against his or her will; or
- (c) Causing or threatening to cause unlawful damage to a person's property; or
- (d) Withholding or threatening to withhold from a person any assistance or benefit to which that person is legally entitled; or
- (e) Illegally doing or threatening to do anything to the disadvantage of a person.

The Act provides for stiff penalties for those involved in electoral violence or intimidation. However, despite the fact that electoral processes in Zimbabwe have been characterised by gender and politically motivated violence directed against aspiring women candidates, a negligible number of perpetrators have been arrested let alone convicted for having orchestrated gender-specific politically motivated violence against female political opponents. Apart from retaliation from male political opponents, women aspiring to be electoral candidates indicate they have also encountered violent backlashes from their spouse or relatives who generally feel threatened by women's new-found power to challenge other men in elections. This violence, emanating from both the public and private spheres, has the effect of deterring women from participating in electoral processes for fear of reprisals from political

opponents and close family members. Failure to understand the gendered nature of violence results in a failure to grasp the forces that shape these power structures (Bardall 2018).

The violence experienced by aspiring candidates can be in the form of sexual harassment, serious assault, rape, threats to withdraw financial support, or even divorce (from a spouse). Following such violence, the fear of being blamed and shunned by spouses, relatives and the community at large for having brought it upon themselves, and the shame and very low rate of success in the prosecution of politically motivated rape, most aspiring women politicians decide not to report such crimes (IFES 2018)

Voter Registration Processes

According to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) Report (2018), women voters and aspiring electoral candidates are often excluded from electoral processes because of the proof of residence requirement for registration as a voter. This requirement is of itself a form of structural violence. This was confirmed by the women interviewed, who said that documents like household utility bills, and letters from landlords or from village heads for rural women, are mostly in the names of male household heads. Landlords usually have leases with the man of the household and village heads traditionally recognise men as the occupants of communal land, under customary law. While for single, divorced and widowed women the documents may be in their names, some married women said the landlords or traditional leaders who are supposed to write letters on their behalf may belong to a different political party and so may refuse to write the letter, thereby thwarting the women's political ambitions.

Cases of physically challenged women who were not be able to walk long distances to voter registration points were also raised. These women have been disenfranchised in the past. Registering to vote and voting are often accompanied by long waiting times or significant travel distances that conflict with women's prescribed gender roles. Such constraints were said to be particularly problematic for women with disabilities, pregnant women, elderly women and women from minority groups who may live further from central registration areas. The history of Zimbabwean elections shows a tendency to recognise only permanently disabled women in the ordinary voting process. They have not made provisions for women in advanced stages of pregnancy or those required to be on bed rest, those with heart problems and elderly women who may not be able to walk for long distances.

Voter Education

Key informants stated that voter education is a critical factor in enhancing women's participation in elections, particularly if it emphasises the right of women to be elected. It also helps women to make more informed and responsible choices. They said voter education should include information on voting rights, the political system and candidates as well as information about where and how to vote. Participants in focus group discussion also said that voter education rarely reaches the grass roots, i.e., household, cell and ward level, because voter education implementers target areas that are easily accessible by motor vehicle. One participant said: '*Ngatiitei chidaka daka chekubata munhu wese.*' ('You should make every effort to reach everyone.')

While it is the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's (ZEC) constitutional mandate, in terms of section 238 (h), to conduct voter education prior to elections, interviews revealed that the Commission has conducted little or no voter education at all in some places. This lack affects women more as they form the majority of people critically unfamiliar with electoral processes, such as voter registration, nomination of candidates, campaigning and the laws and policies regulating such processes. An official from ZEC said the lack of adequate funding hampers their efforts to reach out to everyone. He stated further that, in terms of the Constitution, they are mandated to carry out continuous voter education, but due to financial constraints they have been limited to only periodical voter education.

The Roles and Responsibilities of Political Parties

The 'Gatekeepers' Phenomenon

It is not only the state institutions that need to be held to account for women's poor participation in electoral governance. Kayuni and Chikadza (2016) studied the role of party chairpersons and secretaries in Malawi as gatekeepers for women's access to political positions. They established that these gatekeepers largely determined women's entry into elected positions and into positions within the party hierarchy. Political parties and men within political parties are the major 'gatekeepers' in determining who will be candidates in elected office. They play a critical role in advancing or impeding women's participation in decision-making bodies. Women face male 'gatekeepers' within political parties who are bent on protecting their political turf. These 'gatekeepers' control decisions about who will be nominated to run for office, what positions candidates will be given on party lists, and who will receive support during the campaign and after the

election. Within the parties, tokenism in appointments as well as blocked channels of access to circles of leadership have been a major element in gender relations between party members (Pogoson 2012).

Through the process of candidate selection (where and which candidates are taken on by the party for election), women face a number of obstacles. Men are generally viewed as more viable and better candidates and are given preference over female candidates. Further, the pool from which political parties search for candidates tends to be dominated by men, such as the trade union officials and local councillors who typify candidates in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party in Zimbabwe.³ Men are the major determinants of political action and inaction generally concerned with the perpetuation of the power of the state. Thus, when women compete with men for access to political power, they do so on the terms already established by men for competition among themselves (Pogoson 2012).

In a resolution on women and political participation, the UN General Assembly urged all state parties to:

Strongly encourage political parties to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women, to develop their capacity to analyse issues from a gender perspective, and to adopt policies to promote the ability of women to participate fully at all levels of decision-making within those political parties.

The internal selection processes of political parties are fundamental in determining their gender composition. Most parties proclaim gender equality in their Constitution and manifestos, but the reality is that the internal party leadership still favours men (Pogoson 2012).

Zimbabwe has a mixed political representation system, including direct representation on a constituency basis, proportional representation, a quota system and appointments on a political basis. This makes navigating the system and even selecting where and how to seek political participation challenging. For example, in proportional representation systems, such as in the Senate in Zimbabwe, where a zebra system operates in regard to general candidates, which is supposedly intended to ensure increased representation of women who, in terms of Section 120 of the 2013 Constitution, must be selected from party lists where males and females alternate on the list, a female candidate must head the party list. However, even in this context the position of women on the party list is crucial: if they are not placed in winnable positions they will not be elected. Even when women possess the characteristics that make for good candidates, through the use of invisible power they often are not encouraged to step forward to become candidates.

Women are also less likely to present themselves as candidates, because through socialisation and hidden power they often see themselves as lacking the skills necessary to perform well in politics. Sometimes women hesitate to become involved in party politics, preferring rather to participate in social movements that are less structured and more goal-oriented, such as Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).

Nomination of Candidates

Political party members interviewed revealed that the pre-electoral phase that involves recruiting and nominating candidates is probably the most crucial process for ensuring that women participate in politics as candidates. It was noted that the gender gap widens significantly as candidates for political office move from being eligible to becoming aspirants to finally being nominated by the party. It therefore becomes important for parties to incorporate rules that guarantee women's representation. While the two main parties in Zimbabwe—ZANU-PF and MDC—have written and formal commitments in their party Constitutions and manifestos that guarantee women political participation, the research revealed that these commitments are rarely implemented. When it comes to proposing candidates for elections, political parties do not adhere faithfully to the letter and spirit of their own Constitutions and manifestos. This institutionalised behaviour is further compounded by the lack of mechanisms to compel political parties to comply with constitutional provisions to ensure the implementation of the equality principle in drawing up party lists.

Women interviewed from the political parties said it had been difficult to devise strategies for them to break into the inner circle of power, and even more difficult to hold the party accountable because the leadership was non-committal towards gender equality. According to Maphosa *et al.* (2015), women have always been aware of their unfavourable position in politics. Maphosa cites an event that happened in August 1999, when the ZANU-PF Women's League, at its Victoria Falls meeting, threatened to boycott the 1999 Party Congress if one of their members was not included in the Party Presidium. The women said if there were no drastic changes at the Congress, women would remain confined to gender-ascribed roles of producing children and singing praise songs for men. They would remain as mere window-dressing in politics with the chief role of mobilising votes for men (Maphosa *et al.* 2015; Machipisa 1999). The demand for women's inclusion, however, did not come to fruition as the Presidium at the Congress ended up being all male, comprising President Robert Mugabe, vice presidents Simon Muzenda and Joseph Msika, and Chairman John Nkomo.

There is a pattern of systematic structural behaviour that excludes women from appointment to political party leadership even more in presidential elections. Most recently, the MDC violated its own Constitution by eliminating a qualified and clearly eligible woman from party leadership, as was held in the case of the *Movement for Democratic Change, Nelson Chamisa and Morgan Komichi v (1) Elias Mashavira, Elias Mudzuri, Thokozani Khupe and Douglas Mwonzora Judgment No. SC 56/2020*.

Gender Equality Provisions were said to be Evident on Paper but Less So in Practice

One Female Councillor said:

Hamuna mikana (there are no opportunities) for women *mumaparty* (in political parties). Party constitutions are not followed. I have been a Councillor since 1998, *dai mikana irimo* (if opportunities were there), by now I should be a Member of Parliament (MP)

It emerged through the focus group discussions that across the whole political spectrum there is structural violence and it primarily affects women. The politicking in Zimbabwe is such that candidates are voted into office on the basis of party affiliation and reward and not on demonstrable competency.

The focus group discussions with women from the main political parties' (ZANU-PF and MDC) women's wings all echoed the same sentiment, that there is a politics of exclusion for women and it is imbedded within the structures of all the political parties:

Men often use the strategy of sidelining female candidates, and this resonates across the main political parties, ZANU PF and the opposition, who tend to field female candidates in constituencies that they know the political party has weak support. Female candidates will lose as voters select their representative based on partisan political party basis and not competency of the candidate.

This structural violence against female candidates maintains an uneven political field, as evidenced by the strategies that are used to sideline women. An assessment of the political party structures reveals that female political party members occupy inconsequential positions.

Awareness of Party Governance Structures

The structure and organisation of political parties can be an obstacle to the participation of women. On the issue of whether respondents were aware of their respective party's governance structures, whether there were rules on gender equality within the political parties and if the rules were well

understood and adhered to, respondents stated that there were rules on gender equality within the political parties. These rules were, however, said to be on paper and less evident in practice.

On the issue of whether political parties educate their members on political processes and whether there is a measuring system to ensure gender equality, respondents opined that some parties have a women's league, youth league and main wing, which are a kind of measuring system. Women can participate in the women's league, but men form the majority of the main wing, which is where party policies are made. Respondents stated that while opportunities are equal on paper, they do not translate into equal representation for women.

Election Campaigns

Even if a woman becomes a candidate there are problems of a gendered nature in campaigning. Respondents stated that fear of electoral violence deters most women from effectively participating in politics. The nature of Zimbabwean politics, which is often characterised by violence and emotional abuse, was cited as one of the reasons few women compete for public office. Most women shy away from violent spaces, and as a result more men participate and are thus available to be voted for.

Section 133C of the Electoral Act on 'Preventing political party or candidate from campaigning' stipulates that:

a person who, through intimidation prevents or obstructs or attempts to prevent or obstruct a political party or candidate from campaigning in any election shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level ten or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

Women candidates at National Assembly level, when interviewed, stated that they failed to effectively participate in election campaigns through their political parties not because of open prevention, which could be easily detected, but rather through indirect discrimination. They raised the issue of funding. Running a campaign, starting with the primary election, is an expensive venture. They said that their political parties are not eager to fund the election campaign of a woman candidate as they feel she does not stand a chance in a contest with a male opponent from another political party. As a result of financial incapacity, women rarely win at primary election level, meaning that few progress to participate in the national elections. They fail right at the beginning of the race.

Access to Resources for Election Campaigns

The research revealed that female candidates often lack time, due to their role in society, to be actively involved in election campaigns. They do not have access to economic resources to finance their election campaign, compared with their male counterparts. Their lack of time can be attributed to the gendered division of labour in a society which imposes burdens on women that are not normally faced by men. Women often face a triple burden when participating in politics. They have a responsibility to their work or profession, to their family, and if they become involved in politics they are effectively taking on a third full-time job. Most societies fail to organise in a manner that enables men and women with families to share these responsibilities, particularly considering that child-rearing responsibilities tend to fall disproportionately on women. Prescribed gender roles, such as women's propensity to assume larger responsibility for childcare and domestic work, often leaves women with little time to engage in political activities.

Furthermore, the general feminisation of poverty and lack of control over resources limits women's ability to travel as candidates, voters, party campaigners, poll workers or election observers. This limited control over economic assets also impacts women's ability to run for office as they, unlike men, often lack the financial capital necessary for the adequate funding of their election campaigns.

This raises the question whether there is equitable distribution of resources during electoral processes. It also brings one to question whether candidates (male and female) are financed. Respondents stated that financial resources are vital for one to pitch a successful campaign. One female respondent said:

People vote according to what they are eating (sic) and not what they are told. Those with money they don't campaign, they buy votes with their money.

Another female participant said;

Generally women do not have money that matches that of men. A few women may have but they are in the minority.

Interviews revealed that without adequate financial and sociopolitical capital, most women will not be able to achieve real political power. Thus, together with the understanding of the structural impediments to women's participation in politics and decision-making, emphasis was placed on the need to mobilise resources for women to effectively participate in politics and decision-making. Some respondents were, however, of the view that confidence is the most important resource in politics. One male participant said:

In politics, it is mandatory for women to have confidence in themselves as candidates and as voters. They should have confidence to fight for other women.

Gender Stereotyping

One of the all-pervading structural barriers and a source of implicit structural violence that retards women's participation in electoral processes is the issue of gender stereotyping. Structural violence directly affects women, and is maintained through gender socialisation and gender stereotyping, all of which insidiously identify women as inferior, influencing their actions at all levels (Ouedraogo and Ouedraogo 2019). In Zimbabwe, strong traditional and patriarchal values cause society to frown upon women who enter the political arena as election candidates. Such women are often deemed to be too 'masculine' in behaviour and attitude and generally labelled as rebels who are deviant, uncultured and of loose morals.

The media also plays a role in deterring women from involving themselves in electoral processes as it tends to focus on women candidates' private lives rather than their capability. According to Ossome (2013), not even powerful women in leadership are spared; the media is awash with sexually nuanced 'lessons' regarding the culturally acceptable ways in which female politicians ought to behave in public. More often than not, the media portrays women as sexual objects incapable of political and public leadership. Fearing this adverse publicity of their private lives, a phenomenon rarely encountered by male candidates, female candidates opt out of election races to preserve and protect their personal integrity. It is also usually the case that there is blanket invisibility of women political candidates in elections because only male candidates are given party or state-assisted exposure in the print, electronic and mass media.

Most respondents were of the view that the media plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of an electoral candidate's campaign. The type of media coverage a woman candidate receives therefore determines her fate. Women candidates lamented that immediately prior to and during elections they were, in most cases, portrayed by the media in a bad light, unlike male candidates. Women candidates interviewed from the ruling party, ZANU-PF, said that their male counterparts in most cases received widely positive coverage in both print and electronic media. In some cases where the media purported to cover women candidates, the focus was not on their political aspirations but rather their sexuality or personal lives—for example, that they were going through a divorce or had been divorced twice before.

When it comes to women voters, the opportunity to access the information necessary to make an informed choice at the ballot box was said to be curtailed by the absence of a free media environment. Zimbabwe’s media framework has never been gender mainstreamed and has always been skewed in favour of the political party in power, both before and since 1980. Despite the government gazetted regulations in 2018 permitting opposition parties reasonable access to the state-controlled electronic media, this came too late to have any meaningful impact, especially for the opposition and women candidates, who then and now rarely make the news headlines except in negative stereotyping targeting.

Table 1: Women in Parliament in Selected African Countries

Country	Percentage in National Assembly	Total number of seats	Percentage in the Upper House/ Senate	Total number of seats
50–65%				
Rwanda	61.3%	49/80	38.5%	10/26
40–49.9%				
Namibia	46.2%	48/104	23.8%	10/42
South Africa	42.7%	168/393	35.2%	19/54
Senegal	41.8%	69/165	-	-
35–39.9%				
Mozambique	39.6%	99/250	-	-
Ethiopia	38.8%	212/547	32.0%	49/153
United Republic of Tanzania	36.4%	145/393	-	-
Burundi	36.4%	44/121	46.2%	18/39
Tunisia	35.9%	78/217	-	-
30–34.9%				
Uganda	34.9%	160/459	-	-
Zimbabwe	31.9%	86/270	43.8%	35/80
Angola	30.0%	66/220	-	-

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union Data (Women in Politics: Situation on 1 January 2019)

Lessons Learnt from other Jurisdictions

In Africa, women remain seriously under-represented in decision-making positions across the continent. Hervo-Akendengué, Public Information Officer of the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) cautioned that:

The election of Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the Presidency of Liberia, and dedication of President Kagame of Rwanda to women's decision-making can give the impression that mentalities have changed on the continent. In fact, a lot remains to be done. (UN 2007: 4)

Table 1 shows African countries ranked according to the percentage of women in unicameral Parliaments or the lower House of Parliament, reflecting elections/appointments up to 1 January 2019.

Quota System

An increasing number of countries the world over are currently introducing various types of gender quotas in public elections. In Africa, countries that have had a high percentage of women in decision-making positions use a form of quota system. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the core idea behind quota systems is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that they are not merely tokens. The use of quotas (particularly at the national level) is expanding in sub-Saharan Africa. Data from International IDEA further shows that more than twenty African countries have adopted mandatory or voluntary quotas. Some African countries have constitutionally mandated quotas (Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe), while others have voluntary political party quotas (South Africa, Mozambique). The following are types of gender quotas in use across Africa:

1. Reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislated)
2. Legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative)
3. Political party quotas (voluntary).

Mozambique and South Africa use voluntary party quotas to guarantee that a certain percentage of women are selected as political candidates. Namibia also uses voluntary party quotas and legislated quotas at the sub-national level, which has seen the number of women increasing at both national and sub-national level. Rwanda and Uganda use legal quotas, under which the targets apply to all political parties. Dahlerup (2005) states that the use of quotas is increasingly influenced by international recommendations and cross-country inspiration. She further states that it seems important,

however, that quotas are not just imposed from above, but rest on a grassroots mobilisation of women and the active participation of women's organisations, as quotas themselves do not remove all the barriers and obstacles that hinder women's participation. Rather, if implemented, they can lead to an increase in women's representation, which raises women's political visibility and may encourage other women to engage in politics.

Electoral Systems

Electoral systems play a significant role in creating a more conducive environment to women's entry into parliaments. The most favorable electoral system for increasing women's participation is proportional representation (PR). This system ensures that each electoral district has more than one member. Each party presents a list of candidates for multi-member districts, and there is proportional representation as opposed to winner takes all. Other systems include the constituency-based system, First Past the Post (FPTP) and mixed systems. A range of electoral systems are used across Africa. South Africa, for instance, uses PR, whereas Tanzania has a constituency-based system. Currently, Seychelles, along with Zimbabwe, has a mixed PR and constituency-based system. Zimbabwe has sixty seats in the House of Assembly reserved for women selected on the basis of provincial party tickets and general constituency results as well as the zebra PR system in the Senate.

Women's Caucus

One problem women face is that they may be scattered in legislatures among different parties and thus are not able to exert concerted action on issues affecting women at large. Thomas (1994) states that: 'Women who are organised into a caucus can serve the same purpose as a "critical mass" of women, even where women do not make up a significant portion of the legislature.' According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) Fact Sheet (2007), women's caucuses are able to extend influence over several realms simultaneously. Some African success stories of making use of the women's caucus platform include, but are not limited to, Morocco, Rwanda, Malawi and South Africa.

Women's caucus groups have been instrumental in ensuring that women across political divides come together and fight for their cause. The success of Rwanda is also attributed to the transitional period, in which women who were in Parliament in 1996 came together and formed a cross-party women's caucus, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, known for its

French acronym, the FFRP. It consisted of female members of Parliament from the upper and lower houses, those who represented political parties and those who were elected on the 'women's ballot'. These women then worked together across party lines on issues of common importance. The FFRP focused on many issues, one of them being capacity-building. In the last few years, its focus increasingly has been on legislative responsibilities and constituency service, reviewing existing laws and introducing amendments to change discriminatory statutes, examining proposed laws with a gender-sensitive lens, and conducting meetings and workshops with women's groups to make them aware of and advise them on legal issues.

According to the NDI Women's Caucus Fact Sheet (2007), the other two countries with noteworthy achievements with women's caucuses are Uganda and South Africa. The Uganda Women Parliamentarians Association, formed in the 1990s, has been instrumental in lobbying for gender equality clauses in the Ugandan Constitution, including provisions on non-discrimination on the basis of sex, equal opportunities for women, a quota for women of one-third of local government seats, and the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission. In South Africa, the women's caucus has worked together not only for gender-sensitive policies but to make their experience as female MPs better. The South African Women's Network was instrumental in establishing a daycare centre in Parliament and made sure that Parliament speeches were delivered in gender-sensitive language.

Conclusion: Prerequisites for Creating Greater Inclusion

Promoting gender equality in the area of politics and decision-making as well as in society as a whole is a long and complex process. Gender stereotypes and gender inequalities are deeply embedded at all levels of society, thus any initiatives to remedy these inequalities must be strategic and long-term oriented. Structural inequality in this paper is seen as a system of privilege and inequality, created and maintained by interlocking societal institutions (Ouedraogo and Ouedraogo 2019).

This article established that women are often subjected to structural inequality, which results from male domination, gender stereotypes and the lack of opportunities and decision-making power. The outcome is the non- or under-participation of women in politics at all levels.

For Zimbabwe to achieve a more balanced political participation of women and men, to effectively comply with its Constitution and international gender equality commitments, women need to feel safe. The

state, through its agencies, should guarantee peace and security of female political aspirants and for the majority of voters, mobilisers and campaigners, who are mostly women.

The independent commissions (more specifically the Gender Commission) have the potential to influence the implementation of gender equality in electoral governance, but they lack the sanctioning mechanism. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)⁴ has no power to force parties to comply with gender equality in selecting candidates who contest in elections. The lack of enforcement mechanisms minimises the impact of the work of the other independent Commissions.

Where an electoral candidate perpetrates hate speech, in particular discriminatory or disparaging remarks against any class of persons as prohibited under section 56 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the Electoral Act, ZEC should not hesitate to have the person arrested and his candidature cancelled so as to increase women's confidence in the electoral system. The political exclusion of Zimbabwean women in the last forty years, notwithstanding available provisions on gender equality, points to the success of male control and men's continued domination of political processes. It must, however, be noted that while legislation can help mobilise public opinion and shift societal attitudes, it also depends on effective enforcement mechanisms. If justice systems are slow and inaccessible and police forces remain sources of insecurity rather than protection, legal reforms that put the onus on criminal justice mechanisms are likely to offer limited redress (Brechenmacher 2017). What drives unequal representation in politics is complex. There is therefore a need for greater understanding of harmful gender norms and norm change strategies to promote more equitable systems and to tackle insidious structural violence (George 2019).

Notes

1. Zimbabwe amended its independence Constitution for the 20th time in 2013 and produced a completely reformed and largely human-rights compliant Constitution (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No 20) Act 2013), hereinafter the 2013 Constitution.
2. The section quoted is part of a raft of measures introduced to deal with intimidatory practices and violence in relation to elections.
3. The party grew out of trade union bodies, although over the years its character has changed and it has split into a number of different and warring factions. Internal disputes over leadership and party assets continue. Such are the dynamics that they require separate study. Suffice to say here that women have been and still are caught up in the factions.

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