

Unearthing Strategies to Mitigate Political Violence Against Women in Matero Constituency of Lusaka District, Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this article was to unearth strategies that can be used to mitigate political violence against women in Matero constituency of Lusaka District, Zambia. To access the views of the participants, a qualitative approach and a case study design were used. The sample composed of 24 purposively selected participants from political parties at constituency level. The data from interview transcripts was analysed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed cadre management, increasing police patrol, increasing educational programs, introducing fast track political violence courts and integrating political violence against women into the legal framework as some of the strategies that could be employed. This research concludes that political violence undermines the civil and political rights of women, thus, the proposed strategies should be adopted so as to protect tenets of democracy and accord women an opportunity to enjoy their civil and political rights. This research recommends that the Zambian Parliament, in consultation with relevant authorities, should enact laws and policies that relate to political violence against women and make them explicit and easily accessible to all members of the public by translating and publishing them in Zambian local languages.

Keywords: Strategies, political violence, political participation, women.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

International and regional organizations across the globe have identified political violence against women as a global phenomenon with cases reported in places as diverse as Mexico, Australia, Kenya, India and the United States, among others (UN Women, 2016). In Peru, studies by the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones revealed that nearly half of elected women in 2011 and more than a quarter of female candidates in regional and local elections in 2014 experienced violence or harassment (Juliana, 2019). Data on political violence collected by International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Bangladesh, Burundi, Guinea, Guyana, Nepal, and Timor-Leste showed that female politicians were four times more likely than male politicians to be victims of political violence (Baltrunaite, 2019). Political violence against women has been cited to be a significant barrier to women's political participation globally.

In the context of Zambia, the government gives great recognition to women's rights and considers them as an integral part of attaining equity and equality in all spheres of life (Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015). However, the reality at grassroot level is that women are victimised, assaulted, discriminated, marginalized and denied their political rights (Goldring and Wahman, 2016). This is unpleasant situation considering that democracy advances the proposition that all citizens are entitled to enjoyment and exercise of political rights (Matole, Muleya and Simui, 2023).

Excluding women from platforms which accord every individual the opportunity to exercise their human rights is not only a violation of human rights, but also barbaric. This is equally supported by Muleya (2019)

who contends that there is need to encourage a democratic civic culture that cultivates a degree of inclusiveness in its citizens. In this view, women and men in the political arena need to interact on equal basis. Equally, research shows that efforts to end political violence against women should be made through educating citizens on the dangers of political violence as well as strengthening the judicial systems (Krook and Norris, 2014).

Despite the aforementioned concerns and proposed measures, political violence against women has continued and some scholars have attributed this to failure by the courts of the law to execute the law against the perpetrators (Malambo, 2022). For example, in Zambia, the period between 2011 and 2021 witnessed many vicious incidents of violence where some women were reported to have been beaten and stripped naked by political opponents in Lusaka District (Carter Center, 2021). Research also shows that political violence against women is not only limited to Lusaka district but it is widely spread in the majority of other districts such as Chingola, Kabwe, Kapiri-Mposhi, Kitwe and Ndola (Malambo, 2022). However, there is lack of research literature in the context of Matero constituency which focuses on strategies that can be used to mitigate political violence against women hence, this research intended to fill this gap.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Giving all citizens equal chance to participate in political landscape is the most profound path that can help to grow and sustain democracy (Matole, Muleya and Simui, 2023). Nevertheless, Zambia has seen a rise in the number of acts of violence against politically active women (Carter Center, 2021). Political violence against women deters women from participating in political processes and constitutes a fundamental violation of their human dignity (Kawila et al, 2023). Three years ago, politicians gathered at Mulungushi Conference Centre in Lusaka under the auspice of the Zambia Center for Inter Party Dialogue (ZCID) and agreed to put an end to all forms of political violence, including violence against women. However, this resolution yielded less results as women have continued to be stripped naked, assaulted and harassed (Carter Center, 2021). If political violence against women is allowed to continue, it will discourage women from participating in political processes, fundamentally violate their human dignity, undermine democracy and will be an obstacle to the achievement of a non-discriminatory society. It is within the context of these circumstances that this research aimed at unearthing strategies to mitigate political violence against women in Matero constituency of Lusaka District, Zambia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was guided by the Social Feminist theory advanced by Wollstonecraft (1792). Social Feminist theory also known as Feminist Social theory or Feminist theory is a two-pronged theory that broadens Marxist feminism's argument for the role of capitalism in the oppression of women and radical feminism's theory of the role of gender and the patriarchy in the oppression of women in society. Socialist feminists attempted to produce a creative synthesis of debates about the roots of the oppression of women. These debates were characterized by a focus on officially mandated inequalities between men and women, such as the legal barring of women from voting, property rights, employment, equal rights in marriage, and positions of political power and authority.

Social feminist theory also argues that the exploitation and oppression of women are rooted in the social structures of society and this is evident in all known societies by virtue of them being women (Ferguson, 2017). The theory also attempts to address all barriers to gender equality in social, economic and political settings. The Social Feminist theory fitted so well in this research because it highlights injustice against women in all spheres of life and it seeks to address such injustice. Therefore, it was imperative to adopt it when unearthing strategies that can be used to mitigate political violence against women in Matero constituency.

METHODOLOGY

• Research approach and design

This article adopted a qualitative approach and employed a case study design. The choice of this approach and the specified design was grounded on the desire to access the depth of participant's thoughtful strategies on mitigating political violence against women in Matero Constituency of Lusaka District Zambia (Yin, 2018). The sample size consisted of 24 political party leaders from four political parties. This sample size was arrived at through the principle of data saturation as proposed by Weller et al (2018). Data saturation entails that no new information is expected to be added that will enhance or change the findings of a study. It is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study and the likelihood of obtaining additional new information, further coding or identification of themes is no longer feasible.

• Tools for data generation

An interview guide with semi-structured questions was used to interview 24 purposively selected political party leaders to provide insights on strategies that can be used to mitigate political violence against women. Interviews help to generate rich data about the perspectives, experiences, beliefs and motivations of the participant (Creswell, 2014). In the context of this research, the purpose of interviews was to reveal existing knowledge held by participants on strategies to mitigate political violence as they helped researchers to interact with research participants in a detailed manner.

• Data analysis and quality assurance

Data generated from participants was analysed using thematic analysis. This involved the process of transcribing audios into textual data, reading through the data while identifying and noting common themes. Thorough categorization was done by coding and creating labels for common themes. Major themes were drawn and described in line with the objective of this research. To enhance trustworthiness of the data, the researchers employed dependability, credibility, conformability and transferability where the responses from participants were compared to determine corroborations and variations on the subject matter (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

• Ethical considerations

This research was conducted by strictly following ethical issues. The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Committee of the University of Zambia approved the research before going into the field. Permission from the selected political parties was obtained and individual participants consented to be part of this research. Equally, participants were informed on the aims, expected benefits of this research and potential dangers if any of participating in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Strategies to mitigate political violence against women

This research aimed at unearthing strategies that could mitigate political violence against women. After an interaction with participants and data analysis, five themes emerged as illustrated below.

(a) Cadre management

Participants interviewed recognized the rise in cadreism in Matero constituency and argued that it greatly

contributed to the rise in political violence against women. It was observed and brought to the fore that political parties used party cadres as tools to fix political opponents, and women were not spared. The participants, especially from the opposition observed that political cadres had more powers than even police officers. Participant Seven (7) had this to say:

In Zambia today, cadres seem to be above the law. They can do anything they feel like doing and no one will touch them. They can insult, harass and beat women up. They can go to the police station, beat up police officers and no arrests will be made.

From the findings, some participants observed that some political parties were using party cadres as tools to fix political opponents. It was also observed that some political party cadres had become more powerful than police officers to a point where they could even beat up police officers. The study established that there was need for political party leaders to show leadership by taming their cadres. This is in line with the views of the Carter Center (2016) which recommended that there was need for political parties in Zambia to manage and tame their cadres for full participation of women and other political players to be achieved.

It was also found out in the study that the existing systems in political parties did not allow for proper scrutiny and identification of cadres. Paalo (2017), in his study titled Political party youth wings and political violence in sub-Saharan Africa, also emphasized the need for political party cadres, who are mostly the youths, to be managed properly. Therefore, cadre management would make sure that all the political party cadres are well registered and all their particulars are kept by the party secretariat. This would ensure that the party secretariat had full information about their cadres and that they would avail such information to the police in an instance of any kind of violence against women.

(b) Increased police patrol.

Participants felt that there was need to increase police patrol in the constituency whenever political activities were taking place. They observed that the police were supposed to be in large numbers in any place where political activities were taking place so that they could effectively operate and carry out their mandate of maintaining peace and order. Participant sixteen (16) said:

Political violence has increased to a large extent because political party cadres have increased. At times, the police are outnumbered. It is just inevitable that as political violence increases, so should police patrol.

It is worth noting that police patrols would be cardinal in the quest to mitigate political violence against women in places where political activities such as rallies and door to door campaigns were happening. This strategy came out because it was revealed that most of the times when political violence occurred, the police would give an excuse of not having enough manpower. Namaiko and Etyang (2017), in their study titled conflict structural vulnerability assessment in Zambia, echoed that the presence of law enforcement officers in areas where conflicts were likely to occur was a pre-requisite for effective management of such conflicts.

(c) Increased Educational Programs

Participants revealed that there was need by Civil Society Organisations and the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) to increase educational sensitization towards political party cadres, leaders, women and the general public on the importance of women effectively participating in political activities and the dangers that were there in not allowing or giving women enough space in governance. Participant One (1) argued that:

It is very difficult for an uninformed political cadre to allow women to participate fully in political activities. These cadres have never gone to school and do not understand the importance of having everybody

participate in their own governance. Therefore, there should be educational programs to educate these illiterate cadres.

Furthermore, the participants suggested that there was need for providing gender sensitivity training to the police, adjudicators, judges, lawyers and Civil society Organisations who were likely to handle reported cases of political violence against women. The participants from political parties also observed that if this strategy was implemented by the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), Zambia Center for Interparty Dialogue (ZCID) and Civil society Organisations, political violence against women could be mitigated.

Participants asserted that increasing educational programs was imperative as political violence against women could not be mitigated without having an informed citizenry. The strategy of increasing educational programs is supported by Muleya (2018) who argues that through the teaching and learning of Civic Education, citizens will not only acquire relevant knowledge and have a deeper understanding of issues affecting society, but also skills for reflective and responsible action. Equally, Muleya (2019) explains that Civic Education offers an opportunities and possibilities to the general citizenry to learn how they ought to relate with one another as well as respecting divergent views and supporting each other whenever need arises in the community. Sialombe (2019) is also of the view that education inculcates the virtues of tolerance and coexistence among different political players. It is clear that educated citizenry is a prerequisite for the peace of the nation and for democracy to thrive. This is so because education endeavours to produce citizens who are well informed and would engage in political activities in a civil manner.

(d) Need for Fast Track Courts for political violence

Participants in this research felt that, given the rise of political violence in Zambia, there was need for fast track courts to enable them handle political violence issues expeditiously rather than waiting for the normal court procedures which take forever. The participants argued that the fast track courts for political violence would quickly deal with cases of political violence and in turn, deter would be perpetrators from getting involved in political violence. Participant Four (4) said:

Court cases in Zambia take forever. If political violence cases can be dealt with faster, it can give the general public satisfaction, especially when perpetrators are given punitive sentences. This can also deter would be offenders from engaging in political violence.

Fast track courts for political violence against women were proposed as the solution for securing timely justice and deterrence to would be perpetrators. Funk (2010) notes that fast track courts are established for speedy trials in special cases where hearing is being done either daily or without much delay. Obviously, the fast track court requires, quick processes, fast working court staff, and advanced infrastructures. It was aptly established from the findings that courts were taking forever to reach a verdict in political violence cases thereby not dealing with the perpetrators within time. Parry (2010) points out that, in the same courts of law, there is a legal maxim which says, justice delayed is justice denied. It was for this reason that the study established that there was need for the introduction of fast track courts to deal with political violence cases expeditiously instead of taking these cases to normal courts where they might take long to be concluded.

(e). Integration of political violence in the legal framework

In the interviews conducted, participants pointed out that there was need to include political violence in the legal framework. The participants argued that there was need for adoption of laws and policies which define political violence against women. The participants observed that there was ambiguity in the law in that it failed to differentiate political violence from other types of social disorder, thereby giving political violence perpetrators simple sentences. It was further argued that judges found it difficult to distinguish political violence from criminal violence. For example, judges failed to put a clear-cut line on how and why political

violence was different from a bar brawl, from a riot at a football match, or from the looting and general chaos. It was therefore suggested that there was need for the inclusion of political violence cases in the legal framework and also differentiation of political violence from any form of social disorder. Participant Twenty-Two (22) had this to say:

There is need for integration of political violence in the legal framework. This will allow courts to come up with different and stiffer penalties for perpetrators of violence. Political violence should be treated separately from the other forms of violence so as to give an impression to the general public that political violence is a very serious crime.

The participants argued that there was need for stiffer punishments for perpetrators of political violence. They further argued that if implemented as soon as possible, the inclusion of political violence in the legal framework would help mitigate political violence against women. According to Funk (2010), the relationship between failure in the judicial system and political violence lies in the ambiguity of the law in failing to differentiate political violence from other types of social disorder, thereby giving political violence perpetrators simple sentences. It was therefore proposed in this research that there was need for the inclusion of political violence in the legal framework and more punitive verdicts needed to be imposed on any political violence related cases.

CONCLUSION

This article explored strategies to mitigate political violence against women in Matero constituency of Lusaka Zambia. Key strategies found were; cadre management, increasing police patrol, increasing educational programs, introducing fast track political violence courts and integrating political violence against women into the legal framework. Therefore, it can be stated that if these strategies are executed correctly, they can make substantial contributions to the growth of our democracy and consequently, offering women an opportunity to participate in politics regularly and meaningfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Zambian Parliament, in consultation with relevant authorities, should enact laws and policies that relate to political violence against women and make them explicit and easily accessible to all members of the public by translating and publishing them in local languages.
2. The Zambian Parliament should amend the Societies Act Cap 119 of the Laws of Zambia to give powers to the Registrar of societies to compel all political parties to have a Cadre Information Management System. This system would make sure that all the political party cadres are well registered and that all the particulars of the cadres to be sent for political activities are submitted to the police together with the request for police permit.

COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no competing interest.

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