Factors Affecting the Political Participation of Women's Parliamentary Quota Beneficiaries in Zimbabwe Democratic Governance.

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ABSTRACT

The election of women into parliament feeds into the global discourse of women's participation in politics. It further responds directly to the United Nations sustained clarion call for gender parity through the integration of women into political and leadership positions. This call, as currently reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal number 5, is justifiably amplified by the Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1. While it has been noted that women have made significant strides into politics, both globally and locally, there still remains some structural constraints which continue to hold them back from either fully participating or being elected into parliament. This paper explores the various structural and social systematic challenges that limit the election of women into parliament as a part of the democratic governance in Zimbabwe. The study therefore, in particular, highlights women's parliamentary quota beneficiaries' experiences in national politics of Zimbabwe through a qualitative methodology, using interviews. Findings indicate that challenges that affect women's parliamentary quota beneficiaries' election include: territory marking by seated members of parliament, politics of entitlement, a hostile androcentric political milieu, unfair media representation of female politicians, negative societal perceptions of women politicians, difficulties in juggling family and public roles, lack of education and a low female self-concept. Using Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory, the paper analyses the pervasiveness of these factors and how they systematically work against gender parity in politics. It considers the different concepts of positions, roles and groups showing how all these work towards the exclusion of women in politics. It is concluded that political systematic challenges limit or prevent the movement of women from quota beneficiaries to seated/elected members in the parliament of Zimbabwe. Additionally, women politicians still struggle with work-life balance which further limits their full participation in political activities that may lead to their election into parliament.

Key Words: Gender parity, women's participation, democracy, elections, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

It is the fundamental right of women to participate in governmental decisions at all levels in any democratic country (Musami and Abdullahi, 2023). Women's participation in politics has attracted wide attention over the years. Globally, women currently constitute a staggering global average of 25.6 per cent parliamentarians (Gaynor, 2022). Notably, Canton (2021) opines that in Africa, women currently hold at least 30 per cent of seats in national parliaments in pursuant of the Beijing Plan for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals' aspirations. The participation of women in the Zimbabwean political terrain has evolved (Manyeruke, 2018). Zimbabwe has correspondingly formulated an economic development blue-print which underscores the imperatives of women's inclusion in decision making positions. The blue-print called National Development Strategy 1 feeds into Vision 2030 which seeks to transform Zimbabwe into an upper middle-income economy by 2030. One of the key values underpinning these developments efforts is of leaving no one and no place behind. Women are expected to be fully integrated into all development efforts including participating in politics and influencing national decision-making processes. These efforts are widely perceived to be a direct push towards democracy and a show of good governance.

While the country has done much in terms of promoting women's participation in politics, a lot of gaps are still

showing which hinder the election of women into parliament without relying on the Women's Parliamentary Quota. Most women still feel intimidated by men and they stay out of politics and when they are in, they play it safe by not challenging men (Manyeruke, 2018). Despite dominating the voter population, women have been reduced to mostly cheer leaders in the political landscape (Matiashe, 2023). The parliament is a key decision-making platform where women's presence is highly essential. This paper highlights the different barriers which continue to weigh down women in their bid to be elected into parliament, despite the government efforts at different levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Democracy and the Election of Women

The empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality are crucial to democracy (Moghadam, 2008). Fishman (2017) defines democracy as the rule by the people. The United Nations states that democracy is a universally recognized ideal based on common values shared by people across the world, irrespective of cultural, political social and economic differences. While elections may have been perceived as routine activities to elect new leaders, Reeler (2014) emphasizes that elections are an important component of democracy. The participation of women in governance strengthens women's rights and freedoms (Musami and Abdullahi, 2023) However, whether a woman actually enjoys her rights to be part of the democracy depends on many variables (Tames, 2022.) Women constitute 54% of the Zimbabwean population, however, there is a representation mismatch between women's population and the number of women directly elected into parliament (Campaigners for Human Rights, 2024). Electoral participation can take multiple forms that contribute to the realization of civil and political rights (ACE Project, 2020). Hivos (2023) noted that in Zimbabwe, it had become more difficult for women to hold political office than in the elections that were held in 2018. The media tended to focus on the personal lives of women candidates and subsequently portrayed them in bad light which damaged their credibility. Some of the barriers identified by the ACE Project (2020) to be hindering the election of women were, unfavorable electoral systems, lack of campaign funds, lack of political experience, lack of media coverage, and gender-based stereotypes and bias in the media and violence from within and outside political parties. Additional to that, women's participation rights were found to be frequently undermined by cultural expectations and exclusion from male dominated decision-making platforms. Moghadam (2008) reiterates that democracy is as much about citizenship, rights, participation, inclusion and that the gender of democracy matters profoundly.

A SADC (2023) study noted that while all member states had equality clauses in their constitutions, there were inconsistencies in the codification of constitutions into required laws and policies. The study also reported that gender equality progressive constitutions and electoral laws are often poorly implemented. This is despite strong evidence that as more women are elected, countries experience higher standards of living, the priorities of families, women and minorities are addressed as confidence in democracy goes up (NDI, undated).

The Global Trajectory in Women's Participation in Politics

There has been noted progress with regards to participation of women in politics at different levels. Other countries like Rwanda have performed considerably better than others. There are a myriad of challenges leading to the low participation of women as political candidates. Once elected into political office, women continue to face challenges in carrying out their duties to expectations. However, participation can include voting, work on elections campaigns, engagement in the community and contact with political leaders (Kelly, 2019). In some countries, women legislators, particularly those elected from reserved special seats are marginalized from real decision-making responsibilities (ACE Project, 2005). According to UNESCWA (2021), the political environment is not supportive of women's participation and the male culture tends to intimidate women. The uptake of women as political candidates vying for office has not been without notable challenges. The lack of capacity among women results in their low participation.

Further to that loyalty to political party limits women's effective engagement with the electoral process both at the candidate level and as an elected official (Nyamuzuwe, 2020). Kelly (2019) points to a number of barriers for low participation in Nigeria such as: low levels of female employment and education; sexist attitudes; a

corrupt and patronage based political system; gender gaps in political knowledge; violence at elections including against women candidates. Nyamuzuwe (2020) alludes that women as candidates suffer election related gender-based violence including psychological violence.

While the above cited barriers have been identified in a number of researches, Ndirangu et al. (2017) highlight that huge nomination fees demanded by political parties, hinder women's participation in politics; lack of transparency during the nomination process and a lack of a management framework to support free, fair and credible primaries. Ndirangu et al. (2017) further state that these challenges have led women to join smaller political parties which are not known which in turn reduces their chances of emerging as winners. Moreover, a research study by Lawless and Fox (2008) pointed to a number of other factors such as: A persistent gender gap in political ambition which shows women are less likely than men to be willing to endure the rigors of a political campaign; existence of electoral gate keepers who are less likely to suggest or recommend women to run for office regardless of their resources; Self-perceptions of political viability where women are less likely to asses themselves as 'qualified' to run for office; and the persistence of traditional family dynamics causing self and family conflict as they strive for a work life balance. In spite of the above, Lawless and Fox (2008) state that other studies found that the candidate's sex does not affect his or her chances of winning an election. Nyamuzuwe (2020) study in Mozambique revealed that the political space in Mozambique still considered a male domain thereby standing as a barrier to women ascending in political parties

Zimbabwe's Political Landscape

The first independent government of Zimbabwe inherited a predominantly and Eurocentric political culture which treated women as legal minors who could not participate in national politics (Maphosa et al, 2015). The new government of the day was thus faced with a formidable task of dissipating the colonial legacy of gender imbalances. To achieve this, the government had to introduce a raft of legislative and policy measures which recognize women as equals with their male counterparts. This, though a huge task, was comparatively easier than changing the public opinion on gender roles ingrained in patriarchal beliefs and practices. The traditional Zimbabwean society viewed women as subordinate to men and whose place was the home. The public space was largely a preserve of men.
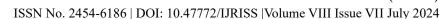
Institutional and Regional Frameworks for Women's Inclusion in National Politics

The global world, through its different supra-state organizations has for many decades pushed for gender balance in different aspects of human life including in leadership or decision-making positions. Signatories to these organizations have also, at different times, ratified the global, continental and regional legislations in support of gender parity. On top of these ratifications, individual countries, Zimbabwe included, have incorporated these ideals in their different constitutions and also developed measures which promote women inclusion. It is worth noting the different pieces of legislations which were ratified and developed by Zimbabwe highlighting their import in advancing gender parity. These international and regional frameworks include The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), The Beijing Platform for Action, The Maputo Protocol: Protecting African Women's Rights and The SADC Protocol on Gender.

Local Actions by the Government of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has progressively updated its legislative and policy measures to ensure that women are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in decision making and also to equally benefit from the opportunities available within the nation. The current constitution has recognized a wide array of women's rights including the right to participation in political matters. In accordance to the constitutional provisions, Zimbabwe established the Gender Commission (ZGC) whose main mandate is to ensure the promotion of gender equality through different monitoring and reporting mechanisms. The Commission is also mandated to investigate possible violations of rights relating to gender and to take necessary legislative measures to remedy any violations or and anomalies.

Zimbabwe, has since independence, formulated two national gender policies. The first one, which came into being in 2004 set out broad-based and ambitious goals on the promotion of gender parity in the Zimbabwean society. The second national gender policy, formulated in 2014, sought to give a renewed impetus to the agenda

of its predecessor. It sets out ten broad thematic areas guiding its vision. In its policy strategy the National Gender policy states that the policy, ''In line with the Constitution is mandated to, develop and strengthen legal instruments, policies and programmes, to ensure attainment of 50-50 representation of men and women in politics and other key decision-making positions.'' Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (2017:21).

Theoretical Framework

This paper was informed by the Conflict Theory by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). The theory focusses on large scale structures hence applicable on Zimbabwe's political system. The theory holds that conflict is inevitable as society is structured according to different positions held by different actors. Though Dahrendorf acknowledges the dialectical existence of conflict and consensus in society, he chose to focus on conflict (Rizter and Goodman 2004). To him, conflict usually happens after a group had been formed through consensus. As group members occupy different positions, assigned different roles and authority, and start to have competing ideas and interests, conflict arise. The initially shared values and objectives are overtaken by differences in positions, roles and interests which promote conflict. According to (Ritzer and Goodman 2004), the emergent positions are arguably loaded with different types and amounts of authority which make the incumbents able to discharge their different roles in society. The position that one occupies is hugely determined by the group he or she belongs. These positions are created and defined by group members.

According to Dahrendorf, the groups which exist in society can be divided into three, that is; the quasi group, the interest group and the conflict group. These groups are pertinent in understanding how different individuals behave within a system. The quasi group is the first group which Dahrendorf defines as, ''aggregate of incumbents of positions with identical role interests'' (1959:180). Members of this group are united on the basis of their common interests. They are in pursuit of the same interests and as such, they are bound to work together thereby feeding into the next interest group. The interest group is believed to be the real agents of group conflict as members, ''…have a structure, a form of organization, a program or goal, and personnel of members'' (159:180). The conflict group is the last of the three groups which denote the actual group seized with conflict. While structural functionalists argue that these groups are held together by voluntary cooperation or by consensus, Dahrendorf believes that what binds society is enforced constraint. This is made possible by the fact that some positions in society are accorded power and authority over others. There is therefore a differential distribution of power and authority to different positions obtaining in society thereby spelling the inevitability of conflict.

What undergirds these three groups are interests, both latent and manifest interests. They all harbor some interests which they seek to advance. As these interests differ within a given group or across groups, conflict is bound to occur. The paper argues that Zimbabwe's political system represent a large-scale structure which have different groups in it. These quasi groups could be understood as constituting, all the actors involved in active politics. They have shown manifest interests to occupy certain leadership positions and actively work towards that. Their appearance on the scene is not by mistake or chance but is a result of clear intentionality. Apart from the manifest interests, they also may have some latent interests which are not declared but instrumental in shaping their thought processes and actions. The interest group(s) arise from the quasi group and this one is very much organized, has clear-cut goals and has clear membership which drive its political agenda. In this study, these were divided into different political parties which recruit individuals from the broader quasi group to represent them in parliamentary elections. At the top are conflict groups which are offshoots of the interest groups. These can be identified as the women's parliamentary quota beneficiaries and the male sitting MPs. It can also be split into two broad categories, female and male politicians. These two groups have competing interests. The conflict arising between and within them can also be viewed as latent and manifest.

Interestingly, Dahrendorf (1958, 1959) argues that conflict which takes place within and between groups is necessary for change and development. The conflict can lead to changes in the social structure, for instance, those who occupy a subordinate position may resist the power and authority exercised upon them by the superordinate members. This resistance can lead to affirmative action, advocacy or change of laws and policies which can be viewed as positive change.

METHODOLOGY

This study is predominantly qualitative in nature as it sought to explore barriers inhibiting women's participation in national politics. In order to capture and analyze factors which continue to obdurately block women politicians from getting elected into Zimbabwe's bicameral parliament, the study made use of qualitative data. Qualitative data, which aligns snugly with the qualitative research approach was selected for its ability to capture the subjective meanings of people's diverse experiences and perceptions. As espoused by Maxwell (2012), people's views, feelings and opinions can be best studied qualitatively as they are not amenable to quantification. Moreso, as articulated by Hammersley (2013), human society is a complex arena whose development is based on intricate interpretations and appreciations of individuality and commonality. These interpretations and appreciations are value laden hence different across time and space.

Consistent with the qualitative research approach, this study employed the descriptive phenomenology research design. The research design is a branch of phenomenology which argues that meanings are subjective and contextual (Creswell, 2007). These meanings are created through routinized experiences of different actors in different social spaces. In order to understand these meanings, a researcher would need to rely on what the concerned actors view their lived realities. As such, the study gave primacy to the views of the affected women politicians who were able to articulate their lived realities and the meanings they subsequently assigned to them.

The data was collected mainly through in-depth interviews with 9 women's parliamentary quota beneficiaries, 3 male parliamentarians and 3 key informants as well as a parliamentary observation. Data from these primary participants were corroborated with views from their fellow male counterparts. A thematic approach was used to analyse data. Dominant and recurring themes were extrapolated from the data and analysed using the Conflict Theory.

The data was objectively captured and presented to mirror the actual views of the participants. Debriefing was also done at the end of the study where publishing consent was further secured.

FINDINGS

Negative Societal Perceptions on Women Politicians

It was established in Zimbabwe, in general, society has not yet appreciated women as equals with their male counterparts. Most people, who are the electorate, believe that men are more superior to women. This view was mostly subscribed to by participants belonging to the ruling party. The belief on male superiority seemed so entrenched so much that even fellow women felt unable to vote for a woman politician. To them, a female politician lacks decision making and leadership capacities. She is intellectually vacuous rendering her weak in instigating development projects in communities. These sentiments are best captured in one participant's response:

We still see that as we move around in communities, people, even women themselves think men are more superior. We continue to make people aware that women can also be good leaders but haaa, it's a lot of work. We still have a long way to go. if women believed more in themselves maybe we would be close to 50-50 parity by now. When you go on the ground that's when you realise there is more to this story about women not voting for each other. As it stands, we must rely on the women's quota. [Key Informant]

It was intimated that the electorate would rather vote for a female candidate only when they are sure that there is an influential man behind that female's candidature. From the interviews, it was indicated that it is exceedingly difficult for a woman to be successful without a man or men running around to make it happen. Most female MPs expressed that in most times during campaigning they needed to be shielded by either a spouse or man for the electorate to be convinced. Other male MPs claimed to have campaigned for women so that constituency members could vote for a woman.

My husband had to talk to people for them to accept me because we found out that women were the most problematic when it comes to accepting other women as leaders. I heard one woman say, 'you know women go

to their mensuration while in parliament (meaning one will need to change her sanitary in parliament)'. [Female MP]

Female MPs indicated that it was difficult for a woman to be successful without a man or men running around to make it happen. Otherwise, the electorate does not believe that a female politician can stand on her own. They believe that the woman's place is the home. The public and political spaces are for men who have the right wits and appropriate intellectual acumen ship. Majority of the male and female MPs and FGD participants agreed that men were generally endowed with certain personal attributes which made them able to lead and command respect in public spaces. Men were also viewed as having the necessary guts to make even risky decisions which female politicians are generally believed to lack. The following sentiments from two different participants testify to this viewpoi

Males have got an upper hand on technical issues. There are these specific attributes which make men be seen as superior. [Male FGD Participants]

Men are bold and courageous. Men can risk, he can go and look for a loan of 50 000. A woman cannot do that, how would she return it? For him, he had done it and had looked for fuel to move around at night and as for you would be asleep. [Female MP]

Poor Self-Concept

It was also noted that the women who feel unable to vote for other women tend to look down upon themselves. They feel incomplete as women and they extend that to other women including the female politicians. Women were characterized as very ready for a male parliamentarian as opposed to a female one.

The challenge that we have seen is that women do more introspection and generalize to all other women. If she thinks she cannot do it, she will not promote any other woman for she extends herself to all other women. When we hold constituency meetings and some even in parliament, some will say 'we want to hear what the fathers think'. They tell us, 'Ah, you want to go and look for men there!' Inferiority complex is entrenched in how we are socialized. That is why I want to show other women and even men that I can do it. [Female MP]

As such, instead of supporting fellow women vying for parliamentary positions, they frantically fight against their election. Some MPs pointed out that women do not like each other to such an extent that if another woman is raised, they will find ways to pull her down. Some, in their experience, had never seen men openly pulling each other down. Men were said to even assist each other. Women were seen to require more convincing to do away with the Pull Her Down Syndrome.

The other thing I have seen is that a woman's enemy is the woman. There is need to have big awareness, men really use women especially during the election time. This issue of saying women go to sleep in parliament or are going to drink tea; women will say let me vote for those men with the red ties, not that woman who will sleep in parliament. They do not appreciate that if they vote for another woman, it will be easier for them to approach her when they have run out of food, if you go to someone's husband, you will be suspected of snatching. [Female MP]

A male MP is more tolerant of a PR MP than a female elected MP. Other female parliamentarians do not want to raise the younger ones behind them. [Female MP]

Poor Education in Women

All parliamentarians alluded that education was a key player in women's limited participation in parliamentary elections. They added that in fact, education was important for all politicians interested in getting elected into parliament. The female MPs cited poor education as eating away their confidence both during their campaigns and when they participate in parliament. The general sentiments were that most female parliamentarians are forced to remain quiet throughout the parliamentary sessions because they are afraid of making mistakes due to their lack of or low levels of education. If a female MP makes a mistake in parliament, they are jeered at in a

way that takes away their confidence. Another female MP disclosed that she may not return to parliament because she did not want to face this system again that had traumatised her.

The first reason that makes you quiet when you are in that house, let me be honest with you, is the level of education. Education is very powerful; it will remove all fear. To this date even after so many sessions, I still find it difficult to interpret and understand parliamentary Bills and hence I am encouraging women to at least have an 'O' Level certificate and if possible, get an Advanced Level certificate [Female MP]

Some of them do not have knowledge, completely! They are just there to clap their hands. Even if it's said today, we want to kill people, they will just clap hands. Yes, there are only a few, about 1%, who will share their opinions. When the minister is vomiting, they clap their hands! You, see? [Male MP]

Economic and Financial Disempowerment of Women

All three political parties' participants agreed that women are disempowered by patriarchal settings which privileged men over women. They felt that that the political space was not even for both genders. Men tend to have better access to resources than their female counterparts. There was a consensus by all the MPs that men still control the resources at whatever level. According to female participants, male politicians are better economically and financially empowered than them. Women's disempowerment was very glaring and counter-productive. The level of disempowerment made women MPs to feel that it was not fair to compete with male counterparts. Rather, they demanded to split the competition along the feminine and masculine principles.

There is no way I would allow my wife to sell a family asset as with the patriarchal nature of our society, I control everything! The husband always controls the resources for those who are married. [Male MP]

The 50-50 that we want is for women to compete against each other in reserved constituencies and not compete with men. I think that men should engage and compete on their own as they have matching resources. That way there can be fairness which would see more women in parliament that have been elected. Money determines everything and therefore men are always at an advantage. [Female MP]

It's not like women are few in politics. If you sit down and take statistics, of women who got into the ballots, they are many. The disadvantage is the issue of money. People vote for a person because of money not capacity. The women would have capacity but no money. In Zimbabwe politics you need money, it is like you are buying your votes. If you cannot give anything it is difficult for you. In Zimbabwe they do not vote for ideas, they vote for what they get. So, if you give them something then they will give their vote in return. [Female MP]
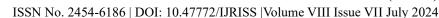
Family and Politics Incompatibilities

The position of a woman was understood to be at home with the family. Participants felt that the admission of women into politics was also met with a split loyalty demand for women who are married for them to satisfy both their families and political demands. Some FGD participants were of the view that balancing politics and family were two incompatible interests.

The uneasiness or un-smoothness that would require you to work way over night and meet lots of people is not easy for especially married women. Maybe it will be relatively different for single women. I think it will be difficult for a married woman to explain how you can be away from home until 12 midnight or 1 A.M. I remember some of the meetings we will do at night because there are certain clusters of our society whom you need to meet differently because they may not be in the comfort zone to be seen interacting with them. [Male MP].

Even after men have 'allowed' their wives to be in politics, at times when there are some challenges, the same husbands will start questioning why the wife joined politics which causes a strain on family relationships. I'm one of the lucky few because I have my husband's support. [Female Participants]

Political Environment Designed by Masculine Principles

Most members of parliament revealed that the passivity and disinterest from women were largely due to the incompatibilities in the political arena. They were of the opinion that all things in the political landscape are

defined by masculine principles. Vast opinions were that men used their own attributes to set a normative expectation of leadership and women were finding it difficult to relate. From the live session observed, there was male vs. male MP commotion as they addressed each other in a heated argument of no substance. Other male MPs also alluded that the space was not for male candidates because of how they relate to each other as men. All the MPs agreed that the parliament was not accommodative of women. FGD participants indicated that the name calling, denigration, intimidation and harassment that we have also witnessed makes the space male dominated. At some point in the interviews one female MP accused one male MP of insulting a female colleague to the extent of telling her that she was born of a 'stinky vagina!' The female MP revealed that when they are done attacking females, they then attack one's mother that they have never met.

I can say the political environment was designed to exclude women but it's a deliberate design. It is not natural but was deliberately designed to make sure that there are some difficulties for women. There should be some punitive laws to deter hate speech against women as they are the majority victims even in parliament and during campaigns. Candidates must be disqualified if found on the wrong side. Politics are not that bad but rather the system has weak laws that do not support and protect women. [Male MP]

Personally, I believe women contribute more to parliamentary session. I think they are outnumbered by their male counterparts and hence the assumption that they are silent. Heckling happens in parliament but goes beyond gender and is more pronounced between different political parties. If a woman happens to be vocal and parliamentarians from a different party heckle, it's more to do with their political differences not gender. It is a masculine principle that women find hard to tolerate. I will say this, church is for women and politics is designed for men. If a woman wants to be in politics, they will need to be a 'man' to make it. [Male MP]
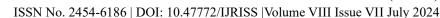
Politics seems as if it was made for men. If you are soft, you will find it difficult. Even the men they look at you and think that they have found some sexual objects to play with. So, you must be a strong woman and know what you want. Firstly, the parliament on its own, its environment is not favorable for women. The booing, 'sit down you Hure (prostitute) to this other person. So, most women will be afraid that if I stand, they will attack me. So, it takes a lot of courage for you to stand and speak. I remember the first time, I stood up, I almost fell as they were shouting, 'hey, kusviba!' (a word to describe someone who is dark in complexion but in a demeaning way' You will not be able to complete your sentence. So, if you are silenced in the first and second year, you will never speak in parliament. [Female MP]

You cannot run away from the fact that parliament is not women friendly. Women start conversation by trying to know each other by emotions and that is not how men operate. So, one comes to parliament, and they expect the emotional part, but it is a hard place, there is not time for emotions because people are playing politics! It is about showing off. We grew up being told do not show off as a woman, be calm and humble. So, when they walk into that space, it is really alien to them. The attitude, you know, when you speak, you are challenged, people contest, and it is a contested area. Women, usually shy away from conflict places, they just say, 'if it is about shouting at each other, let me keep quiet! Therefore, it becomes dominated by the male voices. [Female MP]

I always say that legislative work is not organized around how women engage with processes and unless a woman has some legal training and thinking like a lawyer then she can make it. "This is why those women who make it are from some background, from a legal background because that training moves you from the emotion and opinion and deal with what is factual and can be proven because the system has not changed. [Key Informant]

Selective Engagement of Women by the Media

Female participants expressed that the media was working in cahoots with the system by either limiting their screen or air time and perpetuating a negative narrative about women's capacity to hold public office. Participants also complained that these actions by the media were opening them up to cyber bullying, harassment and prying into their private lives. The media was accused of deliberately ignoring women politicians at conferences by simply not asking for interviews as they usually do with the male politicians or putting away their cameras. If it so happened that a woman is given screen time, it was very limited. Further to that the reports

would not highlight the important work that has been done but rather focus on petty negative social issues.

Parliamentarians are very vocal, the problem is the attitude of journalists, when it is a man speaking cameras focus on them but the sad reality is that when it is a woman speaking, they have a tendency of putting their cameras down hence the reason why people think women are not vocal in parliament. Women are very vocal in parliament it's just that they are not being covered, they are only covered when it comes to sensational stories. [Female MP]

I think is a sweeping statement to say that they do not engage, it is the perception of their engagement that determines. For my 20 years in parliament women participate but it does not make it to the media because it has to be a particular kind of person. [Female MP]

DISCUSSION

The study identified several interrelated factors which hinder women's election into parliament. These factors include; territory marking by seated MPs, politics of entitlement, a hostile androcentric political milieu, unfair media representation of female politicians, negative societal perceptions of women politicians, difficulties in juggling family and public roles, lack of education, a low female self-concept of members of parliament and selective engagement of women by the media. It is clear that the interaction of these challenges has a net effect of stifling women participation in politics in general, and their election into parliament in particular.

Male elected MPs ostensibly wield a considerable clout of political influence in their constituencies. They constitute a formidable force which elbows out the Women's Parliamentary Quota beneficiaries from the political limelight in their constituencies. They pose as godfathers of their constituencies who decide who can talk to the constituency members, who can do what with which people. They have developed a very powerful system of exclusion which works against female MPs. Ndirangu et al. (2017) highlight that huge nomination fees demanded by political parties, hinder women's participation in politics; lack of transparency during the nomination process and a lack of a management framework to support free, fair and credible primaries.   Using Dahrendorf's Conflict theory, these male MPs constitute a privileged conflict group which uses its position of power and authority to dictate what is happening in their constituencies. Their elected position within the constituencies bequeaths much power on them such that even when they are not around, they have to be consulted to make decisions in absentia. The beneficiaries of women's parliamentary quota represent the other conflict group which is less privileged and unable to penetrate into the political limelight where they can make impact. Their position, as unelected MPs, compromises their power and expose them to the whims of the elected MPs. The purpose that their positions should have played, that is, to strategically position them for an election into parliament seem to be faltering in the face of a powerful male MPs force.

Some of the challenges emanate from the politics of entitlement which dominates state making and determines eligibility for election into parliament in independent Zimbabwe. There are male MPs who feel that they belong to the right political party with some who have participated in Zimbabwe's armed struggle. As the process was led by the Chimurenga War Veterans who were largely ZANU PF, pre-eminence was undoubtedly given to those who had close and clear ties with ZANU PF. They believe that they have the moral right to be elected into parliament ahead of those who belong to the opposition parties. The past is invoked in contemporary decision making. If one lacks war credentials, does not have ties with the ruling party, either through marriage, blood or acquaintances, they do not stand a chance to be elected into parliament. It becomes even worse when the person is a woman who is generally looked down upon.

From the participants' responses the treatment or maltreatment of women politicians is reflective of the hegemonic cultural beliefs that women are inferior and belong to the private sphere. Their appearance in the public sphere is believed to be a rebellion against the set rules of society. Speaking out in public fora does not fit with their gender role socialisation. The ACE project (2020) identified some of the barriers hindering the election of women to be gender-based stereotypes and bias in the media. Gender roles are defined as expectations regarding the proper behaviour, attitudes and activities of males and females (Schaefer, 2010). Consistent to what Krook and Sanin (2016) term 'gender scripts', women politicians find themselves harassed, jeered at and manipulated. Women politicians are victims of systematic verbal attacks by their male counterparts who do this

to deliberately discourage them from participating in politics. And as a result of this, some women politicians contemplate either slowing down or aborting their political aspirations. Most women still feel intimidated by men and they stay out of politics and when they are in, they play it safe by not challenging men (Manyeruke, 2018) Some of them make feeble campaigns which do not help their cause of being elected into parliament. This androcentric political culture is therefore very toxic to women inclusion in politics and subsequently their possible election into parliament. They appear to be serving at the pleasure of the male politicians.

The experiences of violence and intimidation expressed by female MPs who came in through the quota system point to a hostile androcentric political environment in Zimbabwe. Nyamuzuwe (2020) previously alluded that women as candidates suffer election related gender-based violence including psychological violence. Their position is deemed inferior in two ways, first in the sense that they were not elected and secondly because they are women. They are therefore deemed to be occupying an inferior position in the political space.

Meintjes (1998) also argues that political violence is not separate from domestic forms of violence but is a further aspect of patriarchal power relations. The control of and authority over women by men emanates from private spaces and extends to public fora. Gendered roles, beliefs and attitudes can shape the forms and impact of political violence (Bardall 2011; 2013). Men know that when they boo, heckle and jeer at women, there is a high likelihood that the woman will never stand up to speak ever again. VAWIP approach considers that the gendered distribution of political power, and both the conscious and unconscious means of preserving it, is itself violence. Another female MP shared that sometimes when a female attempts to speak, she is openly ridiculed for her 'undesirable' beauty and insults even extend to her family. According to Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2018), a woman still cannot question a member of parliament without being told her thighs are too big! In Europe, 58.2% women parliamentarians had been targets of online sexist attacks (IPU, 2018). Further to that male MPs were accused of always bringing up private sexual exploits of female MPs when they were seen to be outspoken just to shut them and it seemed to work all the time.

Education Disparities a Cause for Silence

Education is generally viewed as critical in Zimbabwe's politics. One's education level places them at a certain position of influence. Better education is believed to be emancipatory and instrumental in determining one's confidence levels. Though it is clear that those who enter into parliament through the politics of entitlement don't necessarily have to rely on their level of education, it was clear that having a better level of education would give you a good competitive advantage over others. Most female politicians bemoaned their lack of or limited education. Lack of education causes female parliamentarians to feel inferior, embarrassed and lose confidence when they are both in parliament and in their constituencies. The noise and impact they make through active and informed participation in parliament is believed to have an impact on their visibility and popularity in their constituencies. Most female MPs fail to make this impact as a result of low education and this works against them and reduces their chances of being elected into parliament.

The importance of education is emphasised by Ochieng and Jattani (2022) who argue that education, instils acceptance of existing authority, it also empowers the disadvantaged to challenge authority. A previously cited study by Sahu and Yadav (2018) established that education is especially a powerful predictor of political participation. The study identifies a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation, which include knowledge acquisition and communication skills useful for public debate. Other Studies in In India by Churasia (2022) further show that the disparities between overall voter participation and female voter participation are greater in states with low literacy levels. The above findings of the study and previous cited studies show that there is a correlation between formal education and participation of women at all levels of political participation. Promoting gender parity in access to education would require an integration which involves changing people's perceptions about women, increasing women's access to resources and eliminating the feminization of poverty. This is so because these factors are intricately interwoven. Access to education is closely linked with women's access to resources and their financial freedom.

Lack of Financial Muscle/ Economic Empowerment by Female Members of Parliament

Though there is a general consensus that lack of resources can be a major impediment to access political

platforms, women politicians' story is a little deeper. Culturally men are the heads of the family and decisions about how to utilise family resources solely lies with him to a great extent. While women may need to rely on their spouses for campaigning resources, male MPs tend to be comparatively privileged and well-resourced. This means women politicians are at the mercy of their spouses who can decide not support them financially thereby giving their male rivals a competitive edge over them. One of the reasons why men may not be motivated to sponsor a female politician regards to the negative public opinion held against women as less able to deliver politically. Investing in them would naturally be considered as a bad investment. That attitude causes women to give up on their political dreams as their political lives are sometimes cut short because they cannot keep with the financial demands of their constituencies. Money is a factor in Zimbabwean politics as it has been the tradition that when one is campaigning, they have to use money as a dangling carrot for their electorate. Takaza and Chitereka (2022) point out that the number of women in the informal sector in Zimbabwe exceeds that of men in most countries. This means that there is disproportionate poverty in Zimbabwe, and this affects women's political lives. A show of money is interpreted as being equal to positive development in constituencies, even when it may not be necessarily true. Money also boosts voter confidence in a candidate. Disproportional poverty is a reality for women and a serious deterrent to them achieving their political goals. Poverty also silences women and limiting their access to capacity enhancing initiatives that prepare them for leadership.

Novelty by Female Parliamentarians

A positive self-concept is key in expressing oneself in public and is even more important in leadership positions such as that of an MP. Wolak (2020) suggests that the feelings of self-confidence serve as a resource that encourages psychological engagement in politics. However, this resource tends to be more likely possessed by men than women. Women's lack of this key leadership quality emanates from so many factors as discussed above. Most female politicians entering parliament riding on the saddle of women's parliamentary quota generally exhibit, justifiably though, a novice conduct. In the absence of a robust induction mechanism, they struggle to make headway into parliamentary business making a lot of mistakes which invites sharp and unwarranted criticism and mockery from fellow male parliamentarians. This becomes a huge deterrent causing them to lose confidence. Most female politicians vying for electable parliamentary positions tend to lose confidence as they discover that they do not have the experience, eloquence and boldness that their male counterparts possess. Lack of confidence leads to passivity and subsequently to a lack of appeal to the general electorate who then prefer a male candidate to a female candidate.

Lack of self-belief in their own abilities and self-doubt by women is due to years of suppression, manipulation and psychological abuse through a cultural system that makes women doubt their capabilities and success chances. Carbajal (2018) suggests that women are considered inferior to men, which is a perception based on biblical interpretations. Women are constantly seeking male approval because culturally the men are the head of the household. Headship and superiority are taken into public spaces and similarly expectations of passivity and silence from women are the norm. As previously alluded to, matching male energy in parliament is not without its negative consequences such as name calling and even isolation from fellow women. Self-centred and benevolent conceptualisations of power emerge from culturally nurtured beliefs, attitudes and goals that emanate from one's cultural orientation (Torelli and Shavitt, 2010) In the traditional perspectives, women have no right to take part in political leadership as they are considered inferior and not permanent members of the clan (Lokoro, 2018). Further to that, in understanding political leadership and participation of women, one needs to recognise the societal social status of women as well as the political realm of culture (Norris and Inglehart, 2012). It was evident that culture remains a barrier to women's advancement in politics and their active participation in parliament. Findings in Kenya by Ullah (2018) indicate that a rigid culture, norms and value systems impede women's political participation.

Preece (2016); Lawless and Fox (2010:12) argue that advocating for systematic changes, structural factors is not enough as there is need to address the 'gendered psyche' that prevents women from fully participating in civic life. Novelty at a platform as public as debating in parliament exposes women's so-called inabilities to lead and to engage meaningfully leading them to have insecurities about themselves. In addition, Mansell and Gatto (2023) state that insecurity can also shape political behaviours more broadly. Government and other relevant stakeholders have not assumed a holistic approach to women's participation in politics.

One of the major hindrances to active female participation in national politics, especially their election into parliament, is the challenges associated with juggling family and public roles. Society still expects women to play all their traditional roles which in most cases, for married women particularly, include; mother role, wife role and community figure. These roles reflect Moser (1989) triple roles. On top of these roles, female politicians are expected to add yet another role of serving a larger group of people. Female MPs complain that parliamentary roles and the campaigning processes are very demanding to an extent that they put a strain on them. During the campaigning period, they are expected to be going around the constituencies on daily basis addressing rallies and attending a chain of meetings which require them to leave home very early and return late in the night. This means attending to their domestic duties becomes very problematic. When they seem to have abrogated these roles, they often get into squabbles with their spouses and families. Political participation therefore increases their burden and holds a danger of creating marital problems and increasing chances of mental health issues. It is against this background that some female politicians find participation in politics a very dicey decision to make. Only the elite women, who are given support in their domestic roles are able to effectively establish as politicians and hold better chances of clinching parliamentary seats through an election.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper concludes that there are numerous barriers that prevent women's quota beneficiaries in the Parliament of Zimbabwe from election into parliament. Some of the parliamentarians were found to have a poor self-concept. They tended to look down upon themselves and these feelings were intensified by the treatment they received from fellow parliamentarians that were elected. The study also established that women's visibility was limited due to their poor education. Their limited participation as a result limited their visibility and chances to be known and know their potential electorate. Financial disempowerment was a challenge for women as they did not own or have power over the resources required to run an election campaign, further minimising their chances of successfully being elected into parliament.

It was further revealed that there were some incompatibilities between family and politics. Most female parliamentarians expressed that they struggled to balance work and family and that sometimes their partners/spouses did not understand their working beyond normal traditional working hours. This was a major issue as parliamentarians were plagued with feelings of guilt and fear of not fulfilling their duties as mothers and wives. Election into parliament was further made difficult by a political environment designed by masculine principles which tended to either scare women away from politics or make it hard for them to thrive. On the contrary, the disinterest of women in politics was due to a hostile political terrain in Zimbabwe. It was put forward that the political landscape in Zimbabwe still did not fully support women's entry into politics nor did it genuinely support those who are in but may need further augmenting.

Additionally, women parliamentarians were exposed to ridiculing of their physical appearances. This served as a way to silence them from expressing their views and negatively affecting their self-esteem. Education disparities between men and women expose women in a bad light especially when they have to engage politics at a certain level. Men are automatically perceived to be better candidates as they come across as more politically seasoned. Elections are mostly based on campaigns and the ability to publicly engage. Further to that, women appointed through the quota exhibited novice conduct. For some, parliamentary appointment came as a shock and were not prepared for it. Most of the elected members of parliament are usually those that have been in political circles for a long period of time or have associations with prominent politicians and hence have received some type of grooming. This novelty led to self-doubt, lack of confidence and self-belief. Visibility is a key factor in the election of women in politics. The electorate can only get familiar with potential representatives if they are visible. Without visibility there is no familiarity which leads to challenges for women when seeking to be elected.

It is concluded that women face varied challenges for them to be elected into the parliament of Zimbabwe. The barriers yielded the same negative effects on those that were appointed into parliament as they wish to be elected. It was evident that seated members of parliament respected each other while women's quota beneficiaries were treated as second class citizens of the parliament and undeserving of their seats. It is further argued that, while Zimbabwe's policy of the quota was widely received, there still needs to be monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to superintend over the agreement and measure the outcomes. Democracy as it pertains to women's

full political participation in the politics of Zimbabwe either as voters or candidates maybe longtime coming. Despite the many intentional international, regional and domestic policies and strategies, women continue to not be taken as political equals to their male counterparts in elections in many parts of the world and especially in Zimbabwe.

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