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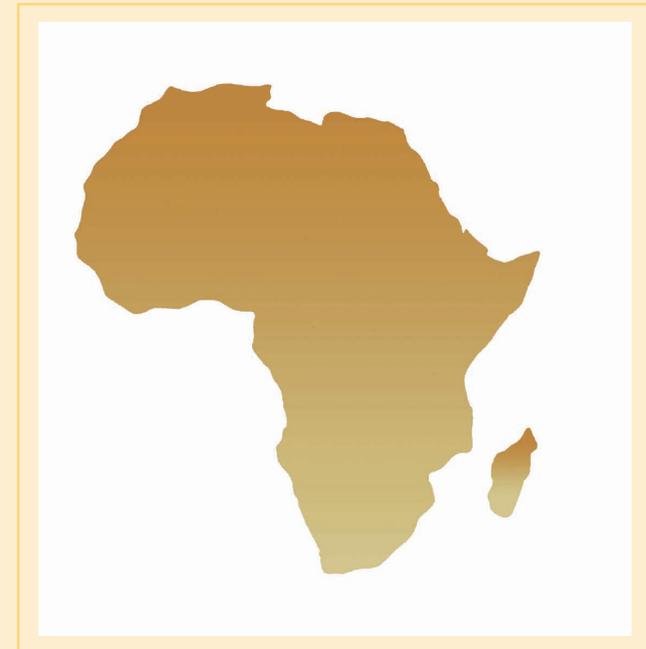
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# GENDER, WOMEN AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN ZIMBABWE



Rudo Gaidzanwa

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ELECTORAL POLITICS IN ZIMBABWE



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IN ZIMBABWE

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# CONTENTS

<b>List of Acronyms</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Literature review</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Zimbabwe's constitution and electoral law</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pertinent electoral experiences in Zimbabwe</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>International and regional instruments and their role in Zimbabwe's elections</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Constitutional and legislative provisions</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The electoral law and regulations</b>	<b>11</b>
Parliamentary elections	11
Presidential elections	12
Voter registration: Local and international instruments and the position of the marginalised	12
Standing for election to parliament	17
<b>Specific problems faced by women as candidates</b>	<b>19</b>
Funding	19
Hostility from men	19
Quotas	21
<b>Path to election: A case study</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Presidential candidature</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Party manifestoes and promises</b>	<b>27</b>
The ZANU-PF manifesto	27
The MDC manifesto	28
<b>The media and coverage of elections</b>	<b>30</b>
Zimbabwean elections and the media	31
Media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 elections: A gender analysis	32

<b>Voter education</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>The election phase</b>	<b>38</b>
The Delimitation Commission	38
The Electoral Supervisory Commission	39
The Electoral Directorate	40
The Registrar-General	40
<b>Elections and violence</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Observer missions and gender awareness</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>The post-election phase: A gendered analysis</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>About EISA</b>	<b>55</b>
Table 1: Gender balance in SADC parliaments	24
Table 2: Women’s participation in legislative bodies in Zimbabwe from 1980 to date	45

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CGE	Commission on Gender Equality
CSO	Civil society organisation
EISA	Electoral Institute of Southern Africa
ESC	Electoral Supervisory Commission
EU	European Union
FPTP	First-past-the-post
GLAA	General Laws Amendment Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MP	Member of parliament
NAGG	National Alliance for Good Governance
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PR	Proportional representation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC-ESN	SADC-Election Support Network
WAG	Women's Action Group
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZWLA	Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association
ZWRCN	Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network



## **INTRODUCTION**

Controversy, especially regarding issues of 'free and fair' conditions, has characterised parliamentary and presidential elections in many countries throughout the world. A major challenge worldwide is to develop and implement tactical and strategic mechanisms to make electoral processes acceptable to all parties and groups by gender, race, class, age and other attributes.

An analysis of electoral processes has to take place from several vantage points; regarding gender, it is pertinent to stress that electoral processes have to pass the 'gender test' on several fronts. This study seeks to analyse the constitutional and legislative provisions pertaining to the Zimbabwean 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections and to determine the extent to which they promoted gender equality.

The concept of equality needs to be explained in order to eliminate misconceptions about means and ends. Equality can be understood to occur in a mechanical fashion where claimants to resources and goods are expected to have access to these resources to the same degree. However, in process terms, issues of equality are often complex because they arise in the contexts of past discrimination, exclusion, differing capacities, skills, exposure and opportunities to access and enjoy the valued goods in any society. Inequalities between men and women therefore tend to be historically constructed and maintained through institutions such as the family, the economy, the polity and society as a whole. In electoral terms, opportunity structures are mediated through the deeper social inequalities that exist between men and women, rich and poor, young and old, ethnic and other differences.

Inequalities are socially structured and are restructured to suit changing circumstances. Similarly, gender is socially constructed and changes with respect to the age, race, class and other circumstances of the individual man or woman. Gender inequalities, like other forms of inequality, manifest in the labour market, in political structures as well as in households, and are reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies.<sup>1</sup>

Gender analysis draws a distinction between sex and gender: sex is biologically determined, while gender is socially constructed. Attempts to

eliminate inequality often meet with limited success and are made more difficult by crosscutting issues related to class, age, race and ethnicity. Thus, while women may be systematically discriminated against by gender, the women of privileged classes and races may at times not necessarily experience the same discrimination and denial of opportunities that affect the men and women of less privileged classes and races; although they will be disadvantaged in relation to men of the same class and race.

In attempting to redress the inequalities between men and women it may be difficult to disentangle these issues, making mechanical equality problematic and undesirable, particularly when it may not be possible or easy to compensate for past discrimination. It may therefore be easier and more feasible to strive for equality of outcome and opportunity, especially in patrilineal societies where men and women participate in gender-segmented activities in the economy, polity or society.

With respect to electoral issues, the gender divisions of labour among men and women in Zimbabwe may make simple equality difficult because men's and women's economic and political activities often centre on different activities. Any discussion on equality between men and women in electoral issues therefore has to take into account these gender differences and the challenges they pose in attempting to achieve equality between the sexes. Accordingly, equity in outcomes may be more appropriate as a concept in dealing with gendered electoral issues. By this is meant the possibility of ensuring that men and women are treated fairly in electoral processes, rewarded without discrimination, are able to achieve similar goals and access political, social and economic power even though they may not necessarily be doing the same work or subscribe to the same political beliefs, priorities and aspirations. It is in this context that the issues of electoral practice in Zimbabwe will be discussed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The most fundamental principle of democracy is the ability to choose those who will govern through the processes of periodic elections. Moyo<sup>2</sup> notes that committed democrats emphasise the importance of elections, especially the influence that citizens can have in the selection and deposition of leaders. Ginsberg and Stone<sup>3</sup> make relevant points regarding the importance of

studying elections and who will govern through the processes of periodic elections. First, they highlight that elections play a role in the formalisation of the popular participation of people, thereby rendering and enabling the independent – at least on a theoretical level – capacity of the citizen to influence the way in which politicians conduct themselves in liberal democracies.<sup>4</sup> Second, they point out that popular elections go a long way towards compensating for private inequalities in political resources, in that elections introduce into the public sphere a formal mechanism for the populace to compete and choose their leaders. A study of elections also provides insight into the subtle ways in which the powerful in society engage in the manipulation of popular influence through mechanisms that have been institutionalised.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, it is only through participation in elections that the electorate influences public policy making and implementation. It is important to note, however, that the final determinant in the process is really the influence of power. Moyo<sup>6</sup> succinctly notes that votes may count, but in the end resources and power are the major determinants of outcomes in political and electoral contestations.

Taking the above into consideration it appears that elections play a crucial role in the fundamentals of democracy and remain a significant marker in the proper functioning of democratic principles; without elections, it seems safe to suggest, democracy would essentially be dead. The proper functioning of democracy therefore entails the ability of citizens to participate fully in choosing their leaders – and in choosing these leaders free will has to exist.

Moyo<sup>7</sup> notes that the degree of freedom – that is, the choice and consent of the voter – remains fundamental to the proper functioning of democracy. It is through the study of elections that electoral processes can be analysed and opinions formed as to whether the elections would have taken place under conditions in which legislative and other political, social and economic conditions are amenable to the proper conduct of free and fair elections.

### **ZIMBABWE'S CONSTITUTION AND ELECTORAL LAW**

Elections in Zimbabwe take place against a backdrop of conditions and standards set out in specific international and regional documents ratified by Zimbabwe, and in accordance with Zimbabwe's constitution and electoral

law. At the same time, prevailing political, social and economic conditions play a role in determining the trajectory that elections will naturally take. The prevailing institutional conditions – such as the nature of electoral bodies and the media – play another important role in determining election outcomes.

### **PERTINENT ELECTORAL EXPERIENCES IN ZIMBABWE**

Sithole<sup>8</sup> has alluded to the ‘search’ for democracy in Zimbabwe’s political history. Developing political systems face many challenges in attempts to adhere fully to the principles of democracy. In a historical analysis of elections in Zimbabwe from 1979 to 1985, Sithole<sup>9</sup> clearly shows that people in positions of power seek to manipulate elections in their favour, particularly in times of stiff opposition. Herbst<sup>10</sup> points to the development of state politics in Zimbabwe, which is characterised by the entrenchment of a one-party state coupled with the development of state-centred and -controlled media.

Related to the above is the critical analysis made by Makumbe and Compagnon<sup>11</sup> of the politics behind the general elections in 1995. This work elucidates issues which later became highly relevant in the 2000 and 2002 elections in Zimbabwe. The issue of media monopolisation and the nascent political violence that would erupt to enormous proportions in the parliamentary and presidential elections are especially pertinent here.

Sithole<sup>12</sup> takes particular account of the then fledgling Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and analyses the shattering of the one-party state as marking the development of multiparty politics in Zimbabwe. The growth of cleavages in the pre- and post-election phases of Zimbabwe’s elections in 1990 has been articulated by Sylvester<sup>13</sup> who raises concern with issues such as one-partyism and problems with the amalgamation of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), which Moyo<sup>14</sup> considers to have been a step towards the entrenchment of one-party politics at the expense of multipartyism in Zimbabwe.

Zaffiro<sup>15</sup> has undertaken a commendable analysis of the development of democracy in conjunction with the critical institute of the media. Of considerable importance is the observation that the stifling of democratic

principles has also entailed the stifling of the media, reducing if not eradicating completely its criticism of those in power. Zaffiro<sup>16</sup> historicises the development of state-controlled media in Zimbabwe, which parallels the growth of autocratic and despotic tendencies in the country. Historically, even in the colonial era there were attempts by the colonial government to control fully the media and to demonise the liberation movements. This, therefore, is relevant to Zimbabwe's position in the context of the elections examined in this work.

Moyo<sup>17</sup> remains one of the more comprehensive scholars on electoral politics in Zimbabwe. The attempt in his work to construct gender profiles of the people who vote – for example, their ages, level of education and how the variable of gender affects voting patterns – is especially commendable. Up to now very little has been done on the profiling of those who vote. This might be because people take little interest in elections past the voting phase. An analysis of the impacts of the media and its manipulation by those in power is therefore also carried out in this work.

In summary, the following emerged as relevant in a historical analysis of the development of election processes in Zimbabwe: the issue of media coverage and its accessibility to all concerned parties, as well as the growth of multiparty democracy and the attempts to stifle it. Though not rigorously articulated with reference to the media is the gender sensitivity of media broadcasts with respect to access by women to the media. Violence has emerged as one of the most problematic political phenomena in elections, which in recent times in Zimbabwe has become the focus of any discussion on electoral processes. Central to current discourses on electoral processes is the participation of women at all levels of the electoral process; this has become a topical issue not only in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region but in the whole of Africa.

#### **INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR ROLE IN ZIMBABWE'S ELECTIONS**

Generally, the international and regional instruments that play a role in influencing elections in Zimbabwe are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and

Development, which make citizenship a prerequisite for the exercise of political rights. Accordingly, every citizen has the right to:

- take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; and
- vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.<sup>18</sup>

Article 7 of CEDAW – described as the definitive international legal instrument requiring respect for, and observance of the human rights of women – states the following:

“State Parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of a country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) To participate in non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.”

The UN Committee on CEDAW stated that:

“The government of Zimbabwe is, by acceding to the CEDAW, bound to guarantee equality between men and women. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has scrutinised Zimbabwe, like all countries that have acceded to CEDAW. The Committee gave its first concluding observations on Zimbabwe’s compliance with its obligations in May 1998. The

Committee stated that 'negative attitudes towards women and discriminatory customary laws and practices continue to contribute to the slow pace in advancing the status of women'.<sup>19</sup>

At regional level, Zimbabwe has ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, of which article 13 states:

- "1) Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of law.
- 2) Every person shall have the right of equal access to the public service of his country."

Zimbabwe is also a party to the Declaration on Gender and Development signed by all SADC Heads of State or Government. This declaration in its preamble expresses concern that:

- "i) While some SADC member states have made some progress towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming, disparities between women and men still exist in the areas of legal rights, power-sharing and decision-making, access to and control over productive resources, education and health among others;

SADC Heads of State or Government have committed themselves and their countries to, *inter alia*,

- i) Placing gender firmly on the agenda of the SADC Programme of Action and Community Building Initiative;
- ii) Ensuring the equal representation of women and men in the decision-making of member states and SADC structures at all levels, and the achievement of at least [a] 30 percent target of women in political and decision-making structures by [the] year 2005."

More recently, in Mauritius in August 2004, SADC governments agreed on principles governing the conduct of democratic elections for all member

states. The major provisions in these principles centre on the conduct of elections by independent bodies outside of government, and the need for people to participate freely as voters and as candidates, as well as through other types of electoral participation. SADC countries are also bound to observe the principles of fairness, transparency and accountability, and to protect the rights of people participating in elections. There is therefore recognition in the region that elections are critical for the exercise of the will of citizens in the electoral business of their country.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS**

An analysis of the relevant provisions of Zimbabwe's constitution and its electoral law shows that elections are an important component of democracy. An election is free and fair when there are no unreasonable or arbitrary limitations imposed on the rights of adult citizens – women and men – in expressing their political will, either as electoral candidates or as voters.

At national level, section 23 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states:

“No law or public officer shall discriminate against any person on the grounds of that person's tribe, race, and place of origin, political views, colour, religion or sex.

*It shall be lawful<sup>20</sup> to discriminate on any of the above grounds in the areas of family law, marriage, divorce, inheritance and customary law.”*

Women's groups in Zimbabwe have argued that:

“although gender discrimination is now addressed by the constitution, the reservations contained in section 23 remain problematic. All gender discrimination should be prohibited except where necessary differentiation is legitimately based on the biological or reproductive needs of women. Although the government has ratified CEDAW, it has not yet made it fully operational.”<sup>21</sup>

The Zimbabwean Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) notes that:

“section 111B [of the Constitution] states that no international treaty, covenant or agreement signed and ratified by the Zimbabwean government shall form a part of the local laws unless parliament passes a law making the agreement part of the laws of Zimbabwe. Thus the most important document on women’s rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), although signed and ratified by the Zimbabwean government in 1991, with no reservations, is not a part of the local law of Zimbabwe.”<sup>22</sup>

The ZWRCN notes further that “[t]his in truth means that women in Zimbabwe cannot approach the courts alleging the infringement of any rights which they may have under CEDAW, as such rights are not protected under local laws”.<sup>23</sup>

Citizenship was a burning issue in the 2002 Zimbabwe presidential election. An amendment to the Citizenship of Zimbabwe Act that came into effect in 2001 states that:

“A citizen of Zimbabwe of full age who at the date of commencement of the Citizenship of Zimbabwe Amendment Act, 2001 is also a citizen of a foreign country; or at any time before that date, had renounced or purported to renounce his citizenship of a foreign country and has, despite such renunciation, retained his citizenship of that country shall cease to be a citizen of Zimbabwe six months after that date unless, before the expiry of that period, he has effectively renounced his foreign citizenship in accordance with the law of that foreign country and has made a declaration confirming such renunciation in the form and manner prescribed.”

According to the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) Observer Mission Report<sup>24</sup> the amendment was publicised in the urban areas but that a greater number of affected individuals live in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. These people were therefore unaware of the effect of the amendment and the deadline contained by it. The majority of those affected were farm workers and rural dwellers born in Zimbabwe’s neighbouring countries or whose

parents were born in these countries. Citizenship and the rights and privileges attached to it are often understood in a manner that is gender blind or male dominated.<sup>25</sup>

In Zimbabwe, citizenship is a prerequisite for registering as a voter, and therefore for voting as well as for standing for parliamentary office. National identity cards, a valid Zimbabwean passport or a Zimbabwean driver's licence were required for voting in the 2002 election. Non-citizens resident in Zimbabwe prior to 31 December 1985 were required to produce valid foreign passports with a relevant stamp to confirm their status as permanent residents.<sup>26</sup> Citizenship is also a requirement for standing for presidential office.

The Zimbabwe government's Poverty Assessment Survey of 1995 indicated that over two million families live in communal sectors in Zimbabwe and 70% of female Zimbabweans live in communal areas. Women who run and manage family farms head about 60% of these households. The observation that most people affected by the above amendment are farm workers and rural dwellers is therefore significant for women and for the attainment of gender equality in Zimbabwe.

It is highly likely that many women unknowingly lost their Zimbabwean citizenship after the promulgation of the amendment, and consequently lost their eligibility to vote in the 2002 election as well as in future elections.

In order to give effect to free and fair elections, an electoral environment that promotes gender equality must be created. Sex or gender should not be a ground on which unfair discrimination is allowed to occur. The substance of political rights, including the right to vote and to stand for public office, must be influenced by considerations of equality, including gender equality. In an election 'the will of the people' needs to reflect the political intentions of women and men alike.

Similarly, universal adult suffrage needs to be interpreted to extend to both women and men. These considerations need to be emphasised in view of the handling of citizenship issues where it is assumed that the world of politics – of which elections are a crucial component – is a male domain.<sup>27</sup>

## THE ELECTORAL LAW AND REGULATIONS

### *Parliamentary elections*

Section 38 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that parliament consists of 150 members: 120 will be elected by registered voters in 120 constituencies; eight members will be provincial governors appointed by the president; 10 will be chiefs elected by other chiefs; and 12 will be appointed by the president. Notably, these provisions are not aimed specifically at securing places for women in parliament, although in the 1990-1995 legislature the presidential powers were relied on to appoint five of the 17 women members in parliament at that time.<sup>28</sup>

Parliament in Zimbabwe is elected for a five-year period according to a constituency-based majoritarian first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. Under this system the winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, but not necessarily a majority of votes.

The electoral system is regarded as an important factor in determining the number of women elected to legislative office. Reynolds<sup>29</sup> notes that:

“... favourable societal conditions will not substitute for unfavourable electoral systems for women to reach their optimal representation in parliament and local legislatures. But unfavourable contextual conditions – including cultural biases and discriminatory practices – can be overcome to a great extent by alternate electoral systems.”<sup>30</sup>

In Zimbabwe, the electoral system places a great burden on women since membership in a political party is a prerequisite for election into parliament. Membership in political parties is a strongly gendered process based on the availability of one's time, energy, resources and skills to participate in the public domain. Political parties hold meetings, rallies and workshops and require their members to devote time to relationships with other party members to enhance their chances of attaining electoral office. These requirements therefore rule out the participation of large numbers of women, especially those of childbearing and child-caring ages who also shoulder domestic responsibilities.

Women's associational lives centre on churches, burial societies and charitable and related organisations rather than on political parties. An electoral system that excludes other associations apart from political parties privileges men's conceptions of legitimate institutions through which political contestations can occur. Women are therefore forced into competition for electoral participation in a male-dominated terrain. This effectively alienates women from political life.

It is generally accepted that the electoral system "can greatly contribute to the achievement of gender equality in politics".<sup>31</sup> A body of literature suggests that a closed list proportional representation (PR) system is more conducive to the electoral success of women than a constituency-based FPTP system. This is recognised by Priscilla Misihairambwi, an activist who takes the view that "the participation of women in politics will improve if the idea of proportional representation is adopted in the electoral system".<sup>32</sup>

A reason advanced for the electoral success of women under a PR system is that voters turn their attention to a political party and its policies rather than to an individual candidate. Wanzala,<sup>33</sup> who argues that voters prefer male to female candidates and are not faced with these choices if the party list system is applied, supports this view. It must be noted, however, that the PR system might also have the problem of imposing a candidate on the electorate. While the electorate may focus their energies on the solidity of a party's policies, the political processes are more than just policies on paper and they call for individuals who have initiative and creativity in the formulation and implementation of policy.

### *Presidential elections*

Sections 28 and 29 of the constitution address the election of Zimbabwe's president. According to section 28(1)(c), the president is elected by all persons registered as voters to a term of office of six years. The election of the president is also addressed in sections 93–102 of the Electoral Act.

### *Voter registration: Local and international instruments and the position of the marginalised*

The right to vote provided for in the various international human rights instruments and in Zimbabwe's constitution is qualified by the need for

registration as a voter. In Zimbabwe, as in all SADC countries, there are no constitutional or legislative grounds that prevent women from registering to vote and voting, provided they comply with the age and other requirements set out in the electoral law. Section 58(3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that a person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter if s/he has reached the age of 18 years and is a citizen of Zimbabwe or is a permanent resident of Zimbabwe. A person is disqualified from registration as a voter on the following grounds:

- insanity;
- being a convicted prisoner sentenced to more than six months' imprisonment;
- being under preventive detention for a continuous period of six months;
- being declared by the High Court as unable to manage his/her own affairs;
- being expelled from parliament (in accordance with the constitution) for a period of five years from the date on which a member of parliament (MP) vacates his/her seat; and
- being convicted of electoral fraud of any electoral offence and declared to be disqualified as a voter by the High Court.

The Electoral Act of Zimbabwe, 1990, states that to be registered as a voter on the voters' roll in a particular constituency, a voter must be resident in that constituency. Any voter wishing to be registered on the voters' roll for a constituency must complete the required form and lodge it with the constituency registrar for that constituency.<sup>34</sup> A voter may be registered in a constituency in which he/she is not resident by completing the prescribed form and forwarding it to the registrar-general. If the constituency registrar or registrar-general is satisfied that a particular voter be registered in a particular constituency, the voter's name and details will be included on the voters' roll for that constituency. Taking account of reasons related to the voter's place of origin, political affiliation or otherwise, a registrar-general may decide that it is appropriate that a voter be registered in a constituency in which s/he is not resident.

Registered voters may apply to transfer their registration to another constituency. A voter registered under the Electoral Act receives a voter's

registration card. A voter registered under the National Registration Act receives a notice or identity document under that act and does not require a voter registration card.

In one of the most comprehensive and critical analyses of electoral politics in Zimbabwe, Moyo<sup>35</sup> points out in reference to the 1990 general and presidential elections that the voters' roll was riddled with inaccuracies probably due to the inefficiency of the registrar-general's office.<sup>36</sup> It must be emphasised that the accusations and criticisms levelled against that office have become even more trenchant over the years, and the happenings in the office, especially in the run-up to the 2002 presidential election, vindicate some of the criticisms. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN)<sup>37</sup> points out that given the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society the amendments enunciated in the General Laws Amendment Act, 2002, meant that women were clearly disenfranchised from the voting process.

Problems regarding documentation have bedevilled the registrar-general's office. During the colonial era, colonial officials frequently misspelled native names or renamed natives, placing a heavy burden on individuals to correct their names as they grew older and became eligible to vote. In addition, there is poor recording of details of voters' and citizens' names. An example of a female University of Zimbabwe academic will suffice to illustrate the problem: the academic applied for a passport and submitted all the required documentation, pictures and payment. When she collected her passport on the day she was supposed to travel to a conference, she found that she had been recorded as a male. The immigration authorities advised her not to travel on that passport since she was likely to be arrested for using another person's passport! The woman had to abandon her travel plans, pay for new passport pictures and start the process afresh. There are other accounts of passport pictures being transposed on documents, where caucasian Zimbabweans are issued passports with pictures of others with negroid features and vice versa.

The customary naming practices and survival strategies of Zimbabweans before and after independence also complicate the registration processes. People often have more than one name and these names are used interchangeably depending on circumstances. Siblings may sometimes take

different surnames, their father's or a grandfather's name. Parents and children may therefore end up with different surnames. In addition, children's names may be changed to facilitate the repetition of grades at school, resulting in one person having two identities. Criminal use of registration facilities to effect name changes is also reported, especially where adults have been deported from other countries.

In custody battles, some adults may have no identity documents because a father has refused to let a child use his name and the mother has been alienated from her family because of a pre-marital pregnancy. In such cases children may grow up and turn adult without any documentation, especially in poor communities where a girl's only respectable survival option is to marry by common or customary law. Orphans experience these problems when nobody has taken responsibility for registering their births. Elderly people also find it difficult to secure birth certificates, resulting in their disenfranchisement since voter registration depends on other documentation. The social and financial costs of travelling to a town or city and paying for the transport and subsistence costs of two adult witnesses necessary for the registration of births and for other purposes are frequently too high for adult, poor and elderly women with child care and domestic responsibilities that are often more pressing than voter registration.

A further problem hampering voter registration is that in Zimbabwe, properties, leases and utilities are registered in the names of men who are socially considered heads of households and who are normally responsible for paying for utilities, while women buy food, clothes and pay for domestic labour in households. In the normal course of life, many women would therefore have no utility bills in their names as proof of residence in specific homes and areas. Lodgers who lease rooms in other people's houses also often do not have utility bills in their names; they too would have no such bills as proof of residence, thereby effectively prejudicing their participation in the electoral process.

In Zimbabwe's hyperinflationary environment (395%), rents escalate frequently forcing lodgers to move residence on a regular basis in search of cheaper accommodation. The mobility of lodgers from suburb to suburb as rents increase prejudices them, particularly women, with respect to voter

registration and the amendment as residence changes. Landlords also prefer lodgers who are single and have no children. Once lodgers marry and have children they are often forced to move to a larger residence where water and electricity bills are higher. To deal with these problems and to facilitate voter registration, lodgers often keep wives in rural areas for long intervals, forcing women and children to live in areas with poor infrastructure.

The General Laws Amendment Act further discriminates against women with the introduction of a new practice that provided for the office of the registrar-general to change married women's surnames to those of their husbands without notifying them or seeking their consent, thus potentially disenfranchising them. It is not a legal requirement for a woman in Zimbabwe to change her name on marriage. Many women only became aware of the anomaly when the names on their identity documents did not match those on the voters' roll, by which time it was probably too late to correct the error.<sup>38</sup> The Women's Coalition in a statement released in April 2002 pointed to the fact that some of the registry offices arbitrarily assigned women married to foreigners their husbands' citizenship, probably disenfranchising these women given the contentious nature of the citizenship issue in the run up to the 2002 presidential election, and preventing them from participating in the electoral process.

Since the majority of women reside in rural areas, registration as voters was highly problematic especially where no mobile voter registration facilities were available. Frail, old and overworked women with many domestic responsibilities – looking after children orphaned by AIDS (Zimbabwe has an HIV prevalence rate of at least 25%), tending to the terminally ill and tilling the land for subsistence agricultural – had to walk long distances to registration centres. Given this scenario, which was further exacerbated by the relatively violent and insecure political climate in 2000 and 2002, it is likely that many potential voters were deterred from registering. It is important to point out that the articulation of the position of disabled people, such as the visually impaired and the wheelchair bound, was very limited. Additionally, special registration procedures for the bed-ridden – *vis-à-vis* the HIV/AIDS pandemic – were not provided, resulting in their voices being silenced in the election. In some of the urban constituencies such as Mount Pleasant, however, elderly and frail men and women were allowed to vote

earlier than others to avoid them having to wait in the long queues at polling stations.

While mobile registration facilities went a long way towards alleviating problems for those who could not travel, the long distances required to reach these facilities was still problematic. Further, while the idea of mobile registration facilities is that they are brought to the people, they only reach those who can actually walk to them; and this is surely difficult for those who are bed-ridden. There is therefore a need for mobile registration facilities to move to the physical locations of those who are in no position to walk.

It should also be noted that voter registration depends on other forms of registration, such as an identification card. In a country riddled by mass inefficiencies and corruption in registration, it is likely that many people were therefore incapable of actually exercising their right to register and therefore to vote.

### *Standing for election to parliament*

According to section 58(2) of the constitution any person shall be qualified to be elected or appointed as a member of parliament, provided that s/he:

- is a registered voter;
- has reached the age of 21 years; and
- has lived in Zimbabwe for at least five years.

Tichagwa has stated that:

“Legally, there is no barrier to women’s participation in public life. The constitution and the Electoral Act 1990, enable women to vote in general and by-elections and to stand for election in presidential and parliamentary elections.”<sup>39</sup>

However, she points out that there are numerous obstacles to women’s participation:<sup>40</sup>

“Custom and culture ... hinder women’s involvement in a sector traditionally regarded as a male preserve. However it has to be

noted that in the recent past there has been an upsurge in the number of organisations that have attempted to raise the awareness of the populace on the general need to cultivate a culture that critically accepts the need for women political leaders. Women's roles tend to be confined to the home where they are involved in caring and looking after their families. Women's inability to gain family and public support is also a barrier to electoral participation. As far as this point is concerned it can also be pointed out that civic organisations such as the Women in Politics Support Unit, have also begun to publicly support women legislators and aspiring candidates and also [to] strategically and logistically help these women. Women's lack of financial resources is another barrier often cited as a hindrance to electoral participation by women."

Ten of the men and women who ran for parliament and who were interviewed for this study highlighted the problems of getting elected within their parties to run for parliament. According to the sentiments expressed by one woman, ZANU-PF and the MDC – as the dominant political parties – have made no deliberate attempts to include women in their party structures. The woman also stated that the parties did not even support women in the primary elections, given that most women traditionally have had no exposure to the system and are bound not to have the ample resources required for a prospective candidate to be able to actually run the primary part of the election. The woman pointed out that the greatest difficulty for any candidate was in the party primaries, where a prospective candidate had to have enough money to pay for such items as food for the campaign team, transport and fuel expenses, and in some cases even for protection in the form of bodyguards. It must be emphasised that given the general tumultuous political environment that characterised the parliamentary and presidential elections, expenses for physical protection were bound to be taxing on women who were newly initiated to the insecurity of the political process in Zimbabwe.

All the respondents and key informants across the political spectrum noted that the intra-party processes and primaries were the most difficult part of a campaign since competition for the right to represent their parties was fierce.

Once candidates had won the party primaries, their party machinery swung into action, campaigning for them and their party. For example, in the parliamentary elections, President Mugabe went on the campaign trail across the country to support and campaign for ZANU-PF candidates, and even those party cadres who had lost the primary elections were enjoined to support the winning candidates. Thus, in the inter-party elections, the struggle shifted to party level and the individual candidate became less significant, minimising candidate deficiencies. In the primaries, however, party cadres with personal, private and public information about each other used this mercilessly to compete for election.

### **SPECIFIC PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN AS CANDIDATES**

#### *Funding*

One of the most pervasive problems for women politicians is, as mentioned, funding. At the level of primaries, individuals must fend for themselves and their campaign team. ZANU-PF candidates pointed out that it is increasingly difficult for poor men and women to run effective campaigns at primary level because of the stiff competition for seats. During primaries a campaign team needs, among others, transport, food, regalia and insignia which profile the candidate. The cost of T-shirts, pens, pencils, caps and other accessories have escalated in Zimbabwe's hyperinflationary environment. Increasingly, the newer parliamentary candidates tend to be young businessmen with enough resources to run effective campaigns. Running a campaign in a rural constituency is very expensive since these constituencies are huge and not as well served by roads, telephones, electricity and other infrastructure as urban constituencies. Travelling distances to meetings, rallies and other campaign-related activities therefore takes long and exhausts the candidates. Women candidates running campaigns and shouldering domestic responsibilities are particularly overworked and likely to burn out, in addition to spending large sums of money to fund their campaigns.

#### *Hostility from men*

For women candidates, resentment of their public involvement is usually high especially in the conservative rural areas. All women candidates across party lines mentioned that in the 2000 parliamentary elections they were

subjected to verbal abuse and harassment by male colleagues and the public for their political aspirations. Private information, such as women's relationships, is made public and can be used against them. Single, divorced and widowed women are particularly vulnerable since such women tend to be perceived as unruly and as unfit wives. Women candidates (notably new candidates) are considered easy competition, especially among men looking for seats since women are easily attacked on both private and public issues.

In view of these difficulties, women have to build strategic coalitions with men, working out compromises that they would otherwise not make if they constituted a critical mass in their political parties. The need for building coalitions with men is unavoidable and demands skill so that women do not lose out on their own agendas.

It is reported that the 2000 parliamentary elections saw the highest number of women candidates contesting an election in Zimbabwe's history.<sup>41</sup> Fifty-five women candidates from five political parties competed for 120 seats in the national legislature. Of the 55 candidates, however, only 14 (25%) were elected.

This figure represents 9.3% of the total 150 parliamentary seats; fewer than those secured by women after the 1995 election when 22% of the parliamentary seats were held by women.<sup>42</sup> This result was a disappointment to women's groups especially after their efforts, which were aimed at sensitising women to vote for women and to promote a women's agenda from a higher political level.<sup>43</sup> However, it is necessary to critique the assumption that voting for women by women is good in and of itself, and that it follows that the sensitisation of women on the need to vote for female candidates is critical.

The MDC, Zimbabwe's newest opposition party, fielded 10 women candidates. Again it is important to note that past the primary phase most women would have left the race. There is therefore need for a policy that deliberately seeks to increase the number of women candidates and also gives female candidates an equal opportunity to be voted in to political decision-making bodies such as parliament.

The Women's Action Group (WAG) expressed dissatisfaction with women's representation at party level. WAG's legal officer is reported to have said:

"Given the fact that women make up the majority of the electorate (52%), we expect this to be reflected by having a proportionate number of women candidates. This, however, is not what has happened and this has prompted WAG to question the parties' commitment to the political empowerment of women."<sup>44</sup>

Tichagwa, commenting on women's political participation in Zimbabwe, states:

"The main factor limiting women's participation in politics is the gender composition of leaders in the political parties and the procedures for selection of candidates to run for parliamentary elections. Political parties are in general dominated by men who select candidates or influence the selection at the constituency and provincial levels. Women have little or no influence over the selection of candidates."<sup>45</sup>

If women are to feature as candidates in elections, critical interventions must take place at lower levels within political parties.

### *Quotas*

With regard to gender composition of political parties, in the run up to the 2000 parliamentary elections the ZANU-PF Women's League resolved that for every three posts held by men in the party, there had to be one elected female member.<sup>46</sup> Commenting on the resolution the league's secretary for information and publicity is reported to have said:

"We have been loyal for a very long time and yet nobody recognised us. We now want to make it clear to the president that we are an effective group and [require] his attention and recognition for what we have done [over] the past 19 years."

Chinowaita<sup>47</sup> reports that the league's resolution was controversial. The popular argument was that "affirmative action if not implemented carefully,

could further marginalise women in Zimbabwe".<sup>48</sup> A male Zimbabwean commenting on the resolution had the following to say:

"If women want to sustain their argument about equality of [the] sexes, they should stop clamouring for preferences based on their sex. They should learn to compete with men on an equal footing and get positions on merit."<sup>49</sup>

In response to this view a representative of the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association (ZWLA) stated that:

"The quota system is crucial in every society that is keen to address the historical imbalances of its people ... the quota system is there to make sure that women are elevated to the same level as men, who, for historical reasons have had an unfair advantage over their female counterparts."<sup>50</sup>

Thoko Matshe, a feminist activist, supports this view and stresses that "the quota system will not instil a culture of laxity in women, but only elevate them to the top".<sup>51</sup> Political analyst, John Makumbe, comments that:

"The quota system is a deliberate move to improve representation and participation of women in society ... women are shortchanging themselves by making modest demands, saying they should demand half of the representation to enable them to compete equally."<sup>52</sup>

Taking a different view, former Zimbabwean independent MP Margaret Dongo does not support a quota system. According to her, "women should strive for better positions through merit as this would boost their self esteem and confidence".<sup>53</sup>

Addressing the under-representation and participation of women in political life, Tichagwa states:

"For reasons that are not entirely clear, women as a political constituency tend to give support to male candidates more than

to female candidates. Some factors in this contradiction include intimidation by male opponents, constraints of family duties and financial problems faced by women candidates.”<sup>54</sup>

This dissatisfaction with the electoral success achieved by women candidates in the 2000 election raises the question of a quota in favour of women as electoral candidates, in addition to one applicable to political party structures. Neither the constitution of Zimbabwe nor the Electoral Act provides for such a quota. Since a gender quota is not constitutionally or legislatively provided for, it is left to political parties to ensure that sufficient numbers of women are included as election candidates. Before the 2000 election the MDC’s secretary for information and publicity, Learnmore Jongwe, is reported<sup>55</sup> to have said:

“ the chances for women to hold parliamentary and other powerful posts in their various parties depended on the will of their individual parties to support women. Women’s chances of success depended on their own efforts and the programmes of their parties.”

As indicated earlier, the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development expresses a commitment to the achievement of a target of at least 30% women in political and decision-making structures by the year 2005. Table 1 (p24) illustrates women’s representation in parliaments in SADC countries.

The SADC target of 30% women parliamentarians by 2005 is unlikely to be achieved without the introduction of constitutional and legislative quotas and an electoral system that guarantees the electoral success of women. The pros and cons of gender quotas have been continually debated.

Figures 1 and 2 (p25) set out the advantages and disadvantages that are thought to accompany the introduction of a gender quota in a majoritarian FPTP constituency system.

Since the signing of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development in 1997, a campaign for 30% representation by women in positions of political decision-making has gained ground.

Table 1: Gender balance in SADC parliaments

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House Elections	Seats	Women	% W	Upper House or Senate Elections	Seats	Women	% W
1	South Africa	04 2004	400	131	32.8	...	...	...	...
2	Mozambique	12 1999	250	75	30.0	06 1999	89	17	31.5
3	Namibia	11 1999	104	19	26.4	11 1998	26	2	7.7
4	Tanzania	10 2000	274	61	22.3	...	...	...	...
5	Botswana	10 1999	47	8	17.0	...	...	...	...
6	Angola	09 1992	220	34	15.5	...	...	...	...
7	Lesotho	05 2002	120	14	11.7	N/A	33	12	36.4
8	Zambia	12 2001	158	19	12.0	...	...	...	...
9	Zimbabwe	06 2000	150	15	10.0	...	...	...	...
10	Malawi	05 2004	193	18	9.3	...	...	...	...
11	Mauritius	09 2000	70	4	5.7	...	...	...	...
12	Swaziland	10 1998	65	2	3.1	10 1998	30	4	13.3
13	DRC	...	210	...	...	...	...	...	...

Source: Sickinga, 2004 cited in IPU-Women in National Parliaments situation as at 30 October 2003 (world regional averages).

**Figure 1: Voluntary party-based quotas in a constituency system**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Quotas compel parties actively to recruit women rather than merely leaving it to the party's women's league.</p> <p>Quotas ensure that women constitute a 'critical mass'.</p> <p>Women have the opportunity to influence decision-making.</p>	<p>Quotas may be seen as un-democratic because they interfere with the voters' choice.</p> <p>Quotas can create conflict within a party when a male member of the party has to make way for a woman.</p>

**Figure 2: Constitutional and legislative quota combined with a FPTP system**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The quota guarantees women representation in parliament and in local councils.</p> <p>A critical number of women have created gender awareness among policy makers and politicians.</p> <p>As a result of the quota there can be an increase in the number of women in cabinet.</p> <p>MPs provide a positive model for women and challenge the stereotype that women cannot hold public positions and responsibility.</p>	<p>The quota perpetuates the stereotype that women lack the capability to compete with men.</p> <p>Women representatives lack adequate support, capacity and networks to enable them to execute their functions. The system may allow unqualified women into parliament.</p> <p>The quota may ensure quantitative but not qualitative participation of women who may not be equipped to participate in parliament for the benefit</p> <p>The quota may not in itself be sufficient to address the structural constraints which inhibit women from entering politics.of women (and men) in society.</p>

**PATH TO ELECTION: A CASE STUDY**

Flora Buka was elected on a ZANU-PF ticket for a rural constituency. Her path to election was as follows: Buka worked as the headmistress of a school in the constituency and initially faced much hostility from the community because she was young (27) and female. But Buka did not mind this much and instead focused her energies on improving the school. In three years Buka had mobilised the community to electrify the school and to build more classrooms. The success of the school instilled in the community a sense of discipline and pride.

The community was so thrilled with Buka's performance that they urged her to compete for council office. Her initial attempt to be elected as a councillor failed, but Buka learned through this experience how to run a campaign and how to present and organise her team, as well as learning about the issues that the community identified with. The women in her community urged Buka to run for parliament and pledged to support her because she treated them with respect and mobilised them to work with her in the community.

In 2000, the women supported Buka to run in the party primary, which she won. After that it was easier since the party supported her financially and with human resources. Violent incidents in her constituency were few and small but Buka was always afraid for her children since no violence had been experienced in the community until she ran for parliament.

For Flora Buka, the support of women in her community is critical; in her experience women do support other women to the extent of voting for them when those women address their concerns. Buka sees the tenacity of rural women, their determination in registering to vote and their dominance in rural constituencies as a strength. Buka is not afraid of challenges since she believes she will be judged on the basis of her accomplishments and on her ability to deliver on her promises. Buka believes that the conservatism of the rural populace is an advantage for her since other candidates who have no track record of addressing the concerns of her constituents will not sway them easily.

## **PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATURE**

Section 40 of the constitution states that to be elected president a person must be:

- a citizen of Zimbabwe by birth or descent;
- aged 40 years or more; and
- living in Zimbabwe.

Presidential candidates from three political parties, ZANU-PF, the MDC and the National Alliance for Good Governance (NAGG), along with two independent candidates contested the presidential election. All five candidates were men.

## **PARTY MANIFESTOES AND PROMISES**

During an election campaign a political party's manifesto sets out that party's election promises. Some insight into a party's commitment to the protection of women's rights and gender equality can be gleaned from a party's manifesto, and a party's real commitment to these issues should be assessed by the extent to which that party lives up to those promises.

During the 2000 parliamentary election the ZANU-PF and MDC manifestos stated the following on the question of gender:

### *The ZANU-PF manifesto*

"Women have been and still remain the custodians of unity, peace and development. They are also the custodians of land. This is why ZANU-PF and the government have always endeavoured to improve the status of women and their quality of life. Yet the challenge is that women who constitute 52% of Zimbabwe's population remain under-represented in key policy positions in the public and private sectors, discriminatory practices persist in both the domestic and public spheres and there are major disparities between educational opportunities for girls and boys in favour of the latter. Important gender concerns include access to land, business and educational opportunities, equal representation in decision-making positions, promotion of reproductive rights and protection from gender violence in both the domestic and public spheres. Our challenge today is to mainstream these

concerns as part of our promotion of unity, peace and development in our country.”

### *The MDC manifesto*

“The MDC will promote a grassroots process towards gender equity in economic, social, political and domestic life, and will ensure that women are not unfairly prejudiced by their childbearing and caring role in relation to employment or economic opportunity.

The MDC will commission a gender analysis of key public instruments, including the national budget, and [will] subject the findings of this analysis to national debate on how its policies of gender equity<sup>56</sup> can best be implemented.

The MDC will amend labour laws to provide for maternity leave on 100% pay, will enhance the involvement of women in technical training and employment, promote equal employment opportunities between men and women and promote family norms that treat male and female children equally.

The MDC will promote the constitutional right of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women to be recognised and entrenched, with appropriate measures to implement this law in law and practice in the domestic, educational, health, economic, employment and political spheres where gender discrimination is still found.”<sup>57</sup>

In the presidential election the MDC manifesto stated: “Women need peace, jobs, education, equal opportunities now”. The MDC also promised to include women in decision-making processes in Zimbabwe. The NAGG committed itself to creating an environment in which women could contribute to Zimbabwe’s development.

ZANU-PF’s presidential campaign promised the following: “Giving real power to women”. ZANU-PF undertook to give women full access to land under the land reform programme and to implement a quota system that

would promote women within the party and government as well as in the public and private sectors. It promised to punish the perpetrators of gender violence in the home and at work.

On reflection, most of the election material is full of rhetoric given the problems that women have experienced in acquiring assets such as land, jobs, constituencies in which to run, and meaningful positions in both ZANU-PF and the MDC.

There is a need to critique some of the election manifestos since their promises of creating jobs once elected into parliament seem to lack gender sensitivity. For example, only 15% of Zimbabwean women have ever featured in the formal employment sector of the economy when it was still growing by 4% a year in the 1980s. Even then they were confined to the lower echelons of the organisations in which they worked, both in the civil service and private sector. In election manifestos 'jobs' probably refer to those for men, not women. The priority for most women in urban areas would be to see developments in the informal sector that could improve their access to capital to start small business ventures. The emphasis on jobs for all people reflects the male wage workers' influence of the labour movement on election strategies in the opposition MDC.

Most of these election promises have to be indicted for being insensitive to the diversity of women's needs and for lumping women as a unitary mass category. Issues such as maternity leave are probably incorporated in election manifestos as a result of middle-class women who are a minority in the middle and top echelons of political parties. Furthermore, ZANU-PF's proclamations of the "economy is land and the land is the economy", assumes that all members of the population are prospective farmers, when this is not the case. While the economy may be underpinned by agriculture, there is little interest within ZANU-PF itself in equitably sharing the land between men and women. Gender sensitive and realistic proclamations in election manifestos must recognise the reality that most farmers are rural women.

Once candidates are voted in they have to be made accountable to their promises and this accountability has to be gender sensitive too. The Land Review Committee in 2003 found that only 15% of land allocations were

made to women in the aftermath of the land redistribution programme. In Zimbabwe, women work primarily in agriculture and the informal sector and the MDC's campaign promises of jobs, as mentioned, address men's concerns for wage jobs more than women's.

### **THE MEDIA AND COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS**

Waldahl<sup>58</sup> points out that a fundamental problematic connected to the political agenda is how an issue is communicated and entrenched as relevant in the public domain. A connection exists between the emphases put on various issues by the media and how these issues end up in society's opinion-forming process.<sup>59</sup> Control and access to the media is therefore an important issue in the formation of opinions about pertinent political issues. Waldahl<sup>60</sup> notes further that the media plays an important role in the democratic processes in any society. Four duties are of relevance in relation to the role of the media in the satisfactory functioning of democracy.

First, as pointed out by Curran,<sup>61</sup> the media plays an important role in the surveillance of society, especially in modern societies where the media should scan society to detect any abuse of power by governments. Waldahl<sup>62</sup> states that the media has to be independent from authorities in order to carry out this function. This aspect is of particular importance in the context of the 2000 and 2002 Zimbabwe elections where the government-controlled media were used for stifling opposition sentiments and for suppressing alternative viewpoints.

For Waldahl,<sup>63</sup> the second duty of the media concerns information; the modern media are society's major source of political opinion, knowledge and insight. The onus is therefore on the media to deliver relevant and credible information pertinent to the political process.

A third duty concerns the function of the media as commentators on political issues. Waldahl<sup>64</sup> notes that the media should be involved in public debates on political issues in a free and critical manner that is not aligned to any political party. Again this is highly relevant to the Zimbabwe situation given the cleavage that existed, and still exists, between the government-controlled and independent media.

The fourth task of the media, which is related to the above duty, is that the media should provide an arena for public debate:<sup>65</sup> only the media possess the capability to disseminate the diversity of political opinions and ideas to a majority of people at the same time. At this juncture, however, it must be mentioned that the media has sometimes been inaccessible to the majority of the populace and that this therefore curtails the efficacy of the media in creating a free public sphere. Following theorists like Habermas, the media can be conceptualised as a public sphere in which individuals make knowledge claims freely without coercion and recourse to dogma – which Habermas characterises as undistorted communication.<sup>66</sup> In an ideal free-speech community, consensus is achieved through completely free and unconstrained discussion that follows only the logic of rational argument, where differentials in power, status and class do not affect the ability to articulate viewpoints and whether these views will be accepted or not.<sup>67</sup> Again, this is a point that requires examination in any analysis of role of the media in the context of Zimbabwe's 2000 and 2002 elections.

### *Zimbabwean elections and the media*

Moyo<sup>68</sup> has argued that the 1990 presidential and parliamentary elections are highly significant in the history of Zimbabwe, given the view that the political processes were firmly in the hands of a post-independent black government. At first glance it would appear that all political parties have unlimited access to the mass media, when this is not the case.

In the 1990 elections Zimbabwe's experience was that the ruling ZANU-PF party monopolised the mass media and used it to its own advantage against now defunct parties. This situation has persisted, especially in the government-controlled media. In relation to the 1990 elections Moyo<sup>69</sup> notes that the ruling party conducted the election willy-nilly, in violation not only of the then Electoral Act but also of advertising standards regarding the publication and transmission of objectionable messages.

With the growth of the independent media in the late 1990s, there was an increase in the capability of opposition parties to disseminate print information without constraint from the government-controlled media. Coupled with this was the growth of civil society organisations (CSOs), which also used the media to disseminate information detailing abuses of power

by ZANU-PF officials and other people aligned to the ruling party. In the context of the 2000 and 2002 elections, the ruling party resorted to numerous amendments and enactments of broadcasting laws, which saw to it that the opposition parties would not have access to the public media. A historical analysis of elections reveals that powerful forces in society influence and seek to influence popular opinion through institutionalised mechanisms such as the media.<sup>70</sup>

### *Media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 elections: A gender analysis*

Women are some of the most disenfranchised people in accessing the media and this has to be taken into consideration when analysing electoral processes. In a survey of the media in Southern Africa, EISA<sup>71</sup> looked into the nature of the media and criticised the way in which the media was abused by the ruling parties for their own purposes, in the process disenfranchising other sectors of the body politic from having full and equitable access to the media. The SADC Electoral Support Network (SADC-ESN)<sup>72</sup> notes that elections, like any other political processes, are gendered; this also applies with respect to access to the media. The South African-based Commission on Gender Equality (CGE)<sup>73</sup> in its report on the South African elections pointed out that the media tends to give wider coverage to the socially powerful at election time.

Given the argument that women have only just become visible in politics, the media in Zimbabwe considers women candidates as lightweights who are not politically interesting, choosing to focus instead on the male heavyweights such as party leaders and other office holders. The coverage given to women during elections has therefore tended to be cursory, patronising and not gender sensitive, often limited to cases where women have been beaten, raped or violated.

### **VOTER EDUCATION**

In many societies men have greater access to political power and decision making than women. Electoral participation depends on access to education about the electoral system and how to navigate it. In Zimbabwe, while literacy levels tend to be high nationally, standing at over 87%, there are age differences in literacy levels: elderly people tend to be less literate than younger people, and women less so than men of a similar age.

Voter education plays a crucial role in making the electoral environment hospitable to all potential voters. As stated earlier, however, this environment is usually male dominated. This feature is sometimes coupled with beliefs that politics, including elections, is the business of men and that women need not participate as voters and that they lack what it takes to be political leaders.

Voter education programmes can, however, overlook stereotyped gender roles by focusing on, for example, the technicalities of how to vote and the technical aspects of the type of electoral system applicable to a particular election. It has been argued that:

“[C]ivic education should be aimed at empowering voters to make choices as to whom to vote for as well as increase their awareness about the basic features of the political process.”<sup>74</sup>

An obvious feature of the political process is the small number of women who take part in it at the higher levels within political parties and as elected officials. Most women participate in electoral processes only through voting for candidates in their constituencies, the majority of whom are male. Voter education programmes should have as a prime purpose the undoing of negative stereotypes about women in political life, including elections. This can be achieved through voter education programmes that include the following objectives:

- To teach voters that if they elect men or women into government they should be sure that the candidate will prioritise issues that are of benefit to both men and women;
- to mobilise women and men to vote for women and men equally;
- to raise awareness among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society on gender issues;
- to promote awareness of women’s political rights;
- to encourage women, in particular, to register and to vote for those working on behalf of women’s causes; and
- to develop an understanding that the vote is secret and that both women and men do not have to inform anyone, particularly male relatives, about who they voted for.

At the time of the 2000 parliamentary election, Zimbabwe's Electoral Act did not contain any provisions pertaining to voter education. The act did not make voter education the responsibility of any of the statutorily established electoral authorities. In this regard a view has been advanced that the government of Zimbabwe:

“... does not appear to have recognised the vital need and importance of civic and voter education, nor to have committed adequate resources for this purpose. Efforts to run a civic education programme through the Ministry of National Affairs seem to have had only a small impact.”<sup>75</sup>

For the 2000 parliamentary election, the role of providing civic and voter education was assumed by civic and church-related organisations. These included the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Zimrights, the ZWRCN and Women and Law in Southern Africa.<sup>76</sup> The need for women to participate in the political process was covered by the ZWRCN's civic education programme, which included focus areas on women and elections, women and inheritance and women and land.<sup>77</sup>

The General Laws Amendment Act (GLAA), which introduced various changes to the Electoral Act, was passed in time for the 2002 presidential election and came into effect on 4 February 2002. The GLAA was, however, challenged and annulled by the Supreme Court on 27 February. The nullified act contained sections that criminalised the provision of voter education by civil society groups and prohibited these groups from receiving foreign funding for voter education.

After the nullification of the GLAA, President Mugabe – relying on the presidential powers set out in section 158 of the Electoral Act – reintroduced the above provisions, thereby limiting the scope for voter education. Voter education fell within the domain of the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) as only the ESC or organisations or persons appointed by it could provide voter education. Given the fact that the ESC is government appointed, as a body it was perceived to be partial to the wishes of the ruling party. The voter education materials disseminated by the ESC lacked gender

sensitivity and focused on the technical aspects of voting and the requirements for voter registration. Voters were apprehensive, particularly in those areas where ZANU-PF was dominant, and the ESC could do nothing to allay voters' anxieties, given that it was also seen as protecting the interests of ZANU-PF since the ESC was appointed by President Mugabe.

Notwithstanding these legal provisions, in the run up to the presidential election "civil organisations worked to provide voter education".<sup>78</sup> While the role played by these organisations has to be acknowledged, a critical analysis of the content of the voter education materials they disseminated indicates problems with regard to appropriateness, relevance and content. Some of the methods of distributing material, especially printed material, were inappropriate and reduced the effectiveness of the messages contained therein. For example, flyers were thrown out of mobile vehicles, particularly in urban areas such as Chitungwiza, and it was left to the discretion of the curious would-be voter to pick them up. This is a highly ineffective form of voter education, especially considering the dangers in trying to pick up flyers in the middle of busy highways and roads. Also, given the violent political atmosphere that prevailed in the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections, people were sometimes afraid to pick up voter education material lest violence be unleashed against them.

At another level, the voter education material produced can also be indicted for their lack of relevance and the absence of people to explain the messages. For example, looking through some of the brochures one finds much regurgitation of Western political experiences. One such pamphlet published by the ZESN tried to convince the electorate to vote by emphasising the power of one vote. The pamphlet reads:

"THE POWER OF ONE

Don't think that your vote does not count:

By only one vote

1645 Oliver Cromwell gained control of England.

By only one vote

1649 Charles I of England was executed.

By only one vote

1776 America was given the English Language [sic] instead of German.

By only one vote  
1845 Texas was brought into the union.  
By only one vote  
1868 President Andrew Johnson was saved from impeachment.  
By only one vote  
1875 France was changed into a republic from a monarchy.  
By only one vote  
1876 Rutherford Hayes was given the US presidency.  
By only one vote  
1933 Adolph Hitler was given control of the Nazi party.  
Your vote counts.  
Go and vote on 9 and 10 March 2002.”

The citation of Western leaders, many of them unknown to Zimbabweans, who changed the course of history in the West clearly shows that some of the voter education material lacked an empirical grounding in the lived realities of the electorate. This could, however, also reflect the funding patterns of NGOs: once funded by a specific body, there is a tendency for NGOs to copy and use the voter education material that comes from these countries regardless of their appropriateness. While Western countries have to be commended for their attempts to instil principles of democracy through the vehicle of CSOs, the onus is on these organisations to develop culturally, socially and historically appropriate voter education material that is recognisable and grounded in the real experiences of Zimbabweans. While all the 2002 presidential candidates were men, this fact should not have ruled out voter education programmes that increased the electorate’s awareness to vote for candidates who recognised women and promoted their social and economic interests. However, the effect of the legal provisions which criminalised the provision of voter education by CSOs was to curtail the content and reach of CSO voter education programmes that the government perceived to be promoting the interests of opposition parties, mainly the MDC. Despite the limited sphere of operation imposed on CSOs, they could have produced more relevant voter education material.

In addressing the rights and interests of women, the Crisis in Zimbabwe Committee placed an advertisement in one of Zimbabwe’s daily newspapers entitled, ‘A woman’s check list for choosing a president’.<sup>79</sup> It read as follows:

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“It is time to choose the man (unfortunately) who will lead our country for the next six years. You are a smart woman. Ask yourself:

- Does he respect women?
- Does he have a good record with the woman in his life?
- Have you heard and seen him personally articulating what he will do for you as a woman?
- Does his party believe and show by their actions that women’s rights are human rights?
- Does his manifesto speak to issues that concern you as a woman?
- Does he have a clean record on issues that concern you as a woman?
- Does he have a clean record on issues of violence, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, organised violence and torture or verbal abuse?

And the ultimate test would you live with this man and entrust our life and that of your children to him?

If you answered NO any of these questions, **THINK AGAIN.**  
Don’t just give your vote. Vote for equal rights and justice.”

The problem with such checklists is that they imply that when candidates are not gender sensitive, women should not vote for them. Given the inference that women candidates are the only ones who might be sensitive to the needs of women and given the current political climate which is not amenable to the participation of women, it would be safe to point out that the realisation of women’s goals will have to be pursued through gender-sensitive men and women. At the same time adverts like the one above should also be questioned for the way they assume that the public would have information on individual men’s private lives and their relationships with women. It is also problematic for women to articulate issues that are assumed to belong to the private domain because men are usually not judged harshly for sexual impropriety whereas women, more often than not, are judged on the basis of their private lives, marital status, number of children and relationships with men. This approach has the potential to backfire on women since it is they, rather than men, who are more likely to be punished publicly for having private lives that men and conservative women do not approve of.

One opposition candidate – a woman who was interviewed for this study and who ran unsuccessfully for a rural constituency – pointed out that single, divorced and widowed women in her party faced problems securing electoral approval. She stated further that political involvement had destroyed some woman’s marriages, making it difficult for them to continue to secure the approval of an electorate which frowns on the participation of uncoupled women in high-profile activities such as elections.

It is worth stressing again that it does not necessarily follow that male candidates are automatically gender insensitive and that women are gender sensitive, woman-friendly and concerned about the promotion of women’s increased participation in electoral activities and politics. What is important to point out is that the electorate should be encouraged to vote for candidates of any party, regardless of their gender, so long as they articulate issues of importance to women with imagination, innovation and, above all, with gender sensitivity. Voter education therefore needs to take cognisance of the fallacy of essentialist assumptions about women’s gender sensitivity and men’s gender insensitivity. Voter education also needs to take into account the realities of men’s dominance and the need to place the burden of developing gender sensitivity on both men and women.

## **THE ELECTION PHASE**

### *The Delimitation Commission*

The Delimitation Commission determines the limits of the 120 constituencies in Zimbabwe so that each constituency should have “as nearly equal as may be equal” numbers of voters in each. When the commission determines constituencies it is required to take into account the geographical distribution of voters registered on the common roll. The number of registered voters determines the number of constituencies in each province. The greater the number of registered voters in a province, the greater the number of constituencies.

The Delimitation Commission also gives consideration to “the community of interest between voters” when it determines electoral boundaries. It has been pointed out that in giving effect to the community of interest between voters, “[a]s far as was possible the Commission made constituencies co-

extensive with administrative districts, suburbs or townships". For the same reason, it tried to avoid combining rural and urban communities into one constituency.<sup>80</sup>

There has been no public participation in the determination of electoral constituencies in Zimbabwe; in other words, women and other stakeholders have been excluded from the delimitation process. Delimitation is usually a highly politicised process. The drawing of electoral boundaries can be manipulated so as to give a political party undue influence (known as gerrymandering). Certain parties place stronger emphasis on, and express a greater commitment to, issues aimed at achieving gender equality than others. The drawing up of electoral boundaries and the determining of constituencies can therefore have implications for gender equality. Women and men should therefore participate and have decision-making powers in this highly politicised process. The Zimbabwean constitutional and legislative provisions do not, as an affirmative measure, guarantee positions for women on this political decision-making body.

### *The Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC)*

The ESC has the responsibility of supervising the registration of voters and the conduct of parliamentary, presidential and local government elections.<sup>81</sup> The ESC is made up of a chairperson and four other members and is appointed for a period of not longer than five years. Currently none of the four members is a woman. The absence of women in such an important body is a marker of the limited role that women have generally played and been assigned in electoral politics. For equitable representation at all levels of the political, social and economic strata, women will have to be included in all important decision-making bodies. While one cannot guarantee that women have the concerns of other women at heart, experiences in Scandinavia show that higher numbers of women representatives tend to be linked to the foregrounding of women's concerns and issues in parliament, whereas the continued marginalisation of women in decision-making bodies usually perpetuates the sidelining of women's concerns.

During the election, the European Union (EU) observer mission pointed out that the ESC ran the voting and counting of votes efficiently. Long queues were experienced at polling stations in urban areas and voting had to be

extended for those areas where voters had not been able to vote during the two designated days.

### *The Electoral Directorate*

The Electoral Directorate's responsibilities include coordinating the activities of the ministries and government departments with regard to the delimitation of constituencies, the registration of voters, the conduct of polls and other matters concerning elections. The directorate is responsible for ensuring that elections are conducted efficiently, properly, freely and fairly. Members of the directorate include a chairperson appointed by the president, the registrar-general and between two and ten other members appointed by the minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. Members' terms of office are fixed at the time of their appointment.<sup>82</sup>

### *Registrar-General*

The registrar-general is a public servant subject to the authority of the Electoral Directorate and is central to all electoral activities including the:

- registration of voters;
- preparation of the voters' roll;
- presiding over the nomination court for the nomination of candidates;
- provision of ballot papers;
- setting up of polling stations;
- provision of electoral staff;
- declaration of electoral results; and
- custody of electoral materials.<sup>83</sup>

Given the difficulties mentioned earlier *vis-à-vis* the registration of voters, the preparation of the voters' roll and the shortage of mobile polling stations, the elderly, frail, sick and infirm, particularly women in both rural and urban areas, experienced problems related to voting.

## **ELECTIONS AND VIOLENCE**

At the time of the 2000 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe the country was already experiencing clashes between farm owners and the peasantry and war veterans who had occupied farms. According to the government,

the farm invasions could not be controlled countrywide. The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries observed that the demonstrations were not peaceful and that there had been numerous reports of kidnappings, beatings and rapes.<sup>84</sup> It is important to point out that a climate of violence was already present in some heavily contested constituencies, and civic organisations should have made an attempt to document and critically analyse how this atmosphere could have affected the voting of women and other traditionally marginalised people in society. The forum noted that the election was marred by political violence and intimidation. It noted further that the prevailing climate of fear had an extreme effect on the electoral process as a whole.<sup>85</sup>

Zimbabwe's Electoral Act lists a number of corrupt practices (sections 104 to 109) and illegal practices (sections 110 to 130). Section 105 of the act includes provisions which state that any person who directly or indirectly, by himself or by any other person makes use of or threatens to make use of any force or violence against any other person in order to compel that person to vote or not to vote commits the offence of undue influence.

Women in Zimbabwe, like women in many other countries, do not live free from violence. It is reported that one in every three Zimbabwean women is physically assaulted and one in two is psychologically abused.<sup>86</sup> Violence against women in Zimbabwe takes the form of physical, psychological and forced isolation and the undermining of a woman's self-esteem, sexual violence and economic violence, through which women may be denied access to work, income and maintenance.<sup>87</sup>

While women, like men in Zimbabwe, can rely on section 105 of the Electoral Act when they experience violence during an election, it is unlikely that women will have recourse to the section when they experience violence or threats of violence other than those kinds listed under the section. Violence in the forms mentioned above can be used against women who wish to break with their traditional roles in the private realm associated with home and family to participate in public life, either as voters or as electoral candidates. Section 105 of the Electoral Act is not aimed specifically at women and does not seem to contemplate the economic and psychological violence to which many women may be susceptible and which is likely to go unreported.

Some women and men were prevented from voting in the elections due to physical violence in Bulawayo and Harare. The EISA Mission<sup>88</sup> observes that most of the reports of violence appeared to have been directed against men. Also, politically motivated violence from January to March 2002 included four cases of rape.

EISA's Observer Mission stated that given the rigorous efforts of the state and ruling party to mobilise rural support in ZANU-PF strongholds, larger numbers of rural women (eligible to vote) voted in the 2002 presidential election than in the earlier parliamentary election. The mission noted that in a grossly unfair election this development should not be seen as an advance for gender equality.

The Electoral Act contains no provisions expressly aimed at securing the safety of women as voters or as candidates. By contrast, South Africa's Electoral Act provides an example of protecting women's human rights, including their physical integrity, during an election. The Electoral Code of Conduct in the South African act aims to promote conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections, including tolerance of democratic political activity, free political campaigning and open public debate. Contraventions of the provisions of the code constitute criminal conduct. The Code of Conduct contains the following section:

*“Role of women*

6. Every registered party and every candidate must –
  - a) respect the right of women to communicate freely with parties and candidates;
  - b) facilitate the full and equal participation of women in political activities;
  - c) ensure the free access of women to all public political meetings, marches, demonstrations, rallies and other public political events; and
  - d) take all reasonable steps to ensure that women are free to engage in any political activities.”

Also section 9(1) states that no registered party or candidate may use language or act in a way that may discriminate on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sex,

gender, class or religion in connection with an election or political activity. Furthermore, section 9(2)(e) of the Electoral Code of Conduct stipulates that no person may abuse a position of power, privilege or influence, including parental, patriarchal and traditional or employment authority to influence the conduct or outcome of an election. This section suggests that it is alert to the subordinate position (created by situational and structural barriers) that certain women find themselves in by virtue of their various roles, including those of wife, mother, daughter, employee and community member, and the pressures they experience because of the gendered understanding of these roles.

Jean Chimhandamba<sup>89</sup> writes that situational barriers usually restrict women's electoral participation. Women bear family responsibilities as mothers and wives and are not always able to participate in electoral activities. Structural barriers also play a part in that compared to men, women lack equal educational opportunities, professional skills and levels of income. Chimhandamba notes that both men and women cast women who aspire for political leadership in negative stereotypes. In the run up to the 2000 Zimbabwean election, women reported that the hostile treatment from men during campaigning hindered women's full participation in politics. Certain men have criticised the involvement of women in politics and regard them as incompetent.<sup>90</sup>

In order to assist societies in overcoming the barriers faced by women, the state should through legislation (and other measures) including electoral legislation aim at promoting gender equality. Electoral legislation should contain provisions that ensure that women's and men's freedom of movement, freedom of expression (including the freedom to receive and impart ideas and information), their freedom to associate and political rights (such as the right to vote and the right to stand for political office) are made meaningful. These rights and freedoms are important in an electoral context. Freedom of movement, expression and association are protected in the Declaration of Rights in sections 20, 21 and 22 of the constitution, respectively.

As mentioned earlier section 23 protects individuals from discrimination, including discrimination based on sex. There is no express mention of discrimination based on gender; however, the constitution considers it lawful

to discriminate on the grounds of race, place of origin, political views, colour or sex in the areas of family law, marriage, divorce, inheritance and customary law. These are all areas of private law. The list does not include constitutional law or electoral law – both areas of public law. Discrimination on the ground of sex, which on a purposive interpretation includes gender, is therefore not constitutionally sanctioned.

#### **OBSERVER MISSIONS AND GENDER AWARENESS**

During the presidential and parliamentary elections numerous observer missions were present in Zimbabwe. The SADC and EU observer mission reports need attention given the contentious issues in the elections regarding citizenship and the general electoral environment. The EU observer mission report mentioned that there was much intimidation in the elections and also highlighted the inequitable access to the media. However, not much is said about the position of women candidates; a striking omission given the issue of the media, funding problems and the other issues discussed earlier herein. One expects the SADC observer mission report to have covered the relations between men and women in the light of the numerous difficulties that women experience in the electoral process. Given the recent interest in the improvement of women *vis-à-vis* increasing their numbers in parliament through the 30% initiative in the SADC region, more could have been said with regard to these issues.

Not much sensitivity is brought to the issues regarding the position of the disabled and the bedridden with reference to voter education, registration and the voting process itself in both the EU and SADC observer mission reports. A focus on electoral democracy must consider the position of all the disenfranchised and dispossessed. A critical analysis should have been done with reference to special voting procedures for the frail and generally for those who are not able to access polling stations given the HIV / AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa and that the region is characterised by massive inequalities by race, class, gender, ethnicity and age, which result in other sectors of the populace not being able to exercise their right to vote.

#### **THE POST-ELECTION PHASE: A GENDERED ANALYSIS**

The first issue that comes to mind in analysing the election results is the distribution of seats by gender. After the 2000 parliamentary elections, it

was quite clear that women had not fared very well at the polls. In fact, a historical analysis of the simple numbers shows that women's numbers in parliament reached a high in 1990-1995 and has declined steadily from then on (see Table 2). The reasons for this decline will be explored in greater detail in order to generate measures for addressing this issue.

**Table 2: Women's participation in legislative bodies in Zimbabwe from 1980 to date**

	1980-84	1985-90	1990-95	1995-00	2000-05
House of Assembly: Total	100	100	150	150	150
Men	91	92	129	128	136
Women	9	8	21	22	14
% Women	9	8	14	14.1	9.3

Source: Gaidzanwa, 2003

The decline in women's numbers reflects the change in electoral dynamics within and between political parties. It is these dynamics that influence and in some cases negatively affect women's chances of election.

In the main opposition MDC party, seven women were elected in the urban constituencies, mainly in Bulawayo and Harare. It was possible for MDC women to secure safe seats because of the relatively new and fluid structures of this party. Thus, women who had been active in the unions and non-governmental sector were able to purvey their political experience and secure seats for themselves in a situation where prominent and middle-class men and women were not willing to align themselves publicly with the MDC. This was particularly so amongst the middle class who generally wanted to distance themselves from a worker-based political party supported by students and liberals. This created a window of opportunity for MDC women and youths to secure relatively safe urban seats.

In ZANU-PF, women who had occupied the relatively safe urban seats in previous elections found themselves caught in the whirlwind of protest against ZANU-PF in 2000. They all lost their seats and it was only the strong rural women candidates who won the elections on the ZANU-PF ticket. Men who contested in the rural constituencies fared much better due to ZANU-PF's traditional rural support base. These cases also show that, in general, women start their political careers from different places in comparison to men. In ZANU-PF women were more easily elected in the urban areas where there was greater acceptance of their careers, diverse marital statuses and their political aspirations. This is also the case in the MDC, since MDC women have cut their political teeth in urban constituencies. As urban seats are perceived to be safe, there tends to be stiffer competition for them in subsequent elections as urban men with poor or no rural bases begin to join political parties and contest elections. For MDC women, the 2005 parliamentary elections are likely to be more tightly contested as men and women compete more intensely for these seats. In ZANU-PF the opposite is true as the urban areas are perceived to be under the control of the MDC. ZANU-PF women will therefore have to fight it out in the large and politically taxing rural constituencies where attitudes towards women in public life are more conservative.

The gains that women have made in electoral politics have not been sustainable. In ZANU-PF, these gains have been reversed within a decade. Whether the MDC women will be able to sustain their electoral success is moot. However, indications are that MDC electoral success is eroding in the rural constituencies, as shown by the loss of seats in the Matebeleland by-elections held after 2000. This is likely to exert more pressure for the urban seats, stiffening the competition against urban legislators, particularly women who tend to be perceived as soft targets during power struggles within and between political parties.

Given the sentiments expressed above, it is critical that gender dialogues be intensified within political parties and for men to be influenced to take up gender issues more seriously. This calls for a concerted push by gender-sensitive men and women both inside and outside political parties to advocate the cause of women and to explain why it makes good political sense to elect both men and women into parliament.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis above has shown that election issues and studies often focus on the actual conduct of elections and the choices of voters during the election period. The structures and institutions of elections are influenced by social processes which are embedded in the general society. These processes usually precede and influence elections so that by election day, many options have been foreclosed on class, race, gender and age lines, while unequal opportunities would have been created along the same lines prior to elections.

Issues such as the choices made by voters may not only be determined by the mechanistic voter education programmes which normally instruct voters where to place their mark. Choices are affected by the experiences of voters with those men and women representing their communities, speaking for others and influencing societies for the general benefit of the public. Men and women tend to have different experiences with these processes. Where there is gender inequity in societies, it is not possible for men and women to participate equitably as candidates, voters, electoral officials or as voter educators.

Participation in electoral activities is influenced by the time, energy, skills and opportunities that men, women and children of different classes, races, ages and ethnicities access in their societies. Thus, in Zimbabwe, men and women tend to experience different gender divisions of labour that create more time for the middle and upper classes, and more skills and choices for men than women in the political and electoral domains. In Zimbabwe, women's associational lives are not focused on political parties, which are male dominated. The FPTP electoral system also disadvantages women by making electoral politics confrontational and do-or-die in character, creating room for only one winner in a constituency. Since there are also gross economic inequities in Zimbabwe, only those women and men from the economically empowered classes stand a chance of succeeding in electoral politics.

Unless political parties in Zimbabwe make a special effort to democratise themselves internally there is little prospect of equal participation by men and women in elections. People will most likely continue to vote for men and those few women who are exceptions in the political parties and the

social domain. Women are forced to make compromises on issues that are important to them because of the absence of a critical mass of women in both ZANU-PF and the MDC in Zimbabwe. 'Difficult' women usually face male hostility within their parties and they are likely to be dropped in favour of more pliable women. Quotas are resisted across party lines because men recognise that these would erode their opportunities for election, especially in those cases where men benefit from the barriers erected against women within political parties. Furthermore, personal information about women is used to erect and consolidate these barriers, making it difficult for women who are divorced, widowed, single or elderly to stand for office. These women are usually attacked for not being docile, attractive, young or pliable. This creates more room for men to participate in an arena where their marital status, age, looks or personal conduct are of little consequence. Another problem is the media's focus on men, which makes it difficult for women in electoral politics to gain attention, except in cases of negative or unconventional behaviour.

Thus, fears of sexual and personal violation, lack of funding, confidence, exposure and experience in bargaining and cutting deals makes women less able to compete in electoral politics. Political parties remain the most important sites of contestation and reform that make the difference between success and failure in men's and women's electoral careers. While women can do well in the general society in Zimbabwe, in politics, the structures and processes tend to be especially exclusionary, favouring men over women and creating barriers that women have to surmount in order to participate. A multiple approach is therefore important in generating reforms within political parties, creating support systems for women outside and within the parties and sensitising the general populace about the need for a better electoral system that creates and maintains equal opportunities for both men and women to participate in electoral politics in Zimbabwe.

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## ABOUT EISA

EISA is a not-for-profit and non-partisan non-governmental organisation which was established in 1996. Its core business is to provide technical assistance for capacity building of relevant government departments, electoral management bodies, political parties and civil society organisations operating in the democracy and governance field throughout the SADC region and beyond. Inspired by the various positive developments towards democratic governance in Africa as a whole and the SADC region in particular since the early 1990s, EISA aims to advance democratic values, practices and enhance the credibility of electoral processes. The ultimate goal is to assist countries in Africa and the SADC region to nurture and consolidate democratic governance. SADC countries have received enormous technical assistance and advice from EISA in building solid institutional foundations for democracy. This includes electoral system reforms; election monitoring and observation; constructive conflict management; strengthening of parliament and other democratic institutions; strengthening of political parties; capacity building for civil society organisations; deepening democratic local governance; and enhancing the institutional capacity of the election management bodies. EISA is currently the secretariat of the Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) composed of electoral commissions in the SADC region and established in 1998. EISA is also the secretariat of the SADC Election Support Network (ESN) comprising election-related civil society organisations established in 1997.

### **VISION**

Realisation of effective and sustainable democratic governance in Southern Africa and beyond.

### **MISSION**

To strengthen electoral processes, democratic governance, human rights and democratic values through research, capacity building, advocacy and other strategically targeted interventions.

**VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

Key values and principles of governance that EISA believes in include:

- Regular free and fair elections
- Promoting democratic values
- Respect for fundamental human rights
- Due process of law / rule of law
- Constructive management of conflict
- Political tolerance
- Inclusive multiparty democracy
- Popular participation
- Transparency
- Gender equality
- Accountability
- Promoting electoral norms and standards

**OBJECTIVES**

- To nurture and consolidate democratic governance
- To build institutional capacity of regional and local actors through research, education, training, information and technical advice
- To ensure representation and participation of minorities in the governance process
- To strive for gender equality in the governance process
- To strengthen civil society organisations in the interest of sustainable democratic practice, and
- To build collaborative partnerships with relevant stakeholders in the governance process.

**CORE ACTIVITIES**

- Research
- Conferences, Seminars and workshops
- Publishing

- Conducting elections and ballots
- Technical advice
- Capacity building
- Election observation
- Election evaluation
- Networking
- Voter/Civic education
- Conflict management
- Educator and Learner Resource Packs

## **PROGRAMMES**

EISA's Core Business revolves around three (3) main programmes namely (a) Conflict Management, Democracy and Electoral Education; (b) Electoral and Political Processes; and (c) Balloting and Electoral Services.

### **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

This programme comprises various projects including voter education, democracy and human rights education; electoral observation; electoral staff training; electoral conflict management; capacity building; course design; citizen participation.

### **ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES**

This programme addresses areas such as technical assistance for electoral commissions, civil society organisations and political parties; coordination of election observation and monitoring missions; working towards the establishment of electoral norms and standards for the SADC region; providing technical support to both the SADC-ECF and the SADC-ESN.

### **BALLOTING AND ELECTORAL SERVICES**

The programme enhances the credibility and legitimacy of organisational elections by providing independent and impartial electoral administration, management and consultancy services. The key activities include managing elections for political parties, trade unions, pension funds, medical aid societies, etc.

**EISA'S SPECIAL PROJECTS INCLUDE:**

- Rule of Law, which examines issues related to justice and human rights;
- Local Government, which aims to promote community participation in governance ; and
- Political Parties, which aims to promote party development at strategic, organisational and structural levels through youth empowerment, leadership development and development of party coalitions.

**EISA'S SUPPORT SERVICES INCLUDE:**

- Research
- Publications
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- Election Observer Reports
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- Voter education manuals
- Journal of African Elections
- Election database

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