



## How the criteria used by political parties in selecting candidates for elections affect representation and performance of women in Zambia

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### Abstract

Women's representation and performance in politics and decision-making positions is very poor despite several legislation and policies being adopted to achieve equality between men and women. One of the major findings of this study was that women's representation has remained below 20% in all the past elections at councilor, mayor or council chairperson and parliamentary level. Political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which women can attain elected office and political leadership, therefore, the structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in politics. In order to bring about meaningful representation and performance of women in politics there is serious need for combined effort from the government, civil society, political parties, political leaders (Women and Men) and members of the public.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental aspects of sustainable development. In the case of Zambia, representation and performance of women in various domains play a crucial role in shaping the country's social, economic and political landscape.

**Keywords:** Underrepresentation, Women, Decision-making, Political Parties, and Elections

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### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to look at the criteria used by political parties in selecting candidates for the 2016 and 2021 general elections in Zambia. This paper has five key sections. The first part is background of the study, assessed related literature. The second section gives a conceptual account of matters relating to representation and performance of women in politics. The third part focuses on the methodology. The fourth section deals with findings as given by participants and gives a discussion. The fifth section is conclusion and recommendation and shows suggestion on areas of further investigations.

### Background

Women comprise half of the world's population; in Zambia they constitute the majority at 51%, but they continue to be drastically underrepresented in leadership positions around the world, starting from the political parties because of the patriarchy or male dominated societies. Political participation and the poor performance of women in politics has been a major concern worldwide. For many years, various specialized agencies such as the United Nations (UN) have acknowledged the need for women to have equal rights with men in politics. Women are a major force behind people's participation in society today, as they play a critical role in posterity.

Africa's Agenda 2063 commits to improving women's political participation through Aspiration three on Africa's good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. This aspiration embeds a culture of gender equality and good governance. Such aspiration and accompanying framework, are necessary, makes clear the fact that the continent needs on the ground-evidence to draw attention to gaps, and to make evident progress on women in political representation and performance. The Africa We Want is one where women have equal opportunities to participate in all levels

of political decision making without hindrance, without fear, and with full support. Special measures to correct historical imbalances must be put in place to ensure that Development Goal Five on gender equality provides for the increase and meaningful participation of women in political decision-making.

This global agenda to be achieved by 2030 will remain a dream if Africa does not change its systems, practices and policies to ensure that more women sit on the political decision-making table. While some of our African countries have surpassed the 50% mark of women in political decision making at parliament level, there is need to cultivate enabling ground from local government level to cabinet level for women to participate in politics.

Statistics on women's political participation in Zambia are very worrying because of the magnitude of the imbalance of women in politics as compared to men. Prior to Zambia's independence in 1964, women fought colonialism alongside men but sadly for them, inequality and oppression emerged soon after. Women have continued to lag behind due to inherited colonial and cultural practices which exclude them from leadership roles.

The Non-governmental Gender Organizations Coordinating Council reveals that Zambia has failed to meet the African Union (AU) and Southern Africa Development Community thresholds of 50 percent women's participation in decision making positions in both elections of 2016 and 2021 general elections. And that been said we, are going to look at the criteria used by political parties in selecting women for position of Mayor, councilors /Chairpersons, parliamentarians, presidents and their running-mate in the 2016 and 2021 general elections in Zambia

### Literature review

The report by Kapasa (2016) as quoted by Katongo (2016) <sup>[5]</sup> shows that, as of 2016, the percentage of women in Zambia's parliament had declined from 18.7 per cent in the preceding year to 17.5 per cent. Women's representation in parliament is, thus, below the SADC and global average of 3.9 per cent and 24.3 per cent of women members of parliament respectively. While the number of women Members of Parliament decreased by 1.3 percentage points in 2016, their male counterparts increased in number by the same margin in the same year.

Kapasa reported that, in Zambia like in many African countries, although women outnumber men, they are mostly on the side-lines when it comes to participation and leadership in all forms of decision-making, including in political office, constitutional bodies, public administration, the judiciary, and the private sector, as well as local, regional, and global development fora. This has led to the under-representation of women and directly impacted national development. Therefore, the government has committed to improving women's active participation in both the public and private sectors. For instance, the Constitution of Zambia upholds women's rights to equal participation, and freedom of assembly and association (Katongo, 2016) <sup>[5]</sup>

There are a number of criteria that have been adopted in order to promote the participation of women in politics. For example, the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) and the Non-Governmental Organization Coordinating Council (NGOCC) trained female candidates on campaign techniques and resource mobilization. The organization also helps female candidates from various parties by printing campaign

materials.

According to Krook (2004) <sup>[6]</sup> even though the electoral system does not provide quotas or reserved seats for women, these civil society organizations lobbied major parties to nominate women as 40 per cent of their candidates, who pledged to do so. However, political parties have been falling far short of this pledge, citing fears that they would not attract enough support from a traditionally patriarchal electorate. Given educational and financial constraints, women are especially affected by requirements to hold a Grade 12 certificate and by the increase in the nomination fees. Female candidates normally receive minimal media coverage during the campaign.

Kunda (2016) <sup>[7]</sup> reports that, the constitution provides that the electoral system ensures gender equity in the national assembly and local councils but no specific measures to achieve this are prescribed in legislation. Only 26 women were elected as members of parliament, representing 17 per cent of MPs, an increase of 4 by from the 22 women in the previous parliament.

According to the National Assembly of Zambia (2015) Articles 45 and 47 of the constitution provide for gender equity in the national assembly and councils. On December 23, 2015, the national assembly passed the gender equality and equity Act No. 22, 2015, to provide legal mechanisms to eliminate women's discrimination in public and political life. However, no regulations have been enacted to actualize the spirit of the law.

### Methodology

The study primarily employed a qualitative method while also utilizing the quantitative method to better understand the problem. The research design utilized here is descriptive in that it focused on outlining participants responses so as to generate meanings. The purpose of descriptive research design as applied here is to state the affairs as experienced by participants. The descriptive research design also helped in that it is not only restricted to fact findings, but the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problem. The study was undertaken in Lusaka district which is located in the Lusaka province of Zambia.

The targeted population sample was 200 participation, 35 were UPND, 35 PF, 20 Ward Councilors, 20 Mayors and some member of staff at the Civic Center. Others, were 20 members of staff at the ECZ and 20 members of staff at the National Assembly, 25 from the ZNWL and 25 were members from the NGOCC. The two political parties were picked because they have been performing and had representatives at all the levels of the positions that were being contested in both the 2016 and 2021 general elections.

**Table 1**

Name of the institution	Females	Males	Total number
UPND	25	10	35
PF	25	10	35
ECZ	10	10	20
ZNWL	15	10	25
NGOCC	15	10	25
CIVIC Center	10	10	20
Ward councilor	10	10	20
National Assembly Staff	10	10	20

The study used purposive sampling to select respondents as the study primarily employed the qualitative method while also utilizing the quantitative method to better understand the problem. That is, cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. The researcher had opted for this method to ensure that only key informants are allowed to take part. Therefore, the researcher purposely chose subjects, who were thought to be relevant to the research topic.

Data was collected through the use of questionnaires and interview guides to illustrate the criteria used by political parties to select candidates for elections. The interview guides were researchers-administered which increased responsiveness and provided explanations for some terms. Face to face interaction helped to capture the depth response to probe and encourage respondents to expand their answers and crosscheck information relating to how and why a given phenomenon occurs.

Data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data. Several analytic procedures provide a way of drawing inductive inference from data and distinguishing the signal (the phenomenon of interest). This aimed at making sense of what was said by the participants in the collected data and also highlight the main findings.

### Findings

The findings showed that there was a total number of nominated candidates for the seats of Councilors, Mayor or Council Chairperson, Member of Parliament, Presidential running mates and president, total number of available seats, the total number of males and females who contested and the total number of male and female in the 2016 and 2021 General Elections.

The finding showed that political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which women can access elected office and political leadership, therefore, the structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in politics (NDI and UNDP 2012) <sup>[9]</sup>. The gender gap widens significantly as candidates for political office move from being eligible to becoming aspirants to finally being nominated by the party (NDI and UNDP 2012) <sup>[9]</sup>. This means that, criteria used by a political party to select their candidates have a great bearing on women's representation and performance. It is for this reason that this study in line with political parties selection of candidates; the United Party for National Development (UPND) and the Patriotic Front (PF) used to select their candidates for the 2016 and 2021 general elections.

The Patriotic Front did not employ the system of primary elections; instead, they employed the interview process in which aspiring candidates were interviewed by lower-level party officials and the final decision on whether one can stand for elections on the party's ticket or not was made by the members of the Central Committee. In explaining the candidate selection, senior political party officials from all the political parties indicated that their parties would only pick candidates that will win and maximize votes for the party. This means that some candidates were picked using the highlighted criteria while some were automatically picked without being subjected to the processes described above. These sentiments were echoed by a female respondent who

indicated that many political parties in Zambia believe women are not as sellable as men in elections. Adding that just because most women have no resources whilst men have resources to fund their own campaigns does not make them more sellable. The findings are similar to those discovered by Bwalya and Nyambe (2016) <sup>[4]</sup>, who indicated that many political parties favor male candidates over females because they are viewed generally as not being sellable.

What can be described as internal democracy was reflected in the methods used to select parliamentary, mayoral, council chairpersons and ward councilor's candidates in both the UPND and the PF. In the UPND, the principle of primary elections was used to select candidates. That is, party members who indicated interest to contest elections submitted their applications, the party members at ward and branch levels voted, as did the leaders at Constituency, District and provincial levels after which names of three individuals with the highest number of votes were submitted to the National Management Committee.

Party leaders are the central political figures in advanced parliamentary democracies. As the single most important decision makers within their parties, they shape these organizations' vote, office, and policy-seeking aims. Leaders, for example, constitute an important reason why citizens vote for (or against) a party, they influence their parties' policy position and make (and break) governments. Leaders also wield significant influence over their co-partisans' career paths.

The findings also confirm the Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC) findings which observed that only 87 women were adopted as MP candidates across the political parties a decrease of 36 per cent from 2011 to 2016. Many women who were approved at ward, constituency, and district levels were not adopted when the decisions were made at the provincial level. The lack of transparency around nomination procedures likely had a negative effect on female representation and reflects a failing of intraparty democracy. The criteria used by political parties to select candidates for elections. The data collected revealed that what can be described as internal democracy was reflected in the methods used to select parliamentary, mayoral, council chairpersons and ward councilor's candidates in both the UPND and the PF. Despite the fact that the criteria used was democratic, the two political parties still had a low percentage of elected women representation compared to men. This therefore means the criteria they use to select their candidates are not gender sensitive. All the political parties did indicate during the interviews that, the first step to considering anyone for nomination of any position was his or her eligibility as a member of the party. After which one's eligibility as stipulated by the constitution of Zambia. Although all political parties stated that membership is an important criterion when nominating and adopting candidates for an election, the reality seems otherwise. A senior UPND official indicated that:

*For one to qualify as an MP candidate he or she has to be a very loyal party member for more than two years, who has contributed to the party not just financially but also morally.*

Contrary to this, there are many instances where people who defected from other political parties were nominated within a short period of time. Female Members of Parliament



confirmed that political experience as well as financial back up is considered as opposed to one's years of political membership. These attributes however favor men more than women. Lovenduski (2016) stated that men dominate top slots leaving only a few women appearances since election campaigns can be very expensive. Similarly, Sampa (2010)<sup>[11]</sup> stated that among the factors preventing women from standing as parliamentary candidates in Zambia is one directly linked to financial constraints.

Academic qualification was also highlighted by all the political parties as an important criterion that they follow when nominating and adopting candidates for elections. It was further learnt that besides meeting these minimum qualifications, a person willing to be a candidate needed to speak good English and articulate issues well. Although this was said to be so, the country saw a number of seats being nullified on the ground that the winning Member of Parliament did not meet the minimum academic qualifications required. For example, Joe Malanji a PF Member of Parliament for Kwacha Constituency on the Copperbelt had his seat nullified because he at the time of elections did not have a full Grade 12 school certificate. The question that one would ask in this instance is; why did the party leave out other eligible candidates, including women, and settle for one who seemingly did not have the necessary qualifications?

The amended Constitution of 2016 calls for 50 per cent representation of each sex (men and women) in nominations, 75 per cent men against 25 per cent women nominees suggests that a shortfall exists in terms of adherence to the constitutional law that aims to bridge the sex gap in parliamentary participation (Alexander and Welzel 2016)<sup>[16]</sup>. At political party level, all the respondents claimed that their parties had created internal party structures aimed at providing the participation and representation of women. The PF introduced a female youth wing called PF pink out of the realization that female youths were failing to be active party members under the youth wing which mostly is associated with violence in the mobilization of voters. This wing was aimed at increasing membership and representation of women in politics. The UPND had a 50% gender quota enshrined in the constitution to promote female political representation. The party increased its 30% threshold in accordance with the SADC gender protocol of 50 %.

However, according to FODEP (2016) as quoted by Katongo (2016)<sup>[5]</sup>, most of the times political parties have used women as a means for party membership mobilization instead of placing them in decision making positions. Nevertheless, similar strategies have been adopted in other countries and they have worked. For example, as reported by the NDI and UNDP (2012)<sup>[9]</sup> most major political parties in Morocco have founded women's sections or comparable internal structures that address women's issues and the needs of women party members. For example, the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) created an equality council to ensure women's representation in the party's decision-making processes. The USFP has worked to reflect women's rights in their platform, tackling issues such as a citizenship law, which guarantees rights to the children of Moroccan women and foreign men. Responding to their own constituencies, other parties have undertaken similar promotion strategies, deeming it desirable to be viewed as empowering women. Political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which women can access elected office and political

leadership. Therefore, the structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in politics.

In the political world, the idea is that most of the government leaders or legislators are generated from these very political parties to represent the interests of the public they serve through decision making, policy recommendations and changes. Unfortunately, as it has already been established, there exists a very clear margin between male and female representatives in these leadership roles, a reality that begs the question; how possible is it to meet the needs or represent the interests of a gender that's not adequately represented when it makes up to more than 50% of the total population as is the case in Zambia? Therefore, given the growing power of party leaders, it should be expected that women's access to this position has important consequences for women's descriptive, substantive, as well as symbolic representation. Kunda (2016)<sup>[7]</sup> reveals that, cabinet ministers in Zambia are appointed by the Head of State (the President), and they should ideally be appointed on an equality basis. However, as in the case of nominated members of parliament, the number of women ministers appointed to cabinet in 2019 was only nine and only five women in the new dawn government out of twenty eight cabinet representing 17.8%. Cabinet is the supreme policymaking and decision-making body in Zambia, requiring representation of the voices of all citizens. The disproportionate representation of women in cabinet suggests that their opinions on decisions of national development are often likely to be overshadowed, especially if they do not align with patriarchy.

The procedures employed by the UPND and the PF to choose candidates for parliamentary, mayoral, council chairman, and ward councilor positions all represented what can be defined as internal democracy. In the UPND, the principle of primary elections was used to select candidates. That is, party members who indicated interest to contest elections submitted their applications, the party members at ward and branch levels voted, as did the leaders at Constituency, District and provincial levels after which names of three individuals with the highest number of votes were submitted to the National Management Committee.

Therefore, it can be argued that despite it being democratic, the mere fact that two political parties have a very small percentage of elected women representation compared to men means the criteria they use to select their candidates are not gender sensitive.

Electoral quotas have become a popular policy measure to bring more women into politics because they are a way of guaranteeing that members of an electorate group, such as women, are included at a prescribed minimum level in representative institutions, whether as delegates, candidates or elected officials. Legislation on candidate quotas which ensure that a certain proportion of candidates for political office are women need to be adopted. Political parties in the country need to also voluntarily adopt their own quotas for women. It should however be noted that, candidate quotas will only be successful if women are placed in winnable positions on a party list and if the quotas include sanctions for non-compliance.

that political parties adopt the following strategies to address gender inequality in the candidate recruitment process: Galvanizing party support for candidate quotas and incorporating these quotas into party statutes; Establishing guidelines for candidate recruitment in party-nomination

committees; Ensuring implementation and placement of women candidates in winning seats; Working with civil society organizations to oversee the implementation of quotas; Cultivating strategic alliances with men, since men play a critical role in building internal party support for these kinds of policies; Expanding the pool of women candidates and training those candidates; Encouraging multilateral relations and sharing experiences across countries and regions.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this study that political parties help to educate voters about the rights of women to participate in politics and the importance for all of society in advancing gender equality. Actions that parties can take during this period include: Providing training to women candidates in such skills as fundraising, message development, media relations and communicating with voters; Training and promoting women in campaign leadership positions (for example in campaign management, get out the vote, voter contact, and communications); Ensuring women's visibility in the campaign by providing additional media exposure; Identifying and disseminating party positions that are priorities for women, which could also attract more women's votes for their party; Monitoring elections, including by recruiting women as party agents to be present at polling stations, particularly if those polling stations are allocated for women only; Providing information to voters that include specific messages highlighting the importance of women's votes and women's right to vote as equal members of society.

Political parties continue to play a central role in encouraging women's participation in politics. Therefore, this study recommends the following actions that parties can take in the post electoral period to promote gender equality and women's meaningful representation and participation in governance include: Conducting an assessment of the level of gender equality within the party, with the aim of identifying, and ultimately eliminating, any practices or rules that may directly or indirectly undermine women; Promoting gender-sensitive reforms to political institutions, such as changing the sitting times of parliament and the parliamentary calendar to accommodate parliamentarians with families; Ensuring gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in party policies, including by supporting gender-specific policy reform, such as combating gender-based violence or targeting parental leave or reproductive rights issues, and by promoting gender equality in areas like access to justice, health, nationality, labor, land rights, social security and inheritance; Supporting cross-party networks of women and women's parliamentary caucuses, as these can help channel women's interests and concerns and can help to mainstream gender in policy development and government oversight; Ensuring women elected to a political institution are provided with leadership roles within the parliamentary group (such as group chairperson) and parliamentary committees (such as chairperson or group focal point); Forming strategic partnerships with civil society organizations.

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