



**Are middle-class women  
“disconnected democrats”? A  
preliminary investigation into  
political participation of  
Zimbabwean women.**

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## Executive Summary

A serious question in gender politics is the participation of women in politics and particularly in representative politics. In Zimbabwe, this has been addressed through a proportional representation mechanism that has added 60 women to parliament, but, however, this is due to a quota system, and, the number of women directly elected has dropped significantly. Representation is however not the only issue of importance, and the participation of women in political life generally is equally important.

In Africa, survey research suggests that there are actually few differences between men and women: women are more likely to support one-party states and were generally more ambivalent in their views. In Zimbabwe, research suggests similar attitudes amongst women, but also reveals marked differences between rural and urban women, as well as differences due to age. It may also be that there are differences due to social class, but this is an area that is poorly researched, as Everjoice Win has pointed out (Win. 2004).

It is a conventional position that the middle-classes are the staunchest defenders of democracy, but recent research in Zimbabwe suggests that this is not the case in Zimbabwe. In this study, the educated, employed and urban, who may be crudely described as “middle-class”, were shown to be mostly uninvolved in the socio-political life of the country, and were described as “disconnected democrats” (RAU. 2015). Did this apply equally to men and women, especially as women are frequently argued to exercise less agency than men?

## Study design

This notion was tested in a study using the most recent Afrobarometer data on Zimbabwe from Round 6 (2014). Two basic propositions were tested in this study:

- Middle-class women will be more likely to support democracy and opposition political parties;
- Middle-class women will be more likely to show higher frequencies of social capital, political participation, and political efficacy.

Two sets of indices were derived in order to test these hypotheses; an index for social class and a series of indices for political participation based on an earlier study (RAU. 2015). These were *social capital*, *political efficacy*, *political participation*, *support for democracy*, and *freedom from fear*. The rationale for the last index was the frequent reference to risk aversion in Zimbabweans for public activities due to fears about political violence.

The *social class* index, using an *ad hoc* cutting score, suggested that 21% of the respondent sample of 1,200 Zimbabwean women would be defined as *middle class*. The overall sample was first described in respect of all the indices, and then a comparison was carried out using *social class* as the independent variable. Here the sample was disaggregated according to whether the respondents were *middle-class* or not, and comparisons made on all the indices of participation.

Two further tests were carried out, one against *residence* (rural versus urban) and the other against *support for democracy*. The rationale for these two further tests was the finding that class did not discriminate between women in any of the indices of participation.

## Results

The first interesting set of findings came from the description of the overall sample of 1,200 women. They reported very low rates of participation generally. On *social capital*, apart from belonging to a religious group (49%), the majority did not belong to a community group, attend community meetings or join others to raise an issue, and hardly anyone reported actions that could be described as *Political efficacy*. A majority (69%) support democracy, but also the majority were dissatisfied with Zimbabwe's form of democracy. The *freedom from fear* index showed that the majority of women (83%) were careful about what they say in public, and a large percentage (44%) feared political intimidation or violence. Finally, the majority reported being close to a political party, but a quarter (26%) refused to answer the question.

### Social Class

When it came to testing the effects of *social class*, the results were very interesting. There were virtually no differences between the *middle-class* group and the other group, the low income earning group, termed *poor* for simplicity's sake. There were no discernible differences between the two groups on the variables measuring *Social Capital*. This trend of little difference between the two groups was seen again for *Political Efficacy*, with voting being the most frequent exercised form of agency, and thereafter both groups showed increasingly less participation the more active the engagement in politics was. The pattern was repeated for *Political Participation*. Very few in either group contacted an official or engaged in collective action.

The pattern was repeated for *Support for Democracy*, *Fear* and *Support for a Political Party*. Thus the point seems clear: class, at least as we have defined this, is not a factor in determining the participation of Zimbabwean women in socio-political life. And if class is not a factor, then is the more frequently raised criterion of residence – rural as opposed to urban – more applicable in understanding women's participation?

### Residence (rural versus urban)

As was found for the class comparison, there were no differences in the measures of *Social Capital* between the two groups. However, there was a significant difference in the frequency of women voting with this being more frequent for urban women, but otherwise there were no differences in *Political Participation* between the two groups. As was the case the for the class comparison, no differences were found between rural and urban women for either *Political Efficacy*, *Support for Democracy* or *Fear*. As regards political affiliation, rural women were significantly more likely to support ZANU PF than urban women, but were no different in the probability that they did not vote or refused to say which party they supported.

Thus, as with class, residence does not distinguish different groups of women, and this suggests that women as a whole are rather homogenous. This seems improbable on face value, and the data was re-examined, this time looking at a factor that should be directly related to political participation in its various aspects, *Support for Democracy*.

### Support for Democracy

There is a small issue to raise here at the outset. The maximum score on the index assumes that a respondent favours democracy, sees Zimbabwe as democratic, and is satisfied with Zimbabwe's form of democracy. However, a respondent can be strongly in favour of

democracy, but also be dissatisfied with Zimbabwe both its extent and form, and, in reality, few persons, either within or without Zimbabwe, would claim that Zimbabwe under the present government is democratic. Two comparisons were made to deal with this potential problem. The two approaches produced virtually identical results, and hence the comparison reported below is based on the original index.

Those that support democracy are significantly more likely to be creating *social capital*, but, of course, the association could be operating in the opposite direction: people active in creating *social capital* are more likely to support democracy. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, there were significant differences in the two groups in *political participation*. Whilst the same general trend, of decreased participation for more active forms of political activity, those that support democracy were significantly more likely to report participation on all the questions comprising the index. There were no differences between the two groups in either Political Efficacy or Fear.

Interestingly, when political party affiliation is compared between the two groups, those expressing support for MDC-T are drawn from the *No Support for Democracy* group, and *Support for Democracy* is associated with support for ZANU PF. This is rather unexpected in the light of all the rhetoric about ZANU PF and its authoritarian, anti-democratic nature. This is perhaps unsurprising in respect of young middle-class women who express deep dissatisfaction with current political leadership according to a very recent report (RAU. 2016). Using age as an independent variable, supports this view, and some small differences emerge between older and younger women.

When this was done, it was found that young women are more likely to refuse to disclose their political affiliation and to be “middle-class”, and support for ZANU PF is more likely to come from older women. The refusal to state one’s political affiliation must, however, be seen in the context of Zimbabwean politics and the views about the fear that participation in politics brings.

## **Conclusions**

Two hypotheses were advanced about the role of *social class* and political participation.

- Middle-class women will be more likely to support democracy and opposition political parties;
- Middle-class women will be more likely to show higher frequencies of social capital, political participation, and political efficacy.

Neither hypothesis is supported by these findings, and can be understood in two ways. Firstly, that class, defined using education, wealth or employment, is not a variable of any utility in current Zimbabwe where the economy has reduced the majority population to serious poverty, but secondly, and importantly, socio-political participation and the defence of democracy is not the exclusive domain of the middle-class in Zimbabwe. All previous Afrobarometer surveys have shown Zimbabweans to be amongst the strongest advocates for democracy, and the suggestion from our findings is that this desire for democracy is not class-specific.

*Support for democracy* seems the interesting variable when thinking about women and participation. Those women that supported democracy were significantly more likely to create *Social Capital*, by belonging to a community group, to attend community meetings, or to join others in raising an issue. They were also more likely to be active participants in

political processes, but, admittedly, the frequencies drop markedly the more that active and open political participation is required. Here the “fear” factor is relevant as there are serious risks in Zimbabwe for open support for opposition political parties.

However, “active citizens” are no more likely to engage officials than anyone else, and here it can be wondered why women would participate in politics but not in less risky social behaviour. Again this might be due to the fear factor, but may equally be the result of unresponsive and unaccountable officialdom in Zimbabwe. However, and bearing in mind that the data set used here derives from 2014, it is also worth pointing out that, in 2016, citizens do not appear so averse to complaining or joining protests, women included.

The final point is in relation to the comparison about attitudes to democracy, and the finding that those who women evince strong support for democracy are more likely to support ZANU PF than MDC-T. Looked at more closely, this finding suggests that this is more likely to be the view of older women (over 35 years). It is also the case that support for ZANU PF is more common in rural women, and the overall finding that older, rural women are more likely to support ZANU PF than the MDC-T is unremarkable. However, it is the high frequency of support for ZANU PF that must be interpreted with caution, given that 25% of women are unwilling to disclose their political affiliation. Other research suggests that support for these two parties may be much closer than the crude statistic suggests.

In conclusion, does it matter that middle-class women are little different to other women in their support for democracy when the evidence suggests that any women who support democracy are more likely to be active citizens? John Gay suggested that there may be a virtuous cycle for the protection and enhancement of democracy, and, at base, this requires active citizens. Zimbabwean women that support democracy are more likely to show the characteristics that support this virtuous cycle and probably irrespective of their political affiliation. The often violent climate that exemplifies Zimbabwean politics must be a serious inhibitor of women’s participation, but, if this can be eliminated, as it should be, then these results suggest that women’s participation in the socio-political life of Zimbabwe will be substantial.

*“...the middle-class woman [in Zimbabwe] is completely silenced and erased from the images of development and rights work. She is constantly reminded that development is about eradicating poverty and so it focuses on those defined as ‘the poor’ (read as resource-poor). Therefore her story and her experiences are not part of the narrative. In essence, this means women’s lives are put in a kind of league table and it is those that qualify who get addressed.” [Win, 2004:63]*

## **Background**

The role and contribution of women to the Zimbabwean polity is often a subject of acrimony, especially when the facts about women’s participation in governance are concerned. Women comprise over 50% of Zimbabwe’s population, but only 12% of the directly elected representatives in the House of Assembly, and then only through the courtesy of a proportional representation clause giving women an extra 60 seats. This new system has left the women from the proportional quota largely powerless when it comes to more than attending parliament (RAU. 2016).<sup>1</sup> Representation is, however, only one aspect of women’s participation in political life.

The very low percentage of women directly elected is not simply a case that women do not vote for women, but also that the political parties seem to have favoured male candidates over females for the constituency seats, and relied on the proportional quota to bolster female participation in parliament. It may also raise the question about how interested Zimbabwean women generally are in politics.

Bratton and Logan (2006) found in a multi-country analysis of the Round two Afrobarometer data, that men and women were differentiated in only minor ways: women were more ambivalent in their views, and showed greater support for one-party systems and greater concerns than men about the divisiveness of multi-party systems, but they were little different in other ways. This was largely supported for Zimbabwe by a recent study of the Afrobarometer data for Zimbabwe for all five Rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys (Reeler.2014), but there were important differences between women as a group alone.

When Zimbabwean women are disaggregated into their geographical residence – rural versus urban - then a number of differences emerge. Firstly, rural women are much more supportive of traditional leaders as a whole, but this is varied by age and education: younger women and better educated women are less supportive of traditional leaders, as was indicated also by Logan (2008). Secondly, rural women have more support for one-party states and less rejection of one-man rule (as was found for the general African sample in the Afrobarometer), but are similar to urban women in their support for multi-party democracy. Thirdly, they are much more likely than urban women to have voted in all the elections since 2000. Finally, it seems that urban women present a more coherent set of views than rural women. They support democracy, reject undemocratic alternatives, do not support traditional leaders, and vote when the consequences of doing so are not problematic.

When we examine women’s participation – belonging to voluntary associations, churches, or political parties – then more interesting differences between rural and urban women emerge, but so too do differences with men. Women, and both rural and urban women, are largely similar in their being affiliated to a church, and the same two sub-groups are much more

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<sup>1</sup> This will be covered in a forthcoming RAU report.

frequent affiliates of churches than the men. The differences are large, ranging from 9% to nearly 20%. This is not the case, however, when we examine women's participation in other forms of associational life. In answer to the questions about belonging to a community development association, women, both rural and urban, are less likely than men to belong to such an association, and this corroborates the observations made earlier that development needs seriously to engage women in development activities. Rural men and women reported this more frequently than their urban counterparts. When it comes to admitting a political affiliation, it is evident that women do so less frequently than men. This was more strongly observed for rural than urban women, but it is also interesting that rural women report an affiliation more frequently than urban men, which once again raises this difference between the rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe. There are marked discrepancies between women reporting political affiliation and specifying for which party they voted. For both rural and urban women, there is greater ease in expressing political party affiliation than in expressing a voting preference, and the percentage of women refusing to answer about a voting preference doubles in comparison to asking them about which political party they support.

Participation is considerably more than mere voting, and the work summarised above suggests that women are very different from each other, depending on age, residence and possibly class. Above we have highlighted some differences due to residence, age and education, but what about class?

Previous research into Zimbabwean's political agency suggested a class factor at play (RAU. 2015). A statistical analysis of the Afrobarometer Round 5 (2012) indicated the polarisation in Zimbabwean society, with four clusters emerging: ZANU PF supporters, MDC-T supporters, "active citizens", and "disconnected democrats". It was interesting for the purposes of the present study that the last group, identified as *urban, educated and employed*, would be a group that is conventionally described as "middle-class", but did not express the kinds of views that would normally be ascribed to the middle-class: they scored low on all the measures of *Social Capital, Political Participation, and Political Efficacy*.

Although the term *class* is somewhat complex to apply in Africa (Cheeseman. 2015), and even more complex in Zimbabwe following the massive changes in the political economy and the social base over the past 13 years (Raftopoulos. 2016). Earlier, John Gay hypothesised, using a theoretical framework derived from Sen (1999), that middle-class citizens would be pre-disposed to support and defend democracy actively, due to their being beneficiaries of the state (Gay. 2003). On the other hand, those struggling under poverty would be less likely to defend the state and would be more susceptible to authoritarian rule. Cheeseman, in a Kenyan study, argues that middle-class Kenyans would seem to exemplify Gay's thesis: they are more likely to support opposition political parties and hold pro-democratic attitudes, but also that ethnicity is a complex cross-cutting variable (Cheeseman. 2015).

The Zimbabwean study, cited above, concludes that middle-class citizens do not appear to be defenders of democracy. On the Gay theory, the "middle-class" should have demonstrated high levels of social capital, political participation and political efficacy, but they don't (RAU. 2015). Or are there other factors operating such as high levels of political fear and risk-aversion, which can be seen in the large numbers of Zimbabwean that fear to talk openly about politics and also fear political intimidation and violence? And what about women?



Above, it was pointed out that women certainly vary according to residence (rural versus urban), age and education, and that the rural-urban divide was crucial to an understanding of women's political participation. But it is also the case that being rural or urban does not exclude other variables being at play. For example, and using Cheeseman's conceptualisation of class, some rural women, such as teachers or social workers, will be educated and employed, as well as possessing a modicum of wealth. Do they follow the rural or the urban pattern, and hence are there class differences masked in the gross classification?

This report is a preliminary examination of class as a variable affecting women's participation in the political life of Zimbabwe, and a number of hypotheses can be advanced:

- Middle-class women will be more likely to support democracy and opposition political parties;
- Middle-class women will be more likely to show higher frequencies of social capital, political participation, and political efficacy.

### **Methodology:**

Following Cheeseman (2015), a number of indices of citizenship and class were constructed from the Afrobarometer Round 6 (2014) data. The overall sample for this round was 2,400, and 1,200 were women. The female group was disaggregated and provided the data for this study.

#### ***Class:***

The class measure was constructed along 4 composite measures, following Cheeseman (2015).<sup>2</sup> The measures were as follows:

- **Poverty:** composite score derived from binary construction of the following questions - *How often gone without food; How often gone without water; How often gone without medical care; How often gone without cooking fuel; and How often gone without cash income.* This gave a maximum poverty score of 5.
- **Wealth:** composite score derived from binary construction of the following questions - *Own radio; Own television; Own motor vehicle, car or motorcycle; and Own mobile phone.* This gave a maximum wealth score of 4.
- **Employment:** score taken from question on employment, binary score for "employed", summed from "*full-time employed*" and "*part-time employed*". This gave a score of 1 or 0.
- **Education:** four categories of levels of education, summed on a four-point scale – no education (1); primary education (2); secondary education (3); and post-secondary education (4).

**Middle-class** was operationalized as follows:

$$\text{Middle-class} = ((\text{wealth} + \text{employment} + \text{education}) - \text{poverty})$$

This gave a maximum score of 9, assuming that a respondent had no score for poverty. Admittedly, this is a crude measurement approach, but perhaps has the value that the measure seems to have prima facie validity in that it seemed to have worked sufficiently well in the Kenyan study to be worth using again. Zimbabwe poses a different problem to Kenya with

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<sup>2</sup> Those interested in the complexities involved in studying class in Africa should see Cheeseman's report. Here we eschewed the complex analysis used by Cheeseman, opting rather to use cross-tabulations

the massive economic decline that set in the late 1990s and has accelerated since 2013. This decline has been accompanied by enormous job losses, and current estimates put nearly 90% of the working population as now working in the informal sector. Whilst the 2014 Census argued that 81% of the working population was employed,<sup>3</sup> the Afrobarometer suggests only 33% of the respondents described themselves as “employed”, having a full-time or part-time job.<sup>4</sup> Thus, many of the respondents here would have high scores on *wealth* and *education*, but not be in full-time employment. Does this mean that these persons could not be middle class?

In the current economic climate in Zimbabwe, it cannot be assumed that being educated, employed and owning goods would be independent of experiencing some form of deprivation. For example, it is highly possible to have wealth as defined, a high level of education and be employed, but still experience problems with accessing health care or not having electricity to cook with: health care from the state has become highly unreliable and private medicine is very expensive, and electrical power and water cuts have become more frequent since 2013.

Since middle class was defined as those persons with scores between 6 and 9 (Table 1), which represented 21% of the sample, only half (47.4%) of this group were employed, but substantially fewer (10.7%) were employed in the “poor” group. Thus, it does seem that this ad hoc cutting score did discriminate to a reasonable degree and did identify a group that could be described as *middle class*.

**Table 1: Class and Employment**

	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Class score</b>
<b>Middle class</b> (6 to 9)	21% (47.4%)	5.9(1.1)* <sup>5</sup>
<b>Poor</b> (1 to 5)	81% (10.7%)	2.3 (1.5)

Additionally, and given the economic climate in Zimbabwe, we did not try to separate out the *middle class* from a wealthier group since there was no way of distinguishing these using the Afrobarometer data in the absence of estimates of actual wealth. Thus, it could be argued that the composite measure of class was merely distinguishing the poor to the non-poor. As a rejoinder to this possible criticism, it may be pointed out that the *class* scores were significantly different, 5.9 (s.dev 1.1) for the *middle class* as opposed to 2.3 (s.dev 1.5) for the “poor” group.

***Political participation:***

Since the objective of this preliminary study was to determine whether social class affected women’s participation in socio-political life, a number of composite measures were constructed in order to examine the political participation, social capital, political efficacy, views on democracy, and fear. These measures had been used previously in a multivariate study of Zimbabwean’s voice and agency (RAU.2015). The measures are described as follows:

<sup>3</sup> Zimstat, *2014 Labour Force Survey*. Harare: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency.

<sup>4</sup> Afrobarometer (2014), *Summary of Results*. Afrobarometer Round 6 Survey in Zimbabwe, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> \**p*=0.0001

- **Social Capital:** composite score derived from the following questions as binary variables - *Member of religious group*; *Member of voluntary association or community group*; *Attend a community meeting*; and *Join others to raise an issue*. This gave a maximum social capital score of 4.
- **Political Participation:** composite score derived from the following questions as binary variables - *Voting in the most recent national election*; *Last national election: attend a campaign rally*; *Last national election: attend a campaign meeting*; *Last national election: persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party*; and *Last national election: work for a candidate or party*. This gave a maximum political participation score of 4.
- **Political Efficacy:** composite score derived from the following questions as binary variables - *Contact local government councillor*; *Contact MP*; *Contact official of a government agency*; and *Join others to request government action*. This gave a maximum political efficacy score of 4.
- **Support for democracy:** composite score derived from the following questions as binary variables - *Support for democracy*; *Extent of democracy*; and *Satisfaction with democracy*. This gave a maximum democracy score of 4.
- **Freedom from fear score:** composite score derived from the following questions as binary variables - *How much fear political intimidation or violence*; and *How often careful what you say*. This gave a maximum composite freedom fear score of 2.

The data was then examined with cross-tabulations done for both **class** and **residence** (*rural* versus *urban*). Additionally, correlations were carried out on all the composite measures.

## Results:

The findings are reported in three sections: overall sample, class comparison, rural/urban comparison.

### *Overall sample*

The sample was rural in the majority (63%). More than half (64%) had secondary (52%) or post-secondary (12%) education, and the average age was 40 years (s.d. 42.4 years).

Applying the measures of class, the breakdown of scores was as follows: On *Poverty*, the majority (69.5%) reported at least one form of deprivation, and over 80% reported at least two. On *Wealth*, a majority (61%) owned a radio, less than half (40%) owned a television, a very small number (11%) owned a car, but the overwhelming majority (81%) owned a cell phone. In contradiction of the 2012 Census, most respondents reported being unemployed, with only 24% reporting being in full-time employment.

**Table 2: Class measures & individual composite measures**

Measure:	Mean (s.d)
Poverty (0 to 5)	1.2 (1.2)
Wealth (0 to 4)	1.9 (1.1)
Employed (1 or 0)	24.20%
Education (1 to 4)	2.67 (0.81)

When the overall class score was calculated, the mean score was only 3.6, and, on the rule of thumb for estimating the size of the middle class group, this was 21% only.

The measures of participation were also interesting. Social capital, political participation and political efficacy all had low mean scores on the indices. On *Social Capital*, nearly half (49%) reported being a member of a religious group. However, only about a third reported attending a community meeting (39%), and a very few (13%) belong to a voluntary association or community group, or join others to raise an issue (18%). And, when it came to direct engagement with political matters, hardly anyone reported actions that could be described as *Political efficacy* (Table 3).

**Table 3: Forms of Political efficacy**

Variable:	%
Contact local government councillor	14.8
Contact MP	5.5
Contact official of a government agency	3.5
Join others to request government action	9

Whilst there was support for *Democracy*, with nearly two-thirds (69%) being in favour of democracy, there was also expressed dissatisfaction with the extent of democracy in Zimbabwe, with only (35%) being content, and only 33% being satisfied with the democracy currently available in Zimbabwe. *Political participation* was extremely low, largely restricted to voting in elections, and becoming increasingly more uncommon as the possibility of more direct involvement in elections increased, as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4: Forms of Political participation**

Variable	%
Voting in the most recent national election	69.6
Attend a campaign rally	44.6
Attend a campaign meeting	21.6
Persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	12.8
Work for a candidate or party	5.9

Support for democracy is low overall, with most being dissatisfied with Zimbabwean democracy, although seeing democracy as the best form of governance for Zimbabwe.

**Table 5: Support for Democracy**

Variable	%
Support for democracy	69.2
Extent of democracy	34.5
Satisfaction with democracy	32.7

Fear around politics is a pervasive issue in Zimbabwe, with 83% of women stating that they are always careful what they say in public, and a large number (44%) stating that they fear political intimidation or violence. Finally, it is worth noting that, while the majority reported

being close to a political party, either MDC-T (18%) or ZANU PF (45%), a quarter (26%) refused to answer the question.

Correlations between the measures of participation were then carried out in order to determine their suitability. As can be seen from Table 6, the measures, with the exception of *social capital* and *political efficacy*, and *support for democracy* and *fear*, show mostly negative associations between them. This suggests that the measures are largely describing independent variables.

**Table 6: Correlations between measures of participation.**

	<b>Political Participation</b>	<b>Political Efficacy</b>	<b>Support for Democracy</b>	<b>Fear</b>
<b>Social capital</b>	0.208**	-0.027	0.021	-0.053
<b>Political Participation</b>		-0.012	0.032	-0.044
<b>Political Efficacy</b>			-0.010	-0.021
<b>Support for democracy</b>				0.165**

Some of the associations require exploration. For example, the support for democracy - *support for democracy*, *extent of democracy*, and *satisfaction with democracy*, all scored as positive responses – significantly correlate with *fear - how much fear political intimidation or violence* and *how often careful what you say* – scored as a positive response to the question. Those that state that they are neither concerned about what they say in public, or are worried about political intimidation or violence, are much more likely to support democracy. Again, the association between *social capital* and *political efficacy*, although significant, in reality means that very few belong to any group other than a church group and very few ever contact an official or undertake any communal action. Furthermore, *political participation*, as seen above (Table 4), diminishes the more active the role that a citizen must take, and has negative associations with all other forms of participatory behaviour. Women vote, but do little else it seems.

Since this study is concerned with understanding middle-class women, the assumptions made about class were also tested for the whole sample. The assumption was that *wealth*, *employment* and *education* would be positively related, and *poverty* would be subtractive. Poverty was negatively correlated with the overall class score, as well as with wealth, employment and education. All the other measures were strongly correlated with each other and with the overall class score. This suggests that the constructed class score would perform well as a measure of class.

**Table 7: Correlations between measures of class.**

[Source: Afrobarometer Round 4]

	<b>Wealth</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Class score</b>
<b>Poverty</b>	-0.024	-0.039	0.033	-0.52* <sup>6</sup>
<b>Wealth</b>		0.31*	0.46*	0.76*
<b>Employment</b>			0.23*	0.43*
<b>Education</b>				0.64*

<sup>6</sup> \* $p=0.0001$

With the confidence that the class measure was satisfactory, the sample of women (n=1200) was then disaggregated according to class. The mean class score was 3.6, with a standard deviation of 2.2. Hence, the middle class was defined as all those women with scores of 6 and above, and the remaining respondents were termed *Poor*, since the more conventional terms, *working class*, seemed hardly appropriate with the vast numbers in informal employment only. These groups were then examined against the composite measures described above, and a further comparison was done on the basis of residence (rural versus urban), since this has always been an important distinction in most social research.

### ***Class comparison***

Demographically, there were no differences between the two groups in either age or residence (rural or urban).<sup>7</sup>

At the outset, is evident that class, as defined here, does not appear to be a significant factor in determining participation or not. There were no discernable differences between the two groups on the variables measuring *Social Capital*. In both groups, the respondents were members of a religious group, slightly more amongst the *Poor* group, but otherwise few in either group were members of a voluntary association or community group, or would join others to raise an issue.

This trend of little difference between the two groups was seen again for *Political Efficacy*, with voting being the most frequent exercised form of agency, and thereafter the same linear decline away from more active engagement in politics.

**Table 8: Political Efficacy**

	<b>Middle class</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Voting in the most recent national election	65%	70%
Last national election: attend a campaign rally	42%	45%
Last national election: attend a campaign meeting	21%	22%
Last national election: persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	14%	12%
Last national election: work for a candidate or party	7%	5.6%

The pattern was repeated for *Political Participation* (Table 9). Very few in either group contacted an official or engaged in collective action.

**Table 9: Political Participation**

	<b>Middle class</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Contact local government councillor	17%	14%
Contact MP	4%	6%
Contact official of a government agency	5%	3%
Join others to request government action	10%	9%

The pattern was repeated for *Support for Democracy*, *Fear* and *Support for a Political Party*. As regards *Support for Democracy*, most Zimbabwean women, irrespective of class, see this as the most appropriate style of governance for the country, but few think Zimbabwe is very

<sup>7</sup> **Age:** Poor (40.6 years; s.dev 46.8); Middle-class (37.5 years; s.dev 15.9). **Residence:** Poor (rural, 37.2%); Middle-class (rural, 35.1%).

democratic nor are satisfied with democracy as evidenced in Zimbabwe. Substantial numbers ( $\pm 40\%$ ) in both groups fear political intimidation or violence, and the vast majority (80%) are careful what they say in public. Twice as many in both groups say they support ZANU PF than MDC-T, but a quarter in both groups refused to say whether they supported a party or not.

Thus the point seems clear: class, at least as we have defined this, is not a factor in determining the participation of Zimbabwean women in socio-political life. And if class is not a factor, then is the more frequently raised criterion of residence – rural as opposed to urban – more applicable in understanding women’s participation?

***Residence: rural versus urban***

The overall sample was split 60/40 in favour of rural women, as might be expected from the census. As was found for the class comparison, there were no differences in the measures of *Social Capital* between the two groups.

**Table 10: Social Capital; rural versus urban**

	Urban	Rural
Member of religious group	51%	48%
Member of voluntary association or community group	13%	13%
Attend a community meeting	42%	38%
Join others to raise an issue	16%	18%

However, there was a significant difference in the frequency of women voting with this being more frequent for urban women, but otherwise there were no differences in *Political Participation* between the two groups.

**Table 11: Political Participation, rural versus urban**

	Urban	Rural
Voting in the most recent national election	73%*	68%
Last national election: attend a campaign rally	45%	44%
Last national election: attend a campaign meeting	20%	23%
Last national election: persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	14%	13%
Last national election: work for a candidate or party	7%	6%

As was the case the for the class comparison, no differences were found between rural and urban women for either *Political Efficacy*, *Support for Democracy* or *Fear*. As regards political affiliation, rural women were significantly more likely to support ZANU PF than urban women, but were no different in the probability that they did not vote or refused to say which party they supported.

Thus, as with class, residence does not distinguish different groups of women, and this suggests that women as a whole are rather homogenous. This seems improbable on face value, and the data was re-examined, this time looking at a factor that should be directly related to political participation in its various aspects, *Support for Democracy*.

***Support for Democracy***

There is a small issue to raise here at the outset. The democracy score has a maximum of 3, derived from the three questions - *Support for democracy*, *Extent of democracy* and

*Satisfaction with democracy.* The maximum score assumes that a respondent favours democracy, sees Zimbabwe as democratic, and is satisfied with Zimbabwe’s form of democracy. However, a respondent can be strongly in favour of democracy, but also be dissatisfied with Zimbabwe both its extent and form, and, in reality, few persons, either within or without Zimbabwe, would claim that Zimbabwe under the present government is democratic. So, does this mean that a supporter of democracy should have a low or a high score on the constructed score?

Two comparisons were made to deal with this potential problem. The first was to do the comparison solely on the item relating to a preference for democracy – *democracy is preferable to any other kind of government*<sup>8</sup> and a positive response to this question. Then a comparison was made using the overall democracy score, with a nil score, ‘0’, being taken as no support for democracy, and any score between 1 and 3 taken as support. The two approaches produced virtually identical results, and hence the comparison reported below is based on the second method.

**Table 12: Social Capital, support for democracy**

	Support for democracy [n=903]	No support for democracy [n=249]
Member of religious group	49%	48%
Member of voluntary association or community group	14%*	9%
Attend a community meeting	42%**	32%
Join others to raise an issue	19%*	13%

9

Those that support democracy are significantly more likely to be creating social capital, but, of course, the association could be operating in the opposite direction: people active in creating social capital are more likely to support democracy.

**Table 13: Political participation, support for democracy**

	Support for democracy	No support for democracy
Voting in the most recent national election	74%**	55%
Last national election: attend a campaign rally	47%*	38%
Last national election: attend a campaign meeting	24%**	14%
Last national election: persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	16%**	4%
Last national election: work for a candidate or party	7%**	1%

10

<sup>8</sup> Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable; Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have.

<sup>9</sup> \* p=0.05; \*\* p=0.001

<sup>10</sup> \* p=0.05; \*\* p=0.001



Unsurprisingly, perhaps, there were significant differences in the two groups in *political participation*. Whilst the same general trend, of decreased participation for more active forms of political activity, those that support democracy were significantly more likely to report participation on all the questions comprising the index.

There were no differences between the two groups in either Political Efficacy or Fear, as seen below in Table 14.

**Table 14: Political Efficacy & Fear, support for democracy**

	<b>Strong support for democracy</b>	<b>No support for democracy</b>
<b>Political efficacy:</b>		
Contact local government councillor	14%	15%
Contact MP	6%	4%
Contact official of a government agency	3%	3%
Join others to request government action	9%	8%
<b>Fear:</b>		
How much fear political intimidation or violence	44%	41%
How often careful what you say	84%	82%

Interestingly, when political party affiliation is compared between the two groups, those expressing support for MDC-T are drawn from the *No Support for Democracy* group, and *Support for Democracy* is associated with support for ZANU PF (Table 15 over). This is rather unexpected in the light of all the rhetoric about ZANU PF and its authoritarian, anti-democratic nature.

This is perhaps unsurprising in respect of young middle-class women who express deep dissatisfaction with current political leadership according to a very recent report (RAU. 2016). Using age as an independent variable, supports this view, and some small differences emerge between older and younger women (Table 16 over).

**Table 15: Political party affiliation, support for democracy**

	<b>Support for democracy</b>	<b>No support for democracy</b>
MDC-T	17%	22%*
ZANU PF	48%*	37%
Other	1%	2%
Not vote	5%	6%
Refused to answer	25%	28%
Don't know	4%	4%

11

As seen in Table 16, young women are more likely to refuse to disclose their political affiliation and to be “middle-class”, and support for ZANU PF is more likely to come from older women. The refusal to state one’s political affiliation must, however, be seen in the

<sup>11</sup> \* p=0.001

context of Zimbabwean politics and the views about the fear that participation in politics brings.

**Table 16: Differences due to Age, Over 35 versus Under 35**

	Over 35	Under 35
Member of voluntary association or community group	14.6*	10.8
ZANU PF	50.7*	40.3
Refused to answer	22.3	28.2*
Class score	3.5 (2.3)	3.8 (2.2)**

12

A previous analysis of voting intentions in 2012, ahead of the 2013 elections, demonstrated that, due to the fear of intimidation and political violence, nearly a quarter of respondents would not disclose their political affiliation. (Bratton & Masunungure. 2012) When variables implicating fear were factored in, the apparent increase in support for ZANU PF disappeared, leaving the parties level pegging. This, of course, seemed a wholly inaccurate prediction when the results of the 2013 elections came out, but careful analysis of this election through the medium of a survey carried out in early 2013 showed that the result was most probably the consequence of electoral manipulation (Bratton et al. 2016).

Thus, assuming that similar processes are operating in 2014, then it is probable that the real gap in support between ZANU PF and MDC-T is much closer than that reported above, but we did not undertake any formal analysis to confirm this. This does, however, mean some caution must be exercised in interpreting political party affiliation.

## Conclusions

The previous analysis of political agency in Zimbabwe suggested that there was differentiation in the populace, with markedly polarised views evident in the supporters of ZANU PF and MDC-T, a group of “disconnected democrats”, who seemed to be middle-class, and a group that seemed to show the characteristics of “active citizens” (RAU. 2015). This finding seems to refute the view that the middle-classes are the defenders of democracy, but it was evident that the group, defined as urban, educated and employed, cannot be assumed to represent a middle-class group except by inference, and hence this was examined directly by more specifically constructing a measure of class in order to test directly the finding that “disconnected democrats” were a middle-class group.

In examining the views of middle-class women on participation, this preliminary study was guided by several hypotheses derived from the literature, but it also provided a view of women generally, at least their views in 2014. *Social Capital* was largely confined to belonging to a religious group, and *Political Participation* is mostly in the form of voting, which 70% said they did and this diminished in frequency the more active such participation could be: voting is safe, but working for a candidate is riskier, and only 6% said that did this. Very few demonstrated any form of *Political Efficacy* in contacting any kind of official, and, in common with all previous Afrobarometer surveys, women are fearful of expressing views in public, with significant numbers (44%) concerned about political intimidation or violence. Zimbabwean women can justifiably be described as “risk averse” in respect of socio-political activity.

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<sup>12</sup> \* p=0.001; \*\*p=0.05

The measures of social class and participation seemed satisfactory. Following Cheeseman, the variables suggesting middle-class identity – *wealth*, *education* and *employment* – were all positively correlated, and negatively correlated with poverty (Table 8). Using a simple rule of thumb, this gave a middle-class group of about 21% of the sample. Whilst the one feature of the “disconnected democrats” was their urban residence, this was assumed to be independent of class, since respondents conforming to the description could obviously live in either rural or urban areas. For example, a teacher with an undergraduate degree could be working in a rural mission school, and own a car, a TV, a radio and a cell phone. Effectively, middle-class respondents might be distributed through all of the four groups in the RAU (2015) study.

The measures of participation – *social capital*, *political participation*, *political efficacy* and *fear* – were mostly independent of each other (Table 7), but some associations were obvious: having low levels of fear meant being more likely to support democracy, and being willing to participate in open political activity meant that women are more likely to belong to social groups other than churches, to attend community meetings or join other to raise an issue. But it is not clear why *political efficacy* should be independent of the other variables on participation, except that contacting officials may be seen as an individual action, hence more threatening than collective action.

In order to provide some direction to the study two hypotheses were advanced about class.

- Middle-class women will be more likely to support democracy and opposition political parties;
- Middle-class women will be more likely to show higher frequencies of social capital, political participation, and political efficacy.

Firstly, it was hypothesised that middle-class women would be a distinct group, and distinguishable from other groups in their support for democracy and opposition political parties as was found in Kenya (Cheeseman. 2015).

This was not the case: disaggregating the data using the measure of class showed no differences between the groups in support for democracy. Neither were there any differences when residence – rural or urban - was used as the independent variable. Women support democracy irrespective of class or residence, and the only difference found in both contrasts was that urban women show a greater frequency for voting in the last election, presumably because it is much safer for them to do so.

This can be understood in two ways. Firstly, that class, defined using education, wealth or employment, is not a variable of any utility in current Zimbabwe where the economy has reduced the majority population to serious poverty, but secondly, and importantly, socio-political participation and the defence of democracy is not the exclusive domain of the middle-class in Zimbabwe. All previous Afrobarometer surveys have shown Zimbabweans to be amongst the strongest advocates for democracy, and the suggestion from our findings is that this desire for democracy is not class-specific as Gay’s thesis and Cheeseman’s findings might suggest.

However, supporting democracy requires much more than mere voting, which most women do, and it was interesting that there were no differences in all the measures of participation, particularly as a previous study had suggested that a group of “active citizens” can be distinguished in the general polity, distinct from those that evince support for political parties. Here using *support for democracy* as the independent variable extended this previous finding. Those women that supported democracy were significantly more likely to create *Social*

*Capital*, by belonging to a community group, to attend community meetings, or to join others in raising an issue. They were also more likely to be active participants in political processes by attending rallies, canvassing for political parties, and even working openly for a candidate. Admittedly, the frequencies drop markedly the more that active and open political participation is required, and here the “fear” factor is relevant as there are serious risks in Zimbabwe for open support for opposition political parties.

However, “active citizens” are no more likely to engage officials than anyone else, and here it can be wondered why women would participate in politics but not in less risky social behaviour. Again this might be due to the fear factor, but may equally be the result of unresponsive and unaccountable officialdom in Zimbabwe. For example, there is endless reporting about corruption amongst state, paras-tatal and municipal officials, let alone the effect that the economic down-turn has had upon the morale and probable efficiency of officials. However, and bearing in mind that the data set used here derives from 2014, it is also worth pointing out that, in 2016, citizens do not appear so averse to complaining or joining protests, women included.

The final point is in relation to the comparison about attitudes to democracy, and the finding that those who women evince strong support for democracy are more likely to support ZANU PF than MDC-T. Analysed more closely this finding suggests that this is more likely to be the view of older women (over 35 years), but it is also the case that a high percentage of younger women express the same support. It is also the case that support for ZANU PF is more common in rural women, and the overall finding that older, rural women are more likely to support ZANU PF than the MDC-T is unremarkable. However, it is the high frequency of support for ZANU PF that must be interpreted with caution, given that 25% of women are unwilling to disclose their political affiliation: as was pointed out earlier, more careful analysis suggests that support for these two parties may be much closer than the crude statistic suggests.

In conclusion, does it matter that middle-class women are little different to other women in their support for democracy when the evidence suggests that any women who support democracy are more likely to be active citizens? John Gay suggested that there may be a virtuous cycle for the protection and enhancement of democracy, and, at base, this requires active citizens. Zimbabwean women that support democracy are more likely to show the characteristics that support this virtuous cycle and probably irrespective of their political affiliation. The often violent climate that exemplifies Zimbabwean politics must be a serious inhibitor of women’s participation, but, if this can be eliminated, as it should be, then these results suggest that women’s participation in the socio-political life of Zimbabwe will be substantial.

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