



# **2018 Elections: What Happened to the Women?**

**Report produced by the Research &  
Advocacy Unit (RAU)**

**September 2018**

- (1) The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular—*
- (a) the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men;*
- (b) the State must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that—*
- (i) both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level; and*
- (ii) women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament;*

## **Background<sup>1</sup>**

With the passing of the 2013 Constitution came an explicit commitment to gender equality in all aspects of Zimbabwean life, which was an important achievement of the women's movement in all the lead up to the final draft. A crucial first step to ensuing compliance with the Constitution was for women to achieve parity in representation. Unless women are able to have a full say in the executive and legislative life of the country, they remain at the mercy of the agendas of their male counterparts, and past history has shown that women's issues tend to be given a lower priority than many other issues in the governing of the country.

A first step to honouring the Constitution came in 2013 with proportional representation in which political parties were given seats for women in direct relation to the number of votes received by a party in the elections. This resulted in a greater number of women in parliament, but fewer women were directly elected. Whilst an apparent advance in the direction of gender parity, in practice it meant that those proportionally appointed actually had less power outside parliament than their directly elected colleagues.

The proportional mechanism will stay in place until 2023, but, for many women parliamentarians and women's organisations, it seemed important to begin more assertive action to ensure greater representation for the 2018 elections. This work began well in advance of the 2018 elections.

Now that the 2018 elections are over, it is time to take stock of how successful has been the campaign for equality.

This brief report summarises two more detailed reports, based on research carried out by the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), the Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) and Hivos. These reports can be found on the RAU website ([www.researchandadvocacyunit.org](http://www.researchandadvocacyunit.org)).

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<sup>1</sup> **The detailed research reports from which this summary report was compiled can be found on the RAU website ([www.researchandadvocacyunit.org](http://www.researchandadvocacyunit.org)).**

## Gender Equality in Representation

One of the major hurdles to be overcome in ensuring equality for women is the perception that women should play a lesser role in public life. All opinion surveys, such as the seven surveys carried out by the Afrobarometer since 1999, demonstrate that the majority of Zimbabweans, male and female, believe in gender equality. However, these views are not matched by the views of Zimbabweans about the fitness of women for public office.

**Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women**

*[Source: Afrobarometer Online Data]*

Survey year	Male	Female
2017	37%	19%
2014	41%	19%
2012	30%	16%
2005	39%	22%

Twice as many Zimbabwean men as women think that women are unsuitable for political office. Patriarchy does not seem a trivial problem in Zimbabwe. However, there are many progressive African countries, such as Rwanda (and now Namibia), when it comes to being proactive about gender equality. Rwanda being the first state in the world to elect more women than men in its parliament.

Although women made up the majority of voters in 2013, the number of women that were elected was very low. After the 2013 elections only 25 women were directly elected. The total number of women stood at 34% in National Assembly. At local government level representation did not fare so well either with women making up 16% of total councilors.

After considerable work in the previous two years the Women's Caucus and women's organisations came together in March 2018 to try to overcome the deficit in representation that happened in 2013. The launch of the Women's Manifesto and 50/50 campaign in March of 2018, was spearheaded by the Zimbabwe Women's Parliamentary Caucus. The Manifesto spelt out Zimbabwean women's demands and calls for government's accountability in advancing gender equality in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5.

### **Objectives of the Manifesto:**

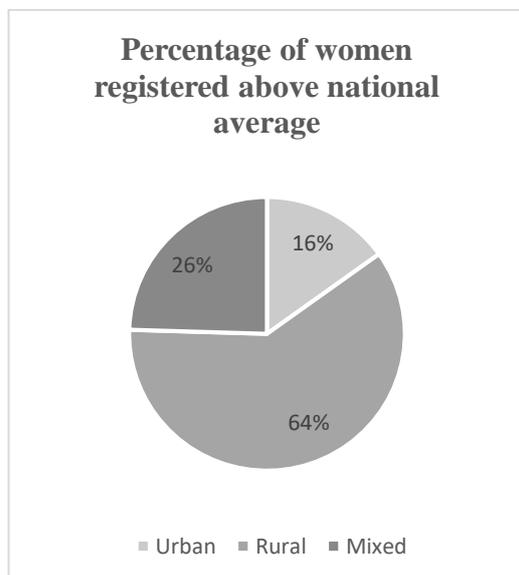
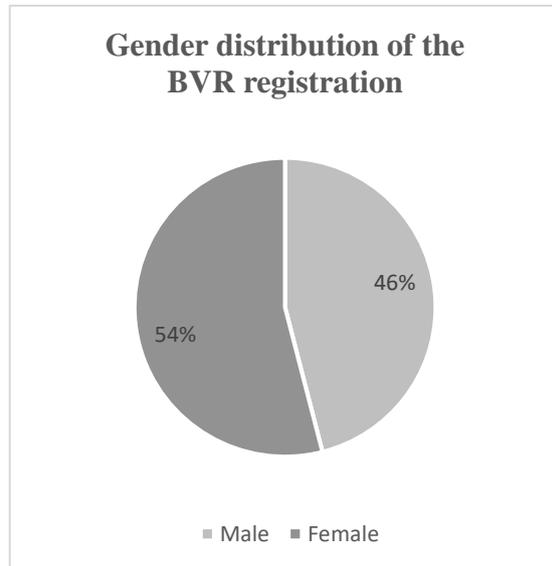
- *Call upon political parties and electoral management bodies to comply with the Constitution on gender balance.*
- *Raise awareness and galvanize the electorate to participate in elections and vote for female candidates.*
- *Articulate a united women candidate's campaign message on gender issues across political parties.*

An energetic campaign was begun to make these objectives real. Political parties were engaged, and a determined effort was made to encourage women to register to vote.

## Women and Voter Registration

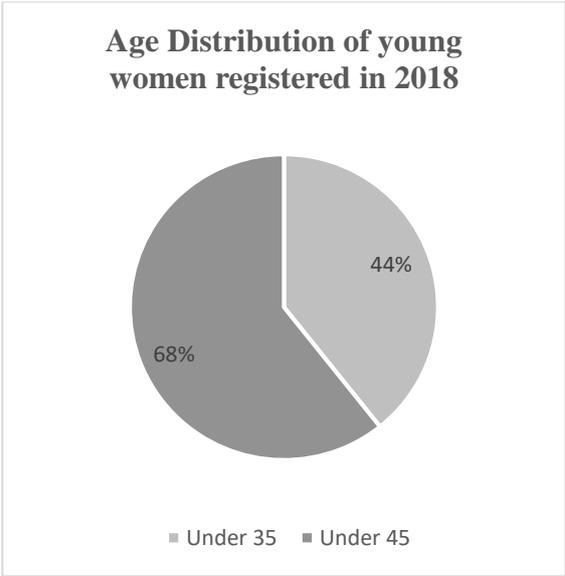
Getting women to register was the first hurdle to be faced, and work done by The Women's Trust (TWT) for the 2013 elections demonstrated that an assertive campaign could have a dramatic effect on the number of women that register and vote. An audit of the 2013 voters roll showed that women were in the majority of the registered voters: 52% of registered voters were women. When the BVR results were available in April 2018, it was possible to see whether this trend continued.

Not only had the trend in 2013 continued, but there were now an even greater number of women registered to vote in 2018. Obviously one of the objectives of the Manifesto had been achieved.



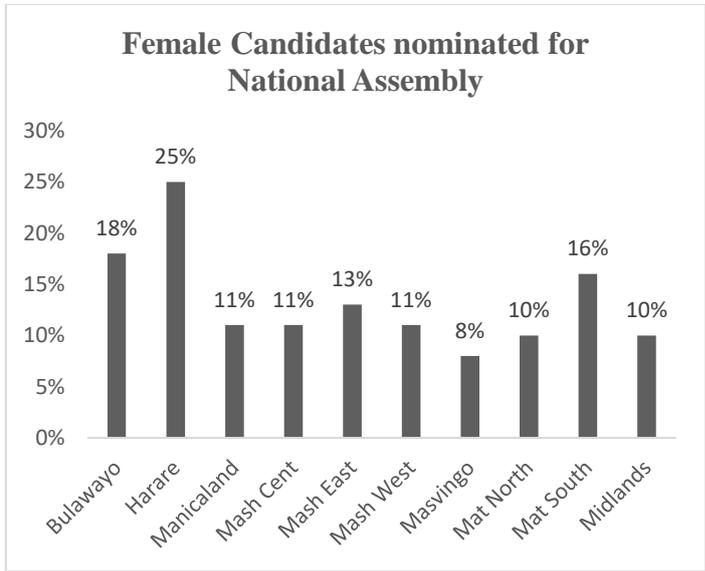
The previous work with TWT had shown that there was a trend for a greater number of rural than urban women to register. This trend continued in 2018, but this time there was an even greater proportion of rural women registered. 64% of rural constituencies had proportions of women greater than the national average for women. Why this was the case is not obvious, but it was obvious that rural women were going to be a significant factor in the 2018 elections.

In 2013, there had been endless complaints about the difficulties in getting registered, and RAU research showed a very high proportion of young Zimbabweans being unable or unwilling to register. In 2018, this has not been the case. 68% of the women registered in 2018 were under 45 years, and 44% were under the age of 35. Women were definitely interested in voting!



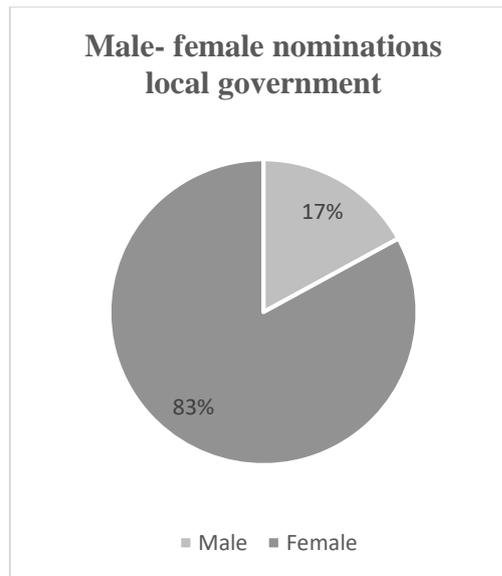
Registering to vote and voting are two very different actions, and thus the actual turnout was the crucial test. It is also crucial for the 50/50 campaign that women are able to vote for other women, and thus the number of women registering as candidates was important. It was the crucial measure of the success of the Women’s Manifesto and the commitment of political parties to gender equality.

**Women Candidates in 2018 Elections**



When the results of the nominations were available, it was obvious that the huge turnout for registration was not matched by the number of women nominated by their parties. Only 242 of the total candidates (1648) for the National Assembly were female, a mere 15%. Among all the ten provinces Harare had the highest number of women candidates for the National Assembly at 25%, and this was followed by Bulawayo (18%)

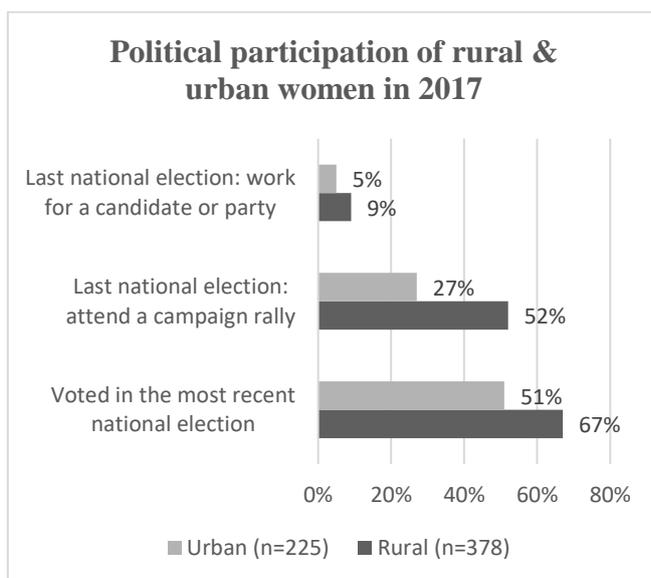
The picture was little better for the nominations for local government. Only 17% of the candidates nominated by political parties were female. ZANU-PF, the MDC Alliance and PRC accounted for 64% of the women candidates, and 8% were independents, the highest other grouping of candidates. This too was disappointing, for local government is the area of government most accessible to women and deals with most of the critical service delivery issues affecting women and their families.



The major point of the 50/50 campaign and the Women’s Manifesto was to affect representation through women turning out to vote and voting for female candidates. Of course there were sufficient female candidates for the National Assembly constituencies, but only if women did actually vote for women and did not vote along partisan political party lines. The RAU/IYWD/Hivos research concentrated on the National Assembly results only and further analysis will look at local government when those detailed results are available.

### Political participation and voting

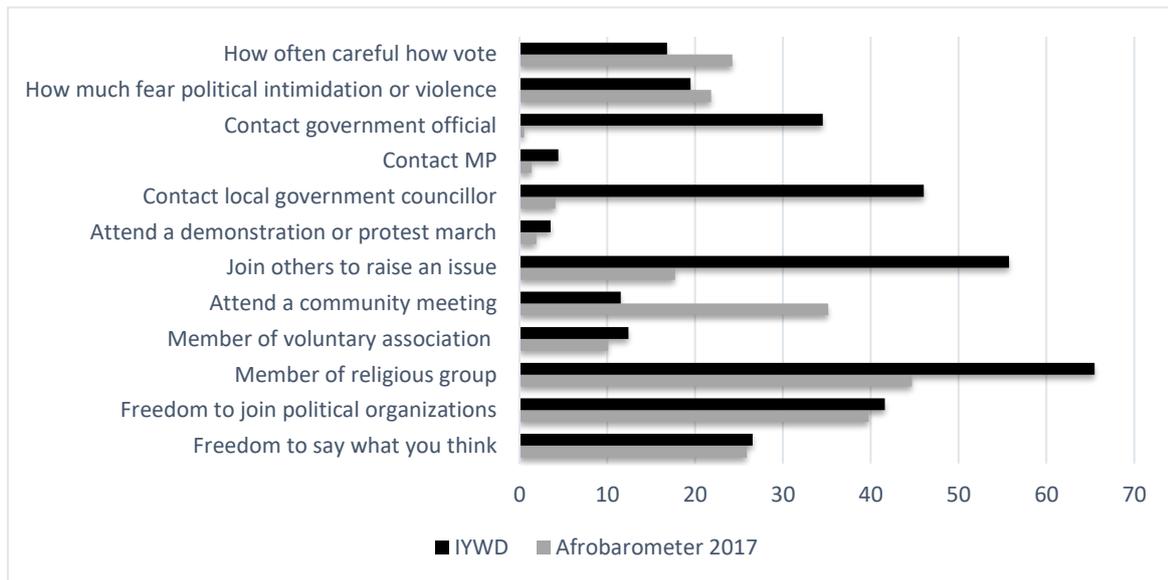
There has been considerable controversy over the 2018 elections, and it not the point here to deal with these. This report only deals with consequences for the women’s movement, but it worth pointing out one result of the elections: the country is deeply divided still on partisan political lines – 54% for ZANU-PF and 46% for the MDC Alliance. This split will have consequences for the women’s movement, and not necessarily negative ones.



In order to understand women’s participation in elections, and the probability of voting, we looked at the Afrobarometer (2017) survey for Zimbabwe. Rural women were much more likely to vote than urban women, as they were to attend a campaign rally. Both are not necessarily very active forms of participation, and rural women’s attendance at rallied might not reflect voluntary attendance. Very few of either rural or urban women report being actively involved in election campaigns. However, it was probable that women would vote.

Since this research was concerned with the views of young women, we also looked at a comparison between the members of IYWD, who are young women, and the national sample of equivalent women (under 40 years) sampled in the Afrobarometer.

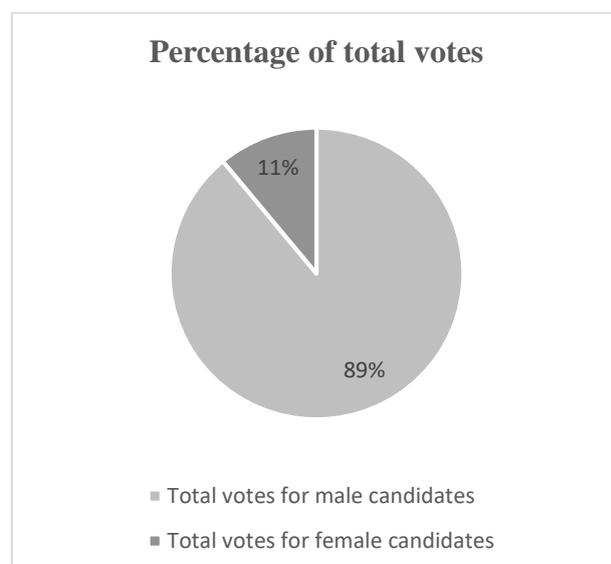
### IYWD compared to Afrobarometer Round 7 (2017)



It is evident that, as was the case with the TWT study in 2013, actively engaging women in issues around political participation has a decided effect. For starters, 98% of the IYWG members sampled were registered and 97% were intending to vote, and the gap between eligibility to vote and actual voting had closed in 2018. The young women were also much more likely to be involved in more active participation in public life. So there is clear benefit to actively engaging young women, but we will only be able to see whether the young women from IYWD did vote in such high numbers as they said they would prior to the election. The overall results of the election for the National Assembly are not encouraging however.

As is now common knowledge, the voter turnout for the 2018 elections was enormous, around 85% of those registered voted. Leaving aside the controversy over the results, this was the largest poll since 1980, and clearly very large numbers of women voted.

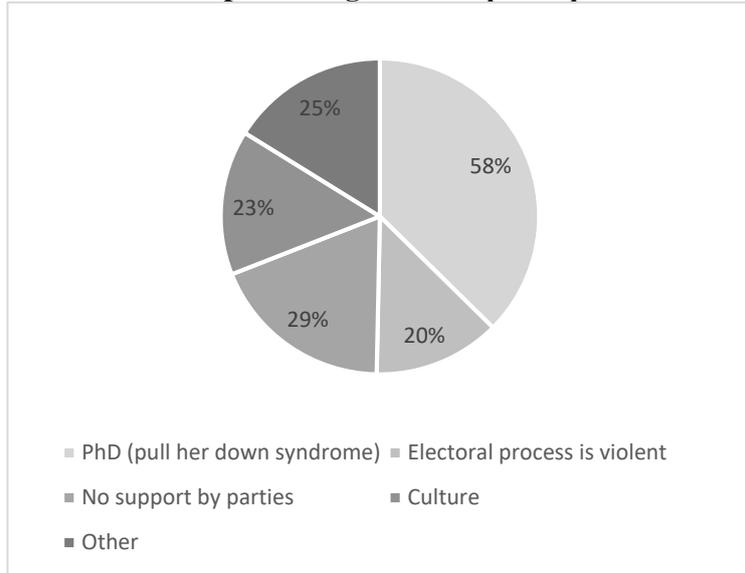
However, female candidates for the National Assembly received a miniscule 11% of the total vote, and only 25 women were elected for a constituency. Nothing has changed since 2013 it would seem.



There is probably no single reason for this poor result. Firstly, the opportunity to vote for a female candidate was very limited, even though other research by RAU and IYWD indicates that 91% of sample of young women felt that women should vote for other women. Secondly, this was very high stakes election in the aftermath of the coup in November 2017, and the ousting of Robert Mugabe. It is also probable that partisan voting overcame all other considerations.

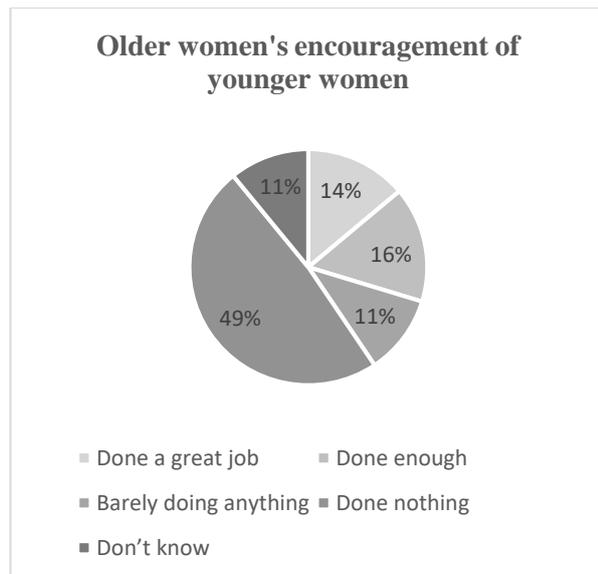
We were interested in the reasons why so few women participate in political processes and asked the young women from IYWD why this was so. We were startled to see that so many felt that this was due to a lack of solidarity amongst women. The PhD (pull her down) syndrome was far and away the most common reason. It was twice as large as political violence, lack of political party support or culture. This clearly needs to be investigated more carefully as it may be an important reason why so few women get nominated or voted for.

**Reasons preventing women's participation**



Finally, we were curious about another possible factor limiting young women's participation, and asked about support from older women. As can be seen from the chart, 60% of the young women felt that older women were either doing very little or nothing at all to help young women. This may also be linked to the PhD syndrome, but nonetheless is an issue that too deserves more exploration.

**Older women's encouragement of younger women**



## Conclusions & Recommendations

Firstly, large numbers of women, and especially young women, registered to vote. This increase may be due to the greater ease of registering in 2018, but, if the IYWD experience is anything to go by, also seems to reflect the hard work done under the Women's Manifesto and the 50/50 campaign in creating the motivation to register.

Secondly, the desire to vote is not matched by the desire to stand for office. Nominations for both the National Assembly and local government were disappointing to say the least. There needs to be careful stock-taking in order to understand whether the appeal to political parties' commitment is going to be the best way to ensure gender parity.

Thirdly, the votes cast for female candidates was also very disappointing. This may reflect a lack of choice or the resort to partisan voting in a very important election.

But, fourthly, it also seem possible that there is an issue about solidarity amongst women at play, both for nominations and for voting. For example, if the desire to vote for women particularly was real, then, despite the small number of female candidates, more women should have won seats.

Thus, there does seem a pressing need to understand this apparent lack of solidarity, and to find ways to counter-act this inhibitions for fuller participation by women, and especially young women, in the political life of the country. Clearly merely encouraging young women to register and vote is insufficient in the light of the 2018 election.

RAU, therefore, makes the following recommendations to address the issues identified:

- *Advocacy work around demanding 50/50 representation, as spelt out in section 17 of the constitution, needs to start as soon as possible in light of the fact that the gender quota is coming to an end in 2023;*
- *As gatekeepers to political office, political parties need to be held accountable for the pledges of gender equality that they are not honouring;*
- *Need for more work to be done in encouraging women in urban areas to participate in civic affairs;*
- *Need for more transformative programmes that change the way women in leadership are viewed.*

However, the real solution for creating gender equality would seem to lie in the direction of radical electoral reform and the movement to a proportional representation (PR) system instead of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system currently in place. This would allow for a rigid implementation of 50/50 where all political parties could easily ensure equal numbers of women and men in their nominated candidates.