



What Determines Agency in Young Zimbabwean Women? A Preliminary Investigation.

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the past four years, the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) has extended its previous programme on political violence, human rights and elections into a comprehensive programme on active citizenship, and this has had an explicit focus on women and youth.

The work on political violence also had an explicit focus on violence against women, and covered political violence (RAU. 2010(a); RAU. 2010 (b), politically motivated rape (RAU. 2010 (c)), rape (RAU. 2015), and other forms of abuse and ill-treatment of women (Dube. 2013; RAU. 2008).

This previous research clearly documented the considerable risks faced by women in entering the political domain, not only to those that choose to be active, but also to those whose husbands become active. Much of this work demonstrated the particularly high risks associated with elections. Political violence and fear of political violence is a significant factor inhibiting the participation of women in politics. It is commonplace that citizens attribute the fear of political violence as a reason, 2018 perhaps excepted, for voter apathy, and this is relevant given Zimbabwe is one of the more violent countries in Southern Africa, and especially around elections (RAU. 2016).

Based on these findings, it was therefore important to look into the participation of young women given Zimbabwe's Constitution that strives for equality between men and women. This report provides findings of a research that was carried out RAU (with data obtained from the Afrobarometer 2017 edition).¹ The study looked into the factors that influence women's political participation with a representative sample of 329 young women aged between 18 and 35. The differences in rural and urban in this research show how there is a need for a shift in how we perceive these demographics.

The access for the data for this study has been kindly provided by the Afrobarometer, who are not responsible for any views expressed in this report.

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Background

The participation of women generally in the social and political life of Zimbabwe is strongly required by the amended Constitution of the country. The Constitution, in Section 3 (Founding Principles), Section 13 (National Development), Section 17 (Gender Balance), and Section 80 (Rights of Women), makes it explicit that the state must strive for equality of men and women.

The reality, however, is different, as was so comprehensively demonstrated in the just-completed national elections. Not only was there no change from 2013 in the number of women directly elected to the National Assembly, but the number of women elected to local government seats dropped by 3%, from 16% in 2013 (RAU & IYWD. 2018 (a)). Even more depressing was the demonstration that women did not even vote for women in the 2018 elections: in the National Assembly poll, female candidates received a paltry 11% of the total votes cast, nearly 5 million and the largest turnout (85%) seen in Zimbabwe since 1980. It was evident that women were intending to be fully participating in these elections: women were a significant majority of the registered voters, 54%, and one study of young women indicated that most were intending to vote (RAU & IYWD. 2018 (b)).

However, full participation in the social and political life of the country requires considerably more than merely voting, and recent research has been examining some of the factors that facilitate or inhibit women's participation. The report focuses particularly on young women (18 to 35 years), a group that can be considered as even more marginalised from public life than women are generally. For example, a recent study indicated that young women see a lack of solidarity amongst women – the “pull her down” (PhD) syndrome – as well as a lack of support from older women as being instrumental in young women being marginalised (RAU & IYWD. 2018 (b)).

This current report is part of a series of studies commissioned by HIVOS, with the intention of providing a *“comprehensive description of the factors, personal, economic, social and political that either inhibit or facilitate young urban women's political participation”*.

Women and Participation in Public Life

Whilst it is evident that political violence during elections has been at comparatively low levels in the past two elections, 2013 and 2018, many commentators point out the relatively high levels of threat and intimidation, and the enduring effects of the previous political violence. Whilst there is undoubtedly some truth in this theory, empirical work on “risk taking” and “risk aversion” suggests that Zimbabweans have become increasingly more “risk taking” since 2008, with a majority of Zimbabweans now being “risk takers” (Masunungure et al. 2016; RAU. 2018). Interestingly, this work demonstrates that there are no significant

differences between men and women in their propensity to be “risk takers”, but there is a consistent difference between rural and urban citizens, with the former, counter-intuitively, being greater risk takers.

Given that risk taking has been increasing, and overt political violence has reduced since 2008, are there other factors at play that might contribute to low levels of agency in women?

In a series of studies on “active citizenship” and “social capital”, RAU has demonstrated a consistent trend for differences between rural and urban citizens, and this held for both women and the youth. On every index tested, rural residents showed significant differences to urban residents. For the youth, rural youth had higher scores on every measure, apart from *Access to Information*: they scored higher on *Social Capital*, *Freedoms*, *Support for Democracy*, *Agency*, *Political Participation* and *Political Trust* (RAU. 2018 (h)). When the same methodology was used for women, very similar findings were obtained (RAU. 2018 (d); RAU.2018 (e)).

Since the study on women did not disaggregate the data according to age, and the youth study did not disaggregate according to gender, there were no specific findings on young women as a group. The present study remedies this deficiency.

Methods

In order to provide the most representative sample for this study, RAU used the data from the Afrobarometer Round 7 (2017) survey. The data was extracted for the age group, 18 to 35, for females and males, giving a sample of 617 respondents, 47% male and 53% female.

A total of 144 fields were extracted, and, where necessary, each field was converted to a binary variable. A series of indices were constructed, some based upon previous research and some developed for the present study. The indices are described immediately below², and the questions from which these were derived can be provided if interested:

Service Availability;	Political Trust;
Service Delivery;	State Responsiveness;
Lived Poverty;	Gender Equality;
Access to News;	Political Fear;

² Estimates of reliability were carried out for each index, the Cronbach’s *alpha* showing a wide variation for these. Service Availability (0.76); Service Delivery (0.84); Lived Poverty (0.61); Social Capital (0.39); Access to News (0.72); Support Democracy (0.51); Political Trust (0.76); State Responsiveness (0.68); Gender Equality (0.78); Political Fear (0.501); Experience of Discrimination (0.49); and Ownership (0.72).

Social Capital;
Support for Democracy.

Experience of Discrimination;
Ownership.

We also included the demographic variable “residence” since much of our previous research has shown very marked differences between rural and urban citizens (RAU. 2018 (d); RAU. 2018 (e)).

The data was compiled in Excel, exported and analysed in SPSS (version 20). Frequencies, correlations, means, and test of means were conducted.

Results

We provide the findings in several sections below. The first section outlines the descriptive findings (as frequencies) for the young women sample of 329 young women between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Next, we tested two main hypotheses as follows:

- Young men and young women show no differences on the various indices (as indicated by previous research on both women and youth);
- Young women from rural areas will be different to young women from urban areas on the various indices (as also indicated by previous research on both women and youth);

Description of young women

Firstly, what are the issues of concern for young women? What do they want government to address?

Table 1: Priority issues for the government to address

	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice
Economy	21%	17%	20%
Wages	10%	15%	16%
Unemployment	45%	36%	21%
Poverty	8%	8%	16%
Taxes	1%	0%	4%
Farming	1%	1%	2%
Food	4%	4%	3%
Drought	9%	16%	15%
Land	2%%	4%	3%

Table 1 shows the choices made by the young women about the issues that government should address as a priority. As can be seen the issues of *economy*, *wages*, *unemployment*, and *drought* feature consistently in all the choices made, whether first second or third. This accords with the views of the general population (RAU. 2018 (f)).

Secondly, where these choices are influenced by poverty, (and here *Lived Poverty* was included as a variable to possibly control for the differences between urban and rural areas), most evidence suggests that poverty is higher in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.

Figure 1.



As seen in Figure 1, Lived Poverty does not appear to be a significant concern for these young women, with only access to cash income a problem for the majority. However, it should be borne in mind that there is probably an important difference masked here, and which relates to “residence”. This is examined later.

As indicated in the Methods section (above), we also examined a range of other indices and their constituent measures in order to determine whether there were other factors facilitating or inhibiting young women’s agency. One obvious factor currently at play is the access to information provided by the various forms of social media, and media in which the young apparently have much greater facility and interest. The Afrobarometer data does not provide detailed breakdown of the various forms of social media – Twitter, WhatsApp, etc – but does give information about the various general sources of news.

Figure 2.

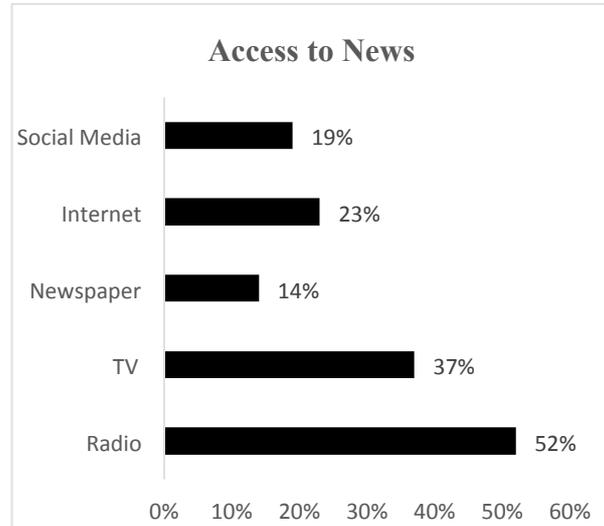
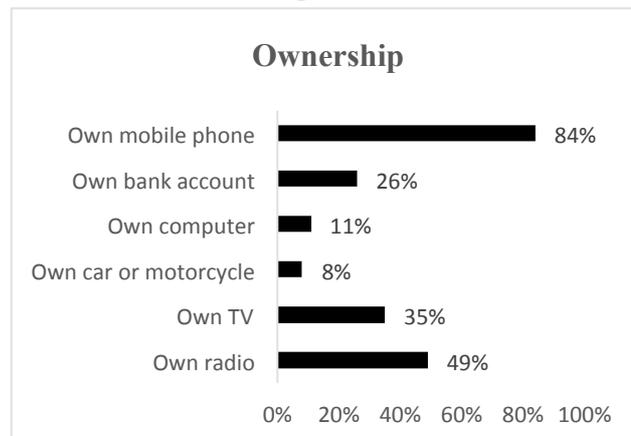


Figure 2 indicates the various sources of news used by young women. Obviously radio is used by most, and newspapers the least, probably because of cost. However, in comparison with the general female population, young women do use the internet more frequently, 23% for young women as opposed to 11% of women generally (RAU. 2018 (h)). The question about social media was not asked in previous Afrobarometer surveys so there is no basis for comparison over time on the variable.

Some indication for the use of social media can be gathered from Figure 3 where 84% of young women own a cell phone. This is not surprising given the extent of mobile phone penetration in Zimbabwe. However, very few have a computer, so access to the internet will mostly have to be by mobile phone. However, those that do own computers do access the internet.³

Figure 3.



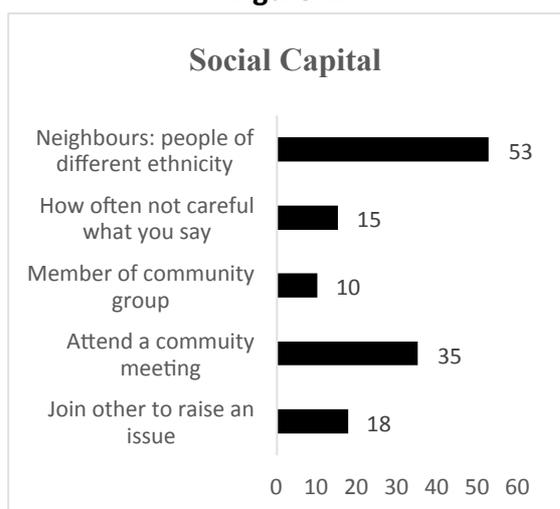
³ Use the internet and own computer: Pearson's $r = 0.36$ ($p=0.001$)

Unsurprisingly, given both their age, the high unemployment, and the state of the economy, very few young women own a bank account, a computer or a car.

The Social Capital measure did not provide a strongly reliable index (see footnote 1), but was nonetheless included as the individual measures comprising the index are all important aspects of social participation.

As can be seen in Figure 4 (below), most young women, and in common with Zimbabweans as a whole, are careful about what they say in public: only 15% are unafraid to speak their mind in public. Even fewer belong to a community group or join others to raise an issue. The findings here merely replicate what has been found for women and youth more generally; that Zimbabweans have little “voice” and even less participation, and it would have been surprising when the data on women was disaggregated by age to find that young women were markedly different to older women.

Figure 4.

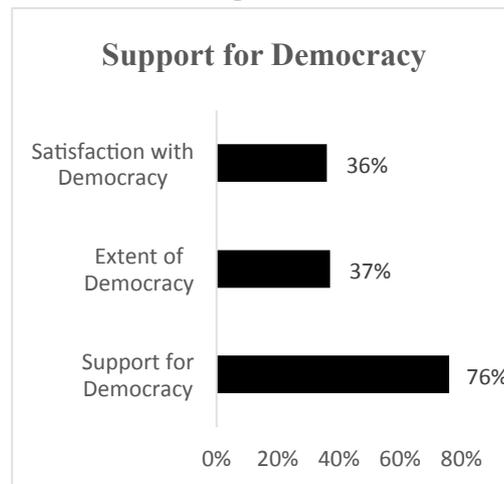


As seen in Figure 4, young women are relatively tolerant of people of different ethnicity, but do not show very high frequencies of participating in community actions. More will attend a community meeting, but this is a feature of young women living in rural areas

Most Zimbabweans in the Afrobarometer surveys since 1999 strongly desire democracy as the political system for country, and decry all other alternatives. This has been consistent finding, and, relative to all the African countries that participate in the Afrobarometer surveys, Zimbabweans are the simultaneously the most in favour of democracy but also the most pessimistic (RAU.2012). It is worth pointing out here that there is also a trend across Africa for women to be not only supportive of democracy, but also more pessimistic about the benefits of multi-party, competitive electoral systems, which frequently lead to political violence and contested results, and not only in Zimbabwe (Bratton & Logan. 2006).

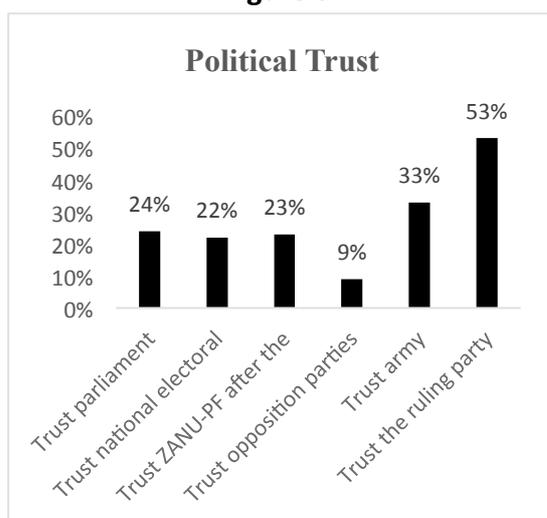
As seen in Figure 5, young Zimbabwean women are not different in their support for democracy, and are not very satisfied with Zimbabwe’s version, nor the extent of democracy. They are supportive of democracy in the majority, and the level of support has not altered much for the past decade. This is important as this is an age group that continually enters public life as they become of age. Thus, each new cohort, at least since 2008, is supportive of democracy, which is clearly good news for democracy advocates.

Figure 5.



Important as this may be, it also must be read together with the very low levels of participation seen in Figure 4. Now one factor that is hypothesized to increase social capital and active citizenship is *Political Trust*, but there are also views that argue that trust is not a crucial ingredient for social capital (van Deth. 2001). For Zimbabwean women, a study by RAU (2018. (d)) found that *Active Citizenship* correlated with a number of the other indices – *Political Trust, Freedoms, Support for Democracy* and *Social Capital*. Whilst this was true of women generally, we examined this in relation to young women.

Figure 6.

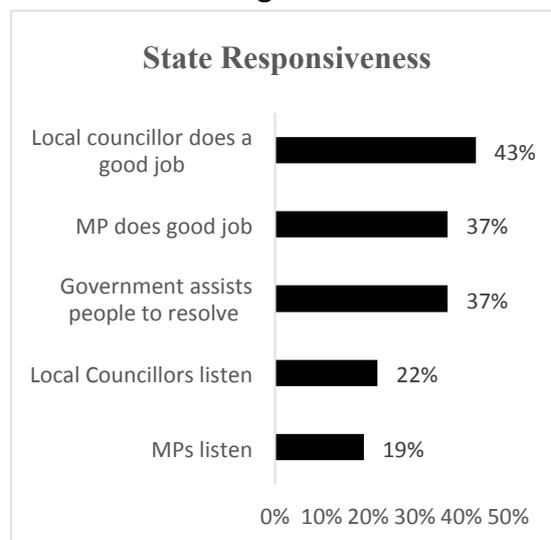


Young women generally do not show high levels of political trust, with only the ruling party getting more than 50% support. For this cohort of young women, whom a majority have come to adulthood during a very conflictual and disturbed period in Zimbabwe’s history, it is probably unsurprising that they have little political trust. The greater trust in the ruling party, ZANU-PF, would seem to be a feature of rural residence (see below), but this apart the low levels of political trust in other bodies are a matter for concern.

As regards the low trust in ZEC, it is thus encouraging that so many young women decided to register as voters in 2018 (and presumably vote) when their levels of trust were so low in 2017.

As pointed out earlier (Table 1), young women have decided views on what issues the government should address as priorities, and it is evident that these are not being dealt with as the economy slides deeper into trouble. This may be yet another reason for low levels of trust in government and government bodies. Here an important variable for understanding how citizens view their governments is *honest and responsive government* (Bergh, Menocal & Takeuchi. 2014).⁴

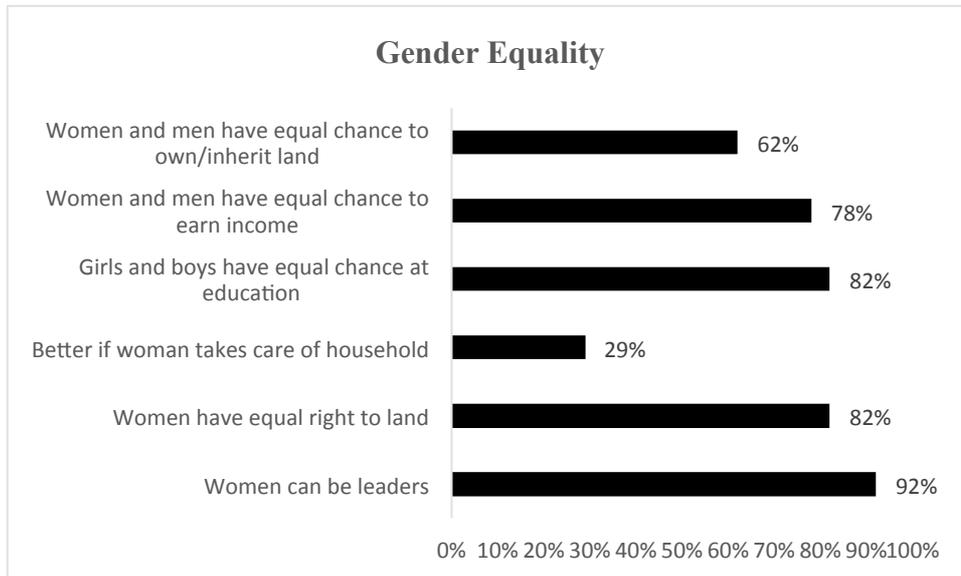
Figure7.



As can be seen in Figure 7, young Zimbabwean women do not hold very complimentary views about the various state agents. Local councillors get the highest approval rate, and thereafter the frequencies decline. There are some anomalies though: local councillors are seen as doing a good job, but half of that number do not believe that they listen. The same is true for MPs. This does suggest that there is much work to be done on the supply-demand relationships between duty bearers and citizens.

⁴ For this study, *State Responsiveness* was an index derived from the Afrobarometer to measure *honest and responsive government*.

Figure 8.



It is always a question when women are concerned, and especially young women, to determine whether patriarchy is another confounding variable. As can be seen in Figure 8 (above), young women believe that women can be as good leaders as men, and that they have an equal chance at education and to earn income. They do not believe that woman's place in the home and that women have an equal right to land, but, perhaps realistically, also believe that women will not have an equal opportunity to inherit land. Here, there is considerable evidence about the difficulties that women in Zimbabwe experience with inheritance, especially in the context of traditional marriages, but this is not only confined to traditional marriage when it comes to inheritance.

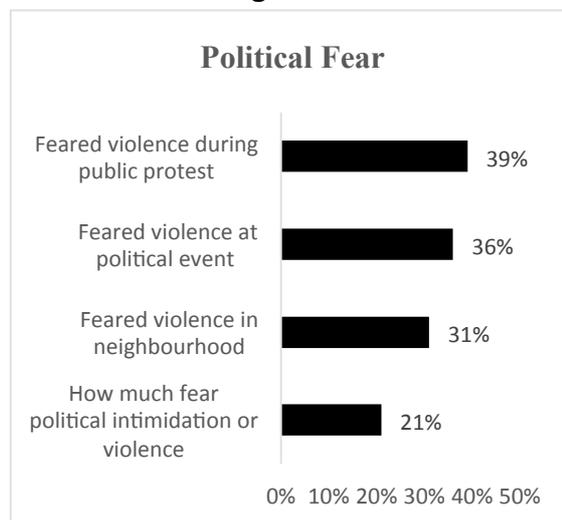
Figure 9.



Notwithstanding the issue about inheritance, young women do not seem to feel that they experience much discrimination. Virtually all do not feel that they have been discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, religion or gender. This is a very warming finding.

Earlier, we raised the matter of political fear and its potential long term effects. As seen in Figure 10 (below), young Zimbabwean women see political fear in its various manifestations as a serious problem. A very high number (79%) fear political violence or intimidation, and over two-thirds (69%) fear violence in their neighbourhoods. The latter may have little to do with political violence and reflect the very high rates of gender based violence in Zimbabwe.

Figure 10.



Thus, the Afrobarometer data do give an interesting overview of young women’s views, even though the data reflects their views in early 2017, and obviously much has happened since. The data suggests that there are many areas for deeper investigation, and some may well not be indicative of how young are thinking at the end of 2018. For example, despite very high rates of political fear, there was very high engagement with the elections, and at least one study suggests that this high registration rate was matched in the very high

turnout by equally high rates of young women voting (RAU. 2018 (b)). In this study, there was nearly a 100% rate of registration, and an equivalent number said they were definitely going to vote. It may be concluded that expressed *Political Fear* in early 2017 was not operating to the same extent in July 2018.

Are young women different to young men?

This an obvious issue to explore in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe. As seen above, young women believe that they have equality, and when we compared young women and men this was in fact the case (Table 2).

Table 2: Gender equality
[Source: Afrobarometer 2017]

	Male [n=287]	Female [n=329]	df	t	Sig
Access to News	1.75	1.45	614	2.498	0.0128
Gender sensitivity	5.35	5.83	614	-3.329	0.0009
Ownership	2.43	2.14	614	2.277	0.0232
Vote for MDC	.185	.128	614	1.957	0.0508

On most measures, there are no differences between young men and women – This the case for *Service Availability, Service Delivery, Lived Poverty, Social Capital, Support for Democracy, Political Trust, State Responsiveness, Political Fear, Heard about Climate Change, and Discrimination*. Young men and women are differentiated only by *Access to News, Ownership, and Voting for the MDC*, where males have greater access and ownership, and are more likely to vote for the MDC. Young women, unsurprisingly, show higher frequencies of views on *Gender Sensitivity*, although both groups believe in equality (Table 3 below).

Table 3: Views of Gender Equality, Males and Females

	Male [n=287]	Female [n=330]
Equal as leaders	70%	81%
Equal for jobs	54%	67%
Equal right to land	70%	84%
Women better at family care	29%	28%
Girls have equal chance at education	90%	91%
Equal chance to earn income	83%	84%
Equal chance of paying job	82%	80%
Equal chance to own/inherit land	64%	63%

As noted earlier, most young women (84%) believe in the right to own land, but, similar to the men, a significantly smaller percentage (63%) believe that their chances of inheriting land are less than their right to land. Interestingly, young men agree with the difficulties in inheriting land, but also they believe that women have less right to land. This seems to be tapping both a patriarchal variable, as well as having residence as a confounding variable as well.

Thus, with these minor differences, we can state that our first hypothesis is largely confirmed: young women and men are little different.

Does place of residence make a difference

As pointed out continually in previous sections, and demonstrated by a number of studies carried out by RAU (RAU. 2018 (d); RAU. 2018 (h)), there are consistent and important differences due to place of residence. We tested for this with the young women.

Table 4: Residence- Rural versus Urban on all indices

	Urban [n=143]	Rural [n=186]	df	t	Sig
Service Availability	8.13	3.85	327	15.993	0.0000
Service Delivery	3.87	4.52	327	-1.677	0.0944
Lived Poverty	2.73	2.90	327	-1.173	ns
Access to News	2.23	.84	327	9.740	0.0000
Social Capital	1.73	2.46	327	-5.576	0.0000
Support for Democracy	1.41	1.54	327	-1.227	ns
Political Trust	1.00	1.17	327	-1.061	ns
State Responsiveness	1.27	1.80	327	-3.108	0.0021
Gender Equality	5.86	5.81	327	.245	ns
Political Fear	1.38	1.03	327	2.777	0.0058
Discrimination	2.92	2.81	327	2.161	0.0314
Ownership	2.80	1.62	327	7.306	0.0000
Heard about Climate Change	.79	.64	327	2.998	0.0029
Vote for MDC	.126	.129	327	-.085	ns
Voted for ZANU-PF	.22	.36	327	-2.846	0.0047

Once again the “rural factor” is demonstrated. Apart from *Lived Poverty*, *Support for Democracy*, *Political Trust*, *Gender Equality*, and *voting for the MDC*, where there are no differences between the two groups, there are significant differences between them. Young urban women feel they have *Service Availability*, *Ownership*, and *Access to News*, but also greater *Political Fear* and *Discrimination*. They are also more likely to have *heard about*

climate change. This last would seem to go with having more access to information through social media and the internet.

On the other hand, young rural women, and much like their older counterparts in the rural areas, see greater *Service Delivery* and *State Responsiveness*, have greater *Social Capital* and are more likely to vote for ZANU-PF. Much of this may be attributed to the patronage of the ruling party and the state, but are also crucial properties of rural life where collective action and assistance are critical to dealing with the arduous conditions in which many rural Zimbabweans live.

Conclusions

The first point to make is that young men and women are little different in respect of many of the variables. Young men show greater access to news, are more likely to have some form of ownership and are more likely to vote for the MDC. Young women, unsurprisingly, have stronger views on gender equality, but as seen in Table 3, young men and women are largely similar, apart from fewer young men believing that women should have equal access to land. However, similar numbers of young men and women believe that women do not have equal opportunity to inherit land, which is probably realistic in the light of the patriarchal culture that is Zimbabwe (Dube. 2012).

The second point is that there are marked differences between young rural and urban women, as is generally found with most other groups. The differences are expected from the differences that generally apply to rural and urban areas. However, it is worth pointing out that young urban women have greater *Political Fear*, do not see *State Responsiveness*, and have less *Social Capital*, but are more likely to have *heard about climate change*. The higher frequencies on each of these measures for young rural women may be due to patronage and patriarchy, but, also, the necessity for collective action and work, that is so fundamental to rural life, should not be underestimated.

As regards young women generally, they do use internet more frequently than older women, which is expected, and probably social media too, given the very high ownership (84%) of mobile phones. Very few own a bank account, a computer or a car.

Whilst there were differences between rural and urban women on *Social Capital*, it must also be noted that all the measures comprising this index were very low. Very few in either group belong to a community group, attend a community meeting, or join others to raise an issue, all indicators of *participation*, one key component of *agency*. Neither do they have much *voice*, with the majority (85%) *being careful what they say in public*. This is not peculiar to young women, though and found for all age groups in Zimbabwe.

Young women support democracy, but few either approve of the Zimbabwean variety or the extent of democracy in Zimbabwe. They also show low levels of political trust, apart from in

the ruling party, ZANU-PF, but, as seen in Table 6, this is a feature of young rural women. Most also do not see a responsive state (*State Responsiveness*), but a significantly larger number (43%) see local councillors as doing a good job. Perhaps more focus should be placed on improving the supply-demand relationship between young women and local government. Here it must be repeated that the measures of *Political Fear* are high, about two-thirds of young women fear political violence, and this must be seen in the context of low levels of participation and voice. But, they do not report *Discrimination*, and feel strongly about gender equality, except for the notion that a woman's place is in the home.

What stands out from this examination of young women? It is clear that we must think through the differences between rural and urban for any attempt to foster increased agency for young women. As Win (2004) pointed out a decade or so ago, the targets for social interventions for women too frequently focus on groups perceived to be the most marginalised, but we think, on the basis of these findings, that a more cost-effective approach may be to begin to more explicitly target young urban women.

Take three indicators. Young women may have greater access to information through the internet and social media; they have greater awareness of climate change; and are equally likely as their rural cousins to see local government as the accessible vector in governance. Perhaps programmes should focus more on "soft" issues for fostering agency. Linking climate change, (which will be a critical problem in coming years), urban decay, social pathology, increasing municipal responsiveness, and fostering young women leadership may be much better ways of increasing young women's agency. It may also have "trickle down" effects for this group's rural cousins. This does not mean that young rural women are unimportant; rather, focusing on young urban women may have particular benefits.

It must be time to think more laterally about young women and their agency, especially when all the efforts at increasing representation have taken such a beating in 2018.

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