



**YOUNG WOMEN'S HOPES
IN THE "NEW
DISPENSATION".**

March 2018

INTRODUCTION¹

Participation amongst young women in governance processes is strikingly low. Although it is a right guaranteed in the Zimbabwean constitution the numbers are appalling. In the previous election of 2013, a gender audit² was carried out of the voters roll and found that there had been massive under registration of young women especially in the urban areas. It was found that the younger ages had very low registration rates of 8% for those between 18-19 years and 18% for those between 25-29 years. In recently released voter registration statistics for the upcoming elections the registrations rates of women have gone up from 51.98% in the previous election to 54.5%³. There has also been an increase in the number of young registered voters which includes young women from 14% to 43.5% of those between 18 and 34 years. In addition there is a large deficit of female representation in governance structures with 34% in National Assembly and 16% in local government. There is an even larger deficit of young women. Low engagement and participation of young women and women in general in governance processes is attributed to fear because of the violent nature of politics, patriarchy that places emphasis on the dominance of men in society and purposefully excludes women, lack of financial resources, and limited educational opportunities amongst others.

For 37 years former President Robert Mugabe ruled repressively over Zimbabwe where basic human rights central to participation in governance processes such as the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to demonstrate and the right to vote were thwarted harshly. On November 14, the military took over, ultimately resulting in his ousting, and ending his reign of almost 4 decades. The 24th of November saw the dawn of a new era with the inauguration of Emmerson Mnangagwa as the new president, the second president in Zimbabwe's history since independence in 1980. His coming into office gave renewed hope to many Zimbabweans, particularly the youth who had known only one president their entire lives, causing widespread voter apathy amongst them. The common sentiment was their vote

¹ Report written by Tintenda Chishiri.

² RAU and the TWT. July 2013. "Gender Audit of the June 2013 Voters Roll." Research and Advocacy Unit. Harare.

³ Election Resorce Centre. "After BVR mop-up exercise, then what?" The Standard. March 4 to 10 2018.

wouldn't count or change anything because the same president always won the elections. The new dispensation brings opportunities for a new start, a chance to operate differently.

The Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) conducted an online survey on young women's views on current political developments and their hopes in the new dispensation. The purpose of the survey was to capture and amplify the views of young women that are usually not taken into account when it comes to issues of national interest. RAU recognizes that in the spirit of democratic governance young women's voices matter and are important in contributing to national development.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using an online platform, Survey Monkey. The choice of the data collection method used took into account the uneasiness that most people have about politics in Zimbabwe as it was filled in anonymously and responses were confidential. It is also cost effective, fast and suitable for gathering data from a large group of respondents because of its wide reach. A set of questions were developed and the survey link was sent via email to young women in RAU's database and shared on RAU's social media pages. It was also shared amongst other young women's networks.

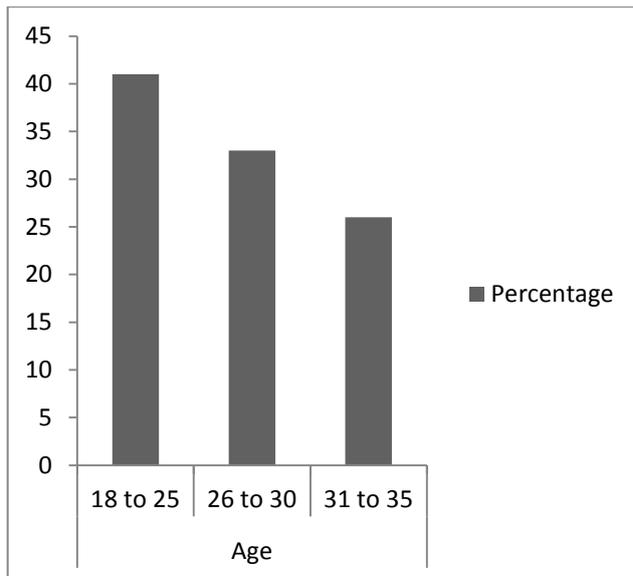
FINDINGS

Demographic data

A total of 85 women responded to the survey. The target population was mainly young women between the ages of 18 and 35.

Figure 1

The majority of the respondents were between 18 and 25 (41.18%), followed by 26-30 (32.94%) and lastly 31-35 (25.88%) as depicted in figure 1. They were mainly from Harare (72%), followed by Bulawayo and the rest of other parts of the Zimbabwe. There were two from Johannesburg, one from Cape Town and one from China. 40% had a postgraduate degree, followed by 34%



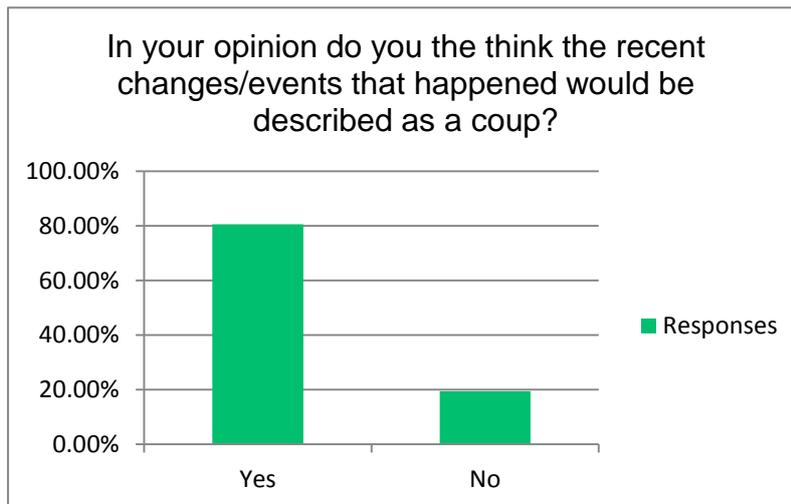
who had an undergraduate degree, and 17% who had a diploma.

The survey was sent to over 150 young women. However, after two months there were only 85 (57%) responses. This is not a great return, but some of the networks to which the survey had been sent to expressed concern over the political nature of the questions. Although we are in a new dispensation, there is still some fear in talking about politics: Afrobarometer consistently reports more than 80% of Zimbabweans state that they are careful what they say in public. During Mugabe's era such talk brought with it dire consequences and so people had resorted to not talking at all about it, an uneasiness that has been carried over into the new era.

Recent political developments

Zimbabwe recently experienced a change in government that saw the end of Mugabe's 37 year rule and the coming in of Emmerson Mnangagwa after a military intervention in November 2017. He became Zimbabwe's second ever president. Because of the peaceful nature of the takeover there was confusion locally, regionally and internationally as to whether it was a really a coup or not because of the presence of characteristics of a coup. The military action included the takeover of government institutions, state media and the imprisonment of government officials including then President, Robert Mugabe. However, violence, a key component of a coup was mostly absent. This confusion led to it being dubbed 'a coup not coup'. 80% of the respondents described what happened as a coup as depicted below.

Figure 2



Although the recent developments and changes were welcome, after the euphoria has worn off, there are mixed feelings about how Zimbabwean young women feel about them. Some are positive describing their feelings as *'promising', 'exhilarating', 'hopeful', 'optimistic'* to mention a few. However, the rest of the respondents, who were the majority, chose to be more cautious in how they felt about the recent changes and had reservations. They used words such as *'apprehensive, 'anxious', 'fearful', 'uncertain'*. Others were cynical describing how they felt as *'sceptical', 'concerned'* and *'disappointed'*

What the changes mean for the young women.

The survey respondents gave mixed reactions as to what the changes meant to them as young women. In the run up to Mugabe's ousting, Zimbabwe was in the midst of an economic crisis that saw unemployment standing at 95%⁴ not formally employed. In light of the economic crisis, a number of the young women expressed that they hoped that the new dispensation would bring prospects for new opportunities economically in the form of jobs. There are a high number of university graduates as shown by the majority of respondents who had postgraduate (40%), undergraduate degrees (34%) and diplomas (16%) but there aren't enough job opportunities to meet the demand. This has forced many young people, particularly women, to take on commercial activities such as selling of food, clothing items, and cosmetics amongst others in order to make a living.

⁴ December 2017. BBC News. "Reality Check: Are 90% of Zimbabweans Unemployed?" <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-42116932>

For other young women, the changes mean more opportunities for social transformation for women who, traditionally have been disadvantaged and side-lined in society as a result of patriarchy. Section 17 of Zimbabwe's Constitution states that "*The State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men.*" However the reality on the ground is strikingly different with women in both the public and private sector immensely under-represented. According to a study of the 64 companies listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, out of 406 directors 10% are female and 90% are male.⁵ The female to male ratio was found to be 1 female C.E.O: 21 male C.E.Os. Out of eight State Universities surveyed, seven of the eight vice-chancellors were male. Of 10 pro vice-chancellors, 9 were male and only 1 was female. In the National Assembly, 34% of the MPs are female and 66% are male. There are only 5 female ministers out of a total 22. They expressed hope that women would attain higher positions in places of employment, equal representation in all spheres of society and increased participation in civic affairs.

Others were more cautious and maintained that they were yet to see what the changes would mean for women in the long run, but, for now, they said that there were no tangible changes for young women.

Young women and elections

Zimbabwe is set to have harmonised parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018. Participation of youth in such processes has always been low. In the 2013 elections, RAU's audit of the voter's roll revealed that nearly 2 million people under the age of 30 were unregistered.⁶ In one age band 18 to 19, only 8.87% were registered. A gender voter's roll audit further revealed that there had been significant under-registration of young women, particularly within the urban areas. Reasons cited by young women for their decision not to participate in the elections were lack of faith in the electoral process, the political parties and management of elections.⁷ It was encouraging however to see that more young women

⁵ Make Every Woman Count. 30 September 2016 "Gender Parity in Corporate Governance: A Pie In The Sky." <http://www.makeeverywomancount.org/index.php/gender-issues/human-rights-of-women/9936-zimbabwe-gender-parity-in-corporate-governance-a-pie-in-the-sky>

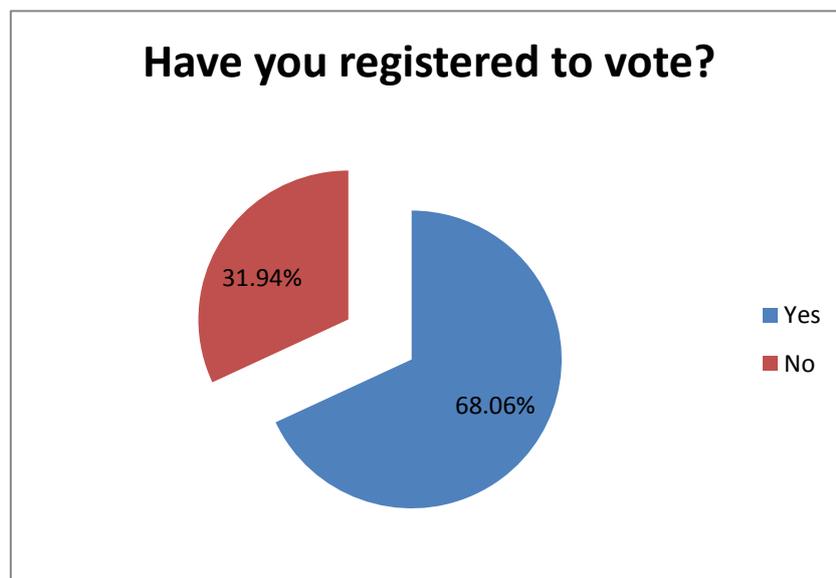
⁶ RAU. July 2013. An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll. Research and Advocacy Unit. Harare.

⁷ RAU. June 2017. Will Young Women Make a Difference In The 2018 Elections? Findings from an online survey.

(80%) in a recent survey carried out last year were intending to vote in the upcoming elections.⁸

68% of the respondents in the RAU survey had registered to vote in the upcoming elections. Recent statistics released by the ZEC state that 54.5% of women had registered to vote in the upcoming elections..This is encouraging although there is still more work to be done to get more young women to register. The general sentiment amongst them was that their vote did not count and it would not change anything because the result was the same every election: *“It’s not the people who vote that count. It’s the people who count the votes.”*⁹ The coming in of the new dispensation has given renewed hope and confidence for some of the women who referred to the possibility of free and fair elections and the fact that their vote might start to count and contribute meaningfully towards positive changes for the country. However on the other hand there were others that were choosing to still remain guarded because of the fact that it was still the same party in power and so people were still suspicious and uneasy. This was another element that was reflected when the young women were asked if they thought the new government will deliver a free and fair election. Sixty-one percent (61.4%) stated that they were not sure. Therefore the new government needs to do more work and shake off their old image to be able to win over young women.

Figure 3



⁸ RAU. June 2017. "Will young women make a difference in the 2018 elections? Findings from an online survey."

⁹ RAU. September 2016. "Very Constrained and Confined. The Lack of Middle Class Young Women's Voices in Political Discourse."

Conclusion

The hopes for the young women can be summarised as follows:

- *Transparency, accountability and restoration of rule of law;*
- *Progressive policies and economic reforms;*
- *Re-engagement with the international community;*
- *No corruption;*
- *A responsive government to people's needs*
- *Running of public services;*
- *Respect for human rights freedoms;*
- *Efficient and effective justice delivery system;*
- *Equal opportunities for women.*

Young women are a demographic group that cannot continue to be ignored. They are significant in number and their voice matters in the national development discourse in the spirit of genuine democratic governance. To encourage the participation of young women there is need to address the fear factor, include young women meaningfully in national dialogues, and restore their confidence in civic processes.. There are also mixed feelings to the “new dispensation” with some feeling positive and hopeful at the prospect of new beginnings and new opportunities for a fresh start, however a large number are still cautious and have reservations towards it, Thus, great attention must be given to winning their trust and speaking to their needs that have never been a matter of priority.