



*Will young women make a
difference in the 2018
elections? Findings from an
online survey*.*

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INTRODUCTION

Women in Zimbabwe make up 52% of the population, yet their views and matters of importance to them are not taken seriously at national level, especially relating to politics and the economy.¹ The 2013 Constitution states that there should be equality between men and women at all levels of society, but this has not translated to the lived reality of women across the country.² This lack of adherence to the Constitution is very evident when looking at the numbers of women in decision-making positions. In local government there is by 16% representation of women; and the National Assembly is at 35%, bolstered by the quota system in accordance with Section 124, but, without it, the figure drops to 17%, and in cabinet there are only 12% women³. This is not because the women are not interested in taking up these leadership positions, but rather they are overlooked in favour of men. The argument has always been that there aren't enough qualified women to take these positions; surprisingly these positions are then filled by mediocre men.⁴

Participating in elections is, of course, critical to ensuring representation, and there have been concerns over the past decade that women, and especially young women, are not doing this. This view was reinforced by young women in a recent RAU study.⁵ This is further bolstered by the results of the Round 7 (2017) Afrobarometer survey on Zimbabwe.⁶ Looking at three key questions - *did you vote in the last election*, *do you trust the ruling party*, and *do you trust the opposition party* - there were a number of marked findings in the female sample (n=603). Rural women were more likely to have voted (67%) in the last election than urban women (51%), more likely to trust the ruling party (65%) as opposed to 46% of urban women, but there were insignificant differences between the two groups in trust of opposition parties. As for age, and comparing those under and over 35 years, women under the age of 35 were less likely to vote (30%) than older women (45%), but were hugely more trusting of the ruling party (83% as opposed to 40%), and also more trusting of opposition political parties (62% as opposed to 53%). This does suggest that there is hard work to be done in generating the base amongst women for ensuring better representation.

Women's inclusion in governance structures is the key to ensuring that the Constitution is adhered to and to end gender inequality. When women are included in governance structures, they bring in their own values and concepts to politics: their priorities are different from men and this diversity is essential because it recognizes that the country is not just made up of men.

*Prepared by Kudakwashe Chitsike

¹ Reeler, A P (2014), *Women and Democracy in Zimbabwe. Insights from the Afrobarometer*. Afrobarometer Policy

¹ ~~Report No. H42014/06/2014~~ *Women and Democracy in Zimbabwe. Insights from the Afrobarometer*. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 14 | October 2014

² Section 17, Chapter 2, Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No20) Act, 2013. See also Section 80, Part 3, Chapter 2.

³ UNWomen

⁴ This is a view endorsed even by the President. *Robert Mugabe: 'Women can never be on a par with men'*, The Telegraph, 30 Jan 2015.

[<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/11380108/Robert-Mugabe-Women-can-never-be-on-a-par-with-men.html>]

⁵ RAU (2016), *Zimbabwean politics: Very Constrained and Confined. The lack of middle-class young women's voices in political discourse*. September 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

⁶ Afrobarometer Data [Zimbabwe], Round 7, 2017, available at <http://Afrobarometer.org>

Furthermore, it is only fair to include women, especially when looking at governance from a human rights perspective. Women's issues have always and continue to be on the back burner as Zimbabwe is a patriarchal country where decisions for and about women are made without them. However, women's social and economic contributions to the development of the country is more than half in comparison to men because of their dual responsibilities in both the productive and reproductive domain.

The Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) has been conducting studies on women's political participation and citizenship over the last 5 years and the main findings have been that women are interested in politics but are hampered by violence (experienced, witnessed and/or heard of), patriarchy and attitudes towards women in leadership roles. Whilst there are expected differences in agency between women due to residence, age and education, the fundamental issues confronting women are largely the same.⁷ It also is evident that women respond better when approached by other women in a safe environment to discuss politics and other related matters.⁸ This is especially where the more problematic issue of participating in Zimbabwean elections is the case, and recent evidence suggests that women-to-women is the best way of engaging women in elections.⁹

The focus of RAU's work in 2017 is to concentrate on the political matters and opinions of professional women under the age of 40. This focus recognises that this group has been left out in programming on activism, but is increasingly becoming more active in politics and beginning to see themselves as the next generation of political leaders. RAU conducted an online survey to establish young women's views on politics as we prepare for elections next year (2018) as a follow up to research conducted with groups of middle class women in 2016.¹⁰ This research is important as it contributes to the efforts by other organisations and movements to encourage women to participate more in national governance.

METHODOLOGY

In keeping with technology, and acknowledging the apprehension that most Zimbabweans have about politics, RAU developed questions and set up the survey on SurveyMonkey¹¹, where the responses are confidential and open to any young woman interested in taking the survey.

The rationale behind using an online survey were mainly that it reduces the margin of researcher error as respondents select their own responses; it is fast and can be analysed in real time, with a report being produced relatively quickly; it is cost effective; it is convenient and anonymous and

⁷ RAU (2016), *Are middle-class women "disconnected democrats"? A preliminary investigation into political participation of Zimbabwean women*. November 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

⁸ RAU (2017), *Women and Active Citizenship in Zimbabwe: A preliminary investigation of changes over the period 2004 to 2014*. June 2017, Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

⁹ RAU & TWT (2014), *Does Encouraging Women to Register and Vote Make a Difference? A Preliminary Report on Women's Experiences with the 2013 Elections*. Report prepared by Caroline Kache, Researcher [RAU]. March 2014. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit and The Women's Trust

¹⁰ RAU (2016), *Zimbabwean politics: Very Constrained and Confined. The lack of middle-class young women's voices in political discourse*. September 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2016), *Are middle-class women "disconnected democrats"? A preliminary investigation into political participation of Zimbabwean women*. November 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit;

¹¹ SurveyMonkey is an online survey development cloud-based software as a service company, founded in 1999

safe for the respondents; and it can reach a wide range of respondents who are willing to disclose personal information because they are not responding to an interviewer in front of them, thus eliminating reaction bias. On the other hand, online surveys have disadvantages including limited sampling as not everyone has access to the internet, and the fact that there is no interviewer means there is no one to explain the questions further to a respondent, to probe and seek clarification which can possibly lead to less reliable data. In this study, and taking account the previous work on middle-class women, the benefits however of the online survey approach outweigh the disadvantages, especially where the respondents would be uncomfortable answering politically sensitive questions.

Sampling

As stated above, we recognise that an online survey does not give us a representative sample. Part of the problem is that people tend to participate in an online survey about a topic they are interested in and will not take a survey about something they consider less ‘interesting’. This can raise problems as it can be used to confirm the views of a small group and not represent the general population’s views. However, since our concern was with young professional women, who are a group that most likely has access to the internet and other social media, we have some confidence that the responses obtained are indicative of the views prevailing among young professional women, and can be used as pointer for future research on a larger scale.

The survey was sent via email to young women in RAU’s database and Kubatana advertised it on their social media pages. It was open for two weeks to any interested women.

FINDINGS

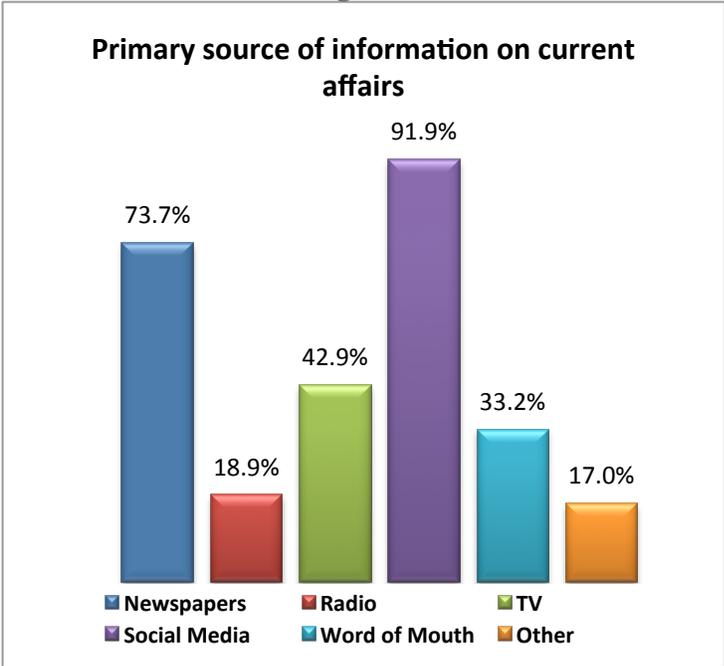
Demographic data

The survey was responded to by 259 women, although the target was for young women, 5.4% were aged 40 and above. A small number (1.5%) were between 18 and 20, 53.3 % were between 21 and 30, 39.8% were between 31 and 40. All of the women had completed secondary school, but the majority, (54.1%) had a bachelor’s degree and 29% had a postgraduate degree. The majority were from Harare (62.9%) followed by 12.7% from Bulawayo and the rest from other parts of the country. A couple of respondents were from Johannesburg, one from the USA and another from Thailand.

The average household income was more than US\$1000 per month, 30% earned between 1001 and 3000, 28.8% earned between US\$500 and US\$1000, 16% stated that they earned less than US\$500, and 14.8% earned over US\$3000. Thus, the sample did, on face value, represent a middle-class population using income as a measure.

Current Affairs

Figure 1



More than 70% of the women considered themselves knowledgeable on current affairs and stated that they mainly receive this information via social media, newspapers and television, in that order. Figure 1 shows that the best way to reach this group is via social media: the survey was advertised both on Twitter and Facebook and within a few days of the advert the numbers quickly escalated. Young women were being tagged and prompted to participate in the survey by their colleagues, both male and female, which was encouraging.

The reliance on social media for information contributed to the rise of the social media movements such as #ThisFlag, which attracted and galvanised Zimbabweans to speak up about politics and other national issues. This is considered a relatively safe space where primarily young Zimbabweans have found their voice to vent about the leadership crisis and the state of the nation. This however has had negative consequences as government fast tracked a cybercrime bill to dissuade users from being too vocal about political matters online. The cybercrime bill essentially refers to criminal activities committed with computers and or on the Internet. Although seemingly in line with actions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, the speed and enthusiasm in drafting this bill in 2016 was seen to be a reaction to what was happening with the social media movements that were coming up and gaining support from groups that traditionally did not speak openly about the discontent, one of these groups was the middle class.

Nonetheless, it is evident that young women use social media primarily, and further support for the notion that this is a middle-class sample comes for the high number (73.7%) that have access to newspapers. It is not clear that this access to print or online versions, but it may be surmised from the reliance on social media that this group also accesses news via the Internet.

Intention to Vote

Over the last year there have been numerous conversations about elections, as Zimbabweans gear for the next elections in 2018. The interest raised mainly is the fitness of the president to stand for another term when he will be 94 and whether there isn't a younger person to succeed him. In these conversations, most people bemoaned the disinterest expressed by young people in the urban areas with regard to elections. This disinterest mainly is because of the mismanagement

and subsequent results of the 2013 elections and what an elderly president has to offer the youth. Another issue raised was with the chaotic registration process in the urban areas, especially for first time voters. It should be noted that, according to an analysis of the June 2013 Voter's Roll,¹² an enormous number of the youth were not registered as voters, but the reasons are not obvious: was this exclusion or disinterest?

Those that attempted and failed to register do not seem interested in going through that process again for the next elections, and, for the young, this seems in line with an African-wide phenomenon.¹³ Additionally the allegations of rigging of elections in each election for the last fifteen years does not endear young people to the process as they have no faith in it. Many organisations and movements including political parties have taken on the task of encouraging Zimbabweans to register to vote; this is a critical right of any citizen as clearly stated in the Constitution. There are social media movements such as #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, #shevotes2018, #hervotewins2018 #CitizenZW, to name a few, that have been calling on all Zimbabweans to register to vote. The importance of voting has been emphasised regardless of political affiliation either to maintain the party of your choice in power or to vote in a new one.

Interestingly, in this survey, as shown in Figure 2 over, 80% said they are going to register to vote because it is their Constitutional right to do so, and they want to see a change in government. The majority of the respondents are under the age of 40, so they only know ZANU PF as the ruling party and President Mugabe as the President, and they are curious to experience a different type of leadership. The main themes that came out for the reason to want to vote in 2018 are listed in the box alongside.

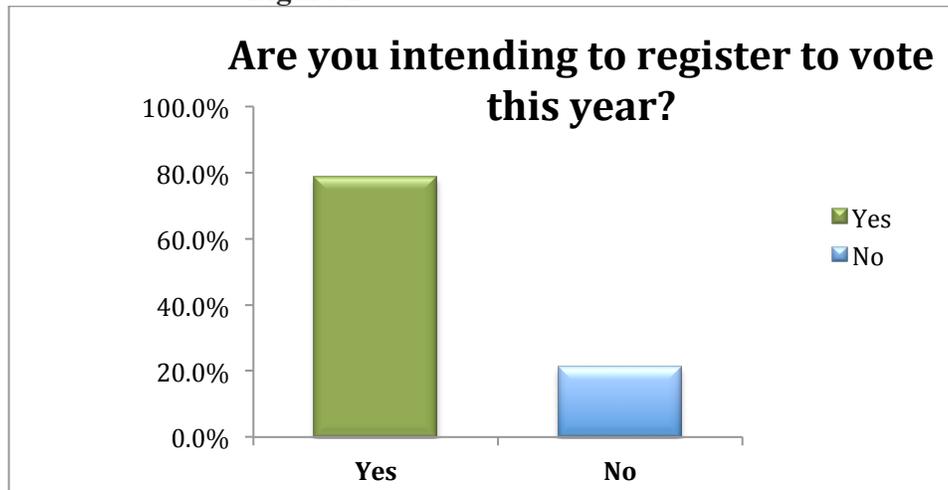
***My vote counts/ (I believe my vote contributes to the election outcome);
Voting is part of my responsibilities/duties as a citizen;
I have never voted before because I didn't have faith in the process but now I want to be active;
Exercising my constitutional right;
Voting to shape the nation's future;
To effect change in government/governance;
I want my voice to be heard.***

Others women expressed anger with the leadership at both local and national levels, but are of the opinion that, since they did not vote in past elections, they have had no right to call these leaders to account and they now want that right. This suggests that the respondents have made the connection between the lives they are living now and the decisions they made previously by either voting or not.

¹² RAU (2013), *An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll*. July 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

¹³ Resnick, D & Casale, D (2011), *The Political Participation of Africa's Youth: Turnout, Partisanship and Protest*. Working Paper No. 136. Afrobarometer.

Figure 2



The general sentiment with those who have made the decision to go and vote is that not voting has not worked to their advantage, and they were of the opinion that it was time to stop complaining and do something about the leadership of this country.

In the last election, in 2013, 55.6% stated that they did not vote, and, granted a number of them may not have been old enough to vote in previous elections, there seems to be an increased desire to vote in 2018. This may be attributed to the higher levels of political awareness because of the continued economic downturn and also, the social movements. This appears to be resulting in calls for a change in leadership to improve the plight of young people, and especially young women who become invisible as they spend most of their time on unpaid care work in the home.¹⁴

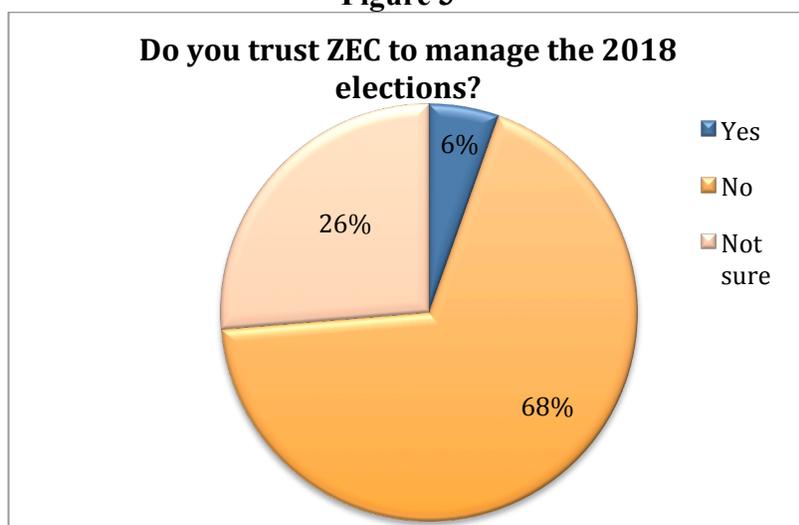
For those who decided not to vote, the reasons are primarily that they don't have faith in the process, the political parties, candidates and the management of elections, and/or are planning to leave the country before the elections.

A whopping 68.3% do not trust the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to run the 2018 elections (see figure 3 over). This is not surprising because, although ZEC is supposed to be an independent commission, it is considered compromised because of its close relationship with ZANU PF, an interested party in the election and the government to boot. The management of the 2013 elections also tarnished ZEC's reputation as they were not considered free and fair by many observers, but merely peaceful, and this was in relation to the previous bloody 2008 polls.¹⁵ It is important for ZEC to carry out a public relations campaign if it has any hope of raising confidence in its management of the next elections.

¹⁴ Zimstat (2012), *Zimbabwe Population Census 2012*. Harare: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

¹⁵ Matyszak, D. A (2014), *An examination of the Performance of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in Managing the 2013 Elections in Zimbabwe*. December 2014. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

Figure 3



54% of the respondents stated that they know what biometric voter registration (BVR) is, and they hope that this will improve the management of the elections and perhaps prevent the manipulation of the elections. It is important for ZEC and accredited civil society organisations to carry out a more comprehensive awareness raising exercise on BVR as a fair number of sophisticated educated urban women did not know what it was, what about the uneducated women in the peri-urban and rural areas.

Political parties

Zimbabwe has no law requiring registration of political parties, a party is simply defined in the Electoral Act (2004, 4(1)) as "*any political organisation*", while the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Act (2004, 2) defines a party as "*an association of persons the primary object of which is to secure the election of one or more of its members to a local authority or parliament, or to secure the office of president, or to campaign for a specified result at a referendum.*"

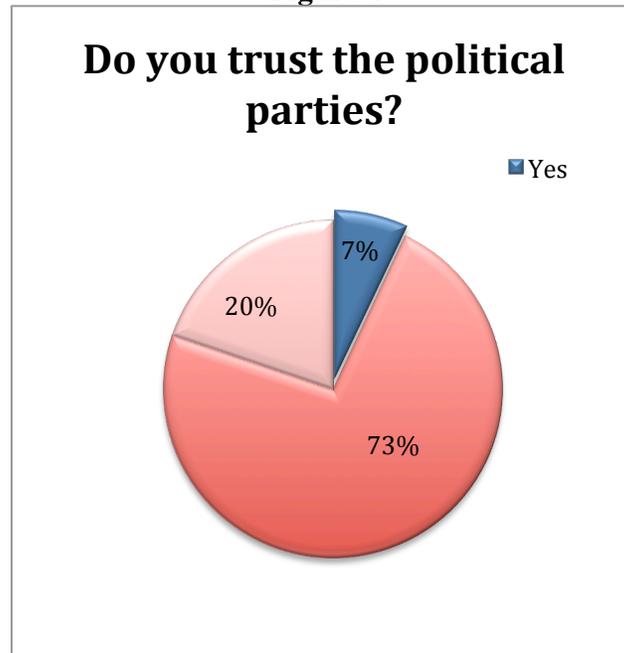
For a population of approximately 13 million, Zimbabwe has a disproportionately large number of political parties, more than 50 at the last count, with many of them considered briefcase parties with very few members. It is important to note that only three of these political parties are led by women; African Democratic Party (Marcelline Chikasha), National People's Party (Joice Mujuru) and Progressive Democrats of Zimbabwe (Barbra Nyagomo). Apart from Mujuru, the other two are relatively unknown. Whether all of these political parties will participate in the elections remains to be seen as the idea of a coalition has been put on the table.

The idea of a grand coalition of opposition parties is appealing: according to the 2017 Afrobarometer¹⁶ survey Zimbabweans are keen on a grand coalition, with 45% stating that they would support this going into the elections. Support for the coalition is stronger among urban and better-educated citizens.

¹⁶ Afrobarometer Data [Zimbabwe], Round 7, 2017, available at <http://Afrobarometer.org>

Figure 4

In response to whether they belong to a political party, 81.9% stated they do not belong to one. Of those that said they do, 14% said belonged to MDC T, 7% to ZANU PF and 10% said other, without mentioning the name of the party. The women stated that they do not trust political parties, see figure 4.



Governance

According to the study young women are of the opinion that the tenets of good governance are not being applied in Zimbabwe and this is killing the country. Being an educated group they were able to articulate what good governance is; rule of law, accountability, responsiveness, citizen participation, equitable and inclusive and effective and efficient. These are all things that the respondents said the current government does not practice. There is little confidence in the leadership, in the ruling party and the opposition as they are seen to be self-centred and having a serious lack of concern for the citizens

*There is need for much more citizen engagement so that we can hold government accountable, they are there to serve us not the other way around;
We say but do not follow through on policies;
Leadership at all levels does not seem concerned about improving the quality of life for ordinary people.
Preoccupied with getting and maintaining power;
Dictatorial, misguided, unethical and selfish;
Disregard of the rule of law;
There is no future for young people;
There is need for strong institutions, not "strong" men.*

The health sector is in shambles, the infrastructure is collapsing and the cash crisis and its ripple effect, just to name a few are major areas of need but nothing is being done to address these problems. Many young people are looking for an opportunity to leave the country and never come back because they do not see a way to change the status quo.

Governance has for too long been about one centre of power and any attempts to discuss another way of governing are always shut down, the women are of the opinion that the nation is in this state because citizens have allowed it. Citizens are ruled by the political elite who keep us divided and this divisive nature of politics deflects from the real issues at hand. True reform driven by citizens regardless of political affiliation, ethnicity, class and gender is required in order to change the nature of politics in Zimbabwe. The women had strong views about how Zimbabwe is being governed. The main themes that emerged from responses were:

- Failed government
- Failed opposition political parties
- Corruption and disrespect for the rule of law
- Self-seeking politicians with no concern for citizens' views
- Citizen apathy from governance processes
- Media complicity in inefficient governance systems

Failed Government

According to the study participants the government has failed to deliver on its promises. Participants lamented the poor governance, human rights abuses that are committed with culprits remaining sheltered from prosecution. For some, “*the idea of government in Zimbabwe is a hoax*”. The government has not only failed to govern Zimbabwe but has also “*ruined the idea of democracy in this country. It could be better to have a church to rule this country not the current government*”. They accused the government of being divisive, creating conditions for the ruling elite to solidify their personal interests at the expense of the political, economic and social development of the country as a whole. When asked for their views on how the country is being run, some of the responses are below:

*Poor governing systems are crippling the economy;
Is it being governed? It is not being governed at all;
The government uses short term and useless solutions that do not even begin to address our problems;
We are losing it as a country;
Our leaders have lost the plot, but they still deny it;
Our leaders were freedom fighters so they only know how to live in conflict;
They have robbed us of our future, they have killed the country.*

A number of the respondents also weighed in with suggestions on how to address the governance problems. These included securing a solid commitment to nation-building, incubating innovations, laying strong foundations for the future and reforming the institutions. A theme emerging within this thread of thought is the need for a restructuring of the systems of

governance. Several respondents indicated that the country needed a strategic change in governance starting with leaders who-because of their liberation war background- are still holding on to their weapons to a people who are extending arms of peace and reconciliation. Such leaders need a complete paradigm shift so they can be taught how to govern effectively and survive in an environment of freedom free from the liberation war ideologies. Other recommendations as suggested by respondents included the infusion of a new breed of young innovative leaders into government and these new leaders would be expected to consult citizens on how best to lead the nation under a democracy that actually works.

Failed opposition parties

Another theme that emerged from the responses was about opposition political parties and how they have contributed to the failure of governance. Due to their ever-increasing numbers and fragmentation, they are more concerned with their own rise to power than exerting pressure on the government to provide better public services. The opposition parties were said to have the same leadership flaws as the ruling party and part of the rot; they are seen as mediocre and have no capacity to take the country forward

Respondents lamented the lack of dynamism and forward-thinking in the opposition parties and that they cannot exert pressure on the government to reform, respect the rule of law and dispense its mandate. Only when opposition parties seek collective change and not just their own political and economic interests, can there be meaningful change in the governance of the country.

Corruption and disrespect for the Rule of Law

According to the study participants the political leaders and the leaders in government are very corrupt. Participants indicated that the corruption and disrespect for the rule of the law are typified by the unclear manner in which the issue of the missing \$15 billion was handled. It was literally swept under the carpet. Public, legal or any other form of discussion of the issue was muted and the culprits were never identified or prosecuted. Accordingly, corruption was pinpointed as one of the key reasons why the country's development has stagnated. Study participants highlighted corruption at several levels:

- At the most senior levels –the president's son-in-law receiving unearned positions and contracts;
- Senior politicians using food aid for political campaigns;
- Extortion by the police at police roadblocks;
- Petty municipality corruption;
- The ordinary person taking short cuts, paying bribes just to get out of situations or to speed up outdated and slow processes.

Study participants lamented that corrupt officials are let loose even where there is evidence of misconduct and the law being applied when it favours the privileged¹⁷. The appeal from

¹⁷ There are countless examples of senior officials that have been embroiled in corruption cases that are never dealt with; the most glaring is the acquisition of property by Dr. Ignatius Chombo, a cabinet minister. This information only came to light during his divorce proceedings; to date there has been no enquiry into how he has amassed so much wealth on a government salary.

participants was for legislators to stop looting public coffers to feed themselves on resources meant for the masses. The young women called for an end to corruption and for respect of the rule of law.

Self-seeking politicians with no concern for citizens

Respondents were of the view that the government does not have citizens at heart, has forgotten about the people that voted for them to be into those positions and has misplaced priorities. The respondents see the country as being run like someone's backyard with a total disregard of the voices of the masses and expressing one's views actually puts one's life in danger. Respondents were of the opinion that the government has abandoned its mandate and was failing to address basic issues such as citizens' rights, provision of public goods and services as well as transparency in the use of public funds.

Participants in the study are disappointed and angry that the government officials, politicians and "whoever is in any position" just wants to grab as much as they can without actually providing a service. Respondents expressed dismay with the insincerity of leaders in carrying out their mandates once they get in power and some respondents highlighted the introduction of bond notes despite citizens' objection to the move as just one example of the government's lack of concern with the citizens' voice.

Citizen apathy

Citizens are disengaging from governance and political issues due to various reasons including the overwhelming feelings of helplessness as politicians seek their own gains and continue to ignore citizens' voice. When citizens withdraw their participation or participate ritualistically-without a hope of influencing affairs- a lot of laws and policies are made without input from the people. According to respondents the outstanding feature of Zimbabwe's governance landscape is unabated and institutionalised mismanagement. This fuels corruption and stimulates self-seeking behaviour from all office and duty bearers in public and private sectors. Consequently, citizens resort to an "*I don't care attitude*" as they accept that they cannot change anything. This idea reverberates in most responses by the study participants who bemoaned young people's loss of interest in governance issues, the generality of the population is looking out for themselves individually, not caring about the next person. As a way forward, it is evident that there is need for increased citizen engagement to hold government accountable.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that there is a leadership crisis in this country beyond ZANU PF and an aged President Mugabe. ZANU PF is seen to be out of touch with the needs of the people and only interested in amassing wealth for themselves and their cronies. The opposition is considered weak and fragmented, with the main opposition party led by another man in ill-health. The women have a keen interest in voting, but who will they vote for if they do not trust the political parties? Independent candidates historically have not fared very well, but this election may change this as there is speculation about business leaders putting themselves forward. This remains to be seen.

According to this survey 79.5% stated that political parties do not represent the interests of young women.¹⁸ This is a clear call for political parties to step up their game when they begin their campaigning. It is important for them to have a gender-sensitive youth agenda in order to draw these potential voters. The messaging has to be appropriate for the different demographic groups, using language that is appealing and in the media that is most likely to catch their attention.

A massive 68% of the respondents reported they did not trust ZEC to run the 2018 elections while 26% were not sure and a paltry 6% of the respondents reported they trusted ZEC. While fully acknowledging that the sample is not a census sample, the statistics are indicative of widespread fears and concerns about the impartiality and capacity of ZEC. They point to some concerns that need to be addressed in order for ZEC's integrity to be above doubt, inevitably, the election result will also not be questioned once problems within ZEC are addressed.

The need for inclusion of the youth, including young women in strategic government positions is very clear. According to the most recent census in 2012, 77% of the population is below the age of 35 years but the distribution of power and sources does not reflect this. There is also an important need for young women to actively engage in politics and governance at all levels in order to influence politics that will make differences in their lives. If the findings of this report are anything to go by young people, especially young women, will make a difference in the next election provided the electoral playing field is level and all political parties are participating as equals.

Young women are of the opinion that this country is being held to ransom by the political elite and the only way out, short of going to war, is voting and voting wisely. As things stand at the moment, there is no political party that is putting the needs of young women at the heart of their campaigns, and they will not do so unless the young women demand to be heard.

There is need to do better as a nation, a priority not only for the leaders, but also for the citizens to work together to win back the national pride, and particularly amongst young people. There are many governance issues that women can rally around to bring about the changes they desire, i.e. cash crisis and service delivery. These issues are affecting citizens regardless of political affiliation. It is important to make the connection between the quality of life and politics: if you are happy and satisfied with the status, then vote to maintain the status quo, but if not, go and vote to change it - every vote counts.

¹⁸ In 2014, according to the Afrobarometer (Round 6) survey, 42% of women between 15 and 29 stated that they had no political party affiliation.