



# *Quotas or Proportional Representation? A Selective Review of the Evidence.*

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### **Abstract:**<sup>1</sup>

Increasing women’s representation in the parliaments of the world has become an increasing field of debate: not about whether this should happen anymore, but rather about what is the most effective method to achieving this. This a slowly developing consensus that some kinds of electoral processes are more effective than others, but there is still a good deal of complexity surrounding both the best electoral method and the factors that impinge on getting women elected.

Zimbabwe in the past two parliaments adopted a reserved seat, proportional representation, approach. This has resulted in more women being elected to parliament, but it seems at the expense of less women being directly elected. In 2018, there were few women selected by political parties as candidates and voting for women candidates was extremely low. The reserved system is due to expire in 2023, and there is active debate on the way forward for the future, especially in the light of the constitutional requirement for equality in representation and office.

This article reviews the arguments and evidence for proportional representation and quotas. It concludes that, for Zimbabwe, proportional representation and a 50/50 quota will be the most effective way to honour the constitutional requirement of Section 17.

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## Background

Since 1893, women have been struggling to achieve their full entitlement to participate in the societies within which they live. In doing so, the pace has been initially slow, with merely being able to vote being the first and very bitter struggle: between 1983 and 1994, 26% of countries had allowed women to vote, but only 17% allowed actual representation (Paxton & Hughes. 2007). The trend changed after the Second World War, and women were voting and participating in most countries of the world by 2003. However, by 2006, women remain highly under-represented, with the global average being 24.3% of women in parliaments in 2019, up from 17% in 2006 (UNWomen. 2019).<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. Achievement of Milestones within Three Years of Sovereignty**

[Source: Paxton & Hughes. 2007]

	<b>Pre- 1893</b>	<b>1893– 1944</b>	<b>1945– 1969</b>	<b>1970– 1989</b>	<b>1990 On</b>
Suffrage	0%	0.3	83%	88%	100%
First Parliamentarian	0%	0.2	51%	75%	100%
10 Percent	0%	0%	5%	38%	38%
20 Percent	0%	0%	2%	13%	4%
30 Percent	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No. of countries	40	23	59	8	24

The progression in women moving from merely obtaining suffrage to parliaments meeting various critical thresholds is shown in Table 1. There is a large jump in the aftermath of the Second World, but a second jump after 1990, the beginning of the so-called Third Wave of Democracy (Huntington. 1993). The situation has not improved greatly by 2019 (Table 2 below), and, as also seen in Table 1, there is a slowing down post-1990 of parliaments even reaching the critical thresholds of 10% and 20% of women parliamentarians.

**Table 2: Percentage of Women Parliamentarians across the world by Region**

[Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union & UNWomen.2019]

<b>Country</b>	
Nordic	42.5%
Americas	30.6%
Europe (including Nordic countries)	28.6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.9%
Asia	19.8%
Arab States	19%
Pacific states	16.3%

Whilst the global average is 24.3%, Table 2 shows that there is considerable variation across the regions of the world, and this is due to the interaction between political, cultural and structural factors (Paxton & Hughes. 2007). However, the contribution of these factors is complex (see below). There are also issues around the selection of women as candidates irrespective of the electoral system, and ideologies about gender, often cultural, lead to an

<sup>2</sup> UNWomen, *Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation. Women in parliaments.* [<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>] Accessed 14 October 2019.

artificial repression both in the supply and the demand for women candidates in many countries (Krook. 2010 (a)).

Beyond representation is the matter of actual political power and executive power especially. Globally only 21% of women are ministers, and mostly “soft” portfolios rather than “hard” portfolios. There is the same variation in African countries, as seen in SADC.

**Table 3: Percentage of women in lower house in SADC countries**

[Source: EISA. 2019]

SADC Country	EISA (2019)
Angola	26.8%
Botswana	9.5%
Comoros	3.03%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	9.8%
Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	6.2%
Lesotho	22.1%
Madagascar	15.9%
Malawi	22.9%
Mauritius	18.8%
Mozambique	38.4%
Namibia	45.3%
Seychelles	21.2%
South Africa	45.3%
United Republic of Tanzania	36.6%
Zambia	16.7%
Zimbabwe	31.5%

Measured by the attainment of thresholds, six countries have reached the 30% level, three the 20% level, three the 10% level, and three (Botswana, the DRC and Eswatini) are still below 10% in women’s representation (see Table 3 above). Only two countries by 2018, Namibia (46.2%) and South Africa (45.9%), have come close to honouring the 50% level required under the Protocol.

Zimbabwe currently has an overall women’s percentage of 32%, which is obviously creditable. However, this occurs because of the reserved seats for women, and the actual percentage of directly elected women is much lower (12.4%). In parliament, there are fewer young women than young males. On the available data, only 3% of female parliamentarians are under the age of 40 compared with 13% of males.<sup>3</sup> Women, since the 2018 election, comprise 28% of all ministerial posts in Zimbabwe, but the distribution is interesting. Women are 30% of all full ministerial posts, including Defence and War Veterans Affairs. The other portfolios are the arguably “soft” ones: Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development; Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry; Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare; Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services; and Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation. Women are poorly represented amongst the Deputy Ministers (1 out of 13 Deputy Ministers), but strongly amongst the Ministers of State (5 out of nine, or 56%).

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019), *New Parline: the IPU’s Open Data Platform*. Retrieved 9 October 2019. [[https://data.ipu.org/content/zimbabwe?chamber\\_id=13560](https://data.ipu.org/content/zimbabwe?chamber_id=13560)]

At face value, Zimbabwe seems respectable in terms of the global trends, as does Sub-Saharan Africa, but the key issue is whether the quota system remains the best way to ensure increased representation. The fact that there is no increase of directly elected women in 2018, and a decrease from 2008 must be interrogated. This is the purpose of the report: to examine the best method for ensuring that more women are elected directly, and that these representatives have actual political power.

## Women, Elections and Representation in Zimbabwe

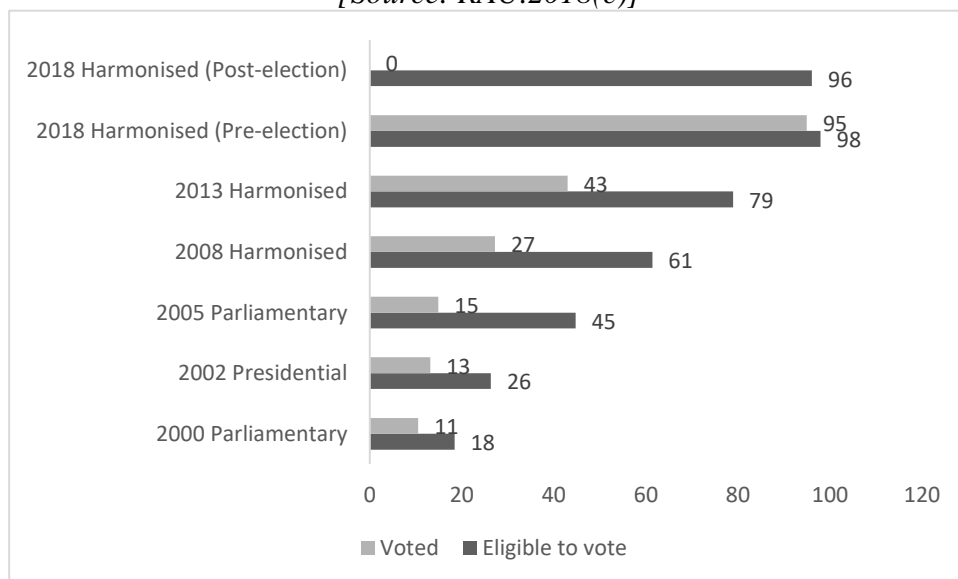
The 2013 Constitution is explicit about gender equality in Section 3 (*Founding Principles*), Section 17 (*Gender Balance*), and, in Section 17 (i), it is clear that the Constitution is prescriptive about representation. As the Constitution states:

*...the State **must take all measures** (emphasis added), 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;*

It is obvious that the Constitution requires absolute equality, 50/50, and this is obligatory. Thus, the current quota system is a departure from the Constitution, and the only question to address is the manner of achieving compliance with the Constitution, as well as the removal of the quota system as it currently stands.

**Figure 1: Percentage of women eligible to vote and voting, 2000-2019**  
 [Source: RAU.2018(c)]



Many of the issues around women, elections and representation in Zimbabwe are addressed in a companion report, but here we wish to raise a number of brief issues that are relevant to the current report. Firstly, there is no argument about the suffrage. Since 1980, any woman who is a citizen is entitled to vote. However, having the right to vote is not the same as actually voting, and there is substantial gap between the numbers of women eligible to vote, those that register to vote, and the actual number that vote. It is evident that there is always a substantial difference between the eligible population and the actual vote, but this is common across the world, and there are many reasons for this - political, structural and cultural. However, the gap is closing, as was seen in a small study of young women in the 2018 election (RAU. 2018(c)). Ninety-nine (99%) percent of the young indicated that they had registered to vote and 95% said that they had actually voted (Figure 1).

Secondly, the numbers of women elected to parliament has been increasing over the years.

**Table 3: Percentages of women in Seventh & Eighth Parliaments in Zimbabwe**

[Source: RAU. 2015; Dube. 2013]

	Seventh Parliament			Eighth Parliament		
	Women	Total	% of women	Women	Total	% of women
House of Assembly	34	210	16.2	86	270	31.9
Senate	23	93	24.7	38	80	47.5
Total	57	303	18.8	124	350	35.4

Women representatives doubled in the Eighth (2013) parliament as a result of the constitutional quota, but it must also be pointed out that the number of directly elected women declined, from 34 to 26. The question is whether this increase added anything to women's actual power to affect policy.

Thirdly, and in answer to the question the effectiveness of women in parliament, with and without the quota, the evidence is equivocal. In the Seventh parliament that ran from 2008 to 2013, women were little different to their male counterparts: the average attendance for women (out of a possible 48 sessions) was 64.5% compared with 64.9% (Dube.2013). Attendance is not the same, however, as participation.

Although fewer women than spoke, their performance was slightly better than men. In the Senate, women spoke 9.7 times on average compared to 8 times for men, and, in the House of Assembly, women were mostly similar to men, speaking 6.5 times on average compared to 6.4 time for men. It is also noteworthy that women spoke on a wide range of issues and not merely on the more narrow concerns of women (Dube. 2013). Furthermore, there were 11 female members of the executive: seven ministers, two deputy ministers, one deputy Prime Minister, and one deputy Vic-President.

In summary, and under the conditions of representation being dependent on direct election (also under the conditions of the Global Political Agreement), women were in a minority, but showed strong participation as well as being a significant part of policy making.

The introduction of the quota system for the Eighth parliament led to greater numbers of women in parliament (RAU. 2015). Their attendance of these was significantly better than the males: of 90 possible attendances, women attended 78% compared to 71% of the men. There was slight trend for female members of the MDC parties to attend more frequently (81%) than ZANU-PF (76%). It is evident that the quota resulted in greater attendance by women. Participation, speaking in parliament, was not measured in this second study, so no comparison between the Seventh and Eighth parliaments can be made on this indicator.

For the Ninth parliament, elected in 2018, we have already commented about the number of women occupying executive office in the government. We saw an increase in the number of representatives in the Eighth parliament, but, in 2013, the number of women in senior positions dropped dramatically. There were only three full ministers (out of 26), three ministers of state (out of 13), and five deputy ministers (out of 24). There remained a female Vice President, but Mrs Mujuru was removed from this post in December 2014 during the serious in-fighting within the ZANU-PF party over succession.

In summary, we can say that suffrage for women is guaranteed in Zimbabwe, and the quota system guarantees a “critical mass” of at least 30%. However, representation does not necessarily translate into “political rights” or the power to influence policy. This may seem a strange assertion when women are now 28% of all ministerial posts, including the unusual portfolio of Defence, but there is a difference between a political right and discretionary appointment. The following thought experiment can illustrate the difference.

Assume the existing arrangement for elections and the quota for women. Women are guaranteed a minimum of 60 seats in parliament, and assuming that no woman is directly elected (unlikely, but possible), then women would reach the ceiling of 22%, much better than the average. However, if political parties decided to field more women candidates than the overall number of women would increase as a function of how many women were directly elected. This, of course, depends on the enthusiasm that political parties for female candidates, and, as was seen in 2018, there is not great enthusiasm. There were a total of 242 (15%) women out of 1,648 total candidates, only 53% of political parties even had female candidates, no party with female candidates exceeded 30%, and the major political parties, ZANU-PF and MDC Alliance, had 10% and 8% respectively. Women candidates got a paltry 11% of the total vote. Thus, the effect of quotas is only as good as the enthusiasm by political parties for female candidates, and the possibilities of women holding senior office reduces dramatically.

Consider a different idea. Elections for House of Assembly take place under a closed list, PR system, and all parties must put forward equal numbers of female and male candidates. Each party will get seats in proportion to their share of the overall vote, and half of these seats occupied by women. In 2018, ZANU-PF got 52.5% (144 seats), MDC Alliance got 34.7% (64 seats), and other parties got 12.9% (2 seats). Assuming a 50/50 rule, then there would be 104 women directly elected in the House of Assembly rather than 86 overall, and only 26 directly elected. The Senate would be subject to the same 50/50 rule, giving another 40 women, and there would be 144 women in total in parliament.

Which system would be better for women?

However, there are many issues lying behind the choice of a PR system, and it is to these we now turn, but first looking very briefly at the major electoral systems on offer.

## **Approaches to Political Representation**

This section derives in the main from an excellent summary of the major electoral systems provided by Pippa Norris (Norris. 1997).

### ***Majoritarian Formulas***

This is essentially the term for most First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) systems, and used in more than 80 countries around the world. A person in most lower house elections is elected on a simple majority of the votes: the person who has the most votes wins, irrespective of whether this is an absolute majority (50+1) or not. This the current system in Zimbabwe for the House of Assembly and Local Council elections. This system is known also as a “plurality” system.

There is another variant known as a *Second Ballot Majority-Runoff System*. Here there is the requirement that the winning candidate must have an absolute majority (50+1), and, in the event that this does not occur, a second round held. There are different variations here, and some countries re-run with only the top two candidates competing, whilst others allow all to compete in the second round.

The major advantage of FPTP systems is that it ensures there will mostly be a government with a working majority, but not always. The disadvantage is that minorities are often penalised unless geographically concentrated, but also that there can be a government can with a minority of votes: since most FPTP systems have “constituencies”, it is possible to win a majority of constituency seats, but not with a majority of the votes.

Zimbabwe has both types of FPTP: “plurality” for the House of Assembly and a *Second Ballot Majority-Runoff System* for the presidency.

There is one other majoritarian system known as the *Alternative Vote*, but this not widely used, only in Australia for the lower house and in Ireland for the presidency.

### ***Semi-Proportional Systems***

Semi-proportional systems, whether using the *cumulative vote* or the *Single Transferable Vote* are uncommon. The first is used no longer, but the second only in Ireland, Malta, and the Australian Senate.

### ***Proportional Representation***

Proportional Representation (PR) is very widely used around the world, with a version of this system used in 83 countries. Seventeen countries in Africa use one or other version of PR, including Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa in SADC.

PR has the advantage of improving the prospects for minority party and minority groups. Simply, political parties earn the number of seats according to the number of candidates they field and the number of votes that the party receives overall, but there are many versions of how to do this (Norris. 1997).

There are two common arguments for using PR. Firstly, PR balances out the relationship between number of votes and number of seats that a party gets, and thus removes a frequent consequence of FPTP systems where a party can win a majority of seats but without a concomitant majority of votes. Secondly, PR will allow greater opportunity for minority parties and minority groups to participate. Both these reasons are argued to foster greater voter turnout, which is arguably a good thing.

There are different versions with the most common being the *Party List* system, either as “closed” or “open” lists, and very different electoral methods. In open list systems, voters can vote for particular candidates within the list, whilst in closed list systems voters only vote for the party and the party determines the rank order of its candidates. Party lists can also be national where the total votes for the total number of with seats divided amongst regions.

However, there are criticisms of PR. Firstly, it is argued that the simplicity of plurality systems may encourage greater voter turnout, but at the expense of discriminating against smaller parties. Plurality systems, by reducing choice, equally may depress turnout. It also be argued that majority systems – where a party must have an absolute majority of the vote – have advantages over both PR and plurality (FPTP) systems, especially where this encourages coalitions and pre-election pacts. Tested empirically, early studies came to different conclusions.



Jackman argued that voter turnout was largely a function of institutions and electoral laws rather than electoral systems (Jackman. 1987), but this was largely refuted in a study of 509 national elections in 20 countries (Blais & Carty. 1990). These authors, unpacking the confounding of electoral and institutional variables evident in the Jackman study, demonstrate the marked superiority of PR systems on voter turnout. Voter turnout in PAR systems is 7% higher than plurality systems and 5% higher than majority systems.

This is encouraging for the advocates of PR, high voter turnout is obviously desirable, but there is the question of interest here about whether PR is equally effective in increasing the percentage of female representatives.

### ***Mixed Systems***

As Norris describes, there are newer electoral systems such as those used in Germany, Italy and Russia (Norris. 1997). Germany has combined single member and party list constituencies: half the MPs elected are on an FPTP system and half come from regionally based, closed party lists.

There are differences depending on the goal. FPTP systems seem to derive from countries that wish to ensure that they have governments that are able to govern, whether or not the party in power can demonstrate support from the majority of the citizenry. In such systems, minorities, whether ethnic or ideological, will be disadvantaged. PR systems, and the variants of this, place a greater priority on the representativeness of parliament. For example, Denmark has 10 political parties represented in the parliament, thirteen will contest in 2019, and mostly is governed through coalitions. This is the case for many European countries.

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, uses an FPTP system, has 18 political parties, nine of which have seats in parliament, and two parties – Conservative (Unionist) Party and the Labour Party – hold 87% of the seats. These two parties have dominated British elections since the 1920s, and, as long as the government has an absolute majority (50+1), it can govern, make policies, etc.

Thus, electoral systems depend to an extent on what the country values in its form of representation, but obviously all countries are concerned, no matter what is the electoral system, that there is effective governance. Both of these issues are equally important for men and women, but, for women, there is the more pressing issue of being able to play the game, and this is the critical issue behind what is the form of electoral system adopted by a country.

There are thus two questions here. What form of electoral system is best for increasing the numbers of female representatives, and does that system facilitate effective participation by the representatives? There is an additional question whether a system also increases the number of women that vote, but this will not be addressed here as it is evident that, in Zimbabwe, women do turn out in very large numbers (RAU. 2018 (a)).

Specifically, we will examine Proportional Representation (PR) as the potential candidate for increasing women's representation, following on work done by RAU in the 2018 elections (RAU. 2018 (b); RAU. 2018 (c); RAU. 2018 (d)). RAU has previously argued on the basis of this research that PR should be the objective of policy reform, but PR was not examined in any detail.

### **An overview of the evidence**

Respected political scientist, Arend Lijphart, argued nearly three decades ago that proportional representation should be the system of choice for emerging democracies (Lijphart. 1991). This was in the first flush of the so-called Third Wave of Democracy that followed the collapse of

the Soviet Union (Huntington. 1993). In Lijphart's view there were strong reasons for accepting proportional representation:

*To sum up, the parliamentary-PR form of democracy is clearly better than the major alternatives in accommodating ethnic differences, and it has a slight edge in economic policy making as well. The argument that considerations of governmental effectiveness mandate the rejection of parliamentary-PR democracy for developing countries is simply not tenable. Constitution makers in new democracies would do themselves and their countries a great disservice by ignoring this attractive democratic model. (Lijphart. 1991. p83)*

Has the evidence to date supported this assertion, and particularly for women?

### ***Proportional Representation (PR) best for women?***

PR, as a whole, has been investigated extensively since 1991, and the studies have grown in sophistication over the years. Lijphart, in this early study, argued that parliamentary PR would result in four times as many women elected as under parliamentary plurality (FPTP) systems (Lijphart. 1991). He also argued that PR would produce higher voter turnout, as well as the country receiving higher democracy scores.

The early research into PR and its effect for women generally agreed that PR was beneficial for women (Paxton & Hughes. 2007). By 1993, 57 countries were using PR systems (Inter-Parliamentary Union. 1993), but there remained differences in the views of workers as to whether there were factors other than PR that were influential in increasing women's representation.

Richard Matland argued on an analysis of the 1995 Inter-Parliamentary Union world survey (Inter-Parliamentary Union. 1995), that, in Western countries, using PR would result in a 15.6% increase in the number of women elected (Matland. 1998). He also argued that the culture, the equality of men and women, measured by literacy, being involved in the labour force, and levels of university education, had a positive effect on increasing women's representation. Matland also argued, in an analysis of 16 lesser developed countries (LDCs), that none of the factors operating in OECD countries work to increase women's representation in the LDCs, including proportional representation (Matland. 1998).

Matland argues, in explanation of the finding, two possible reasons. Firstly, in LDCs there is such low participation of women that, for a variety of reasons, there are too few women to allow any meaningful measurement of patterns. Secondly, participation in the labour force may mean very different things between OECD countries and LDCs. In the latter women may be working in largely subsistence-level activities that are very unlikely to generate the kind of agency needed by women to seek participation in political activities. Another obvious explanation, not canvassed by Matland, is the cultural impact of patriarchy in many LDCs.

Kenworthy and Malami, in an investigation of 146 countries, examined the roles of three sets of factors: political, cultural, and socio-economic (Kenworthy & Malami. 1999). The countries were drawn from Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and Western Europe. The data set was more extensive than that considered by Matland. These authors conclude that political factors, mostly as electoral systems, were central to determining gender inequality in representation: "*Party list/multimember district systems are more conducive to the election of women to national legislatures than are candidate-centered/single-member district systems*".

Additionally, there is a strong association between the proportion of women in professional jobs and the proportion of parliamentary seats held by such women, as well as the inhibitory effects of countries in which religions emphasise traditional roles for women. Overall, Kenworthy and Malami conclude:

*“Our analyses highlight five key determinants of the degree of gender inequality in political representation (in non-Marxist-Leninist nations): the structure of the electoral system, the party composition of government, the timing of women's suffrage, women's share in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes. The first two, electoral system structure and the party composition of government, may not provide much impetus for further progress in the near future. To be sure, a shift in electoral system structure from a candidate-centered/single-member district system to a party-list/ multimember district system would boost women's legislative representation in many countries.” (p260)*

More recently, Matland has argued that PR systems should not be seen as being equivalent, with some systems, such as those having “higher district magnitude” are more advantageous for women than those that have “higher electoral thresholds” (Matland. 2005). The process, from deciding to stand and be selected by a party, is frequently very difficult for women, as strongly indicated the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe, but, if the electoral system adds further difficulties, than the hurdles can become near insurmountable. No matter which system is in operation, these first two steps are critical, so persuading political parties to give women a positive valence and then actually selecting female candidates is always a problem. Matland makes six important points about expanding women’s representation:

1. Women should organize both inside and outside political parties.
2. Women should urge parties to set down clear rules for candidate selection.
3. PR systems are better than plurality/majority systems for increasing women’s
4. Some PR systems are preferable to others.
5. Women should carefully evaluate all parts of any proposed electoral system for their possible advantages or disadvantages for women.
6. While PR systems are better in the long run, immediate results cannot be guaranteed. Changing the electoral system is only one part of a more comprehensive strategy for improving women’s representation.

Finally, Matland points out, in respect of point (4), that PR systems that treat the whole country as district are probably the most advantageous for increasing women’s representation (Matland. 2005).

As Kenworthy and Malami pointed out (above), there are other factors affecting women’s representation, and they include culture and women’s professional status, or more broadly, social structure, politics and ideology (Paxton & Kunovich. 2003). Arguing that imprecise measurement accounted for the lack of effect of the role of ideology in previous studies and deriving a measure from the World Values Survey, Paxton and Kunovich demonstrate that attitudes to women have a strongly significant effect on women’s representation. Whilst also finding that PR systems were better than other electoral systems, they point out that ideology – attitudes to women – affects both the supply side (education and employment) and the demand side (parties choosing women candidates and voters voting for women).

The choice of electoral system clearly exists in a context, and thus women’s representation is likely to be affected by a wide range of factors. This was tested in an interesting recent study

(Krook. 2010 (b)). Krook points out that there have been dramatic increases in the absence of changes in institutional, social, economic and cultural factors. Using a qualitative methodology, and examining both Western and sub-Saharan countries, Krook is able to demonstrate that there are multiple combinations of conditions that lead to higher or lower levels of women's representation.

High representation in Europe results from five distinct combinations of conditions that include PR, the status of women, new left parties, quotas, and the presence of women's movements, either autonomous or non-autonomous (affiliated to political parties). Combinations of these variables played out differently across the 22 European countries studied.

For sub-Saharan Africa, and the 26 countries studied, the effects of the variables was wholly different. PR was not such a significant factor, quotas were, and legislation following a conflict seemed much more important and consistent across many countries, South Africa for example (Krook. 2010 (b)). High levels of development, measured by the UN Human Development Index, also proved significantly related to increased representation, but the very interesting finding was a significant increase in representation in some countries post-conflict, Rwanda being the obvious example. This finding built on an earlier study by Melanie Hughes who found that there was indeed an increase in representation post-conflict (Hughes. 2009).

In a quantitative study of 36 high-income, 86 middle-income, and 63 low-income countries, Hughes looked at two factors that had received little attention, international linkages and civil war. There was little effect for international linkages, suggesting that these linkages do not have much effect in low-income countries, whilst there are gains for women in the aftermath of long civil conflicts, but not sustained in the longer term (Hughes. 2009). A majority of the countries examined that had suffered from conflict showed increases in representation post-conflict, but the gains were generally modest, especially for conflicts that were concerned with territorial disputes (Georgia, Myanmar, or Sudan) rather than major civil wars (Mozambique, Rwanda, or Uganda). Of course, not all countries are or have experienced conflicts, and most are located in low-income countries, and many in Africa. Hence, this factor has limited applicability in contrast to the more common factors identified in the research.

Many countries have transitioned from authoritarian from authoritarian forms of government since the 1990s, which is one of the issues that emerges from the post-conflict changes, but applies to many other countries. The transition to democracy may also be a broad factor effecting political, structural and cultural factors, and indirectly contributing to a different valence given to women and their participation in politics. Yoon examined sub-Saharan countries that had experienced multi-party elections between 1990 and 1999 (Yoon. 2001). The study included 28 of the more than 40 African countries that had held multi-party elections since 1990. The study included social, economic and cultural variables (access to education, participation in the labour force, increase in the consumer price index, and patriarchy), as well a range of political variables (the electoral system, political party fragmentation, and gender quotas). Patriarchy, unsurprisingly, had an inhibitory effect, but PR and quotas increased representation. A second study indicated that democracy, as multiparty elections, reduced women's representation, although PR again did produce higher levels of representation, as do quotas (Yoon. 2004).

Recent work on the impact of democratisation, suggests that "democratisation" affects representation rather than the level of democracy at any one time (Fallon, Swiss & Viterna. 2012). Examining representation over time, from 1975 to 2009, these researchers endorse Yoon

with respect to the initial period after democratic transition occurred, but then demonstrate that representation increases as democracy enhances a range of basic freedoms. The analysis also demonstrates how complex the interactions can be, and the importance of longitudinal as opposed to cross-sectional study. For example, there is frequent reference in studies to the impact of Marxist-Leninist and left parties in enhancing representation, and Fallon *et al* show how this, and other factors, have curvilinear relationship: there is higher representation for women in countries with such parties prior to transition, but representation drops after transition (Fallon, Swiss & Viterna. 2012). The point is that women’s representation is context dependent and, to a significant extent, country dependent, especially when seen over time. Hence, there is no one shoe fits all approach to the problem, and those advocating for improvements in women’s representation in any country need to undertake careful analysis of the country and women’s position in the country. Here, the role of structural, social, economic and cultural factors are as important as the choice of electoral system.

The relevance for all of this research for Zimbabwe lies in understanding how the country might operationalise the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. This very bold vision is yet to bear the intended fruit a decade later. The Protocol is specific about the achievement for 2015:

- *Endeavour, by 2015, to enshrine gender equality and equity in their constitutions and ensure that these rights are not compromised by any provisions, laws or practices;*
- *Endeavour that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women including the use of affirmative action measures as provided for in Article 5;*

As was seen earlier, there has been moderate progress towards increasing the thresholds for women’s representation in SADC: six (40%) now in 2019 exceed the 30% threshold that is internationally seen as acceptable, but only two are close to 50% requirement of the Protocol.

**Table 4: Percentage of women representatives and electoral system in SADC countries.**

[Source: EISA. 2019]

	EISA (2019)	Quota	PR	non-PR
Angola	26.8%		Yes	
Botswana	9.5%			Yes
Comoros	3.03%			Yes
Democratic Republic of the Congo	9.8%	Yes		Yes
Eswatini	6.2%			Yes
Lesotho	22.1%			Yes
Madagascar	15.9%			Yes
Malawi	22.9%			Yes
Mauritius	18.8%			Yes
Mozambique	38.4%		Yes	
Namibia	45.3%		Yes	
Seychelles	21.2%		Yes	Yes
South Africa	45.3%		Yes	
United Republic of Tanzania	36.6%	Yes		Yes
Zambia	16.7%			Yes
Zimbabwe	31.5%	Yes		Yes

As it stands in 2019, nearly all the SADC countries that reach the 30% threshold - Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania - use PR or some mixture involving PR. Zimbabwe has a combination of FPTP and a quota (reserved seats) for women. Of the countries that reach or exceed the 20% threshold, nine of them, six of them use PR. There are three countries, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe, that use FPTP rather than PR, and reach at least the 20% threshold, and this difference raises many of the issues canvassed above about the factors that affect representation.

Thus, the international studies, and the regional data, all support the notion that women will do much better under a PR system. However, it is also clear that there is a very complex range of factors influencing not only representation but also the choice of the electoral system itself.

Proportional representation does not necessarily guarantee that women will be chosen as candidates: this depends on many factors outside the electoral system. These are all the factors outlined in many studies, and, as seen in the brief review above, institutional, economic, social, and cultural factors all have different effects in different countries (Krook. 2010). There is no doubt about the effects of changing attitudes towards women, getting consensus amongst political parties that voluntary quotas are valuable, and having material improvement in the status of women through education and participation in the labour force. These will all have a positive effect on women's representation, but only in the long term. However, the robust finding is that PR makes the biggest difference for women, irrespective of all other factors, and the question is whether the short-term change of adopting PR will then have down-stream effects on the factors mentioned above.

The difficult question to address for a country like Zimbabwe, where women's status is low; where patriarchy is strong; where political parties place a low priority on women as candidates, perhaps reinforced by the quota; and where political violence around elections is common; how can women's representation be increased and access to real political power be enhanced?

This may lie in the direction of a quota system, but perhaps not in the current form. This is examined in the next section.

### *Quotas?*

It is not axiomatic that PR guarantees places for women, and hence there has been an increasing resort to quotas internationally. However, quotas need to be carefully examined, for, as Mona Lena Krook has pointed out, the motives for putting quotas in place can either facilitate or inhibit both representation, and, more importantly, real political power (Krook. 2008).

There are three main types of quotas: party quotas, reserved seats and legislative quotas. Party quotas have been around since before the Second World War, and are subject to many influences and motives, many of which have little to do with a genuine interest in advancing women's rights. The success of party quotas will depend in the final analysis on how much power women can wield within any given political party, and, as seen in the 2018 elections, this can be minimal. Only 53% of Zimbabwean political parties had any women candidates, and the two major parties barely reached the 10% threshold: 10% of ZANU-PF's candidates were women and the MDC Alliance was worse, 8%.

There is conflicting evidence about the success of voluntary quotas. These were successful in some countries, such as Argentina, but not so in others, such as Chile (Didier.2012; Schwindt-Bayer. 2009). However, the simple quantitative evidence indicates that quotas, whether voluntary by a political party or legislated, result in increases in women in parliament. When more complex analysis is carried out, legislated quotas result in significantly higher

representation for women than voluntary quotas (Didier. 2012). It seems unlikely that political parties can be forced to implement quotas, for a variety of reasons (mostly cultural), and, as Didier points out, when culture is included in the analysis the effect of voluntary quotas disappears (Didier. 2012).

Hence, there is greater interest in either reserved seats or legislative quotas. These are usually seats for which men are ineligible to contest, as in the current system in Zimbabwe, but are widely used around the world. There are many different reasons behind adopting reserved seats, and some feminists oppose them as both a gambit to attract women voters as well promoting the selection of “malleable” women (Krook. 2008). Legislative quotas, on the other hand, aim at ensuring that political parties nominate a certain percentage of women amongst their candidates, and this measure has been increasingly preferred. As Krook comments here:

*“Taken together, the insights of various case studies point to at least four distinct accounts as to why quotas are adopted: women mobilize for the adoption of quotas to increase women’s representation, political elites recognize strategic advantages for supporting quotas, quotas are consistent with existing or emerging notions of equality and representation, and quotas are supported by international norms and spread through transnational sharing.”* (Krook. 2008. 351)

The quote illustrates in brief the kinds of motives behind the adoption of legislative quotas, and some of the pitfalls, particularly where political elites see advantage that probably has little to do with advancing a feminist agenda. The positive outcome is where legislative quotas are part of a much wider agenda within a country for addressing the broad range of women’s rights as well as minorities. As pointed out earlier in the section on PR, changes in structural, social, economic and cultural factors that are beneficial for women will have a positive effect for women’s representation in the long term (Fallon, Swiss & Viterna. 2012).

There is much to say about the wider reform agenda, and an enormous literature, but here we will stay with the narrow problem of quotas, and the relationship between quotas and electoral system.

In general, research on non-voluntary quotas show that they have a positive effect for women’s representation, increasingly used across the world. In assessing the efficacy of quota systems, three factors are relevant (Schwindt-Bayer. 2009). The first is the quota size, the percentage of candidates that must be on a political party’s list. The second is “placement”, the kinds of seats to which women are allocated, with the idea that women should have a good chance of winning that seat, and preventing political parties from paying lip-service to the quota by obeying the rule, but at the same time violating it by keeping the desirable seats for men. The third factor deals with “enforceability”, penalties for not enforcing the quota on a candidate list. Schwindler-Bayer, in her analysis of 26 countries in which quotas were used, indicates that the average size of quotas was 30%, very much in line with the internationally desired threshold (Schwindler-Bayer. 2009). However, 61% of the countries had no policy or legislation on placement, and more than half (54%) had either weak or no enforcement rules. This indicates the problems with quotas. Most countries do not ensure that women candidates get a fair shake at winning seats, and, in political parties where women have little influence, the political party can obey the quota without men jeopardising their chances of being elected. This may resonate with women in Zimbabwe (RAU. 2018 9(a)). Secondly, without enforcement mechanisms political parties can simply ignore the quota. Here we can point out again that only 53% of Zimbabwean political parties fielded female candidates, and only the small parties approached

the 30% threshold, with the two major political parties, ZANU-PF (10%) and MDC Alliance (8%) being very poor examples of gender empowerment.

Quota size, irrespective of placement and enforcement, leads to higher numbers of women in legislatures, but the addition of rules about placement and enforcement makes an even greater difference (Schwindler-Bayer. 2009). The strongest effect is obtained with a combination of placement and enforcement, as might be expected, but the actual results of this analysis indicate that the number of seats women by women under quotas does not necessarily match the quota size. Apart from the quota, the electoral formula, voter preferences and other factors will influence the result. Obviously, voters have choices too.

As with PR, the findings on quotas vary according to both the sample of countries examined and the methodology for the study. One quantitative study, looking at quotas across 153 countries, concluded that voluntary quotas were more effective than legislated quotas, because the former were more likely to be followed or enforced, with the argument that there is greater commitment to a course of action chosen voluntarily (Tripp & Kang. 2008). Quotas of any kind, however, lead to higher rates of women in parliament, and the combination of quotas and PR electoral systems are key in increasing representation for women:

*“The study of quotas and female representation in legislatures results in some surprising findings in light of previous work in this area. Although in the past, party list PR electoral systems were seen as one of the most important determinants of female representation, the introduction of quotas in large numbers since the mid-1990s now suggests that even though that electoral system is very important in some parts of the world, these new institutional measures are even more important in raising female rates of representation globally.”* (Tripp & Kang. 2008. p358).

There has been detailed consideration of quotas in Africa (Ballington. 2004). This comprehensive report concludes that PR systems result in twice as many women being elected as other systems. It was concluded also that, in the 21 African countries studied, using one or other form of quota (reserved seats or voluntary party quotas), voluntary party quotas worked best under PR systems, and especially where there was a placement mandate: women are given winnable seats. As seen earlier, the preference in SADC has been for PR, and all countries using PR reach at least the 20% threshold, with two (Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa) exceeding 30%. However. Whilst only three SADC countries (DRC, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) have adopted quotas, both Tanzania and Zimbabwe reach the 30% threshold.

The way the evidence begins to pan out suggests that there are some obvious recommendations that Zimbabwean women can begin to consider. However, representation is only a start for improving women’s agency, and the goal as suggested earlier is to wield actual political power, influence the legislative agenda, and engage government in the wider frame, not merely on “women’s issues”. Thus, we consider briefly some of the wider consequences that emerge from PR and quotas: this speaks to the question raise earlier about the directionality of effects. Do women get more agency, including representation, from changes to structural, social, economic and cultural factors, or does representation provide the route to these changes?

### ***Some caveats***

As Cornwall and Goertz have argued, representation is merely one aspect of the more important project of “democratising democracy” (Cornwall & Goertz. 2005). Their point is that, without much wider changes in a country, that involves dealing with all the spaces in which women live



and work, representation can become a very narrow concession indeed. Krook expresses the concern of feminist scholars and activists thus:

*“They propose that quotas further neoliberal projects, demobilize women’s movements, result in the election of non-feminist women, promote a static view of “women” as a group, and decrease the effectiveness of women as political actors.”* (Krook. 2008. p360).

These views are not merely those of the fringe, but receive mainstream consideration by the World Bank (Klugman et al. 2014). Fostering women’s agency is obviously a larger project than increasing representation, and especially so when contemporary evidence indicates that women are becoming a significant majority in many areas. This relates to the notion of a “critical mass”, not only in achieving representation, but also in the broader social and economic life of countries. This reflects the concerns of the feminist researchers in looking at not only electoral systems, but also the structural, social, economic and cultural factors that affect representations and apply to women’s lives more generally. Looking at one country as a case study, we can see how some of these factors operate.

For example, higher education is a good indicator for being able to get well-paid jobs in the labour force, and for giving women greater agency. In the US, women are becoming a majority in terms of university attendance, the larger percentage with undergraduate degrees, and the greater number of Masters and Doctorates awarded. In 2017, 51.9% of doctoral students in the US were female, and a remarkable 59.9% registered for Masters or other post-graduate courses (Okahana & Zhou. 2018). It would seem that, at least as far as education is concerned, women are way past any critical mass threshold, but how has this played out in representation?

In 2019, women are 23.7% of Congress seats, both Senate and the House of Representative, the highest number of women ever, and the first time the 20% threshold was achieved. The 10% threshold was reached only in 1993. The distribution between the two major political parties is the really interesting finding. Since the 1990s, there are markedly more Democrats than Republicans. In 2019, Republicans are 12.7% of women in Congress, 6.5% of the party, whilst Democrats are 87.3% of all women in Congress, and 37.9% of the party. The Democrats reached the critical mass threshold (33%) in the party in 2015, and the lower threshold (20.9%) in 2005: the Republicans have yet to reach even the lowest level of 10% in 2019 (Manning & Brudnick. 2019).

This brief case study illustrates several points. Firstly, in a very developed country, where structural, economic, and social barriers for women are reduced, women have found the space for their agency through education. They are getting the skills that will enable them to compete strongly in the labour market, although there are cultural factors to overcome, such as patriarchy and the dilemmas of child rearing that always falls disproportionately on women. Secondly, this does appear to have resulted in greater representation for women, but not yet close to the critical mass or threshold of 30%. Thirdly, a cultural, or rather an ideological factor, seems to be in play when comparing the two major political parties, and the difference is very significant. Without getting into complex political analysis, Republicans can be described as conservative, whilst Democrats are certainly liberal, even mildly left-wing in American politics. As seen earlier, ideology plays a complex role in respect of representation (Fallon, Swiss & Viterna. 2012), and ideology in the US example results in Democrat women dominating the female constituency and even reaching the hallowed 30% within their own party.

Critical mass is thus dependent on wider factors than a mere electoral system. Beckwith and Cowell-Myers looked at the issue of number alone in a study of the relationship between “sheer numbers”, and women-friendly public policy (Beckwith & Cowell-Myers. 2007). They

conclude that such policy is more dependent upon a left-wing parliament, with weak opposition, as well as a strong feminist movement with public support, and little opposition in civil society to the feminist agenda. This applies to western countries in which “sheer numbers” are present, as in the Scandinavian countries, as well as countries in which there is no critical mass, as in the UK, US and Germany. However, it is worth pointing out that the Scandinavian countries do rely on PR, so perhaps sheer numbers should not be discounted, nor should the influence of an autonomous women’s movement. Furthermore, it is argued that the notion of critical mass requires much more work before being an accepted truth (Studlar & MacAllister. 2003).

There are other issues to raise in respect of PR and its consequences for women. This is whether PR increases the participation of voters, and here it is worth remembering that Zimbabwean women do vote, and are in a significant majority in the number of registered voters. The point is that high voter turnout is at least one of the indicators of a healthy democracy, and, if large numbers of women vote, then is (theoretically) the chance that there will be more women voted in as representatives. However, Zimbabwe in 2018 belied this theory, but in the context of the Zimbabwean FPTP. A New Zealand study provides a partial answer (Karp & Banducci. 1999). Comparing the voter turnout between two elections - one under FPTP and the subsequent under PR - this did result in greater voter turnout. However, the increased turnout was the consequence of voters on the extreme left participating, but this also suggests that the opportunity for smaller parties and minority views afforded by PR created greater interest. Unfortunately, this study did not test for gender as a variable, and hence it merely demonstrates that minorities are more likely to vote under PR. For Zimbabwe and women, this may be of less consequence since women turn out anyhow in large number to vote.

Outside of issues around increasing the number of women voters, the question of female candidates remains critical, as seen so vividly in the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe. As Krook points out, this is an example of artificial repression (Krook. 2010 (a)): in Zimbabwe, women attain the 30% threshold by virtue of a quota of reserved seats, but were only 15% of the candidates for the House of Assembly. This strongly suggests that this is due to ideologies around gender, illustrated by Table 5.

**Table 5: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women [Source: RAU. 2018]**

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

Although most males and females do not hold discriminatory views about women and leadership, a consistent third of males do, and, presumably, this adds to the other factors impeding the selection of women candidates.

## **Conclusions**

What does this analysis say for Zimbabwe? There are a broad number of questions to answer, and here we have selectively examined the international literature. It is necessarily selective because the literature is very large, and not all is relevant for Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a country in crisis, and a country in which elections and the electoral system generally draw critical comment. It is also a country amongst the front-runners in achieving a “critical mass” with slightly more than 30% of the legislature being female. The deep question is whether this

critical mass a results in women having both real political power or increasing women's agency more generally. There were three questions that were examined:

- Firstly, in the light of the dismal performance of women candidates and voters in the 2018 elections, and the aftermath of creating a gender quota, is the current electoral system, FPTP and a gender quota (reserved seats), the most favourable way for women to make real the requirements of the constitution for real gender equality?
- Secondly, are quotas the best route to increasing women's real political power, their ability to influence the national agenda beyond being able to ensure a better deal on "women's issues"?
- Thirdly, is it just the choice of electoral system that matters for women, or do the broader contextual factors, structural, economic, social and cultural, play as important a role?

It is evident from the international literature that proportional representation, of any kind, is the most favourable electoral system for increasing women's representation. Whilst "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) systems are not necessarily disadvantageous for women, they depend on a wide range of factors, structural, economic, social and cultural (ideological), that are not easy to change in the short-term. Nonetheless, it is clear that PR results in greater numbers of women (Matland. 2005; Paxton & Hughes. 2007; Kenworthy & Malami. 1999). There is some disagreement over the range of factors also to take into account (Krook. 2010 (b)), but, on balance, PR, in some of its forms, is the most beneficial electoral system for women.

This is also the case for countries from sub-Saharan countries (Yoon. 2001; Yoon. 2004). This further supported by data from SADC, where all the countries that have adopted PR reach at least the 20% threshold, and some, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa, even exceed the 30% threshold (EISA. 2019).

In short, and noting that there are many issues around the adoption of PR, it seems the clear answer to the first question is that proportional representation should be the electoral system of choice for Zimbabwe, certainly for increasing women's participation.

However, in dealing with the second question, Zimbabwe has a reserved seat system for a quota and this has resulted in the country achieving the 30% threshold. On face value, why change something that seems to be working? It is clear that the attempt to get voluntary party quotas does not seem to work, as the parties chose very few women as candidates. Had the parties selected more women as candidates, as was the purpose behind the 50/50 campaign, and operated under a placement mandate where women had the possibility of contesting for winnable seats, then it is highly probable that the critical mass might have been considerably higher. Marrying the two ideas, PR and a quota that reflects the constitutional requirement for gender equality, might not this result in a true 50/50 balance in representation? But, also, would this not be achieved through PR alone?

The structural, economic, social and cultural barriers cannot, however, be discounted as these clearly affect the supply and demand relationships in finding female candidates.

It is evident from the Scandinavian countries that increased representation and changes in structural, economic, social and cultural factors are synergistic. However, it is not axiomatic that increased representation leads to women-friendly public policy, and, Beckwith and

Cowell-Myers demonstrate, this can happen in the absence of “sheer numbers”, or a critical mass (Beckwith & Cowell-Myers. 2007). A strategic view for women is that there needs to be investment in both increased representation and women-friendly public policy that changes the structural, economic, social and cultural factors that impede representation and public participation generally.

There is also a “chicken-and-egg” problem. Does increased representation lead to women friendly public policy, or does women-friendly public policy drive increased representation? For example, in the US that there have been marked gains for women in academic achievement paralleled with increases in percentages of women in parliament, admittedly mostly in the Democratic Party, but facilitating access to education for women, and enhancing their meaningful participation in the labour force can take decades before this might pay off in the area of representation. It is a frequent comment by male politicians in Zimbabwe that there are too few “competent” women for any real changes made to the current system, a claim that does not hold up when the strides that women are taking in the wider society are examined. This argument seems based on prejudice and patriarchy, and the real problem seems to be that women find Zimbabwe’s violent politics unattractive (RAU. 2016 (a); RAU. 2016 (b)). It is not that there are no competent women, rather Zimbabwean politics dries up the supply.

This can only be the beginning of a much larger debate, but it does appear that proportional representation alone will increase the number of women in parliament. If supplemented with a legislated quota, which the Constitution suggests must be 50%, an enormous change will have taken place. This undoubtedly would lead to women-friendly public policy, and thereafter alterations in all the inhibitory factors – structural, economic, social and cultural – will begin to be overcome. This all sounds a dream, even a fantasy, but, as Mona Lena Krook has pointed out, a powerful, autonomous women’s movement seems to make a big difference, especially where there is PR and a quota (Krook. 2010 (b)). Is this the missing ingredient in Zimbabwe: a women’s movement autonomous of the political parties?

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