

Gender and Voting Participation in Africa: The Case of Zambia

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Abstract: This paper presents empirical evidence regarding the trends of gender and political participation during the 2001-2011 period in Zambia. Focusing on voting as one aspect of political participation, and taking age, education and place of residence as explanatory variables, we use data from the Afrobarometer survey to see how voting participation varied with regard to gender in Zambia during this period. Despite Zambia's higher levels of political participation among African countries, our analysis shows that when compared to their male counterparts, women still have disproportionately lower levels of political participation than men, regardless of factors such as educational achievements, age and place of residence. The research findings contribute to the gender and political participation literature by evidencing that the gender gap continues to be an avoidable inequality in voting participation in Zambia.

In contrast to their male counterparts, voting participation of women increased in absolute terms within this period in Zambia. However, our analysis shows that the difference in voting patterns is more pronounced between women in the different social groups than men. The study further suggests that, in spite of the international drive for full equality in political participation, and as a result of the centuries old traditional cultural constraints in Zambia, and the African society at large, women have been subjected to a social attitude boosted by some of the discriminatory chauvinisms of colonialism towards women, has been created that still operates in Zambian culture and leads to the exclusion of women from active participation in political life.

Keywords: Africa, Elections, Gender, Voting participation, Zambia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of contemporary studies conducted on gender and political participation have often been from the developed western democracies. Findings from these research has frequently pointed to women having less political participation compared to their male counterparts (see for example, Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010; Currell, 2005; Inglehart and Norris, 2003). In young democracies of the developing south, African democracies in particular, a growing number of studies

have also pointed to a male dominated political scene (Bawa and Sanyare, 2013; Beck, 2003; Bratton, 1999; Bratton et al., 2010; Geisler, 2004; McEwan, 2003; Isaksson, 2010).

However, very little research has looked at how voting participation varies by gender over the years in Africa's developing democracies. This paper address this gap by attempting to analyse the voting participation by gender in Zambia during the 2001 – 2011 period. We also examined how voting participation varies between social groups in Zambia during the same period.

2. DISCOURSES ON WOMEN AND EQUALITY

The Women's Rights Movements includes those of the 19th and 20th century woman suffrage movement in America (Note 1), coupled with the efforts made by international organisations such as what the United Nations does towards advancing gender equality in all spheres of life. For example, in 1979 the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has been seen as one the most important UN charters with regards to gender equality and has been heralded as the springboard that has helped to advance the now respected role of women in modern day society (see Adams and Byrnes, 1999:51; John, 2000; Gelb and Palley, 2009) and most especially in countries of the global north.

In most societies, the advancements in women's empowerment included women having to be constitutionally recognized as equal members of society to their male counterparts, giving women equal access to health care, as well as affording them the right to participate and vote in elections. Even though, it has been argued that these efforts slowly resulted in women scaling up their status in comparison to their male counterparts, it has been argued many of the women's advancements were most visible in the western world (see Sylvia Tamale's work for women in Africa, 2000; 2011 and see also Stromquist, 2013 for analysis of debates on women from a regional perspective), their impact in countries of the developing south and in traditional African societies, including Zambia in particular, were minimal. This was mainly attributed to the conservativeness and the relatively closed nature of traditional societies in Africa, where women are still culturally seen as inferior to their male counterparts, and their role in society is still tightly controlled by a male dominated society (Thiam, 1986; Jackson, 2007).

Since the dawn of the 21st century, coupled in part with some of the progress made by the 'Third Wave Feminism Movement' (Note 2), there has been an accelerated emphasis aimed at achieving gender parity in all spheres of everyday life. This has seen more and more scholarship exploring, among other things, factors that influence gender inequality, as well as the international and local advocacies highlighting gender inequalities (Bates- Earner and Carin 2012; OCED, 2012; 2010; Salkeld, 2008; Stieglitz, 2012; UN, 2002). These advocacies resulted in the formulation of gender parity policies including the establishment of global policies such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and a new set of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2000 and 2015, respectively. These global goals are aimed at, among many other objectives, achieving gender equality in all affairs of life, with a special emphasis on the developing countries, Africa in particular (see Chibba, 2011 for MGDs in Africa). Regional initiatives such as the 'Gender Link for Equality and Justice' in Africa, which advocates for a 50/50 gender representation in workplaces and political life (see genderlinks.org.za 2014), and also the recent wave of gender quotas adopted by a number of African countries aimed at apportioning a certain number of political seats and positions to women candidates in African politics, have relatively improved the gender imbalance.

These efforts, coupled with renewed interests from political science researchers aimed at highlighting the pervading inequalities in gender and political participation, (see Bratton et al. 2010; Bratton, 1999; Bratton and Logan, 2006; Krishna, 2002) is slowly helping to bring African women and their equality with their male counterparts to the fore of national policies. Rwanda, located East Africa, is often cited as an example of the gains that women are making in the arena of political participation in Africa (see Ballantine and Spade, 2012; Kihui, 2010; Nwonwu, 2008), as a result of the introduction of gender quotas among other policies.

This paper is theoretically situated within these two broader gender discourses, (1) those advanced by the international community and (2) those from within academia which are aimed at advocating for the eradication of gender imbalances in everyday life as well as empirically highlighting the gender inequalities that are still rife in political participation in Africa.

The concept of gender is taken in this research to mean 'the socially constructed roles, behaviours, attributes and activities that a given society sees as appropriate for men and women' (World Health Organization, 2010; in Cutter, 2012: 20), while the term political participation is narrowly taken to mean 'a citizen's act in casting their ballot paper during an election for the purposes of influencing the selection of their political leaders' (Kim et al., 2011). Therefore, political participation in this paper is used to mean voting and the two terms, voting and political participation, will thus be used interchangeably.

The research poses the question; why does political participation have a marked imbalance in relation to gender? The research adopted Zambia as a case study for empirical examination of gender and political participation trends. Zambia is among a very small number of African countries that have made real democratic progress in terms of successfully holding relatively free and fair elections (see Baldwin, 2013) over a number of years as well as conducting acceptably peaceful transfers of power to the winning political party after national elections. Zambia is also one of a number of African countries which are recipients of international donor funds, (Note 3) which are normally interlinked with stringent binding regulations to embrace female empowerment. Zambia is thus a unique African country wherein to gauge the progress of gender and political participation in Africa.

Even though a number of studies have been conducted on gender and voting behaviour/voter turnout, as well as on some of its influencing factors including age and education in Africa (see for example, Bratton et al, 2005; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2007; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2010), their findings point to men having a higher proportion of political participation than their female counterparts (Bratton and Logan, 2006; Bratton et al., 2010; Bratton, 1999; Krishna, 2002). There is a limited number of empirical research examining the trends of female voting changes over time. Therefore, our analysis of gender variation in voting behaviour in Zambia revealed that age, education and place of residence are influencing factors. Thus our analysis aims to fill this gap in the literature by providing in-depth empirical evidence which:

- confirms to previous empirical findings on gender inequality and political participation in Africa,
- offers an interesting finding of women voting trends in Zambia, as well as suggesting with an indigenous insight that traditional cultural practices still continue to compound the exclusion of women from active participation in everyday political life in Zambia.

3. GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PERSPECTIVE

There exists a consensus among gender and political participation scholars that men tend to have higher levels of political participation than their female counterparts (Bratton, 1999; Dalton, 2008; Gallego, 2007; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; Norris, 2002). In Western Europe and North American democracies, the trends in gender and political participation have traditionally seen men having high levels of political involvement in everyday life, including in voting, compared to their female counterparts (Burns et al., 1997; Coffe, 2012; Norris, 2002a; Paxton et al., 2007; Schlozman et al, 1999). It has further been argued that this trend also reflects the gender divide found in other regions of the world, such as countries in Eastern Europe, where it has also been found that women are disproportionately misrepresented in all the spheres of everyday political participation. This gender divide in political participation in the western world, including in countries in Eastern Europe, has also been found to mirror the gender trends in political participation in some countries of the developing world (Desposato and Norrander, 2009), including African countries where women have been found to have low levels of political participation (for an in-depth analysis: see Kellow, 2010; Ndlovu and Mutale, 2013; Tripp, 1994).

In recent times, however, some studies from the western world have suggested that the gaps in certain aspects of political participation are starting to narrow (Norris, 2002b). Krishna (2002) contends, for example, that in most developed western countries the usual gender imbalance in political participation is slowly levelling off, and in some democracies the rates of participation by women are higher than those of men. Where women are found to have higher political participation levels than men (Bashevkin, 1985; Erickson and O'Neill, 2002; Leighley and Nagler, 1992), it was noted that they are more prone than men to vote for and support left-leaning parties.

These findings point to a scenario where the relationship between gender and political participation in the advanced western democracies appears to be changing, as more and more women are taking part in everyday politics. The gender divide in political participation in Africa and Zambia, in particular, lacks current scrutiny and with the coming to fruition of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2015 where some of its goals, for example Goal 2 and Goal 3, have had some influence in raising the plight of women in Africa. With the adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it would be interesting to gauge whether African women are also nearing political participation equality with their male counterparts.

4. GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA AND IN ZAMBIA

In Africa, the post-independence period has seen the level of women's participation in politics dwindle, despite women having played some of the significant roles during the 'wind of change period' of the 1960s-80s (Note 4). Since then,

African women's involvement in politics, it has been argued that their role in active politics has played second fiddle to the mostly male-dominated political organisations, as has been seen in a number of African countries including Zambia (see Cheeseman, 2015; Konde, 2005; Tripp, 1994). This has further been backed up by findings from studies of gender and political participation in the developing world, including in Africa, which have found that women were less likely to take part in active political participation (Andersen 1975; Bratton 1999; Coffe and Bolzendalh, 2011; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Marien et al. 2010; Schlozman et al., 1994; Richards et al. 2016).

In seeking to bridge the gender gap in relation to women's political participation, and thus afford women some strong voices in the African political sphere, a number of African countries have introduced 'Gender Quotas' (Note 5) aimed at not only encouraging women to participate in everyday politics, but also enabling them to hold a certain percentage of seats in parliaments as well as in local government (Ndlovu and Mutale, 2013). The increase in the adoption of these gender quota systems has led to some increases in female representation in African parliaments (Ballington 2008), with Rwanda having a larger number of women in the parliament compared to other countries in Africa (Dahlerup, 2006; Steady, 2011). In spite of these efforts, women still largely play second fiddle to their male counterparts in political participation across Africa (see Leonardo and Johnson, 2014, for women representation in African government cabinets).

It has been suggested that this could be as a result of reinforced centuries old African traditional norms that continually view women as caregivers of the household, among many other traditionally enshrined roles (Kellow, 2010; Tripp, 1994). Customary laws are some of the aspects of traditional African societies that still hold women back in terms of equality in a given country's constitutional law as well as in political life (see Tamale, 2010). For example, as a result of the ingrained discriminations against women enshrined in customary laws, the majority of married African women still have no right to own property. In many African marriages, when a woman loses her husband she also loses the right of property inheritance '... to her husband's land' and wealth (Sharma, 2006:154; see also Parpart, 1996; Sheldon). What a woman has built up and contributed to throughout her married life she loses upon her husband's death. This could probably explain why, when compared to other regions of the world, the percentage of female representation in African parliaments still continues to lag behind their male counterparts (Goetz and Hassim, 2003).

Furthermore, studies have found that African women were less likely compared to their male counterparts, with sparse reasons given behind this phenomenon, to vote at election times, as well as contacting political leaders within the communities (see Bratton et al., 2010; Bratton and Logan, 2006; Coffe and Bolzendalh, 2011; Isaksson, 2010; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2011). For example, in Zambia, it has been found that both men and women were equally likely to register to vote as well as engage in the communal political activities including meetings and rallies. However, when it came to the actual casting of votes, men were more likely to vote than their female counterparts (Bratton, 1999).

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

It has been argued that there is no single most important factor that has an all overriding influence on the levels of women political participation in everyday society. However, a number of studies have found that education is one of the key factors that impinge on women's active participating in everyday politics across the world (see Verba et al., 1978; Norris, 2002; Krishna, 2008; Booth and Seligson, 2008). For example, it has been found that women that have lower levels of education in Western Europe were less likely to turn out and vote compared to those with higher levels of education (see Norris, 2002). Norris (2002), further argues that in the post-Second World War period, increases in the levels of women's education attainments and the opening up of institutional constraints on women also played an influential role in women turning out to cast their votes in higher number, as well as taking part in other everyday political matters (Inglehart and Norris, 2000).

Age has also been attributed to having a positive effect on political participation, with older women found more likely than younger women or men to vote during elections (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2011). There is thus some broad agreement within the literature that age and education are some of the main factors that influence the trends of women political participation.

In Zambia, there is a lack of more empirical research documenting the realities and factors underlying the gender divide in political participation over time. Even though some research has been conducted, few have specifically focused on trying to explain why age, education, and place of residence have a strong bearing on how people vote.

6. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper come from the Afrobarometer survey, which is conducted regularly in 35 African countries (Afrobarometer Data, 2005, 2009, 2012). The Afrobarometer survey is an independent non-partisan research project that measures the social, political and economic atmosphere in Africa. For the present analysis we used data from three rounds of Zambian survey; 2005, 2009, and 2012. The sample size in all three was 1,200 each.

Each survey had a question “With regard to the most recent national elections, which statement is true for you?” with options “voted” and various reasons for “not voted”. The 2005 survey asked about voting participation in the 2001 election, and the 2009 and 2012 surveys asked about the 2008 and 2011 elections, respectively. The 2008 election was a by-election only for the presidential post.

We pooled the data from these three surveys and examined how voting participation changed over time. Using logistics regression, we also examined how voting pattern varies with respect to gender, age, education, and place of residence.

For the binary logistics regression, we dichotomised the question of whether they voted in the last election into Yes=1 and Else=0. The independent variables are gender (female=1), age, education, place of residence (rural=1), and year of the survey. Age is categorised into three groups: young (up to 30 years), middle (31 to 45 years) and old (older than 46 years). Education also is categorised into three categories: lower level education (up to primary school completed), middle level education (some secondary to post-secondary education), and higher level education (some university to post graduate). We used R statistics program for the analysis.

7. OVERALL VOTING TRENDS IN ZAMBIA (2001, 2008 AND 2011 ELECTIONS)

This paper finds that age, education, and place of residence are some of the factors that influence voting participation in Zambia. In absolute terms, there has been an increase in voting participation for both male and female voters over the 10-year period in Zambia. It is also evident that the gender gap in voting rate is narrowing. The rate of male voting rate has consistently been increasing over the years, while the female voting rate decreased about 3 percentage points in 2008 and then increased to about 10 percentage points in 2011.

Table 1: Voting Participation of Different Social Groups in Zambia, 2001 - 2011

Category	Percentage Voted		
	2001	2008	2011
Male	63.8%	64.0%	68.6%
Female	56.6%	53.5%	63.5%
Chi-square	6.42*	13.64*	3.48
Urban	58.0%	54.0%	58.5%
Rural	61.6%	61.6%	71.9%
Chi-square	1.46	6.61*	23.49*
Low Edu	53.5%	59.0%	72.3%
Middle Edu	62.2%	57.4%	61.4%
High Edu	82.7%	84.6%	56.3%
Chi-square	20.18*	9.04*	17.30*
Young age	51.6%	51.1%	58.4%
Middle age	78.0%	69.7%	78.9%
Old age	73.5%	74.6%	76.6%
Chi-square	74.55*	47.78*	49.63*
Overall	60.2	58.8	66.0

*p< 0.05

We also found that the overall voting participation decreased in 2008 and then increased in 2011, and this might be due to the fact that the 2008 election was a presidential by-election and we thus assume that Zambian citizens take less interest in voting when elections don't concern local issues where they can engage in electing their local political representatives.

Interestingly, the voting patterns from an age category perspective was overwhelmingly consistent in the voting patterns of older people in Zambia. The findings show a continuous higher voting trend among older people (both males and females) from both rural and urban areas. Remarkably, we also found that in terms of voting patterns during the 2001-2011 period in Zambia, both males and females from rural areas voted more than their urban counterparts. Compared to younger age group, voting rate is higher among middle and older age groups in all elections. The voting rate in the younger age group had increased slightly in 2011, however, there was still a 15 percent difference in the voting rate between the young and older age group.

We found education has an influence on voting participation in Zambia. We found there was about a 30 percent difference in the voting rate between the less educated group and the more educated group in 2001. This gap decreased to about 25 percent in 2008. However, in 2011, the pattern reversed and the voting rate among the less educated group was higher than the more educated group (16 percent). The overall pattern shows however, that when compared to low educated groups, voting participation is high among highly educated people.

We also found that place of residence had a bearing on voting participation in elections in Zambia. People in rural areas were found to be participating more in elections than their urban counterparts. The trend shows that rural voting participation is increasing over the years, while the urban voting participation decreased in 2008 and then increased to the previous level in 2011.

8. FEMALE-MALE COMPARISON

Data show that the male voting rate is consistently increasing over the years whereas, compared to 2001, the female voting rate decreased in 2008 and increased again in 2011. Both in the urban and rural areas, the male voting participation has been higher than female voting participation over the 10-year period. In all educational categories, male voting participation is found higher than that of females, except among higher educated group in 2011. In all age categories, the male voting rate is found to be consistently high in all the three elections.

Table 2. Male-female voting participation among different social groups in Zambia, 2001 - 2011

	2001		2008		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Urban	62.5%	53.6%	60.3%	47.8%	62.2%	54.9%
Rural	64.5%	58.5%	66.2%	56.9%	73.5%	70.2%
Chi-square	0.25	1.36	2.16	4.72*	8.72*	15.09*
Low Edu	58.6%	50.0%	65.1%	54.5%	71.2%	73.2%
Middle Edu	63.9%	60.1%	61.9%	51.2%	67.9%	53.1%
High Edu	85.3%	77.8%	92.9%	75.0%	52.6%	61.5%
Chi-square	9.21*	11.61*	5.81	4.01	2.99	26.02*
Young age	53.2%	50.1%	56.5%	46.3%	61.0%	55.9%
Middle age	82.1%	72.8%	72.6%	66.5%	81.5%	76.3%
Old age	77.5%	67.9%	77.5%	70.0%	77.0%	75.9%
Chi-square	49.43*	24.22*	20.28*	24.09*	24.48*	24.94*

Regression analysis shows that, compared to urban areas, the odds of someone in rural area participating in voting is higher. We can see the similar trend for the education also. Compared to lower educated people, the odds of some in higher educated category is more than double. Analysis also shows that females are less likely to vote than males in Zambia.

TABLE 3. Logistic regression model assessing determinants of voting participation in Zambia (Dependent variable $voted=1$)

	Odds ratio
Intercept	1.351**
Male	Ref
Female	0.733***
Urban	Ref
Rural	1.489***
Low education	Ref
Middle Education	0.992
High Education	2.301***
Age (squared)	1.000
Year 2001	Ref
Year 2008	0.956
Year 2011	1.333***
AIC	4724.7
Num. obs.	3595

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The question here is why there is a comparatively (compared to men) larger difference in the voting rate between rural and urban females, and less educated and more educated females? We argue that in order to close the gap in voting patterns between rural-urban women and less educated-more educated women, specific government policies targeting women are needed. We argue that the lower levels of voting among urban women compared to their rural counterparts could be attributed to the effects of modernity upon contemporary urban Zambian's way of life unlike most of the rural women's way of life which is mainly limited to household chores. Election times provide rural women with one of a very few opportunities to openly participate in an often male dominated rural lifestyle. While in urban Zambian, women tend to engage in many diverse occupations and thus have limited time to fully participate in elections.

To enable Zambian women to participate at the same levels as their male counterparts in everyday political life, most especially in voting there has to be renewed educational efforts aimed at encouraging all women to take part in politics. The international donor agencies as well as local non-governmental organisations in partnership with the Zambian government need to formulate policies specifically aimed at tackling the negative traditional stereo-typed roles of women in Zambian society, where a social psychic which has been passed down to posterity continues to portray women as inferior beings in society.

Therefore, based on our findings, we argue that even though the gap in political participation between women and men in all categories is significant in Zambia, there are positive signs based on the 2011 elections that women are slowly making gains in political participation in Zambia. For example, the trend among the less and more education categories in 2011, where women had a higher voting rate than their male counterparts', bears evidence not only to the notions that there is no one single factor that can explain the lower levels of political participation between females and males, but also to the strides that women have made in political participation in Zambia in recent time. However, the efforts that the Zambian government, the international non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children Zambia, as well as local non-governmental organisations including 'The Zambia Social Forum' are making in advocating for gender parity (including

the girl-child education initiatives) in all affairs of life in Zambia might partly explain this shape increase in women political participate.

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Notes

Note 1. For a complete analysis of how these movements improved women welfare including archiving voting rights: see- McConaughy CM (2013). *The Woman Suffrage Movement in America*. Cambridge University

Note 2. Kerilynn Engel, (2014) contends that this movement was associated with the push for, among other issues, women's greater influence in politics.

Note 3. Almost all western donor funds to Zambia and Africa come with provisions that not only advocates for a gender natural approach but also demands for good governance applications.

Note 4. See for example, Allman et al. (2002) for an analysis of some of the roles that women played during the African struggles for independence period.

Note 5. Gender Quotas is taken to mean in this paper- African governments' policies which are aimed at apportioning a certain percentage of political seats/positions for women. The adoption of gender quotas has partly been influenced by many studies that have argued that doing nothing to reverse the gap in political participation could further marginalise women in politics (see for example, Barnes and Burchard, 2013)