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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# WOMEN'S QUOTA AS A STRATEGY FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN POLITICS: A REVIEW OF THE ZIMBABWEAN PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS.

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research article is to examine the effectiveness of the women's quota proportional representation and participation of men and women in the Parliament of Zimbabwe. Women's quota is a policy stance used to reserve parliamentary seats for women in order to observe equitable gender balance in parliament. It is not peculiar to Zimbabwe alone but is practised in many political settings throughout the world. The study was carried out using a qualitative research methodology approach for the intention of having in-depth interviews of both female and male parliamentarians as well as key informants. This was complimented by the researcher's observation of one live parliament session. The study was guided by the Intersectionality Theory augmenting the findings which established that women parliamentarians appointed through the quota experience some exclusion including from the Community Development Fund. They equally are exposed to mockery during debates and other gender insensitive behaviours. Therefore, the study concludes that Zimbabwe's parliamentary quota system has indeed increased the presence of women in politics but recommends that the selection criteria of beneficiaries be standardised. It is further suggested that the quota beneficiaries should serve a stipulated term to make way for others' empowerment.

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## INTRODUCTION

The women's quotas also known as gender quotas in some countries are meant for proportional representation and have been adopted as a gender mainstreaming strategy. Women's quotas are defined as an instrument aimed to accelerate the achievement of gender balanced participation and representation by establishing a defined percentage of positions, that are allocated to women, generally under certain rules or criteria (European Institute for Gender Equity, 2019). Sobhani (2021) describes gender quotas as affirmative measures designed to address the under representation of women in politics. As argued by Beauregard (2017) quotas are fast track political measures aimed at solving women's historical exclusion from politics over a shorter period of time. In addition, gender quotas make political careers accessible to women (Sobhani, 2021). The increasing of women's representation in the legislative through quotas may signal their inclusion in the political sphere, that is expected to have an influence on mass level attitudes and behaviour (Franceschet, Krook & Piscopo, 2012). The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across the globe has forced policy makers to respond by introducing gender quotas (Rohini and Ford, 2011). This strategy has been adopted by more than 100 countries (O' Brien & Rickne, 2016). The article is organised as follows: literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussions and conclusions.

**Contextualisation and Reflections on Literature:** Zimbabwe is one of the many African countries that adopted the women's quotas to equalize the representation of men and women in politics. In Zimbabwe, the quotas have been widely applied to politics. This saw the increase of women in the house of assembly from an average of 10% in (2008) to 31.5% in 2018 (WALPE, 2019). The differences in percentages are evidence of how difficult it has been for women to access political leadership through the electorate. This failure is alluded to several different factors such as lack of resources, negative cultural attitudes towards women's political leadership, lack of self-esteem and low confidence of women and a hostile political environment that serves as a deterrent for women to not feel safe in the political field. George (2019) suggests that expectations about women's roles influence women's ability to run for office and participate politically. The Zimbabwe general elections in 2018 failed to increase the numbers of women but rather further shrunk their political representation. Hence, the women's quota became a necessity in line with the constitutional provisions for equal participation of men and women in all spheres of the economy in Zimbabwe. The quota is included in the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution, which was approved by referendum and signed into law in May 2013 (UN Women, 2013). The women's quota in Zimbabwe has recorded notable progress such as increasing the voice of women in parliament through motions that are specific to women and girls (Dube, 2018).

The women's quota in Zimbabwe managed to increase the number of parliamentary members from 210 to 270 (Hamandishe, 2018). The quota system in Zimbabwe has resulted in women being appointed to ministries and others holding ministerial positions in previously described as 'men's ministries'. Through the PR system, women were also appointed as provincial ministers including the current Minister of Defence, Oppah Muchinguri. (WALPE, 2019). Studies in India have established that quotas increase female leadership and influences policy outcomes (Rohini & Ford, 2011). However, on the contrary, other findings have revealed a different picture of the quotas. Dube (2018) established that the quota system overshadows democracy and also does not promote gender equality but rather gender representation. He & Kaplan (2017) suggest that women's quotas are widely debated and stir up controversy. Other research by Jankowski & Marcinkiewicz (2019) have described quotas as ineffective or even paradoxical. The women's quota is provided for under Section 124 (1)(b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, initially running for two terms. However, the quota under the constitutional amendment bill no. 2 in 2021 was extended to run for another 10 years, up to 2033 (Gender Links, 2021). There are considerable studies on increasing political participation of women through the quotas such as, Hamandishe (2018), Pande (2012), Burnet (2011), Porfido and Horgan (2020), Mukabera (2019), Guariso (2018) and others. However, there is scarcity in studies reflecting on whether the increased numbers translate to empowerment. Based on this background, the study sought to answer the research's main question that: Has the Zimbabwe women's parliamentary quota system equalised participation of male and female members of parliament?

**Importance of Gender Equality in Politics:** The participation of women in politics has increasingly been acknowledged as a key element for sustainable development across the world. Women's full and effective participation is a matter of human rights, inclusive growth and sustainable development (OECD, 2018). Nwankar (2022) notes that women's equal participation in government is central to democracy and egalitarian societies. Women's representation in politics has so many benefits. Didi (2020) argues that leadership by women and their perspectives in parliament ensures greater responsiveness to citizens' needs. However, despite some gains, women still rarely hold leadership roles (Didi, 2020). The political involvement of women is essential to equity and peace (Mlambo & Kapangura, 2019). Women have demonstrated political leadership by being able to work across party lines even in the most combative environments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008). The Beijing Platform for Action outlines the prioritization of women's leadership and women's full access to power structures (United Nations Policy Brief 2019/03). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that, women have the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and its implementation. Didi (2020) notes that, more than 131 countries passed 274 legal reforms in support of gender equality. Additionally, having female legislators belonging to various backgrounds can bring a wide array of issues for consideration and propose solutions accordingly (Didi, 2020). Women's leadership or participation in politics is still not widely accepted in some cultures. A study established that some traditional leaders in Mogadishu, Somalia, had a strong influence on politics at all levels and showed a preference for men over women in politics (Ali and Noah, 2022). As Kangas *et al.* (2015) point out, it may be seen as threatening the traditional male hierarchy or patriarchal order. Added to that, the African governments public commitment to protect women has not materialized causing women to play outside of the political ground (Mlambo & Kapangura, 2019). Dube (2022) suggests that lack of will, restrictive electoral frameworks and deeply entrenched patriarchy cause low participation of women in politics.

**Quotas-A Quick Fix Strategy to the Gender Equality goal:** Increasing female representation in politics is also seen as another major step towards democracy and political idealism. However, as argued by Radu (2018), while half of the world's population are women, today women only hold 23% of all seats in parliament and senates globally. The case for quotas is that women make up

anywhere from 0% to 56% of the national legislatures around the world (Manning, 2014). Women around the world are underrepresented in parliament and far removed from decision making levels (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). The equal participation of women and men in public life is one key element of the Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979. As argued by Accord (2023), quotas have been implemented in varying degrees of success in South Africa, Liberia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Rwanda among other countries. There are many challenges facing women in their political ambitions to either get elected or to effectively participate when elected or appointed through proportional representation. It is imperative to understand the problems faced by women when they participate in politics (Kumar, 2017). Kassa (2015) argues that most African women depend on men economically which is the main cause for their low participation in politics. Culturally, the headship of the family is reserved for men and hence they make all financial decisions and those that may be deemed important. The patriarchal system that has circumscribed roles for women have made them outliers in politics (Ali and Noah, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa, scholars argue that cultural norms and stereotypes on gender roles influence women's running and being elected for office and more specifically patriarchal culture being a barrier to female representation (Manning, 2014). Women have limited access to the required resources for electoral campaigns as significant resource mobilization is mostly done by men and allocation is the prerogative of the head of the family. While female headed households maybe common, poverty is a factor for most of them. Fundamentally, women's quotas or gender quotas have been widely accepted and seen to be an easier quick fix remedy to increase the numbers of women in the political arena. There is a growing recognition that combining quotas with skills development in leadership can have a stronger impact and strengthen opportunities for women's voices (Kangas, *et al.*, 2015).

Quotas are important in terms of social justice, emphasizing the notion that they help to realise the right of women to be represented in national parliaments (Hopp, 2016). As argued by Ballington & Karam (2005), successful quotas lead to active recruitment of women by political parties, women having the possibility to influence decision making processes as individuals and a large minority of women will be able to influence political norms and culture. In the political world, quotas ensure that parliament truly reflects the population it represents and when a parliament mainly consists of men, it become hard to gain broad support for political decisions and to demonstrate that every citizen can be elected (Turam, 2015). Additionally, scholars find that states that elect more women are likely to have better pediatric outcomes, spend more on social welfare, and empower women. They emphasise that the significance of symbolic representation must not be under estimated as it means fulfilling women's right to be represented by female bodies in parliament to which they might relate better regarding certain issues such as child care, maternity leave and exposure to sexual harassment. Beyond increasing the share of women, quotas are often expected to have other effects, such as a positive effect on women that they do not target (Revillard, 2020). Despite some gains, women still rarely hold leadership roles (Didi, 2020).

Different types of women's quotas have been implemented in countries with different political contexts. In Iraq, political parties must place women in every third position on political party lists, in Argentina, party lists are required to have a minimum of 30% women among their candidates. Sweden adopted a Zipper list where a list of male candidates is alternated with a list of female candidates resulting in women in every other position on the party list. As indicated by Manning (2014), developing nations like Rwanda take the lead in female representation while world powers like the United States of America (USA) fall into the middle of the pack. As argued by Haider (2011), quotas have a number of advantages for women such as; at an individual level: female politicians may develop confidence and competency through their experience in office and Mass Participation: the process for women in political institutions can encourage the

political engagement of women constituencies and citizens more generally. Rwanda has recorded a number of successes since establishing the women's quota. The women's quota in Rwanda has among other noted gains, caused the reviewing of laws that enshrine inequalities or any form of discrimination, female solidarity and partnerships with men regarding gender issues and institutionalising budgets that integrate gender (Kanakuze & Kigali, 2003). Studies in India indicate that quotas increase female leadership and influence policy outcomes (Pande & Ford, 2009). Beaman *et al.* (2009), suggest that quotas can have an impact on society's perceptions of women, with increasing acceptance of women. The coming into effect of the women's quota in Zimbabwe in 2013, was applauded as a progressive step towards opening up the political space to women, while also addressing women's macro and micro societal needs (Accord, 2023).

**Challenges with the Women's Quotas:** With the hope of enhancing opportunities for women, there has been an upsurge in the use of women quotas in politics and economics in the recent years (Zehnter & Kirchler, 2020). The effectiveness of the different types of quotas varies by nation. Findings indicate that voluntary party quotas were more effective in developed countries while reserved seat quotas were only significant in the least developed countries (Nayar, 2022). The quotas have increased the number of women participants in various sections of politics. However, the implementation of quotas has not been without hurdles while also presenting new challenges. Radojevic (2022) posits that gender quotas may also have unintended consequences and among them are the quality and potential reputational costs for women elected through quotas. Other studies indicate that states that are dependent on foreign aid may be forced to adopt quotas or may adopt them independently for purposes to garner domestic and /or international legitimacy. Party leaders may initially agree to the idea of quotas to gain public recognition; however, they may lack commitment and show resistances when it comes to implementation (Yoon & Shin, 2017). International influence and inducements best explain quota adoption in developing countries (Bush, 2011).

As established by Revillard (2020), many studies have sought to assess additional effects, producing ambivalent results that sometimes cast a doubt on quotas. Having more women through the quotas may not bring changes in the agenda and introduction of bills concerning women's issues and does not necessarily translate into policy gains for women as a group (Haider, 2011). Additionally, some articles argue that quotas manipulate voter's choice, instead of truly reflecting the political equilibrium, they artificially change the candidate pool (Nayar, 2022). Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), was advocating for the women's quota to be abolished in Zimbabwe because they alleged that some male politicians were abusing women promising them favours for them to be elected and in the process soiling the intended motive (CITE, 2021). Nayar (2022) furthers that some women's rights activists claim that quotas are detrimental to women's causes, as they imply that women cannot be elected on their own. Again, as argued by CITE (2022), citizens of Zimbabwe view the quota as mere tokenism that will never empower women. Accord (2023) posits that while quotas are an important starting point in Zimbabwe, sustained transformation requires that we go beyond quantitative analysis to qualitative analysis. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) noted that the quota by itself has not adequately addressed transformed the political space to ensure gender equality (ZESN, 2020). Some findings elsewhere show that negative perceptions of beneficiaries were a specific concern about women's quotas (Zehnter & Kirchler, 2020). Even so, as argued by Pande & Ford (2009), argue that, in India rather than create backlash against women, quotas can reduce gender discrimination in the long term.

**Theoretical Framework:** Grant (2014) describes a theoretical framework as consisting the selected theory that undergirds one's thinking. It allows one to interpret, explain and generalise findings (George, 2022). The below theoretical framework forms the basis of this study. It sets a ground for examining the different contexts that have produced mixed outcomes for women's quotas.

**Intersectionality:** The study employs an intersectional lens to bring forth the various dynamics surrounding the implementation of the quotas their successes and weaknesses. Intersectionality is an analytical tool that enables complex analyses of marginalization (Brown *et al.*, 2021). The theory is founded on a relational conception of political power that locates constitution of power relations within social interaction, such as political representation (Server *et al.*, 2016). Intersectional analysis is extended to post-colonial feminism in political science (Hancock, 2016). The use of Intersectional Theory brings forth the argument that while women are a category, they are not a social class and hence their situations are different. As alluded to in this study, quotas have been met with mixed feelings and some have called for their removal in Zimbabwe. These calls are based on the various contexts of culture putting women in different positions in social and political lives. Hence, their failure and successes in others. As pointed out by Brown *et al.* (2021) and Maj (2013), intersectionality is a study of relative power that allows for feminist theorists to account for the differences among women. In Japan, a 2015 study of 'anti-feminist' conservative women highlighted how some engage in politics, in their view, without 'betraying' their commitment to traditional roles at home (George, 2019). The study in Japan exemplifies the differences in women that can be attributed to their divergent values, perceptions, politics of the day and events. This research article argues that the different outcomes of women's quotas can be viewed from a point of intersecting variables that have been created by different political environments. Intersectionality argues that oppression and privilege can shift depending on the context, and all experiences of marginalization are relevant (Kelly *et al.*, 2021). The different stories of women who have been beneficiaries of the quota should not be approached with a view to generalize women's political participation and situations. As indicated by Kelly *et al.* (2021), intersectionality asserts that individual identities overlap and intersect and reflect macro level forms of oppression and privilege. Additionally, intersectionality also has practical applications and can be used in the realm of policy making, helping institutions to address women's diversity (Maj, 2013). Server *et al.* (2016) posit that the merit of intersectionality is found in its ontology of power. In this regard, Intersectionality is extremely significant for feminist theory making important contribution to feminist scholarship (Maj, 2013). It was the intention of this paper to examine how the women's quota has affected the political participation of women in the parliament of Zimbabwe.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out within the qualitative research approach. Qualitative methodology deals with meanings, beliefs, perceptions and human feelings (Petty *et al.*, 2012). Berg & Howard (2012) characterize qualitative approach research as a concept, description of things and metaphors. A qualitative can thus be described as interpretative and naturalistic as it seeks to understand and explain beliefs and behaviours within the context that they occur (Draper, 2004) Soiferman (2010) indicates that qualitative methodology often employs inductive thinking as the researcher begins with specific observations and measures and then moves to detecting themes and patterns in the data. Interpretivism as a paradigm underpins this study. According to Pham (2018), Interpretivism instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding the whole population. It instead gains a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context. The paradigm alludes to the intersectional lens that describe women as not homogenous and their experiences as being based on their different variables in their contexts. This study sought to understand the unique experiences of women members of parliament who were beneficiaries of the parliamentary women's quota.

**Population:** A total of 12 parliamentarians took part in the study. Out of the total sample, 9 were women and 3 men, all serving in the parliament of Zimbabwe. A sample is a part of the population that represents it completely (Shukla, 2020).

**Data generation tools:** In-depth interviews with parliamentarians were carried out. Some interviews were done face to face while others were carried via recording of phone calls with the consent of participants. Parliamentarians were not always available at the same place. Some of the parliamentarians expressed that they did not have time for physical interviews. In-depth interviews were used to gain insights into the experiences of members of parliament who were appointed through the quota. Focus groups comprised of one group with men and women and additionally a parliament session observation took place. A parliamentary session observation was observed via a one-hour live recording. This was due the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic induced restrictions. The observation provided the researcher with an almost on the ground experience of the activities that take place in the parliament of Zimbabwe. Kawulich (2012) asserts that observations help one to learn how people in a setting interact and how things are organised.

**Purposive Sampling Technique:** Parliamentarians in the parliament of Zimbabwe were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Key informants were those that work with parliamentarians in their daily work. As argued by Palinkas (2015), purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification of information rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Saturation is used in qualitative research as a criterion for discontinuing data gathering and or analysis (Sanders et al., 2018) In this study, saturation was reached at 12 participants. Thereafter, no new revelations were surfacing. Fusch & Ness (2015) suggest that failure to reach saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted.

**Data Analysis:** A thematic method was employed to analyse data. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify patterns in the data that are important (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A six-phase framework for analysing data by (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was followed. The data went through the illustrated phases in the table below.

Step 1	Becoming familiar with the data	Step 4	Review themes
Step 2	Generate initial code	Step 5	Define themes
Step 3	Search for themes	Step 6	Write up

Adopted from Braun & Clarke (2013)

## RESULTS

The findings are responses that were provided by the 12 participants who were 9 females and 3 males. The participants were all parliamentarians representing different constituencies across Zimbabwe.

**Exclusion from Community Development Funding:** All the female participants who came into parliament through quota expressed that they were not benefiting from the community development fund given to their fellow parliamentarians. A participant complained that:

*"It's very frustrating to be called an MP but without the support of government. We are not active in our constituencies because we do not have anything to take to the people".*

Another revealed that the community development fund was being used by other as a campaign tool.

*"In the constituencies people do not know that MPs are given a development fund. Instead, MPs act as if they are using their own funds. This then finds them favor with the electorate and it becomes easier to campaign".*

Participants indicated that this gave others an advantage by increasing their chances of being re-elected. The community development fund is a strategic fund set aside by government to augment development in constituencies. The fund is meant for elected members only. However, ironically, all the male parliamentarians are benefiting from the fund since they are all elected. This policy by government reduced

the visibility of proportional representatives in their constituencies that negatively affected their chances of being elected. This policy, to a great extent, perpetuates the narrative that women do not have the capacity to represent constituencies and cause development. This also minimizes the intention of the women's quota by the government of Zimbabwe. Having more women through the quotas may not bring changes in the agenda and introduction of bills concerning women's issues and does not necessarily translate into to policy gains for women as a group (Haider, 2011).

**Proportional Representatives are Restricted from Visiting Constituencies:** Half of the female members of parliament disclosed that they were not allowed to visit their constituencies own their own. They had to seek permission from a seating member of parliament. Participants alleged that this was a result of mistrust between proportional representation members and elected members. The members of parliament also accused fellow women members of being the main culprits that did not want other members to visit constituencies without their permission.

A member disclosed that,

*"I think women just don't like to work with other women. I didn't think it would be a reality at this level. I thought the other women would be mentoring us. I'm sad they see us as competition".*

It was further indicated that the elected members were afraid that if the spotlight was given to proportional representatives, they would lure voters in their favor for the next elections.

A female participant added:

*"Women are the ones who don't want to work with other female MPs. They are very protective of their constituencies and always suspicious if you just visit without their consent. They don't trust us!"*

The mistrust between female members of parliament divides them rather than bring them together to be a powerful force. This means if the MPs who joined parliament through the quota are under restrictions. The electorate will never get a chance to know the other MPs. Additionally, the mistrust just pushes them back into the background. This has many disadvantages for women as politicians. If they are not seen to be working together, then who would want to work with them? Instead of increasing their voices, this alleged uncooperative behaviour towards each other gives their male colleagues more mileage and coverage in politics.

**'BACCOSSI' as a Demeaning Name for Proportional Representatives in Parliament:** Almost all of female MPs revealed that they were being referred to as the baccossi MPs. They also mentioned that they were not respected in parliament because they came through a government scheme.

An MP revealed,

*"They call us names because we do not have any constituency".*

Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention termed (BACCOSSI), was a scheme that was temporarily put in place by the Robert Mugabe government at the height of economic challenges in Zimbabwe in 2007. It was a stop gap measure for citizens to access bulk groceries at cheap prices.

Another added that,

*"They say we are a mass production scheme by the government, that is why they call us BACCOSSI MPs."*

Another MP opened up that those who were elected had a tendency to sit together during parliamentary sessions leaving the proportional representatives to be in their own corner. They felt discriminated against and their purpose in parliament minimized. Findings indicate

that even when trying to make a contribution during sessions, they were either booed or asked to sit down. Observations of a parliamentary session showed parliamentarians calling each other names and hurling insults towards each other.

The disrespect and discrimination for proportional representatives in parliament showed a lack of respect for government efforts and a thwarting of the gains made so far. This further lowers the self-esteem of the female parliamentarians causing them to not participate. The intention of this policy was to nurture women through this process to the extent that they do not need quotas to access parliament. The silencing of women who came in through the quota is not only by men but by other female parliamentarians as well. Zehnter & Kirchlner (2020), established that some studies show that negative perceptions of beneficiaries were a specific concern about women's quotas. In this regard, other members were feeling more equal than others creating a them and us situation in parliament. This situation isolated the majority of parliamentarians. As argued by CITE (2022), citizens of Zimbabwe view the quota as mere tokenism that will never empower women.

**Female Elected Members of Parliament Discriminate against Proportional Representatives:** Participants conveyed their disappointment at the discovery that other female elected MPs did not want to work with them. PR MPs alleged that the female elected MPs acted superior to those that were appointed through the quota.

*"You can tell by their demeanor that they don't particularly like us. They see themselves as better because they were elected by the people",* bemoaned a fellow female MP.

The women perceived each other as threats and not strategic partners. Other participants divulged that some male MPs were more willing to work with PR MPs. However, another participant explained that it was not because males were more cooperative but just that they did not perceive these PR MPs as threats, therefore not worthy opponents. Additionally, findings showed that most of the female MPs from one particular political party were considered as more aged and less educated, hence the willingness of male colleagues to work with them.

A participant said,

*"You can even go with a male MP to the constituency and he will not bother to introduce you. That's how unimportant we are! Most of the times we are treated like we do not have anything of value to contribute since we were not elected so we know nothing".*

The treatment shows that there is resistance of the quota by both males and females depending with who is benefiting from the status quo. The willingness of male MPs to work with women because they did not consider them as competition displays a disregard for women as capable politicians in their own right. Again, in this case there is perpetuation of men leading from the front and the women cheerleading from the back. The portrayal of women as non entities in politics not only demeans them as humans but negatively works on the psyche of the electorate. This reinforces a negative attitude and stereotypes about women in politics by society in general.

**Selection Criteria of Proportional Representatives Members of Parliament Was Not Clear:** Male participants were of the view that the government selection criteria of proportional MPs were not clear. They also accused the government of recycling the same old MPs who were have been in parliament since 2008 but have not made any impact in their constituencies to this day.

A male participant questioned,

*"Why were these old women brought back? We all know that they are useless and not active in parliament at all. Some of them are always*

*sleeping during parliamentary sessions. I think they are just tired but still want to benefit from government, so they just sit there!"*

Some PR MPs argued that their party selected them because of their experience and seniority in the party structures. Another one claimed that some aspiring female parliamentarians had been taken advantage of by some men in their political parties while being promised selection into parliament.

The not so clear criteria exacerbated women's vulnerability in an already hostile sector. This also meant that the women who really deserved to be selected were probably not chosen. This diminishes the influence of women in policies that protect them. There is a probability that those that were selected have no interest in gender equality, leaving the female constituency with no proper representations. The recycling of MPs who were known to have previously failed in their constituencies and were rejected by the electorate defeats the purpose of the quota. The quota system overshadows democracy and also does not promote gender equality but rather gender representation (Dube, 2018). Some articles argue that quotas manipulate voter's choice, instead of truly reflecting the political equilibrium, they artificially change the candidate pool (Nayar, 2022). The selection of the same women in parliament means there is a group of over empowered women but who still do not participate effectively.

**Lack of Training of New Members of Parliament:** Other participants cited novelty as an issue they faced when they first became members of parliament. Some had never gone through any form of training or orientation and found themselves uncomfortable to even speak. While some later received training, they felt that it was not enough.

They wanted more training.

*"I had no idea of the terms that were being used and was very confused. This made me not to want to speak as I totally lost my confidence. I was afraid others would laugh at me. My inexperience robbed me".*

She opened up that her confidence hit a low promising herself never to attempt speaking in parliament.

Traditionally women are not groomed for leadership. It is then not strategic to bring them to parliament and expect them to perform. This has bearing on their confidence to present or engage with other seasoned colleagues. Men from an early age are prepared for leadership. They will obviously be outperformed by their male colleagues. This novelty led women to be invisible during parliamentary debates causing Zimbabweans to lambast their non participation and doubting the effectiveness of the quota. The patriarchal system that has circumscribed roles for women have made them outliers in politics (Ali & Noah, 2022).

**Whipping system in the Parliament of Zimbabwe as an Interference:** Findings established that the whipping system in the parliament of Zimbabwe forced members of parliament to align with corrupt party colleagues. One MP divulged that before a parliamentary session, members would be told of the forthcoming motion by a party colleague. The Chief whip would encourage members to support the fellow party member.

A participant criticized this system saying,

*"This whipping system is wrong. Even when someone says something stupid, these women just clap because they have been coached ahead of time. Some are afraid of the consequences of going against a party colleague".*

Due to the above system, no meaningful debates can take place when others are 'stifled'. For women, it is a 'double jeopardy' as they are already faced with other challenges that limit their participation. This

has also rendered the quota ineffective to a certain extent as the majority of female parliamentarians were appointed through this strategy. This translates to increased silence from women in the parliament of Zimbabwe. It means the space is not open to divergent views putting women in place of passivity.

**Limited Education:** Limited education of most of the women's quota beneficiaries was also said to be another challenge. Participants believed that some parliamentarians could not take part in debates because they were not educated.

A female participant at her own admission said,

*"I am old and not educated. We are just in parliament by mere luck. I have been in the party for a long time that is why I was chosen. I don't even know how to use some of the ICT gadgets that we were given to assist us in our parliamentary work. I want encourage the young ones to pursue education before coming in so that it is easier for them in parliament".*

Findings show the historical inequalities in access to education in Zimbabwe that still affect women today. The limited access to education affects women's participation in parliament. Female members of parliament are also not fully able to express themselves because they lack the eloquence that education facilitates. Furthermore, coming across as less educated as compared to parliamentary peers warrants ridicule and insults. The fact that some participants are described as 'aged' by others, means there is no hope for any self-improvements.

**Competing Interests:** Some female participants cited competing interests in the form of work and family especially for those who were married.

*"If you go to work in the evening, you will be accused of having boyfriends. Some of the in laws do not understand our work and try to influence our spouses".*

However, others stated that they had support from their partners that is why they had the freedom to work outside work hours and even travel with male colleagues. Another parliamentarian mentioned that she was worried because she was not spending enough time with her children.

*"I hardly spend time with my children. With the issue of drugs these days, I am worried but I also want to be an independent woman", she said.*

The long hours outside of work hours either serve as deterrents for women from fully carrying out their work duties or totally not be interested in politics. The cultural expectations to be a super woman forces them to compromise and sacrifice their political careers. Most parliamentary work involves lots of travelling and with male colleagues. This is something that is unacceptable to most spouses causing women to be over accountable and to over explain their actions. Some women find this to be overwhelming and hence leave work altogether for the sake of peace and 'balance' at home. As alluded to by George (2019), the expectations about women's roles influence their ability to participate politically. Scholars argue that cultural norms and stereotypes on gender roles influence women's running and being elected for office and more specifically patriarchal culture being a barrier to female representation (Manning, 2014). The intersecting of cultural expectations for family and career ambitions causes conflict in women making it difficult for them to choose. Competing interests and the pursuit of balance have the potential to shorten the political careers of women while males can acceptably pursue their political dreams.

## CONCLUSION

A considerable number of MPs were either not happy with the implementation of the women's quota or the treatment of its beneficiaries.

The lack of funding by government after putting such a policy in place shows a haphazard approach to women participation in politics. Most of the MPs did not see the implementation of the quota as the success it should have been due to different challenges encountered by those were appointed into parliament. Others blame a non standardized selection criterion for MPs for the poor performance by proportional representatives. If selection was based purely on merit and past experiences with certain individuals, then some MPs wouldn't have made it back into parliament again.

Empowerment of women parliamentarians through the quota has been watered down by recycling and appointment of 'aged' individuals who were perceived as too old to care or to change anything. The whipping system further silences women and deprives them of self-governance in parliament to express their independent views on a subject matter. The limited education of appointed women affected their self-esteem causing self-doubt. The prescribed gender roles affect and limit women's political ambitions as they seek a non-existent balance.

The women's parliamentary quota in Zimbabwe is a good strategy to quickly close representation gender gap in parliament. The quota has visibly increased the presence of women in the political field. As argued by Haider (2011), quotas have a number of advantages for women such as; at an Individual level: female politicians may develop confidence and competency through their experience in office and Mass Participation. In spite of that, patriarchal tendencies to treat anything to do with women as unimportant were noted as challenges. The implementation of the women's quota in Zimbabwe has not yielded the intended successes experienced in other countries such as Rwanda. It is also concluded that women parliamentarians are living up to the stereotype that women are their own worst enemies.

It was also noted that the women are not focusing on their common interests but rather putting more energy in highlighting differences. Ongoing trainings and capacity building programmes are required for parliamentarians to effectively debate on national issues. Male politicians do not consider female politicians as equal competition leading to disrespect in parliament. The women's quota has caused women to be minimized and exposed them to more insults and stereotypes. At the time of this study, there were no specific empowerment programmes by government to target female parliamentarians. Government still relies on the goodwill of non-governmental organizations. Due to aforementioned challenges, it is concluded that the quota has not equalized the participation of women in the parliament of Zimbabwe to that of their male colleagues. Due to noted supposed limited success, other parliamentarians both male and female are not in favor of the quota. However, there is still notable progress with the women's quota in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has managed to increase the presence of women in parliament from 10% to 31.5% (WALPE, 2019). Additional to that, the quotas have also been spread to cover local government through the Zimbabwe Constitutional Amendment Bill no.2 Act of 2021 (Gender Links, 2021). This will facilitate the nurturing and mentoring of women for bigger platforms such as the Parliament of Zimbabwe. The increased presence of women in parliament has meant that, they have to a certain extent, created and solidified pathways for elections and re-election into parliament. The process of women 'minimally' taking part in parliament also serves to empower them and re-socialize society into accepting women as capable political leaders. The women's quota is viewed as a positive start for women to gain easier entry into politics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A wholesome approach to the women's quota strategy could yield better results. Each political party has to come up with its set criterion for proportional selection into parliament. The selection process should be based on merit of members of parliament. Better implementation and an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism has the potential to protect proportional representatives.

Further to that, there should be terms for parliamentarians who are appointed through the quota system. The terms are a way of getting rid of recycling of the same people and creating an opportunity for others to be trained as well. Men should be included in the mentoring of fellow female parliamentarians to encourage collaboration and partnerships. Men should be regarded as part of the solution and not the problem. There should be ongoing capacity enhancing programmes through increased collaborations with other stakeholders. Moreover, a better empowerment process may take place, positively shifting the attitudes of many towards the quota. While the whipping system is regarded as one of the barriers to female members' participation in parliament, the members themselves should be empowered enough to independently think and speak. This may be possible if there is no recycling of those that are considered to be out of their depth as they do not feel indebted to anyone. The community development fund should be distributed to all members of parliament regardless of how they came in so that others do not have an upper hand over their colleagues. The electorate should be made aware that the community development funds are not donations coming from individuals so that they are not used for campaigning. The seniority and 'old' age of other female MPs can be turned into a positive by encouraging them to mentor the novices in the parliament of Zimbabwe.

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