Examining the Role of Political Parties in the Enhancement of Women Representation in Parliament, Zambia: A Phenomenological Perspective

Chidongo Phiri, Harrison Daka*, Vincent Kanyamuna, Janet Mundando, and Pauline Brill

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of political parties in increasing women’s representation in the Zambian Parliament. This study was motivated by the constant underrepresentation of women in the parliament of Zambia. The main focus of the research was on the Patriotic Front (PF), the United National Party for Development (UPND), and the 2016 general elections. This research was qualitative and case-based, based on two major parties, and was in-depth research using 26 purposefully selected party officials at different levels of the party hierarchy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, narratives, and unstructured questionnaires from two political parties and documents from the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). The study used an interpretive phenomenological theoretical framework based on discussions and reflections on direct sensory observations and experiences of the role of political parties in increasing women’s representation in the Zambian National Assembly. The starting point for using interpretive phenomenology in this research was our ability to approach this research without knowing a priori assumptions. Phenomenological theoretical framing has been used as a broad and loose name for various analyses that have emphasized experiences, interpretations, narratives, and discourse based on the phenomenological orientation of social science philosophy. Data were analyzed and presented thematically and in text. The research revealed that both political parties implemented strategies and mechanisms to improve the representation of women in parliament, at least 30% of women in decision-making positions, adoption of the concept of women’s wing, education and sensitization, admission of women to political party strongholds and relaxation of adoption requirements for women. After the parliamentary elections in 2016, the PF announced that the party would accept 40% of women as parliamentary candidates. However, the study found that the two parties fell short of their regional and international targets for the number of women allowed into parliamentary seats. Nevertheless, the study concluded that the absence of affirmative action, semiotic narratives and disrespect for women’s voices in political parties keeps women represented in the Zambian parliament. This shows that political parties have a role to play in strengthening women’s representation in parliament through positive action in all party structures. The study urges political parties to seriously consider using practical, thoughtful strategies and mechanisms to increase the number of women in parliament, as Zambia does not have a legal quota system.

Keywords: Affirmative-action, gender-mainstreaming, phenomenology, semiotics.
1. Introduction

The under-representation of women in parliament is a worldwide problem. Although there has been a universal increase in the representation of women in parliament, based on accumulated data, women are still grossly underrepresented in politics globally (Hatakka & Kelles-Viitanen, 2015; IPU, 2015). Worldwide, it is estimated that about 22.1% of individual parliamentarians are women (Hatakka & Kelles-Viitanen, 2015). Although a few African nations are said to have made huge progress with respect to the representation of women in parliament, with Rwanda topping the global rankings, Zambia is one of the African nations where women are lowly underrepresented (CSO, 2012; IPU, 2015). Women have proceeded to be underrepresented in the parliament of Zambia despite the nation being a signatory to universal international conventions.

The study posits that organizations should endeavour to challenge and converse gender stereotypes that limit women's leadership opportunities in politics. Among the efforts made by the Zambian Government include the formulation of the National Gender Policy in 2000, which was revised in 2014. The general aim of the Policy is to ensure that gender is mainstreamed throughout government operations by all government institutions. On March 12, 2012, the government established the Ministry of Gender and Child Development, whose mandate is to coordinate the mainstreaming of gender in Government policies and programmes and monitor their implementation by all players in the gender sector (GRZ, 2014a, p. 1). In 2015, the Gender Equity and Equality Act was enacted and provides, among others, for the taking of measures and making strategic decisions in all spheres of life to ensure gender equity and equality (GRZ, 2015). The Constitutional Amendment Act No. 2 of 2016 also recognized gender equality as an important issue. Article 45 (d) of the Act provides that the electoral system shall ensure gender equality in the National Assembly (GRZ, 2016).

2. Theoretical Framework

This study used an interpretative phenomenological context to explore in detail how women representatives were making sense of their personal experience of being underrepresented in the Zambian parliament. The framework is phenomenological in that it involves a detailed examination of the women parliamentarians’ life experiences in the Zambian parliament. The phenomenology approach provided a thorough account of the parliamentarian reasons for being represented in parliament over time and their personal responses in the context of Zambia. Of concern was to investigate women parliamentarians' personal experiences and perceptions as opposed to producing an objective statement about the events that unfold themselves in the Zambian parliament. Further, interpretative phenomenology was found relevant in this study because it emphasizes the dynamic process of the study. Simply, researchers took an active role in the process of data correction. The idea was to get close to the parliamentarians' personal world, in Conrad’s (1987) words, an “insider's perspective”, but one cannot do this directly or completely. This means that other research perceptions were considered through a process of interpretative activity.

2.1. Statement of the Problem

Zambia has not only fizzled to meet the 50-50 AU/SADC target by 2015 but equally failed the earlier SADC target of 30% representation of women in politics and decision-making positions by the year 2005. Logically, this shows the exclusion of women’s voices in politics as contained in the SADC protocol agreement beleaguered for 2023. This implies that, despite the efforts made by the government and respectful society associations to undertake and address, the issue has not been realized. If nothing further is done to address the problem, women in Zambia will continue being denied the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to national development (GRZ, 2014b). Political parties are the most important vehicles through which women can get to parliament. Despite this being the case, their representation within the parliament of Zambia is not well-known and appreciated. This study was undertaken to investigate the roles of political parties within which women parliamentarians take part in the parliament of Zambia.

2.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out what role political parties were playing in the improvement of the representation of women in the Zambian parliament.

2.3. Specific Research Objectives

The present study aims to:

1. Find out what positive affirmative action political parties have taken to improve women’s representation in the Zambian parliament,
2. Identify positive action measures taken by political parties, if any, that contribute to addressing low female representation in parliament in Zambia,
3. Explore the challenges political parties are facing in improving women’s representation in the Zambian parliament.

2.4. The Importance of Research

This study aims to help political parties come up with better methods for improving women’s representation in parliament. Ultimately, it is hoped that once women are well represented in parliament, women in Zambia will not only begin to contribute fully to their own development but also to the development of the nation.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Overview of Zambia’s Political and Electoral System

3.1.1. Zambia’s Political and Electoral System

Since independence in 1964, Zambia has used three different political systems. The first was a multi-party system, which was in place from 1964 to 1972 (AU, 2016, p. 11). In 1972, Zambia was declared a one-party state, with the ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) as the only party led by President Kenneth Kaunda. In 1991, a multi-party constitution was adopted, with the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) winning the first multi-party elections in 23 years (Commonwealth, 2016). Since the reintroduction of the multi-party system in 1991, Zambia has used its first electoral system, known as “first past the post” (AU, 2016). However, the 2016 constitutional amendment introduced a new electoral system for presidential elections, which required an absolute majority of votes to be cast for a candidate. However, members of the National Assembly are elected directly on a simple majority vote basis under the SMU system in each of the 156 constituencies (Carter Center, 2016; GRZ, 2014a).

3.1.2. Political Party Arrangements in Zambia

Multipartyism has seen the rapid proliferation of political parties in various forms. Although it can be said that the Multi-Party Democracy Movement (MMD) was formed collectively by Zambians of different backgrounds, most political parties in Zambia were founded by a single person with a vested interest in becoming Republican President. These parties are identified by that particular person who is the main party sponsor, adding that political parties in Zambia are not publicly funded (NDI/FODEP, 2003). Although Zambia is considered a democratic country, most political parties do not respect democratic principles. These parties do not hold regular elections even though their constitutions provide for it. Internal democracy is also lacking in the parliamentary candidate selection process (NDI/FODEP, 2003). Women and youth are underrepresented in the partisan structure of most political parties. Only 8 of the 20 parties participating in the 2011 legislative elections had female candidates (EU, 2011).

Most political parties in Zambia are said to lack strong ideological convictions, but based on a cultural or regional basis, they draw most of their support. The PF is said to be a socialist party, while the UPND is a liberal party (EU, 2011). However, despite these ideological claims, it is not uncommon for political party members to easily switch to another party with a different ideology (Carter Center, 2002). Following the general elections held from 1991 to 2016, the representation of political parties in parliament has been characterised by mostly few dominant parties. This has been the case despite Zambia having over twenty registered political parties (Carter Center, 2002). Although support for various parties has shifted across the elections held since 1991, party support has increasingly been clustered in ethno-geographic patterns. Consequently, Zambia has had two consecutive elections with essentially the same electoral alignments, which has seemingly fostered greater, direct, head-to-head political conflict, which has regretfully taken on ethnic overtones to a degree that most have not previously experienced (Carter Center, 2016; EU, 2011).

3.2. The Status of Women’s Representative in the Parliament of Zambia

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) set a goal of 30% female decision-making representatives through a series of strategies, including active action, public debate, and training and mentoring for women as leaders (IPU, 2015). Around the world, over the past 20 years, from 1995 to 2015, the proportion of women in parliament has increased. In 1995, there was a regional imbalance in which country had the most women in parliament. European countries stand out among the top 10 with the most women in parliament. By 2015, however, countries from other regions had entered the top 10. In 1995, the Seychelles was the only African country out of the 10 with
the most women in parliament. By 2015, three other African countries, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa, made the top 10. The average proportion of women in national parliaments globally has nearly doubled, from 11.3% in 1995 to 22.1% in 2015, but still below the BDPfA target of 30% (IPU, 2015).

Politics and decision-making are often male-dominated in Zambia, and women’s representation in parliament since 1968 has been just under 30% (CSO, 2013; IPU, 1996–2008). Although the proportion of female MPs increased from 13.9% in 2009 to 15% in 2010, this increase follows a decline in the proportion of female MPs in 2006 (14.7%) and 2009 (13.9%), up from 19% in 2005 (CSO, 2012). Compared to the National Assembly in 2010, the proportion of female MPs has decreased from 14.7% in 2010 to 11.5% in 2011 (CSO, 2012). In 2016, prior to the dissolution of the National Assembly due to the general election of 11 August 2016, the representation of women in Parliament in Zambia stood at 13.9% (NAZ, 2016).

### 3.3. Factors Contributing to the Low Representation of Women in Parliament

Several factors are believed to be responsible for the underrepresentation of females in parliament, both at the international and local levels. Those include (1) lack of political party support for women, (2) family responsibilities, (3) lack of financial resources, corruption, known locally as Nichekeleko1 in Zambia (Phiri, 2017, p. 104), and (4) sociocultural beliefs about women’s roles and women’s lack of political ambition (Ballington, 2008; Lawless & Fox, 2012; Sampa, 2010). Furthermore, for Zambia, other factors include a lack of political will at all levels to address the gender-specific challenges faced by potential female candidates and the hostile political environment.

### 3.4. Factors Explaining the Increased Representation of Women in Certain Parliaments

Various explanations have been offered for the need to increase women’s representation in certain parliaments, both at the international and regional levels. While others attribute the increasing trend in women’s representation in some parliaments to the political/electoral system, others attribute this increase to affirmative action. Procedures such as gender quotas and reserved seats have resulted in a higher proportion of female representation in Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, and several other African countries (IPU, 2015; Kalumba et al., 2023; Krook, 2010; Ndlovu & Mutale, 2013).

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach and uses a case study design. The aims were to gain in-depth knowledge of the role of political parties in improving the representation of women in the parliament of Zambia. Importantly, qualitative methods were found appropriate because they helped to collect rich and detailed data, allowing insights into individual actions in the context of social life (Giddens & Sutton, 2013).

#### 4.2. Research Sample

PF and UPND were chosen deliberately on the assumption that they are informative. At the time, these two political parties were widely represented in the National Assembly, with the PF and UPND having 80 and 58 directly elected delegates, respectively, bringing the total to 138 out of 156. These delegates are directly elected through a vote. The study had 26% deliberately selected from different levels in the political party hierarchy based on their wealth of information identified as a repository of information on the topic studied. As Kombo and Tromp (2006, p. 82) argue, “the power of purposive sampling lies in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issue being studied”. The sample had thirteen males and thirteen females.

#### 4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In qualitative designs, data is usually collected through interviews and observations or from the literature (Ghosh, 2013). This study collected data through in-depth interviews with political party leaders and documents from the Zambia Election Commission. The data is analyzed thematically by summarizing and organizing them into topics based on the research objective and question.

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5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Affirmative Action Strategies Introduced by Political Parties to Improve Women’s Representation in Parliament in Zambia

The first objective of the study was to explore the affirmative action strategies that political parties have put in place to improve women’s representation in Zambia’s parliament. As a result, research shows that the following strategies have been put forward by political parties: have at least 30% of women in decision-making positions, adopt the concept of a women’s wing, train and raise awareness of women, relax the conditions for admission as parliamentary candidates, and admit women into party strongholds. Furthermore, specifically for the PF, in the run-up to the 2016 elections, the president reportedly announced that “the PF would accept 40% female parliamentary candidates”.

By designating a wing specifically for women, it shows that political parties were aware that women suffer disadvantages in politics, as feminist theory propagates in the literature cited (De Beer & Swanepool, 2000). The pronouncement to adopt 40% of women was specific to the PF, and it meant that the PF had intended to adopt at least 40% of women as parliamentary candidates. It was hoped that by so doing, the low representation of women in parliament would be enhanced.

By designating a wing exclusively for women, it shows that political parties are aware that women are at a disadvantage in politics, as alluded to by feminist theorists (De Beer & Swanepool, 2000). The declaration of accepting 40% women representation is specific to the PF. This shows that the PF meant to accept at least 40% of women as parliamentary candidates. This is hoped to improve the low representation of women in the Parliament of Zambia.

Participants from both political parties revealed that the main requirements or things they consider an aspiring parliamentary candidate for adoption include the candidate’s ingenuity, the candidate’s loyalty to the party, the candidate’s popularity in a particular constituency, and the candidate’s knowledge of the party’s rules. By omitting some requirements when considering women for adoption, both political parties hope that the low proportion of women in parliament in Zambia can be improved, thereby acknowledging the observations of Feminist theory that women are disadvantaged (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). Regarding the adoption of women in political party strongholds, political parties mean that there are areas where political parties claim to be popular; as such, they were guaranteed to win as these are the areas where they usually win a lot of seats.

Political party documents were examined to determine if they included affirmative action to improve women’s representation in parliament. Two PF manifestos, 2011–2016 and 2016–2021, as well as the PF establishment, have been revised. The manifesto clearly states that the PF, as a party, intends to double its percentage in 2006. The 2011–2016 manifesto further mentions a threshold for women’s representation in the process of decision-making, such as those set forth in the Ballington, 2008, the SADC, 1997 and the 2000 Millennium Declaration and Development. The PF manifesto 2016–2021 indicates that over the period 2016–2021, PF will continue to accept the largest number of women as parliamentary candidates at the councilor level to help reach the 50/50 threshold.

However, the Party manifesto does not contain any provisions regarding the representation of women in the National Assembly. Furthermore, the 2016–2021 UPND manifesto, also known as the Ten-Point Plan, does not contain any explicit statements about improving women’s representation in parliament. Article 5 of the UPND constitution sets out the goals of the party. Article 5(i) states that the party will make efforts to involve women more in public life and decision-making with the goal of achieving at least 30% of women’s representation in political offices. By specifying these thresholds in their political party documents, it can be said that political parties have responded to the international and feminist calls for the need to address gender inequality in politics.

5.2. Contribution of Affirmative Action Strategies Introduced by Political Parties to Addressing Low Female Representation in Parliament

This section addresses the study’s second research question, which examines how affirmative action strategies introduced by political parties have contributed to addressing the low representation of women in parliament. Regarding the strategy of having at least 30% of women in decision-making positions, it should be noted that political parties have now begun to include women in decision-making positions. Holding decision-making positions in the party not only clearly articulates women’s interests and makes their voices heard but also helps them gain much-needed experience, helping them have the courage to fight for a congressional mandate. The inclusion of statements on gender equality in political party documents also creates the impression that political parties are concerned about the lack of representation of women in parliament.

However, research shows that most members of the controlling structures of the party are men. Although both political parties claim that women now hold senior positions in their respective political parties, most positions are at the deputy level. For example, the two general secretaries of political
parties and the presidents of political parties are men. In all constituencies visited, the party chairmen of both political parties were men. Even though participants pointed out that women could not hold such positions either. It can be said that influential positions in political parties continue to be occupied by men, and this result is consistent with the conclusions cited in the literature (NDI/FODEP, 2003; Sampa, 2010). With most leadership positions held by men, it can be argued that women's interests and voices are effectively underrepresented and ignored. As a result, women continue to be underrepresented in the candidates approved by political parties and the National Assembly.

Furthermore, apart from the PF manifesto stating that the party will continue to admit the largest number of women to meet the SADC threshold, the documents do not give a specific figure on the number of female candidates it will admit in each contested election or what the party will do to adopt many candidates. The party’s manifesto contains no provisions regarding women’s representation. On the other hand, the UPND constitution does not specify the type of affirmative action measures the party will use to ensure at least 30% representation of women in decision-making positions. Furthermore, the UPND constitution does not specify whether affirmative action will be used when selecting parliamentary candidates. Affirmative action measures seek to redress past discrimination, and an example of affirmative action measures used in politics is the use of quotas to establish a proportion or number of fixed numbers for nomination or representation of a particular group (Tripp & Kang, 2008).

Regarding training and awareness-raising measures, the fact that women are consistently underrepresented in parliament shows that women are not fully aware of the importance of running for office. Additionally, training and awareness were only provided during the period leading up to the election and were not part of ongoing exercises. Therefore, political parties do not seem to prepare women well in advance. This finding is consistent with research showing that political parties in Zambia engage in little activity between elections (NDI/FODEP, 2003).

Regarding the strategy of applying the concept of a women’s wing, the persistent lack of representation by women in the candidate lists of the two political parties may indicate that the activity of women in the two political parties is not enough to help increase the representation of women in the parliament of Zambia. For example, the head of the PF women’s wing emphasized that her association has developed an action plan to enable the wing to carry out various activities to improve women’s representation in Parliament. However, due to a lack of funding, the plan is still in the draft stage. Besides expecting sponsors or financial support from political parties, the women’s wing must also innovate and launch fundraising initiatives to ensure the active participation of women in politics. Further, women members of political parties must also play a leading role in demanding gender equality in all their political party structures.

Regarding the conclusion of loosening the conditions to be admitted as parliamentary candidates, ECZ data on validly nominated candidates shows that the two political parties each admitted 28 women out of a total of 156 national seats. Although the UPND adopted 22 women and the PF 21 women in 2011, the number of women adopted by both political parties in 2016 not only met the 50/50 AU/SADC target by 2015 but was also less than the previous target of 30%. The SADC’s goal is to increase the representation of women in political and decision-making positions by 2005. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the number of constituencies also increased from 150 in 2011 to 156 in 2016 (GRZ, 2016).

Considering the fewer numbers of women adopted, discrepancies in the adoption pattern concerning the adoption of women and the revelations by participants, it was not clear how and to what extent the said positive discrimination was applied. The revelations by the participants show that the political parties had no clear guidelines for adopting many women. In some provinces, the ECZ data shows that only one woman was adopted by respective political parties. Constituency officials interviewed also revealed that some candidates were imposed by the party leadership in their constituencies. The literature cited has also talked about the lack of democracy in political parties (NDI/FODEP, 2003). As such, the commitment of the two political parties to the enhancement of women’s representation in parliament can further be questioned. Literature shows that political parties do not adopt many women in Zambia (EU, 2011).

On the other hand, ECZ data shows that the PF failed to meet their 40% pronouncement about the adoption of women as parliamentary candidates. During interviews, lower organs of the party revealed that they were not looking at gender when recommending candidates for adoption. In addition, a Women’s Wing National Official revealed that the President was shocked to find that Provincial Chairpersons, most men, recommended fellow men to be adopted as parliamentary candidates. The assertion by this official resonates with the feminist perspective that men work as a group to disadvantage women (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). The fact that the PF failed to meet its 40% target also shows that little was done to ensure that the envisaged 40% was met. The adoption trends further
demonstrate the lack of political will among political parties to help address the low representation of women in the Zambian Parliament.

ECZ data shows that both political parties admitted fewer women in their strongholds than anywhere else. While the PF adopted five women each in Lusaka and Eastern provinces, in the remaining four provinces considered their strongholds, they adopted only one woman each. On the other hand, UPND only adopted six women in its stronghold, including two women in the Northwest province, one in the Western province and three in the Southern province. As ECZ data shows, most of the parliamentary winners of both political parties came from their respective strongholds, where each party won more than 70% of the seats. The results showed that the PF’s decision to admit 10 women in two provinces believed to be party strongholds allowed the election of eight women to the National Assembly.

The fact that these women come from only two provinces, while the party accepts only one from other provinces, is considered a stronghold of the party, suggesting that if the trend of admitting at least five women per province continues, many women will be elected to Parliament. On the other hand, although the PF adopted more women in the Southern Province than anywhere else, the six adopted women lost because the UPND won all the seats in the Southern Province. On the other hand, although the UPND adopted four women in the Northern and Luapula provinces, all the adopted women lost the election. Therefore, it is true that if political parties had admitted a significant number of women to their strongholds, more women would have been elected to Parliament because it did not matter who ran for office if the party was popular.

The results show that in 2016, PF added five more women, while UPND added eight more women to the list of 2011 winners. Such an increase explains why interview participants said the measures passed had resulted in more women in parliament during the election. For example, a UPND MP pointed out that her party had deliberately accepted four women from an area considered a party stronghold, and 3 of them had won the election, representing 30% of women who won the election.

On the other hand, PF officials pointed out that their party had deliberately adopted more women in the Lusaka district than in 2011, and those four adopted women had won the elections. If both political parties introduced deliberate measures, such as admitting 40% of women per province into their strongholds, more women would be elected to parliament. Regarding the assertion by some participants that more women won the 2016 election than the 2011 election due to measures introduced by their party, such an increase could be attributed to unforeseen elements. The increase recorded by both political parties could, among other reasons, be attributed to the disintegration of MMD, the second-largest party in 2011. It should also be noted that the seats available in 2016 increased to 156 from the 150 threshold available in 2011. The increased number of seats results from the provisions of the Constitution Amendment Act of 2016 constitution.

However, although each political party recorded an increase in the number of women winning party elections in 2016 compared to those who won in 2011, this increase remained below the SADC Gender Protocol agreement on women’s parliamentary representation, which requires SADC countries to ensure a 50/50 Gender Parity representation in political and decision-making positions from 2015. In fact, the increase was even lower than SADC’s previous claim of 30% for women in decision-making in 2005. Worse still, female representation in parliament mostly comes from both political parties. This implies that women’s underrepresentation in Zambia’s parliament is far from over. For instance, in 2016, out of the 156 available seats, only 26 women were elected to parliament from all political parties, of which 23 were from the two bigger political parties, except one from the FDD, and two were independent member candidates.

5.3. Financial Challenges Political Parties Face in Improving Women’s Representation in Parliament

A third objective of the study was to find out the challenges political parties face in improving women’s representation in Parliament. This research shows that a lack of resources is one of the main challenges political parties face in improving women’s representation in Parliament. The lack of resources will occur at two levels, namely at the level of political parties and at the level of individual women. Participants from both political parties claimed they were not publicly funded. As such, their funding comes from contributions from members and supporters. UPND participants added that the lack of funding was a major challenge even for an opposition political party, as they believed the ruling party had the privilege of using public funds during election campaigns. Various election observers seem to agree with the UPND on the use of public funds by the ruling political parties in Zambia (Carter Center, 2016; EU, 2016).

The delegates also revealed that, due to lack of funding at the party level, the ingenuity of the candidate is one of the factors that need to be considered to be considered a candidate. The participants reported that, in general, women hold less material and financial capacities than men. “When a woman has only 5,000 Kwacha in her account, then a man who has millions of Kwacha”, said one constituency
of mental and physical violence, trauma, and detention in the political process (Phiri, 2023). Many and psychological power relations and inequalities they experience and alone experience in politics. At the individual level, women accept violence because of the economic, physical, and psychological power relations and inequalities they experience and alone experience in politics.

Of particular concern is the existence of corruption-related violence against women in the form of mental and physical violence, trauma, and detention in the political process (Phiri, 2023). Many election observers also reported violence, especially between the PF and UPND, and this violence was more pronounced than in previous elections (Carter Center, 2016; Commonwealth, 2016; EU, 2016; ZEIC, 2016). Continued political violence shows that political parties in Zambia have failed to respond to SADC’s call for political parties to effectively address political violence, including all forms of intimidation, to reduce barriers to women’s participation in politics (SADC, 2009).

Equally, inadequate financial challenges lead to a hostile political environment challenge faced by political parties to increase the representation of women in parliament. Participants, mainly from the UPND, asserted that they could not attract many women to contest elections because they feared increased political violence during the 2016 elections. For example, Phiri (2017), on a similar issue, argued that Zambia’s political environment remains corrupt. Equally, the presence of corruption-violence during political campaigns threatens women’s lives on individual and societal levels (Phiri, 2023). On an individual level, women accept the violence due to economic, physical, psychological and unequal power relations that they suffer and experience alone in politics.

Furthermore, ECZ suspended its campaigns in Namwala and Lusaka districts for ten days, from July 9, 2016, to July 18, 2016, citing escalating political violence not only in the said district but also in other districts (Al Jazeera, 2016; Akufuna, 2016). Furthermore, following the August 2016 election, President Edgar Lungu appointed a commission of inquiry to explore the causes of political violence before and after the August 11, 2016, general election (Lusaka Times, 2016). Although the UPND claims it is the target of violence, the suspension of operations in Lusaka and Namwala shows that even the UPND may be engaging in violence in its strongholds. Based on these findings, there is no doubt that the 2016 general election period and its aftermath were very hostile.

Furthermore, ECZ suspended its campaigns in Namwala and Lusaka counties for ten days, from July 9, 2016, to July 18, 2016, citing increased political violence not only in the provinces but also in the other regions (Al Jazeera, 2016; Akufuna, 2016). Furthermore, following the August 2016 election, President Edgar Lungu appointed an investigative committee to investigate the causes of political violence before and after the August 11, 2016, general election (Lusaka Times, 2016). Although the UPND claims they are targets of violence, the suspension of operations in Lusaka and Namwala shows that even the UPND may participate in the violence in its strongholds. Given these findings, it is certain that the 2016 general election period and its aftermath were very hostile.

Furthermore, the participants considered the 2016 election to be more competitive, adding that they were more focused on winning the election than promoting the interests of women. Factors that are said to have increased competition include the introduction of the 50+1 provision at the presidential level and the impending outcome of the 2015 by-election. These factors are also considered, as noted by observers of the 2016 election (Commonwealth, 2016). As a result, the participants revealed that in order to survive the competition, political parties employed certain strategies that could be detrimental to women. For example, participants from both political parties said they had to work with other political parties, such as the MMD and adopt former MMD MPs, most of whom are male. The selection of candidates from other political parties has taken a toll on their own members, even some women who are considered famous. Former congressmen are considered famous after becoming incumbents and have enough resources that they can use not only to campaign for themselves but also to campaign for presidential candidates.

Another strategy used by political parties was said to be the withholding of names of adopted candidates to see which candidate an opponent party would adopt. As such, candidates viewed as not strong were left out at the last minute. Such a strategy explains the revelation by the ZEIC report

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2See Phiri Chidongo (2023), who describes Corruption violence as structural violence exploited by populist ideologies.
that some women who were adopted by political parties were replaced at the last minute, even after being issued with adoption certificates (ZEIC, 2016). Participants from the UPND, for example, asserted that the party wanted to adopt female candidates in the Chilanga Constituency and Western Province, but male candidates were later preferred. Considering that elections were always competitive, the assertion by political parties that they were finding it difficult to adopt women due to competition shows a lack of willingness by political parties to address the low representation of women in parliament.

Another strategy used by political parties is to keep the names of approved candidates secret to see which candidate the opposition party will field. This is because candidates who were considered weak were eliminated at the last minute. Such a strategy explains the revelation in the ZEIC report that some women adopted by political parties were replaced at the last minute even after receiving adoption certificates (ZEIC, 2016). For example, UPND participants claimed that the party wanted to field female candidates in the Chilanga constituency and in the Western Province, but then male candidates were given preference. Given that elections are always competitive, statements by political parties that they have difficulty admitting women due to competition show a lack of willingness on the part of political parties to address the low representation of women in parliament.

Another challenge established by this study is the corruption in the political spaces of Zambia. This is where one needs to pay something in return for participating in politics. According to Phiri (2022, p. 188), the Zambian people think that politics is about “corruption in the form of rackets and abuse of authority” by the political parties and business executives of the party that fuels it. While some lower organ party officials pointed out that corruption was rife during primary elections, senior party officials also confirmed that they did receive allegations of corruption during the adoption process. When investigating the spread of corruption in political parties, Phiri (2022) observed one issue affecting the attainment of the sustainable development goals that have excluded women from participation in politics in Zambia is the selective enforcement of the Nolle prosequi law contained in the criminal procedure act (CPC). A constituency official revealed that there was usually payment of bribes localized as the Nichekeleko phenomenon (Phiri, 2017) to the candidate selecting committee members by aspiring candidates. The commonly held understanding of Nichekeleko by the Zambian people is that it is corruption, ranging from bribery, theft, embezzlement, and gratification to favouritism (Phiri, 2017) which perpetuated the low women representation in Zambia’s parliament. This revelation was also supported by a PF National Women’s League official who pointed out that one did not only need money for campaigns but also money to get adopted because there was so much corruption during Primary Elections. Equally, one candidate, when interviewed, observed that corruption is understood, and a localized practice known as the bineyi phenomenon (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021) in political parties. Bineyi entails a system of business social networking in which corruption is understood, and a localized practice known as the bineyi phenomenon (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021, p. 23). Women are discouraged by the bineyi phenomenon, which reduces their numbers as people’s representatives in the national assembly of Zambia.

Politics is also said to be a source of livelihood for many unemployed and poor people in the community. Poverty and underemployment are said to have contributed to the unprecedented “cadre” situation in the 2016 general election. As one party official commented: “Politics is the exchange of money, and women are not good at giving. Another electoral district official revealed that election time is an opportunity to share money with potential candidates because, after the election, those elected to the National Assembly tend to separate from the electorate”. The ECZ also appears to generate income through elections. The commission increased nomination fees for aspiring candidates for 2016 to cover operating costs. The parliamentary appointment fee was initially increased from K5,000 to K10,000 but was later revised to K7,500 following strong opposition from stakeholders (Chongo & Mbewe, 2016; ECZ, 2016). As observed in the literature, campaigns in Zambia are becoming increasingly expensive, but women generally have less access to capital than men (Norad, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that in a commercialized political environment, to be successful as a candidate for the National Assembly, it is necessary to have a good economic situation.

Another unexplored challenge is the stronghold of political parties. From the ECZ data, the two political parties both have areas where they have more support than the other. While PF received more support in Muchinga, Northern, Luapula, Eastern and Copperbelt provinces, UPND received more support in Western, Southern and Northern provinces. The Commonwealth (2016, p. 22) observes that “although politicians have repeatedly sought to appeal to ethnic or regional groups since the adoption of multi-party politics in 1991, the extent of and the extent to which this phenomenon is exploited is more pronounced in these regions”. It is not surprising that although the PF adopted more women in the southern province than anywhere else, all the women who were adopted lost because the UPND won all the seats. On the other hand, while the UPND adopted four women in Luapula province, all women lost the election, so the question of the popularity of the parties in the region could not be a
reason for some participants, as pointed out by political parties. It is doubtful that if parties deliberately admit more women to their domain, more women will be elected to Parliament.

Even though there were no statistics available, the people involved in the study said that not having a Grade Twelve Certificate affected a lot of women. Not only women but also men who were incumbent MPs could not run for re-election because they did not have a Grade Twelve qualification. Women were said to be more affected because many women involved in politics did not have a high school diploma. According to the information, many women in Zambia are unable to read and write well, which makes it difficult for them to be involved in politics. It was obvious that little was done to include both genders equally when changing the constitution, as the situation of women’s social and economic status was ignored.

The study also found deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs contextualized in the Chimbuya phenomenon in Zambia (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021, p. 40) as another challenge to women’s representation in parliament. The issue is that the phenomenon of Chimbuya, though culturally accepted by many Zambian ethnic groups, yet its meaning is hidden, (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021, p. 41). This was found detrimental to women’s participation in politics. Phiri and Selestino Kandondo (2021, p. 42) argued that: “it seems the Chimbuya phenomenon is contextualized in uttering practical jokes and subtle sexist words detrimental to women recipients in various ways”. Chimbuya is the social reciprocal relationship premised on jokes and power formally described as traditional cousinship in Zambia (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021). Sketched in Chimbuya is quite complex, ramifying into many disparate concepts of conduct by agents (Phiri & Selestino Kandondo, 2021). Unfortunately, interactants of it are at liberty to wear and experience different Chimbuya lenses, such as sexist jokes and sexual violence against women, which affects their numbers in parliament.

In addition, some people think that leadership should go to men; others think that men are good at politics and women are not. For example, a UPND parliamentarian said some party members do not believe in her because they believe she cannot win the election if she runs against a stronger male opponent. An official in the UPND leadership also revealed that a traditional leader even went to his party secretariat to protest the party’s decision to admit a woman to his constituency. The literature also reveals that women are discriminated against within political parties due to long-standing socio-cultural beliefs that politics is a male domain (Kalinda & Chirwa, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that women are more stereotypical than men, as feminist theory argues. It can also be argued that political parties have done little to try to change negative attitudes towards women. Participants also revealed that their respective parties are having difficulty admitting women because very few women are running for office. For example, in one electoral district, there may be five male candidates against one female candidate. Therefore, from a man’s point of view, it is easier to choose the best candidate than to choose a woman. Basically, it can be said that political parties have done little to encourage women to run for parliamentary positions.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Political parties have taken steps to promote equality by implementing affirmative action measures. Some of these measures include setting up women’s organizations within the parties, making it easier for people to become candidates for parliament, providing training and awareness programs, and pledging to adopt 40% of women in the party. Additionally, parties have chosen women as candidates in areas where they have strong support and have committed to having 30% women in leadership positions where important decisions are made. The study says that not enough women were elected to parliament in the 2016 elections. It argues that the political parties did not do enough to increase the number of women in parliament. The research found that political parties need to make sure that women are well-represented and involved in all parts of the party, including being candidates for parliament. Equally, in case of corrupt activities in adopting female candidates, there should be equal enforcement of the Nolle prosequi law as stated in the CPC of the laws of Zambia. They can do this by using policies like affirmative action. This means that in Zambia, there was no specific rule about the number of men and women allowed to be in parliament. Instead, the main way for men and women to become parliament members was by being a part of a political party.

The research suggests that political parties should ensure they have rules that give equal opportunities to both men and women when selecting candidates. This means each province should have an equal number of male and female candidates. Political parties should think about putting women in important positions in the party. The women’s groups should also try to find educated women and motivate them to run for office in parliament. Additionally, political parties should educate their members about gender issues to change attitudes regarding societal and cultural problems that hinder women’s involvement in politics.
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