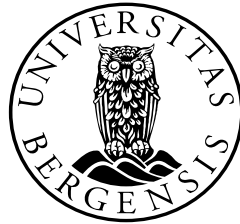


***'I felt like I was going to be a change champion?'* Online and offline political participation of young Zimbabwean women**

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## Abstract

Young women remain one of the minority groups that have been marginalised from the political arena due to assumptions that they are not politically conscious or are inexperienced. The reasons for such assumptions manifest from the various barriers which have been created by power dynamics which affect young women's political participation. This paper explores the experiences of young Zimbabwean women in political participation both online and offline.

This study was qualitative, phenomenological study using six interviews. The study participants are all young Zimbabwean female activists who were involved in either politics or civil society. It was analysed using thematic analysis.

To get an insight on the experiences of young women in political participation, this study was guided by questions relating to the motivations for participation, barriers, and challenges that they face and their use of online platforms as a form of participation. The findings showed that the initial experiences of the participants were characterised by involvement in civil movements and groups such as trade unions and student activism. Their motivations to start participating in politics were influenced by several factors. The willingness to see change in Zimbabwe characterised by a great economy and good governance was a major factor. However, they also highlighted different barriers that limited their political participation. These included harmful cultural values and norms, abuse, internal party politics, limited security, and lack of financing.

Despite these challenges, the young women's persistent nature represented great potential in the application of empowerment in political participation. The agency displayed in their navigation of the political terrain indicates this. The use of digital tools mainly social media also shows their willingness to continue their activism. Although some challenges are identified in the utilization of digital democracy by both theorists and the participants, it remains an integral component for their participation. The application of various forms of power remains an impeding block in political institutions, the media, and other areas that young women are supposed to operate in. This study concludes that, young women remain an integral part of the formal body politic, therefore they should be treated as such through representation and institutional reforms which can accommodate them.

**Key words:** *young women, political participation, Zimbabwe, digital democracy, social media, power, empowerment, activism.*

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The principles of democratic governance and human rights are based on the idea of equal participation of all citizens of all countries. It is therefore important that women have equal and meaningful representation and participation in all aspects of governance. While women make up more than half of the world's population, in many countries women's participation in political processes that make decisions about their lives remains marginalized. Zimbabwe is no exception to this global trend. In addition to a legal framework that emphasizes gender equality and equity in politics, the country has signed a number of declarations aimed at strengthening women's leadership and decision-making. Zimbabwe's constitution, which came into effect in 2013, provides for 60 seats for women in proportional representation in parliament, increasing the percentage of women in parliament from 16% to 34% (Hamandishe, 2018). This is a positive development that offsets the constituency voting system and is seen by some as highly competitive and unfriendly for women aspiring to become members of parliament. There is, however, no clear provision for the participation of young women in this. The system does not apply to local governments, and it expires in 2023. Questions therefore arise. How will this affect young women's political participation? Will they continue to contribute to Zimbabwe's politics?

To achieve meaningful participation of women in political processes including their representation in parliament and local government, legislation is not enough. There is a need to implore political will amongst political players. The manner and processes by which political activities in Zimbabwe have been handled, has resulted in many women shying away from politics. Many female politicians have publicly shared experiences of violence, harassment, and intimidation within political institutions. The backlash has also spilled to other platforms including the media and this has not inspired confidence amongst other women in different social classes and age groups. It is for this reason that most women have utilised online spaces to advocate for their interests.

As a means of keeping up with technological advancements, social media has become a necessary tool to facilitate dialogue, debates, and thoughts in Zimbabwean politics especially amongst young people. Owing to a history of media suppression by the State, it has become a space to discuss pertinent issues affecting the society, to lobby for political support and to offer solidarity to incarcerated activists and political prisoners. In the post 2018 election period, social media has been vital in pushing for economic and political reforms with

movements such as #ZimbabweanLivesMatter being created. The backlash from various forces, mainly from the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has also been felt especially against opposition parties such as the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC), the newly formed Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), journalists, young female politicians and activists.

Contrast to traditional media, social networks are decentralized, participatory communication systems in which what were formerly known as audiences emerge as producers of large amounts of ‘user-generated content’ (Walsh & O’Connor 2019). Consequently, citizens, as agents of communication, can now directly shape public discourse and opinion. Social media has made it easier for people around the world to connect and see real-time information. Additionally, users can follow other users and be followed by other users, facilitating arrangements to ensure immediate dissemination of information and ‘viral’ quality, allowing information to flow through networks quickly and often unpredictably (Yar, 2014). Another important feature of social media is its symbiotic relationship with traditional media (mainly television). Traditional media increasingly rely on social media to fuel the 24-hour news cycle, selling out coverage via news-driven stories on social media platforms. Due to the flexibility and characteristics described above, it has become a necessary alternative to traditional forms of political participation.

## 1.2 Context

Even though Zimbabwe has signed several normative frameworks calling for the inclusion of women in key decision-making bodies, the reality remains bleak. With elections coming up in 2023, it is important to think about the intersection of political participation and gender inequality in the country. Politics in Zimbabwe has historically been marred with violence. Whilst violence was used to attain independence in the country, it has now been institutionalized to build an authoritarian state (Sachikonye, 2011, Melber, 2003) where opposing voices are thwarted. Women often bear the brunt of this as it materializes as domestic abuse, rape, political hostility/ aggression, and most recently online violence. In political organizations and public spaces, their contributions are rarely acknowledged, and their efforts are often belittled.

Zimbabwe adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2012 and incorporated it in the 2013 Constitution but laws protecting women have not been fully implemented (Human Rights Watch – HRW). With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the inclusion and protection of women



remains relevant and is crucial to this study. The research project relates to SDG 5.5.1 which aims to ‘*ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political life*’. It also contributes to 5.B which aims to use **communications technology** to promote the empowerment of women although it has unclear goals on how this will be achieved.

The polarization of traditional media spaces has also enabled most of the population to embrace social media for key communication. The polarized mainstream media is characterized by one state television station and multiple state radio stations, making social media platforms indispensable alternative sources of information for Zimbabweans (Nyoni, 2017). As of January 2021, there are 14,76 million mobile connections in Zimbabwe with over 6.3 million internet users (DataReportal 2021). Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter are the most used. A poll carried out by Voice of Zimbabwe (2018) shows that 53,2% of Zimbabweans get information from these platforms and 32,5% reported that social media is a reliable source of information (Sengere, 2018).

Whilst the use of social media is helpful for information dissemination, clarification, and political engagement, it has also used to further marginalise women through manifestations of violence such as insults. The various spaces have become pervasive with the rise of anonymous characters also known as ‘ghost accounts’ who ride on this invisibility to launch scathing attacks on different individuals. Bardall et. al (2018) notes that, women with high public status are usually labelled as social misfits with denigrating terms such as *hure* (prostitute), adulterous, or spinster being used against them, 76% of such insults coming from men. Young female politicians and activists who are at the bottom of the country’s political stratification usually face such violence and it goes unchecked. With a rise in the continued arrest and intimidation of young activists, this research explores the different ways young female activists have been participating in politics, their motivations, the challenges they face and the utilisation of online media as an alternative means of participation.

### 1.3 Purpose and Relevance

This study seeks to understand the experiences of young female politicians and activists in Zimbabwe, through exploring their ways of participation. Unequal power relations between men and women in Zimbabwe (Mpofu 2014) have perpetuated targeted political marginalisation amongst women. However, the persistence shown through the continued participation of women in such spaces, offers a platform to explore this subject. Young women are amongst some of the minority groups that are rarely considered as being

politically active or conscious and exploring their experiences seeks to nuance this. This study is therefore relevant since it investigates the various factors influencing young women's political participation including their strategies and choices both online and offline.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to explore the *experiences of young women in political participation both online and offline*.

The following questions will be investigated:

- What are the motivational factors behind young women's activism and their initial experiences with political participation?
- What challenges and barriers, online and offline have young women encountered in their political participation?
- How has social media been used by young women in their political participation?

#### 1.5 Outline

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. The introduction is followed by a literature review in Chapter Two and an overview of the relevant theoretical concepts utilized in this project in the third chapter. The fourth chapter details the methods, research design and ethical aspects of this study. Chapters Five and Six provide the empirical findings, which are then discussed in Chapter Seven. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, presents key conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a discussion of relevant literature that informs and contextualizes my research. For the literature review, a systematic literature search on Oria, Web of Science and Google Scholar was used to identify relevant publications using phrases like ‘women’s political participation in Africa’, ‘political participation and social media’, ‘the nature of Zimbabwean politics’. English written publications from 2013 to 2021 were used mostly but with reference to a few older ones too. Articles were thoroughly read to select the ones relevant to the study objectives. The first section in the chapter briefly examines women’s political participation in Africa and Zimbabwe. Factors influencing participation are then discussed before literature on social media and political participation is presented. The next section then examines the synergies between offline and online participation and the last part discusses the literature gaps which the study aims to find.

### 2.1 The position of African women in politics

There are various contemporary studies that explore the dynamics surrounding women’s political participation in Africa. In their research, scholars like Mlambo & Kapingura (2019) and Kassilly & Onkware (2010) indicate that there is low representation and participation in political processes and decision-making positions amongst African women. Mlambo & Kapingura (2019), and Kassilly & Onkware (2010) attribute this mainly to the patriarchal nature of African societies which hinders and locks out women from the public sphere. In their studies, these researchers acknowledge how, due to this cultural setup, domestic duties such as maintaining homes, tilling land, and raising children etc have been prioritized more by women over politics. These factors will be explored in detail in the next sections.

Contextualising the nature of political participation for African women, Kassilly and Onkware describe it as – a story of fear and humiliation but also a story of hope and determination. This paradox is reflective of both the struggles women face in politics, motivations, the resilience created, and the successes achieved through such experiences.

#### 2.1.1 Factors influencing political participation

Mlambo & Kapingura (2019), and Kassilly & Onkware (2010) pay particular attention to institutional, political, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to participation rather than personal difficulties that women may face. Noted barriers include, violent conflict, sexual violence, intimidation, persecution, internal party politics, male patronage, cultural and traditional norms, and lack of financing.

*Cultural norms:* According to Morna & Makaya- Magarangoma (2013), social and cultural factors are the single most important barrier to women's access to decision making. This is because, most of the women take a far greater role in home- making and care work and participate less in formal politics. Kassilly and Onkware (2010) describe this as an issue of women's lesser status and men's superior status which is so deeply ingrained in patriarchy that it makes the relationship seem natural to women themselves. This relegation of women to the private sphere makes many women themselves believe that political participation would negatively impact their ability to perform their primary duties as caretakers, thus leading to 'broken homes, [and] breeding of irresponsible children' (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010, p. 592).

*Internal party politics:* In a study on Gender, political parties and the reproduction of patriarchy in Nigeria, Pogoson (2012, p. 102) attributes women's limited engagement to socialization processes grounded in 'a culture of female subordination'. She describes how men dominate the setting of agendas in all political parties, even the meeting hours reflect men's timetables rather than women's. Since men usually form the majority in a party's structures, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore able to influence the party's internal politics (p. 112).

*Financing:* Access to political funding is also a major barrier to women's political participation worldwide (Murias, Wang, and Murray, 2020). Like the ability to participate in politics, financial resources affect election results. Negotiating space is therefore a dynamic process for politicians who don't have the resources to buy access or the political clout to demand it, but it's a particularly daunting task for women in countries who earn less than men. This assertion supports the need to understand how women's roles, responsibilities and status are important and central to their experiences of citizenship.

*Psychological factors* are also identified as motivations to political participation. These include different reasons which are shaped by a combination of political issues and experiences often accompanied by a sense of duty to improve the lives of others (Gordon et.al 2021). In an American study I found on young women's political participation, Booth-Torbin and Han (2010) discuss the election that ushered in Barack Obama in 2008 and identify that most of the young women who participated in the campaigns, genuinely believed that there would be change.

Meena et al (2017) also notes that, the motivations and '*decision to engage in political spaces is determined largely by the personal traits women possess that help them to overcome*

*systemic, structural, and institutional barriers to their political ambitions. These traits include: the personal goals they set themselves and their determination to make a difference, the knowledge, competencies, and skills they have for undertaking a political career, and the resources or capacity they have to mobilise resources.'*

### 2.1.2 Politics and gender in Zimbabwe

The description of African women's position in politics and the factors that influence their participation in the sections above, are also relevant to Zimbabwe. Various studies on Zimbabwean politics – (Tshuma 2019, Roudabeh 2017, and Sachikonye 2011) explore the history of the country's politics including marginalisation due to gender, age, and patronage. Despite the adoption of the gender quota system, also known as proportional representation (PR) in 2013 which reserves sixty parliamentary seats for women, only 85 (out of 270) sit in the current parliament, meaning that only 25 were directly elected. Less than 5% of women in parliament are below the age of 35 (Tshuma 2019). However, the persistent history of gender based political violence in Zimbabwe also known as gendered repression - 'a denial of specific forms of security for women within unstable settings' (Roudabeh 2017) has been identified as a major contributor to this low representation. Studies analysing the violence in the 2008 run-off election (Tshuma, 2019; Sachikonye, 2011) show that women who engaged in politics were sexually assaulted, gang raped, tortured, and beaten, most of them for supporting the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC<sup>1</sup>). Sachikonye (2011) notes that, this was often followed by intimidation and property destruction as revenge for supporting or campaigning for opposition political parties. Even with such levels of representation in public office, women and youth seem to be the most involved in certain political processes, with figures indicating that 54% on the previous election's voters' roll were women (NDI Pre-election Assessment – 2018:6).

### 2.2 Social media as a way of political participation

Various assertions on the apathetic attitude of young people to politics have been refuted by researchers such as Loader et al (2014) in his research on *The Networked Young citizen: social media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement*. Bailey (2021, p.4) notes that, through everyday talk, people develop identities, construct opinions, and develop public reason. In his article, Loader (2014) observes how political attitudes and identities of young people have become less influenced by social ties such as family, school and neighbourhoods

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<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe's main post-independence opposition party since its formation in 1999. It was formed after the People's Convention in February 1999 and was made up/ supported by many civic groups, including students, labour movement and churches. It was led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai, prime minister (2009-2013)

but have been shaped by daily use of social networks which they are both a part of and enablers in modelling political discourses according to their needs. This has consequently given an illusion of a generation that is not dutiful to the tenets of citizenship shaped by the older generations such as involvement in political parties.

The failures of political establishments to acknowledge and embrace such technological advancements and address the challenges young people face has given rise to alternative communication channels and action (Loader et al, 2014, p. 145) such as the Arab Spring. Although there is agency created by social media through this *alternative networking*, the informality of processes leading to collective action can be untidy and challenging and can also result in offline effects usually due to misinformation, rumours, and propaganda (Tucker, 2018) which are predominant in polarized societies such as Zimbabwe.

#### 2.2.1 Political communication online

Several researchers on social media and political participation (Bailey, 2021; Waeterloos et al. 2021; Loader et al, 2014; de Zuniga et al, 2012) agree that the rise of social media applications and the usage of internet should make us revise our definitions of participation. They acknowledge classical definitions which equate participation to voting, political party involvement, (Conway 1985) working for communities and attending protests (Verba et al, 1995) but also implore on the need to understand information flows (Zuniga et al, 2012) and how they will shape politics in the future (Loader et al, 2014).

Key studies show that political communication through social media, points out to the possible displacement of traditional models of democracy (Loader et al, 2014) characterised by collective political expressions to more individualistic manifestations aided by technology (Bailey 2021) and facilitated through networking practices (Loader et al, 2014). Social media use is therefore important when assessing young women's political participation since most contemporary societal issues are influenced by social networks in this digital age.

#### 2.2.2 Appeals of social media

Middaugh et al (2017), in the article Digital Media, Participatory Politics and Positive Youth Development, explores how certain forms of internet use such as social networks promote civic engagement and how such digital tools promote youth empowerment. The article describes how tools such as online news sharing by youths usually follows a process of forwarding, liking, commenting, or following links to donate money or sign petitions. This reduces the gap between information sharing and action.

Middaugh also notes that, the involvement of young people in media production and information sharing contributes to self-identification as a citizen and the development of a collective sensibility. Examples of this are given by Johansson (2016, p.27) in his research on Social Media and Politics in Indonesia. He mentions how in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election, Jokowi supporters used the hashtag #ReplaceTitleSongWithJOKOWI on twitter to urge Jakarta residents to gunner support using humour and combining the hashtag with song titles.

Example: Rima Hazrati (@Rimazrati24), July 10, 2012  
Tweet: #ReplaceTitleSongWithJOKOWI sheila on 7 - buat  
Jokowi tersenyum (smile for Jokowi)

Example: Pengkuh Arya (@pengkuharyaa), July 10, 2012  
Tweet: #ReplaceTitleSongWithJOKOWI one direction -  
what make JOKOWI beautiful :D

Fig 1. *Some tweets*<sup>2</sup>

Johansson notes that, these tweets were generated the day before and during the election thereby giving recognition to the Jokowi candidate at a time where it mattered. Such examples of positive youth engagement will be highlighted in this research.

### 2.2.3 Synergies between online and offline participation

Due to its casual nature, social media facilitates informal political discussions which often cut across partisan lines through weak links such as friends of friends (Bailey, 2021). For instance, if Chipu and Rudo belong to Party A, and Rudo is ‘friends’ with Kundai from Party B on Facebook, Chipu will be able to interact with Kundai’s content indirectly because of Rudo’s interactions and vice versa (see Fig. 2<sup>3</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of tweets from Johansson’s research.

<sup>3</sup> A pictorial representation of researcher’s example on social media interaction.

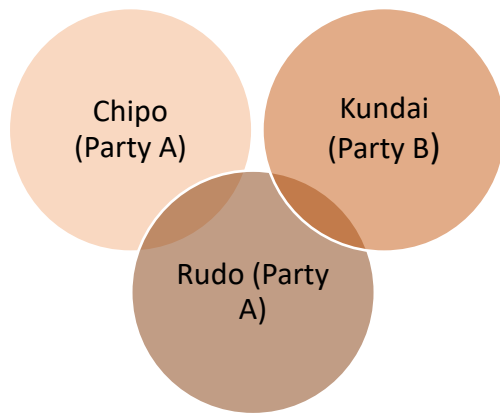


Fig 2. *Example*

This results in exposure to wider opinions which is sometimes characterised by misinformation and misperceptions that can distort individual views and ultimately affect democratic processes offline (Tucker, 2018 p. 51). Since most misperceptions are partisan driven, they intensify ideological polarization at a mass level (p.52). These distortions target ignorant and politically vulnerable people and are usually created and promoted by political elites to promote their policies, seek re-election, or avoid accountability (Flynn et al, 2017). This usually includes the stereotyping of opposition members (Tucker, 2018, p.52). Such biases affect the way governance is carried out especially when extreme measures of power preservation such as violence are used.

Several studies identify that there is a relationship that exists between the use of social media and gender-based violence (GBV) in different spheres such as sports, (Kavanagh et al, 2019) academia (Kavanagh & Brown, 2019) and communities (Nwamuo, 2013). These studies identify how women are represented and treated in virtual spaces. Women with high social status often receive threats of physical violence, harassment (Kavanagh, 2019, Bardall et al, 2018) and sometimes death threats which may turn to reality (Nwamuo, 2013). While the above-mentioned papers do not focus on political activists, they reveal how posts, videos, or pictures on social media by popular women can attract vile and result in endangerment of lives and well-being.

### 2.3 Literature Gaps

Women in politics are not a homogenous group. In most of the studies looking into the political history of Zimbabwe and Africa, young women are not specifically targeted. In this literature review, studies which resonated with this research and specifically focused on young women were scarce. Considering the hierarchies which exist in political parties and society at large, it is important to document the experiences of young people who are fostering change in different ways. This study will therefore serve to place young female



politicians and activists on the agenda based on the experiences they shared. Exploring alternative means of political participation also only started receiving academic attention recently. Whilst most studies have assessed the relationship between political participation and social media, a few of them have investigated the lived experiences of young people and how they interpret their experience of online political participation, its effects offline and the contributions they have made through social network platforms. This research will add to this knowledge.

## CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes the models of empowerment including elements of power and digital democracy as the theoretical framework for this study.

### 3.1 Empowerment Theory and elements of power

Empowerment is described as an ongoing process that applies directly to individuals who are deficient in power because of social exclusion and marginalization, as well as discrimination and social inequalities (Al Dajani and Marlow, 2013). Whilst incorporating concepts from other proponents of empowerment, this study will utilise Naila Kabeer's framework which depicts empowerment as a dynamic process where women acquire resources to develop a voice, articulate preferences, and gain agency to make decisions and fulfil their aspirations. Kabeer (2005) identifies resources, agency, and achievements as critical dimensions in exploring empowerment. However, she also highlights how, even in the presence of these three pillars, women can still be disempowered especially when they are subjected to unfair authority. As Yount (2017) notes, cultural and ideological norms remain major proponents of disempowering women, also identified as elements of 'power over' by Kabeer (2005:14). Here, Kabeer describes how negative agency can result in the exercise of authority, use of violence and other forms of coercion as 'power over' others. This is an essential factor in my study.

Using a human rights-based approach Crawford and Andreassen (2015) identify various forms of '*power over*'. They recognise that power is a complex and contested concept by referencing Steve Luke's three dimensions of power – *visible*, *hidden*, and *invisible*. Visible power is observable whilst hidden power extends itself to control political agendas and invisible power is about control through individual or collective actions and through the control of information through processes of socialisation (p. 667). In their paper, they also reference case studies of Zimbabwe which indicate the repression of women by the state and through other societal norms. This is utilised in this study as well because it corresponds with both the context and relevance of the research. Crawford and Andreassen (2015, p. 675) also highlight ways of challenging power that are applicable to Kabeer's notion of outcomes or achievements derived as a result of both agency and access to resources.

Mosedale(2005) identifies the concepts of '*power within*' described as self-esteem and confidence and '*power with*' which refers to collective action. The latter recognising that more can be achieved by a group getting together than by individuals alone. These are essential to my study and are also acknowledged differently by other scholars. Authors such

as Gould (2013) and Barua and Haukanes (2019) focus on aspects of emotions to analyse the dynamics of *power within* or *with*. Whilst acknowledging the difference between the two concepts, Gould (2013) articulates the role of emotion in the collective. She describes how being part collective (*with*), the euphoria and camaraderie from being in action together brings feelings or fulfilment derived from taking part in something larger than oneself (*within*). According to Barua & Haukenes (2019), this sense of solidarity can be important in the enhancement of personal empowerment.

Cornwall and Rivas (2015) also analyse Kabeer and other concepts of the empowerment theory, supporting it as a method of developing 'women's self-understanding and ability to express themselves' (p. 404). Hypothetically implying that, empowerment is about women's capability to question reality and their role in society. Developing such understanding is a continuous process within a group that can eventually lead to change. The process of empowerment is, therefore, beneficial to them and other oppressed social groups. Solidarity through group consciousness and support of each individual is thus an important element of empowerment according to Cornwall and Rivas.

Although Kabeer brings out various elements of empowerment, she also highlights the importance of women's political representation and building citizenship from the grassroots. With clear depictions on the positive effect of national representation, Kabeer (2005) also analyses the essence of proportional representation (PR) in parliament and evokes questions on whether it is legitimate or an act of tokenism. Similarly, this scrutiny is relevant to both Zimbabwean politics and this research considering that the country is headed for an election and the proportional representation provision expires in 2023. The theory also investigates the role played by women as leaders, workers, mothers, and citizens in ensuring political empowerment and mobilizing for social change, all of which are applicable in assessing young women's political participation.

This project uses the theory of empowerment to explore political participation through investigating the dynamics surrounding power at various levels. Tracing the history of political violence in Zimbabwe as a way of exercising power by men, this theory is relevant since it can be used to identify how such inequalities are now manifesting in non-traditional platforms like social media. It also clarifies how behaviours are tested when marginalised groups challenge the status quo and assists in answering the research questions.

### 3.2 Concepts of digital democracy

This research also utilizes three concepts of digital democracy which are relevant to this study. These are, *participation*, *appeals* and the *digital divide*. Hacker and van Dijk (2000) define digital democracy as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for purposes of enhancing political democracy. This includes the use of microblogging sites and other interactive online platforms for the dissemination of information amongst, awareness raising or grassroots organization. Hagen (2000) notes that, the dysfunctional role of mass media in political processes of most countries created the crisis in political participation which facilitated the use of alternative participatory methods like ICT. However, he also reports that technology does not cause but merely amplify social trends. When discussing participation, Hagen (2000) advises political scientists to consider digital democracy in the context of national political systems and cultures especially forms of representation, the role of political parties, current and past roles of mass media regarding public broadcasting systems. Hagen also assesses appeals of online spaces on citizenship. He believes that the overarching importance of social media is contributed to the direct communication between constituents and representatives. Rheingold (1993) supports this notion by highlighting how ICT helps a citizen to become active in many different roles making them a publisher, eyewitness reporter, advocate, organiser, student teacher and potential global participant. Calderaro (2010) who explores concepts of the digital divide [limited access to the internet] attributes these disparities to unequal distribution of infrastructure globally. These concepts are relevant in the exploration of this study since they seek to address the reasons, strategies, and effectiveness of social media in political participation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

To satisfy the study objectives of this paper, qualitative research was used. Due to the interest in exploring the experiences of young female activists' political participation, this method was most appropriate since it offers a holistic analysis of a subject without limiting the scope and nature of the participants' response (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Creswell and Poth (2017) describe qualitative research as research which begins with assumptions, a worldview, and the possible use of theoretical lens. This definition stresses assumptions and worldview which I would like to declare in this research. I base my research on the interpretivist philosophical approach in this study because I share the view that a single event can be seen through multiple realities or interpretations. As Neuman (2011) notes, the goal in research is to understand viewpoints and meanings and not to make a value judgement or advocate for a position. This philosophical approach is therefore useful since it focuses on understanding the involvement of young women in politics, their motivations, challenges, and the online tools they use as an alternative to participation.

A phenomenological design was used for this study. Creswell (2013) describes phenomenology as an approach which focuses on the commonality of lived experiences in a particular group of people. Since this study intends to explore the experiences of young women's political participation both online and offline, data was collected from participants who have experienced this phenomenon (Creswell 2013, p78). This design also requires an investigation into the meaning of these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As reflected by the method of data collection used, in-depth interviews, the overall research design is appropriate for this study. Since personal information is shared in the exploration of this topic, which is sensitive in the study context – Zimbabwe, it is the most appropriate.

### 4.2 Data Generation Methods

#### 4.2.1 Study Site

The study was conducted with female political activists from Zimbabwe. All interviews were conducted online, due to COVID-19 and incapacity to travel. Most of the participants could not access Zoom, therefore WhatsApp and Telegram were used alternatively to conduct some of the interviews. This allowed for easier recruitment of participants from different parts of the country. Specific cities of participants were anonymized, and exact locations were replaced with provinces for confidentiality.

#### 4.2.2 Methods of Data Collection

For the study, semi structured interviews were used. Six interviews with politically active women were conducted, lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes. The interview sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants. Interviews were conducted in English, although some participants used their local dialects (Shona and Karanga), in some responses, usually for emphasis. Participants were asked to identify their preferred platform of communication; four preferred WhatsApp, one Telegram and one Zoom. Three of the participants requested the interview guide beforehand and one of them preferred to fill in the answers instead of answering them. However, I interviewed her again for about 40 minutes, for clarification and since she did not manage to finish answering all questions.

The use of in depth semi structured interviews was to allow better exploration and elaboration of the topic which is sensitive. As Punch (2005) notes, this method facilitates capturing of nuanced human perspective and provides deeper understanding of each person's experience. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was divided into three main parts. The opening part comprised of closed questions on demographic information; the second part was made up of open-ended narrative questions about the political activism of participants. The last part was problem focused and investigated how social media has been used in political participation, the challenges experienced by participants and the opportunities it brings. Initially, some of the questions seemed very similar and did not evoke much response from the participants. However, this was adjusted after the first interview in both the interview guide and interview strategy to encourage more responses for follow up inquiries.

#### 4.2.3 Selection and Recruitment of Participants

The inclusion criteria of participants included the following: they should be politically active women 35 years and below, involved as either political party members, elected officials, or activists in civil society; they can be from any ethnic group, and they should be familiar with and active on various social media platforms. A snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants. As an activist, I used contacts from my network to identify people with similar traits of interest. However, initial recruitment of informants was assisted by two of my contacts who acted as gatekeepers to put me in contact with some potential participants. An information letter and informed consent form were presented to all participants, clearly stating objectives of the study, and emphasizing that participation is voluntary.

Limitations were also faced in the recruitment of participants. Time constraints from the internship I did as part of the study program and other personal stressors influenced both the

recruitment and sample I got. Initially, I anticipated interviewing eight participants, four in public office (municipal or parliament) and four activists from political parties and civil society. However, it proved difficult as some initial contacts especially from political parties became sceptical of the study and one withdrew consent. This was because they were from the governing party and they questioned the intentions of the study. As a result, the I was able to recruit where from a group with very similar backgrounds and would likely differ with other political players who do not share the same experiences. Five of the six participants are from opposition political parties and one is from a civil society organisation which is part of the youth movement in Zimbabwe. Despite certain cohesions, it is important to stress that this study does not intend to generalize the experiences of all young female political activists in Zimbabwe.

All my participants have a high level of education and had no challenges expressing themselves clearly. They also participate in activism in different ways and use different forms of social media in their activism thereby providing distinctive perspectives in their experiences and for the research. Also, one of the participants I interviewed is above the age I intended to interview, however, I decided to include her, due to the experiences she has had and the interesting input she provided which clearly indicated the use of social media in political activism. Details of participants are recorded in Table 1 below.

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Participation Level</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Age</b>
Fadzai	Harare	Party Member	Masters	31
Rudo	Harare	Activist	Bachelors	23
Nakai	Masvingo	Party member	Bachelors	25
Chenai	Mashonaland East	Elected official	Bachelors	30
Kudzai	Mashonaland West	Elected official	Diploma	31
Sekai	Matebeleland North	Party founder	Higher National Diploma (HND)	39 <sup>4</sup>

*Table 1: Participant Description*

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<sup>4</sup> An age exception was made for this participant, based on factors to be highlighted in the Findings Chapters.

### 4.3 Data Management

All interviews were recorded using the voice recorder on my phone and transferred to my password protected laptop before being deleted on the phone. They were later transcribed into a text-based format for easy management. The transcripts were stored on my password-protected computer and the names of the participants were not included in the transcripts, to protect their identities. I managed the data through NVivo 12, the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software developed by QSR International (QSR International, 2020).

### 4.4 Data Analysis

For this study, I used the Braune and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis. The first step was to familiarize myself with data and it involved the manual transcription of data, re-reading, noting relevant, interesting, and repetitive ideas. I did this through continually listening to the interview recordings and reading notes. I then generated codes by basically going through the data and identifying similar phrases and statements by participants and grouping them. After coding I then identified relevant concepts by extracting basis ideas out of the coded data to create broad themes. I further assessed the themes again based on the data provided and listed them in a table for further analysis. In the fifth step, I defined and summarised the themes based on core elements characterising them for easier interpretation. Producing the report is the last step, which is the final presentation of the analysis through this written report which answers the research questions whilst in sync with the theory and literature. The NViVo software helped with the management of data and making the analysis process more systematic and hence more transparent and trustworthy.

### 4.5 Quality Assurance

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Criteria used to ensure trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Conelly, 2016: 435). Credibility measures congruency of research with reality (Shenton, 2004). To ensure that my research is credible I used established research methods. I also focused on getting honest answers from the participants by declaring my independence and ensuring that participants had the choice to accept or decline the offer to take part in the study. During the data generation and analysis stage, it was important for me to be reflexive in order to minimize subjective biases, thus, I collaborated with my colleagues to read and give me feedback. My supervisor was readily available to provide constructive criticisms where necessary. My work was thus subject to scrutiny by peers and academics (Shenton, 2004). To establish dependability, I ensured that



the processes followed during the study were all reported and documented. Transferability is concerned with how findings of one study can be applied in a different context (Shenton, 2004). I established this through the identifying and presenting the context of the study. However, in qualitative research transferability is not a comprehensive principle since research findings rely on subjective interpretations of reality, which is experienced differently from person to person.

#### 4.6 Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I implored reflexivity to scrutinize my role in the research. To produce a study that is credible and trustworthy, I examined and was aware of my own values, preconceptions and biases and did not allow them to influence the research process. I am a political activist who has experienced and witnessed various forms of political issues including violence in Zimbabwe. Knowing that I intended to explore other people's experiences, I was aware of this throughout the research. Having met and interacted with some of the potential participants as well, I reflected on my possible source of positionality bias related to my subjective perspectives and interpretations, as well as the participants' assessment of me. Whilst I was aware of these issues, I did not find this to influence the participants significantly. This is because they freely narrated their stories and gave more information which prompted a shift in the initially intended research topic (see Appendix C).

However, some of the participants hinted their scepticism in the beginning due to the different political orientations between me and them. This also made me aware of the position I held as a researcher, and I assured them about the academic nature of the study. I was also aware of the limitations in my interviewing skills for academic research. It was therefore sometimes difficult to judge when I could press for more answers especially since I could not assess other non-verbal cues. These experiences inevitably shaped my outlook including some of the contextual factors that can affect trustworthiness if ignored. I hope my reflections contribute to the trustworthiness of the study.

#### 4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important element of any study and they should take precedence where participants are involved. I considered various ethical issues throughout the research seeing the volatility of the subject to some ethnic groups or political players. Punch (2014) identifies informed consent and confidentiality as the main pillars of ethics in qualitative research.

Being a student in Norway and outside the context of direct political tensions, participants were able to express themselves freely. However, considering the nature of the topic and the polarisation of Zimbabwe's political culture, I ensured that participants knew that the data collected would be anonymised for their protection. Yet, for some participants who can be identified by their responses, I sought further consent to use their data and I also informed them of the possibilities of being identified.

#### 4.7.1 Informed Consent

According to Conelly (2014) consent should be given voluntarily, subjects should understand what is being asked from them and they should be competent to participate in the study. To ensure that all these steps were taken correctly, I ensured that the potential participants understood the study through detailed written explanations of the research (see Appendix B) in their preferred language (they all preferred English). I also made sure that they had adequate time to ask questions and seek clarity. Participants were required to give consent in writing, and they were made aware that they could withdraw at any point in the study before data processing.

#### 4.7.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used to identify the participants. As seen above all the participants were given fictitious names to protect their identity. Interviews were also conducted individually in private via the online platform they were comfortable with.

#### 4.7.2 Ethical Clearance

I sought and obtained ethical clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) since the study will be conducted through the University of Bergen (see Appendix C).

## CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring political participation of young women in Zimbabwe: Political Involvement, Motivations, and social media participation

Chapter five explores how young women are involved in political activism. The chapter will present findings on the participants' initial involvement in activism, their initial experiences with political dynamics in Zimbabwe, their motivations for entering politics and how they have used social media as an alternative means of participation.

### 5.1 Description of Political involvement

All participants reported being involved in activism for at least five years. Findings show that most of the participants are members of political parties who started off as members of civil groups or movements.

5.1.1 Initial involvement in politics and civil society: All participants reported how their activism was shaped by participation in civic organizations which usually targeted a specific constituency, such as workers, students, or youth. When describing their history of participation, the participants narrated stories from when they were teenagers to present day. Chenai, Fadzai and Nakai were student activists before they joined mainstream politics. Chenai, an elected local government councillor for an urban constituency, described how she started activism whilst in university.

*I have been active in Zimbabwean politics for about a decade now. I started back in college at the University of Zimbabwe as a student activist. I also became a student representative in the SRC<sup>5</sup>. I then joined national politics in 2011 up until now, in Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and now Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC). Chenai*

Nakai and Fadzai who are also members of political parties, described how their participation in student politics was a strategy to join national politics. They explained how the political trajectory of some prominent politicians from student organizations to parliament inspired them. Most of the vocal and recognised politicians in opposition parties in Zimbabwe are former student leaders.

*I ran campaigns to be the Secretary General at the University of Zimbabwe, the interest was rooted in the prospects of being a politician in the future. In Zimbabwe, participating in student politics is one of the paths into national politics. We have many parliamentarians who were once former student leaders. Nakai*

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<sup>5</sup> Student Representative Council – the student governing body in universities, with representatives from different faculties.

They all described how their experiences with authorities whilst advocating for better study conditions for students shaped their approach to politics including the choices of the political parties they joined.

Kudzai and Sekai are former trade unionists. They both started activism in their workplaces as young workers. Due to unfair labour practises, they witnessed, Kudzai and Sekai joined workers' unions in their workplaces which are a part of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions<sup>6</sup> (ZCTU). They were both elected as young workers' representatives of ZCTU in their prospective workplaces and subsequently joined mainstream politics in different ways. Kudzai currently serves as a local councillor in a peri urban constituency whilst Sekai leads a political party as founder and president.

Rudo is part of a youth led and youth focused organisation. She described her involvement as being mainly at a community level. Although she is not a politician, she has been involved in campaigns, discussions, debates and lobbying of government at all levels from community, local government, and national level. The organisation which Rudo works for, focuses on leadership development and advocacy mainly. However, since it centres on young people, they [the members] also interact a lot with other movements such as environmental justice and feminist movements in the country and beyond.

5.1.2 Initial experiences with political dynamics: Participants described early encounters with the political oppression in Zimbabwe. Most of the events described were violent incidents where members of the security forces. For example the police or military were involved. Chenai and Fadzai reported that their first experiences with politics were in college. From their narrations, student activism in Zimbabwe attracts a lot of suppression from the government through violation of rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Fadzai recounted how she was part of a demonstration against the mistreatment of female students at the university which led to a beating and arrest by the police. She said that the incident *opened my eyes and gave me a clearer picture of the ruling party's repressive nature which does not honour anyone*. Chenai also gave an account of her experience:

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<sup>6</sup> ZCTU is the primary and largest trade union federation in Zimbabwe with 25 Affiliates. It became popular in the 1990s, opposing the government's neo-liberal economic policies. It was also the main force behind the formation of the opposition party MDC in 1999.

*Back in college, we would contest in SRC elections, and we would know ZICOSU<sup>7</sup> being aligned to the ruling party, would wear party regalia, and would be allowed to do so but if you wore RED<sup>8</sup> on campus, it would be an issue. This is when I first realised that the state was invested in student politics. They would go as far as using military intervention or they would use the intelligence guys<sup>9</sup>. Prominent politicians like the national director of information would come on campus with Chicken Inn<sup>10</sup> and bring money for students so that they could vote for a ZANU PF aligned movement. Other politicians would deploy their children. I realized how brutal and cunning ZANU PF was, even in student politics.*

In a similar manner, Kudzai and Sekai also described instances which oriented them in politics. Sekai who has been politically active since she was a teenager gave an account of an incident in 2002 where her parents' business complex was burnt down by members of the ruling party due to suspected allegiance to the opposition. Similarly, Kudzai also narrated the ordeals of 2008, a period where Zimbabwe experienced great political turmoil amidst economic instability. She reported how the economic situation in the country resulted in general instability in high density urban locations where she's from. These areas are considered opposition strongholds. She explained, how although food was rationed in stores, there was always a possibility of getting harassed while buying due to suspicions of being in opposition. She said, *I had to wake up very early to go and queue for food stuffs. It was like hide and seek with the authorities.*

When giving the accounts of these electoral processes, most of the participants explained challenges of political participation as young women. These will be presented in depth in Chapter Six.

## 5.2 Motivations

Various motivating factors were described as central to young women's political participation in the interviews. These created an analogy with some of the experiences mentioned above. Most of the motivations were based on the hope of seeing a better Zimbabwe but others were driven by the excitement of participation, and influence/mentorship from other politicians.

Basing on the history of political, social, and economic turmoil in the country, the desire to see a better Zimbabwe which is free and has a great economy motivated most of the

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<sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe Congress of Students' Union – a student representative organization known to be aligned to the ruling party ZANU PF

<sup>8</sup> Red was the traditional colour for 'pro democratic' movements in the country including the opposition party MDC

<sup>9</sup> The Central Intelligence Organization in Zimbabwe whose main mandate is to provide high security to the state from threats both within and outside the country.

<sup>10</sup> A fast food outlet, like KFC or McDonalds

participants to continue being politically active. In their descriptions of the ideal country they want, different aspects were mentioned. Some of the participants' focus was on the state of politics and governance in the country. They longed for a democratic state where processes like elections could be held freely and fairly. When asked about her motivations to participate in politics, Chenai said, *I have been influenced by the hope for a better Zimbabwe, which is free, not only characterised by yearly independence celebrations but a country basking in glory like the old days. A country that can tolerate diversity and promote democracy through free and fair elections.*

Other participants also highlighted gender disparities in politics, stressing the unlevel playing field which favoured men and disempowered women. To even the political field, Sekai described how she formed a political alternative that supports women fully, is pro poor and inclusive. She said, *I realised that there was nowhere to rise in a male led party because of the patriarchy. I was always in the shadows of men because I am one person who is firm on addressing what I stand for. I stand for women's rights and I'm a pro development activist and if those tenets do not exist or are not respected in any political party I will not subscribe. That was the main reason why Party X<sup>11</sup> was formed.*

Some of the participants also confirmed how the state of the economy and poor service delivery motivated them to take part in politics. Both Nakai and Kudzai lamented the dilapidating economies in their communities. They shared how they have vowed to curb issues of corruption and underdevelopment. As an elected councillor, Kudzai described her reasons for contesting in local government, *I just wanted us to be able to provide the basics of everything, water, housing, electricity etc like a normal country should, so that no one is at the mercy of anyone... I was so tired of the corruption and underdevelopment of my community.*

Other participants highlighted the importance of focusing on people's livelihoods as a way of improving the economy. Sekai put it this way, *The people of Zimbabwe are no longer interested in the antagonism and politics of retrogression, they want ideas that support their livelihoods, and therefore we continue to participate to share alternative solutions for the country's economy.* Kudzai also added that *the corruption has led to so much poverty. The poverty I have witnessed has led to so many things especially amongst girls in my community, who are abused for basic commodities daily, that's why I fight for these issues every day in*

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonym for the political party.

*Council even when I'm ridiculed.* The narrations of the participants of their political and economic viewpoints, exhibited their desire and political will to make Zimbabwe a better nation.

*Excitement in participation:* Some of the participants also highlighted how the excitement of participating in political processes motivated their continued activism. Rudo shared how interaction with various politicians made her realise that politics was not boring. She reported that, there was an excitement in *paying attention to the dynamics, the campaigns, really seeing the level of interest, listening to people's issues amidst the noise, discussions of development and inclusion, representation, and the future of everything*, especially before and during elections.

Nakai also shared a similar sense of excitement as she reported how the feeling of belonging to a political party and contributing to it thrilled her. Describing her admission, she said, *my experience was interesting because the year I joined the political party, we were headed towards the general elections the next year (2018). This gave me a sense of fulfilment and excitement as I felt like I was going to be a change champion*

The history of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle includes women who are celebrated even today. Some of the participants confirmed that they derived the strength to continue fighting for their country from such examples. Fadzai said, *I've also been influenced by other female leaders even from the liberation struggle such as Joyce Mujuru who have had a great history in politics despite their misgivings. So, I always tell myself that if such women were able to fight for their country from a very young age how can I fail to do the same.*

### 5.3 Social media and political participation

In this study, the use of social media as an alternative means of political participation was explored. As young people, who are more technologically advanced, the participants use social media as their 'uninterrupted' space of engagement. Results show that all the participants were familiar with and use social media in their political engagements. They use platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to engage with their constituencies and as information sharing mechanisms. The young women also shared the various ways social media was useful in their political participation. These will be explored below.

### 5.3.1 Effectiveness of social media

Most participants established that online platforms were a good mobilisation and grassroots organization tool for young people since they were the main consumers of social media.

Narrating her election path, Chenai explained that she was using WhatsApp and Facebook to mobilise the youth to register to vote. She said, *what we would do on WhatsApp is, we would create a hotline phone number where people could ask general questions about voter registration and where they could also check their registration status. It was an easy process because you know ama2000<sup>12</sup> are interested in engaging online*, she added jokingly. Some of the participants like Sekai explained that social media assisted them as an alternative means for organising at grassroots level. *On WhatsApp I am in over 500 groups since my days in labour activism and it's easier to use because you reach a great number of people in less than five minutes. Campaigns such as downing tools would be easier to organize.* Kudzai supported the sentiments that social media was an easier tool for mobilisation and campaigns. She also added that it was a cheaper option

*I used WhatsApp during my campaign. It was cheap and faster to get my messages to everyone. Because of the privacy feature, it was easier to connect with individuals at a personal level. Even after the election I created groups for my ward to enable discussion of issues in real time. I also use it as a platform for debating my ideas with my constituency so yeah, it has been effective.*

Participants also revealed that social media was a great information sharing mechanism and it allowed them to target audiences meant to receive information. Rudo reported that, *if I have specific people I want to address like ministers, I just tag them on twitter and people read that. I really think it's a great way to get information out especially during times like this with COVID-19.* Fadzai also shared that information received online can also be shared offline. She echoed that, *social media users can also influence their parents who are not active for simple things such as registering to vote, information sharing on current politics and doing away with propaganda.*

Awareness raising was another advantage of utilizing online spaces, identified by some of the participants. They explained how important it was for Zimbabweans in the diaspora and other international players to have an insight into the events and state of the country through platforms like Twitter spaces<sup>13</sup>. Rudo reported that, *it is vital to communicate issues that are*

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<sup>12</sup> The term used for Generation Z (Gen Z) children – born between 1997-2012. They are duped digital natives because they are the first generation to have grown up with internet. They precede millennials (1981-1996).

<sup>13</sup> A new function on Twitter which allows people to talk to each other in real time using audio.



*happening domestically<sup>14</sup> especially so that those in the diaspora or international partners and bodies can know. Sometimes they do respond and assist. Adding to this, Fadzai said that the creation of hashtags especially, is an easy way to get attention and fight for different causes online. It has worked before for other movements so I believe that it will work for us as well. For instance, in 2020 there was a #ZimbabweanLivesMatter<sup>15</sup> campaign that got a lot of attraction from influential people and organisations around the world.'*

Although participants clarified the effectiveness of social media, some of them were not convinced about it. Rudo, Chenai and Sekai doubted the full impact of social media especially on elections and policy making. Chenai explained that *the true measure of effectiveness of social media is going to be this upcoming election [2023] because people might be sloganeering and chanting on social media, but results will tell if all of that has translated into a win.*

### 5.3.2 Opportunities for other activists in social media

This study inquired from participants some valuable advice they could pass to other young female activists and politicians. All the participants agreed that it was important for young women to participate in politics through every means possible to effect change in the country. They also offered different advice on using social media in political participation. Fadzai had this to say, *social media is an effective way to influence other people currently. Considering the history of the country and the violence that happens to people who want to protest, it should be utilized. Although it's not entirely safe, young women can voice their concerns even anonymously.* Kudzai also added that, *social media is a steppingstone to make you known to people. You must use it to gain influence. It will come with hardships but it's a great way of making your mark in the politics of the country. Also start where you are comfortable with. Use the platforms available to you and voice out when others speak like on twitter spaces.* Rudo, Sekai and Kudzai also stated how social media was a great story telling tool for activists and how they could use it to document their political journeys. Sekai reported that, *social media would be important for young women to build their own portfolios without having to rely on a lot of complex things. For instance, if one wants to know someone, they can follow their political journey on social media, it is very easy to use, and one can choose*

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<sup>14</sup> This interview was carried out during a period when there was massive crackdown on activists by the government. A lot of people were incarcerated during this time.

<sup>15</sup> It was a protest movement inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter campaign in America. It was directed towards the current government and was supported by famous people such as former Botswana President Ian Khama, Musicians Beyonce Knowles, Ice Cube, 50 Cent etc

*where to share their information. I would recommend them to use Twitter and WhatsApp specially in Zimbabwe for political participation.*

### 5.3.3 Challenges of using social media

Results show that although social media was used as an alternative means of engagement, it also had its challenges. Most participants reported having faced constraints whilst using social media. Key notable findings show that some of these challenges made it difficult for political activists to organize or even share information online.

Most of the participants reported that the lack of access to standard devices and the price of mobile data in Zimbabwe made it difficult to use social media as a means of engagement. Fadzai described social media as an elitist platform which only a few can access. Participants reported that mobile data is expensive in Zimbabwe such that even if you want to engage with people from different parts of the country, it may be difficult. Fadzai stated, *we have a huge rural population in Zimbabwe who have no access to social media. Kudzai added, maybe after everyone even those in Muzarabani<sup>16</sup> have access to social media, that's when things will change.* Participants reported that because of this problem it is difficult to engage or organise online in real time.

The inactivity of the middle class and older people was also described as a major barrier in the use of social media for political participation. Although online platforms presented an opportunity for young people to debate and discuss on their own, they felt that information which required action by older people could not be relayed in their absence. One participant said, *the other challenge is that the middle class, people who are serious about life are not active on social media. So you can put something on Twitter or on Instagram and they won't even see it, even if it is something that directly affects them.* Other participants also explained the disengagement by older politicians and how it was difficult to raise issues with them online. Sekai explained that *we need to realise that most of the leaders in our country are older people who do not use social media. Most of the ministers have no access to social media and their accounts are run by other people and they do not even pay attention to these platforms.*

Rudo also added that *there have been a lot of innovations that policy makers cannot keep up with. So, you cannot regulate what you don't understand. Most of our politicians are older, they do not know how to use these platforms, let alone the intrinsic details around algorithms*

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<sup>16</sup> A remote village in Zimbabwe

*and so on.* Participants described this as a challenge because most of these older people have access to resources and can open opportunities which younger people may not be able to. Their absence on social media presents a huge problem in both information sharing and the ability to organise for social change.

Participants also expressed frustration on how young people in Zimbabwe engaged with issues that affect them online. Chenai reported that, *the greater number of youths go on social media to pass time, to follow these celebrities like Mai Titi<sup>17</sup>, to joke, to throw shade at one another or to listen to ZimDancehall<sup>18</sup> and very few are interested in the current affairs.* Fadzai also reported that, *sometimes people ignore your content. It gets lost in traffic and your ideas are drowned in the propaganda spewed daily on these platforms.*

One participant also gave a thorough analysis of how social media can be problematic to activists especially when privacy is invaded. She highlighted how irregularities in policies and legislation in Zimbabwean laws affected the scope at which people could become political active. She explained that,

*Tech is highly unregulated and since it's something that is different across jurisdictions privacy and data protection especially, it isn't even considered in Zimbabwe. For instance, the cyber security Act in Zimbabwe is based on trying to scare activists, it can get you arrested for posting, insulting, or threatening anyone. So, if you say anything against the president, it could get you arrested. And even companies like Econet<sup>19</sup> can give information to whoever has the most money, posing a danger to activists.*

This Chapter explored findings related mainly to the background and initial experiences of young women. It also identified motivational factors which encouraged their initial political participation and explored the use of social media, including the technical and other challenges that can make it unreliable, its effectiveness and the opportunities it presents. The next Chapter will delve more into the barriers to political participation and the coping mechanisms which young women have adopted.

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<sup>17</sup> A popular Zimbabwean socialite

<sup>18</sup> A Zimbabwean music genre developed by youths from high density locations also known as the ghetto.

<sup>19</sup> Econet is Zimbabwe's largest telecommunications service provider. It was founded by Zimbabwe's richest man Strive Masiyiwa in 1993 but only managed to get an operating license in 1998 after a series of contestations by the government.

## CHAPTER SIX: Barriers to political participation and coping mechanisms

Chapter six will present findings on the negative factors influencing participants' political participation and the coping mechanisms young women have adopted to confront the challenges they face. The challenges range from personal, societal, and institutional barriers. The chapter will also report on the coping mechanisms implored by the participants.

### 6.1 Young women's representation and participation

This section will present findings depicting young women's views on representation in governance, their participation in political processes in their communities and online.

#### 6.1.1 Political Representation

In the interviews, study participants were asked about their views on young women's representation in politics in Zimbabwe. All the participants agreed that young women were underrepresented in positions of power or influence and issues affecting them were not prioritized. Fadzai said that this stems from the disrespect of women in the country, *'as if we are a joke'* she said despairingly. Some also explained that the few who are elected in parliament might even pursue personal interests in the long run. Chenai reported that,

*I do not think young people's issues are well represented in Zimbabwe. When you look at Parliament and councils, the number of young people, I don't know, are maybe even less than 5%. All the others are over 40. Of those few, you find that some are not genuine about the issues of young women, of course before someone is elected, they seem genuine but the moment they go into parliament they get a big car and start getting allowances, then they forget about all of that.*

Sekai however, attributed this lack of prioritisation to existing structures in political institutions. She explained that the existence of women's councils<sup>20</sup> or assemblies in political parties limits spaces where women's issues can be heard. She clarified how these 'departments' are smokescreens meant to eliminate women from the important platforms such as the politburo<sup>21</sup>. She said, *'you find that when you go to the politburo or standing committee there are only three women there to represent the issues of women.'* Sekai also shares how

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<sup>20</sup> Department within a political party consisting of the female membership meant to promote participation.

<sup>21</sup> The highest policy making body in political parties, it is used by ZANU PF, adopted from the Chinese Communist Party and consists of 25 members.

such disparities in the representation of women actually led to the abolishment of such a council in her political party in order to avoid political segregation of women.

Some of the participants also described their concerns with the quota system in parliament because of how it allows a quick solution to the issue of underrepresentation without addressing the real causes of gender inequality. It is unfair because men who have worked hard may not get parliamentary seats because they have been awarded to less qualified women. Nakai shared;

*We have a quota system, Section 124(b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which determines women's representation in the parliament of Zimbabwe. In as much as it enables some women an opportunity to participate in mainstream politics, I argue that it's not fair to give a specific number of seats to women. This even goes against the 50/50 mantra for gender equality.*

Some of the participants also stated how this act of tokenism pacified women who are appointed to these positions. Referring to the quota system, Fadzai explained that *'it is a good initiative, although it gives women positions in parliament it does not give them room to be innovative and to shape politics in their own way.'*

Although there was a consensus that young women are underrepresented in parliament, all participants reported having been elected to leadership roles at some point in their political activism careers. Fadzai and Nakai reported how they contested as student leaders and were elected to positions of influence that is, secretary general at university level and secretary for gender representation at national level respectively in their student organisations. Chenai and Kudzai as mentioned above, also reported their election into local government authorities. Sekai also shared how she contested for a parliamentary seat twice. Even though Rudo is not involved in mainstream politics, she gave an account of her election whilst in school:

*I was elected in parliament back in High School. You know, the Junior Parliament is not really a formal body but it's a proxy of the real parliament, all roles are duplicated. We had to campaign through High school debates and then in parliament we had to discuss issues affecting young people and children, including sexual reproductive health and rights, child welfare, basic rights etc.*

## 6.2 Barriers to Political Participation

### 6.2.1 Cultural norms, societal expectations, and male patronage

All the participants described in different ways how certain cultural norms, societal values and male patronage limited their participation. They reported that several ways were used to discourage young women from being politically involved. In the interviews, the young women described how patriarchal norms were upheld in the Zimbabwean society. One participant described this saying, *I think there's just a hard wiring of patriarchy from family, business, and politics in the country. The idea is that women need to be led, they shouldn't really have a voice* (Rudo). Another participant also gave an example of this, citing the level of disrespect by reporting that, *women are not respected at all in this country. You find that even in a company at work, a woman who is on the same level or who is part of the management with other men can be requested or sent by someone in the same position to make tea for them* (Sekai). This continued promotion of traditional gender roles women was also viewed as a major limitation in the political participation of women by most of participants.

*In this part of Africa, women are always looked down upon. The expectation is that we should be gardening, cooking, looking after children or just carrying out other traditional roles. So, no matter how good or genuine you might be, there will always be critiques. There is always a push to confine women to household activities and not leadership positions. Even churches of late have developed the same stance.* (Chenai)

A few of the participants who had contested in national elections also confirmed how marriage was synonymous to stability in the society and how being unmarried prevented other women from supporting them. One of them said, *during campaigns and the election period, I didn't have a stable life. I was a young woman who wasn't married and didn't have a baby. As a result, I got constant criticism from people in my constituency. Some of the women would not support me because they feared I would snatch their husbands.*

Interviewees also expressed how patronage deterred the efforts, entry, or participation in politics. They felt that there was a notion that men were more fit to be better leaders than women. Fadzai exclaimed that, *they don't believe that women can lead so they use that weak claim to get more power and support from women whilst manipulating them.* Most of the participants supported this claim by expressing that young women were viewed as tokens in

politics. In their responses, they described the different ways women were ‘used’ in political activities to advance the ascension of men. Sekai and Chenai both agreed that young women were only needed for activities such as participation in rallies, mobilising and canvassing of votes but are *rarely empowered to occupy spaces of power* (Chenai). Other participants also described how men used their dominance to lure women into relationships to stifle them politically. Fadzai claimed that *male politicians are vultures. They prey on young aspiring politicians, they promise us positions, money, marriage to support them in their quest for power.*

Describing their political participation on social media, most of the activists agreed that they received different treatment than their male counterparts. They explained that they were constantly reminded of personal relationships in the past or present as a way of shaming or questioning their morality, something men were not subjected to. Kudzai recounted that

*Yes, yes, the treatment we get online is different. Men are rarely attacked based on their sexuality or relationships. They can voice their opinions and write anything online without fearing any attack. For us women it's always about who you slept with, your relationships, your social life, where you hang out. These things are put ahead of any ideas that one may want to discuss on social media.*

One participant however had a contrasting view and she highlighted that, gender and male patronage did not affect the reception she got online.

*I do not get any different treatment. I think there's an expectation that all social media is toxic or that I am 'slut shamed'<sup>22</sup> but I have not had that experience. For me it has relatively been different. I think that I'm very objective in my posts and people interact based on that. If I write something that is a fact, it doesn't matter where its coming from, a fact is a fact.'*

(Rudo)

### 6.2.2 Intimidation and violence

Most of the participants who had been involved in electoral processes described how the prevalence of intimidation and violence was a barrier to their participation. They described how intimidation usually comes as a threat to deter one from contesting a position. Fadzai described how even as student leader, male counterparts threatened her when she was nominated for an elective position. She claimed that they would say, *you will not be able to*

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<sup>22</sup> Stigmatization of women who are perceived to violate societal expectations of good behaviour or appearance.

*manage these positions, you will not even be elected, these positions are reserved for men – (Hamupapinde apa, hamupagone apa, panotoda isu vechirume).*

Similarly, Chenai and Kudzai who are both elected officials, also described how they were intimidated by soldiers from the army barracks in their constituencies who are always known cause of havoc during elections, since they are usually deployed to maintain ‘peace’ in the country. Chenai said that because of this, she rarely slept at home because of the fear of being abducted or raped. Kudzai also said, she was cautioned that she was too young to be contesting in elections. She shared that,

*To be honest I feared so much for my life at this point. One of the soldiers said to me what are your guts (Zvivindi zvenyu ndezvei) when I approached them seeking votes. Their wives also chased me from their homes when I approached them during my campaign. Some would outrightly say they support ZANU PF.*

This intimidation was also experienced as threats and assaults online usually done by influential people with huge following. Fadzai shared the following,

*Sometimes people with huge following on social media will want to use threats on women. You will hear of people saying that they will leak nude pictures of a prominent female politician what is so unusual about someone’s nude pictures? she added rhetorically. A lot of men will support this with their perverted minds. This does not usually happen to men, but women are constantly attacked, and people do not concentrate on the ideas they [women] bring but on what the audience wants.*

Experiences with politically motivated violence appeared in most of the participants’ interviews. They described acts of violence experienced by other women and themselves. Interviewees lamented electoral violence and the fear it induced in women. Kudzai recounted the 2008 elections saying that, *there were various reports of people being tortured around the country, beaten, and sometimes killed for being opposition party members. It was difficult because they recruited and kidnapped young people in broad daylight to what they called mabhesi<sup>23</sup>. These bases were established to train youth for violence against opposition. Some of my friends who were taken told me about the rape and assaults that happened there. She despairingly added that, during elections the violence is just too much, especially in communities like ours which are far from the capital.*

Participants also described how on various occasions they were beaten severely and sometimes arrested as a way of silencing them and preventing their participation in political

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<sup>23</sup> Bases – imitations of military bases established by ZANU PF before the 2008 run off election which was highly contested after an alleged win by the opposition.



activities. When describing their experiences as former student activists, Fadzai and Chenai narrated incidents where they were subjected to violence and arbitrary arrest. Fadzai reported that *'in a demonstration we held in 2017 with female students from different learning institutions in Harare<sup>24</sup> we marched to parliament in demand for students' rights. The result of that was we were beaten so badly, and we were arrested'*. Chenai mentioned that involvement in student politics also meant that, *'as a contesting candidate, you could be arrested on malicious charges so that you're not present on election day'*.

### 6.2.3 Forms of abuse

The women I interviewed described how different forms of abuse were perpetuated on women in politics. Their responses were based on the general experiences of women in politics as well as their own encounters. One participant reported that, *we are prone to abuse as women. When you look at prominent female leaders, they are being bashed left right and centre simply because they are involved in politics*. Rudo explained how different experiences of abuse were usually based on factors such as background, social class, and education levels. *You find that if you're from affluent backgrounds, you're usually exempted from such treatment. I have noticed that the women who don't have strong social affiliation or are less educated, experience abuse a lot more*. She further reiterated that,

*It's just systematic and structural issues [social classes and cultural norms] that need to be addressed. The social, economic, and political structures in the country tend to be abusive to young women. There's a lot of abuse and harassment especially sexually. Our bodies are so sexualised that they are used in political battles, as means of getting certain favours or jobs and those are concerning issues because they hinder our participation in politics.*

Participants also described how men targeted young women for sexual favours Fadzai supported this by describing how, *in university, there was a thigh for a mark, which was basically male lecturers demanding sex from female students to pass exams*. She further explained that most girls who were known to be vocal on issues were asked for such favours and some gave in, in fear of failing, which could lead to discontinuation of studies.

Beyond sexual and physical abuse on women, the young women I interviewed also explained how they were subjected to hate speech and ridicule. They shared how they were called by different names such as *'hure [whore]'* because of their involvement in politics. According to the participants, they experienced this both offline and online. Kudzai explained that, even as elected officials, *we are ridiculed and looked down upon [tinoshorwa]. It is difficult for us to*

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<sup>24</sup> The capital city of Zimbabwe

*really talk about the issues we face as young women without getting any negative feedback from fellow councillors [male].*

All the interviewees agreed that there was a lot of bullying online and it had been normalised in Zimbabwe's political circles. Some of the participants described how difficult it was to navigate online spaces due to the prevalence of ghost accounts<sup>25</sup>. Fadzai described how *most of the attacks done to women online are instigated by ghost accounts and one can never know who it is. It leads to a lot of fear in young women and results in apathy and the lack of will to participate in politics.* According to some of the participants, this is caused by the biases created through misinformation by those in power. Sekai reported that, *social media is easily manipulated, for example Varakashi<sup>26</sup> can have 10 accounts which are just used to attack and criticize those in opposition.* She also gave an account of how hate speech was used to attack her on social media:

*I think my situation is unique because most of the reception I get is engineered. People are made to hate me as a person. Some are intimidated by me, by my ideas to the extent that they create ghost accounts to attack me, so anytime I post they are waiting to attack. I used to block them but now I no longer do that because they still come with different ghost accounts and that is the tragedy of our electorate because they still follow crowds even without understanding the ideas that have been talked about. A few of the tolerant people even from the same political parties will however come to me privately and tell me they support the ideas that I am talking about. Other people with huge following make it a habit to attack me.*

Kudzai also pointed out that criticism and diverse views from the most supported opinions also invited ridicule online. She said, *if you highlight opposing view to that of fellow party members in the comment section of any social media platform, they will start giving you names such as hure [whore] just so you react.*

#### 6.2.4 Limited security

Security was an emergent theme in the interviews of the participants. They described how the lack of security in politics made them hesitant to participate with strong conviction. Fadzai shared that, *many young women do not participate in politics because they do not know what to expect. There is a lot of fear that has been induced by the ruling party that makes it hard for young women who are a vulnerable group to participate with strong conviction.* Chenai felt that the issue of security was sensitive because it was impossible to campaign or even represent people when your own security is not guaranteed. She added that,

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<sup>25</sup> Pseudo accounts

<sup>26</sup> Alleged paid ruling party members, deployed to terrorise opposition members online.

*Recently three young female leaders were abducted and after that, they were accused of making it up. So as a young woman I'm always concerned about whether I'm safe participating in politics or I can just be abducted one day and wake up with artificially induced cancer or just disappear like Itai Dzamara<sup>27</sup>.*

Whilst describing political participation online, Rudo, described several online dangers that can pose as threats to activists and the need to train them on the use of online platforms. She shared that;

*Social media generally has a lot of dangers, like stalking, oversharing, personal private information. If you're constantly posting where you are, you can be poisoned in a restaurant or have people come to your house. Oversharing also leads to profiling of activists, so the bulk of information that ends up in wrong hands, is because of us. So, there's need to be trained on how to not overshare and on how not to be too quiet as well.*

Fadzai who was at the time of the interview studying outside Zimbabwe said, *recently I have also become low key in such spaces as I fear for my life at a time when the ruling party has become more violent. I am currently studying outside Zimbabwe, and I plan to go back soon. I fear that if I become very active right now, I may get arrested on arrival back into the country.*

Some of the participants reported that this lack of security both online and offline diminished any hope for any change in politics. Chenai expressed that, *we will never have enough freedom to exercise our rights whether for registering to vote or airing out our concerns. It's never going to happen within the Zimbabwean political context.*

#### 6.2.5 Internal party politics

Participants who were part of political parties also highlighted various challenges emanating from being part of an institution. They described how they were always limited by bureaucracy and protocol that had to be adhered to. Sekai shared how the whipping system<sup>28</sup> was used against women in political parties, saying, *when I was a member of Party Y, the president did not allow us to speak to the media on different issues. So, this is beyond young women, it is about women in general. He outrightly said you have no right to address the media.* She went on to explain how such procedures also affected the way elected women communicate their issues in local government and parliament stating that, *it [whipping] is*

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<sup>27</sup> Itai Dzamara is a prominent journalist who was also an outspoken critique of Robert Mugabe. He was abducted in 2015 by men in an unmarked vehicle whilst getting a haircut and remains missing to this day.

<sup>28</sup> A British parliamentary system, where political parties appoint a representative also known as the Chief Whip who helps to organise their contributions to parliamentary business. This system has been adopted by most British colonies including Zimbabwe. It is also used in political parties, usually to swerve votes or to adopt a position that can be shared with the public.

*prevalent in parliament, I have had instances where I asked women why they were not raising certain concerns in parliament and their responses were that they cannot do that without approval from the Chief Whip<sup>29</sup>. So, as long as we have that system it will be hard for women to voice their concerns.*

Both Kudzai and Chenai attested to this by describing how exhausting it was to get approval for contestation in elections. They both shared how they had to subscribe and align themselves to certain individuals in the process. Chenai said, *'there was factionalism within the party, so I chose a popular faction, got support, and won the primary election'*.

When discussing her online participation vis-à-vis physical activities and internal party politics, Fadzai had contrasting views from the ones mentioned by Sekai above. Whilst she agreed that protocol was observed, she did not necessarily vilify its impact on participation. She explained that,

*Of course, being a member of a political party, you have different structures from branch, ward, district, provincial to national level. What I put online sometimes must get approved by the leadership I report to. So, I need a go ahead from other leaders and in some instances, they even help me to draft what I post. But sometimes nothing we experience physically is represented online. For instance, we have a lot of internal fights in our party but when it comes to social media, we know that a lot of people are out to discredit our party, so we support each other and attack the opponent.*

#### 6.2.6 Financial constraints

In the interviews, the lack of financial resources for campaigns also emerged as a major theme. The informants explained how difficult it was to navigate the political terrain with limited or no resources. Some participants also described how elections are usually sponsored by businesspeople who rarely support women because they fear that if the female candidates lose, it will be a loss in their investment.

Chenai recalled how she had no money to sponsor her election in 2018. *'I was unemployed and would be asked for favours [sexual] by men in the party in exchange for money for the elections. I won the primary election with limited resources, mostly from my mum and women focused civil society organisations.*

Similarly, Kudzai also shared a similar experience and talked about how she contested the election when she was financially constrained, struggling to pay her rent. *I received no money*

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<sup>29</sup> See 28

*from the party, she said. The residents I represent now and a few friends were the ones who contributed to my posters and flyers. Everything else I banked on hope.*

However, some of the young women also acknowledged how recently Twitter spaces have become great platforms to engage the diaspora in the mobilization of resources for future activities and elections.

#### 6.2.7 Discouragement and self-doubt

A few participants described that the toxicity that exists both online and offline can be a constraint in their political participation since rumours and misinformation spread on online platforms affected the way people viewed them in real life. They reported how the judgement passed on them by society lowered their confidence and self-esteem. Fadzai shared how she was judged politically because of her interactions on social media. She reported that, *young as we are, we have made life choices which can even sometimes be rendered scandalous, and these are used to judge us and affect the way people engage with us even on political matters. This makes us so self-aware that participation becomes difficult.*

Kudzai also gave an account of how social media interactions affected her confidence.

*When I started activism, I was very vocal and would say my mind without fear until the time came when I wanted to contest for a position in the party. The competing side went on a smear campaign and started spreading stories about me and an alleged relationship with a married man. This was done on Facebook, at a time when we didn't have most of the new platforms. It caught me off guard and I remember crying a lot about it. Even my self-esteem became low. Up to date I rarely use this platform.*

#### 6.3 Coping Mechanisms

Most of the interviewees reported having been subjected to a lot of distress due to their activism. The various traumatic events offline and the insults online could have led to quitting. However, they overcame these challenges and channelled their energy towards finding ways to protect themselves. They reported that, in the instances where they were bullied online, they started ignoring or blocking vile characters and started engaging more tolerant individuals. Some of them even attested that this change of attitude, made it easier for former critics to engage constructively. Kudzai shared that, *you find that people have become more engaging, and they will send me messages and tell me what their concerns are or offer advice. Most of it is no longer coming from just name calling. I think they also realised now that I mean business. When I do my work, I do it properly so that baseless negativity back more constructive criticism.*

Other participants also added that they began to use humour as a means of coping with the various constraints they face. Sekai who has been at the receiving end of a lot of insults, shared that she now laughs when people insult her because she is now unbreakable. The realization that some of her attackers online were nice people in person, who only had different ideologies made it easier for her to cope. She said,

*it's funny because the reception I get physically is very different from what I get online. I get so much respect where I walk around so most of the insults online is not the same physically. Sometimes I'm afraid of just walking around in town because people will start asking for pictures and swarming me and all of that and sometimes it's even funny because people can come up to me and say oh, I am that person what attacks you online and I laugh about it.'*

She went on to describe how she had also developed thick skin – a notion used by most of the participants to describe their resilience.

Participants also acknowledged the role of the family. Families were support systems for the participants. In Chenai's case as described above, she was supported financially by her mother. In cases like Kudzai's, she mentioned that she had to rely on *hope* since she was an orphan.

Solidarity from international political players, famous people and other Zimbabweans was also something that the participants relied a lot on. When describing the success of the #Zimbabweanlivesmatter campaign, Fadzai acknowledges how support from celebrities and other people strengthened their resolve. The solidarity offered by the Zimbabwean diaspora through resource mobilisation, has also sustained the young women in their different efforts.

Finally, some of the participants also highlighted that they used their experiences to understand power dynamics and to negotiate power. One of the young women even testified that she now knows '*which buttons to push*' when bargaining with male counterparts, in political parties, public spaces and online.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences of young women in political participation through identifying their ways of participation, motivations, the challenges they have faced and how would they have utilised social media in their activism in Zimbabwe. The country is a highly patriarchal society where women are expected to thrive more in the private sphere of family life whilst being a public figure is highly shunned. Its political history is also marred with incidents and stories of violence against female activists, some of which are shared by the participants in this study. The young women interviewed in the research are all politically conscious and active citizens, who described how as a minority group [*in the political context*], their participation is often limited by structural, systematic, and even intrapersonal factors. However, as young resourceful activists with great prospects for their country and understanding of technological advancements, they have developed various coping mechanisms and they have also incorporated social media as a means of participation. The findings presented in the preceding chapters guided this section

The research was inspired by literature on political participation of African women (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010; Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019; Morna & Makaya-Magarangoma, 2013; Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Pogoson, 2012) which instigated a review of how the civil involvement of women in Zimbabwe is determined and a probe into the position of young women. Various studies on social media and political participation (Bailey, 2021; Waeterloos et al. 2021; Loader et al, 2014; de Zuniga et al, 2012) also guided the study's examination of non-traditional ways of participation that the participants have been using. Whilst this literature will be used throughout the chapter, it will be framed by the discussion of the theories (empowerment, power, and digital democracy) which will guide the structure of the different sections.

### 7.1 Discussion on the motivational factors and other forms of agency

#### 7.1.1 Agency

The empowerment process is catalysed by different elements which Kabeer (2005) identifies as agency, resources, and outcomes. To determine the empowerment potential of political participation, I assessed participants' motivation using the concept of agency. Mosedale (2005) and Kabeer (2005) both agree that agency as a process requires one to make choices or goals and to act upon them. These goals are often in relation to careers, family, or other important life decisions. This also resonates with the assertions by Meena et al (2017) of how the decision to engage in political spaces is determined largely by the personal goals and traits



women possess to help them overcome a system. In my findings, all the participants exhibited high levels of agency through their educational qualifications, career paths, and contributions to their communities or constituencies. The tailor making and deliberate patterning of their activism indicates this. In the reflections of their involvement in politics they described transitional processes from other civil duties or groups to more defined spaces which they are involved in now. For instance, Nakai and Fadzai who are both former student leaders emphasised how student activism was an intentional strategy to enter national politics. Exercising their agency through strategic choices which require viable options (Kabeer, 2005, p14) is what the participants in this study did by joining student movements, trade unions, other civil groups, and eventually political parties.

The study also demonstrates how agency is exerted through the correlation between the use of social media and the age of the participants. As highlighted in Chapter four (Methodology), all participants are below the age of forty. They acknowledged how navigating online platforms is very easy for them. In some ways, they claimed this space as their own due to the absence of older political players. To them (young women), social media enabled their political activities without going through the bureaucratic processes that limit their freedoms. Likewise, contemporary studies on political participation and digital democracy (Loader, 2014, Zuniga 2012, and Bailey 2021) recognise how effective online spaces have become in advancing interests, shaping public opinion, and facilitating debate amongst young people. They recognize traditional elements of participation such as protests and voting whilst imploring on the need to understand how information flows in this digital era have changed politics globally. Understanding the inclusion of digital democracy in their activism by young women, whether as a choice or strategy is therefore crucial in examining their political participation.

#### 7.1.2 'Power within and with'

Kabeer (2005) and Mosedale (2005) point out the importance of analysing how power informs the feasibility of choices and shapes decisions to assess whether a choice represents agency and empowerment or restricts it. This also relates to Kabeer's concept of '*power over*' also known as negative agency which shall be discussed later in the Chapter. The viability of choices is determined by the intrinsic process at an individual level where a person's sense of self-worth is raised to a point where they feel that change is inevitable, also referred to as '*power within*' by Mosedale (2005). Development of this confidence determined by how it manifests within a person, how it changes an individual's perspectives, and how it produces



*outcomes* should be understood within the process of empowerment since it expands the sense of agency and options available.

The participants' descriptions of their motivations and the ways in which they have made deliberate choices to advance their participation, reverberates with Kabeer and Mosedale's depictions of the empowerment process. Although they describe political processes that are seemingly volatile and threatening to their physical being especially in their initial experiences, the courage and continuation of their activism exhibits authentic control and confidence *within* themselves. Participants also described incidents where they feel discouraged to continue participating in politics. However, they also prove that they manoeuvred through these obstacles. For instance, one of the participants (Sekai) highlighted how she formed a political party which supports the elevation of women, birthed from the negative experiences of operating in a male dominated setting. This is indicative of both agency and strength derived from susceptibilities which push people towards acting to facilitate change. This is supported by the research on motivating factors for participation by Booth-Torbin & Han, (2010) which shows that young women unlike other groups in politics are motivated to participate in politics when they see an undeniable possibility for real change.

Mosedale's (2005) description of *power with* as collective action created by recognising the strength in a group, echoes the sentiments of the participants' motivations to engage online. The confidence of being part of a platform where they could excel both nationally and globally was noted in the study. Participants displayed appreciation of their networks online. With online participation, young women received support from international political players, the Zimbabwean diaspora and other individuals who could support their cause including celebrities. It was viewed as a pathway that could eventually foster change in the country's politics. This display of patriotism is referred to as an innate *sense of duty* which motivates young people to continue activism to improve the lives of others (Gordon et al, 2021). Participants referenced how the success of other online campaigns such as #ZimbabweanLivesMatter had encouraged their continued online presence. Likewise, Loader (2014) explains how the advent of digital democracy has even become part of the youth's identity since they get more influence from their social networks than from traditional sources such as families or schools.

Participants also discussed the emotions brought up by belonging to political and civil groups. Two of the participants indicated how the interactions they had with politicians and in

political parties motivated their continued activism. Nakai shared how becoming a *member* of a political party *thrilled* her so much because it generated possibilities of effecting change as a collective in the next election (2023). In this scenario, two concepts of empowerment emerge, that is: ‘*power within*’ and ‘*power with*’. This also reveals how Mosedale examines ‘*power with*’, namely the importance of spaces and opportunities for women to meet with other women and reflect on their situation, recognizing their strengths and formulating strategies to affect change (2005, p. 250). Barua & Haukanes (2019) in their analysis of these empowerment dynamics also recognize how collective amity (*with*) can be important in self-empowerment (*within*) but can also help to sustain participation (Gould, 2013) something that this study confirms.

## 7.2 Discussion on power and barriers to political participation

*Political representation*: Kabeer (2005) highlights the importance of women’s political representation in parliament. She indicates the importance of representation as a form of citizen building and grassroots acceptance. She, however, questions the legitimacy of proportional representation in Parliament. Particularly whether it empowers women or is an act of tokenism. Likewise, in my findings, participants also harbour conflicting views when addressing the same issue. Whilst they all agree that women are generally underrepresented in Parliament, they are unsure whether the quota system which reserves sixty seats for women is fair or not. One of the participants reported that it is biased because it does not consider the qualifications of the appointed women vis-a-vis that of other aspiring candidates, whether male or female. Another participant appreciated its existence but also noted that it limited women’s communication of their issues. What is interesting to note is that both opinions are a manifestation of power dynamics that have rendered men dominant in political spaces to an extent where women begin to second guess their potential.

### 7.2.1 ‘Power Over’: Biases of gender ideologies

The empowerment process is an undulating one because as women gain more power and confidence as individuals or in groups as discussed above, they consciously engage in spaces that invite more risks to their lives and expose their vulnerabilities. This is what Kabeer (2005) describes as ‘*power over*’, which in its negative connotations refers to the capacity of some actors to dominate the agency of others through for instance, exercise of authority. Crawford and Andreassen (2015) also explain how this power manifests in the form of visible, hidden, and invisible ways. In this study, such experiences in the form of both institutional and societal barriers were observed. Findings indicated that, patrons of power in

such places [institutions or society] could either empower women or disempower them. This is caused by the sustenance of harmful cultural norms which remain the major proponents of disempowerment (Kabeer, 2005; Yount, 2017; Morna & Makaya-Magarangoma, 2013).

In the literature on the political participation of African women, most of the scholars identify how the advent of patriarchy has facilitated poor political involvement of women. Although the studies are from different parts of Africa – Kenya (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010), South Africa (Morna & Makaya- Magarangoma, 2013), Nigeria (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010), they present elements of ‘*power over*’ that are problematic to Zimbabwe as well. They identify elements of a patriarchal culture that advocate for the confinement of women to the private sphere of family life. Throughout the studies, the scholars emphasize how women are constantly pushed further away from public spaces as a way of consigning them to the private space. Kabeer (1999) confirms this by recognizing that norms in the society determine behaviours appropriate for men and women, and such gendered identities developed throughout life and could not easily be ignored. This is consistent with my findings where interviewees described in detail how they experienced societal expectations that relegated them to stay at home and take care of children or homes instead of participating in the public sector. Chenai even described how being unmarried is viewed as instability and how it made her lose support when she contested for elections.

Beyond the societal expectations examined above, the experiences of ‘*power over*’ as a barrier to participation at institutional level are also linked through the literature and narrations of the young women. When describing the *process* of qualifying to contest for an election, Chenai explicitly details how she had to align to a *popular faction* to get support. Whilst this notion aligns with the positive aspects of strength in a collective emphasized by Cornwall & Rivas (2015), Gould (2013) and Barua & Haukanes (2019), it reveals how such processes can be coerced as well. In the description of *visible power*, Crawford and Andreassen (2015, p. 667) observe how someone with *power over* the other can coerce the latter to act in a way they would not normally act. These power relations are predominant in institutions like political parties and state institutions as displayed in this study. Pogson (2012) also notes that, powerful women are often exploited by non-dominant men because of the patriarchal setup of what is considered to be the support system [political parties]. Identifying such power dynamics in the experiences narrated by the participants, gives better insight into their struggles and an understanding of their behaviour towards it.

As indicated in the first paragraph of this section, the exercise of authority by men in spaces where women are generally marginalised, stifles their efforts to participate fully. It is a form of *hidden power* where men decide which issues can be discussed or excluded from an agenda depending on the interests of those with authority (Crawford and Andreassen, 2015, p.667). This reproduction of patriarchy in political parties reviews what Pogson (2012) refers to as ‘a culture of female subordination’ where constitutions and manifestoes are consciously male biased. This is a challenge which young women in Zimbabwe face in political parties where they are subjected to constant exposure of unfair practices. Examples of the whipping system described in chapter six as a means of enforcing order or soliciting for votes, gags the voices of women, and limits the control they have in communicating issues of importance to their needs. My findings suggested that the unfairness within political parties as institutions promoting biases of women's potential in politics was not only a threat to their ambitions but also to their bodies as well.

According to Crawford and Andreassen, (2015), *hidden power* in repressive political environments like Zimbabwe takes form overtly and covertly through overall political harassment by the state. This usually comes in the form of beatings and indiscernible torture which are examples of *extreme agenda-setting to silence critics and opponents of the regime* (p. 671). As seen in the study, the participants who are all from the opposition narrate incidents where they were beaten, harassed, or tortured for participating in demonstrations or protests. Although participants reflected on how their bodies were threatened because of activism and they recognized the hand of the state, it was difficult for them to address this as a power dynamic because of its hidden nature. In fact, they seemed to accept that this was an inevitable part of their journey as activists. They focused on the difficulties they face as women and the fear of harassment, violence, or incarceration and how these lead to limited participation. Throughout the interviews, they did not expose any intimate details of their personal experiences. Probably because they feared the judgement that comes from consequences derived from defying societal expectations and going against gender biases. They had experienced violations motivated by power.

In this study, aspects of *invisible power* are experienced both online and offline. Participants described how name calling is normalised against female politicians and activists. On social media, young women are attacked based on their previous personal relationships which is uncommon amongst their male counterparts. Fadzai, Sekai and Kudzai described how these assaults influenced their well-being and relationships. These were usually done by ghost

accounts also described by Flynn (2017) as vile individuals who usually push the agendas of corrupt or incompetent politicians online, also identified as *varakashi* by the participants. Crawford and Andreassen (2015) also discuss how *invisible power* is harder to perceive because of its innate entrenchment in societal traditions. Using a human rights-based approach, they condemn socialization processes which are internalized practices that are discriminatory but are exercised as a means of one's identity. This is often meant as a cultural guard at both personal and national levels (p 674). Such elements can be seen in the way women are treated in both public and private spaces. This shows how young women experienced *invisible power*. In the private space, it intersects with both *visible* and *hidden* power in the public sphere through the patriarchal domination displayed on both the traditional and contemporary platforms of participation.

### 7. 3 Access to resources, including online platforms

Kabeer (2005) mentions resources as another dimension through which the concept of empowerment can be explored and how they are the medium through which agency is exercised. They are distributed through various institutions and relationships in the society. Relationships in the participants' activism have proven to be important in their political elevation. As mentioned above, families remain the primary source of support for most of the participants and for some like Kudzai, their communities contributed a lot to their rise. The social support from the participants' networks is important to their contributions in the constituencies they represent. For this reason, proponents of empowerment theory suggest that empowerment should be changed from individuals to groups (Kabeer, 2005). This means that individuals seeking empowerment may need a little outside encouragement from others who can give it. Empowerment itself cannot be granted, but barriers can be removed (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Meaning that, anyone wishing to be empowered must claim it (Mosedale, 2005).

According to Kabeer (2005), resources can be distributed through various institutions where some actors exercise greater authority over others. An analysis of the participants' responses indicates that most of the sponsorship was upon recommendation from political parties. Two constraints to adequate or fair resource distribution in electoral financing are identified in the findings. One is the limited ability by young women to raise funds and the other is their position in political parties. Some of the participants indicated this when explaining how they were excluded from sponsorship opportunities by businesspeople as they were considered weaker candidates and therefore a *waste to investment*. This resonates with the article by

Muriaas, Wang, & Murray (2021) on gendered political financing where such barriers are identified. Muriaas et al, describe how this happens because women are excluded from the networks where financing is discussed and are also regarded as *newcomers* in comparison to men. It leaves very little room for significant fundraising. In the case of the participants in this study, they relied mostly on small donations from family and sympathizers. In Kudzai's case, the political party did not offer any financial support and she eventually had to rely on *hope*.

### *Information as a resource*

The control of information through mass media is identified as a major contribution to online political participation by Hagen (2000). Zimbabwe currently has one state-controlled television station and several radio stations. This makes social media a good alternative for participation (Nyoni, 2017), since having only one platform available can be used to manipulate citizens and politicians (Crawford and Andreassen, 2015). This shows that with the adoption of social media, it is easier to navigate spaces that have previously been closed.

With the pressures and rooted value judgements and unequal burdens within politics in Zimbabwe, it is easy to see how the use of online platforms in participation is inherently good. For example, Sekai demonstrated how it was easier to organise using social media (p. 27) by being part of several online platforms where information could be relayed easily and effect action physically. This confirms the frustrations that the participants have in entering formal spaces which can sometimes mean having to be harassed or beaten or even just to adapt to dominant norms, which were discussed in Chapter Six. Participants seemed aware of the benefits and appeals of using online platforms for participation which are discussed by various scholars (Hagen, 2000, Loader, 2014, Zuniga 2010). These included, being able to communicate directly with their constituents, awareness raising and grassroot organizing.

Interesting insights from Calderaro (2010) also resonate with the technical challenges which the participants identify as hindrances to effective online political participation. Economic factors which hinder most of the Zimbabweans from accessing the internet or owning mobile phones, make it hard for young women to quantify the effectiveness of their participation online. The increased marginalisation of citizen oriented online spaces compared to entertainment spaces (Hagen, 2000) is another hindrance to effective online participation. This confirms how the digital divide can sometimes render efforts to participate online ineffective.

#### 7.4 Transformative Change?

Though agency and resources, previously assessed, make up an individual's capabilities or ability to create the life they want, achievement refers to the outcome of this potential (Kabeer, 2005, p. 15). Outcome, in this case, refers to the extent to which agency and resources are used to bring about change and impactful political participation both online and offline. My results showed how participants can find creative ways to participate, make a difference on many levels, and break down barriers that limit their potential to become the leaders they envision.

Women empowerment is also defined as the process by which women redefine and select who they can be and what they can do in situations where they have been marginalised by men (Mosedale 2005, p.252). What is more relevant in this study, is how young women have identified platforms and spaces where they can be more impactful compared to their male counterparts and older women in politics. This has been achieved by their constant efforts to overcome the barriers that limit their participation through strategy and actions. In their different capacities, my participants' involvement in Zimbabwean politics, surpasses the challenges they face thus paving way for other young female activists. This is what Kabeer (2005) refers to as transformative agency which can lead to long term change to the structures of repression. By occupying influential positions in political parties, the government and civil society organisations, the young women challenge power and prove that it is possible to occupy spaces that can advocate for their interests. Since these benefits are exemplary of meaningful political participation, they also assist in creating identities for the participants through the interactions they have both online and offline. In this way, the young women challenge perceptions about them that limit their opportunities, further breaking down barriers for the next person or generation of activists.

Hagen's conceptions of digital democracy question how online spaces can bring about change in political processes. He argues that political systems with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) can only play a role in how *but not how much* people can participate in political processes (2000, p. 56). Loader (2014) however focuses on the potential of social media to improve young people's political inequality. He identifies how the different forms of social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have become essential tools for the youth to prevail in traditionally closed spaces. Although there is no specific mention of young women, there is an acceptance that online spaces help citizens to take different forms which make them politically acceptable (Rheingold 1993). An interesting

view from one of the participants confirms this. In her submissions, Rudo who is the youngest of the participants and very eloquent on issues of technology, dismisses the negative connotations attributed to online participation by young women. She stated that, because she researches and posts facts on her platforms, she has never been attacked. In this scenario she takes the form of a teacher and global participant which makes it easier to gain political mileage as Loader et al (2014) expounds.

Cornwall & Rivas (2015) highlight that a transformative agenda should seek to change institutions and structures through which unequal access to control and resources is persistent. They also highlight why this is important to include the voices of the less powerful, in this case, young women. The result of this would be greater autonomy amongst the women and the creation of options or alternatives to develop themselves politically without having to conform to the ideals of the powerful in politics. An important feature of SDG 5, highlighted on page 3. Another way of ensuring this change is through solid networks (Crawford and Andreassen, 2013) which the participants have secured properly both online and offline. From the findings, the young women in their strategies and choices, seem to have taken strides to achieve the change they desire. Questions still arise; Are the strategies sufficient in their continued participation? Will they be able to implore them (strategies and choices) in the next election (2023)? This will be realized in the future and possibly explored further.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to examine the political participation of young women through identifying their motivations, challenges, strategies used to participate in politics. Presented below are the results of my research questions and analysis.

My participants used different strategies in participation. They were involved in civil society organisations, movements such as the student fraternity and trade unions. They described how they had developed their careers through these routes. One of the participants was the founder of a political party, others were local government councillors, political party members and civil society leaders. All of them were motivated by the desire to experience a better Zimbabwe which they hoped to contribute to. Although they indicated initial experiences which were sometimes characterized by violence, the young women managed to continue participating in politics.

They used a broad range of strategies of participation both online and offline. Participation involved demonstrations, protests, electoral campaigns and contest. This research revealed that participants were more comfortable with using social media in their participation. Because of their age, proximity to power and technological understanding, they had a great appreciation of online spaces and considered them to be more accessible. These forms of participation showed the political awareness of the participants and an appreciation of how politics was evolving globally, in spite of the various challenges they faced.

Due to traditional norms and cultures which manifest themselves in both public and private lives of young women, their experiences and contributions can sometimes be undervalued or less appreciated. Participants described a number of barriers that limited their participation. These included male patronage, forms of abuse, limited security, and financial constraints. Those who were part of political parties also explained how unfair the processes which were carried out internally were. They lamented the constant expectations to conform to societal standards. Additionally, they did not appreciate various notions that viewed them as weak or unconscious citizens in the politics of the country.

It is therefore important to examine and safeguard political participation of young women in various ways. This is because, they contribute a lot to political systems. It is important that they are represented in the formal political system although they may be considered inexperienced. The participants in this research reflected political consciousness and they were very active in the spaces they occupied. However, their use of social media was a

strategy to curb the various barriers they are faced with. Political participation is an empowering tool that can foster change in authoritative regimes such as Zimbabwe. It is therefore necessary to continue exploring the different synergies implored by young women in political participation. Other forms of participation such as social media should also be understood using the context in which they are used. Understanding Zimbabwe's governance system and previously or currently used methods of media, assists in proffering any solutions to assist young women in their participation.

#### *Recommendations for further research*

The participants in this study have positioned themselves well in the political arena. They are experienced and have built support systems and resilience to the various barriers. Whilst they highlight how they got involved in activism and politics; they limit themselves because of the scope of this study. It would be interesting for future studies to focus on young women who are at the beginning of their political careers to understand the processes that lead to some of the ways of participation highlighted in this study. It would also be fascinating to understand the participation of young women in political and electoral processes post 2023 (year of the next general election). Further exploration of the role of social media in political participation including the synergies between online and offline participation would also be prudent in this digital age.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

<u>Demographic Information</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age</li><li>• Nationality</li><li>• Ethnicity (eg. Shona, Ndebele)</li><li>• Education</li></ul>
<u>Questions about involvement in politics</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How long have you been active in political activism in Zimbabwe? What is your level of involvement Do you see your efforts in these activities as political? Why or why not?</li><li>2. Have you been elected as a representative in any formal political body? (e.g local governments, parliament, state-level, etc.)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If No, have you run for a representative position in a formal political body?</li></ul></li><li>3. Have you been a member of a political party or movement in Zimbabwe?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the name of the political party/movement that you are a member of in Zimbabwe?</li><li>• How long have you been a member of this political party/movement?</li></ul></li><li>4. What was your first experience with the political dynamics in Zimbabwe?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you think the voices of young women are represented in Zimbabwean politics?</li><li>• As a young woman, what are your main concerns about Zimbabwean politics?</li><li>• What has influenced your choices and decision to take part in political activism in Zimbabwe?</li></ul></li></ol>



<p><u>Experiences and challenges of using social media in political activism.</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which social media platforms have you used in your political activism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that they have been effective in advancing the cause you fight for?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. What are your experiences of using social media in political activism as a young woman in Zimbabwe? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has it been difficult to navigate?</li> <li>• Is the reception different between men and women?</li> <li>• Do you feel like your activities in the community, local or central government politics influence the reception you get online?</li> <li>• Do you think that your experiences have been influenced by your gender? If so please explain?</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. What are the major challenges of using social media in political participation as a female activist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your personal experience regarding any of these challenges?</li> <li>• What is your reflection regarding these challenges? What do you think that might be the reason behind it?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. How have these experiences influenced your political participation?</li> </ol>
<p><u>Social media as an alternative and effective form of political participation</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeing that other movements such as #Feesmustfall and #Metoo have had a lot of success in advancing their causes via social media, do you think this can be an effective way of creating change in Zimbabwean politics?</li> <li>2. Do you think that through your engagement using social media you can influence politics in Zimbabwe?</li> </ol>

	<p>3. How would you encourage other young women to use social media in their activism? Which tools and platforms would you recommend?</p>
<p><u>Closing Remarks</u></p>	<p>Please mention any additional comments you would like to add.</p> <p>Thank you for your participation</p>

## Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent form

### Information letter and Informed consent form

#### **Topic: Social Media and Young Women's Political Empowerment: Exploring the effect of online violence in Zimbabwe**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore how online violence affects young women's political participation in Zimbabwe. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

I am a master's student pursuing Master of Philosophy in Global Development-theory and practice at university of Bergen Norway. In fulfilment of the requirements to earn this degree, I am carrying out a research project to explore how online violence affects young women's political participation in Zimbabwe. The other objectives include:

To investigate how online harassment has impacted young female politicians and activists' contribution to the country's politics.

To establish how social media can be used to enhance young women's political participation.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

Victor Chimhutu- Associate Professor in the department of health promotion and development, University of Bergen

Ennie Makoni - Student of MPhil in Global Development Theory and Practice, University of Bergen

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

Sample selection is based on individual criteria of being a young female politician or activist from Zimbabwe with access to social media.

Must have some knowledge about Zimbabwean politics and the role women have in the national discourse.

Individuals must be 18 years old and above for their consent to be accepted.

The selection of young female activists and politicians as an interest population is due to their status as minority individuals who participate in spaces that are traditionally meant for men.

For the project, I seek between five to eight participants.

#### **What does participation involve for you?**

Participation is in the form of semi-structured interviews with possibilities of follow-up discussions. This is necessary for obtaining accurate information and understanding of experiences in relation to how social media has affected your political activism.

Your information might be recorded either electronically or by hand. This will be through taking notes in a booklet during the interview or video recordings during interviews as part of documentation for the research if necessary.

The interview including follow up conversations might take between 45 minutes to 1 hour with the options for break and postponement based on your schedule.

The interview might include some background information about you and experiences with social media and political participation and you have the right to decline to respond or answer questions that you deem uncomfortable.

### **Participation is voluntary!**

Participation in the research is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving any reason. All information about you will be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data.**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Access to your personal data will be available to the researcher, the project supervisor, and the University as the main institution responsible for the project.

We will replace your name and contact details with a specific code. The list of names, contact details and assigned codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected information and it will be stored on a highly encrypted server provided by the University with access to the researcher and the University of Bergen personnel.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end in June 2022. Personal data collected as part of research regulations will be discarded completely and items such as sound recordings, interview notes etc., will be destroyed without any trace.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the research group on the handling of your personal data.

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- **Victor Chimhutu**

Associate Professor in the department of health promotion and development, University of Bergen

Email: Victor.Chimhutu@uib.no

Contact number: +47 55 58 28 55

- **Ennie Makoni**

Student of MPhil in Global Development Theory and Practice, University of Bergen

Email: Ennie.makoni@student.uib.no

Contact number: +47 98 45 38 40

- UiB Data Protection Officer: Janecke Helene Veim (Email: personvernombud@uib.no)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17

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**Consent form**

**1.0** I have received and understood information about the project: Social Media and Young Women’s Political Empowerment: Exploring the effect of online violence in Zimbabwe. I give consent:

- ◆ to participate in interviews
- ◆ to participate in follow up interviews and informal discussions

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. December 2022.

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(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix C: NSD Ethical Clearance Form



MELDESKJEMA FOR BEHANDLING

AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Norsk

Meldeskjema /Social Media and Young Women's Political Empowerment: Exploring the effect of onlin.../Vurdering

Vurdering

Referansenummer

732173

Type

Standard

Dato

12.07.2022

Prosjekttittel

Social Media and Young Women's Political Empowerment: Exploring the effect of online violence in Zimbabwe

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Universitetet i Bergen / Det psykologiske fakultet/Hemil-senteret

Prosjektansvarlig

Victor Chimhutu

Student

Ennie Charity Makoni

Prosjektperiode

30.12.2021-30.12.2022

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Særlige

Rettslig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene kan starte så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det rettslige grunnlaget gjelder til 30.12.2022

Meldeskjema

Kommentar

Data Protection Services has assessed the change registered on 07.07.2022.

The period for processing personal data has been extended until 30.12.2022.

If it later becomes necessary to process personal data for a longer period, then it may be necessary to inform your participants.

We will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Contact person: Markus Celiussen

Good luck with the rest of the project!