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FREE FOR ALL BUT NOT FREE FOR 52%



A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE'S 30 JULY 2018 HARMONISED ELECTION

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Introduction

Zimbabwe held her historical Harmonised Elections on 30 July 2018. This was the first plebiscite without Robert G. Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai. The political environment in Zimbabwe has been very fragile around national elections, evidenced by the high levels of violence and intimidation during the elections in 2000, 2005 and 2008. Mugabe's rule was generally characterised by political intimidation, violence and repression on dissenting voices and opposition political parties. Therefore, being a politically active woman in Zimbabwe has historically not been without risk. In 2008 the violence escalated, political motivated rape and in some instances gang rape was used as a means to punish female opposition politicians, supporter or their spouses. Without the long standing two arch-rivals, 30 July was presented by Emmerson Mnangagwa as a break from the past, in which he invited observers from all over the world and thereby reigniting a re-engagement with the international community who had been prevented from observing elections in Zimbabwe by Mugabe. The new major presidential contenders became Mnangagwa leading The Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and Nelson Chamisa leading a unified opposition political movement under the banner of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance. Moreover, significant for the election was the diversity of political parties contesting with a record of 23 presidential candidates on show, 4 of them being women and 19 men. With; (i) the international observers and media on the ground; (ii) less incidences of overt violence; (iii) opposition parties' rallies happening with minimal or no disturbances; (iv) civil society facilitating debates with candidates across the political divide on key policy and developmental issues; (v) state media covering opposition rallies (although still criticised for being biased), Mnangagwa strived to have 30 July Harmonised Elections pass the credibility test. However, observing the 2018 election with a feminist lens it is obvious that although progress has been made, the political environment is still not conducive for women's participation. This is the core issue we are responding to in this report.

The report is based on grounded observations from AK and IYWD's team of international and local observer, narratives from young women candidates, officials at local government and regional levels, including the Gender Focal Person for Bindura Municipality and Provincial Head of the Ministry for Women's Affairs, as well as representatives from local NGO's working with women's rights in Zimbabwe and debriefing meetings with inter-governmental organizations such as SADC and AU. Selected cases with female candidates are featured throughout the report to illustrate some of the core challenges facing women, when standing for election in their local communities.

¹RG Mugabe was forced from power on 21 November 2017 following state takeover by the Military on 15 November 2017 The Herald.co.zw

Policy and Legal Framework

Zimbabwe is a signatory to a number of human rights instruments and has a comprehensive legal framework that provides entitlements for young women's participation in politics and governance. Some of the key relevant provisions are;

- The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) which sought to abolish any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of sex.
- The National Gender Policy (2004). Section 6.2.3.2 seeks to “redress the numerical gender imbalances in decision making and politics by increasing the numerical representation of women to 52%”
- SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) (Articles 12 & 13). A target of 50% representation in decision-making positions by women has been set and the aim is to achieve this in all SADC countries by 2015 (Although this target was missed by many miles)
- The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) Chapter 2 Section 17 which emphasizes gender equality as a national objective and Sections 56 and 80 on equality and non-discrimination
- Section 124 (b) of Zimbabwe' 2013 constitution provides 60 non-constituency seats to women for the 2 first parliaments, elected under the new constitution. Thereby, 6 women from each of the 10 provinces are elected through a system of proportional representation based on the votes casted for candidates representing political parties in the general election of National Assembly members.
- Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 on Gender Equality
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) which also provides for gender equality was adopted and ratified in March 2018.

Women's Participation in Numbers

This section provides an overview of women's political participation in the Harmonised 2018 elections in terms of numbers, which provide an insight of the current trend when compared to previous elections.

Women's Representation on the Voters' Roll

When it comes to voting women are well represented on the voters roll and constitute the majority of the voters with 52 % of the registered voters being women in 2013 and 54% in 2018. Thereby the gender composition on the genders roles reflects the demography in Zimbabwe where 52% of the population is constituted by women.

Women's representation on the voters' roll				
	2013 ²		2018 ³	
	Number*	%	Number	%
Women	3.050.651	52%	3.073.190	54%
Men	2.824.458	48 %	2.622.516	46%
Total	5.874.114	100%	5.695.707	100%

**) The number of registered voter during the Jun 2013's voters roll was highly contested. The Research and Advocacy Unit concluded in their 2013 report that the roll contained well over 1000 000 000 deceased or departed voters.*

Candidates for National Assembly

Proportionally women's political participation as candidates for National Assembly in Zimbabwe's elections are highly skewed in comparison to their male counterparts. The two largest political parties ZANU-PF and MDC-A consisted of respectively 91% and 90% male candidates⁴.

² Research and Advocacy Unit, 2013: Key Statistics from The June 2013 Voters' Roll

³ Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2018

However, the number of women contesting in the 2013 election compared to the 2018 election has increased dramatically. In 2013, 44 women from the two largest parties ZANU PF and MDC-T⁵ contested for national assembly, where in 2018 the number of women contesting for a seat in the National Assembly among all the parties was 237. It is here important to note that due to the large variety of parties contesting in the 2018 election, the total number of women and men contesting increased from 420 in 2013 to 1648 in 2018.

Candidates for National Assembly		
	2013⁶ <i>Only candidates representing ZANU-PF and MDC-T</i>	2018⁷ <i>Candidates representing all parties</i>
Women	44 (10,5%)	237 (14,4%)
Men	376 (89,5%)	1411 (85,6%)
Total	420	1648

Women's Seats in the National Assembly

The 2018 election result in 85 women making it to parliament, where 25 was elected and 60 seats allocated through the Proportional Representation (PR) quota system.

Women's seats in the National Assembly		
	2013⁸	2018⁹
Directly elected women	25	25
Seats occupied by women (including proportional representation)	85	85
Seat occupied by men	185	185
Seats occupied by women in percentage	31,5%	31,5%

⁴ZESN 2018: Harmonised elections – Preliminary Statement ⁵Data has not been available on women contesting from the other parties contesting in 2013.

⁶ZESN 2013 Harmonised Elections Report ⁷ZESN 2018: Harmonised Election - Preliminary Statement

⁸Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014: Women in Parliament in 2013 - the year in review ⁹ZEC, 2018: National assembly distribution by province, sex and parties.

Candidates for Presidency 2018

2018 became the election with 4 female presidential candidates..¹⁰

Candidates for Presidency 2018		
Women	Men	Total
4	19	23

Candidates for Local Council

Although, the number of women contesting for LC has increased from 740 in 2008 to 1176 in 2018, the number of women elected for LC decreased from 373 in 2008 to 261 in 2018.

Candidates for Local Councils ¹¹			
	2008	2013	2018
Total number of women contesting	740	899	1176
Total number of women elected	373	323	261
Representation in percentage	19%	16.2%	13.3%

¹⁰<https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/joyce-mujuru-melba-dzapasi-thokozani-khupe-elections-zimbabwe/4498258.html>

¹¹Wipsu.co.zw

Mashonaland Central Local Governments¹²

Area	Number of Wards	Elected females	Elected Males	Female percentage representation
Shamva	29	3	26	10%
Pfura	40	2	38	5%
Guruve	24	-	24	0%
Rushinga	25	-	25	0%
Mbire	17	1	16	5%
Muzarabani	29	2	27	7%
Bindura Rural	21	-	21	0%
Bindura Urban	12	1	11	8%
Proportional representation	10	6	4	60%

Challenges for Women's Political Participation

As seen above, women constitute the majority of the registered voters, but are grossly under-represented in the real decision-making arena. According to our observations and conversations with female political candidates, a number of challenges prevented women from contesting and being elected into office. These challenges are of a structural and systematic nature that sometimes is not seen or understood by an ordinary election observation process. In this report, we have tried to identify some of the issues that were recurrent in our observation and conversations with women in the run up to the 2018 Harmonised Election. These include but are not limited to political culture and structures, limited economic resources, social norms and sexism.

¹³<https://za.boell.org/2018/07/25/zimbabwes-2018-elections-charismatic-appeals-vs-performance-legitimacy>

Political Culture and Structures of Exclusion

Despite constitutional provisions to promote women's political participation and ensuring gender parity in Zimbabwe, political parties generally fail to comply with such regulations. While on the one hand, political parties claim to respect policy and legal frameworks to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, on the other hand, they trample upon the very principles. The same bigotry and patriarchal culture that women experience in their personal lives is reflected in the political parties. Sexism is prevalent and normalised in political parties, defended as jokes or as embracing status quo. Such invisible violation of women in political parties goes without condemnation. Eventually, when it comes to voting or selection of leadership, women are not anywhere near 'leaders' but rather objects of sexual gratification and cheerleaders of male leaders in the parties. Women are expected to obey the orders of the male leaders, the same way they are expected to obey and submit to their husbands, or male counterparts in their lives.

The female politicians who managed to contest under their political parties confirmed that they were often subjected to smear-campaigns orchestrated by their own political parties during primaries, or by the opponent during the national election. The smear-campaigns were targeting women for their looks, equating their political engagement with prostitution and taunting them for their lack of economic means to follow through on campaign promises.

The few women who have challenged values practised in the parties have either been suspended, expelled, demoted or stripped of any position they may hold in or for the party. Some, who may not have openly challenged the party, but were perceived as a rival, were discriminated against in different ways that prevented their candidacy. For example, the excuse of technical errors of registration, CVs and applications mysteriously disappearing. Less discreet, some female candidates were pushed to stampede for the women's quota in Parliament. This has resulted in a new trend where a large number of female candidates contested as independents, after having been denied the chance to contest for their original political party.

When it comes to intimidation and violence, as long as it happens intra-party it is normalised. Even when the culprits are known, they enjoy impunity. And it is such cultures of violence that increase the cost of participation for women, especially the young women who are more exposed to sexual violations and harassment and age discrimination from the elderly women and men in the party. Several female candidates reported sexual violence, harassment and intimidation from fellow party members. In some instances, the intimidation targeted their families as well.

The existing quota system provided by Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution to increase women's representation is not spared from political manipulation. The quota system allocates 60 additional seats to women for the period of the first two parliaments following the adoption of the constitution in 2013. The quota system has led to an increase in women's representation in the National Assembly from 13.3% percent in 2008 to 33.2% in 2018 (IPU). However, the results of the 2018 harmonised election showed that only 14% of the women were elected into office. Thus, there is reason to believe that affirmative action is still necessary to maintain women's representation in parliament. Moreover, the provision of the quota system only allocated seats to women in parliament and not to the local councils. In fact, as illustrated above the trend of women's representation in local councils has been going downward since 2008. Enhancing women's political participation in Local Council is key to strengthen the influence of more disadvantaged groups in decision making e.g in rural communities and urban high density areas.

The fact that candidates for Proportional Representation (PR) come from political parties has led manipulation of criterion of coming up with party lists. The selection of the candidates in the parties has been considered grossly unfair in non-transparent and undemocratic manner. This naturally subjected woman to abuse by those charged with the power to determine the lists. In some instances, the PR candidates were appointed by the parties' regional chairpersons and some of the candidates were removed or moved down the lists without being informed of or agreeing with the decisions. Moreover, young candidates or those perceived strong were often pushed out of the quota system to the advantage of older women or those with more power and resources in the parties. Furthermore, once finally elected into Parliament through PR, the women are not easily accepted by fellow parliamentarians as equally influential as they are accused of not representing any constituency and have not been elected by the people into power.

CASE A – Rumbidzai

**Rumbi (name changed to protect identity of candidate)*

Rumbidzai Phiri, 45, decided to run for office as local councillor for a peri-urban ward in the 2018 Harmonised Elections. After having participated in a number of trainings with IYWD, Rumbidzai was inspired to gain more influence on local politics and advance social services delivery issues for her community. However, she fell ill and was unable to submit the necessary documentation to contest for nomination within her political party* (name withheld). Although she had informed party officials of her situation, she was denied the chance to submit her CVs after the deadline. Rumbidzai was, however, convinced that even if she had applied to the party, her application would have failed as candidates are selected according to their financial status rather than political vision or leadership capabilities. So she decided to contest as an independent candidate instead. When asked by IYWD-AK team on the ground on why she thought she wasn't going to be accepted as a candidate by her own party, Rumbidzai had this to say: "If you do not have money, the party won't take you as a candidate. They do not want a woman with nothing". A sentiment which was repeated by other female candidates. Soon after she announced her intention to run as independent, Rumbidzai's started experiencing from members from her party which she had left. They also colluded with her landlord and she got evicted from her house by her landlord. Meanwhile, Rumbidzai's former fellow party members proceeded to conduct smear-campaigns against her, saying that anyone would be foolish to vote for a homeless person, all while mocking her physical appearance. Individuals from the party's campaign team threatened Rumbidzai directly, stating that they wanted to "burn her bones". Despite her obstacles in this election Rumbidzai is still determined to run as an independent candidate in the next elections in Zimbabwe.

¹⁴ This has nothing to do with sex but used as defamatory terminology for women to denigrate them

¹⁵ The Zimbabwean Constitution provides for a 60 Seats Quota for women in Parliament. This is a transitional measure which was set for 2 terms from 2013 to 2023

Economic Violence

Economic resources play an important role in influencing political power, but most critically in electoral campaigns. The bigger political parties can contribute with funding and campaign resources to their candidates, but most have a lot of personal costs as well.

This places women and particularly young women in politics in a disadvantaged position. Women are often subjected to economic violence including limited access and lack of control and ownership of economic resources or funds. For most women and young women who we interfaced with under the electoral observations, had no personal claim to money, or other income generating property. And where the household had some form of income or economic means, they are likely to be controlled by male figures in the household, either father, spouse or siblings. In addition, on a general level, patriarchal structures of inheritance and property rights limit women's access to economic means. For instance, women lack claim to ownership of their own houses or residential land, especially in rural, farming and non-urban areas. This interconnection of economic resources and political power was confirmed by all interviewed candidates who underlined the importance of financial resources to conduct successful campaigns to compete with men.

The control and ownership of economic resources in the household is just one layer of the economic violence that women in politics are exposed to. The second layer is the prioritisation of economic resources within the political parties, where the same control and ownership are enjoyed by a privileged male dominated elite within the party leadership. Therefore, resources available to the parties do rarely trickle down to women and young women candidates, especially the candidates at local council level are neglected, who need financial support for their campaigns.

For independent women candidates, the struggle is even deeper. They hardly have anyone or anywhere to rely on for economic resources for their campaigns and other electoral logistics. This is even made worse by bad electoral practices such as vote buying, corruption and other rigging practices that are used by political parties especially incumbents, to bribe voters and buy loyalty from their supporters.

Moreover, politically active women including election observers, party agents and aspiring candidates reported being discriminated against in the distribution of government support programmes such as food aid, farming inputs and land allocation. As a result, many women have confirmed that this reality influence their level of participation in political processes. Not only political candidates reported to be discriminated, also several young female members of IYWD, who had been active as local observers during the election day reported to be discriminated against in the distribution of government services. This is especially the case in politically volatile and non-urban regions like Mashonaland Central, where the majority of our observations were carried out.

Social Norms and Sexism

Patriarchal structures and sexist tendencies like the ones mentioned above not only manifest themselves in the political and economic spheres of women's lives, but also in the power dynamics and gender roles within the local communities and households. In the rural areas, religious and cultural practices as well as the mainstream media are key drivers that reinforce traditional perceptions on gender roles, whereas in the urban areas social media are increasingly becoming the main platforms for public debates.

Familial Politics

Through our observations and conversations with several female candidates, it was clear that the bigotry and patriarchal behaviour experienced in the political parties mirrored their daily lives at the household level. The majority of the women came from male led households, where male domination was the order of the day. Even when some of the young women and women were breadwinners, decision making solely lied with their spouses, fathers or other such male figures. Where the women did not have moral support from their families, they were subject to physical and psychological violence by their families.

Through conversations with female candidates it was highlighted that also women were complicit in perpetrating violence and smear campaigns against their fellow women. For example, some of the female candidates experienced patriarchal practices perpetuated by female in-laws who would actively campaign against them or show open support to rivalling candidates from more dominant parties. However, it is important to note, that intimidations and fear of violence was a major reason for lack of family support of the female candidates. These views are examples of structural discrimination and violation that happens to women but because some of these practices have been normalized, no actions are taken to address the situation.

Religious and cultural oppression

According to the Constitution it is the responsibility of the traditional leaders to promote and uphold cultural values of their communities and, in particular, to promote sound family values. According to our observations the religious and traditional leaders reinforced patriarchy and continued to push women to the peripheries of political participation. Also, we observed that the role of traditional leaders was conflicted; it certainly has shifted from promoting and safeguarding the foundational *Ubuntu*¹⁶ values of our humanity as an African people. Culture and tradition were being interpreted to benefit one privileged political outfit, at the expense of values that guarantee safe spaces for women's political participation. In some instances, some of the traditional leaders publicly imposed their political views and threatened voters that if they do not vote in a certain way, they will face the consequences after election. Additionally, the fact that most of the traditional leaders (both paramount chiefs and village heads) are male shows the extent to which the traditional institution is still far from promoting positive social norms based on *ubuntu* and the equality of women.

While ideally for positive strength and faith in their participation women would find it easy to resort to religion, our observations and conversations with women and young women noted that in some instances religion was used to distance women from political participation. In some religious groups, their doctrines provide a predetermined political position and the role of women in politics. This made it difficult for women to be supportive of each other, outside religious prescriptions. In addition, the proliferation of religious groupings that preach doctrine of women's subordinate roles to men also added on the layers normalising the weak position of women's voices in politics and public discourse generally. This subjective interpretation of what is holy and righteous for women to do and what is not definitely had an impact on women's participation.

¹⁶ good (moral) nature, humaneness (<https://zu.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/isizulu-english/ubuntu> 4-11-2018)

Intimidation and Discrimination by the Media

During the last decade access and use of the internet has developed at a dramatic pace. Cellular coverage has expanded from 6% in 2006 to 80% in 2016. In 2017, 40% of the total population actively used the internet amounting to 6.72 million active users and 5.92 million active mobile internet users equating to 35% of the population. Today most Zimbabweans access internet services and social media via mobile devices (67%).¹⁸ The widely accessible use of the internet is something that changes how political campaigns are formed, but also how dialogue and communication with and about political candidates takes place. In fact, threats and violent behaviour towards women is something that is increasing both in the cyber-space and in the physical world. For instance, the use of social media to threaten and humiliate Zimbabwean women supports the patriarchal structures and sexist behaviour that prevent and suppress women from taking active part in politics and civic life. The threats undermine their integrity and security of women and thus place them in a further discouraging position to take on political or civic leadership. Social media has popularised the word *hure*- a Shona word for prostitute that has widely been used online and offline targeting to denigrate women's participation.

Overall the coverage of women politician in the mainstream media has been limited during the election campaigning. Often, when female politicians occurred in the mainstream media, the focus was on their private life such as marital problems, sexual life, gossip and fashion whereas the male politician received more substantive focused coverage.

This can be attributed to social norms that seek to police the lives of women. Another reason could also be over-subscription of male journalists over female journalists in the media fraternity where female journalists hardly report on politics but men do. This results in the sensationalisation of women's narratives. And with the social media, the sensationalized messages of women quickly become viral. The tired use of the *hure* terminology against many female candidates in the run up to 2018 election is a testimony to such.

CASE B - Chipo

**(name changed to protect identity of candidate)*

Initially Chipo wanted to contest as a candidate for a political party. She submitted her CV to her party but it was not found by the filing officers among others. She followed up with the office she had submitted the CV to and was told that the CV was pulled out because the party did not trust her enough because of her liberal political ideas. As a result she chose to contest as an independent candidate.

Shortly after, the rumors about Chipo's plans to contest reached her husband through party people who had removed her CV, before she notified the husband. Her husband became jealous and started calling her a prostitute. He was afraid to lose her, - that she would leave him if she became successful as a politician. It is a prevalent perception that if a woman become successful, other men will be interested in her. The frustration of the husband led him to burn down their house, including the furniture and clothes for Chipo and their children. He took her money and her phone and left her. Afterwards he kept harassing her by sending her threatening text messages. She has reported him to the police, but she doesn't feel protected by the police. According to Chipo there have been less overt violence from the ruling political party, but there have been other types of violence. She expresses it as:

"No violence, but the violence was coming from the mouth"

Members of her political party continued to intimidate her after she decided to contest as an independent candidate. They called her *hure* and tried to convince everyone in the compound that she was a *hure*. They called threatening her on the phone in odd hours of the night. They followed up and beaten her campaign team members. On election day the political party forced her supporters to be assisted voters and pretend they were illiterate. After the election they were mocking her because she did not get elected and she and her family and supporters can no longer government support in the form of food aid and farming seeds. Her husband never came back.

Despite of all the intimidation and violence she has endured, she wants to contest again as an independent candidate for the next election. Her message to other young women is:

"Although it is tough, never surrender"

Conclusion

The Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD), Afrika Kontakt (AK) and other allies, celebrate the relatively high number of women contesting in the 2018 Zimbabwean Harmonised Elections compared to previous elections. The number of women participating in the election as voters and candidates, especially the high number of female independent candidates, prove that women are willing to engage in political processes. Although, we acknowledge improvements in terms of political tolerance towards opposition parties and party diversity, it is clear that women are still constrained by deep-rooted patriarchal structures of oppression in the society manifested by economic inequalities, socio-religious practices and sexist norms that permeate their participation in decision making processes.

In spite of a rich legal framework and a catalogue of regional and international instruments to promote women's rights for political participation, the findings of this report demonstrate the need to deconstruct the structural systems of oppression that currently militate against women's rights of political participation. This includes reforming the legal framework, especially the electoral act in order to guarantee equal representation. Furthermore, considering the political parties being the main gate keepers of political power and influence, there is need for them to have policies and internal systems that addresses sexual harassment and the sexist culture and make space for women in the leadership structures and as candidates for the parties.

With all the above experiences of women in the run to 30 July 2018 Harmonised Elections, we conclude that the election was not free and fair for more than 52% of the population.

Recommendations

- ***Family oriented approach:*** There is need to include members of the immediate family and spouses or fathers in the preparation of women in training and motivating them to contest for political office when they choose to be candidates. That way the family can get prepared together, balance expectations and clarify possible prejudice and false perceptions of the men in the family.
- ***Feminist movement building:*** There is a need to strengthen the feminist movement for united actions and advocacy in order to promote women's participation in politics. This requires a common politicized feminist agenda among women rights activists across political divisions. This furthermore encompasses a critical reflection on the effectiveness of the current practices that the feminist movements in Zimbabwe are using to influence change.

- ***An effective Quota system for Women*** should be adopted before the next election in The new quota system should accommodate for a 50/50 percentage of female and male representation and a 25 % representation of young women. It is further recommended that instead of allocating additional seats to women in parliament, the law should enforce the political parties to have an equal representation of women and men among their candidates in order to be eligible to contest at elections. The same system should be implemented at local council level.
- ***Information:*** increase information and knowledge sharing to change negative attitudes and behaviours towards young women's political participation
- ***Male allies:*** From our observations there is need for women to identify and have male allies who can also mobilise other men to support women. Such alliances are key not only for mobilising numbers for women but to also influence patriarchal structures and norms to shift. Traditional leaders as opinion makers are quite key as an ally however need adequate engagement and induction in feminism
- ***Media Training:*** It is our observation, that in order to enhance the coverage of women in the mainstream media and to positively deal with negative responses on social media, women candidates need to have media training. This has to be part of their preparation and education on standing out as a political leader. The media training should include helping them to develop strategies to deal with verbal abuse among others. We should advocate for improved media coverage of women's issues and women candidates pre, during and post the election period.
- ***Political parties*** should adopt and implement gender policies that ensure women and young women's representation in party leadership and policy committees, not just in the women's wing. They should also provide support and resources to ensure the election of women candidates, including a quota for young women.
- ***Public funding*** measures that promote the nomination and election of women into decision making bodies should be put in place. This may include earmarking funds for activities supporting women's participation, such as providing direct funding for women's wings, withholding funding from political parties that do not reach a threshold of women nominated, or increasing funding for parties with higher levels of gender equality. The government of Zimbabwe should ensure transparency in campaign financing to limit the use of black money and illegal networks and companies. Regulations on political funding should be used to level the playing field in electoral competition. These can also work to ensure that women are able to compete on a more equal footing with men.