

WOMEN IN ZAMBIA'S ELECTION: FIGHTING FOR PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

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I spent the summer as a Fulbright scholar in Zambia observing the campaign and general elections, which took place on August 11. The presidential contest was between the two major parties: Patriotic Front (PF) led by incumbent, Edgar Lungu and the United Party for National Development (UPND) headed by Hakainde Ichilema. There was much excitement in the country manifested by campaign songs, slogans, colorful political party promotion materials including clothing, t-shirts, scarves, umbrellas and even cars bearing the portraits and names of candidates. T-shirts and colorful clothing materials were handed out freely to supporters. The streets bore huge billboard advertisements and pictures of candidates. Television commercials churned out political songs, some of which quickly became household songs! Indeed campaign spending reached unbelievable amounts in a modest economy. It was an interesting time to be in the country.

The focus of my research was on women and their race to become members of parliament. This was my second year studying the role of women in parliament and the challenges they face in being elected. This summer, I interviewed female parliamentary candidates in Lusaka district. The general outcome of the

election reflected low numbers of women. Since Zambia does not have a quota system as other countries the number of women in parliament has remained low. The encouraging news is that the vice-president, Inonge Wina, a woman, has been retained. Also, there was a woman running for president, Edith Nawakwi. She heads the fourth party and this was her second time standing as a presidential candidate. Unfortunately the number of women in the Zambian parliament did not increase following the election. 106 women contested the parliamentary elections and 26 won seats, representing a 0.7 percent increase. Overall, women make up 17 percent of the parliamentarians or 26 out of 156. This is a low figure considering that African countries have been campaigning for 50-50 gender representation and some have at least 30 percent.

In the absence of a quota system, women's numbers remain static. The factors contributing to the low number of women elected to parliament in Zambia include the high cost of running a campaign, negative attitudes against women, low education levels, electoral violence and poor media coverage. Also, women did not take advantage of the media the way men did, although the more educated women effectively used social media to their

advantage. The women who did succeed were well educated beyond high school and were adopted by the main parties, which provided money to their candidates. Candidates belonging to smaller political parties or independents faced major financial and promotional changes. As a result most of the women elected belonged to the ruling party, PF. Most of the women's platforms seemed to be similar, promising to provide development, skills for women and employment for the youths. However, when they were adopted by their political party their platforms were merged with the party's general platform.

Some factors leading to the success of the candidates include political party adoption, status of the party, experience of the candidates – incumbents fared better - financial resources, candidate's educational level, and the ability to utilize the media, including social media. Female candidates were assisted and coached by the Women's Lobby Group.

I also led a workshop for women in politics. Among the women I interviewed was Ms. Annie Chinyanta (pictured in electoral gear). The group picture shows women who participated in the election in various capacities, and belonging to different political parties.

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