



*Women and Elections in
Zimbabwe: Insights from the
Afrobarometer.*

August 2014

Background¹

Women are mostly marginalized in African political processes, but nonetheless have one key area of equality with their men folk, and that is in voting: the ballot does not discriminate, even though the results of the balloting frequently do not meet the expectations of the voter. Elections are obviously an important component of democracy, and, even though many Afrobarometer studies indicate that African citizens have been losing faith in the value of elections, elections offer the only peaceful path for both attaining and consolidating democracy². But in the largely patriarchal societies that comprise most African countries, do women have the same voice and level of participation as their menfolk?

As Carolyn Logan and Michael Bratton have shown, women across Africa hold largely similar views on democracy to men, but differ in two important respects³. Women are more ambivalent, more frequently giving neutral or “don’t know” answers to questions, but, qualitatively, women are less convinced about the need for multiparty competition, with fears about divisiveness and greater tolerance of one-party regimes.

Furthermore, Logan has also shown that support for traditional leaders, for those that indicate that they actually have a traditional leader, is slightly stronger in rural, older, and less educated citizens (and more so for women), and correspondingly weaker in the young, urban and better educated.⁴ Traditional leaders are important for understanding elections in Zimbabwe as there has been considerable anecdotal reporting that they have adopted partisan political positions, can have considerable influence over rural voters, and, given the highly patriarchal nature of Zimbabwe’s culture, are likely to have strong sway over women.

Women in Zimbabwe may be marginalised in virtually all aspects of public and political life, but they do exert an influence through their voting. A recent report on the 2013 elections noted the enormous improvement in the rate of voting by these women in 2013⁵, and it is evident from other Zimbabwean research that women see participation in politics as important and have increasingly participated in such at least as voters⁶. However, a significant factor affecting participation in elections, in the later years of Independence, and especially since 2000, has been political violence associated with elections.

Relatively little political violence was reported between 1980 and 2000 by the women surveyed, although it is not the case that there was no political violence at other times, as, for example, in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1987, or that there was no political violence associated with

¹ This section draws mostly on a previous RAU report - see RAU (2010), *Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis*, Report produced by Idasa (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), and the Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). May 2010. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

² Moehler, D.C (2005), *Free and Fair, or Fraudulent and Forged: Elections and Legitimacy in Africa*. Working Paper No. 55. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS; Moehler, D.C., & Lindberg, S. I (2007), *Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap: The Role of Turnovers in Africa’s Emerging Democracies*. Working Paper No. 88. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS; Logan, C., & Cho, W. (2009), *Looking toward the Future: Alternations in Power and Popular Perspectives on Democratic Durability in Africa*. Working Paper No. 110. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS; Logan, C (2008), *Rejecting the Disloyal Opposition? The Trust Gap in mass Attitudes toward Ruling and Opposition Parties in Africa*. Working Paper No. 94. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

³ Logan, C., & Bratton, M (2006), *The Political Gender Gap in Africa: Similar Attitudes, Different Behaviours*. Working Paper No. 58. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

⁴ Logan, C (2008), *Traditional Leaders in Modern Africa: Can Democracy and the Chief co-exist?* Working Paper No. 93. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

⁵ RAU & The Women’s Trust (2014), *Does Encouraging Women to Register and Vote Make a Difference? A Preliminary Report on Women’s Experiences with the 2013 Elections*. Report prepared by Caroline Kache, Researcher [RAU]. March 2014. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT and THE WOMEN’S TRUST.

⁶ RAU (2010), *op cit*.

elections, as, for example, in 1990 and 1995. But the big change came in 2000, and subsequently the very high rates of political violence associated with the 2000 Parliamentary election, the 2002 Presidential election, and the notorious 2008 Presidential re-run election⁷. A startling 62% of women surveyed claim that they experienced political violence in 2008.

Apart from the views about political violence, the 2010 sample also reported very high rates of feeling unsafe during elections. By 2008, 68% of women reported feeling “*unsafe*” or “*extremely unsafe*” during elections, up from 22% in 2000 and a mere 5% in 1999⁸. Thus, it was highly encouraging that this recent report, on the SiMuka campaign⁹, indicated that so many women had turned out to vote despite serious fears about violence, and perhaps because of the much more peaceful atmosphere prevailing since 2008. Nonetheless, as suggested above, voting is a minimal requirement for democracy, and, in most views, democracy is more than merely voting: it requires active citizenship.

Thus, when research on the views of Zimbabweans shows that citizens have a high demand for democracy¹⁰, allied to good understandings about what democracy entails, it is interesting to see whether the participation in voting by Zimbabwean women is matched by wider participation in the socio-political life of the country. Here we will examine only the findings for Zimbabwe of the Afrobarometer studies briefly described above.

Methodology

Since the Afrobarometer provides online access to the data from all five rounds of the surveys in Zimbabwe, the data relating to five key questions that were repeatedly asked of Zimbabwean citizens were extracted. Whilst the questions were not identical in all respects, they are arguably equivalent for the purpose of analysis, and hence were treated as such for the purposes of comparing changes over the five rounds. The data on women only was extracted, with the cross-tabulation on residence – rural or urban. The questions were as follows:

- **With which one of these statements are you most in agreement? A, B or C? A:** *Democracy is preferable to any other form of government. B: To people like me, it doesn't matter what form of government. C: In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable.*
- **Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Zimbabwe? Are you:** *Not at all satisfied; Not very satisfied; Fairly satisfied; Very satisfied; Zimbabwe is not a democracy.*
- **There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?** Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
- **Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.**

⁷ For an overview of the violence associated with these elections, see CSVr (2009), *Subliminal Terror? Human rights violations and torture in Zimbabwe during 2008*. June 2009. JOHANNESBURG: CSVr.

⁸ See again, RAU (2010), *Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis*, Report produced by Idasa (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). May 2010. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

⁹ RAU & TWT (2014), *Does Encouraging Women to Register and Vote Make a Difference? A Preliminary Report on Women's Experiences with the 2013 Elections*. Report prepared by Caroline Kache, Researcher [RAU]. March 2014. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT and THE WOMEN'S TRUST.

¹⁰ For a broad overview of the Afrobarometer research on Zimbabwe and democracy, see RAU (2012), *Bucking the Trend: Africa, Zimbabwe, Demand for Democracy, and Elections*. May 2012. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

Statement 1: *Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Zimbabwe.* **Statement 2:** *Many political parties are needed to make sure that Zimbabweans have real choices in who governs them.*

- **How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: *Traditional Leaders/Chiefs/Elders?***
- **Did you vote in the last election?**¹¹

The responses were collapsed into binary variables for each question. For example, for the responses on trusting traditional leaders, the positive responses – *a great deal* and *a lot* – were summed as were the negative responses – *not at all* and *a little bit* – giving a combined binary frequency for a two opposed variables: *trust traditional leaders* and *do not trust traditional leaders*.

For each of the variables above, two cross-tabulations were extracted: gender and place of residence (rural or urban). The data was compiled as a time series for each question, with the time series dependent on whether the question was asked in a particular round.

The question relating to trust in traditional leaders was only asked in Rounds Two (2002-2003) and Four (2008-2009), but the remaining questions were asked in each of the five rounds. The results are reported as simple percentages, and no statistical analysis was carried out.

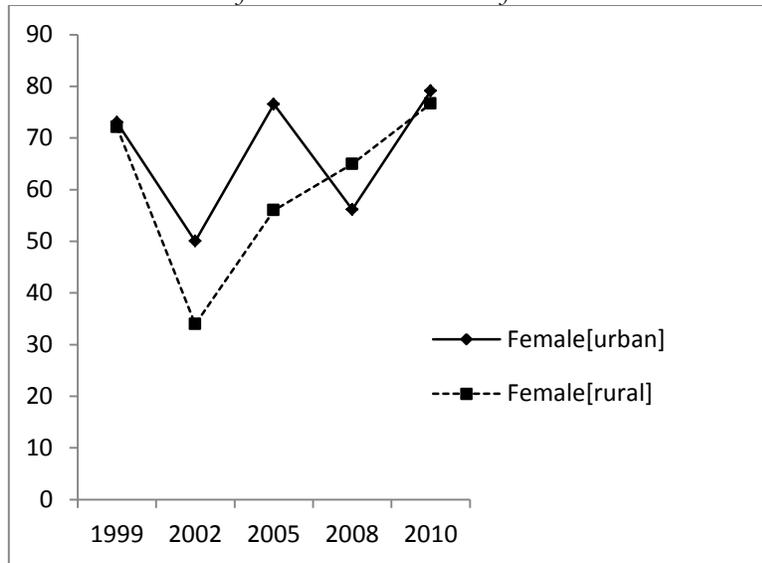
¹¹ This question was asked as a series of alternatives, but only the responses indicating that the respondents had voted were coded. All other responses were assumed to indicate that the person had not voted, for whatever reason.

Results

As indicated, the intention of this desk review was to examine only some aspects of women's participation in the political life of Zimbabwe, and hence each of the Afrobarometer findings is reported separately. First, the issue of support for democracy is described, and the differences between males and females are highlighted.

Figure 1: Percentage preference for Democracy [Rural v Urban]

Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



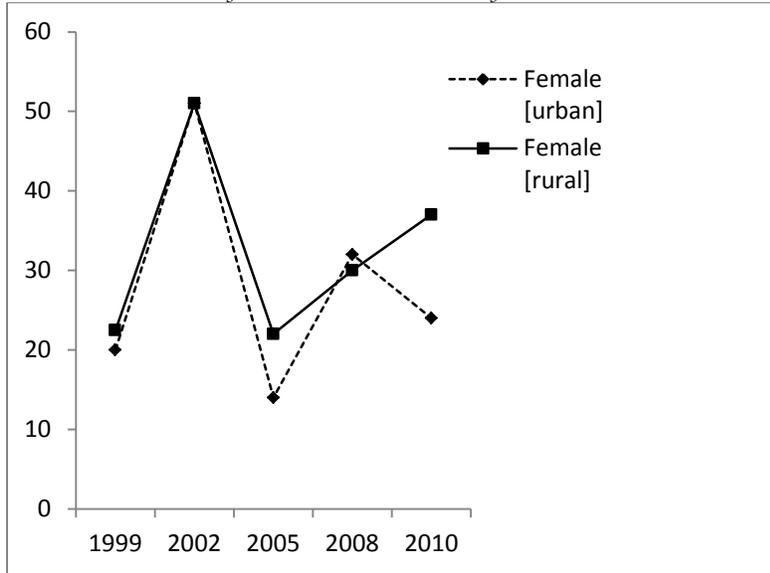
Differences can be seen between the rural and urban groups, but both groups show similar levels of support by 2010, presumably because of the improved socio-political climate engendered by the Global Political Agreement [GPA] and the performance of the Inclusive Government [IG]. Interestingly, there was a marked drop in both rural and urban females in 2002, but thereafter both these groups show a trend to preferring democracy to other forms of governance.

Rural women showed a larger drop in their preference for democracy in 2002, but thereafter this increased to the same level as urban women by 2010. Urban women showed a marked drop in 2008, which presumably was a consequence of the 2008 elections, and the costs that women saw for participating in elections.

As can be seen from Figure 2 (over), women's satisfaction with Zimbabwe's democracy has fluctuated over the decade or so since 1999. However, the general trends are similar over the years since 1999, with both rural and urban women showing similar rises and falls in their levels of satisfaction. It is interesting that rural women were more dissatisfied than their urban counterparts in 2008, which suggests one consequence of the elections that ZANU PF lost, since ZANU PF has its major support base in the rural areas. Overall, the conclusion must still be that Zimbabwean women of all types are dissatisfied with their democracy, with less than half expressing satisfaction, and only reaching 50% in 2002.

Figure 2: Percentage satisfaction with democracy [rural v urban]

Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe

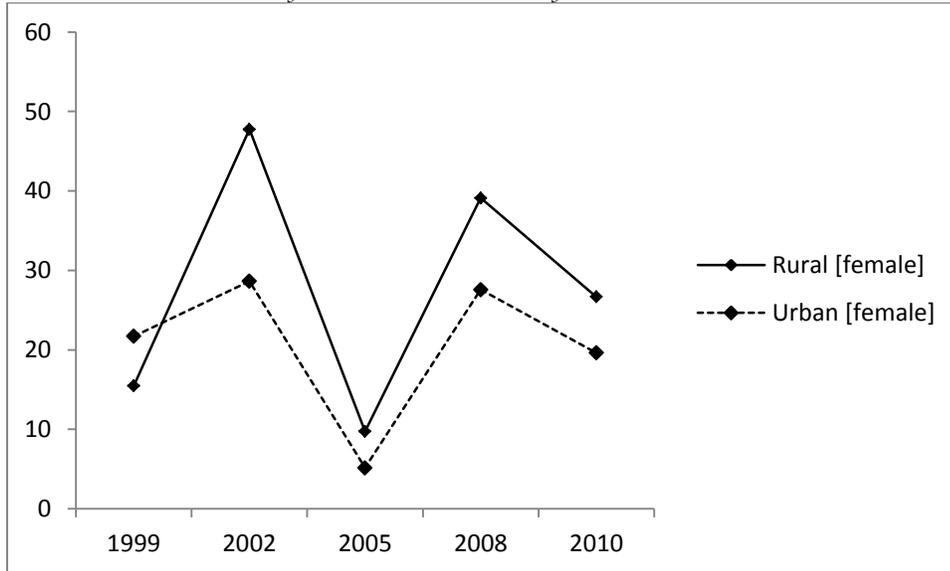


With many studies indicating a fascination with the “big man” syndrome in African politics, and the domination of many countries by single parties for many decades – Zimbabwe for 34 years now – the question about whether Zimbabweans are in favour of one-party states was interesting. In particular for Zimbabwe, the issue here revolves around the competitiveness of multi-party politics and, as mentioned earlier, the violence that has accompanied so many elections, and especially since 2000.

With women bearing the brunt of political violence, their views were interesting, and, as can be seen from Figure 3, women, both rural and urban, have moved in their views over time. Urban women consistently show less support for a one-party state (1999 excepted) than rural women, and the trend overall seems to fluctuate according to the political context.

Figure 3: Percentage support for one-party state [women; rural v urban]

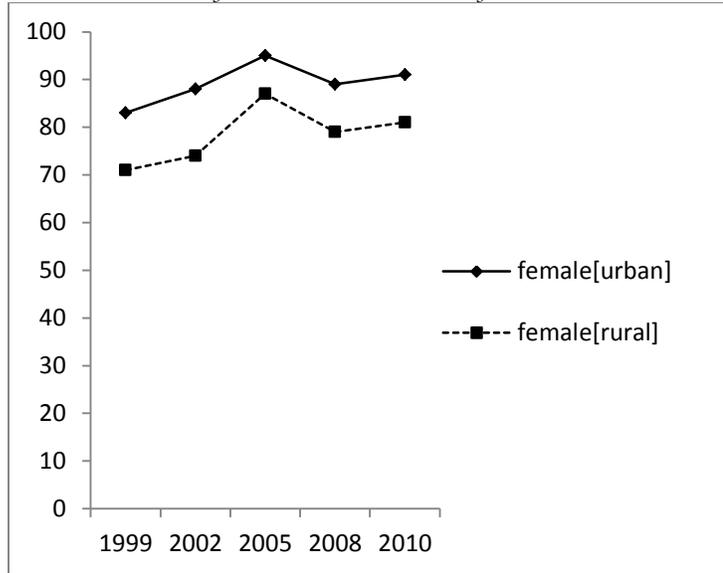
Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



Just as women reject one-party rule, so do they reject one-man rule (Figure 4 below), but, as can be seen, less rural women overall reject the concept of one-man rule than urban women. However, the pattern of rejection is similar for both groups.

**Figure 4: Percentage rejection of One-Man Rule
[Rural v urban]**

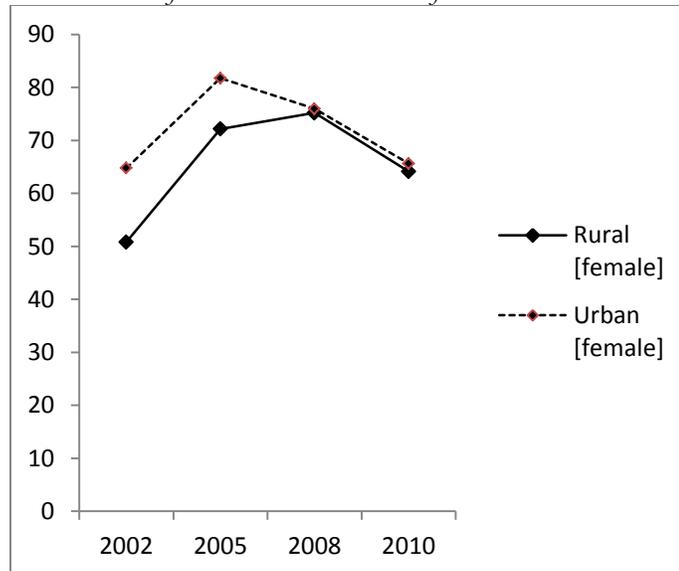
Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



That women reject the one-party state does not necessarily mean that they are in favour of multi-party democracy. As Logan and Bratton (2006) pointed out, African women see problems in the competitiveness that accompanies multi-party systems, and, in Zimbabwe, as can be seen from Figure 5, this support grew between 1999 and 2002, but, for both rural and urban women, has been declining since then. This may be due to the violence accompanying elections, but also, additively, in the peace that followed the Global Political Agreement and the subsequent Inclusive Government.

Figure 5: Percentage support for multi-party democracy [rural v urban]

Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe

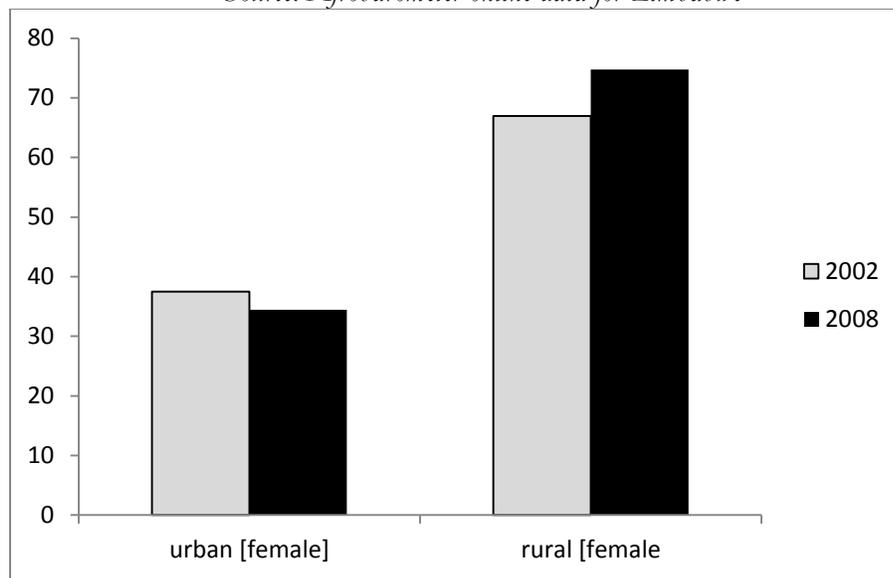


However, there is a small contradiction in the views of women, seen when comparing their lack of support for a one-party state (between 2008 and 2010) and their decreasing support for multi-party democracy in the same period. This may be less of a contradiction, in fact, than it appears: Zimbabwean women may be reflecting the problems that accompany elections in stating their concerns about multi-partyism - there are problems with multi-party democracy because, in Zimbabwe at least, competitive elections seem to invariably produce significant political violence. Thus, their rejection of one-party states is perhaps a broader concern, independent of attitudes to multi-partyism, and not tied to elections as is multi-partyism.

The last feature about women and democracy that emerged out of the Afrobarometer research was the finding that there were differences between urban and rural women in their trust of traditional leaders, and, in Zimbabwe, as pointed out earlier, there are many media and human rights reports about the role of traditional leaders during elections¹². Additionally, since 1998, and the promulgation of the Traditional Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17], traditional leaders have overt (but legally limited) administrative power in Zimbabwe; even if legally required to be expressly politically neutral, their actual political preferences can give traditional leaders enormous local power¹³, and it seems from most reports that traditional leaders act as if they have greater powers than those to which they are entitled.

Figure 6: Percentage trust in traditional leaders [rural v urban]

Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



There are some interesting findings regarding rural and urban women in their expressed trust for traditional leaders according to the Afrobarometer data, although this question was only asked in two of the surveys. As can be seen from Figure 6, rural women report increased trust in traditional leaders from 2002 to 2008, whilst urban women show a drop over the same period, and the

¹² For a detailed overview of the powers of traditional leaders, including references to the misuse of these powers, see Matyszak, D.A. (2010), *Formal Structures of Power in Rural Zimbabwe*. November 2010. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

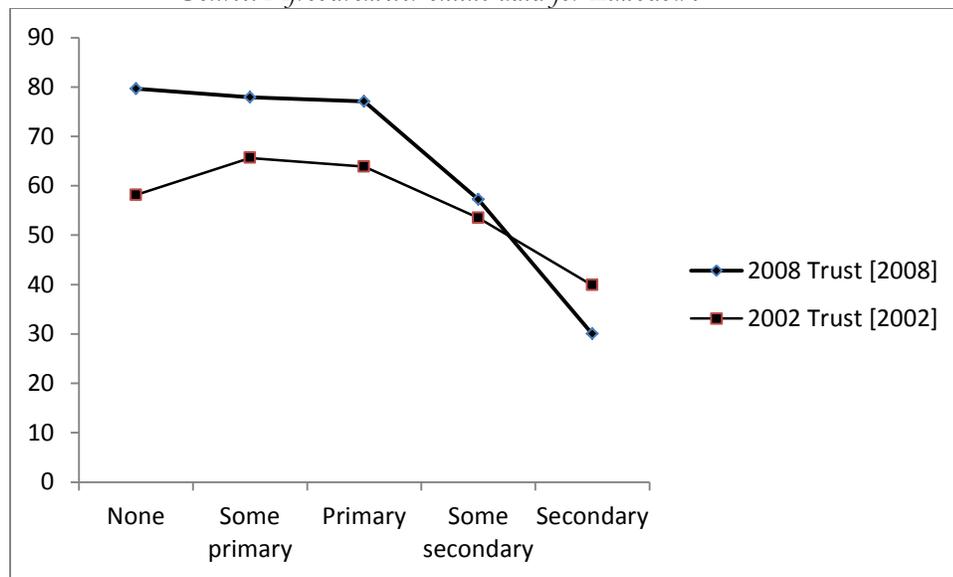
¹³ *Ibid.*

difference between the two groups is large, in excess of 30% points. Of course, one obvious difference is that rural women will have much more experience of traditional leaders than urban women, and the latter may well have been swayed by the adverse publicity that traditional leaders have received for their alleged role as partisan in elections and the distribution of public goods.

However neither group is internally homogenous, and Logan points out that there are differences in women’s support for traditional leaders according to age, level of education, and residence, whether rural or urban. As can be seen from Figure 7, this holds for Zimbabwe too: trust in traditional leaders shows a near-linear decline as educational level increases, which holds for both rural and urban women. Additionally, trust is lower in 2002, but declines more sharply in 2008. It should be pointed out here that the role and influence of traditional leaders has grown steadily since the passing of the Traditional Leaders Act in 1998, and it’s delayed effective date and implementation in 2000. Over the period of these two surveys, the reporting about the political role of traditional leaders has become consistently more critical.

Figure 7: Percentage trust in traditional leaders according to level of education [2002 to 2008]

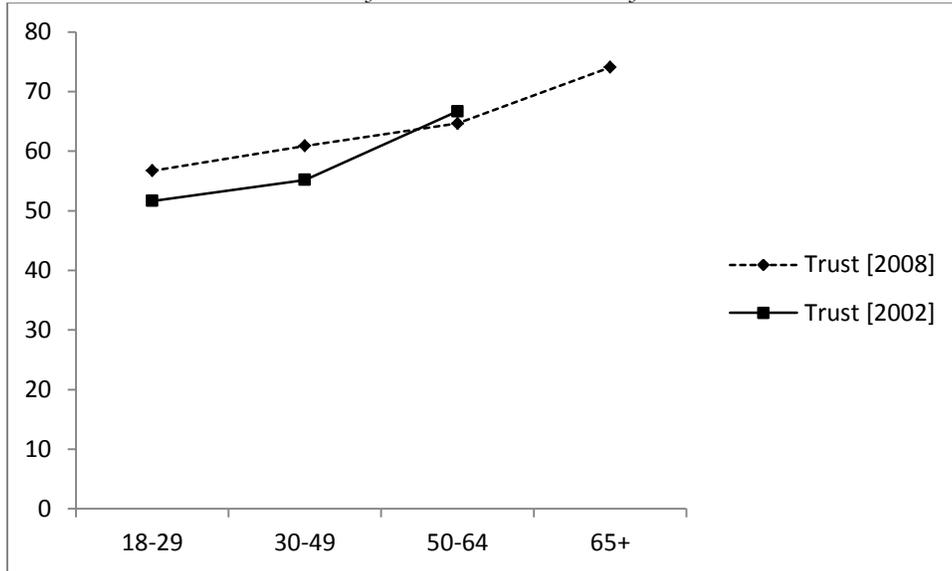
Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



As regards age, it can be seen from Figure 8 (over) that trust in traditional leaders is generally high amongst Zimbabwean women irrespective of age, and remains largely the same over time. There is a difference between the young and the old, as Logan suggests would be the case, but it is not pronounced.

Figure 8: Percentage trust in traditional leaders according to age of woman

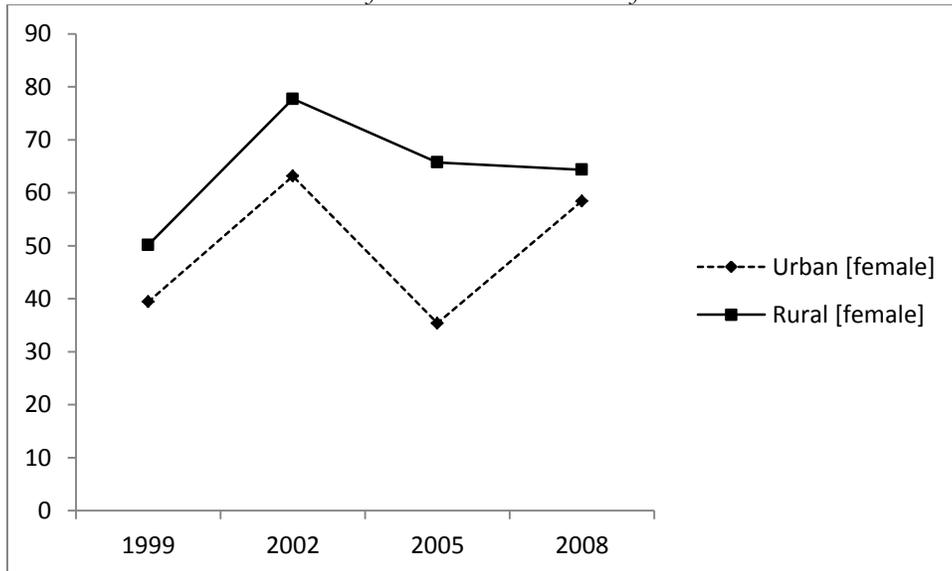
Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



Finally, there is the issue about voting, and here the observations and studies from many different sources indicate strong differences between rural and urban women in being able to register and vote. For example, an analysis of the 2013 Voters' Roll showed many more women registered in rural as opposed to urban areas.¹⁴

Figure 9: Percentage voting in elections [rural v urban]

Source: Afrobarometer online data for Zimbabwe



¹⁴ See, for example, RAU (2013), *An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll*. July 2013. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

As can be seen in Figure 9, there are marked differences between rural and urban residents: there are higher rates of rural citizens voting over time and less urban women reporting that they have voted. There is a very marked drop in urban women voting in 2005 (after very violent elections in 2000 and 2002), but this recovers to similar level to that of rural women in 2008. This drop in 2005 suggests more than mere difficulty in registering, and is perhaps the combined effect of both difficulties in registering as well as fear generated by the political violence in 2000 and 2002 elections. When the environment became more peaceful, as it was between 2005 and 2008, then urban women became more likely to participate.

Conclusions

Female citizens of Zimbabwe seem to view the world in much the same way as their sisters across Africa according to Afrobarometer. These extrapolations from the five Afrobarometer surveys to date show that, overall, Zimbabwean women support the notion of democracy, are not very satisfied with the variety that pertains in Zimbabwe, reject one-party government (but this is changing), strongly reject dictatorship, support multi-party democracy (but this too is waning), and mostly vote. They also support traditional leadership, but markedly more so for rural women.

When women are disaggregated into their geographical residence, then a number of differences emerge. Firstly, rural women are much more supportive of traditional leaders as a whole, but this is varied by age and education: younger women and better educated women are less supportive of traditional leaders as was indicated by Logan's study. Secondly, rural women have more support for one-party states and less rejection of one-man rule, but are similar to urban women in their support for multi-party democracy. Thirdly, they are much more likely than urban women to have voted in all the elections since 2000, presumably because the consequences for supporting ZANU PF in the rural areas are both beneficial and unlikely to lead to violence. Finally, it seems that urban women present a more coherent set of views than rural women. They support democracy, reject undemocratic alternatives, do not support traditional leaders, and vote when the consequences of doing so are not problematic.

This little foray into the Afrobarometer data cannot, of course, be either conclusive or extensive, but it does suggest that there is a great deal more that can be gleaned from a gendered analysis of the five rounds to date. It does seem that much might be understood from more comprehensive statistical analyses of the Afrobarometer, and provide the basis for interesting comparisons with other studies on women's voice and participation in politics in Zimbabwe. It is also the case that too little attention is given to a gendered perspective of women's participation in politics, which may be more nuanced than is commonly assumed.