



# ***Women and Social Capital in Zimbabwe: 2012 to 2014***

**Report produced by the Research and Advocacy  
Unit (RAU)**

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## **Contents**

Executive Summary .....	3
<b>Background</b> .....	6
Methods .....	7
Results (Changes in aspects of Social Capital) .....	7
Conclusions.....	12
References:.....	14

## Executive Summary

Social Capital has become a concept of growing interest in the past two decades. The presence of a high degree of social capital is argued to be one of the strong underpinnings of democracy, and the presence of varieties of civic and social associations is assumed to contribute to more active citizenship. In the West at least, there is increasing concern about the declining participation of citizens in elections, together with concern that citizens are also less interested in participating in social and civic networks and associations. This is interpreted as the effect of declining social capital.

Very little study of social capital has been carried in Zimbabwe, although it is implicit in the many and wide-ranging studies and discussions about the role of communities in Zimbabwean civic life. It also is worth stressing the very important role played by women in community life, especially in the rural areas of Zimbabwe which can be argued to be the basis of strong social capital in the rural areas.

A previous examination of social capital as one aspect of active citizenship suggested that the component of social capital, trust, operated differently between rural and urban citizens (RAU. 2015). Trust was defined as either *intimate*, about relationships with other citizens, or *institutional*, about relationships between citizens and duty bearers. Returning to the point about women, community life and possibly the major creators of social capital, it is worth noting that studies of women's participation suggest that the rural-urban divide is highly relevant. Studies of middle class women indicate a strong disconnection for this group from community life, apart from attending church (RAU. 2017; RAU. 2016 (b)); RAU. 2016(a).

A companion research study to the present report attempted a more detailed examination of social capital (RAU. 2018). A measure of social capital was constructed using six questions common to all three rounds, and tested this against seven measures of public interest and participation, as well as four demographic variables (age, residence, employment and education). This study showed good relationships between social capital and measures of political interest and participation, but there were marked difference between rural and urban women. Social capital, as we have defined this, is a property of rural rather than urban women. However, social capital is not a static property of individuals and communities and clearly varies both over time and due to socio-political events.

Thus, we examined the stability of this previous finding, looking to see whether the rural-urban differences were stable over time, particularly since the changes over the five-year period, 2012 to 2017, were marked.

## Methods

The present study examined social capital in women using the data from the last three rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys on Zimbabwe: Round 5 (2012), Round 6 (2014), and Round 7 (2017). A measure of social capital was constructed using six questions common to all three rounds, and tested this against seven measures of public interest and participation, as well as four demographic variables (age, residence, employment and education). The measures of public interest and participation were also constructed from questions common to all three rounds: *access to information*, *freedoms*, *political participation*, *agency*, *support for democracy*, and *political trust*. A seventh measure, *lived poverty*, was included to check for possible confounding on the *residence* variable: it cannot be assumed that poverty in Zimbabwe is wholly a feature of the rural areas in the current economic climate.

## Findings

For the components of the Social Capital measures itself, some increased over the period, some stayed static, and some declined:

- *Trusting neighbours (+43%)*
- *Feeling safe in the neighbourhood (+14%)*
- *Not being careful what you say (+2%)*
- *Joining others to raise an issue (-2%)*
- *Attending community meetings (-6%)*
- *Being a member of a voluntary association or community group (-9%)*

There were minimal changes in the percentage of women from 2012 to 2017 that could be described as having “hi social capital”. Secondly, these changes in social capital over the three rounds were statistically significant: social capital rose from 2012 to 2014 and then dropped from 2014 to 2017. The interesting finding here is in the difference between “hi” and “lo” groups of women, with the former showing an increase in social capital by 2017, with the “lo” group showing a decline. It is not possible to see an obvious reason for this difference other than the difference being due to residence, with the “hi” group being mostly rural women.

Although radio is far and away the most common source of information, there was a decline in accessing all forms of information. There was small increase in the number of women using the internet, but it was a very small percentage of women that had access to internet. Unfortunately it was not possible to compare use of social media over the period as the question was only asked in 2017. The decrease in the number of women using radio and television is not offset by a significant increase in the use of other media.

Women’s perception of freedom – to say what one thinks or join any organisation one chooses – rose significantly from 2012 to 2014, but then dropped enormously from 2014 to 2017. The changes in the first period might be attributable to improved economic situation under the Inclusive Government and a largely peaceful, but surprising election. But the changes in the second period, 2014 to 2017, may either reflect the deteriorating economic situation or a growing disenchantment with politics in the light of the faction fighting in all political parties.

One of the more disappointing findings was in the very low levels of engaging public officials, what we described as a measure of agency. Zimbabwean women do not engage duty bearers on our evidence. Whether this is a lack of agency as such or the perception that duty bearers are unapproachable or ineffective, or both factors are operating, is not clear. However, less than 10% of women report that they often engage duty bearers. This is extended by the responses of women on political participation. Virtually none of the women reported working for a candidate or political party, and the numbers that attended a political meeting dropped markedly between 2012 and 2017: from 59% attending a meeting or rally in 2012 to 43% in 2017. This all suggests that women are disengaging from politics, and this is worrying.

Women continue to express support for democracy as the best model for the country, but this support is declining. Only 46% of women thought that Zimbabwe was a democracy in 2012, which declined to 35% in 2014, rising to only 38% in 2017.

By 2017, there is increasing trust in the ruling party, the police, the army and the president. There is also decreasing trust in parliament, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), and the courts. Overall, these women respondents do not report very high levels of political trust in any of the years.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, this a picture of declining interest and confidence in politics, government and political parties over the five years. This must be moderated against the earlier (statistical) study which showed marked differences between rural and urban women, but we also have to bear in mind the findings about middle class women, and especially young middle class women.

Clearly, one cannot generalise about Zimbabwean women, and this is important when considering ways to increase the agency and participation of women. One shoe will not fit all, and it is necessary to devise different strategies for different groups of women, but one finding is important in our view, and this relates to urban and middle class women. It is too easy, as Everjoice Win has pointed out (Win. 2004), to focus too much on young, poor and rural women, and certainly, if women are going to be an influence in politics, the middle class and educated woman must be a critical inclusion in any development strategy.

## Background<sup>1</sup>

Social Capital has become a concept of growing interest in the past two decades. Although originally elaborated by Coleman (1990), the major association has been with the work of Robert Putnam (Putnam.1995). The concept has deeply engaged political scientists and others, but has not been without its critics (van Deth. 2001; Durlauf. 2000). The presence of a high degree of social capital is argued to be one of the strong underpinnings of democracy (Fukayama. 2001).

Social capital thus is argued to be the bedrock of functioning democracy, and the presence of varieties of civic and social associations is assumed to contribute to more active citizenship. In the West at least, and following Putnam, there is increasing concern about the declining participation of citizens in elections, together with concern that citizens are also less interested in participating in social and civic networks and associations. This is interpreted as the effect of declining social capital.

Very little study of social capital has been carried in Zimbabwe, although it is implicit in the many and wide-ranging studies and discussions about the role of communities in Zimbabwean civic life. For example, *nhimbi* can be argued to be a social process relying on social capital (Tenson. 2017), and *Operation Murambatsvina* can be argued to be an event that was hugely destructive of social capital, as has been the many displacements that have taken place in the past two decades. It also is worth stressing the very important role played by women in community life, especially in the rural areas of Zimbabwe which can be argued to be the basis of strong social capital in the rural areas.

A previous examination of social capital as one aspect of active citizenship suggested that the component of social capital, trust, operated differently between rural and urban citizens (RAU. 2015). Trust was defined as either *intimate*, about relationships with other citizens, or *institutional*, about relationships between citizens and duty bearers. Statistical analysis revealed a relationship between *institutional trust* and support for ZANU-PF, and there was no relationship between either form of trust, *intimate* or *institutional*, and a category of respondents that could be described as “*active citizens*”.

Returning to the point about women, community life and possibly the major creators of social capital, it is worth noting that studies of women’s participation suggest that the rural-urban divide is highly relevant. Studies of middle class women indicate a strong disconnection for this group from community life, apart from attending church (RAU. 2017; RAU. 2016 (b)); RAU. 2016(a). Thus, it seemed worthwhile in view of the differences found between different groups of women to focus explicitly on women and social capital.

A companion research study to the present report attempted a more detailed examination of social capital (RAU. 2018). A measure of social capital was constructed using six questions common to all three rounds, and tested this against seven measures of public interest and participation, as well as four demographic variables (age, residence, employment and education). The measures of public interest and participation were also constructed from questions common to all three rounds: *access to information*, *freedoms*, *political participation*, *agency*, *support for democracy*, and *political trust*. A seventh measure, *lived poverty*, was included to check for possible confounding on the *residence* variable: it cannot be assumed that poverty in Zimbabwe is wholly a feature of the rural areas in the current economic climate.

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<sup>1</sup> Report produced by Tony Reeler, Senior Researcher.

This study showed good relationships between social capital and measures of political interest and participation, but there were marked difference between rural and urban women. Social capital, as we have defined this, is a property of rural rather than urban women. However, social capital is not a static property of individuals and communities and clearly varies both over time and due to socio-political events.

Thus, we examined the stability of this previous finding, looking to see whether the rural-urban differences were stable over time, particularly since the changes over the five-year period, 2012 to 2017, were marked. Briefly, this covers the period from the last year of the Inclusive Government (and the Global Political Agreement), the aftermath of the surprising electoral result in 2013, and the rapidly declining economic situation under the “new” ZANU-PF government.

## Methods

For this study, we used the data from three rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys Round 5 (2012), Round 6 (2014), and Round 7 (2017). Disaggregating women, we ended with a total sample of 3003 women for the three rounds. The detailed methods are described in another report. Here we are reporting only on the changes that took place over these three Rounds.

Briefly, and derived from the literature, we first constructed a measure of Social Capital from six questions that were asked in all three Rounds, and also six measures of forms of participation. Each of the latter was composed of several questions themselves.

Measure of Social Capital	Measures of Participation
1. How often felt unsafe walking in neighbourhood; 2. Attend a community meeting; 3. Join others to raise an issue; 4. Member of voluntary association or community group; 5. How often careful what you say; 6. Like, dislike or not care as neighbours: people of different ethnicity.	1. Access to information (4); 2. Freedoms (2); 3. Political Participation (3); 4. Agency (3); 5. Support for Democracy(2); 6. Political Trust (8).

The number for each measure indicates the number of questions from the Afrobarometer that was used to construct the measure. A more complex analysis was carried out, based around a number of testable hypotheses, and described in another report (RAU & MPOI. 2017(a)). Here, we merely report on the quantitative findings over the five years.

## Results (Changes in aspects of Social Capital)

Here we deal with the data disaggregated by year in order to examine whether there are changes, because there have been marked political and economic changes over this five-year period.

**Figure 1: Changes in measures of Social Capital over three Rounds (2012, 2014 & 2017)**

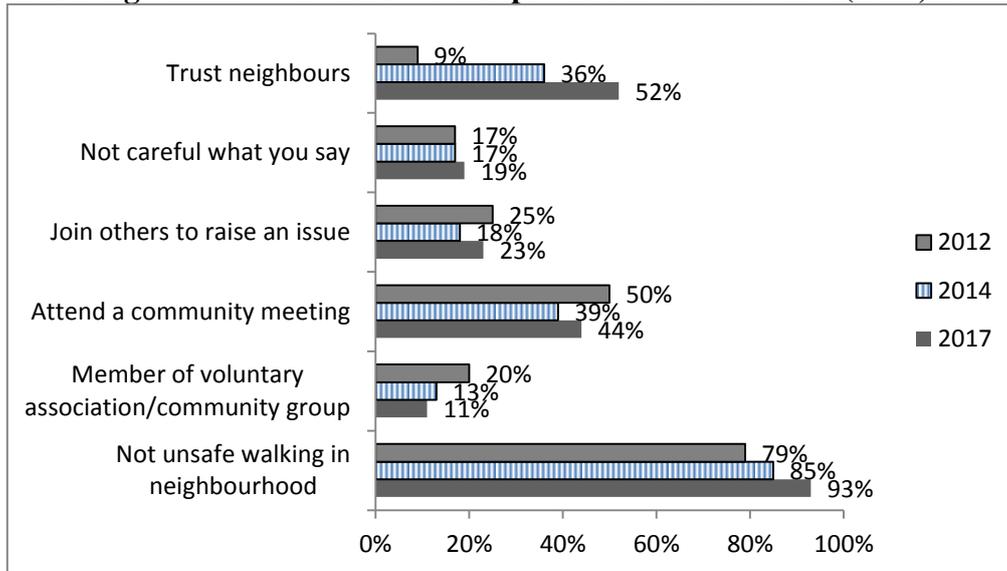
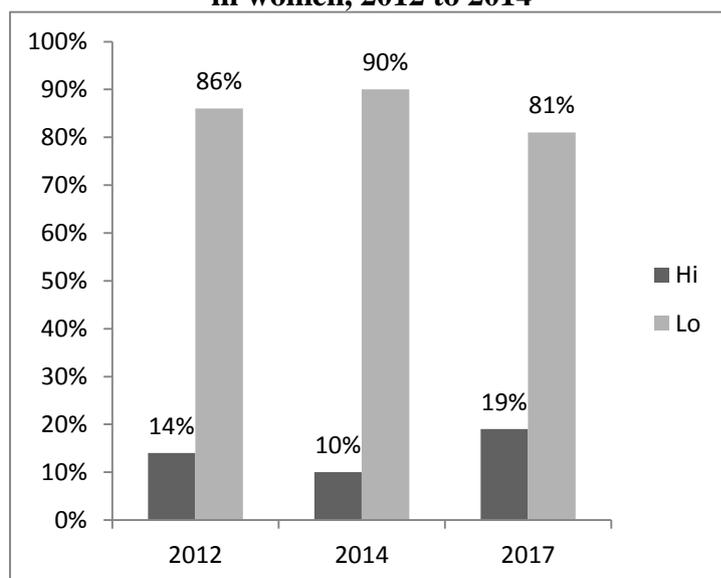


Figure 1 shows the changes in the individual components of the social capital measure over the three rounds. *Trusting neighbours* (43%) and *feeling safe in the neighbourhood* (14%) both increase over the five years. There is little change in *being careful what you say*, a decline in *being a member of a voluntary association or community group*, and little change in the other two measures, *joining others to raise an issue* and *attending community meetings*. Apart from *membership of voluntary associations or community groups*, all the separate components of social capital either stay static over the period or increase.

A contrast was done between women with “hi” and “lo” Social Capital. Firstly, there were minimal changes in the percentage of women from 2012 to 2017 that could be described as having “hi social capital” (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentages of “hi” and “lo” social capital in women, 2012 to 2014**



Secondly, these changes in social capital over the three rounds were statistically significant. The average social capital score for 2012 was 2.5 (sd.1.6), which dropped significantly in 2014 to 2.04 (sd.1.5),<sup>2</sup> and then rose significantly in 2017 to 3.2 (sd.1.6).<sup>3</sup> This is the period from the last years of the Inclusive Government, the victory of ZANU-PF in the 2013 elections (and the party’s re-assumption of the government), and the period of severe economic decline again and very serious faction fighting in most political parties.

<sup>2</sup> T-test (2012 v 2014):  $t=7.14$  (df=2398);  $p=0.0001$ .

<sup>3</sup> T-test (2014 v 2017):  $t=15.29$  (df=2398);  $p=0.0001$ .

Given these apparently paradoxical changes between 2014 and 2017, the question must be asked about the extent to which the measures comprising the social capital index are independent of political and economic forces. Certainly the change to increased social capital from 2014 to 2017 occurs against the background of the factors mentioned above, but also against the background of greatly reduced political violence.

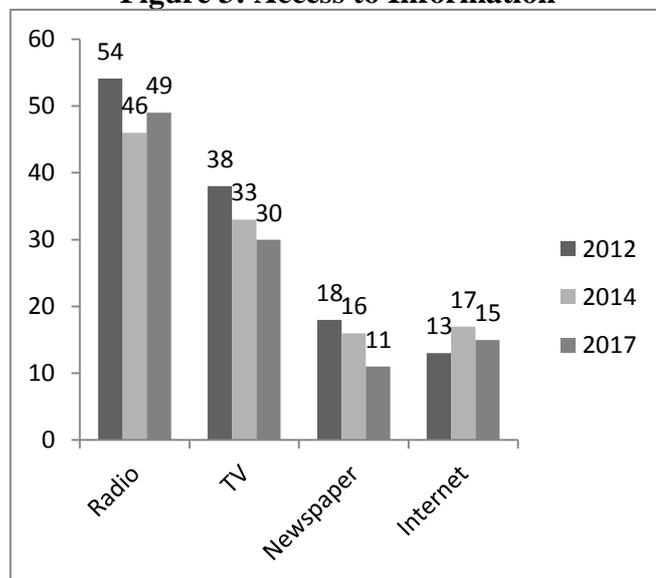
In fact, political violence has been relatively low since 2008, and hence increased participation may well reflect this rather than anything else. However, it can also be seen that there were differences between the “hi” and “lo” groups. The “hi” group fell between 2012 and 2014, and then rose between 2014 and 2017, whilst the “lo” group showed the opposite trend: the “lo” group rose between 2012 and 2014, and rose again between 2014 and 2017.

Since the previous (statistical) study indicated that “hi” social capital was largely a function of rural residence, did these differences reflect the different views of rural and urban women? Were rural women, who are in a majority supporters of ZANU-PF, expressing something positive about the result of the election in 2013 and unaffected by the faction fighting in ZANU-PF? Were the changes in urban women’s responses a function of the increased hardship they were experiencing as the economy declined after 2013? More work is needed here to understand these differences.

Access to information can be a critical factor in facilitating agency, and there is frequent comment about the restricted access of Zimbabweans to reliable information, and the possible effects of propaganda on political participation (Chikwana et al. 2004). As can be seen from Figure 3, there is a relative decline in access to most sources of information from 2012 to 2017, except for access to the internet.

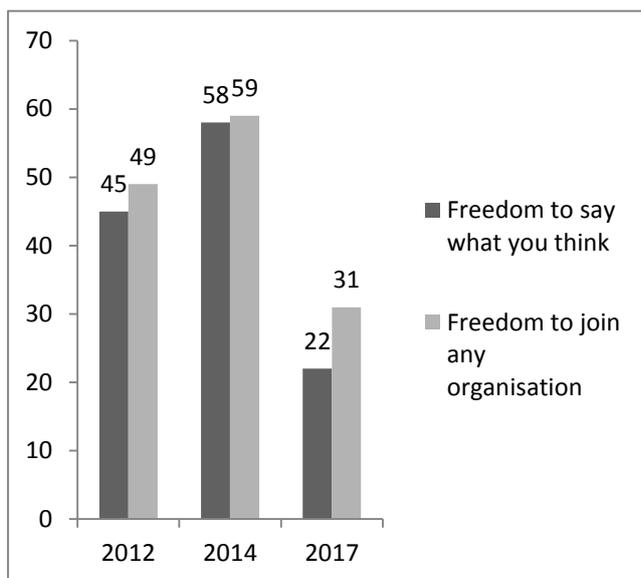
Overall, and unsurprisingly, radio is the most used form of access to information, and thereafter the other forms decline strongly. It is interesting to see the increase in the internet against the decline in newspapers, probably as a consequence of the growth of cell phone technology. Here POTRAZ reports that there were 13,311,223 mobile subscriptions in the second quarter of 2017, and 6,677,531 of these were active.<sup>4</sup> The access to new technology may thus explain both the decline in newspapers and in TV, with people switching away from TV to internet-based information and entertainment.

**Figure 3: Access to Information**



<sup>4</sup> Posts and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), *Abridged Postal and Telecommunications Sector Performance Report*. Second Quarter 2017.

**Figure 4: Perceptions of Freedoms**

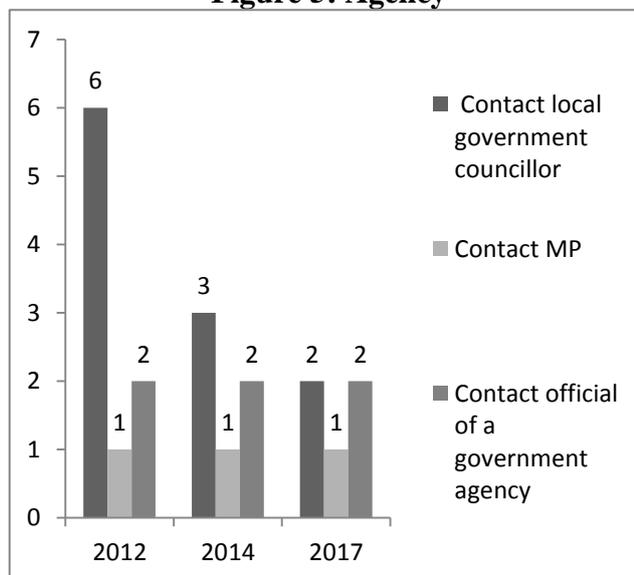


There is a significant increase in Zimbabweans perceptions of their freedoms from 2012 to 2014, and then a very dramatic decline by 2017. What explains this?

The increase from 2012 to 2014 seems paradoxical as it covers the period from the Inclusive Government to the aftermath of the 2013 elections, and the massive victory for ZANU-PF. Does this increase, of 13% and 20%, for each measure represent a view that the period of political conflict, and the political violence and fear that this induced, is over?

However, this honeymoon is short-lived, and the decline from 2014 to 2017 is enormous, 36% and 35% for the respective measures. And what explains this decline? This period is marked by severe factional conflict in almost all the political parties, an increasingly difficult economic climate, and the realisation that elections are approaching in 2018. Are citizens fearful that there will be massive violence, or they losing faith in politics in general against a perceived lack of a national focus on the part of any political party?

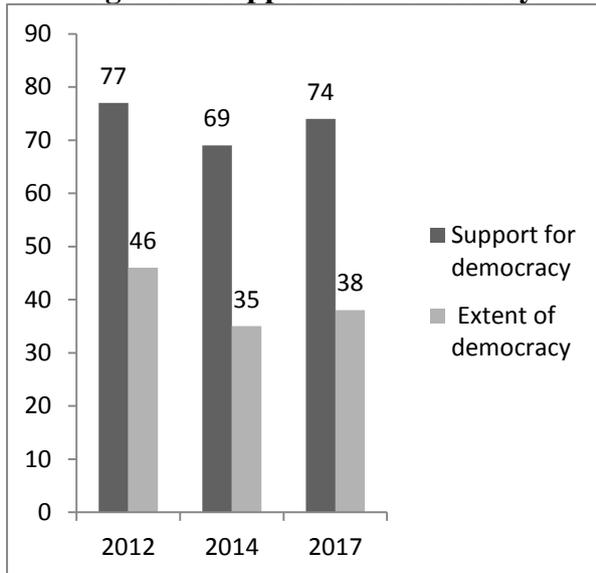
**Figure 5: Agency**



In constructing these measures, we deemed those with *agency* as only those that answered *often* to the question about whether any of these officials were contacted. As can be seen in Table 5, the frequencies were markedly low, declined from 2012 to 2014, and increased from 2014 to 2017. As was seen in Table 2, it is those that scored high on *Social Capital* that are those with *Agency*, and, furthermore, this is a small number of women, 19% in 2017.

This finding needs more investigation, and here it will be useful to look at the women's perceptions and views about corruption as well as their views about the efficacy of these public officials.

**Figure 6: Support for Democracy**

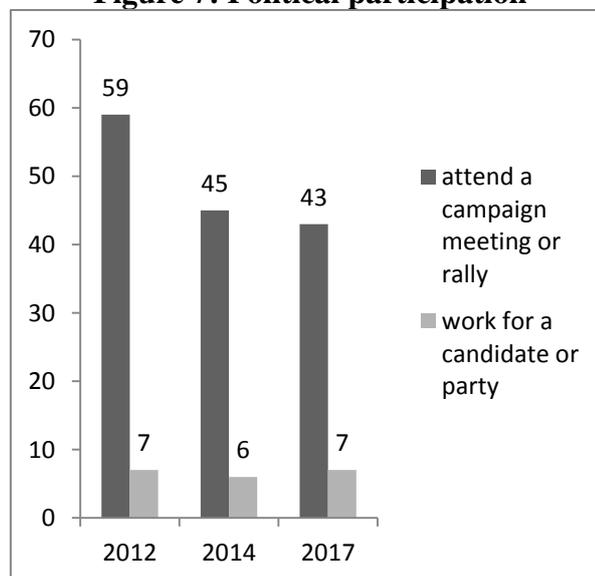


It is evident, and in common with most findings for Afrobarometer surveys on Zimbabwe, most women support democracy but few like the Zimbabwean variety (Figure 5 below). This should also be read together with the differences found between rural and urban women reported elsewhere (RAU & MPOI. 2017). The rural women are much more supportive of democracy than the urban.

There are no major differences in women as a group over the time period, but there is a substantial drop in views about the extent of democracy from 2012 to 2014. Was this a consequence of the results of the 2013 elections?

Bearing in mind the general finding about the differences between rural and urban women, there is a steady decline in participating, at least in the sense of attending public meetings (Figure 6 above). The more active form of participation, *working for a candidate or party*, is hardly ever undertaken by women. But the overall decline in what might be termed “passive” participation, has declined significantly: 14% between 2012 and 2014, and 16% between 2012 and 2017. This suggests that women are viewing politics in a very negative light, as has been indicated by other research (RAU. 2016 (a); RAU. 2016 (b)).

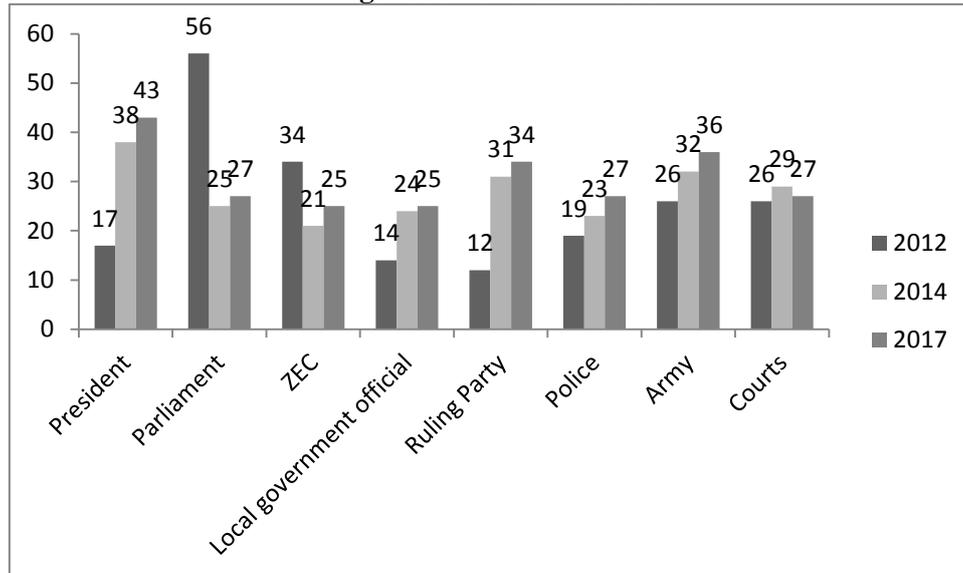
**Figure 7: Political participation**



This suggests that women are viewing politics in a very negative light, as has been indicated by other research (RAU. 2016 (a); RAU. 2016 (b)).

Finally, there is the matter of *political trust*. We chose eight state agents for this comparison, and, as can be seen in Figure 8, there were a number of changes over the five-year period.

**Figure 8: Political Trust**



By 2017, there is increasing trust in the ruling party, the police, the army and the president. There is also decreasing trust in parliament, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), and the courts. Overall, these women respondents do not report very high levels of political trust in any of the years. It is very interesting in the light of the recent military deposing of the president to look at the contrast between trust in the president and trust in the army. Elsewhere we found that political trust overall was much stronger for rural women (RAU & MPOI.2017), and this included both the president and the army. Is this then a contradictory finding: that people trust both the president and the army, but still take to the streets in their tens of thousands in November 2017 to push for the removal of the president? Or was this a specific urban phenomenon, where urban people wished for the president to go, and demonstrated not because they trust the army, but because the army explicitly allowed the demonstration as we have speculated elsewhere (RAU & MPOI. 2018).

## Conclusions

Against the finding that social capital increases public and political participation, and the finding that this was predominantly a feature of rural women (RAU. 2018), we were interested to see whether there were changes over time and against the turbulence in the political economy of Zimbabwe over the past five years.

As regards social capital itself, there were big increases in trust and feeling safe between 2014 and 2017, a decrease in belonging to community, and other measures changed very little. Most (apart from feeling safe) are minority positions: overall, in 2017, most women (81%) are careful what they say in public, few (89%) belong to a community organisation, and equally few (77%) join others to raise an issue. The changes over the five years in the social capital index were significant, but difficult to understand at face value. It is difficult to understand why social capital should increase in 2017 against the background of increasing economic hardship and political faction fighting: we might rather have expected the continuous downward trend from 2012.

All forms of information show decline but use of internet is increasing slightly. Round 7 included a further question on the use of social media, not in the three previous Rounds. This showed that most women do not use social media, but slightly more than 11% do.

There was a significant rise in women's perceptions of their freedoms from 2012 to 2014, but followed by a dramatic drop between 2014 and 2017. Is this due to the aftermath of the 2013 elections, fears about the pending elections in 2018, or a massive decline in faith about politics in general against the background of all the faction fighting in the political parties?

As for agency, the frequency with which women approached political and public officials is very low indeed. Seen together with the changes in perceptions of freedoms, does this bolster the notion that women feel that politics is irrelevant and outside their control? There is corroborative evidence for this notion for middle class women, and especially young middle class women (RAU. 2016(b)).

Women remain support of the idea that democracy is the best model for Zimbabwe, but are doubtful about the Zimbabwean variety: about 70% support democracy, but way less than half feel that Zimbabwe is a democracy. Whilst most women vote, they show declining interest in attending a campaign meeting or rally, and virtually none work actively in supporting a candidate or party. In particular, the diminishing interest in attending political meetings or campaign rallies suggests a growing disaffection with politics.

There are many changes over the period in political trust. There is increasing trust in the president, the ruling party, the police and the army, but decreasing trust in parliament, ZEC and the courts. However, the levels of trust for all are low, and only trust in parliament reached the level of a majority.

Overall, this a picture of declining interest and confidence in politics, government and political parties over the five years. This must be moderated against the earlier (statistical) study which showed marked differences between rural and urban women, but we also have to bear in mind the findings about middle class women, and especially young middle class women.

Clearly, one cannot generalise about Zimbabwean women, and this is important when considering ways to increase the agency and participation of women. One shoe will not fit all, and it is necessary to devise different strategies for different groups of women, but one finding is important in our view, and this relates to urban and middle class women. It is too easy, as Everjoice Win has pointed out (Win. 2004), to focus too much on young, poor and rural women, and certainly, if women are going to be an influence in politics, the middle class and educated woman must be a critical inclusion in any development strategy.

Perhaps the way forward to increasing social capital and increasing women's agency is to follow a simple set of interventions:

- *Building women's confidence, speaking skills and knowledge of the issues under discussion, as well as women's association and forms of mobilisation which support them in public spaces. Formal inclusion of women is not sufficient in itself to ensure their inclusion;*
- *Creating networks and linkages between women would-be political candidates and women in political office, between women in politics and women in movements and women's organisations, and among women*

*within political institutions – even if they are from different parts of the political spectrum can strengthen women’s effective participation;*

- *Addressing the barriers to women’s participation in public life: the way women are treated in public when they speak out; the way what they say is listened to and whether it is heard; whether women are asked to speak if they raise their hands; attitudes of family members and partners to women going out alone to meetings; and a host of other cultural and social dimensions. These need to be addressed to ensure that women are able to participate as citizens in the public arena. This must include working with men on their own restrictive attitudes and behaviours, as well as work that helps family members (and especially mothers-in-law) to understand why it is good that women are taking part in these spaces.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Mohanty, R. (2007) *Gendered Subjects, the State and Participatory Spaces: the Politics of Domesticating Participation in Rural India*, in Cornwall, A.&Coelho, V.S.P, (Eds), *Spaces for Change: the Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas*, Zed Books, pp76 – 94, cited in DFiD (2010), *The Politics of Poverty: Elites, Citizens, and States. Findings from 10 years of DFiD-funded research on Governance and Fragile States, 2001-2010, A Synthesis Paper*. DFID.

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