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# Media and Elections/ Governance



At the polls in Mauritius

*Credit: Gender Links*



**Wailing Women, Marching Men:  
The Paradox of Women in the Post-Election**

**Kenyan Press**

By Simiyu Barasa

**Abstract**

After the post election ethnic violence broke out in Kenya following the disputed presidential election results on 29 December 2008, the recurring imagery in the press was that of women suffering and wailing. From the print to audiovisual sector, women appear as the images of victimisation, but the stories are about the leaders hawking war. During times of conflict, the media shows women as subordinated persons. In the case of the reportage of the Kenyan violence, one can go further to see how such imaging of women is manipulated to push certain agendas and the various contradictions when the media presents women as victims, yet makes them invisible in the attempts to seek peace and solve the conflict. While women are victims of the violence in the pages of the print media, voices in the radio and footage in TV News, men have more prominence in the articulation of violence.

**Key words**

elections, violence, media

**Media in Kenya**

The Kenyan media scene has been booming since the 1990s liberalisation of the sector that was synonymous with the advent of multi-party democracy. Until then, the television and radio sectors had been controlled by the state, with the Voice of Kenya (later to be renamed Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) being the sole television and radio station. Mainstream newspapers were, and still are, *The Nation* and *Standard* newspapers. The freeing of the airwaves brought about new television stations, with the leading ones now being KTN, NTV and Citizen TV. FM radio stations have exploded, with major ones with a national reach (Kiss, Classic, Capital,

Easy, Metro, Citizen, KBC English Service, KBC Swahili, BBC, Hot 98) and tens of others which are regional and broadcasting in vernacular. As these stations bloomed under the banner of media freedom brought about by democracy, the women's rights movement also became more visible and active, networking with the mass media and at times clashing in the course of activism.

In the run up to the 2007 December General Elections, the women's rights movement in Kenya considerably argued and successfully lobbied media houses to refocus their representation of women both as voters and as seekers of electoral positions. Almost all advertisements urging for peace to prevail during the election period

were characterised by images of women. During the clamour for a new constitution in the late 1990's, the political class had invented the mythological "Wanjiku" (a name for a girl in Gikuyu, one of the Kenyan tribes) to represent the voice of the downtrodden local *mwananchi* (ordinary citizen). Everything perceived to be for the elite was attacked as not being considerate of Wanjiku. As the 2007 elections came in, the voice of Wanjiku was resuscitated again and the prevailing government accused of not factoring Wanjiku (the common citizen) in their agenda. Images of women in impoverished conditions aimed to show that economic development figures had actually not translated to better lives for ordinary Kenyans. The government in turn used images of women with healthy looking babies on their backs drawing water from taps while fat looking cows grazed in the background to show how Kenyans were "smiling" at the good life that had been brought by the government.

Gender-based violence directed to women candidates was high in visibility, leading to its condemnation. Any time a woman candidate suffered assault, the women's rights movement joined hands and visited the survivors in hospital, complete with a battery of press people, and loudly protested such actions. Foreign ambassadors were also present using such press briefings to comment on the rising violence. Unfortunately, it also highlighted how "successful" such violence can be in public humiliation of female candidates, making criminal elements refocus on it as a tool or political tactic. Whether the high number of reported cases of violence against women candidates was because of more women seeking political posts, or much more media attention on such crimes when previously they were unreported, or as a rise in opponents using it as a political tool of choice, remains debatable. The reality is that gender violence was so high during last year's election campaign period that the police Commissioner, Maj. Gen. Ali, publicly stated that his force would give women political candidates special security.

On voting day, images of long queues with old women patiently waiting their turn characterised stories about how high the voter turnout was, that even elderly women had come out to vote. All this imaging continued until

the presidential results started being delayed by the Electoral Commission of Kenya. The images of women (used to insinuate peace) disappeared, replaced by images of men shouting aggressively at the Electoral Commission of Kenya Chairman Mr. Samuel Kivuitu, of uniformed male Paramilitary Police, and men punching their fists in the air as they danced around torched cars and buildings. The headlines used keywords like "Stand Off, Chaos, Delays Spark Angry Protests," and such antagonistic words.

On 29 December 2007, amid outbreak of violence in some parts of Kenya ostensibly as a result of the delayed results, the wide lead that the opposition leader Raila Odinga had over the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki, narrowed suddenly and in a couple of hours Kibaki was declared the winner and hurriedly sworn in. Kenya erupted into what became a tribal war, with ethnic groups maiming, killing and burning properties of opposing ethnic groups within their territories, to "finish them off" or exile them back to their ancestral land.

In the first week of the outbreak, there was very little representation of women in the media. More visible were images and stories of mobs of men waving machetes, clubs, and assorted crude weapons while singing blood curdling war cries. In the background, burning shops and looted business premises were visible, or billowing smoke. The areas covered were Kisumu City, Eldoret and Mombasa City, strong opposition areas. The immediate interpretation by the media was that of destruction of property as "people protested the controversial elections that were allegedly rigged." When the Kenya Assemblies of God Church in Eldoret was torched with 35 refugees burnt alive in it on 1 January 2008, the focus soon turned to portraying the violence as ethnically motivated. Figures of the dead started popping up, and six digit figures of those on forced migration. Still little mention of the women.

When Dr Sam Thenya of the Nairobi Women's Hospital called for a press conference and highlighted the fact that the hospital was receiving double the average number of daily rape cases and even some from much farther areas than usual, the media refocused their attention.

5 January saw newspapers carry photos of Desmond Tutu saying a Kibaki-Raila power sharing deal was possible, while the photo of a woman with her twins at the refugee camp in Nakuru drove the point home that the country needed healing. More images appeared of women breastfeeding children in desolate conditions in the camps while men ran from teargas canisters lobbed by police.

Under the question if it is hunger or pure lawlessness that led the men to that act, it goes ahead to say the "country has been in near anarchy over the election dispute all week." This was the beginning of media coverage of the plight of ordinary citizens in the violence, as opposed to the previous days where attention had primarily been on the face off between Kibaki's and Raila's presidency claims.

The following day the *Daily Nation* front page showed a three-picture sequence of a group of robbers attacking a woman as she alighted from a *matatu* (public service vehicle) in Kibera and robbing her of her shopping.

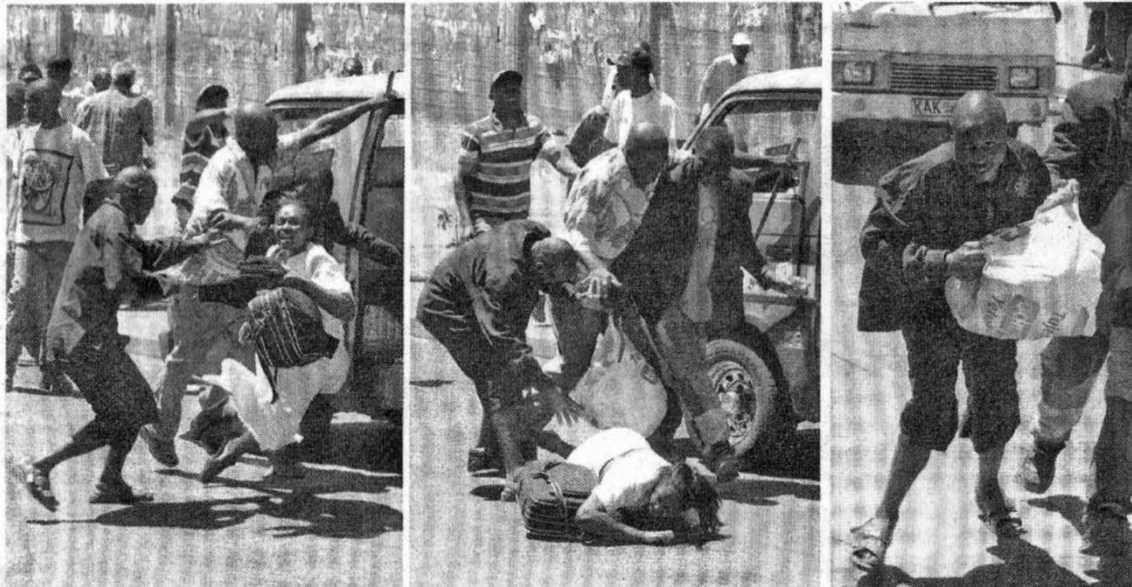
While giving the crisis in figures, *Daily Nation* said 199 killed, 1,000 arrested, 179,000 evicted from home, and with the story the icon of a woman feeding a hungry child in a camp for displaced people. This was to show

www.nationmedia.com

NAIROBI, JANUARY 6, 2008

KENYA IN CRISIS

# Kibaki opens the door for coalition



Perhaps driven by hunger or just lawlessness, this group of robbers knocked down a passenger as she alighted from a matatu in Kibera, Nairobi, and robbed her of her shopping yesterday. The country has been in near anarchy over the election dispute all week. Photos/REUTERS



that finally the violence had hit home by manipulating the image of the woman as a victim. Such tabulation of statistics using icons bearing suffering women to denote citizen casualties are the trademark of all reportage on violence in all the world's conflicts.

Women and children stranded in refugee camps, walking with their earthly belongings on their shoulders and heads as they fled the violence, or standing with tears in their eyes as they recounted the loss of loved ones started appearing in a bigger proportion. The reality dawned that this was more than just a protest against rigged polls, but a civil war unfolding. With such pitiful images, the country found a desire for peace. The media houses got together to rally the country under the banner of "Save Kenya," using slow motion clips of women fleeing in terror or frozen in despair with a crying child to drive the emotional appeal home. For two days, all the media houses called for peace, and created history by running joint editorials on the same.

The international media jetted in, reading the whole violence under the lens of the Western ideals of democracy. By placing too much emphasis on the Western concepts of democracy, and the fact that there are contentions on the figures the electoral commission issued, the Western media missed the point that the local media was putting across: that there was, unfolding, the systematic killing of people due to ethnic origins, and gender. They ignored the plight of the ordinary civilians and sent back images of men in violent protests and marches. The local media, overwhelmed by the images of masculine violence being screened in international media houses, flipped and

started to report like the western media, creating the classical two-form antagonists: those for pro-democracy protesting rigged figures, and the anti-democrats supporting the status quo and protecting their tribemates in power who had been accused of corruption and nepotism. Unlike the genocide in Rwanda (and even the war in Iraq) where the "madonna image" of a woman in distress cuddling an innocent young baby was used

to show the serious humanitarian crisis arising, the images beamed to the world were rid of women and children.

Instead, angry male crowds facing off riot police wearing jungle fatigues and wielding guns replaced them. Visuals of looting filled the news again, satisfying the Western stereotype of Africa as a world of violence and unrest. As such, no emotional attachment to the crisis on humanitarian grounds burdened Western viewers. It was just another case of democracy coming to birth in another volatile African country. It was not viewed as a case of civilian catastrophe happening.

Only when the West began drawing parallels with the Rwanda genocide did the image of woman reappear again. Since men image combat, women better image civilian targets. Women appeared either standing in refugee camps, or trying to salvage property from the smouldering embers of a

burnt house, or cuddling a crying child. Kenya was "facing a humanitarian disaster." Figures started being visible again of the number of rape cases. Images appeared of women being desolate in refugee camps: chin in palm, with a pot of measly looking porridge boiling on a makeshift stove while surrounded by hungry looking children, and facing malnutrition. The women interviewed wept as they recounted deaths of loved ones. However, no female imagery appeared when it came to the sides trying to solve the violence. Male politicians still grabbed headlines, calling for mass protests or warning against them, with women in the periphery wailing.

Political parties again decided to manipulate the imaging of women to score points against their opponents. The most obvious was the PNU advert, seeking to accuse the opposition of inciting the genocide. Using the Eldoret Church where 35

# Negotiators face legal minefield in arriving at power-sharing deal

**The law reforms to validate the deal may take months or years to hammer out**

**By GITAU WARIGI**

**T**he announcement that the two sides involved in the Kofi Annan mediation effort had narrowed down their differences to what kind of coalition government to have may not have been the thundering breakthrough the country expected, but it was highly significant nonetheless.

It is understood that ODM are rooting for substantive power-sharing. They have drawn a list of the ministries they want for a transitional period pending major constitutional reforms. Furthermore, the party wants guarantees that President Kibaki will not fire the appointees to those ministries, a notion that the PNU side dismisses as impractical and contrary to existing constitutional norms.

PNU has been agreeable to a coalition where the President appoints those he wishes from ODM as the constitution provides for. The position of an executive prime minister is something the PNU is opposed to in the absence of enabling constitutional provisions. But word is that the government is not totally averse to a non-executive premier, or a minister-in-chief.

"In principle, power-sharing can be agreed upon. But there is a legal minefield. Plus the necessary legal reform will take time, even a few miracles to accomplish. There has to be facilitating bills brought to Parliament and amended-

conference fell apart because the draft proposed an executive prime minister. The draft's opponents criticised it for relegating the President to more or less ceremonial duties. The entire anomaly with this arrangement was that the President was expected to be subjected to a direct popular mandate, which the more powerful prime minister was not.

Tanzania navigates this problem by having a non-executive premier who is answerable to the President. Assuming Kenya wants to pursue an arrangement where the President shares executive power with a prime minister, the constitution will have to be altered, which in turn will affect many statutory provisions. It would fundamentally alter the way the government works.

"If we want a prime minister, what scope should he get? Which appointments can he make? Do those include ambassadors? What are the checks and balances that would govern this office? Will the Head of the Public Service report to him? Can the President fire him? Such questions would have a huge ripple effect on the bureaucracy. It may actually be easier to draw up a new constitution from scratch," said Mr Paul Mwangi, a lawyer and author who has written extensively on the Kenyan Judiciary.

The other form of power-sharing that was tried was a coalition between National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under the Naru umbrella. It failed, which raises questions as to whether another attempt involving the same divided group of politicians won't be equally futile.

But, strictly speaking, the NAK-LDP memorandum of understanding and the follow-up coalition did not amount to sharing executive power. It could not do



**Mr Kofi Annan with President Kibaki and ODM leader Raila Odinga. A grand coalition bringing ODM into government has been proposed. Photo/FILE**

als from those parties. His action did not have the goodwill of the corporate leadership of Kanu, which at the time comprised Mr Uhuru Kenyatta and Mr William Ruto. In that sense it was not an inter-party coalition, leave alone being a government of national unity.

By poaching individual Opposition figures, the President technically did not

election is impractical. But if the matter were to come up, it would raise questions of how a presidential election would be separated from parliamentary and civic elections. Kenya's electoral law says that a General Election must simultaneously be carried out at three levels: presidential, parliamentary and civic.

A re-run of the presidential election

Though at the forefront of those affected, women are missing from negotiations.

people were burnt alive, they asked, “Who killed our *mothers* and children,” to draw emotional appeal.

Virtually all calls for aid to the victims of the clashes used images of women i.e. The “Save a Life Fund” by Standard Chartered Bank, Kenya Breweries and Nation Media group showed predominantly images of women fleeing with their earthly belongings on their heads, children on their back.

Cartoons resorted to using the mythical Wanjiku, to say she voted and yet democracy failed her and she is now “lost and confused, not knowing won... but hit by the sad fact that it is Kenya that has lost” (Gado, *Sunday Nation* 13 January editorial cartoon).

Isn't it ironic that while the women were and are still used to state that the nation is in a crisis (oh my God! Look what they are doing even to women! Someone needs to stop this!), figures of the dead and internally displaced people are given en masse, but so far no figures have as yet been published showing gender distribution of how many females died or are in the camps of the internally displaced.

The other irony is that by creating such senses of women as weaklings and victims, it is not surprising that it feeds on masochism making males target women more in the violence that is going on in Kenya. The police were being blamed for not controlling crime. At the same time, to show that the police were using excessive violence, images of women wailing and mourning young children shot by stray bullets while sleeping in their cots were splashed for maximum effect.

Evident also is the discrepancy in terms of the images of victims and those actually showing the victims getting assisted or seeking solutions. No one has queried the fact that while it was images of women in dire need of medical attention either by assault, rape, or malnutrition, images of health services provision are characterised by men. This brings the question as to whether men actually had greater access to health facilities than women did. Men appear in photographs sharing hospital beds amongst themselves, giving interviews about the sad

situation on the ground. So where do all the women we see in the same newspapers as victims go? The images of women in the camps are many, just standing next to their children and little belongings, yet when food distribution is shown in the same camps, it is images of men that overwhelm. Where do the women we saw earlier go to get their food?

Even in the interviews about the effects of war and what needs to be done, the majority of interviewees are the men in dark suits, which is ironic since the same media says that it is women who are mainly affected. If they are, then why are we not seeing them explaining what they went through, and what they think ought to be done? Women tend to appear in later segments of the news while men hog all the prime news. Indeed, for all TV stations' talk shows, the average ratio of male to female is roughly 9:1 since violence broke out. Even when discussing how the violence is affecting manufacturing industries, little airtime has been given to the Chairperson of the Kenya Association of Manufactures, Betty Maina. Notable attempts have been few. Njoki Muhoho, a business management consultant, appeared to explain the economic effect of the violence at the workplace on KTN. Citizen has hosted a Red Cross woman explaining the humanitarian crisis. The question is - why the omission of women, some of them “heavyweights” in the political scene, in the analysis of the impact of the violence?

Charity Ngilu, the only female member of the ODM Pentagon (the five-member team that leads the Orange Democratic Party) did not receive as much coverage as the rest of the pentagon concerning the violence. One of the only exceptions is the Justice Minister, Martha Karua, and even so, it is done with the slant of (derogatively) showing her as an abrasive, extremist woman. When the lady whom the media have nicknamed “The Iron Lady of Kenyan Politics” blasted the former British High Commissioner in Kenya Edward Clay on BBC's Hard Talk via video conferencing, TV stations replayed the clips locally.

Radio stations took the cue, hosted call-in sessions jibing her as the “Iron Lady” until the joke went too far, and

callers used her to justify the killings of members of her Gikuyu Tribe. The radio hosts quickly back-tracked and apologised for “not realising that tribal hatred is still rife,” and cut short the call-ins saying “let us not promote war.” The damage was done. By demonising her, they demonised her tribe, contributing to inciting and justifying the ethnic violence.

An article appeared in the *Sunday Nation* 20 January about a group of women from the Kibera slums, arguably the most affected area of Nairobi, saying they were tired of living in the Jamhuri Show Ground Refugee camp and wanted to go back to the houses from which they were forcibly evicted. They said they wanted to organise a peace march back to the slums, and had already formed themselves into an inter-tribal mass intent on going back home to preach peace to their men. Despite the article giving a date that had been set, and actually following them to the District Officer who granted them administrative permission to go ahead with their march since public gatherings have been outlawed, no images or news of whether the march actually took place or its effects has been forthcoming from the media. Women, especially wives of presidential candidates were prominent and thoroughly scrutinised in the campaign period, but during the violence, no one has bothered to find out what they think about their husbands’ misconduct.

What about those ads calling for peace, which do not have much presence of the same women they claim are victimised? The case of the Artistes United for Peace is a case in point – ten male celebrity artistes lend their voices to calling for peace, yet only one woman, Esther Wahome, speaks.

Such errors and omissions, deliberate or not, just go to show how incredibly ironic the depiction of women in the Kenyan ethnic violence has been from the very beginning, due to the patriarchal stereotypes that exist and insensitivity of the Kenyan and international media.

The point of view and visual subordination reflect the social distance and manipulability of the symbolic function of the image of the Kenyan woman caught in these unnecessary tribal killings and arsons.

● **Writers Bio**

*Simiyu Barasa is a Kenyan Filmmaker, and writer, deeply concerned that his beloved country can produce deaths and statistics for ethnic cleansing stories about Africa.*





## The Role of Activism in Shaping Public Policy: The Case of the Women in Politics Support Unit

By Sibongile Mpofo

### Abstract

Civil society has been in continuous struggle against the privileges that certain classes and groups in society enjoy because of the control of resources and power. In Zimbabwe, the quest for equality has seen the mushrooming of women activist groups that have tasked themselves to fight for equality between men and women in all positions of power and decision-making. Their only channel of lobbying has been through the media. Media theorists posit that media should be an agency of representation by enabling various social groups to express alternative viewpoints (Curran 1991; Litchenberg 1990). Dahlgren (1991) states that individuals and civic groups must have adequate and equal opportunities for placing their questions on the agenda, and the media has a role in representing these diverse viewpoints. With the current state of the media in Zimbabwe, which is highly polarised on political grounds, it remains to be seen how the media has responded to calls for diversity of views and inclusion of women in all aspects. This paper seeks to analyse the role of women's activism in Zimbabwe, with special focus on Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), in advocating for social change and whether the media has been a willing partner in this cause.

### Key words

activism, women's movements, democracy, civil society, diversity, gender, feminism.

## Introduction

Activist movements in Africa have called for more freedom and participation in decision-making at both economic and political levels by all groups in society. Under the new democracies, African leaders are also under pressure to establish institutions based

on the concept of participation, especially by the marginalised groups of society, such as women. The nationalist movements were the beginnings for the search for democracy in the continent (Ake 2000). However, the coming of independence did not usher any democracy as was expected by the masses. The less powerful members of society, marginalised groups such as women, remain excluded from

mainstream debates about and on issues that affect them.

Activist elements of the civil society that include movement for the empowerment and participation of marginalised groups such as women emerged to lobby for social emancipation. Inequality between men and women in positions of power and decision-making was one of the twelve key areas identified in the landmark 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Yet, very few women have been able to break the glass ceiling and make it into positions of decision-making.

While women's participation in politics and such decision-making bodies as local government and civil society has improved in most countries, women are still concentrated in the more traditional female-biased professions. In addition, the few that have made it to Parliament and other higher political bodies have also joined the male-bandwagon. While various programmes of action were formulated a few years ago by lobby groups as part of their contribution to the regional campaign, there have been very little tangible results, forcing activists to change the strategy.

Having women Members of Parliament elected does not entirely equate to equilibrium on how policies are formulated. As Karam (1998) argued, the transformative agenda goes beyond the numbers. He maintains that women have to learn the rules and structures and how to use them effectively. They should effectively change those that are not gender-friendly and make strategic inputs, influence the outputs and strive to change attitude and stereotypes. As we shall see later, the case study of the Zimbabwean situation indicates that while women have made inroads in so far as effecting social change through active movements, this change has still not quite equated women on the same level as that of men. The numbers in rural and urban councils, parliament, and cabinet are still not enough to effectively push for a female agenda.

Women's organisations such as Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU) in conjunction with the Women's Trust last year held a public meeting on *Zimbabwean Women and the 2008 Election*. The event was aimed at intensifying the 50/50 campaigns and also to find strategies on how to increase women's representation

in decision-making at national level.

The role of the media therefore becomes particularly important as they provide the platform through which people can be empowered to participate in national debates. Some scholars like Curran (1991) have argued that the media ought to reflect diversity from civil society and various ethnic groups. As an agency of representation, the media should reflect the varied nature of civil society and enable various social groups to express their viewpoints on areas of policy and national debates.

Theorists note that the media should go further by assisting civil organisations to mobilise support and assist them to register effective protests and develop and promulgate alternatives (Curran 1991). Aware of the role of the media, activists have in the last few years taken the media to task, forcing them to give fair coverage to previously marginalised groups such as women.



Sheila Bapoo, Social Security Minister at Mauritius elections workshop in November 2005. Credit: Colleen Lowe Morna

Apart from polarisation, gender imbalances are still entrenched in the male-dominated Zimbabwean media. The local media still finds it not newsworthy to report on issues concerning women. The Gender and Media Baseline Study carried out by Gender Links (GL) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), showed that while on average women comprise 19.4% of members of parliament in the region, only 8% of politicians whose views are sought for comment are women.

The latest media analysis report by WIPSU for the period July-September 2007 shows that women in politics and decision-making are still not given enough coverage by

the press. The statistical information on the coverage of women in politics done by WIPSU for the period July-September 2007 reveals that:

- 19 out of the 68 articles reviewed referred to female parliamentarians;
- seven out of the 68 articles referred to female councillors
- 22 out of 68 referred to the Vice-President;
- 16 of the 68 articles referred to four ministers and the deputy minister in their official capacity;
- one of the 68 articles referred to the two governors;
- six of the 68 articles referred to the Chairperson of the Commission that runs the city of Harare; and
- one of the 68 stories referred to a female councillor.

Another media monitoring report done by WIPSU focusing on the issues that are covered, showed that most stories covering women in politics were in the scandals category, followed by social events and development and cartoons and pictures. The media gave excess attention to all the scandals that involved female politicians.

In this era of globalisation, varying challenges confront journalists, some of which threaten the very essence of journalism. Media roles are either changing completely or being fused with contemporary issues to reflect changing societies. The right to civil liberties and citizenship has given rise to activism, which has become a major lobbying tool for advocating for social change.

### **Women In Politics Support Unit (WIPSU)**

WIPSU was established in April 2001 by a group of feminists to lobby for equal representation between men and women in politics and decision-making positions. The organisation has been laying the foundation for the 2008 harmonised elections by running campaign programmes for female candidates.

WIPSU has been lobbying for political representation since the Parliamentary Elections in 2000, Urban Councils Elections in 2003, 2005 Parliamentary Elections and now 2008 harmonised Presidential, Senatorial, Parliamentary and Council elections. The organisation's strategy has evolved from just lobbying for change and advocacy to actually identifying

and mobilising capable candidates, capacity building for identified prospective candidates, mobilising women and the public's support for women candidates and setting up a women candidates campaign fund. Its activism and lobbying has gone a step further from just challenging and changing women's subordination to men, to actually taking control of that social change themselves. According to its programme of action, the organisation has been advocating for the following.

- An electoral system that advocates for women's representation – Electoral systems play a part in advancing women's representation. An electoral system can best be understood as a way in which votes are translated into seats. The choice of an electoral system can effectively determine who is elected and which party gains power. Zimbabwe's electoral system does not ensure a representative parliament.
- Party positions on the greater representation of women and strategies to realise this goal by 2008 – Women in the opposition highlighted that they are in a struggle within a struggle. The political terrain women are operating in is not conducive. Women in these parties are facing resistance from men within their political parties. Under the guise of democracy, women candidates are falling out in primaries. Party politics have strong bearing on women's participation.
- Mobilising the women's vote – by encouraging women to come forward, providing a conducive environment for participation in politics at all levels, training potential candidates and their campaign teams, building alliances within the women's movement and lobbying and advocating for changes in culture and systems in different political parties.

The organisation has also lobbied for a repeal of legislation that impedes on the rights of women, such as the Electoral Act, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Public Order and Security Act (POSA), as well as civic and voter education. WIPSU's contribution and certainly that of many other women's movements and rights activists has contributed immensely to gender

diversity in Zimbabwe. A significant number of women have entered the political arena.

### Success Stories

Latest statistics from the Government show that the number of women who are contesting in the council elections has risen from 75 in 2005 to more than 800 aspiring candidates for the 1 700 seats in the 29 March elections. Female representation in the Politburo and central committee also rose to 38% and 33% respectively.

Quoted in *The Herald* (13 March 2008, E8), the Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Oppah Muchinguri said, "Since women have started agitating for the quota system, we have recorded a lot of achievements especially within the ruling party, where out of three top posts, one is occupied by a woman." In parliament, although the situation is not satisfactory in the House of Assembly, she said the quota system was successfully achieved in the senate with 36% representation.

In the ruling party Zanu-PF, senior women have been allocated parliamentary seats without going through the primary elections. The party has also requested 60% quota for the local government and parliamentary candidates to be allocated to women. The party has also reserved to appoint a female Vice-President, Joice Mujuru.

Opposition parties have also embraced the quota system to promote women candidates as mandated by the SADC principles and guidelines on elections. Both factions of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) have a policy commitment to equal participation of women.

Affirmative action in promoting policies has also helped propel women into decision-making positions in public, private and professional sectors (Dahlerup 1998). While the quota system has been criticised as perpetuating stereotypes, it has however given the opportunity for women to somehow break the glass ceiling.

On the regulatory front, success stories include the Sexual Offences Bill in which women lobbied for the inclusion of a clause that makes marital rape an offence that

attracts a prison term. Other laws include the Constitution Amendment No.17, and Section 23 (a) and the Domestic Violence Act, amongst others.

### Shortcomings

While laudable – the activists' lobbying has borne some fruits to a certain extent – women's movements still feel there is a yawning gap concerning equality amongst women and men in society. Much of the blame has been put on the local media, which according to WIPSU has not played its part as a vehicle for diverse views and representation of marginalised groups. The democratic function of the media in Zimbabwe exists only in theory. While it should be organised in such a manner that they enable diverse social groups to express their views as posits (Dahlgren & Sparks 1991:30), the Zimbabwean media is still polarised not only on the political front, but on gender. This is worsened by the fact that the media is male dominated: no female journalists are in editor's positions.



ZANU PF supporters chant slogans as they listen to an address by President Robert Mugabe at ZANU PF Headquarters in Harare on August 29, 2007. Credit: IRIN

A democratic media system should ideally represent different interests in society. It should facilitate their participation in the public domain by enabling them to contribute to public debate and have input in the framing of public policy. However, research done by media monitoring projects has shown a very negative picture in the coverage of women in the media. Media monitoring reports done by WIPSU for both 2006 and 2007 indicate that more of their campaigns now need to target the media itself as a constituent.



**Table showing number of stories covered by newspapers in 2007**

Paper	July	August	September	Total
Herald	14	19	13	46
Zimbabwe Independent	0	6	1	7
Financial Gazette	2	3	2	7
Standard	1	2	1	4
Sunday Mail	0	0	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>68</b>

Source: WIPSU media monitoring report, July-September 2007

The table shows a great fall of figures from the previous quarter. The *Herald* continues to comparatively carry more items on women politicians with 46 articles. There is, therefore, need for media to cover more women parliamentarians, including rural councillors and senators, who command a large population of marginalised women.

Having said that, the milestones that women activists have achieved in Zimbabwe, which to a certain extent are commendable, would all go to waste if the activism is solely to put women in positions of power and end there. Mtintso (1999) noted that having numbers in parliament, rural or urban councils would not yield any desirable social change and equilibrium in society unless those women are capacitated to push forward the activism strategy.

While Abzug and Jain (1996) noted that women's presence and actions in parliament can force the institution, society's perceptions about women and force policies to change, having more numbers in parliament could be meaningless if women are still stereotyped and look down upon themselves as inferior to men. The danger is that once they enter the political elite, they cease to associate themselves with the lot and fail to identify with them, thus they tend to embrace the male agenda. Simply having women in positions of power therefore, fails to bring tangible results to the women's movements that worked hard to build them up.

Women in parliament should constantly work with

women and feminist movements outside parliament so that there is a powerful voice pushing the women's agenda. There should be no dichotomy between these two strands but rather they should be seen as interdependent and complementing each other (Karam 1998). Shortcomings of gender activism in Zimbabwe have been lack of capacity-building to our women leaders themselves, before they could also lobby for the capacitating of women in general and media in specific, to play an effective role in social change through national policy debates.

**Conclusion**

Media is one of the pillars of society, expected to play its democratic role rather than categorising. It is expected to change negative mindsets in society. With the rise of civil society and the consciousness on the rights of individuals or groups, the media's role is expected to even go further by assisting these civil organisations and acting as a platform for their protests. Activists have witnessed this loophole that without the support of the media, their struggles would continue being a far cry. Also, an assumption that individual women's organisations or women politicians would effect change may not be ideal, but rather a whole encompassing programme targeting women, explicitly as women, and not on the grounds of their social standing in society. Having a whole encompassing women's movement with a clear feminist goal could give rise to meaningful activism that would be able to put more pressure on the patriarchal systems in Zimbabwe.

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● **Writers Bio**

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## Gender in Russian Media during Election Campaigns

By Tatiana Frolova, Olga Smirnova, Elena Vartanova



### Abstract

Russia during parliamentary and presidential elections made an interesting case for research of gender issues coverage by the national media. Although Russian women traditionally form a large and active part of media audiences, they have not yet received sufficient attention by the media. At the same time, during the last few years gender consciousness has been substantially developed, however, this process is accompanied by the whole complex of controversies.



### Key words

elections, media, gender

According to research of gender tolerance of leading Russian Mass Media during election campaigns, women's presence in the media content and information flows is still insignificant, and this is especially true of the political aspects of media content. Russian media often ignore presence of women in politics and other parts of public life. This also reflects a low degree of women participation in the public policy of the country.

This all has been reflected in the Russian press substantially. Thus, content analysis of Russian leading print media represents the most adequate information model of

gender equality in a political and public sphere of the country and its coverage by the most popular media outlets. Efficiency of the study affects the realisation of one of the most urgent problems of gender policy – the formation of gender tolerance in modern Russian journalism.

The study was carried out by the Center for Gender and Media Studies which has been established by the Faculty of Journalism, Lomonossov Moscow State University (MSU) and the Russian Union of Journalists in April 2007 as a separate unit at the Faculty of Journalism. Among

the primary goals of the Centre are the analysis of gender sensitivity of the Russian media and integration of gender studies in journalism education.

Social experience and the history of gender relations in Russia are unique. The problems that Russian society is now facing took their shape through the several decades of the Soviet period and have grown more complicated in the course of the deep transformation process which Russia is experiencing now. Taking into consideration the peculiarities mentioned, the concept and the findings of our study can be fully understood.

Up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia had been developing as a traditional androcratic society with men playing the dominant part in all the spheres of life. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century the gender contracts were changing as Russian society was getting modernised. After the Revolution in 1917 when the monarchy was toppled and the socialist regime was beginning to fledge, the government introduced a policy of freeing woman from the traditional family, involving her in social life and providing the conditions for her economic independence from men. Women took active part in the formation of the new society and in the development of the state economy.

The gender contract of "the working mother" was promoted all through the Soviet period. The phenomenon of the so-called Soviet "super-woman" – the woman who not only worked at the production sites together with men but also took care of the family - was shaped. In accordance with the androcratic tradition, the men did not get involved in household activities. The state of women was getting more complicated in the atmosphere of total deficit typical for the Soviet economy. Moreover, despite the proclaimed equality, subtle discrimination of women was still a characteristic feature of the social sphere. Thus, the peculiarities of the gender order in Russia have always been interrelated with the active role of the government in establishing gender norms and contracts, i.e. the emancipation policy and the policy of supporting maternity. At the same time, one of its peculiar features was maintaining the traditional relationship model in the spheres of family and sexual life.

In the 1980s, Perestroika brought about political reforms, the switch to market relations and freedom of speech, including the abolition of censorship in the mass media. However, gender relations influenced by the unique gender history still had a peculiar nature.

The development of gender relations was highly controversial. On the one hand, the so-called androcratic Renaissance could be witnessed in many spheres of public life: the formation of social layers allowed some women to "return" to the family and become "simple women" again. On the other hand, many Russian women having great social and working experience were able to make successful personal careers.

Men's gender roles also changed. The policy of state paternalism eliminated the typically "male" qualities in many men and hindered their self-realisation under the new circumstances. And on the contrary, with the state no longer being in full control, some men could realise their "male" potential and felt they owned the life and the women. Another important point is that first of all, the major social changes affected the women, the families, the children. The gender roles in Russia were changing, the relations becoming tense.

Sharp gender controversies are one of the many complicated social problems in this country. The gender contract in Russia is still different from the "equal status" contract typical for a modern family in many Western countries. The nature of this phenomenon is influenced by a number of peculiar features of gender relations in Russia. The partner relations between genders based on mutual agreement and concerning all spheres from family life to politics are not common for Russia, be it in family life or politics.

The statistics show that Russian women, who make up 52% of the population, are hardly represented in political life: Russia takes 97<sup>th</sup> place in the world for women's participation in the country's parliament. The current tendencies cannot be called positive either: women made up only 98.4% of seats in parliament 2003-2007, the percentage being significantly lower than in 1993-1995, with 13.5% of seats taken by women.



Women in Russia have been traditionally employed in the least-paid industries, including in state-subsidised spheres: education, Medicare, culture, the segregation of women in these sectors is increasing steadily. Men still take top administrative positions much more often than women. To illustrate, women make up 72% of state executives in the country, but only 12% of top managers in these spheres. Despite the rapid growth in female employment and women's relatively active part in politics, inequality is still typical in both family and private life.

There are many purely male problems in this country as well. The major changes in the social and economic life affected men more than women. The average life duration for males is less than 60 years; the rate of deaths from unnatural reasons is extremely high. Permanent stress and risky behaviour have become quite an ordinary thing for Russian men. The image of the man of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> century is one of a successful businessman, a "macho", who feels ashamed of any weakness or any worries about his health and takes aggressive behaviour and polygamy for granted. Manliness is often associated with self-destruction, i.e. the behaviour connected with risking one's life, bad habits, neglecting one's health etc. The sharp increase in the number of divorces and illegitimate children, in the figures of social orphanhood and crime are the logical consequences of the change in the gender roles and the lack of harmony in gender relations.

The urgency of gender problems is demanding changes in the existing social policy and necessitates serious discussions on the subject. The level of gender consciousness reflects the general state of the democratic processes in society. This approach has become the chief theme of our study: how are gender problems perceived at the political level? How are they expressed in the election campaign?

October – November 2007 we conducted a study on the following subject: "Gender expertise in the political performance of Russians" and "Gender problems in the election campaign 2007" with the focus

on mass media data reflecting the course of the parliamentary election campaign. It is a well-known fact that the main functions of elections in the democratic system are the articulation and representation of the various interests of people, the expansion of communications, encouraging the electorate to settle urgent social problems and the modernisation of society by means of political competition.

In the course of the election campaign, the role and actual political significance of various social problems are reviewed. This makes it possible to compare the existing state of gender problems to their factual influence on the development of the political agenda, i.e. the society's readiness to resolve gender problems. We wanted to know if gender problems could compete with other up-to-date social objectives through the period of active political performance. We were also interested to know which gender problems attracted the greatest media attention at that time.

The main research method is the content analysis of media texts with further generalising of quantitative and qualitative characteristics.

Due to major political, economic and social transformation, the Russian media market has undergone dramatic changes. Actually, it has been created anew. However, the federal daily newspapers still keep their leading positions and remain the most powerful group in the Russian media market. Therefore, six federal newspapers were chosen as the main empirical basis for the analysis:

- "Izvestiya" – the leading federal newspaper;
- "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" – the official newspaper of the government;
- "Novaya Gazeta" – the liberal opposition newspaper;
- "Kommersant" – the liberal opposition newspaper for the business circles;
- "Komsomolskaya Pravda" – the mass newspaper with the highest circulation; and
- "Moskovskiy Komsomolets" – the newspaper popular among young people.

120 newspaper issues were used for the study. In addition, extracts from other newspapers and magazines, political programs, TV-debates, commercials and internet-forums were used as background information.

Our study was based at the so-called "positive" gender concept presupposing that society should aim for harmony of the interests of males and females, at setting the conditions for fulfilling the gender potentials. In view of this, we left out some questions typical for gender research, such as the following: how many women run for seats in Parliament? Which questions are set by female candidates? Are women subject to sexism and the language of aggression?

We were interested in such topics as: does society accept the existence of gender problems? In which spheres of life are they the most urgent problems? What is the current rating of gender problems? Do the political process participants take gender problems seriously? How do mass media view gender problems? Are gender problems covered differently in media representing different political views? Such an approach determined the choice of the main categories for analysis:

- *the topics* of the texts showed the distribution of gender problems among the different spheres of social life;
- *the problem range* reflected the rating of certain gender problems depending on the frequency of their mentioning;
- *the positions* identified the approach, the estimates, the aggression language;
- *the persons* determined the numbers of men/women as the subjects of comments;
- *the genres* revealed the nature of addressing gender problems.

The selected texts were divided into two groups: "election-related" (423) and "gender-related" (69); a small part of texts (34) touching upon both the election and the gender problems. The given texts were of the ones of special interest and became the subject of detailed analysis.

The most interesting results are as follows:

Only 8% of texts in the "election-related" group had any mentioning of various gender problems (*diagram 1*), whereas in the "gender-related" group 49% of texts were connected with the elections (*diagram 2*). Consequently, society is willing to deal with gender problems, but politicians prefer not to notice them and do not regard them as serious. The pro-governmental "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" (14%) and the popular newspapers for the masses (6%) paid the greatest attention to gender, while the business newspaper "Kommersant" and the liberal edition "Novaya Gazeta" did the least (2%)(see *diagram 3*).

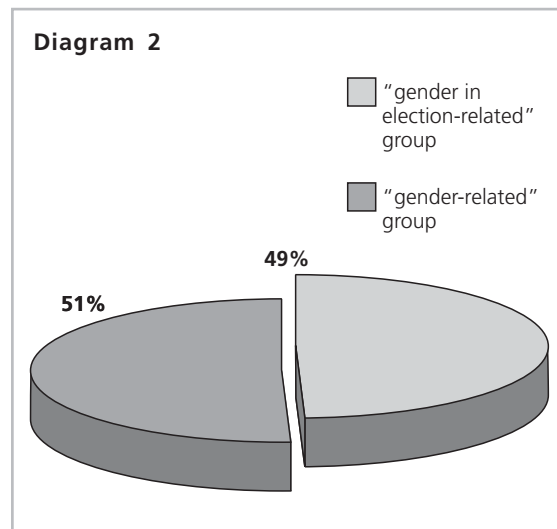
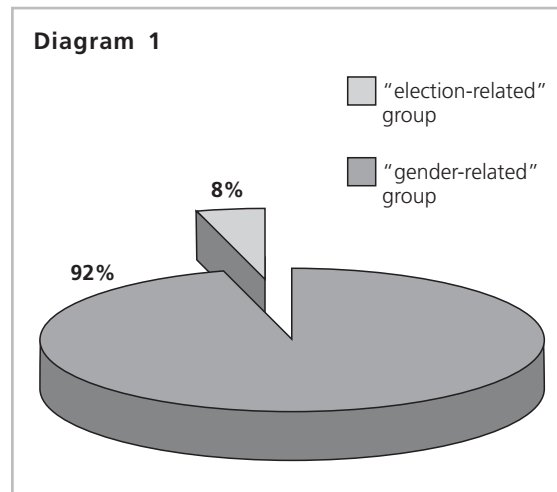
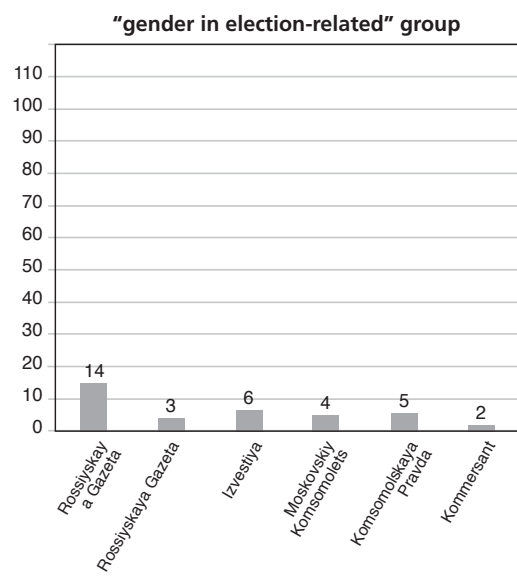
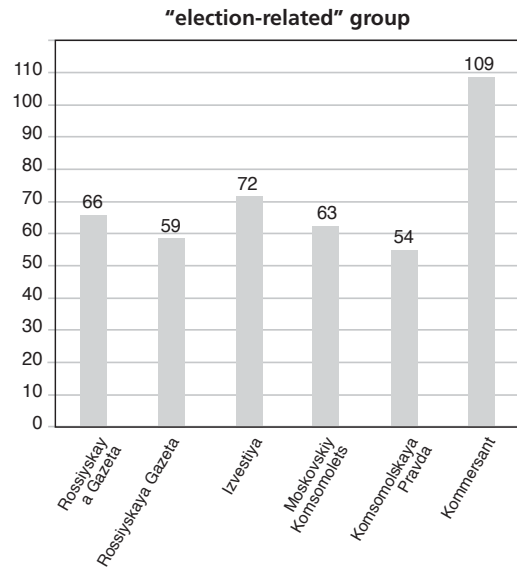


Diagram 3



Gender problems were most often mentioned in extracts referring to social and family spheres, and also to politics (34%, 24% and 25% respectively). Less often, they referred to economy and culture (3% and 9%). This fact can be explained by the following reasons: firstly, the election campaign of the party in power was based on employing achievements in the social sphere (two years earlier the government initiated the massive social programs, including one for demographic development),

the range of social problems bringing about the gender approach. Secondly, the notions of “gender” and “sex” come closest in the private sphere; the problem of sex being one of the favourite subjects for popular journalism, often determining the topic selection for popular media and reflecting the change in gender roles in the private sphere and family life.

The feminisation of the social sphere and the demographic problems connected with females dominating in the troublesome social sector are heading the rating of the most up-to-date issues. The political programmes paid great attention to the problems mentioned; the media also concentrated on the deviant behavior of men and the army service. The male media images were marked by greater negativism; self-sacrifice and disquiet prevailed in the female representations. A significant number of texts do not define a particular problem but rather describe situations marked by problematic relations having a discreet gender nature.

The neutral approach is typical for positions and assessments (48%); the attitude to gender problems is most often based on the modern perception of gender roles (34%), only 18% of texts expressing a view supporting the traditional division of roles.

The historical experience of the Russian people, in which women have long been participating in the differentiation of labour, has played its part. The Russian newspapers believe women do not need any special political support; they stress that the human potential on the whole has not been fulfilled.

We can see the different approach to covering gender problems in different newspapers: the popular mass editions express greater interest in social problems (including gender problems), but the influential quality media tend to pay more attention to covering and assessing the actions of the government and political parties. To them, citizens are not equal partners. The journalists of all kinds of media are not free from gender stereotypes.

The main conclusions of the study are as follows:

- the position of gender problems on the political agenda does not correspond to their actual significance;
- the gender consciousness of the Russian society is being transformed, all the controversies of this process being revealed;
- the media coverage of gender problems is spontaneous and does not reach the level of quality analysis;
- the mass media are not free from gender stereotypes; and
- the popular press is ahead of the quality press as far as the formation of gender consciousness is concerned.

To sum up, the given study reflects the controversy of gender consciousness: society feels and sees these problems, the mass media show that it is high time they became an important point on the political agenda. However, both the politicians' and experts' community do not pay enough attention to them. They still view social problems overall and gender problems in particular as something not important enough to be used in politics fully. Only an insignificant part of the texts covering the election campaign was devoted to the subject of gender, and the political platform did not reflect the topic adequately.

To a certain extent, the above-mentioned can be explained by the nature of the Russian parliamentary election campaign, which was fiercely criticised in both the Russian and the world media. All of the experts pointed out that the television debate ratings were quite low (no more than 3%), that the advertising was not quite professional and that a real competition of ideas never took place. The assessment of the elections said, "The persons beat the ideas." The future of the president rather than the future of the society became the main topic of discussion in the press.

The Russian social experience is not only unique but can also become a lesson to societies that are now passing through a transformation period. It is not only government actions or the nature of the economic relations that the

development of democracy and civil society depends on. By means of a single example, our study has shown that the press has to hear the voice of society, look at its citizens, and represent their interests. The problem of civil upbringing and human development make up one of the main tasks for such a society.

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