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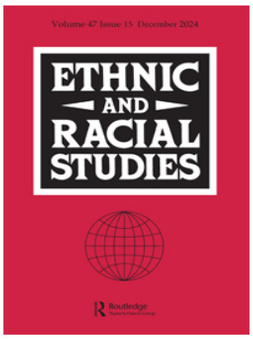

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Kuziwakwashe Zigomo

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The influence of transnational Pentecostal religious beliefs on women's political participation in Zimbabwe

Kuziwakwashe Zigomo

Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

ABSTRACT

Over recent decades, transnational Pentecostal religious movements have experienced rapid surges in authoritarian regimes which have reported high levels of women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa such as Rwanda and Zimbabwe. This article assesses whether transnational Pentecostal religious beliefs have been influential in enhancing women's political participation in Zimbabwe? The article employs an intersectional and postcolonial feminist lens to demonstrate how religion impacts individual political behaviour. It further draws on ethnographic material gathered in Zimbabwe consisting of in-depth interviews with nine Pentecostal women in politics. The article finds that whilst Pentecostal religious beliefs do enhance women's political participation, the quality of this participation differs considerably amongst women.

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Introduction

There is a vast breadth of literature which explores the influence of religion on political participation. Within this literature, there is contestation amongst scholars as to whether religion advances or hinders political participation. Whilst some studies argue that religion is a deterrent to political participation (Akah and Ajah 2020; Omelicheva and Ahmed 2018; Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003), there is more evidence to suggest that it is instead a mobilising force which significantly enhances political participation (Aghazadeh, Mahmoudoghli, and Ha 2017; Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008;

CONTACT Kuziwakwashe Zigomo K.Zigomo@kent.ac.uk

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Jones- Correa and Leal 2001; Koralage, Touseff, and Begam 2022; McClendon and Riedl 2015; Sperber and Hern 2018). There is even more evidence to suggest that certain religious groups do more to actively foster or enhance political participation than others.

It is within this context that studies which investigate the influence of transnational Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) on political participation have emerged. These studies, which have been spurred on by the rapid spread of PCCs on the African continent over recent decades (Gifford 2004; Maxwell 2006; McCauley 2012), have found that Pentecostalism has significantly enhanced political participation amongst its adherents, particularly when compared to other religions (McClendon and Riedl 2015; Sperber and Hern 2018). Sperber and Hern's (2018, 830–862) study in particular on Pentecostal identity and citizen engagement in Zambia found that Pentecostals did share partisan preferences along with reporting higher levels of political interest and participation than other Christians though they were less likely to contact public elected officials. The latter is a finding which they attribute to the prevalence of informal patronage networks established by Pentecostal leaders which allow them to function as conduits which serve as political interlocutors to their politically mobilised adherents as observed in other African states (McCauley 2012).

However, as useful as these studies have been, there is still significant room for more in-depth qualitative exploration and analyses on the influence of Pentecostalism on the political participation of distinct groups. This is even more necessary as PCCs have experienced rapid surges in authoritarian regimes which have reported high levels of women's political participation such as Rwanda and Zimbabwe (Kubai 2007; Maxwell 2006). As women, in particular, make up the larger membership of PCCs and report higher levels of religiosity (Kaunda and Kaunda 2018, 27; Kaunda 2016), we may therefore do well to consider whether PCCs have been influential in enhancing women's political participation and, if so, then in what ways they have been influential?

Regarding the latter, existing studies on Pentecostalism and political participation have focussed on the influence of religious beliefs over church attendance, religious traditions, religious behaviour, and so on (Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008; Sperber and Hern 2018). The literature on the influence of religious beliefs on political participation has provided valuable insights into the wider aspects of political participation which more of the populace is involved in such as voting, joining protests, signing petitions, sharing political news, etc. (Koralage, Touseff, and Begam 2022; Sperber and Hern 2018). It has further provided insights into macro-level religious beliefs and their influence on the aforementioned wider aspects of political participation (Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008, 296–314). However, within these studies a lack of attention has been given, firstly, to the more demanding aspects of political participation such as running for office or joining a political party or organisation which much less of the populace are involved in. And

secondly, to understanding the influence of micro-level or individual religious beliefs, particularly on the more demanding aspects of political participation. The lack of attention given to these vital areas obscure the deeper and more nuanced insights which could be gained from investigating the influence of micro-level religious beliefs and how these may impact the quality of political participation at the individual level. My study therefore aims to fill these gaps by focussing on the influence of individual Pentecostal religious beliefs on the political participation of women either running for political office or actively engaged as members of political parties in Zimbabwe.

The study draws on ethnographic material gathered in Zimbabwe over two electoral periods (2018–2023) consisting of in-depth interviews with nine Pentecostal women in politics.[1] It employs an intersectional and postcolonial feminist theoretical framework in adopting elements of Omelicheva and Ahmed's theoretical framework on political participation which explains how religion impacts individual political behaviour (Omelicheva and Ahmed 2018, 6–8). In investigating the influence of Pentecostal religious beliefs on women's political participation in Zimbabwe, the study finds that Pentecostal religious beliefs do enhance women's political participation by enabling them to construct new religious subjectivities which propel them to pursue their political aspirations. However, the quality of this participation differs considerably amongst women as Pentecostal women's political engagement is mediated by other factors apart from just their religion and gender, mainly: their party affiliation, age, marital status, class, occupation, education, and patriarchal norms.

Methodology

A feminist approach – intersectional and postcolonial feminist theories

The term "intersectionality" can most notably be traced back to the influential work of African American civil rights advocate, Kimberle Crenshaw, who examined the intersection of gender, race, and class, particularly in highlighting the multiple axes of discrimination African American women faced in corporate America. Crenshaw argued that it was these multiple axes of discrimination which lay at the intersection of gender, race and class that made the oppression of African American women distinct to that of their white female counterparts (Crenshaw 1989). Since its inception, intersectionality has travelled far and wide, making it somewhat of an open-ended theory which scholars globally have adapted in different contexts and disciplines (Griffin 2020; Rosette et al. 2018; Tariq and Syed 2017; Zigomo 2022).

On the other hand, postcolonial feminist theory arose as a response to first and second-wave feminisms in challenging the highly simplistic and

orientalist conceptualisations and representations of "the third world woman" who is often juxtaposed to the white western female subject. A key thinker of this school, Chandra Mohanty, problematises the monolithic representations of third-world women particularly in the global South by highlighting the complexities inherent between and amongst them, making their experiences varied (Mohanty 1984). Likewise, postcolonial feminists bring these complexities to the fore by highlighting the different colonial histories and legacies which have and still continue to shape the dynamic nature of gender relations in distinct ways in the global South (Chadya 2003; Mama 2020).

In considering the case of Zimbabwe, an intersectional and postcolonial feminist perspective is important in highlighting the diversity amongst Zimbabwean Pentecostal women which informs their experience. This diversity can be attributed in part to the subjective nature of their individual religious beliefs and further to this the multiple identities which these women have in not just being female Pentecostals but in belonging to other distinct categories based on: their marital status, age, class, occupation, education, and party affiliation. This diversity thus shapes the quality of their political participation in different yet meaningful ways. We will also see how the country's colonial legacy of patriarchal norms continues to shape the dynamic nature of gender relations in the postcolonial landscape.

This study incorporates elements of Omelicheva and Ahmed's (2018, 4–25) framework on political participation which demonstrates how religion impacts individual political behaviour (see Appendix Figure A1). The framework groups the most prominent characteristics of religious political participation into four main categories: *motive*, *political opportunity structure*, *incentive* and *frames*. Though initially used for a quantitative study, this framework has been adapted in this article for this qualitative study and provides structure to the discussion section on the findings.

Further to this, my approach in this study is to conceptualise religious women not as passive subjects or mere recipients of religious messages and texts but rather as active and agentic beings. Thus the worldview of my research participants is central to this study and as such my focus is on how these women exercise their agency in interpreting and appropriating religious messages and scriptural texts for themselves and into their public lives. Consequently, I adopt the approach of a growing number of scholars who acknowledge that whilst religion in itself can be limiting in some ways for Pentecostal women, it can also be empowering for them by enabling them to construct new religious subjectivities for themselves through their re-interpretation and appropriation of religious messages and texts which further empowers them to seek opportunities in the public sphere and pursue their more secular aspirations (Frahm-Arp 2006; Gilbert 2015; Mapuranga 2018; McClendon and Riedl 2015; Soothill 2007). This is important, as

much of the literature on religious women is quite limiting as it focusses more on their roles in church, family and interpersonal relationships, thereby often limiting them and their interactions to the private sphere (Hackett 2017; Mate 2002). Without taking anything away from these studies, my argument here is that we need to broaden our understandings of religiously mediated gendered identities and consider the ways in which women are fashioning and re-fashioning Pentecostalism for themselves enabling them to have very public roles within their communities – particularly in spaces which have previously been dominated by men.

Data collection & methods of analysis

This study is based on ethnographic material gathered during the period spanning over two elections (2018 and 2023) in the capital city of Harare. Data collection took place from July 2017 to July 2023. Whilst the data collection period spanned over two elections, this article is more so focussed on the 2018 election which recorded significantly higher levels of women's participation. The main method of data collection was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were carried out with nine female political candidates who identified themselves as Pentecostal.[2] Six of these women were independents, two from the main political parties – the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) respectively, and one from a smaller less established party, the African Democratic Party (ADP). All of these women were young professional women aged between 20 and 40 years at the time of either campaigning or interviewing. Once the data collection was done, a thematic and discourse analysis was conducted. Themes emerging from the interview transcripts were coded and grouped into respective categories. Gradually, patterns began to emerge and I will elaborate more on these as I discuss the empirical findings later in the article. However, before getting to this, it is necessary to provide a contextual backdrop on the Pentecostal and political landscape in Zimbabwe.

Pentecostalism and politics in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has witnessed three significant waves of Pentecostalism since its inception. The first was pioneered by the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) which was officially established in 1943 (Togarasei 2018, 36). The early Pentecostal church faced much opposition from the colonial state and was accused of fanaticism due to its emphasis on glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and the gifts of the Spirit which was a move away from the more orthodox mainline churches (Maxwell 2006, 47; Togarasei 2018, 36). Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) was established after its founder, Ezekiel Guti, broke

away from AFM and grew to become a formidable movement. Maxwell's (2006) ethnographic study on Guti and the ZAOGA church shows strong links between Guti and the nationalist movement's liberation theology, particularly during the late colonial period (1950s and 1960s).

The second wave Zimbabwe witnessed was post-independence, as Pentecostalism witnessed another surge in the 1980s and 1990s. This was precipitated by a shift in the geopolitical climate globally with the collapse of communism and the shift to western-imposed capitalist policies and economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAPs) in many African states. Open borders allowed Pentecostal leaders, particularly from America, to flock in and more local churches established as splinter groups from earlier movements (Togarasei 2018, 39; Gifford 1991). The Prosperity Gospel doctrine allowed this movement to spread far and wide particularly in the urban areas as it was based on the ethic of hard work which was "a form of spirituality perfectly in tune with the needs of the emerging middle-class entrepreneurs of the ESAP years" (Maxwell 1998 cited in Jeater 2016, 169–170). ZAOGA experienced exponential growth during this time along with other PCCs belonging to this 2nd wave generation movement such as Hear the Word Ministries which later became Celebration Churches International (CCI), New Life Covenant Church (Jabula Ministries), Word of Life Ministries with roots in Hear the Word Ministries, Christ Embassy – a satellite church with its base in Nigeria, Faith Ministries, and Family of God (FOG), amongst others. During this period, the ruling Zanu PF party had absolved all oppositional forces after experiencing a landslide victory at the polls in Zimbabwe's first election after independence (Dorman 2016, 33). Robert Mugabe's ruling Zanu PF party had significant support in the urban towns. However, with the backlash from the ESAPs implemented in the mid-90s, support for the ruling party began to wane in the cities, particularly in the capital of Harare, though it managed to maintain a stronghold in the rural areas. Economic mismanagement, spiralling unemployment, and the state's repression of all oppositional forces contributed to the decline in support of the ruling party causing it to lose its control over municipalities to the main opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai (McGregor 2013, 783). During this period, the Prosperity Doctrine was the PCCs response to the nation's economic woes by equipping its adherents to become self-sufficient and not rely on the state (Maxwell 1998, 351).

The third wave began in 2008 with the rise of the prophetic Pentecostal Charismatic Churches pioneered by Emmanuel Makandiwa the leader and founder of the United Family International Church (UFIC). Whilst Makandiwa himself has roots in the AFM the movement he pioneered has also been significantly influenced by West African Pentecostalism (Togarasei 2018, 42). The rise of the prophetic PCCs took place during the period in which a Government of National Unity (GNU) had been established within which Zanu PF

had been forced to share power somewhat uneasily with the MDC due to the worsening economic conditions, rocketing hyperinflation, and continued violent repression of oppositional opponents. The GNU, however, lasted for only one 5-year term bringing in a modicum of economic reprieve and stability until Zanu PF was able to re-establish itself, rebuild its support base and win a landslide victory in the 2013 elections (Dorman 2016, 187–209; Raftopoulos 2013, 971–988; Tendi 2013). Zanu PF's victory culminated into another 5-year term of authoritarian rule and economic mismanagement which saw the nation descend back into hyperinflation, poverty and unemployment. The PCCs continued to expand throughout this period. And, coupled with this, the emergence of youthful hashtag social movements in 2016 registering their public discontent with the state's inability and unwillingness to address the nation's economic woes. It was during this period that a Pentecostal Pastor, Evan Mawarire, with links to the 2nd wave generation movement rose to prominence as the founder and leader of the #ThisFlag social movement (Chitando and Tarusarira 2019). Mawarire was detained and arrested by state security agents numerous times during this period. Meanwhile, factionalist succession struggles within Zanu PF culminated into a military coup in late November 2017 which saw Mugabe replaced by his former right-hand man, Emmerson Mnangagwa (Tendi 2019). Internal succession struggles also echoed within the main opposition party eventually seeing Nelson Chamisa, come to power in early 2018 after Tsvangirai's death following a protracted battle with cancer (Laiton 2019).

During this period, the 3rd wave generation movement pioneered by Makandiwa was distinguished from the 2nd wave due to its emphasis on the prophetic. However, much like the previous wave the appeal of this movement for its congregants lay in its propagation of the Prosperity Doctrine though with less of an emphasis on hard work and more on the miraculous i.e. "miracle money" (Jeater 2016). Since Makandiwa's church was launched, many similar prophetic-style PCCs have proliferated the city. Another notable distinction of the 3rd wave movement is in its alliances with the ruling party which have significantly increased under the Mnangagwa administration. Some of the PCC leaders who've openly endorsed Zanu PF from the 3rd wave prophetic-style generation are Makandiwa of UFIC, Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD), Uebert Angel of Spirit Embassy, and Passion Java of Kingdom Embassy, amongst others. These alliances have primarily been based on two factors, firstly a shared ideology mainly the liberation ethos and nationalist ideals of the ruling party, and secondly its patronage networks which many of these Pentecostal elites have benefitted from and to some extent have been implicated in allegations of state corruption (Aljazeera 2023). It is difficult to tell which PCCs have been more aligned to the main opposition even though Chamisa got his theological training from the AFM.

Whilst most 2nd wave generation PCCs have tried to generally remain apolitical, they have, under the banner of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), been vocal at times in publicly condemning state violence and repression whilst also attempting a mediatory role between the main political parties (Togarasei 2013, 102). On an individual level, however, these churches have taken different approaches. For instance, whilst three mega-PCCs in Harare, ZAOGA, FOG and CCI, were more sympathetic to the state in the 90s aligning their stance with the biblical text of Romans 13 (Togarasei 2013, 102; Musoni 2021, 2), there was a notable shift in the stance of ZAOGA and CCI particularly in the 2000s. ZAOGA shifted in its stance from the early 2000s onwards due to the state's repression of oppositional voices in the towns and targeted attacks on its urban-based members suspected of being aligned with the main opposition party (Musoni 2021, 6). Likewise, CCI also shifted its stance most notably in 2016 when it released a public statement condemning the unlawful detention of one of its former youth pastors, Evan Mawarire, who founded the #ThisFlag Movement.[3] FOG, however, continued in its public endorsement of the ruling party (Musoni 2021, 6).

The 2nd wave generation PCCs may also not want to align themselves with the main opposition due to corruption in local council municipalities, ideological bankruptcy and irregularities in the party (Zamchiya 2013). Apart from having similar factionalist internal struggles to the ruling party, the main opposition has increasingly over the years begun to look similar to the ruling party in consolidating its power base in the city and showing signs of authoritarianism and intolerance of less established parties and independents (Zigomo 2022, 541; Scoones 2018). Overall, the two main political parties of Zanu PF and MDC have maintained a hegemony in Harare fostering a political environment that is hostile to less established parties and independents – more of which I will discuss later.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to state that the women interviewed for this study are members of some of the PCCs outlined here, mainly: CCI, Word of Life, Faith Ministries, FOG, Christ the Rock Ministries, UFIC, and Christ Embassy. Thus they are linked to particularly the 2nd and 3rd generation of PCCs. Let us now turn our attention to these women.

Intersectional perspectives: the influence of Pentecostal religious beliefs on women's political participation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's (2018) election recorded its highest number of female political candidates, with women running for positions in office at all levels of government. In Harare alone, the highest number of women were seeking positions in local council recorded at a total of 143 candidates, whilst a substantial number of 81 candidates were seeking positions in the national assembly

(Zimbabwe Electoral Commission 2018). At the presidential level, four out of the 23 candidates were female and whilst this may seem significantly much lower in proportion to their male counterparts, this was the highest number of women to ever historically contest at the presidential level (Zulu 2018).

There are two significant factors worth briefly stating here which significantly contributed to the increased participation of women in the 2018 elections which have been documented by scholars. The first is the implementation of the Proportional Representation system in 2013 which was to last for a period of ten years. This saw well over a third of Zimbabwe's parliament become female in 2013 (UNWomen 2013) and thus is believed to have encouraged more women to feel confident in stepping up to run for office in the next election in 2018 (RAU Gender Audit Report 2018, 2). The second factor is the military coup which took place in November 2017 which resulted in a transition of power from Mugabe to Mnangagwa. The coup and subsequent change in leadership spurred on hopes of political reforms thus significantly opening up the political space (Southall 2017, 83).

This study investigates an under-explored area which may further explain the enhanced participation of women. That is, whether Pentecostal religious beliefs had any influence on women's political participation particularly with the surges in PCCs in Zimbabwe over this period and, if so, how this impacted the quality of political participation for women? I now present a discussion of my findings below which are based on in-depth interview data obtained from nine Pentecostal women who were active in politics over this period.

Motive

The first thing I sought to understand was what these women's motivations were in running for office and whether they were driven by religious or other motivations? What is interesting here is that the Pentecostal women interviewed were not primarily driven by religious motivations in running for office but by other motivations. Those who had no prior political involvement, and who chose to run as independents, pointed to a lack of access to basic amenities like running water which they believed was mainly due to the politicisation of public service delivery.[4] Naturally, this lack of access to basic amenities points to a lack of satisfaction in these women's lives which would provide them with a strong motive for political action at the individual level (Omelicheva and Ahmed 2018, 9). However, this needs to be further understood within the Zimbabwean context where the hegemony of the two main political parties has persisted for well over two decades in Harare, resulting in political, and subsequently socio-economic, horizontal inequalities which is indicative of relative deprivation much like that experienced in other contexts (Stewart and Langer 2007). These collective

grievances, which are not specifically religious grievances, are thus significant motivators for political action.

Notably, one of the candidates interviewed, Nyasha Magumise, a high school teacher by profession and a member of a 2nd wave generation PCC, Faith Ministries, stated that her awareness of the issues to do with public service delivery in the area she had moved to coincided with a message her pastor was preaching at that time encouraging congregants to get politically involved so this appears to be coincidental. But whilst this appeared to be coincidental, Magumise interpreted this as no coincidence at all but rather as divine providence as she matter-of-factly stated,

> and it just so happened that it was during that time when my own pastor was encouraging us to get into politics as Christians instead of praying for people you don't want to be involved … and I was like, okay I really felt God was saying okay that's where you should be going, the way it all happened.

Later, we will see how, much like Magumise, for other Pentecostal women their political involvement came out of a sense of a divine calling which in some cases was confirmed by their pastors but it was only after some probing into their religious beliefs that these women revealed this.

The other point worth highlighting here is that party affiliation matters perhaps even more so than religion, as the perspectives mentioned were all from independents without prior political involvement. I didn't, however, get similar concerns or comments from Pentecostal women within the main political parties' structures, mainly Netsai Marova (MDC) and Tafadzwa Sihlahla (Zanu PF). These women were motivated more so by the ideologies of their respective parties. Interestingly, this coincides somewhat with the literature on women's mobilisation into guerrilla movements in Salvador where the women first recruited into these movements were more so pulled in by the ideologies and causes of these movements more so than anything else (Viterna 2006, 20).

Opportunity structure

In their theoretical framework on religious political participation, Omelicheva and Ahmed (2018, 7), who draw much of their inspiration from the field of contentious politics and social movements, indicate that either being a member of a religious organisation, and/or voluntary organisations matters considerably in providing opportunities for motivated actors to engage in politics. What is quite pertinent here, however, are the conditions or enabling environment which necessitates this involvement or one's decision to get involved politically. The literature on opportunity structures typically points to factors such as political and economic (in)stability, demographic factors i.e. a youth bulge, and dissatisfaction of the population, amongst others, in

fostering enabling environments for mobilisation and, in some cases, insurgency (Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch 2014). These enabling environmental factors were also significant for the women interviewed.

For Tendayi Mpala, an entrepreneur by profession who was 31 years of age at the time of interviewing, being a young member of her church's business community (Celebration Churches International, a 2nd wave generation PCC) and being present when her pastor initiated a call to action presented an opportunity for her to get involved in meeting the needs of the women in her community by launching her candidature to run for office in Harare West Constituency.[5] Whilst Mpala admitted that she had always felt she was called to politics and came from a political family herself (I will discuss this in more detail later on), she did mention that it was only in 2016 that she made a decision she would run for office in 2018. It is important to understand the environmental factors which led to this decision. In 2016, the growing discontent amongst the youth towards the state due to economic mismanagement and high unemployment rates disproportionately affecting the youths culminated into the rise of several hashtag social movements, one of which was led and founded by a youthful and charismatic 2nd generation Pentecostal pastor, Evan Mawarire (Chitando and Tarusarira 2019, 242). Mawarire's extensive social networks and links to Harare's upwardly mobile youth middle-class population were partly due to his work as a former youth pastor at Celebration Churches International (CCI) located in the affluent suburb of Borrowdale, and subsequently starting his own church, His Generation, in the leafy suburb of Mount Pleasant. Mawarire also performed as a Master of Ceremony (MC) at high profile events. Mawarire, launched #ThisFlag Movement after a Facebook video rant which the pastor recorded about not being able to pay his children's school fees due to the highly volatile economic conditions and rampant corruption in government. The movement fast became increasingly popular with a middle-class young urban population in Harare gleaned from Mawarire's extensive social networks but later extended its reach to the peri-urban areas and had some rural penetration. Whilst Mpala was not an active member of #This Flag, her prior knowledge of Mawarire from attending the same church, made her inspired by his movement as she attended some of the protests and demonstrations in Harare's CBD organised by the movement. It just so happened that it was also around this time that Mpala felt she had reached a level of financial independence and stability within her own business to be able to fund her campaign. So this culmination of factors created a ripe environment for Mpala to feel it was a good time for her to get politically involved. What Mpala's experience highlights is that religion (alone) is not the only factor that influences one's decision to participate in politics but rather a combination of factors which

converge at a point in time making that point in time an opportune one. In adopting an intersectional lens, we can further see how religion, age and class combined in shaping Mpala's experience. In being a youth herself, Mpala could identify with the youth's discontent and was herself immersed in the youth networks through her church community where she was further inspired to pursue political change. But Mpala also comes from a particular class of society that affords her better access to education and opportunities allowing her to be economically independent which differentiates her from less privileged women who may desire to be engaged in politics but lack the resources.

On the other hand, Duduzile Nyirongo, a Chartered Accountant by profession and a Pastor at UFIC (a 3rd wave generation PCC), pointed to a couple of inter-related factors, mainly: her being a pastor and a chartered accountant, and secondly, in this pastoral role, becoming more aware of the systemic and structural nature of people's problems such as poverty and unemployment.[6] During her pastoral training, Nyirongo's eyes were opened to the political aspects of the bible as she stated,

> *People really never used to talk much about politics even in the Pentecostal [church] that I went to. But then when I went to Bible College, I started to understand church history, even the Bible itself and some of the things- most of it- were just political. That's when my mind began to open … And you just see how Jesus was a social justice advocate … so I began to see the other side.*

Nyirongo's perspective highlights how levels of religiosity can be a significant factor in political mobilisation, alongside one's profession and education which provide one with expert knowledge and/or awareness of macro-level structural inequalities and how these impact people at the micro-level. Interestingly, whilst Nyirongo's senior pastors have openly endorsed the leadership of the Zanu PF ruling party, Nyirongo herself does not share this stance as she was quite critical of the ruling party and, I must add, the main opposition, thus choosing instead to run as an independent candidate. This demonstrates the agency which Pentecostal women have in choosing to chart their own paths despite what their leaders may model to them as well as their own subjective experiences with Pentecostalism which may propel them into the public sphere. Naturally, Nyirongo realised the issues her congregants were facing could not be tackled by prayers alone but by addressing the structural and systemic forces at play which were contributing to these issues. This contradicts viewpoints other scholars have made about how PCCs' over-spiritualisation of society's problems and their emphasis on the Prosperity Doctrine serve to divert their adherents' attention from the structural elements which perpetuate such problems (Gifford 1991, 65–66; Maxwell 1998, 358).

Incentive

Incentive speaks to the costs and benefits associated with political action for motivated actors. Rational choice theory conceptualises individuals as rational actors who seek to maximise their utility by weighing the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action (Scott 1999, 128). Naturally, this will be highly subjective and we may assume that where the benefits outweigh the costs an actor will be even more politically motivated to act. However, Omelicheva and Ahmed (2018, 8) challenge this rational choice framework when they posit that religious actors may, in some cases, choose to engage in costly actions when they perceive such actions as justifiable and thus rational. This will happen in a case where the individual's perception of the high costs involved is still deemed as far less than the costs of inaction. It is therefore important to consider what Pentecostal women perceive the costs and benefits of both political and non-political involvement to be for themselves, how they subjectively weigh these for themselves, and whether they perceive the costs as outweighing the benefits for them or if there are times when these women will decide to participate even if it is too costly for them to do so?

A Pentecostal female political candidate, Tafadzwa Sihlahla, who was 25 years at the time of campaigning, a congregant of Christ Embassy (a 2nd wave generation PCC) and a member of Zanu PF, identified a cost of non-political involvement in the comment below.

> I feel that as Christians we have what the world needs and we can't be subtle with it. So we are the ones that have to be in those leadership positions because we have guidance from God. *We can't leave people that do not believe in God to make decisions for us- it means we are at their mercy* … I need to be in that position so that I can influence people more from that position of influence rather than … just in church.

Sihlahla's comment speaks to the under-representation of religious people in government and thus the cost of being ruled by secular people whose priorities are different and which may not align with the values of religious people. The cost of not getting involved in politics is therefore "to be at the *mercy* of ungodly leaders". This links to the literature on studies which have been done on place-making and territorialisation amongst Pentecostal communities universally particularly in the diaspora. Whilst that literature refers more so to Pentecostals taking possession of geographical territories (Fresenmyer 2019), this further challenges us to consider how Pentecostals see the arena of politics, more so political leadership or government, as a secular space which needs to be claimed and occupied by believers for the purpose of expanding their influence.

Another cost linked to the above is further highlighted in reference to a scriptural text in the bible (Judges 4) by two Pentecostal women who ran

as independents – Sarudzai Muringisi who was 36 years of age at the time of campaigning, a Pastor at Christ the Rock Ministries (a 2nd generation PCC) and an Accountant by profession, and Tendayi Mpala. Both recounted the story of a biblical character, Jael, who was a regular housewife yet managed to secure victory for a nation in captivity. Muringisi specifically stated,

> *I believe that women are definitely in the agenda of God. We have a very special purpose that God is calling us to, you know*. Because even when you look at that whole story with Deborah saying to Barak, 'God says you need to go and fight this war. But Barak saying 'I won't go if you don't go with me'. And Deborah going with him telling him that 'this victory is going to be at the hand of a woman'. *So there's a whole nation being held captive* … And God specifically allows for victory to come at the hand of a woman. And Deborah was talking about Jael. And *Jael is just a regular housewife. She's minding her own business in her home. And the enemy, Sisera, is coming, running breathless. She invites him into her tent, and she … gives him milk, he relaxes. He drinks the milk, he feels safe with this woman. He falls asleep and then she takes a tent peg and hammers him and the enemy of the nation has died. So, those kind of things bring some clarity for me … I strongly believe that we can have women in politics who are still very conservative.*

For Muringisi, the cost of disobedience by godly men is ungodly rulership (captivity) – unless women step up to the plate. This perspective further highlights the element of strength in domesticated femininity through the construction of Jael as a "warrior woman". This resonates with transnational Pentecostal constructions of "princess warriors" linked to Australian and American PCCs (Maddox 2013). Feminists caution that whilst this might seem empowering for women, it is still in harmony with patriarchal norms as these universal constructions of "warrior women" are "rendered submissive to a dominating male figure" (McCall 2011). From the intersection of religion, gender and patriarchal norms here, we can see how religion informs the patriarchal norms in Zimbabwean society mainly as these ancient scriptural texts which were written in patriarchal historical contexts were introduced into the Zimbabwean context during the colonial era. However, such texts were adopted into an already patriarchal society thereby subjecting women to what is referred to by Schmidt as "double patriarchy" (1994). However, despite this, religious women arguably still demonstrate their agency in modernising and re-appropriating these texts to justify their political inclusion within hostile patriarchal spaces.

When we compare Sihlahla, Muringisi and Mpala's perspectives, party affiliation doesn't factor in as much here as religious identity is most important. In highlighting the cost of ungodly rulership all are advocating for religious representation in government. Thus it appears that religious identity may have the potential to trump partisanship but in a politically polarised

environment this is highly unlikely. What this more so suggests is the influence of religious identity on trust in public officials and representatives. Schmidt and Miles (2016, 1) argue that religion is a social identity which is similar to gender or race and thus can significantly influence the public's attitudes towards public officials. By stepping up to run for office, these Pentecostal women are therefore presenting themselves as change agents who by virtue of their religious identity can foster a greater sense of trustworthiness in public officials which is a refreshing departure from the status quo.

Another cost of political involvement for women is to do with the cost to their reputations which are based not so much on religion but in regard to gender and marital status. Young single female Pentecostals, Esther Zimudzi and Tafadzwa Sihlahla, highlighted the specific challenges women have to face with men asking for illicit and sexual favours from women engaged in politics. This often further creates a perception that it is typically loose and immoral women who get involved in politics. In previous research on female political candidates in Zimbabwe, young single and divorced women in politics reported that they were perceived by the public as being either "loose" and promiscuous or as failures in life (Zigomo 2022, 541–542). This is consistent with Geisler's (1995, 568) research on women politicians in southern Africa. In this case, however, there were contrasting perspectives from two married women (one later divorced at the time of interviewing). Kudzai Mubaiwa, an independent candidate and a Pentecostal businesswoman, had a more supportive husband who supported her political aspirations and she even went on to leverage her status as a married woman in the election by posting a picture with her child on her social media platform on Mother's Day which she relayed was one of her most popular posts. Whilst Marcellina Makoni, a leader of a less established party, ADP, and a pastor of her own women's ministry, did not have a supportive husband who instead discouraged her from participating in politics when she had first wanted to contest in early 2000 thus causing her to abort her political career prematurely whilst she was still married. It was only when she was single again that she felt she had the freedom and opportunity to pursue her political aspirations and not be bogged down by society's expectations of married women. Makoni's experience highlights that the costs of political involvement are relatively high for married women particularly those with unsupportive husbands or families as it can place a significant strain on their marriages. Naturally, as such political involvement would not only take much time away from their families but also render such women open to smear campaigns and labels that would tarnish their reputations. This could further serve as a deterrent to respectable married Christian women who have a status to uphold. Now divorced, Makoni further revealed that her clean reputation in being a pastor spared her from the plight of other young single and divorced women in politics when she later became involved in politics in 2013.[7] This

highlights how levels of religiosity can "sanitise" one's image in politics particularly in a hostile political environment where young single and divorced women are viewed as being loose and immoral particularly when contesting for seats in male-dominated spheres. Such a perspective further illustrates how gender and marital status when mediated by religion i.e. levels of religiosity, can shield some women from the damage to their personal reputations thus minimising the costs of political involvement.

Frames

According to Omelicheva and Ahmed (2018, 7) frames refer to the impact of various background conditions on an individual's decision to engage in political action. For instance, how they were raised, what networks they were a part of, how they begun to learn about politics, and so on. Most of the Pentecostal women interviewed were politically socialised from an early age. Tendayi Mpala and Marcellina Makoni, for instance, were born in political families. Mpala's father was the first deputy Minister of Tourism and the MP for Masvingo, whilst her mother was also actively involved in politics. On the other hand, Makoni's uncle was a politician as he was the Minister of Health and a brigadier in the army. Further to this, Makoni came from a family of chiefs and so was well-versed with the demands of traditional leadership. Growing up, Kudzai Mubaiwa had received some political education from her uncle who was very supportive of the MDC. Later, due to the nature of her work as a consultant, she had also been roped into some campaign activities for the ruling party though somewhat unknowingly. So these Pentecostal women had been politically socialised much earlier due to their family, political, educational and work networks even though their church networks, as we saw earlier, also played a role. This highlights how religious, family, political and social networks were key in heightening these Pentecostal women's political socialisation and subsequently, mobilisation. This is very much in line with the literature on micro-level mobilisation processes of women in revolutionary movements more universally (Viterna 2006, 3) and the broader literature on political socialisation theory (German 2014, 19–26). Furthermore, this also demonstrates how involvement in all or some of these networks can be critical for women's mobilisation into politics not just religion alone.

Conclusion

Whilst there is broad consensus amongst scholars that PCCs enhance political participation, less is known about its impact on distinct groups, mainly women, and even less so on women who engage in the more demanding aspects of political participation such as running for office and/or joining a political party. In this in-depth qualitative study, I have adopted an

intersectional and postcolonial feminist lens to elements of Omelichiva and Ahmed's framework of political participation to provide deeper insights into the religious motivations of Pentecostal women running for office or in political parties. In so doing, I argue that PCCs have been instrumental in contributing to the enhanced political participation of Pentecostal women running for office in Zimbabwe. However, whilst religion has been important in this regard, it is not the only dimension that matters as other factors such as marital status, age, class, occupation, education, and patriarchal norms have also been instrumental in shaping these women's experiences making the quality of participation differ considerably amongst these women.

Notes

1. For this article, I have limited my analysis to Pentecostal women due to the focus of the article. However, this is part of a larger study which includes male participants and women of other Christian denominations as well as those without any religious affiliation.
2. A purpose sampling mechanism was initially employed in selecting the first few women from my personal networks. From there I was able to expand the sample size by employing a snowball sampling mechanism mainly in getting referrals from these women. Consequently, this mode of selection presents a limitation regarding my sample which is reflective "a social bubble" or network that is not as diverse as I would desire it to be. Despite this, the sample was still fairly diverse due to differences in marital status, age, constituency, party affiliations, professions, and the Pentecostal churches they are members of.
3. This public statement was released by the Senior Pastor of CCI during my observations in attendance at a Sunday worship service in 2016 before I embarked on this research.
4. Nyasha Magumise. Independent Political Candidate. POVO. Harare West. Interview. July 2018.

   Kudzai Mubaiwa. Independent Political Candidate. Harare CBD. Interview. September 2018.

   Sarudzai Muringisi. Independent Political Candidate. Harare West. Interview. July 2018.
5. Tendayi Mpala. Independent Political Candidate. Harare West. Interview. July 2018.
6. Duduzile Nyirongo. Independent Political Candidate. POVO. Harare East. Interview. July 2018.
7. Marcellina Makoni. Party Leader. ADP. Interview. July 2024.

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Ethics statement

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ORCID

Kuziwakwashe Zigomo http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3397-5010

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Pentecostal Women in Politics Interviewed:

– Nyasha Magumise
– Marcellina Makoni
– Sarudzai Muringisi
– Duduzile Nyirongo
– Tafadzwa Sihlahla
– Kudzai Mubaiwa
– Netsai Marova
– Esther Zimudzi
– Tendayi Mpala

Appendix

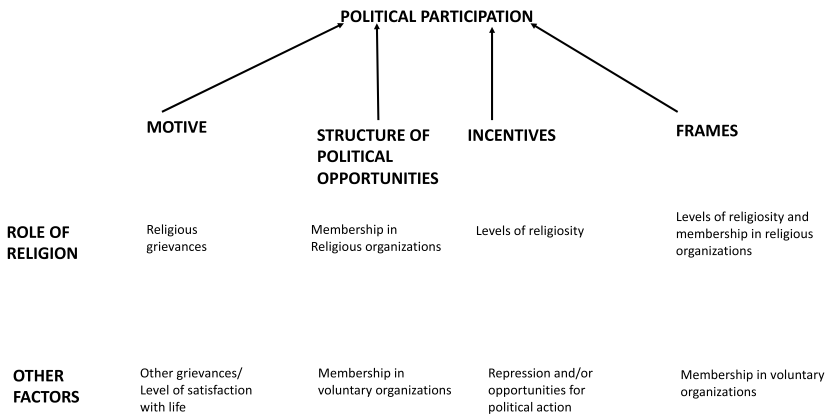

Figure A1. Theoretical Framework for Political Participation (adapted from Omelicheva and Ahmed 2018, 7).