



# **POLICY PAPER ON YOUTH ELIGIBILITY TO PUBLIC OFFICE IN ZIMBABWE: CHALLENGES, ALTERNATIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## **Abstract**

This policy paper sets out to examine the eligibility of the youths as public *ex officio* whether in parliamentary, government or municipal institutions. Despite constitutional provisions, the government has not explicitly raise issues on the consideration for the youths as an underrepresented population inclusive of young women and or people with disabilities from accessing public office positions within the three tiers of the government. The youths in Zimbabwe constitute to 67.7 percent of the total population and yet the political space for youth participation and decision making remains intolerant and limited while difficult to navigate challenges to youth inclusion. Notably, compared to other African countries, even the world beyond, Zimbabwe possess a strong and sound legal framework that when adhered to, can improve youth representation not only in political circles but in all facets of life. While the youths possess the energy, creativity and passion to take on intractable problems inherited from their elders, there seem to be no participation by youths in areas of life that affects them. The article, therefore, sets out to discuss the challenges, alternatives and recommendations. A review of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, internal policies of political parties and related local governance laws and bye laws aided the identification of measures which either promote or inhibit Youths from accessing public office in Zimbabwe. It concludes by gesturing towards the future of reforming the institutions that relate to reducing the eligibility age cap and an improvement on transparency in accordance with the constitution. To achieve this, a collective effort is of essence in which youths themselves, government and civil society organizations all share a point of convergence.

**Keywords:** Youths, Participation, Eligibility, Age Caps, Public Office, Zimbabwe

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## **List of Acronyms**

<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Novel Corona Virus</b>
<b>CSOs</b>	<b>Civil Society Organizations</b>
<b>ICCPR</b>	<b>International Convention on Civil and Political Rights</b>
<b>MCDA</b>	<b>Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis</b>
<b>MDC</b>	<b>Movement for Democratic Change</b>
<b>MDC-A</b>	<b>Movement for Democratic Change Alliance</b>
<b>MDC-T</b>	<b>Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirayi</b>
<b>NAYO</b>	<b>National Association for Youth Organizations</b>
<b>PA</b>	<b>Policy Analyst</b>
<b>UDHR</b>	<b>Universal Declaration of Humana Rights</b>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<b>United Nations</b>
<b>YETT</b>	<b>Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust</b>
<b>YP</b>	<b>Young Person</b>
<b>ZANU-PF</b>	<b>Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front</b>
<b>ZEC</b>	<b>Zimbabwe Election Commission</b>



## 1. Introduction

This policy paper discusses the eligibility of the youths as public *ex officio* whether in parliamentary, government or municipal institutions. Once they have become elected officials or appointed to work in the public administration they automatically become public office holders. The true north of this is that the youths should be eligible as parcels of the administration of government, civil or military, or is itself created by the law-making power (Bell, 2010). Globally in 2019, there were about 1.2 billion youths constituting to about 16 per cent of the global population of which 211 million of these were from the sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the constitution classifies youths in a range of between 15-35 years who attribute to 67.7% of the population (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act 2013 Section 20, NANGO, 2019). Youths in Zimbabwe are at the receiving end of poor governance, corruption and to some extent poor eligibility to public offices despite being a *de facto* reproductive and productive part of the population. What is of concern to scholars, researchers and the youths themselves is that the same underrepresented victims can stir up national development feeding into the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) towards the achievement of Vision 2030 in which Zimbabwe is to become a Middle Income Country (M.I.C). It is therefore, a matter of public truth that the situation remains worse for underrepresented groups like young People with Disabilities constantly under the threat of intersectional discrimination. For that matter, young people with both visual or hearing impairments and intellectual/cognitive disabilities have not been spared in confronting such social headwinds as both youths and as youths with disabilities who have remained incapacitated to contest for public office opportunities (UNESCO, 2020).

It is almost trite to say that the political space for youth participation and decision making remains intolerant and limited while difficult to navigate challenges to youth inclusion including inadequate representation in decision making bodies hence the sidelining of youths issues, restrictive and exclusion of age caps on eligibility for public office. Despite constitutional provisions, the government has not explicitly raise alarm on the consideration for the youths as an underrepresented population inclusive of young women and or people with disabilities from accessing public office positions within the three tiers of the government (national government, metropolitan and provincial councils and local authorities inclusive of urban and rural councils), (Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 20, 56, 67(3), 121 (1)b, 125 (1)b). Currently, despite constituting to over 60 percent of the national population, only five out of two hundred and ten

MPs are below thirty five years, while the current cabinet does not consider anyone below thirty five; serve for Honorable Kirsty Coventry who at the time of appointment to public office in 2018 was thirty five years (YETT, 2020). While the quota system is a necessary evil, it is both the selective and exclusionary manner in which the quota system is structured that is of public concern.

Against this backdrop, the constitutional awareness amongst the young population remains very low as yielded by the Youth Situational Analysis (YSA) which revealed that less than one in five young people (17,5 percent) were aware of their relevant 2013 constitutional provisions (YETT, 2020). This poor constitutional awareness among the youth remains worrying given the fact that within the same supreme law lays the hidden treasure at the disposal of the young population if they are to be placed on a pedestal to greater heights as public *ex officio*. With such information, youths are able to design, oversee, and implement as well as advocate policies which address key youth empowerment priorities in areas of employment, citizenship and rights, health, food security, Information and Communication aka ICT as well as education. Some observers note that any country's social and political landscape is defined and determined by the youths who, sadly in the Zimbabwean context are susceptible to abuse and manipulation by politicians as political tools of violence come election time. This think piece therefore sets out to discuss the drivers within formal and informal institutions, that is, constitutional frameworks and customs or norms, respectively that either promote or inhibit the youths from accessing public office positions in Zimbabwe (North, 1990). This gap has also been further widened by the eruption of the coronavirus aka COVID-19 pandemic which has both deepened the economic headwinds while being weaponized by politicians to persecute either aspiring young politicians or Civil Society Organizations (CSO) representing the youths (Moyo, 2020a).

The think piece was produced by triangulating both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in order to unpack the lived world of the research participants regarding the phenomenon under study. The data used in this paper was collected through key informant interviews from some members of the youths, policy makers, members of parliament, civil society and academics. The informants were purposively selected and assigned pseudo names for example PA 1- mini-focus group discussion comprising Policy Analysts/Experts) or YP 1- mini focus discussion of young people. Henceforth, for the purpose of this study, the researcher used positions of participants. However, these pseudo names are suffixed with letters designating their status and numbers implying the order that followed the mini-focus group discussions. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the researchers deployed digital technologies to collect data including emails, telephone interviews, and virtual meetings though some informants were

sensitive to the use of their identities. The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the contextual and conceptual issues, Section 3 analyses the levels of participation in Zimbabwean public spaces, Section 4 looks into legal frameworks guiding youth eligibility to public office, Section 5 interrogates the internal political party policies, Section 6 assesses the major bottlenecks while Section 7 explores policy alternatives and Section 8 concludes by making recommendations to effective implementation of the youth eligibility to public office.

## **2. Contextual and Conceptual Issues**

It is instructive to note that over the past few years Zimbabwe's commitment to the youths has been viewed with much skepticism and widespread suspicion mostly for its appalling performances compared to other countries. Recent figures in a survey indicate that youths in the southern African country have been ranked among the world's poorest who live in an extremely difficult environment (International Labor Organization, 2016). The survey further reveals that the majority of the Zimbabwean youths who occupy 67.7 percent of the national population were experiencing extreme poverty as they earn less than US\$2 per capita per day (International Labor Organization, 2016). The country has also been viewed as one of the countries where young people face hardships to secure not only decent but any work putting them at the mercy of informal activities such as vending, gold panning, cross border trading and selling of airtime, groceries and clothing. 20 percent of youths in the 18 to 24 years age group are never able to secure employment and the same survey indicated massive gender imbalances at work places which favored young men as opposed to young women (ILO, 2016). Supported with statistics, comparatively, 63 percent of young men compared to 52 percent of young women are likely to secure employment. In summation, the Zimbabwe Youth Development Index places the country on a rank of 127 out of 170 as one of the countries with most underdeveloped youths (ZHRC, 2019).

While the youths possess the energy, creativity and passion to take on intractable problems inherited from their elders, they must grapple with serious social, political and environmental problems which pose as a threat to their eligibility in public offices (OXFAM, 2016). Not surprisingly, youth are at the forefront of many of the world's emerging political movements. They have delivered piercing critiques of the extent to which wealth and privilege have rewritten the rules of the system, shifted ever more economic risk to youth and barred youth from a fair say in the policies that affect their lives. Recent years have seen a considerable uptick in interest in youth issues among political leaders and civil society groups. This think piece therefore seeks



to unpack and exhibit what is currently being done and what should be done if Zimbabwean youths are to become the motor of tomorrow's political scape. Obviously, policy makers must make concerted efforts to enhance youth participation in policy making. They should engage with young people as active citizens, architects of their own future even if it means contesting for public office positions which have always been a prerogative for the elderly from ages of forty upwards. Millions of youth around the world face discrimination based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, caste, religion, ethnicity, physical abilities or the place where they live. Yet, despite being largest in the world, young population is no homogenous group as various categories are at play; henceforth the intersectional nature of these forms of systemic discrimination experienced by young people deserves special attention.

By definition, youth eligibility to public affairs is basically a qualification that youths need to have in order to be elected to various governmental bodies. In most countries this eligibility for public office is dependent on various restrictive qualifications relating to property, education and age. For the purposes of this discussion a public office is any position in a public sector whether in parliamentary, government or municipal institutions (Bell, 2010). Viewed from this perspective, there has been an inconsistency in recognizing and supporting youth participation in electoral cycles on one hand, than to be active citizens and leaders on the other. Youth representation remains persistently low in leadership, party membership and legislatures. 50 percent of the global population is under 30 years, yet only 2 percent of parliamentarians are under 30 years. Thus, a key factor is the gap between the minimum age at which young people can vote, and the minimum age at which they can run as political candidates which is significantly higher. The minimum voting age is more or less aligned across countries, whereas the age at which citizens can stand as candidates for public office varies widely. A study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2018 concluded that in most countries citizens must wait several years after gaining the right to vote before being eligible to run for parliamentary office, usually until age 21 or 25, but in some countries as late as 35 or even 40 (IPU, 2018). This has created enormous gaps between the youth electorate and political leaders in countries with large youth populations leading to their continued suffocation or simply a "youth bulge."

As such, the governments the world over have established a higher age qualification for eligibility for public office than for eligibility to vote. In most developed countries the age of eligibility for public office is 25, as it is in Belgium, Ghana, Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Japan. In Austria the age is 26, and in Iran,

Libya, and Turkey it is 30. In countries with bicameral parliaments an even more advanced age is required for election to the upper house; in the United States, India, and Japan the age is 30, while in Brazil, France, and the Philippines it is 35, and in Belgium, Libya, and Turkey it is 40. In Turkey for example, Civil Society Organizations played a pivotal role following the Young MPs Now campaign which lobbied for Turkish authorities to lower eligibility age from 25 years in 2007 to 18 years in 2018. Consequently, the 2018 elections witnessed the youngest ever MP candidate, an 18-year-old female high school student.

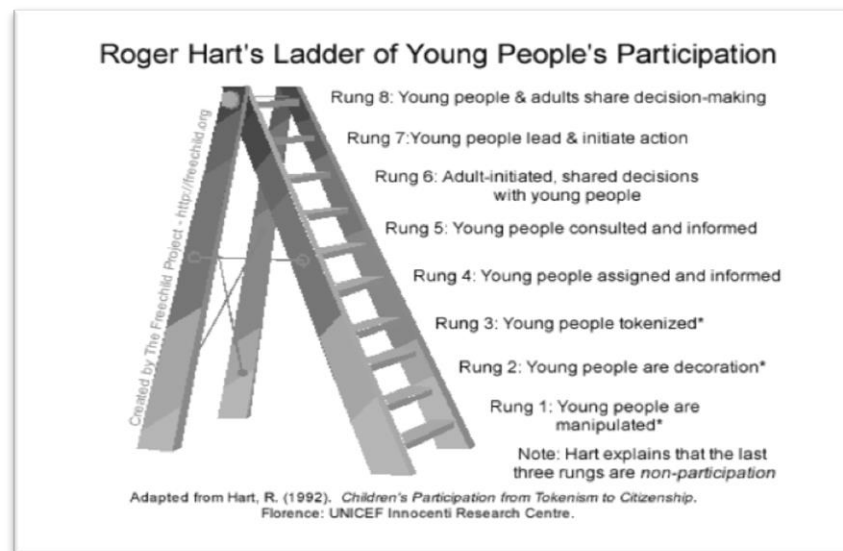
There are educational qualifications for candidates for representative's bodies in Brazil, the United States, Turkey, and other countries. In some countries candidates for parliament must undergo an examination of intellectual, moral, and even financial fitness. In Turkey senators must have a college diploma, and in Iran the only persons eligible for election to the upper house are persons who have already been members of the lower house for at least three sessions or who have been ministers, ambassadors, chairpersons of the house, general attorneys, chairpersons of appellate courts, professors or lawyers with 15–20 years of experience, or property owners who must pay taxes to certain expected amounts.

The practice has remarkably been different in the African context of course with a handful of exceptions given that policies are not uniform. For those that are doing well, there has been recognition for age gaps as a barrier to enhanced youth participation and have started reflecting on reducing age requirements to run for office. In the African context, Kenya is one good example which has lowered the required minimum age for becoming a candidate. In Nigeria social campaigns helped in increasing pressure on governments to lower the candidacy age in line with the voting age. The Not Too Young To Run campaign was instrumental in encouraging Nigerian lawmakers to approve a bill lowering the age of eligibility for parliamentary representatives to 25 years and the age for the presidency from 40 to 35 in 2017 and 2018, respectively. As can be witnessed above, much of the progressive world has embraced the innovativeness of youths for their energy, vibrancy, adaptability, willingness to embrace change and enthusiasm to learn. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, lags behind, unable to keep pace to these realities.

However, in Zimbabwe, 20 per cent of the population is aged between 15 and 24, but people are not eligible to run for office until they are 21 years old for the lower house and 40 years old for the upper house (UNICEF, June 2015). The age gaps between voters and political candidates are however susceptible to the consequences that subject the youths to under representation, poor participation, mistrust and suspicion as well as being unaccounted for (NAYO Press Statement,

2018). Just to say it as loud as it should be, in Zimbabwe non-participation level (manipulation, decoration and tokenism) is largely rampant as outlined by Roger Hart's ladder of participation as presented below (NAYO Press Statement, 2018).

### 3. Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation and the Position of Youths in Zimbabwe



Source: Hart (1992)

Hart recognized Rung 4 to 8 as where consultation, participatory action, ownership and empowerment took place and for this he referred the five top Rungs as the Participation Stage (Hart, 1992). Contrary to this, Rungs 1 to 3 held the scenario in which the young people were consumed by manipulation, used for decoration by adult politicians who were only fit for tokens that would amplify and advance the agenda for adult public *ex officio*. Hart therefore termed all bottom three Rungs, “Adultism” the stage at which there was no participation by youths in areas of life that affected them (Hart, 1992). This has been somewhat a subject of much controversy for scholars and researchers working with and around young people. Essentially, the debate is which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful? Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults, and of course, not excluding adults but reducing their role to that of supporting figures (Fletcher, 2008).

### **3.1. Junior Parliamentarians and The Concept Of Participation In Zimbabwe**

The junior parliament is primarily, an effective civic education tool for grooming young people about parliament functioning. Children possess knowledge and opinions about their lives and experiences that may differ from those ascribed to them by adults (UNICEF, 2011). However, on too many occasions they are not consulted may have negative rather than positive consequences? United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in which government around the world were bound to uphold a universally agreed standard for children's rights. In order for children's participation to be both effective and ethical, certain principles and standards must be met. If not, children may be manipulated, placed at risk or denied any real opportunity to articulate their views. Contrary to this, Zimbabwe has been characterized by too much polarization in its political environment which spills into the junior parliament basically being run as an event. Child parliamentarians have not been spared from serious political party activity while their policy changes proposals have not been implemented (Newsday, 2015)

With regards to youths, while political will to create mechanisms to aid participation has existed more in principle than in practice, political space for youth participation and decision making remain limited and difficult to navigate (NAYO Press Statement, 2018). Major bottlenecks to this participation have been inadequate representation in decision making bodies, restrictive and exclusion age caps on public office eligibility, political exploitation of youths before and during elections and weak youth involvement in local governance especially on invited spaces. While several international, regional and national frameworks aimed at supporting young people are in place, the fact that there is no holistic approach to implementing these is a cause-for-concern.

## **4. Global, Regional and National Legal Frameworks in Support of Youth**

The rights to participate fully in a country's political and electoral landscapes are basic human rights recognized in an extensive body of international and regional legal instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The UDHR recommends that every human being is entitled to the same human rights and fundamental freedoms regardless of age, race, gender, religion, culture, political

affiliation or the country where one lives. The ICCPR with reference to Article 25- Everyone is entitled to public affairs and choosing representatives. Alongside the conventions, there are a number of global, regional, and national policies, which support and advocate for meaningful youth participation in decision-making and offer concrete suggestions for how national, bilateral, regional, and multilateral agencies can increase political participation of youth. These have undoubtedly helped bring youth issues to the dinner table of government priorities.

The EU Strategy for Youth, UN Youth Policy, African Union Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter all encourage the participation of youths in decision-making processes and representation in public offices is no exception. The EU Strategy for Youth and the UN Youth Policy both seeks to address the needs of young people in member countries. Meanwhile, African Youth Charter on Participation particularly Article 13 of the Charter advances youth development and empowerment in Africa while African Youth Charter on Democracy, Elections and governance especially Articles 3 and 4 recognizes the significance of good governance, popular participation, the rule of law and human rights. Such international and regional policies highlight the value of increased information and capacity development to ensure that young people are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to become active citizens and leaders in their communities. In addition, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages 193 United Nations Member States pledged to live no one behind.

## **5. National Institutions Supporting Welfare of Youths**

National legal frameworks like constitutions which in the recent past, have been drafted in more open and transparent processes increased involvement of historically excluded groups often has resulted in the incorporation of special provisions to foster political participation of youth. Because constitutions are the highest law within legal systems, they give relevant stakeholders a possible instrument to develop targeted interventions to promote the participation of historically excluded groups, which can include youth. Section 20 of the Zimbabwean constitution and in particular Section 20 (b) is very clear and keen in encouraging the government to ensure that youths are given opportunities to associate, be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). This includes occupying positions within public offices, allowing them to elect persons into public office and be entrusted themselves to leadership roles. Section 67 (3) b of the same constitution is more explicit in that it motivates those over the legal age of majority to stand for public office and, if elected, to hold such office (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). It is the argument of this think piece that despite

the Zimbabwean constitution having complied with both regional and international standards on youth-sensitive strategies, program and programs, the eligibility to public office question has not been addressed. It is a paradox that public offices have remained open only to more adult and mature people, thus sidelining the youths who are in most cases self-driven, innovative and energetic. Henceforth, this paper seeks to make an enquiry into why and how the young people in Zimbabwe can be so far yet so near.

**Table 1** below provides a snapshot of the current representation of various groups vis-à-vis selected public offices in Zimbabwe.

**Table 1 Current Representation in Zimbabwean Public Offices as of 2018**

Public Office	Total Number	Women	Men	Disability	Youths
Ministers	20	6	14	Nil	1
Supreme Court Membership	7	3	4	Nil	Nil
Upper House	80	26	54	2	Nil
Members of Parliament	180	24	156	Nil	2
Councilors	1959	274	1685	-	Less than 50
Chiefs	286	5	281	Nil	Nil

**Compiled Authors**

Table 1 above was drawn to showcase both represented and underrepresented groups as components of the national population. Of the latter, the youths form part of the most underrepresented population alongside people with disabilities (especially those with visual and or hearing impairments) whose attempt to compel the ZEC to provide Braille ballot papers and other assistive devices in the 2018 harmonized elections was thrown into a dumpster. Youths in general are vulnerable to abuse and being manipulated particularly by politicians with the majority of them being used for purposes of committing violence during election time. Even the devolution policy preached by the Second Republic under His Excellency Mnangagwa is no guarantee that it will address the plight of many youths. Paradoxically, the policy does more harm than good, serve for, section 72 which calls for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups such as the youths and women in economic activities and other than that there is no guarantee whatsoever that it is or will be youth centric. It is therefore the argument of this paper that despite their significance to politics and sound supporting structures in place, youths have been denied access to and participation in the corridors of power which could have been a panacea to the problems they are currently facing within the Zimbabwean jurisdiction. Pursuant to this, it is the duty of the next section to unpack the why question.

## **6. Internal Political Parties' Policies and Youth Engagement**

ZANU-PF is an increasingly ageing party with the majority of its councilors, parliamentarians, and ministers being over 50 years old. While the MDC was meant to be a young party, and indeed draws support from young, urban voters. However, neither ZANU-PF nor MDC offer real political power to the young (Hodzi, 2014). ZANU-PF Youth League has been important for mobilizing young cadres as a vehicle for patronage and as an institution for socializing youth into the liberation ideology. The ZANU-PF as both party and government co-opts youth and tie them into networks that can potentially be mobilized into violence. Hence, both the YL and extensive patronage networks are part of ZANU-PF's architecture to stay in power.

### **6.1. ZANU PF Youth League**

Zanu-PF Youth League has in the past, on numerous occasions, endorsed Robert Mugabe's candidature and has rarely offered opinions that differ from those of the Politburo. Both ZANU-PF and MDC-A serve mainly to reproduce the voice of the party leadership (Hodzi, 2014). The ZANU-PF Youth League (YL) has been an active youth wing through which young people can demonstrate loyalty to the party and develop a political career and accumulate wealth through patronage networks. The YL has been central for political mobilization, especially for campaigns and elections and has been strongly associated with organizing and conducting political violence and intimidation in the past (Hodzi, 2014; Kriger 2005). Observably, the gruesome stories in Matabeleland by ZANU-PF Youth Brigade in early 1980s remain a thorn in the flesh as victims or families of victims fail to come to terms with the Gukurahundi genocide that saw the purge of over 20000 souls of the Ndebele tribe.

### **6.2. MDC during the Government of National Unity (GNU)**

In almost all major political parties in Zimbabwe the low-level workers and volunteers tend to be the youth, while the leadership is dominated by older people. In most cases the youth are confined to party youth leagues or their equivalents. Youth appear to be excluded from mainstream politics, confined to youth wings and left out of decision-making and agenda-setting processes. The youth assemblies are considered by mainstream politicians as a reservoir of foot soldiers used to mobilize support for the political parties. Although not as widely networked and resourced as the ZANU-PF YL, urban MDC-A youth have organised and enacted violence too, often to resist or retaliate against state violence (Wilkins 2013). Roger Hart's ladder of

participation becomes applicable to the Zimbabwean context, especially Rungs 1 to 3 which portrays young people as being consumed by manipulation, used for decoration by adult politicians who consider them as only fit for tokens that would amplify and advance the agenda for adult public officials.

Youth exclusion from mainstream politics was most prevalent in the selection of party candidates for the 2013 elections. In the MDC candidates were selected at National Executive level, which determined that some constituencies would hold primary elections while others would hold confirmation polls for incumbent members of Parliament (Hodzi, 2014). Zanu-PF, on the other hand, delayed primary elections until the week before the national elections and allegations of vote-buying, rigging and a chaotic voting process dominated the party's primary election narrative. In both parties the Politburo (Zanu-PF) and the National Executive Council (MDC-T) dominated the determination of the final candidate list, further alienating the youth from active participation as candidates (Hodzi, 2014). However, as mentioned above, most of these young people stood in areas where their parties had no chances of winning. In reality, none of the parties seems interested in having young people as active participants although they are happy to have their backing as voters, vigilantes and campaigners which limit the enthusiasm of young people for political participation (ActionAid Denmark 2013).

## **7. Bottlenecks to the Eligibility of Youths in Public Offices**

The challenges hindering the youths from being eligible to public office posts can be discussed in a dichotomy as they emanate from both internal and external fronts. These were derived through engagement with respondents who formed part of the sample peculiar to the production of this policy paper.

### **7.1. External Factors**

- 1) Poor grassroots participation that translates to little or no civil engagement-Respondent PA 5 and PA3 cited limited civic engagement opportunities which hinder effective



participation in economic and political spaces that is, in parliament and political parties (Zimbabwe Youth Task Force, 2017), as a major bottleneck.

- 2) Poor political financing- Evidence showed that poor funding mechanism were in the way of youth participation in public affairs. Poverty makes young people particularly vulnerable to being excluded. About 70% of young people in Zimbabwe are unemployed. And those that work experience extreme poverty, earning less than US\$2 per capita per day. Youths become susceptible to exploitation and control which readies them to sell their rights, for food hand-outs and promises of jobs that never materialize.
- 3) Economic headwinds resulting to high youth unemployment-For PA2 youths in Zimbabwe are among the world's poorest, as they are living in an extremely difficult environment subjecting them to continued hardships and living in penury (ILO, 2016; Mwale and Moyo, 2020). Only a few youths are able to secure employment and those that succeed in doing so earn less than US\$2 per capita per day.
- 4) Age caps which creates the gap between the minimum age at which young people can vote, and the minimum age at which they can run as political candidates. As presented in Table 1, people are not eligible to run for office until they reach a certain acceptable age for the lower house and 40 years old for presidency. Respondent PA1 cited these "hot potatoes within the constitution" that feeds into the general assumption that with age comes wisdom forgetting that sometimes wisdom comes alone living age behind and this negatively affects youths in becoming eligible to public sector economics.
- 5) Politicization of public offices and or state apparatus which exacerbates exploitation of youths by politicians for political violence especially during election time, lamented PA 4. It is instructive to note that youth development interventions become channeled through partisan lines and in most cases politics end up biased towards ruling regimes.
  - Use of a highly securitized approach backed by a battery of legal and extra-legal instruments by the Mnangagwa administration has weaponized COVID-19 in order to achieve some objectives beyond the public health concerns. The status quo has been but one good example of state partisanship (Moyo and Phulu, 2021). With this leverage, government has sort to use the lockdown measures to clamp down on political opposition, silence critics, contain the restive population and imprison vocal young personalities like Joana Mamombe and her accomplices (Kagurume, 2020).

## **7.2. Internally Driven Factors**

- 1) PA 6 sees poor confidence among the young people that public matters do not evolve around age or gender but capacity. This alongside the reign of terror displayed by the Second Republic weighs heavily on the youths who observably do not understand supportive legal frameworks available to them and consequently do not wish to partake in the political plain field. It is worth noting that without knowledge of the constitution as the supreme law plus other legal frameworks, youths may never be aware of relevant hanging fruits and their worth, something that hinder them in contesting for public sector positions.

## **8. Exploring Policy Alternatives**

A potpourri of policies in Zimbabwe have always been made incrementally, that is, decision makers concentrate their attention on modest changes, but crises often force policymakers to abandon incrementalism and reach out to non-incremental directions (Anderson, 2013). If current policies are not working well enough and a change is needed, analysts might suggest modifying the present policies or trying a different policy approach or strategy. Pursuant to this, respondents who made part of the sample identified four areas of focus as their policy options if youth eligibility to public office is to be enhanced.

This section provides a framework for analyzing potential changes in challenging the eligibility of youths to public office openings in a hostile political environment. The issue is to increase participation of youths in electoral processes ahead of the 2023 election or even beyond. To this end, the study employs a standard analytic framework that focuses on three distinct perspectives on policy analysis (Allison, 1971): the rational, political, and organizational perspectives. Allison (1971) suggests that these domains operate in parallel and interact. The rational perspective asks the question of what is the best policy option. This approach has been most completely realized in cost benefit analysis. Recommendations derived from such rational analysis need to be tempered by political considerations. Perhaps, the most cost effective measures may not be acceptable to various stakeholders with their own concerns. Any best solution (if one even exists) ultimately represents a trade-off among competing stakeholders and interests (Kleiman, 1989; MacCoun and Reuter, 2001).

The analysis compares the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative of the youth eligibility to public office in Zimbabwe meant to benefit the young people. The four grey areas

include 1) the do nothing stance by youth, 2) lobbying for the quota system, 3) lowering age of eligibility like in other countries discussed herein and 4) focusing on transparency for youths to understand the requirements for public office competition. It is from this basis that the best policy alternative to boost youth eligibility into public office can then be singled out for implementation.

### **1) Option 1: Do nothing principle**

While the option is justifiable, the youths literally become unresponsive in attending to urgent policy problems and for Anderson (2013) this renders them as the problem rather than the solution. Doing nothing to their present circumstance is a policy option that can be adopted by the young population, which may require them to measure the cost of doing nothing versus the cost of doing something but in many instances the latter has always outweighed the former.

### **2) Option 2: Lobbying for review of the quota system**

Table 1, identified youths as an underrepresented social group and the same table shows some traditionally underrepresented groups like women and people with disabilities benefiting from the quota system. A quota system in politics is an affirmative measure that establishes a fixed percentage or number for the nomination or representation of a specific group (Dahlerup, 2006). The government reserved seats for women which witnessed a surge in the influx of women in parliament as over the past.

Notwithstanding the government's effort, there is still a gap in terms of youth's participation in politics which is directly reflective on the quota system that is being adopted at national level. YP2 concurred with YP 8 that youth are demanding more than just a quota with 10 seats in parliament; they are demanding a radical change in the whole system to ensure that the playing field becomes even, and youth have a genuine chance to make it into public office and be truly represented. PA 10, hinted that while youths are energetic and anxious, they should hoodwinked into eating the humble pie by way of accepting the reserved 10 seats. The young should not accept power on a silver platter given that in a revolution power is demanded rather than handed.

### **3) Option 3: Lowering the age of Eligibility**

As has previously been discussed, in Zimbabwe, 20 per cent of the population is aged between 15 and 24, but people are not eligible to run for office until they are 21 years old for the lower

house and 40 years old for the upper house. Proponents of a lower candidacy age argue that maturity and experience lack in younger candidates, they may become “captives” of a political party, and they may not be equipped to withstand the pressures of the political environment. However, the youths counter argue this perspective saying such existing age gaps are a barrier to enhanced youth participation hence there is a need to reflect on reducing age requirements to run for office.

#### **4) Option 4: Transparency in unpacking list of requirements**

Youth development interventions become channeled through partisan lines and so is the access to youth participation in public office positions. All the YP respondents who contributed to the outcome of this paper, cited transparency gaps in both policy and political issues as requiring scholarly attention. They recommended that action rather than rhetoric was of essence, where the former could be backed by the provision of relevant information at the disposal of the young people. The transparency question should also be done in the context of the disability constituency, especially those with visual or hearing impairments and intellectual or cognitive disability that have observably remained underrepresented by way of assistive technologies so that they do not end up being left behind (UNESCO, 2020).

### **8.1. Evaluation Criteria for Policy Alternatives**

- a) **Administrative Feasibility:** Largely based on whether the policy options are implementable or not and if public institutions or other responsible institutions have the capacity to do so.
- b) **Economic Feasibility:** This forms part of the cost-benefit analysis and cost effectiveness of each alternative. Preferably the alternative benefits should outweigh the alternative costs (Kwandayi, 2010).
- c) **Equity:** Equity asks about the social allocation of burdens and benefits. Fairness, or equity, is a very important criterion for evaluating environmental any policy, as has been noted.
- d) **Moral acceptability:** Involves the extent to which the policy option is acceptable or not in light of the society’s ethical norms.
- e) **Legality:** Relevance of alternative policies to existing legislation, established goals and mega policies
- f) **Political Feasibility:** Estimates the attractiveness of the policy option in the political context.

## 8.2. Findings from the Study

Option	Moral acceptability	Political Support	Feasibility	Equity	Cost-Benefit
One	40	100	40	100	30
Two	80	80	80	100	60
Three	100	80	100	100	100
Four	100	80	80	100	100
Weights	20	10	30	30	10

Table 2. *Weights of Each Policy Alternative through a Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis*

The table above is a presentation of the weights given to each policy alternative through the Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA). Specific to this study, the weights represent the Level of importance while each criterion was given a rank guided by the advantages and disadvantages of all the policy alternatives discussed above. The score for each alternative would then be given by multiplying the rank on criterion by the given weight. As tabulated, the best alternative can clearly be singled out.

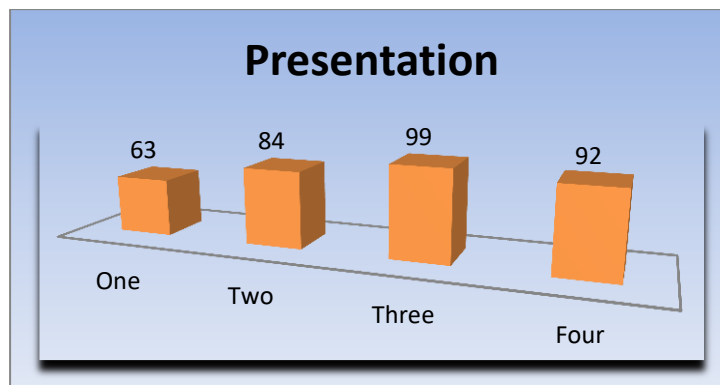
## 8.3. Analysis of Findings

Option	Moral acceptability	Political Support	Feasibility	Equity	Cost-Benefit	Total
One	8	10	12	30	3	63
Two	16	8	24	30	6	84
Three	20	9	30	30	10	99
Four	20	8	24	30	10	92
Weights	20	10	30	30	10	

Table 3. *Scores for each policy alternative*

The table above shows that option three scored high with option four emerging as the best policy alternative. Options one and two have detrimental effects of stirring disgruntlement in youths who according to the respondents are now growing impatient due to feelings of neglect and of being ignored for too long.

## 8.4. Presentation of Findings



*Graph 1. Policy Alternative Decision*

At this time, the findings suggest two policies, with each recommendation having been inspired by a tour in the advantages and disadvantages of each and every policy alternative. The paper therefore strongly recommends the prioritization of (Option 3) since the undisputable way of ensuring youths to take a leading role lays in reviewing the age cap which apart from being in itself a hot potato or controversial issue, has also been a success elsewhere. However, this study also recommends that the adoption and implementation of (Option 4) be given cognizance given that everything begins and ends with transparency which can help in putting structures necessary for building the capacity of youths to take a leading role public matters.

## 9. Gesturing the Future

Arguably, the government of Zimbabwe has had a negative perception towards enhancing the capacity of youths to partake in political processes. To that effect, the government employed a selective approach that ensured young people remain confined outside the corridors of power. The youths attribute to over 65 percent of the national population and yet they are the most under represented social group. However, any country's social and political landscape is defined and determined by youths yet in Zimbabwe they are treated with skepticism, mistrust and suspicion. While the youth suffer from political alienation, they are also susceptible to abuse and manipulation by politicians as political tools of violence comes election time. It is therefore critical for Zimbabwe to undertake the reforming of institutions that relate to reducing the eligibility age cap and an improvement on transparency in accordance with the constitution.

Specifically, this supposes various stakeholders should consider the following to effectively implement recommendations clearly exhibited in this paper:

## **1) Youths**

- Youths should take the leading role by understanding various legal structures (including the constitutional provisions, the national youth policy as well as both regional and global legal frameworks) and use these as leverage for their qualification into public office positions, which is basically the decision dinner making table.
- Internal drive and oomph is greatly demanded in areas of participation in order to avoid crying foul. For years the youths have operated under the shadows of their elders which had its consequences. In fact, one of the respondents likened it to giving a hyena the authority to look after the goats and when the goats start being eaten then one wonders why?
- The young people must not make the same mistake done by women of accepting a quota system which was initially designed for technocrats but ended up being politicized. Youths however, should not accept power on a silver platter which when accepted exhibits youth to manipulation and exploitation by older politicians

## **2) Government**

- Should strengthen the capacity of persons with visual, hearing and mental impairment by way of improving both political and electoral landscapes. The government is in a strong position to encourage stakeholders to treat those with disability as human beings first and not as charity cases. Eligibility to public office must be universally accessible and while it is impressive that the government reserved 2 seats in the senate for this cause, it is however recommended that political and electoral processes should be inclusive by way of providing necessary information in accessible formats and increasing representation of the youths, in particular those with disabilities.

## **3) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)**

- The caveat to CSOs especially those pushing for the youth agenda is that they should balance between being confrontational and persuasive. While their advocacy actions are for a good cause, it may be recommended that they should always be watchful of and vigilant to government's operations and decisions. Recently at the time of putting together this paper, 450 CSOs face deregistration as government weaponizes COVID-19 and use it to clamp down on those posing as a threat to national security.
- CSOs maybe a unifier between young and adults so that the two can complement rather than compete with one another, otherwise there may not be meaningful

progress. After all in the exact words of one of the respondents, “if you mix the mind of an old man/woman and that of a young man/woman, you can rule the world.”

#### 4) Political Parties

- Political parties dominated by youths may train and or prepare young people on leadership positions as a way of strengthening their capacity. Even the quota system itself should be kick started at political party level as a grass root mechanism to empower and prepare young people into public issues.

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