The Voices Forgotten by The Fourth Estate:

A Report on Gender Bias in the Media Ahead of Zambia’s 2021 Elections
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About the EJS Center

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) was founded in 2018 to be a catalyst for change across Africa, by helping unleash its most abundant untapped power—its women. It aims to amplify the voices of women and girls in all spheres of life by increasing the representation of women in public leadership roles in Africa.

Through its work, the EJS Center envisions more voices heard, talents unleashed, and leaders launched that prioritize the aspirations of women. Its mission is to champion women’s ascension to the highest levels of leadership and challenge systematic barriers to girls’ and women’s advancement. The Center offers a unique blend of programming, advocacy, will include archival research, and museum exhibitions and seeks to become a premier institution dedicated to advancing and sustaining women’s political and social development on the continent.

The EJS Center was founded by former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa’s first democratically elected woman president, who led Liberia from 2006 until 2018. During that time, President Sirleaf led the country through reconciliation and recovery following the nation’s decade-long civil war, as well as the Ebola crisis. She won international acclaim for achieving economic, social, and political change and was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Peace in 2011. Recognized as a global leader for women’s empowerment, President Sirleaf is passionate about supporting the next generation of African women in public life.
Introduction

One of the major barriers to women’s advancement in public leadership is adverse media coverage, which includes both under-coverage and biased or toxic coverage. If gender equality is to improve both globally and on the African continent, this needs to change.

The media—often referred to as the ‘fourth estate’¹ for its vast influence over political governance and the functioning of democracy—is an incredibly powerful source of information in any society. While the introduction of the internet, social media, and mobile communications apps have diversified the type of content that people have at their fingertips, it has also amplified the reach of traditional media, articles, and videos, which are now more easily shared and can be viewed by hundreds of thousands of people at the click of a button.

Despite the common assumption that the digitization of media has democratized the news, African media continues to face considerable challenges when it comes to free and fair media environments. There have been notable declines in press freedom in several countries across the continent.² ³ With new technologies have come new and restrictive laws, harassment, imprisonment of journalists in some countries and internet shutdowns have also become increasingly common over recent years.⁴ ⁵ ⁶

In addition, rapid digitization has also challenged news outlets’ business models, making it increasingly difficult for them to secure sustainable revenue sources. This has exacerbated the “pay-to-play” system within many outlets across the continent, where those seeking media coverage are expected to pay for the content they consume either directly or through advertising or other reciprocal agreements.

The changing media landscape has impacted entire societies—but its effects have been felt differently by men and women. For example, women are more likely to be subject to online harassment and threats. Negative media coverage about women is often picked up by trolls and is quickly spread, creating an additional barrier to communicating effectively about their work. Given that women generally have less access to financial resources⁷ compared to their male counterparts, they are also less able to afford the costs of media exposure. These factors contribute to women being underrepresented and underreported in the media.

According to a study on the portrayal, participation, and representation of women in the news media spanning 20 years and 114 countries, women make up only 26% of the people covered in online news stories and news tweets. Further, only 4% of traditional news and digital news stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes. This dynamic⁸ leaves space for disrespect, stereotypes, and violence towards women to flourish.

The EJS Center believes that to create an enabling environment for African women to reach the highest levels of leadership, it is crucial to address the underlying causes of the prejudicial treatment of women in the media.
Therefore, as part of the EJS Center’s efforts to equip media professionals with the skills to conduct fair and equal coverage of women’s related affairs, the Center undertook its first media training project over the course of 2021 to promote gender-sensitive reporting in three countries: Zambia, Kenya, and Senegal. The effect of the underrepresentation of women in the media is felt particularly acutely leading up to and during democratic elections when the press plays a crucial role in determining how candidates are viewed by voters. Therefore, these countries were selected for: (1) the proximity of upcoming national elections, (2) the level of press freedom, and (3) geographic and linguistic diversity.

With Zambians heading to the polls in August 2021 for national elections, shortly after the training took place, the Center took the opportunity to explore in real-time, the prevalence and impact of gender-biased reporting through quantitative and qualitative research.

The Center’s aim in conducting this research was to gain a data-driven assessment of the level of coverage of men and women candidates and the prevalence of gender-based stereotypes in reporting. In addition, the Center sought out first-hand perspectives from both journalists and women candidates about the barriers to achieving fair and equal media coverage. The findings are outlined in this report.

**ZAMBIA**
- Media landscaping conducted *(July 2021)*
- **25** journalists trained *(13 July 2021)*
- Media monitoring conducted, with **1,344** articles reviewed across **8** publications *(11 July – 11 September 2021)*

**KENYA**
- Media landscaping conducted *(September 2021)*
- **20** journalists trained *(21 – 22 September 2021)*

**SENEGAL**
- Media landscaping conducted *(November 2021)*
- **13** journalists trained *(30 November – 1 December 2021)*
Case Study: Zambia

Zambia is a presidential representative democratic republic. It gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1964, with then prime minister Kenneth Kaunda becoming its first president. Zambia then became a one-party state in 1974 under President Kaunda until 1991.9

Multi-party democracy was brought in by the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) under the leadership of Frederick Chiluba and, since this time, Zambia has been a multi-party state with seven peaceful transfers of power. As of December 2021, women held 25 of the 166 seats in the Zambian parliament (15.1%), ranking 143rd in the world and considerably below the Southern African regional average of 30.6%.¹⁰

The parliamentary and presidential campaigns were dominated by the two leading political parties: the Patriotic Front (PF), led by incumbent President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, and leader of the opposition United Party for National Development (UPND), led by Hakainde Hichilema.¹¹

The campaign was conducted against a backdrop of increasing political and economic tension, with Zambia’s economic situation looking increasingly precarious¹² in the lead-up to the polls. In addition, some reported that press freedoms and human rights were under significant threat.¹³

While there were pockets of violence reported ahead of the ballot, on the day of the election, the atmosphere was reported to be largely peaceful and calm¹⁴. The World Bank’s most recent figures put Zambia’s population at 18,383,956¹⁵, total number of registered voters was 7,023,499, and voter turnout stood at 70.61%.

| Voter turnout | 70.61% |
| Registered voters | 7,023,499 |
| Total votes cast | 4,959,332 |
| Votes rejected | 126,569 |
2021 Presidential Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Presidential Running Mate</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HICHILEMA Hakainde</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mutale Nalumango</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>UPND</td>
<td>2,852,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUNGU Edgar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nkandu Luo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PF</td>
<td>1,870,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KALABA Harry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Judith Kabemba</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>25,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANDA Andyford</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gerald Mulao</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>19,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M’MEMBE Fred</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Cosmas Musumali</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>16,644</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAMUDUDU Highvie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kasote Singogo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PNUP</td>
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<tr>
<td>KATEKA Chishala</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Samuel Kasnaka</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NHP</td>
<td>8,169</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHANDA Charles</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Simon Mbulu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>UPPZ</td>
<td>6,543</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHISELA Lazarus</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Rosemary Chivumbi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>ZUSD</td>
<td>5,253</td>
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<tr>
<td>MUMBA Nevers</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Reuben Sambo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>MMD</td>
<td>4,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONGA Enock</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bright Chombo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3RD LM</td>
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<tr>
<td>MWAMBA Musonda</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>John Harawa</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>UNIP</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEMBO Sean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Henry Muleya</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PEP</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYIRENDA Stephen</td>
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<td>Lucy Changwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NAREP</td>
<td>1,808</td>
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<tr>
<td>MWENDA Kasonde</td>
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<td>Changala Siame</td>
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<td>EFF</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILUMBE Richard</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kaela Kamwenshe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>LM</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
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The only woman to stand as a presidential candidate, Ms. Chishala Kateka, garnered 0.16% of the vote (8,169 votes). Alongside Ms. Kateka, there were also five women vice-presidential candidates, with the top three parties all fielding women for this position. This provided the EJS Center with an opportunity to explore how the media’s coverage of women candidates differs from their male counterparts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total Elected</th>
<th>Percentage of Elected MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
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Spotlight on:

Alongside the only woman presidential candidate, the three most popular parties in Zambia fielded women vice-presidential candidates. Below the profiles of these four women are highlighted.

**Chishala Kateka**  
President of the New Heritage Party

Chishala Kateka holds a Bachelor of Economics from the University of Zambia and was the first woman to serve as Chairperson of the Board for Absa Bank Zambia. She entered politics in November 2020, when she announced her candidacy for President of Zambia. She currently serves as President of the New Heritage Party, of which she was a founder member.

**Her Excellency Mutale Nalumango**  
Vice President of the United Party for National Development (UPND); Current Vice President of Zambia

Mutale Nalumango trained as a teacher and previously served as Vice President of the Secondary Schools’ Teachers Union of Zambia. Her political career began in 2001, when she became Member of Parliament for the Kaputa Constituency and the first woman to serve as Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. She joined the UPND in 2011 and was subsequently appointed National Chairwoman. She currently serves as Vice President of Zambia—only the second woman to have held the position.

**Professor Nkandu Luo**  
Vice Presidential Candidate for the Patriotic Front

Nkandu Luo is a scientist and Professor of Microbiology who entered politics in 1996. She began her political career as Member of Parliament for the Mandevu constituency and went on to hold several key ministerial positions, including Minister of Health, Minister of Gender and Child Development, and Minister of Livestock and Fisheries. She joined the Patriotic Front in 2011 and was appointed President Edgar Lungu’s running mate in May 2021.

**Judith Kabemba**  
Vice President of the Democratic Party

Judith Kabemba holds a Masters in Psychology from the University of Zambia and previously worked as a teacher. She entered politics in 2016 as parliamentary candidate for the Nchanga constituency. She later joined the Democratic Party, serving as Party Spokesperson before becoming Vice President in March 2021.
Study Methodology

Alongside the media training workshop, with the support of in-country partners Mthoniswa Banda Consultancy and the Zambia Free Press Initiative, the EJS Center conducted media monitoring over a two-month period (July 11 – September 11, 2021) leading up to and immediately following the August 12 election.

Four of the most popular daily newspapers and four of the most popular online publications were selected for review. These included a mix of private and state-owned media to ensure a range of coverage:

**Daily Newspapers:**
I. News Diggers (print/privately owned) [https://diggers.news/](https://diggers.news/)
II. The Mast (print/privately owned) [https://www.themastonline.com/](https://www.themastonline.com/)
III. The Times of Zambia (print/state-owned) [https://www.times.co.zm/](https://www.times.co.zm/)
IV. The Zambia Daily Mail (print/state-owned) [http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/](http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/)

**Popular Online media:**
I. Mwebantu (online/privately owned) [https://www.mwebantu.com](https://www.mwebantu.com) and
II. Kalemba (online/privately owned) [https://kalemba.news/](https://kalemba.news/)
III. Zambia Reports (online/privately owned) [https://zambiareports.com/](https://zambiareports.com/)
IV. Lusaka Times (online/state-owned) [https://www.lusakatimes.com/](https://www.lusakatimes.com/)

1,344 articles that were published by these media outlets in relation to the election were analyzed based on a set of questions that aimed to ascertain the presence of any gender stereotypes. This included whether the article discussed a candidate’s appearance, their marital status or whether they had children; the total number of men and women candidates or experts mentioned within the article; and whether the article sought quotes directly from candidates or experts and, if so, whether they were men or women.18

To complement the quantitative data from the media monitoring exercise and delve further into some of the key insights, the EJS Center also conducted qualitative interviews with a selection of Zambian journalists and women candidates. Journalists were asked to what extent they proactively covered women candidates, whether they felt the Zambian media was equal in its coverage of male and female candidates, and how important they felt the media was in contributing to election outcomes. Meanwhile, the women candidates interviewed were asked about their experiences with the Zambian media, how much it had impacted their campaign efforts, and what could be done to create a more even playing field for women.19
Limitations

**Outlets Reviewed**

It is worth noting that, due to the volatility of the election period and the ongoing COVID-19 situation, some newsagents were temporarily closed. This caused the research team on the ground to face some challenges accessing physical print newspapers. Some newspapers and online issues were not published on or around election day. It should also be noted that while this study examined eight print and online newspapers, there are a total of 16 widely read newspapers, and 36 newspapers in total, across Zambia. Furthermore, this study did not address social media or radio coverage which are also a significant part of the media landscape.

**Implicit Bias**

In order to mitigate against bias, researchers were guided by a carefully worded questionnaire. The same questions were applied to all articles for analysis and the research team consisted of both men and women. The EJS Center recognizes that implicit bias may still exist even with these mitigations.

Bearing the above limitations in mind these results should be taken as indicative and not exhaustive. In order for future studies to produce a more robust and wide-ranging picture of the state of media bias in Zambia, the EJS Center recommends conducting media monitoring across all 16 top newspapers, national and regional radio stations, social media channels, as well as expanding the interview pool.
Key Findings

Underreporting on Women Candidates

One of the key observations from the media monitoring was that there was a significant lack of coverage of women candidates during the 2021 election period in Zambia—mirroring global trends. Of the 1,344 articles reviewed, 244 mentioned women candidates (18.15%), compared to 1,059 articles that mentioned male candidates (78.79%). Following a similar trend, only 114 of the articles interviewed or quoted women candidates (8.47%) compared to 543 for male candidates (40.4%).

Even at the highest levels, mentions of women candidates in article headlines were notably low:

a. Chishala Kateka (presidential candidate) – 8 articles
b. Mutale Nalumango (vice-presidential candidate) – 14 articles
c. Nkandu Luo (vice-presidential candidate) – 12 articles
d. Judith Kabemba (vice-presidential candidate) – 0 articles
e. Rosemary Chivumbi (vice-presidential candidate) – 0 articles
f. Lucy Changwe (vice-presidential candidate) – 0 articles

When it came to coverage that cited officials or experts (642 in total), 158 (24.6%) of these were women, and 484 (75.4%) were men.
These figures mirror results from a previous global study conducted in 2015 by The Global Media Monitoring Project, which found that only 24% of 45,402 people interviewed or used as subjects in 22,136 stories from 114 countries were women. This study also showed that when women were included in the news, they appeared primarily as sources based on their personal experience or as popular opinion providers and eyewitnesses to events, rarely as experts.

The insights revealed by the media monitoring were further supported by interviews conducted with some of the women vice-presidential candidates.

One woman candidate interviewed by the EJS Center noted that one of the top three barriers to campaigning she faced was the lack of resources available to her to secure media coverage:

“During campaign is a time that most media houses in Zambia make money. The cost for running an advert or appearing on TV or radio, believe you me, was very expensive.”

She cautioned that this was a serious issue because:

“Media is a very serious tool that can influence the outcome of an election. And also, there’s so much propaganda now, especially on social media... If you have no access to media to explain yourself and defend yourself, and also to bring out your true character, then your potential is killed. Just like that.”

When asked if she felt that her campaign was covered to the same extent as her male counterparts, she noted:

“Usually, when a woman speaks, people listen, so if one secured the opportunity of airtime, it could be powerful. However, when you look at most of the primetime slots, it was the male that got them because they had more resources. So, I think the male folk in that regard received more attention; they receive more publicity.”

Another woman candidate also found this to be the case and noted:

“I think that clearly, that goes without saying that the male counterparts were getting much more coverage than I was... You had to put in a lot of effort, which is not the case with men.”
When discussing the issue of underreporting with a media consultant based in Lusaka who recently worked for a prominent TV station, she noted:

“It’s very obvious that the Zambian media have a tendency to focus on male candidates rather than female candidates, and lately, when they cover women, it’s on the negative side and not to promote their cause or to promote their voices.”

The media consultant also highlighted the links between resources and coverage, noting similarly to the vice-presidential candidates interviewed that:

“The biggest aspect is the financial muscle. You need to have money and support to venture into politics in Zambia. Even a person like me would say largely there are the issues of finances; you need it to lobby support, lobby people to listen to you. Even the issue of traveling around the country to garner support takes finances.”

These findings have been backed up by third-party research. The recent report ‘Women’s Political Participation - Africa Barometer 2021’ noted:

“Studies have repeatedly shown that women’s voices make up less than one-quarter of those whose views and voices are heard in the news media. This ‘silent censorship’ has given rise to a global gender and media movement demanding gender equality ‘in and through the media’.”

As the ‘fourth estate,’ the media plays a crucial role in ensuring that all candidates’ voices are heard, regardless of their sex, race, class, age, or socioeconomic background. This role is vital because it is supposed to provide voters with impartial information to guide their decisions at the ballot box.

Not only are women candidates profiled less, but they are also typically less likely to be called upon for comment or expert opinion. This creates an unequal playing field for those women running for office. It also perpetuates a cycle of women and girls believing that leadership roles are not for them; as Marian Wright Edelman said: “You can’t be what you can’t see.” With women holding 24% of positions across upper and lower chambers of parliament in African countries, and just 14.8% of MPs in Zambia, the need to raise the visibility of women leaders remains critical.
Biased Coverage of Women Candidates

Unfortunately, even when women candidates can access the media, they often face another barrier—biased coverage. This was demonstrated through the qualitative research, with Zambian women interviewees providing multiple examples of the media falling into common gender traps.

Five Common Gender Traps:

1. Focusing on women’s family or marital status (e.g., highlighting that a woman is unmarried or questioning whether she can balance the job with being a mother)

2. Attaching women to powerful men (e.g., commenting about the woman’s father or husband’s prominence)

3. Discussing women’s physical appearance (e.g., commenting on the clothing that the woman is wearing or her physique)

4. Using derogatory and gendered language to describe the person (e.g., describing a woman as having a shrill voice)

5. Commenting on the person’s competence in a way that is linked to their gender (e.g., portraying a woman as too emotional)

While the monitoring data predominantly displayed underreporting, of those articles that did feature women candidates, there were instances of gender bias and use of gender stereotyping. For example, following the election, when prominent Patriotic Front MP Mumbi Phiri stepped down, one headline in the Lusaka Times read: ‘Mumbi Phiri retires from active politics, opts to go back to being a housewife.’

Despite 29 years as a politician and other reasons given for her departure from politics, such as her displeasure with the party’s performance, the article focused largely on comments made about her marriage—one of the key gender traps that journalists can fall into.

When discussing the issue of biased coverage with women candidates, it became clear that gendered misrepresentation or inappropriate coverage was an issue many women had to contend with.

One woman candidate noted:

“Especially for women. It’s very active. Very tough. So, every day they are calling you names. Using very vulgar language toward you. Zambian politics people go to the extent of even branding you a prostitute.”
Another woman candidate in the 2021 elections discussed how this had been a problem throughout her career:

“The media was one of the many challenges I faced personally. You tend to be supported more by men and not by fellow women. And my view is that it’s because of the negative perception about women, which... then affects the different sectors in the political arena. They are never portrayed positively. They’re always in the negative, if you just analyze our tabloids, for example, you will find that if they are going to portray women, they will portray women in the negative, either being battered, or they will portray them dancing with their pants showing... just very negative things. Even the children as they grow up, they obviously have this negative perception about women.”

She further explained that the media had played a significant role in building her career but also in jeopardizing it:

“I can tell you my own personal experiences; there was a time I was the darling of the media, they always wanted to build my profile and so on. I think if you’re not careful, you can be so exposed to the media that you think, well, you know, the day has arrived, but when they turn against you, they really do it in a manner that destroys you. And be conscious, very trivial things like your dressing, why are you dressed in short dresses, that becomes a topic of discussion. So, one has to be very, very careful as a woman on how the media can either build you or destroy you.”

When discussing this issue with Zambian journalists, the EJS Center received similar feedback. A journalist working with one of Zambia’s major newspapers noted that:

“The media tend to focus on personality when covering a woman candidate and not her political ambitions and messaging... The general abuse of women leaders has discouraged participation.”

Another interviewee, a male journalist at a leading Zambia newspaper, shared the same opinion:

“... females have been generally marginalized, historically, especially in the political sphere. You find that the moment a female pops up to become a political party candidate, some people in communities go and dig up a few things. What she did, I mean, how it impacted society. I’ll give an example: how many boyfriends has this woman had, how many men she has been involved with? Is she married or not? Those are some of the things people talk about.”
Gender Traps in Action Across Africa

Millie Odhiambo: On being childless, father’s death and her long distance relationship
DAILY STANDARD, KENYA

Blinken in Senegal: Aïssata tall shines and seduces her world!
SENEWEB, SENEGAL

Mumbi Phiri retires from active politics opts to go back to being a housewife
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

‘Fire sexually frustrated Dora Siliya’
ZAMBIA WATCHDOG, ZAMBIA

Yaye Fatou Diagne ex wife of Ameth Khalifa Niasse and Serigne Mboup: A beautiful Senegalese Drianké with charm to spare
SENEGEO, SENEGAL

Unable to cook, it is Suluhu's time to serve
THE EAST AFRICAN, KENYA

Underrepresentation in the Newsroom

Interviews conducted with Zambian journalists also highlighted that one of the contributing factors to the media’s persistent underreporting and biased reporting of women candidates appears to be the makeup and culture of newsrooms themselves. Across Africa, this is particularly acute in leadership positions across print, TV, radio, and digital reporting. According to a recent global research study, Africa registered the greatest gender gap in the media industry with women making up only 39% of news personnel.

The same stereotypes that pigeonhole women candidates as caretakers, overly emotional, or sexual objects are also barriers to equality in the newsroom. Often, women reporters are assigned to ‘less important’ coverage or ‘women’s issues.’
As part of the media monitoring exercise, researchers were asked to note the gender of the article’s author. While they were not able to do so for all articles analysed, of the 753 they were able to identify, male journalists made up 445 (59.1%), and women journalists made up 308 (40.9%).

When analyzing the impact of reporters’ gender on the frequency of women candidates being covered, the media monitoring revealed a surprising result. When breaking down the number of articles covering women candidates, women journalists included women candidates in the coverage 20.8% of the time, and male reporters included them nearly twice as often (38.9%).

Other areas of analysis revealed little difference between the coverage of men and women reporters. When it came to the inclusion of women officials or experts, women journalists featured them 14.6% of the time, and male journalists included them at a similar rate of 14.8%. A similar trend was seen when comparing how many women candidates were directly interviewed or quoted in the story—12.6% and 10.3%, respectively.

However, when discussing the issue of gender-biased reporting with a woman journalist, she noted that women journalists have a special role to play in tackling the issue, as often they prioritize coverage of fellow women and issues that affect women and girls:

“I feel female journalists also need to take a keen interest in these female-related issues, the political arena, and others. We need to ensure that we take an interest in the females because we know that the future is female.”

A male journalist the Center spoke with highlighted that when he had tried to take a particular interest in women candidates, his male colleagues in the newsroom would mock him:

“One of my negative experiences as a journalist which I encountered was when I got so close to about five female candidates, that was in 2011, I was trying to help them get enough publicity that they needed. Eventually, the first jab I got from my fellow journalists was that they were my girlfriends. I mean, I thought it started as a joke until people started becoming serious. That’s when I brought it to the editor.”
It is not just male journalists being harassed in newsrooms when standing up for gender equality. African women face multiple challenges in securing coveted positions in journalism and in progressing on their career path due to gendered barriers. One of these challenges is harassment in the workplace. Research indicates that women working in African media were twice as likely to experience sexual harassment at work than men.

The issue of trust and safety is also spilling out into the media’s relationships with women candidates. One of the women journalists the Center spoke with also highlighted the issue of trust and how important it is for her as a woman journalist that she is able to build a rapport with women candidates:

“As a journalist, we need to ensure that we protect our sources, and we need to ensure that we create that rapport between us and sources who are also females and the female candidates, those that are also into leadership. They need to create a rapport with us as journalists. They need to trust us. Without trust, we’re not going to do anything. We’re not going to ensure that their news articles are brought into perspective.”

Similarly, a male journalist noted that it is up to journalists and newsrooms to help give women candidates a platform and tackle the distrust or discomfort they may feel:

“The other negative encounter I had, when covering the female candidates, was when I was told that most of these females I was covering are so down and weak, they are too timid. What are they talking about in parliament? And, I said, if they are timid, it’s normal. Most people who are normal when they’re talking to journalists become timid, or, when they are they want to, I mean, they, when they go in the political platform, they become timid, but it’s up to us to help in the same way we have helped men because even among men, we have some of them who are timid, but we have ended up bringing out public speakers in them.”

The view that more needs to be done to tackle how the media approaches gender bias was also echoed by the media consultant the Center interviewed:

“In the run-up to the elections we had, there was a lot of miscommunication and mudslinging—character assassination. There’s a need for the media to come up full force and be more professional in how we cover our news sources, including women candidates... as journalists must be a bit more aggressive and move forward when it comes to ensuring we cover female/ women candidates. I think we haven’t done that, really.”
Conclusion and Recommendations

The research conducted in Zambia and feedback received from workshops conducted in Zambia, and other African countries, have provided convincing evidence of the critical role the media could play in creating a level playing field for women politicians and candidates.

As noted by the media consultant, the Center interviewed, “the media has a huge role to play” when it comes to elections in Zambia. As is the case around the world, it is through a media lens that Zambian citizens receive much of their information on political landscapes, players, and policies.

As such, there is justifiable concern that the prevalence of gender bias in the media could be affecting the way voters view women candidates, and at the same time, deterring women from entering politics at all. This was explicitly noted by one of the interviewed journalists who said that “the general abuse of women leaders has discouraged participation” and was affirmed by two 2021 women candidates who cautioned over the media’s ability to ‘make or break’ a woman candidate.

It is not just the biased coverage of women that is contributing to a shortage of women candidates and the persistence of gendered stereotypes; it is also the dearth of women’s voices. As the media monitoring demonstrated, women candidates in the 2021 Zambian elections were significantly less likely to receive coverage from the major newspapers compared to their male counterparts. This chimes with global trends outlined in recent reports from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which found significant differences in the media’s coverage of men and women.

Finally, while the data on the makeup and culture of newsrooms in Zambia is not exhaustive, insights from journalists interviewed suggest that the culture within a newsroom may limit journalists’ ability to cover women in the same manner as they would men. One male journalist interviewed highlighted the ridicule he faced when trying to promote coverage of women candidates in the 2011 elections, and the media consultant emphasized a lack of women in media leadership positions:

“... even in media, women are not in positions where they can make decisions or fight for the issues that are affecting women... There’s a lot that needs to be done in how we cover women candidates.”

Changing the playing field for women candidates

Feedback from the EJS Center’s workshops showed that both men and women journalists are motivated to address this issue. Many of the participants in the workshops emphasized their desire to report in a more gender-sensitive manner. Further, all the journalists interviewed in Zambia recognized the challenges women candidates face in the media, and all highlighted efforts they or their organizations were taking to combat these.
One development that might yield change is the Zambia Media Council Bill, which the Zambia Media Liaison Committee has recently submitted or preparing to submit to parliament. This bill includes a code of ethics that would hold media practitioners accountable for creating a more level playing field. The initiative would be self-regulatory, overseen by the Zambia Media Council under the auspices of the Media Liaison Committee. It includes specific guidance on electoral coverage stating, for example:

2.1 - The media should avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to people’s race, color, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, physical or mental disability or illness, or age.

and

3.11 - During the declared campaign period, all candidates should be allowed to take part in programs to speak about constituency or area matters.

One of the women interviewed by the Center noted that while this bill will be an important tool in the media self-regulating and improving standards, media personnel also need “to do some retraining and refocusing on this and specialized training.” And this is where those striving towards gender equality can contribute to the creation of a more gender-balanced media landscape.

By providing journalists with the tools to recognize bias and the actions they can take to combat it, it is possible to shift the landscape for women public leaders and help create an environment in which they are able to reach the highest levels of office in greater numbers.

When surveying feedback from participants of the EJS Center’s media training workshops on gender sensitivity before and after training, there was a marked improvement across all scores. Following the workshop in Zambia specifically, journalists felt very confident (4.87/5 compared to 4.5/5) that they were able to recognize gender bias in the media, understand gender-sensitive reporting (4.87/5 compared to 3.8/5), explain the concept of gender bias to a peer (4.80/5 compared to 3.87/5), and are convinced that unbiased reporting during elections is important for the democratic process (4.97/5 compared to 4.0/5). Notably, the most significant improvement came in participants’ confidence in their understanding of the barriers to equal gender representation in reporting (4.73./5 compared to 3.53/5). Similar trends were seen in workshops carried out in additional African countries. Across the board, participants found the identification of gender traps particularly educational and noted their ambition to be more conscious of these going forward.

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<th>How confident are you in your understanding of the barriers to equal gender representation in reporting?</th>
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<th>How confident are you in your understanding of the concept of gender-sensitive reporting?</th>
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<th>How confident would you feel explaining the concept of gender bias to a peer?</th>
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| How confident are you in your ability to recognize gender bias in the media? | Before | After |
|                                                                           | 4.00   | 4.87  |

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<th>How important is unbiased reporting during elections is important for the democratic process</th>
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Beyond training and empowering journalists and providing industry reporting standards through legislation such as the Zambia Media Council Bill, media houses and their owners have a responsibility to work towards greater equality within their staff bodies. Women journalists should not be relegated to perceived ‘women’s issues, rather given equal opportunity at the top jobs, be that in editing, reporting, or marketing and sales. While it will be up to each individual news outlet to establish the best course of action, having robust diversity and inclusion policies would be a good place to start, along with flexible working hours to some women, particularly those with children or dependent family members, are supported as they manage their work alongside their personal responsibilities.

In addition, social media can also play a significant role in mitigating the challenges that women candidates encounter in traditional media. Even though this media monitoring didn’t address social media’s influence, it is fair to say that it has transformed the communications landscape and the way electoral campaigns are conducted. According to some, social media has been a ‘political equalizer’ and a ‘unique political resource’ allowing women to have more control over their political messaging and be able to reach out directly to their electorate when traditional media has confronted them with barriers. At the EJS Center our Amujae Leaders have certainly benefited from the power of these relatively new platforms, building a loyal following and making bonds with other women candidates whom they might not previously have been able to lean on for support and advice.

However, it will continue to be important that women candidates use social media with their eyes wide open. Increasingly women candidates have become the target of abuse and disinformation on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and this can threaten to derail their campaigns or undermine their political careers — as such it must be treated seriously and strategically.

The scale of the challenges and opportunities highlighted in this report was articulated by one woman candidate who, upon finishing her interview, noted:

“Centers like yours, working with some of us, can provide the leadership in trying to work with the media houses at a country level, at a regional level, at the continental level, to create a better perception of women, to put up positive reporting, to mobilize those women that can be mentors to the young people that want to participate in politics. Otherwise, a lot of girls and women are going to recoil because of what those of us who are in politics are going through. So, maybe that is the challenge for you.”

This sentiment was also echoed by founder of the EJS Center, former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who knows all too well the high stakes at play when it comes to the media:

“We cannot underestimate the importance of media’s role in shaping our world view, and specifically how we view women. They have a responsibility to ensure free, fair, and un-biased reporting in order to level the playing field and allow women to reach their full potential, whether as political candidates, community leaders, or valued members of society. It is also the responsibility of institutions like the EJS Center to help the media along on this journey and work with them to create a more equal media landscape for all.”
References

2. https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-squeeze-on-african-media-freedom/
7. https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/03/africa-gender-gap-access-to-finance-morsy.htm#:~:text=Worldwide%2C%20women's%20access%20to%20finance%20is%20disproportionately%20low.&text=In%20Sub-Saharan%20Africa%2C%20only%20over%20the%20past%20several%20years
18. A full breakdown of the monitoring questions can be found in the Appendix of this report.
19. The guiding questions for these interviews can be found in the Appendix of this report.
22. Of the 41 remaining articles the headlines did not refer to candidates at all; rather focused on general electoral updates.
Appendix

**Media Monitoring Questions**

1. How many female candidates are mentioned by name in the story?
2. How many male candidates are mentioned by name in the story?
3. How many female candidates are directly interviewed or quoted in the story?
4. How many male candidates are directly interviewed or quoted in the story?
5. How many female officials or female experts are interviewed or quoted in the story?
6. How many male officials or male experts are interviewed or quoted in the story?
7. Do gendered stereotypes/instances of sexist language towards male or female candidates appear in the story? (Please select one of the below options. If the answer is "yes" please answer Q19, Q20...)
8. How many gendered stereotypes/instances of sexist language are directed towards female candidates?
9. How many gendered stereotypes/instances of sexist language are directed towards male candidates?
10. Please list quotes from the story that indicate gendered stereotypes/sexist language (Please list exact quotes.)
11. Does the story refer to male or female candidate(s’) appearance? (Please select one of the below options. If the answer is "yes" please answer Q23, Q24 and Q25. If the answer is "No", please skip...)
12. How many statements about appearance are directed towards female candidates?
13. How many statements about appearance are directed towards male candidates?
14. Please list statements from the story that refer to candidates’ appearance (Please list exact quotes.)
15. Does the story refer to whether or not male or female candidates have children?
16. How many comments refer to female candidate(s’) marital status?
17. How many comments refer to male candidate(s’) marital status?
18. Please list comments from the story that refer to candidates’ marital status:
19. Does the story focus on issues specifically related to gender equality or inequality? (Please select one of the below options. If the answer is "yes" please answer Q31).
20. What gender equality issue(s) are discussed specifically? (Please only answer if your answer to Q30 was "yes")
21. Please list comments from the story that illustrate why it focuses on gender equality issues: (Please include only direct quotes from the story, rather than analysis or commentary).
Interview Questions

Questions for journalists
1. What news outlet do you work for?
2. What is your role?
3. Did you cover the Zambian 2021 Presidential and Mayoral elections?
4. Do you believe that the media plays a role in influencing electoral outcomes?
5. Do you consider gender bias when reporting?
6. [Follow up if yes] What steps do you take to avoid it?
7. Did you cover any women candidates during the election campaign?
8. Did you interview or seek an interview with any women candidates during the election campaign?
9. Do you feel the Zambian media cover women and men candidates in the same way?
10. If not, please elaborate
11. In your opinion, why do you think there are fewer women candidates than men in Zambia?
12. What challenges, if any, do you think that women candidates face in seeking media exposure?
13. What challenges, if any, do journalists face in ensuring gender balance in their coverage?
14. What could be done to improve the environment for women candidates in Zambia?

Questions for candidates
1. What were the biggest barriers you faced when campaigning?
2. Do you believe that the media plays a role in influencing electoral outcomes?
3. Did you engage directly with the media, i.e., send a press release, offer interviews/comments?
4. Was your political campaign picked up by the media?
5. Do you feel your campaign or you as a candidate were covered to the same extent as your male competitors and/or colleagues?
6. If not, then why?
7. Do you believe that, generally speaking, women candidates are treated the same by the media as men in Zambia?
8. If not, can you elaborate?
9. Have you ever felt targeted in a negative way by the media?
10. In your opinion, why do you think there are fewer women candidates than men in Zambia?
11. What could be done to improve the environment for women candidates in Zambia?