

The cost of politics in **Zambia**

Implications for political
participation and development

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Table of contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Sample and weighting procedures	6
Characteristics of parliamentary candidates	7
Age	7
Marital status	8
Education and professional backgrounds	8
Cost of party nominations	10
General election campaign costs	13
Total campaign spend	15
Gender dynamics	17
Urban-rural divisions	17
Sources of funding	18
Candidate views on campaign finance	21
Drivers of costs of politics	22
Clientelistic politics	22
Limited policy linkages	24
A lack of party backing	25
Corruption	25
Access to external funding	26
Absence of effective regulation	26
Conclusion	26
Recommendations	27
References	29

Executive Summary

- Zambian parliamentary candidates are predominantly male, older, more educated, and much more likely to be involved in business or hold high-status professions than the general population.
- In 2021 the average campaign cost was 568,000 ZMW (31,300 USD), with the average cost for candidates winning more than 20% of the vote higher at 990,000 ZMW (54,500 USD).
- Most campaign costs are incurred during the general election campaign, but many candidates also spend substantial amounts of money winning party nominations. The average spend among candidates who participated in competitive primaries was 158,000 ZMW (USD 8,600).
- There are significant differences in campaign spending between parties. Candidates from Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND) on average spent 165% more on their parliamentary campaigns than those not belonging to these two leading parties.
- Campaigns are mostly self-funded. The average candidate financed 55% of their campaign with their own resources, with the share of self-funding higher for candidates with larger budgets.
- There are large differences in candidates' access to external financing. PF candidates – the ruling party going in to the 2021 election - attracted three times more resources from “well-wishers” than other candidates.
- PF and UPND candidates received more funding from their parties if measured by actual contributions. However, since candidates from these parties also spend significantly more of their personal resources in campaigns, the share of their campaign budget covered by the party is smaller than for candidates of other parties.
- While the high costs of politics are likely to be a major impediment to women candidates and reduce their propensity to run, we do not find that women candidates spend less than their male counterparts.
- Candidates recognise that campaigns are very expensive and an impediment to accomplishing a more diverse parliament.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen and effectively enforce campaign finance regulation and provisions already present in the legal framework.

Introduction¹

The Zambia Cost of Politics Survey (ZCPS) is an attempt to collect systematic data on issues pertaining to campaign finance in the Zambian 2021 parliamentary election. Observers of Zambian politics have long voiced concerns about the extent to which parliamentary elections are characterised by lavish spending and high levels of clientelism (Arriola et al. 2021; Burnell 2001; Bwalya 2017). Expensive campaigns have the potential to skew political competition in favour of political parties with access to state resources, reduce female representation, and distort political representation to the detriment of pro-poor policies. Moreover, expensive campaigns, especially if such campaigns are privately financed, also have the potential to increase levels of corruption. While issues related to campaign finance in the Zambian context are well known (Wang and Pottie 2003; Muriaas 2019; Siwale and Momba 2020), there is a dearth of quantitative data estimating the actual costs of running for parliament in Zambia and specifying the source of resources used in campaigns. Furthermore, we do not know whether important subgroups of candidates, based on factors such as gender and partisanship, spend varying amounts in campaigns. These are questions the ZCPS aims to shed light on.

Elections in Zambia are regulated by the 2016 amended constitution and the Electoral Process Act (EPA). The EPA also includes a code of conduct for parties, candidates, and key institutional stakeholders. Elections are organised by the Election Commission of Zambia (ECZ). While unofficial campaigns run throughout the electoral cycle, the official campaign period is limited to three months before the election. This is the period where the bulk of ground-campaign occurs and when candidates incur most of their campaign spending. Polls, held every five years concurrently with presidential and local elections, are conducted using a Single Member District model in 156 constituencies. Most constituencies are rural, and malapportionment is high with the number of registered voters per constituency varying significantly between urban and rural areas (Boone and Wahman 2015). The concurrent timing of parliamentary and presidential elections has meant that parliamentary candidates serve an important function in mobilising voters on behalf of their parties' presidential candidates.

The 2021 Zambian election was an important moment in Zambian political history as the incumbent Patriotic Front (PF) was decisively defeated by the main opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND). The turnover marked the third occasion in which Zambians had voted an incumbent President out of office. Traditionally, the Zambian party system has been described as weak and fractionalised but since the PF's electoral victory in 2011, Zambia has developed into a strong two-party system (Rakner and Svåsand 2004; Siachiwena 2020). In the 2021 election, the two main parties, PF and UPND, won 97.8% of the combined presidential vote and 142 out of the 156 seats in parliament. Among the 14 other successful candidates, 13 ran as independents. Despite the Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Party (SP) fielding candidates in virtually all constituencies around the country, they failed to win a single seat. A myriad of other smaller parties only fielded candidates in a minority of the country's constituencies. Historically parties in Zambia are highly regionalised, yet some of these regional divisions were less clear in the 2021 poll as the PF lost ground in many of its traditional strongholds (Siachiwena 2021; Boone et al 2022).

Political parties play an important role in the ambition of aspiring Zambian candidates, not least because of the strong dominance of the PF and UPND. Both used a form of hybrid-system for candidate nomination.

1 We are indebted to Ubuntu Research and Rural Development Company in Lusaka for carrying out the survey interviews and to the candidates that have shared their experiences both in the qualitative interviews and surveys. Beauty Nalwendo provided excellent research assistance during the qualitative phase of the project.

Although often referred to as “primaries” they do not converge to the typical format of an inclusive and decentralised primary. Parties involve party committees at the constituency, district, and provincial level in ranking candidates. However, ultimately it is party national-level executive committees that make the final decision on candidate selection. Indeed, they have often been known to pick candidates that were not favoured locally (Goldring and Wahman 2018). In fact, Arriola et al (2022) have argued that parties tend to pick candidates with significant resources, hoping that these candidates will finance much of the local campaign.

Campaign finance in Zambia remains de facto unregulated and there is no state financing of political parties. The 2016 amended constitution provides provisions for both state-funding of parties, declaration of funding, and a campaign spending cap. However, none of these provisions were in effect during the 2021 election. The Political Parties Bill, intended to implement the constitution’s campaign regulation, has still not been enacted (Siwale and Momba 2020). As a consequence, there is no independent oversight of campaign finance or enforcement of limitations stated in the constitution. While candidates are officially obliged to submit a statement of assets and liabilities to ECZ, such statements are not made available for public information or audit (EU EOM 2021).

General elections are costly affairs for candidates and the literature has suggested that such campaigns are mostly financed by private resources (Arriola et al. 2022). Voters have high expectations that candidates will provide community and targeted support during campaigns with a high reliance on grassroots rallies tending to further inflate costs for candidates (Beardsworth 2018). But the 2021 election occurred during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and ECZ put in place restrictions on campaigning. Most notably, traditional rallies were banned. Despite this many candidates did organise such rallies or pivoted to other forms of campaigning, such as door-to-door canvassing. In general, candidates do not believe that the ban on rallies reduced the costs of campaigning. On the contrary, 71% of candidates interviewed for our survey believed the ban made campaigns more expensive.

Methodology

ZCPS was conducted in two stages. In the initial stage, carried out during August 2021, qualitative interviews with 23 Zambian parliamentary candidates standing in the 2021 election were conducted in Lusaka, Central Province, Kitwe, and Ndola. The qualitative interviews informed the questionnaire design and aimed to improve the validity of the collected data. Interviews typically lasted between 30-60 min and were fully transcribed.

In the second, quantitative part, of the project we conducted telephone interviews with randomly selected candidates from the full list of 682 contestants. Interviews were conducted in English and Nyanja and were completed between September 2021 and October 2022. Telephone numbers were sourced from a variety of sources, but mostly through the political parties themselves. All surveys were conducted by Ubuntu Research and Rural Development Company in Lusaka. In total, seven enumerators were trained to perform the interviews and all data were recorded on tablets.

It is important to note that all data on campaign spending presented in this report are self-reported. We cannot fully preclude the possibility of intentional or unintentional misreporting. However, average spending approximations from the quantitative data are similar to levels reported in face-to-face qualitative interviews. Moreover, self-reported data have become the global standard for estimating campaign funding in lieu of other forms of data. In the report Zambia Kwacha (ZMW) amounts are translated into US Dollars

for ease of comparison with the exchange rate of 12 August 2021, the day of the election, used. However, it is worth noting that the ZMW has appreciated significantly against the dollar since the election.

Sample and weighting procedures

In total 250 of the 682 candidates standing in the 2021 election were targeted. The sample frame did not include candidates who stood unsuccessfully in party nominations and did not end up participating in general elections. This has consequences for the interpretation of findings in regard to primary expenditure. Given the size of the sample and our ambition to achieve a sample that was as representative as possible, we did not make use of any stratification. In the case that contacts were unavailable, refused participation or their telephone number could not be located, we replaced numbers randomly. Data from 206 respondents, slightly lower than the target of 250, were captured. The decision to conclude data collection before reaching the pre-set target was in the interest of reducing problems of possible recall bias stemming from candidates responding long after the end of the election campaign.

In order to investigate the extent to which the sample is representative, we compared key characteristics of the sample with the characteristics of the entire population. We are particularly interested in factors that have theoretically or empirically been associated with campaign spending in the southern Africa context and use previous work by Wahman and Seeberg (2022) from Malawi to identify these. Table 1 shows the population and sample means of key variables and indicates whether these means are significantly different than the entire population using a single-sample t-test. It illustrates that the sample is largely representative of the population, only with a statistically significant underrepresentation of PF candidates. The sample comprises of 12.6% PF candidates, compared to 18.3% for the entire population. Since the sample is largely representative of the population on most variables, we provide unweighted averages. However, it may be important to keep in mind that average spending figures may be conservative given a slightly lower share of PF candidates in the sample.

It is also worth noting that while the sample is relatively large - 30% of all candidates running in the 2021 election - it does not allow for certain forms of disaggregation. For instance, due to the sample size, we do not disaggregate data based on province.

Table 1: Sample and population characteristics

	Sample	Population	t-statistic
Winner	15.5	18.29	-1.089
UPND	14.1	18.08	-1.647
PF	12.6	18.29	-2.440**
Independent	21.8	23.24	-0.539
Woman	22.3	19.53	.963
Vote Share	15.40	18.22	-1.770
Urban	16.99	16.78	0.080

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$ Note: Sample and population averages with t-statistics.

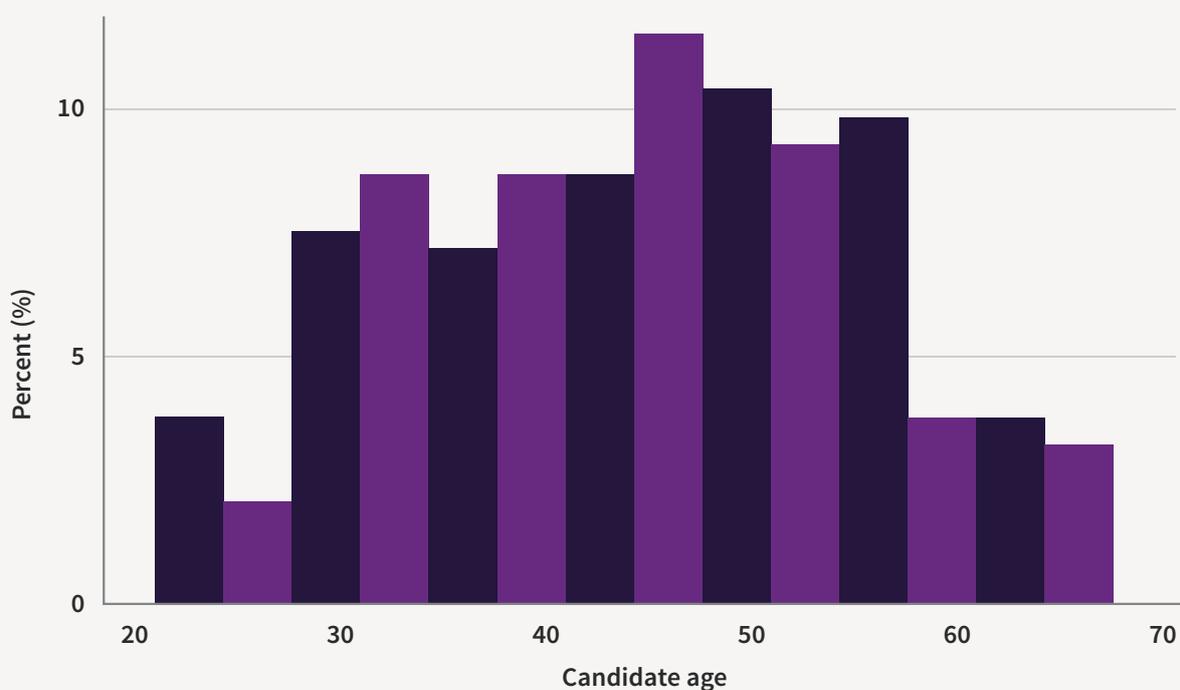
Characteristics of parliamentary candidates

Since no candidate statistics are provided by ECZ we do not have a good sense of the characteristics of Zambian parliamentary candidates. The one exception is gender. In 2021, 20% of all candidates were women, a significant underrepresentation, making gender parity in parliament unlikely. In total 15% of elected legislators were women, a small decrease from the numbers in the previous parliament elected in 2016. On other important factors, the sample based approach in ZCPS provides a good basis for understanding the demographics of parliamentary candidates in the 2021 election in terms of age, marital status, education and profession and can give a first indication as to whether the costs of politics may have had consequences for political representation.

Age

The average candidate in the sample is 44 years old and a majority of the candidates are in their 40s or 50s. Just 10.3% of candidates are over the age of 60, whilst only 11.8% are under 30. Looking in-depth at the 24 candidates in our sample under the age of 30, none of these represented the two major parties. Instead, most of these candidates represented smaller parties or ran as independents. SP was the party with the highest share of young candidates. The party made a concerted effort to nominate more women and youth, but most of these candidates ended up making a very limited impact in parliamentary elections given that the party failed to win a seat. Costly primaries, in combination with an attempt by UPND and PF to nominate independently wealthy candidates, made it hard for youth candidates to make an impact. Given the demographic profile of Zambia it is fair to conclude that the youth remains severely underrepresented not only in parliament, but also among candidates.

Figure 1: Age distribution of candidates

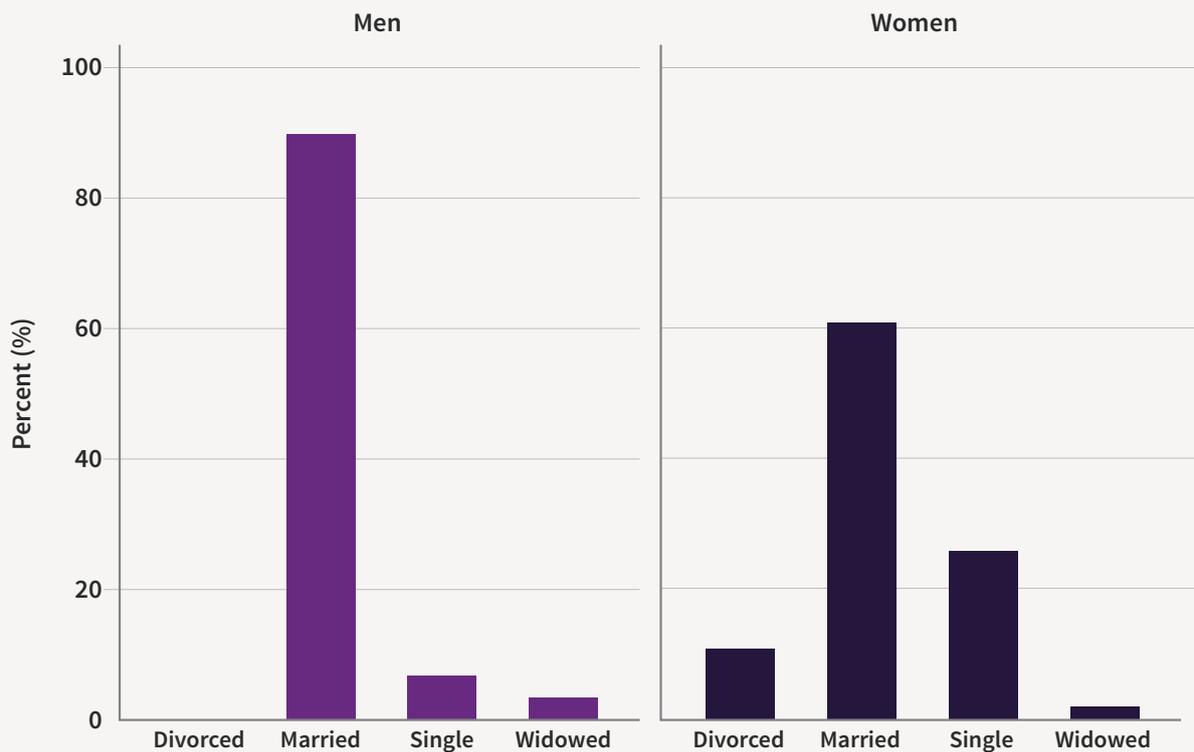


Source: ZCPS

Marital status

The typical parliamentary candidate in Zambia is married. In the sample, 83.5% of candidates stated that they were married by the time of the election. However, we find important gender differences in the responses. While 90% of male candidates were married, only 61% of women candidates were. As many as 26% of female candidates stated that they were single and 11% were divorced. These descriptives indicate that married women may face higher obstacles than married men in running for office. Such obstacles may be related both to social stigma and access to resources (Arriola et al. 2021).

Figure 2: Marital status by gender

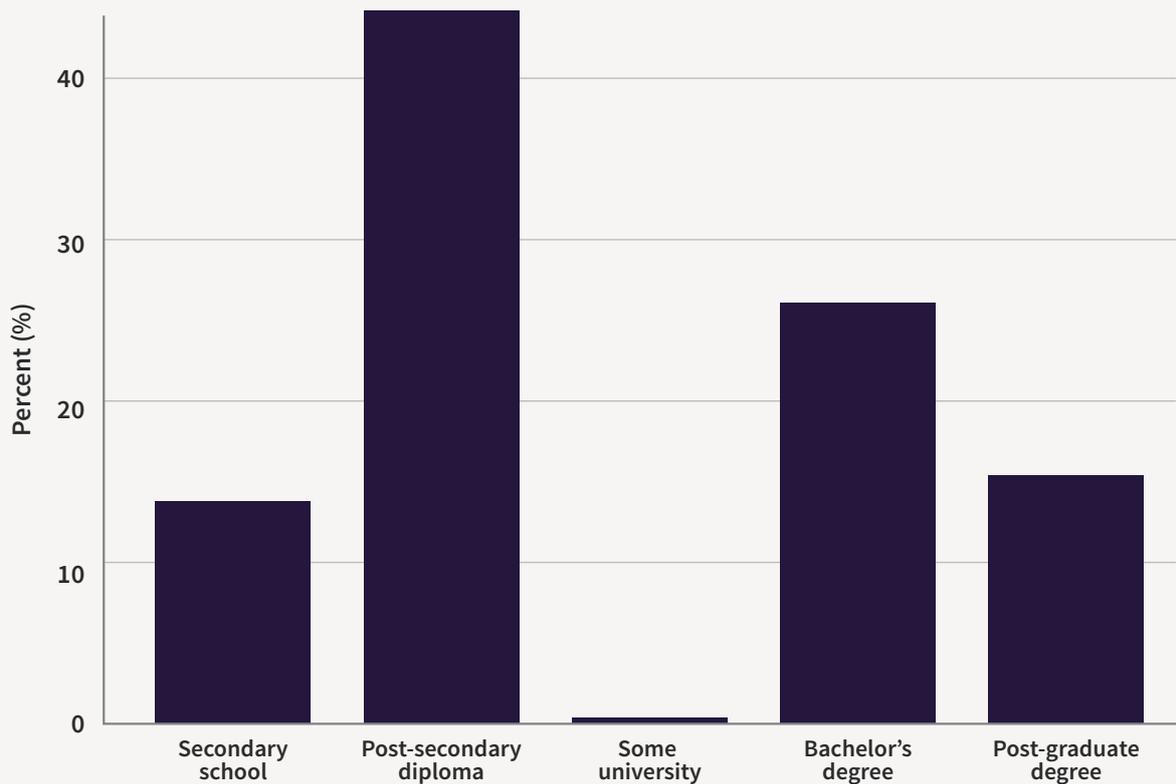


Source: ZCPS

Education and professional backgrounds

Looking at education, we find that most of the candidates do not hold a university degree. The most common qualification is a non-university post-graduate degree, such as a diploma or a degree from a polytechnic. In the sample, 59% of the respondents did not have at least a bachelor's degree, 26% had a bachelor's degree as their highest degree and 15% held a post-graduate degree (master's degree or doctorate). In general, candidates have higher levels of education than the population at large. However, this is partly due to EPA requirements for candidates to hold at least a grade twelve certificate or its equivalent in order to be eligible to stand for office.

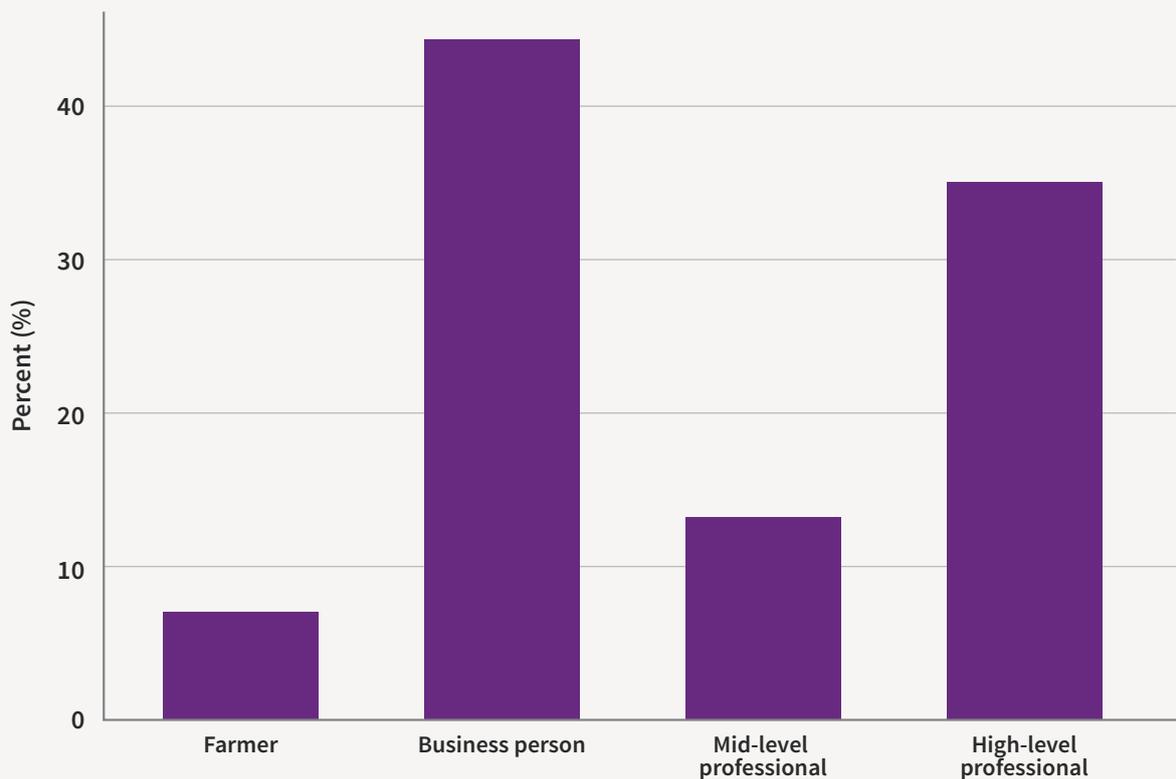
Figure 3: Distribution of education levels



Source: ZCPS

As for profession, we note that candidates are highly non-representative of the general population. For simplicity, Figure 4 shows the four most common professional categories. Together these account for 80% of all candidates. Although most working Zambians are employed in farming (either subsistence or commercial), only 6% of candidates state that their profession is in agriculture. Most commonly, candidates describe themselves as businessmen or businesswomen (35%). Probing this further 71% of candidates stated that they owned a business. However, most of these businesses were relatively small. Only 15% of candidates owning businesses stated that they employed more than 20 people. Apart from being a business owner, the most common profession was an upper-level professional, such as banker, doctor, lawyer, engineer, professor, or senior-level civil servant. The third most common category was mid-level professionals, such as teachers, nurses, and mid-level civil servants. The data show a clear under-representation of blue-collar workers among candidates. Only 3% of candidates describe themselves as either skilled or unskilled manual workers. Moreover, despite Zambia's high concentration of marketeers and street vendors, less than 1% describe this as their main occupation.

Figure 4: Most common professions



Source: ZCPS

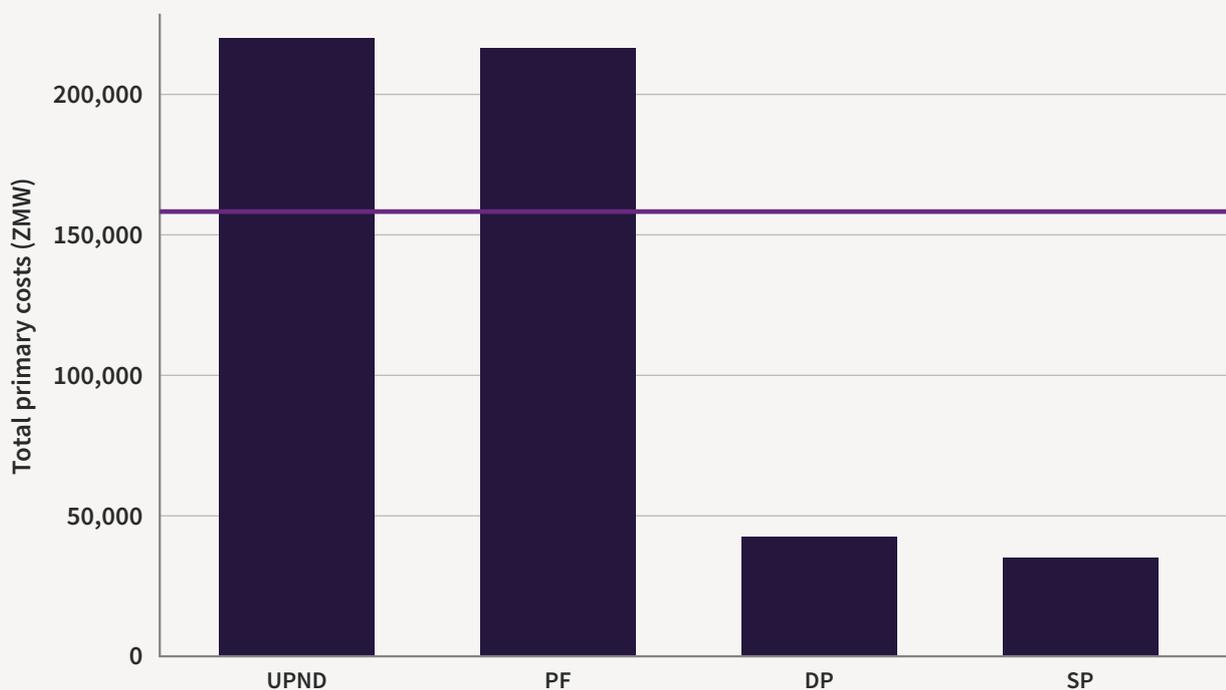
Cost of party nominations

Spending in Zambian campaigns start during party nominations. Political parties do not use open primaries for party members, employing instead a hybrid format where local divisions of the political parties are in charge of ranking candidates. These rankings are passed upwards in the party hierarchy and the final adoption decision is made centrally by a national committee. While the final decision is made at the central level, candidates nevertheless spend significant amounts of financial resources in an effort to enhance their chances. Nomination campaigns are used to build momentum, affect local-level rankings, and show an ability and capacity to mobilise voters and resources. Indeed, during interviews with candidates, most acknowledged that parties were interested in selecting candidates with the capacity to finance the lion's share of their own political campaign. In many cases, candidates were asked not only to display this capacity through lavish selection campaigns, but also by submitting financial statements to the national selection committee.

Looking at the data on nomination spending it is important to note that the survey only includes candidates that ended up participating in the general election (although they may not have ended up representing the party that they initially sought the nomination for). This means that some lower spending candidates that were unable to make an impact in nominations are not included in the estimations. Nevertheless, in the sample the average UPND aspirant spent 220,000 ZMW (12,100 USD) in the selection process and the average PF aspirant spent 216,000 ZMW (11,900 USD). These aspirants spent almost five times more in the selection process than those seeking the nomination for DP and SP. The high costs associated with selections in UPND and PF creates an insurmountable barrier to entry into politics for most Zambians, with

their chances of winning greatly reduced if they are unable to secure one of the two tickets. Across all parties the average cost of participating in a competitive candidate selection process was **158,000 ZMW (8,600 USD)**.²

Figure 5: Average spending in nomination campaigns by party



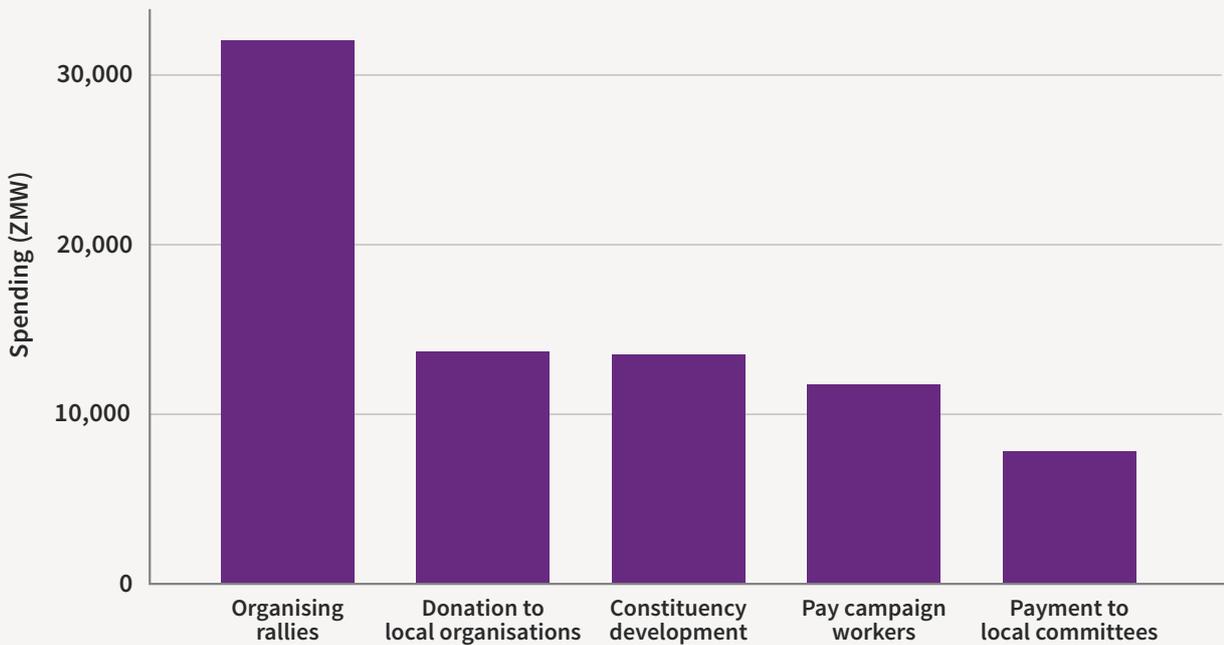
Note: Reference line shows the average amount spend for all candidates participated in contested selection processes.
Source: ZCPS

What do aspirants spend money on during selection processes? Figure 6 shows the average spending for the five most costly spending categories in the selection process for all aspirants. Interestingly, the most resource intensive item in selection campaigns is campaign rallies geared towards local party structures. On average, aspirants spent 32,000 ZMW on rallies (1,800 USD). A finding that suggests that aspirants do not simply gear their spending towards the representatives in nomination committees at various levels.

Also included on the list of key expenditures are two more items geared towards creating general momentum and community recognition: donations to local organisations, groups and churches 14,000 ZMW (800 USD) and constituency development projects such as the renovation of schools and building of infrastructure or boreholes, 14,000 ZMW (800 USD). This is followed by payment to campaign workers at 12,000 ZMK (USD 700) and payments and gifts to committee members at the local level at 8,000 ZMW (USD 440). It is important to note that this expense category would be considered unlawful interference with the process and that it is likely that some candidates might not have reported the accurate amount in this category as a result. Similarly, the average candidate stated that he/she spent only 700 ZMK (USD 40) on gifts and payments to members of the national executive committee. However, several candidates interviewed for the qualitative interviews claimed that members on the national executive committee for both major parties received substantial bribes to favour certain candidates. Underreporting in the survey data remains a distinct possibility.

² This average does not include 80/206 candidates in the sample that did not face any challengers in nominations. Most of these candidates ran for minor parties where the demand for the party ticket was limited.

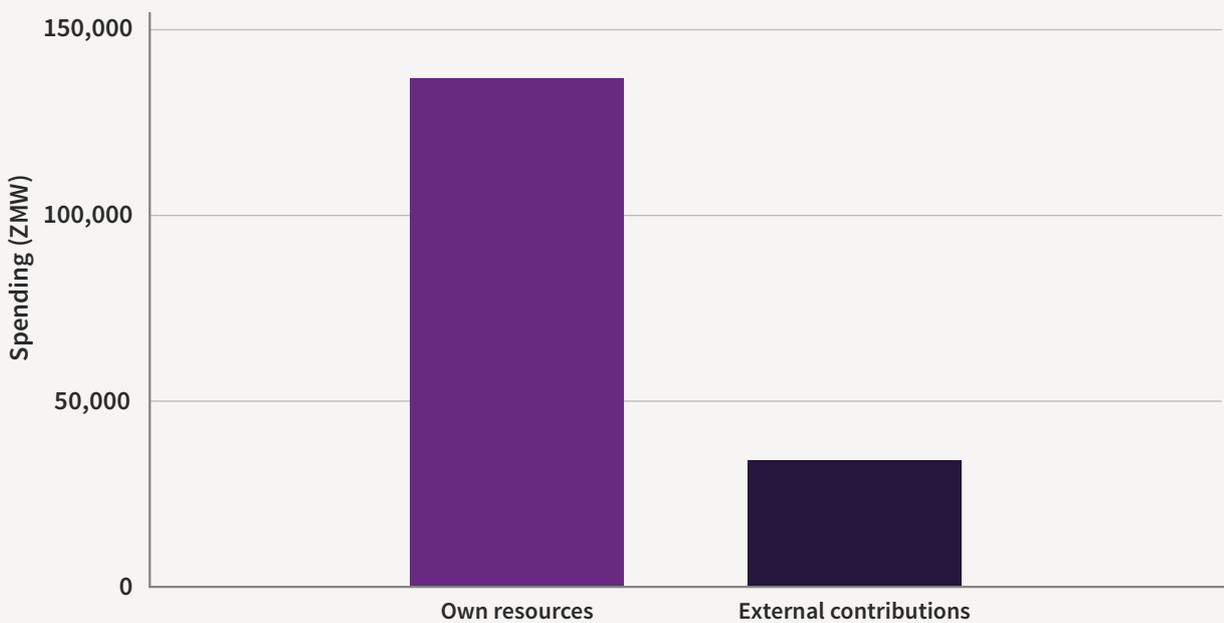
Figure 6: Expenditure during candidate selection



Source: ZCPS

Looking at the sources of funding for selection campaigns, the survey finds that most of the money spent by aspirants at the selection stage comes from personal resources. This is true for all parties. The average candidate spent 137,000 ZMW (7,500 USD) of their own resources in the selection process, receiving, on average, donations amounting to 34,000 ZMW (1,900 USD) from various well-wishers and business interests.

Figure 7: Source of selection campaign funding



Source: ZCPS

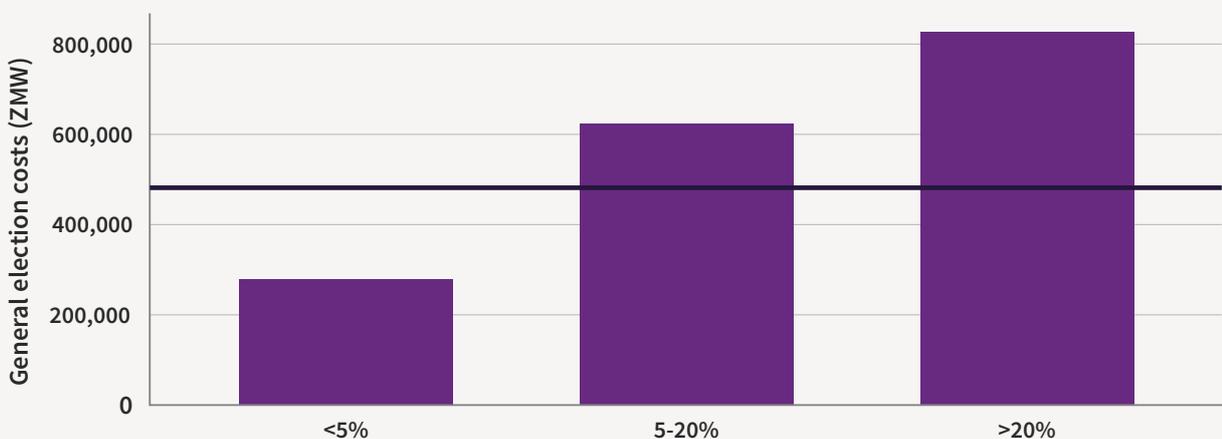
General election campaign costs

While some candidates receive their party nominations without competition or decide to side-step the nomination process by contesting as independents, all candidates face the pressure to spend resources during the three month campaign period. The data from the ZCPS show a huge variation in the amount of spending that candidates incur during the general election campaign. The average candidate spent **478,000 ZMW (26,300 USD) in the general election campaign** (excluding the selection process). However, the amount varies between no money at all spent, to a maximum of 6,000,000 ZMW (330,600 USD). Comparing the costs of general election campaigns with selection campaigns, it is worth noting that most candidates spend as much as three times more in the general election campaign than in the selection process. In other words, candidates that secure a party-ticket for the regionally dominant party cannot relax and abstain from spending in the general campaign.

An important difference between candidates are those that ran viable campaigns and those that made very little impact. It is particularly important to estimate the costs associated with running a viable or even successful campaign. For this reason, we show the average amount spent in general election campaigns depending on vote share received in the general election. A reasonable assumption is that candidates receiving less than 20% of the vote are not viable. Indeed, we see significant differences in spending depending on vote shares in the general election. Candidates receiving less than 5% of the vote spent an average 280,000 ZMW (15,400 USD), whereas candidates receiving 5-20% of the vote spent an average 624,000 ZMW (34,400 USD). **The average viable candidate (candidates securing more than 20% of the vote) spent 828,000 ZMW (45,600 USD).**

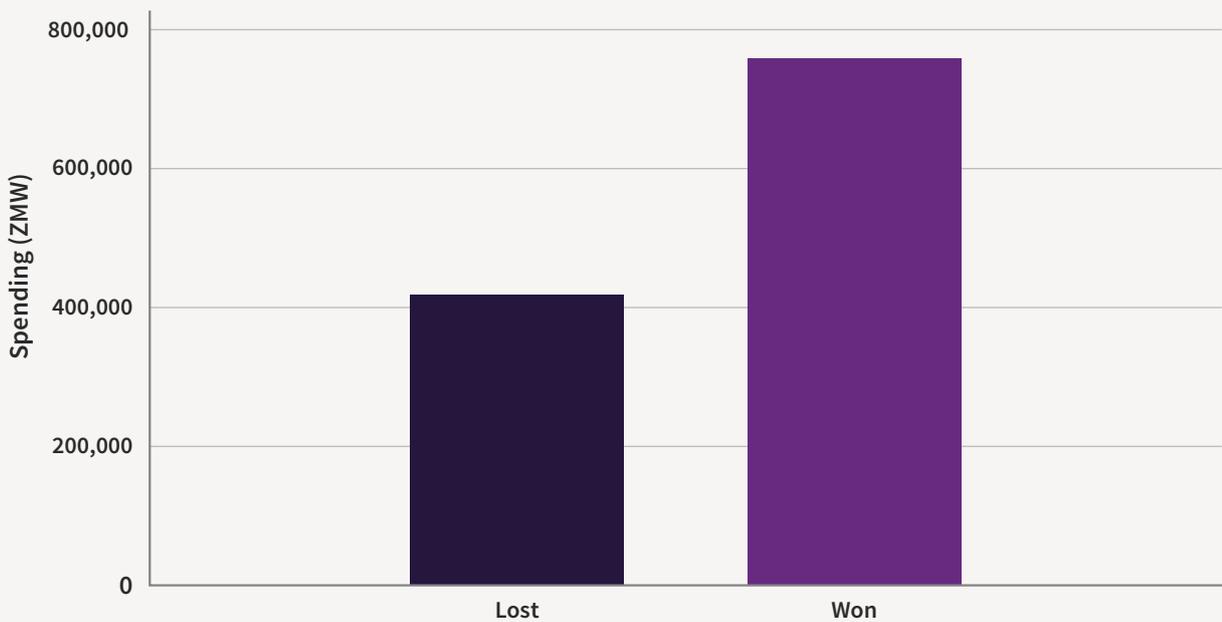
We can also break down the general campaign costs based on whether a candidate was successful or not. The average losing candidate spent ZMW 425,000 (23,400 USD), whereas the average winning candidate spent 763,000 ZMW (42,000 USD). Given the observational nature of the data, it is not possible to prove a causal relationship between the amount spent in campaigns and the probability of winning. It is possible that candidates with higher probability of winning are more motivated to spend. Nevertheless, it offers a strong indication to show that candidates will need to spend a significant amount of money to be a viable contestant in elections.

Figure 8: Spending in the general campaign by vote share



Note: Reference line shows average spending for all candidates. Source: ZCPS

Figure 9: Average spending for losing and winning candidates



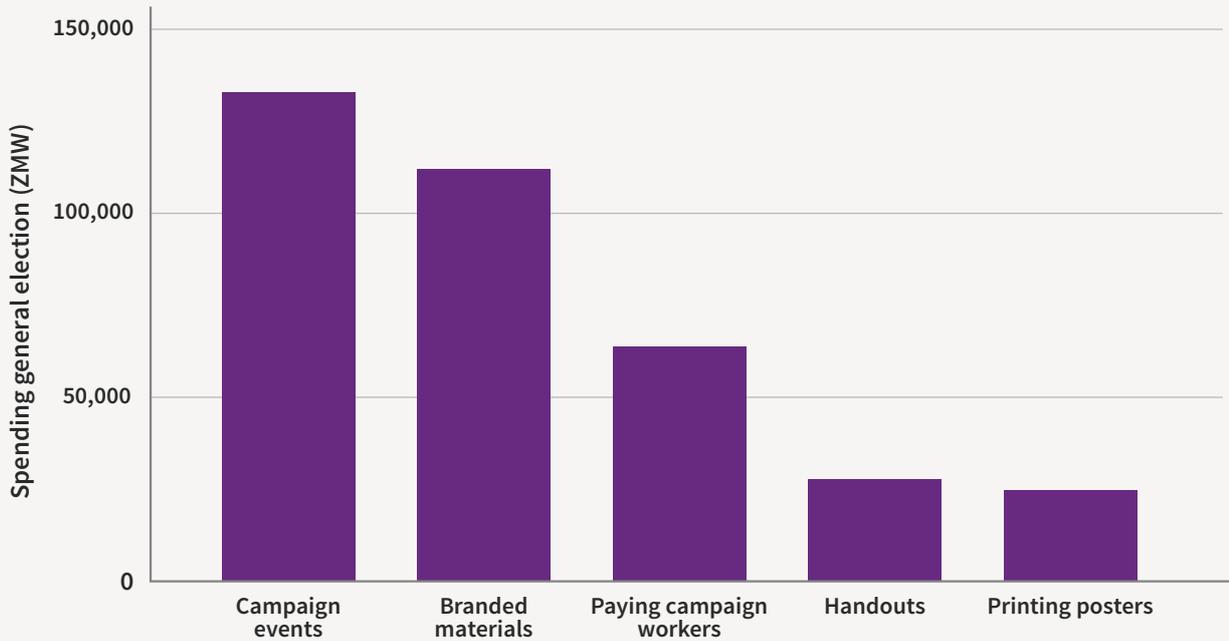
Source: ZCPS

The five costs that comprise the bulk of expenditure in general campaigns are illustrated in Figure 10. Two, in particular, stand out. First, organising rallies, campaign tours, roadshows, sports tournaments and other campaign events. On average, candidates spent 133,000 ZMW (7,300 USD) on these. This is a remarkable figure especially given that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ECZ banned election rallies³ and candidates had to find other ways to organise smaller meetings and events, such as a whistle stop tours or mask distributions. The second area that required significant investment was branded campaign materials such as t-shirts, cloth, masks, and hats. On average, candidates spent 112,000 ZMW (6,200 USD) on such material even if most candidates interviewed attested that they cannot possibly provide the amounts of clothing requested by their constituents.

In addition to these costs which comprised around half of the total outlay of an average candidate other notable expenses were payments to campaign workers (64,000 ZMW/3,500 USD), handouts to voters (28,000 ZMW/ 1,500 USD), and printing of election posters (25,000 ZMW/1,300 USD). The costs for hiring campaign workers is significant. During interviews several candidates argued that these costs may have been higher in this election since the ban on rallies prompted them to engage in more labour intensive forms of campaigning such as door-to-door canvassing. It is also worth adding that the amount spent on handouts to voters may be understated due to the illegality of the practice. Interestingly, the average candidate spent only 11,478 ZMW (600 USD) on constituency development projects. As a point of reference, this was the second most common expense item for candidates in parliamentary elections in Malawi (Wahman and Seeberg 2022). The fact that candidates are not expected to deliver much constituency development may be seen as a good thing in terms of reducing the costs of politics and making sure that service delivery is provided by the state. However, it can also be argued that candidates providing constituency development may be the most beneficial expression of electoral clientelism from a development perspective.

3 Although several candidates still organised traditional rallies

Figure 10: Expenditure categories during general election campaigns



Source: ZCPS

Total campaign spend

Combining the selection process and general campaign, the average candidate spent 568,000 ZMW (31,300 USD) in their campaigns. However, this average conceals some very significant variations. The average total campaign cost for candidates that received more than 20% of the vote was 990,000 ZMW (54,500 USD). Table 2 below shows the distribution of candidates in the sample along different spending intervals.

Table 2: Distribution of total campaign spending

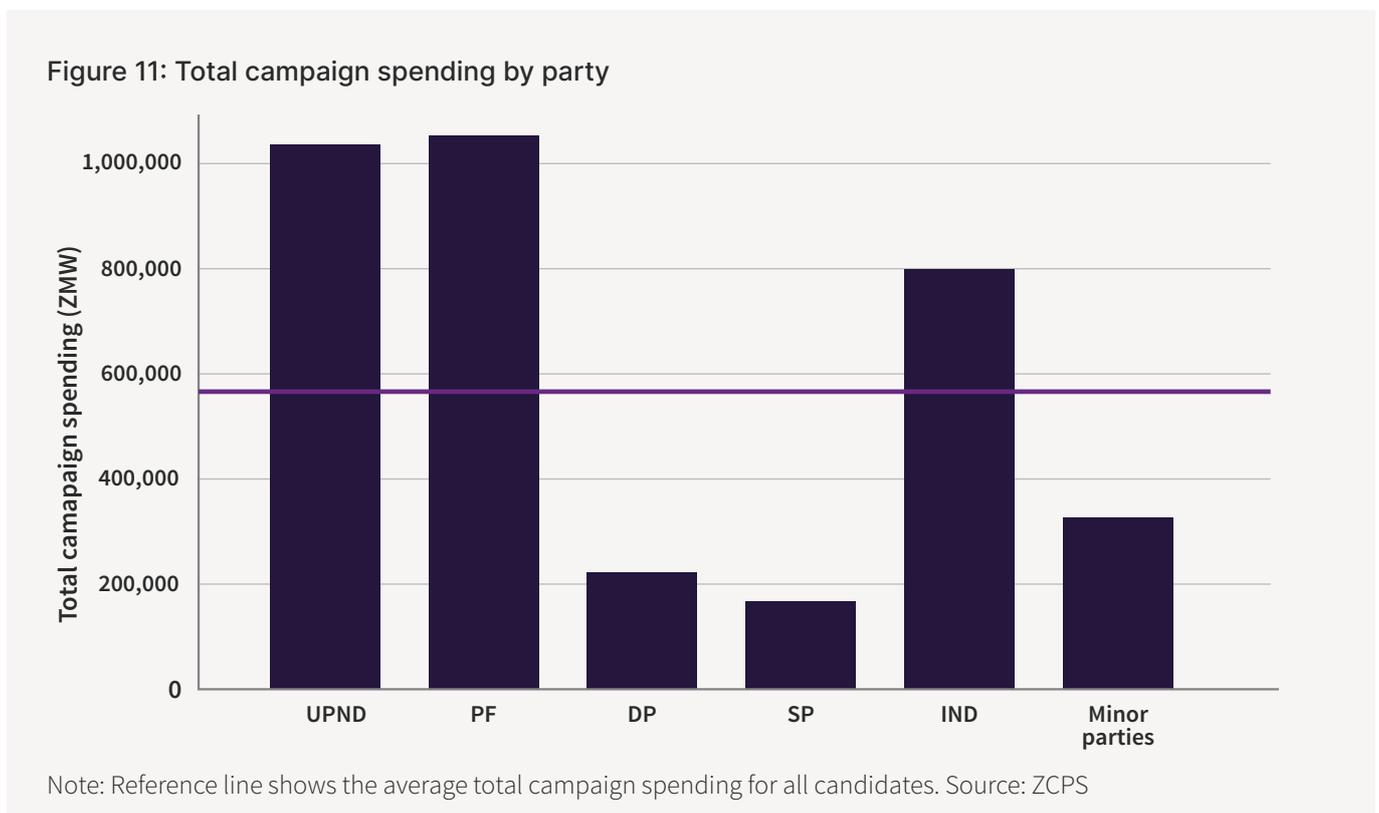
Total spending	Share of sample
>2,000,000 ZMW (>110,000 USD)	4%
1,000,000-2,000,000 ZMW (55,000-110,000 USD)	13%
500,000-1,000,000 ZMW (27,500-55,000 USD)	19%
250,000-500,000 ZMW (13,750-27,500 USD)	14%
100,000-250,000 ZMW (5,500-13,750 USD)	26%
50,000-100,000 ZMW (2,750-5,500 USD)	10%
10,000-50,000 ZMW (550-2750 USD)	9%
<10,000 ZMW (<550 USD)	4%

Source: ZCPS

Figure 11 shows variations in total spending by party. The figure shows that, perhaps unsurprisingly, two parties stand out: UPND and PF. The average spending is very similar: 1,051,000 ZMW (57,900 USD) for PF and 1,035,000 ZMW (52,800 USD) for UPND. The significantly higher spending by the two main parties reflect the superior position of PF and UPND in Zambian politics and may be an important contributing factor to the fact that smaller parties performed so poorly in the 2021 election. The only candidates that were able to challenge PF and UPND in 2021 were independents. On average, independent candidates spent 799,000 (40,700 USD). The group of independent candidates is a heterogenous group of political insiders and outsiders. Some independent candidates ran genuinely independent campaigns, but 40% of these candidates had unsuccessfully sought nominations for PF and UPND in the 2021 primaries. Having lost out on the nomination, they decided to contest as independents.

DP and SP were very ambitious with fielding candidates in virtually every constituency in the country. In order to entice candidates, especially those of lower means to contest on the SP ticket, the party promised to cover nomination fees. However, the data indicate that both DP and SP were unable to attract candidates that could finance competitive campaigns. The average DP candidate spent 223,000 ZMW (11,400 USD) and the average SP candidate, 168,000 ZMW (8,600 USD).

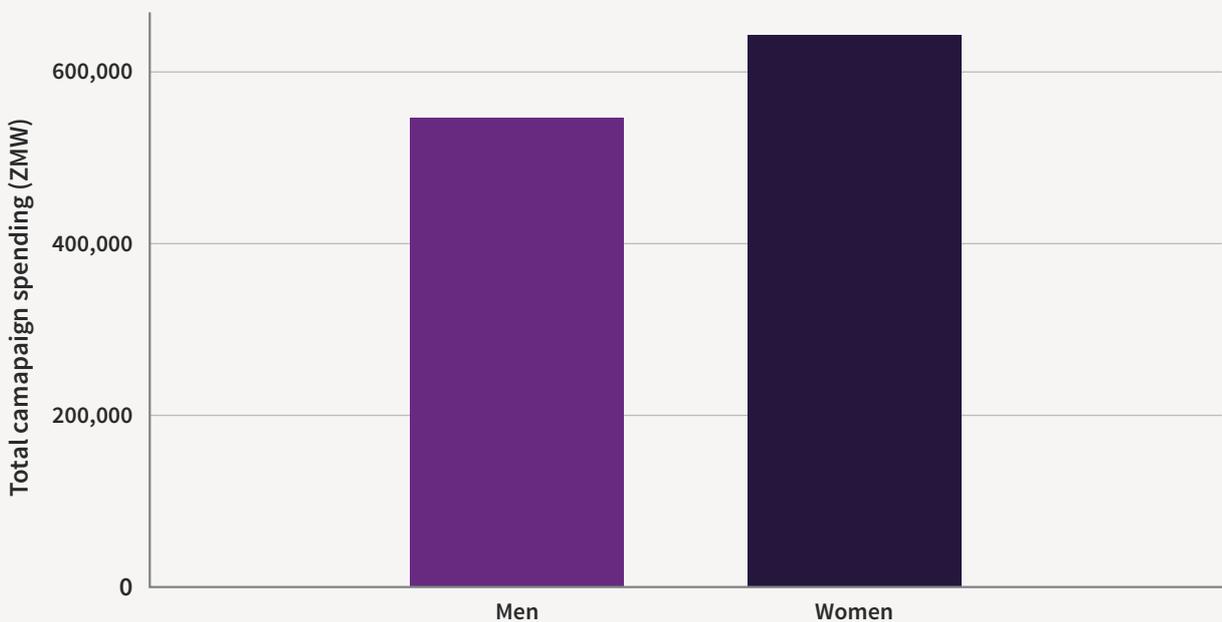
The findings in Figure 11 also indicate that candidates from the major parties do not relax their spending after winning party nominations. This is significant as some candidates standing in party strongholds should have a high chance of winning based solely on their party affiliation, given the regional nature of Zambian politics. However, the logic of campaigning in highly clientelistic environments still prescribes that candidates spend lavishly to project status, generosity, and a sense of authority (Kramon 2018; Cheeseman et al. 2020). Moreover, local candidates are expected to spend to boost mobilisation for presidential campaigns. Strong local mobilisation translates into higher national-level status and higher chances for career advancement and re-nomination.



Gender dynamics

It is often assumed that one of the main reasons that women are under-represented in politics, especially in clientelistic electoral systems, is unequal access to resources and networks that can finance campaigns. However, looking at the spending in the 2021 parliamentary election there is no evidence that women spend less money in campaigns than men. On the contrary, the opposite is true. The average female candidate spent 644,000 ZMW (33,000 USD) compared to 546,000 ZMW (30,100 USD) for the average male. It is important to note that the data do not refute the argument that women are disadvantaged due to inadequate resources. The data presented above only reflects the candidates that actually decided to run and do not preclude that the lower number of women candidates is partly due to women's general inability to finance campaigns.

Figure 12: Total campaign spending by gender



Source: ZCPS

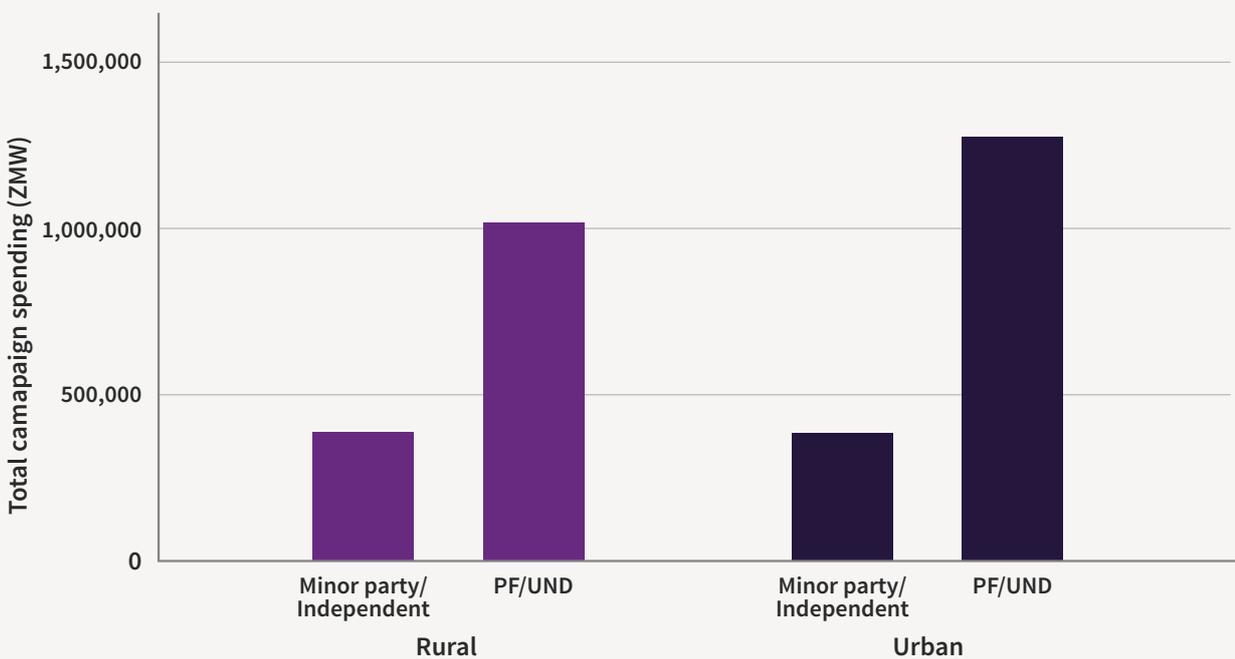
Urban-rural divisions

Figure 13 shows the difference in total campaign spending by urban and rural location. Since the most determining factor for campaign spending is party affiliation and the sample is not balanced on partisanship along urban and rural locations,⁴ the data are separated based on whether candidates were independents or represented a minor party or whether the candidate represented one of the two major parties (PF and UPND). Comparing minor party candidates in urban and rural locations, there is virtually no difference. The average minor party candidate in rural locations spent 400,000 ZMW (22,200 USD) compared to 390,000 ZMW (21,600 USD) in urban locations. There is, however, a more noticeable difference between major party candidates. The average major party candidate in rural locations spent 1,002,000 ZMW (55,700 USD),

⁴ Constituencies in Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe, Chipata, Kabwe and Chingola, Mufulira, Luanshya, and Livingstone are coded as urban.

compared to 1,280,000 ZMW (71,100 USD) for the average major party candidate in urban locations. These findings align with previous studies that detail how the cost of campaigning is higher in urban rather than rural locations (Wahman 2019; Kanyinga and Mboya 2021). While it is often assumed that the high costs of transportation in vast rural constituencies in combination with significant demand for clientelistic rewards among poor rural populations will increase the costs in rural locations (Vicente and Wantchekon 2009), one must not forget staggering levels of malapportionment in Zambia (Boone and Wahman 2015). In 2021, the number of registered voters per constituency varied between 11,000 in Lufubu constituency (Central Province) and 177,000 in Kanyama constituency (Lusaka Province). Candidates competing in populous constituencies are pressed to spend significant amounts on campaign material. Moreover, prices for goods and services remain higher in urban than rural Zambia and the general concentration of wealth in urban areas mean that many of the financially more capable candidates will compete for urban seats.

Figure 13: Total campaign spending by urban/rural location



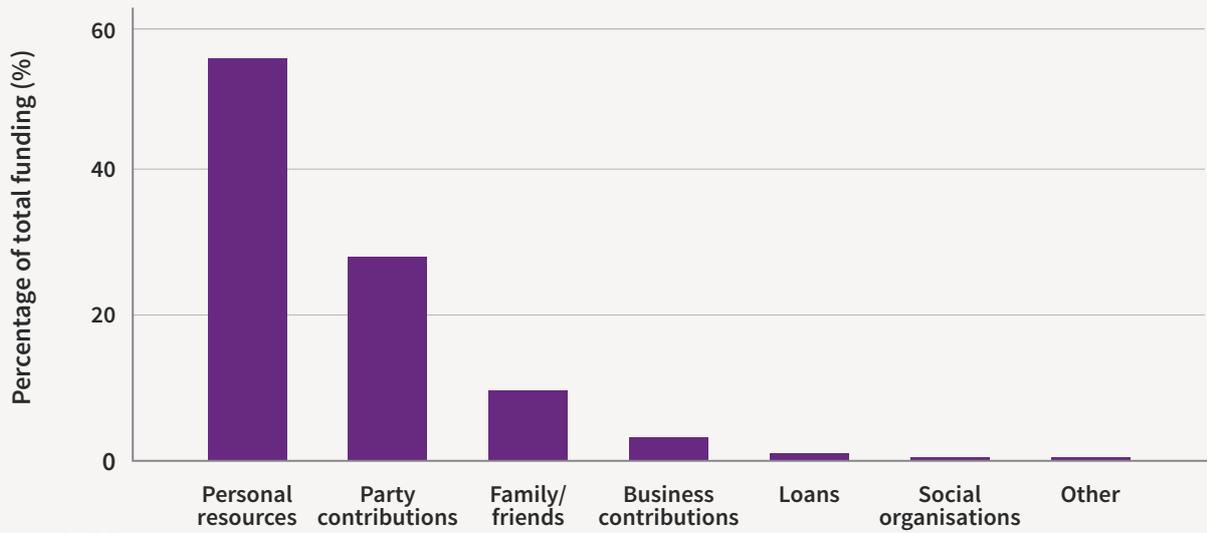
Source: ZCPS

Sources of funding

Where do parliamentary candidates receive their funding from? In the survey, we asked respondents to estimate the share of their entire campaign budget that came from personal resources, party contributions, business contributions, social organisations and donations from friends and family.

Figure 14 shows that the average candidate financed 55% of the campaign through personal resources. In other words, candidates wishing to run for parliament are expected to foot most of the bill themselves. The second largest finance source is party contributions. The average candidate received 28% of their campaign budget from their party. Other notable sources of funding are contributions from friends and family (11%) and business contributions (3%).

Figure 14: Sources of campaign funding



Source: ZCPS

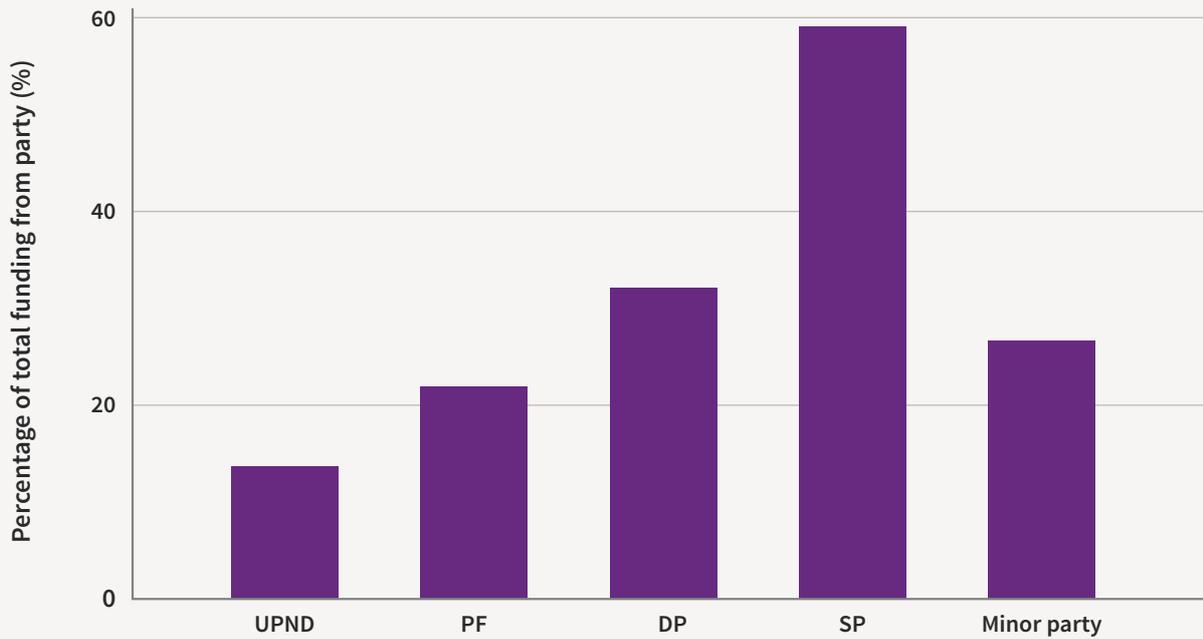
The contributions from parties are particularly interesting when explored in more detail. Party candidates were asked about what sort of financial support they received from their party. Among all of these candidates, 43% stated that they had received branded campaign material from their party, 39% stated that they had received cash and 25% stated that the party had covered their nomination fee.⁵ While the share of party contributions may seem high, it is important to note that candidates with small campaign budgets were much more likely to receive large shares of their budgets from their party than those with large campaign budgets. Previously, it was noted that the average campaign budget was 568,000 ZMW (31,300 USD). Comparing candidates with an above average campaign budget and those with a below average campaign budget, we find that candidates with an above average campaign budget received 12% of their budgets from the party whilst candidates with below average campaign budgets received 36%. The data indicate that many less resourced candidates relied heavily on party funding, but such party funding was insufficient to match the better resourced candidates.

The candidates that received the largest share of the funding from their party was SP. On average SP candidates received 59% of their campaign funding from their party. While this is very telling about the financial structure of SP, it is important to keep in mind that SP candidates typically had small campaign budgets (on average only 168,000 ZMW or 8,600 USD). Similarly, candidates from DP and other minor parties also received relatively large shares of their budgets from their parties, 32% and 27% respectively. While the difference between PF and UPND is not staggering, it is nevertheless meaningful. The average PF candidate received 22% of their budget from their party, compared to only 14% for the UPND. Given that PF and UPND candidates had budgets five times the size of SP and DP candidates the monetary value of party contributions is significantly higher for PF and UPND than for SP and DP even though they comprise a smaller overall percentage.⁶

5 The nomination fee in 2021 was 15,000 ZMW (825 USD) for men and 13,500 ZMW (740 USD) for women.

6 Ideally, we would be able to estimate the monetary value of the party contributions. While we did ask respondents to estimate the value of party contributions, we do not present these data here as PF candidates were particularly likely to either refuse to answer the question or claim not to know.

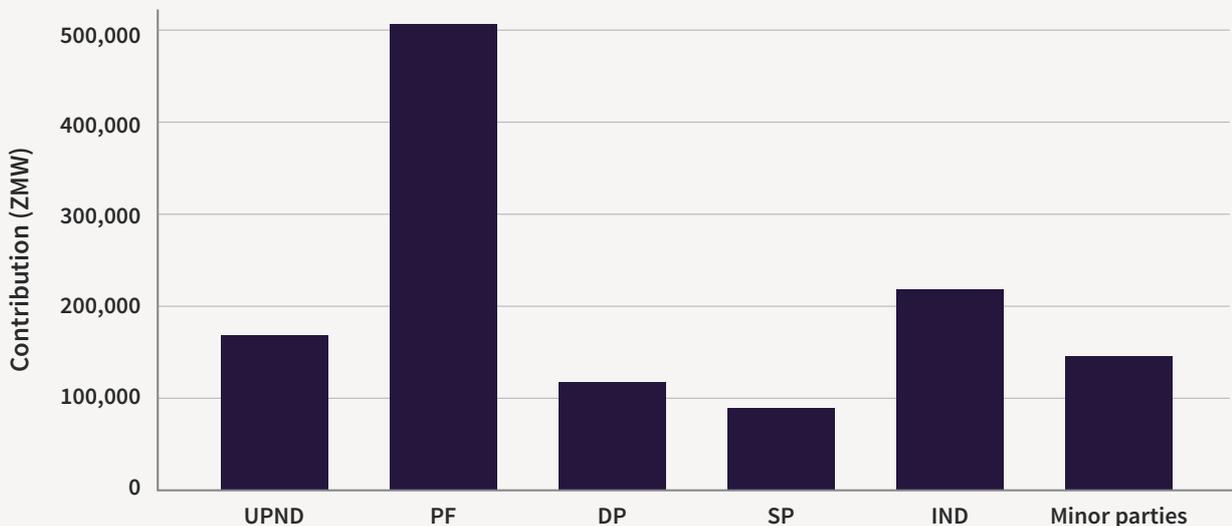
Figure 15: Campaign contributions from party as share of total budget



Source: ZCPS

Apart from party contributions, there are also differences in the amount of money that various candidates received from different forms of “well-wishers” including business interests, and associates. Candidates running for the ruling party were much more capable of raising external funds. The average PF candidate received on average 503,000 ZMW (27,000 USD), about three times as much as candidates from any other party. It appears that the financial benefits of belonging to the ruling party has more to do with a candidate’s ability to attract external funding than securing resources from the party itself. Interestingly, while UPND candidates did receive more funding from external sources than candidates from other opposition parties, the difference was not large. The data therefore imply that any candidate who wants to run a successful campaign in the opposition will have to use large amounts of private resources.

Figure 16: Campaign contributions from “well-wishers” by party



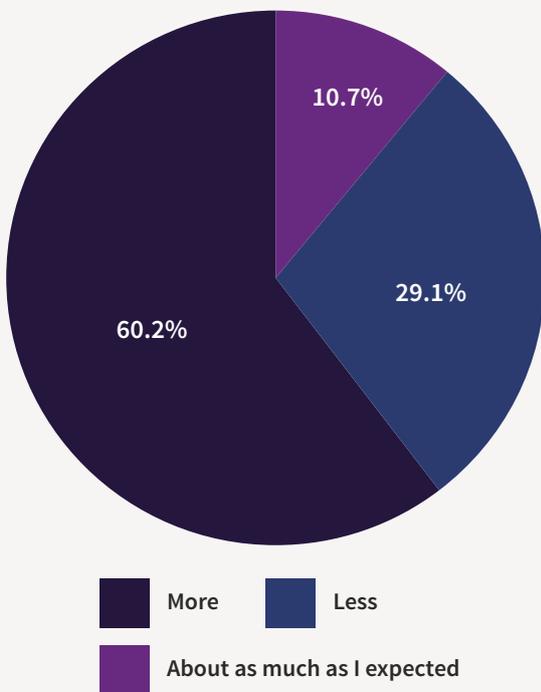
Source: ZCPS

Candidate views on campaign finance

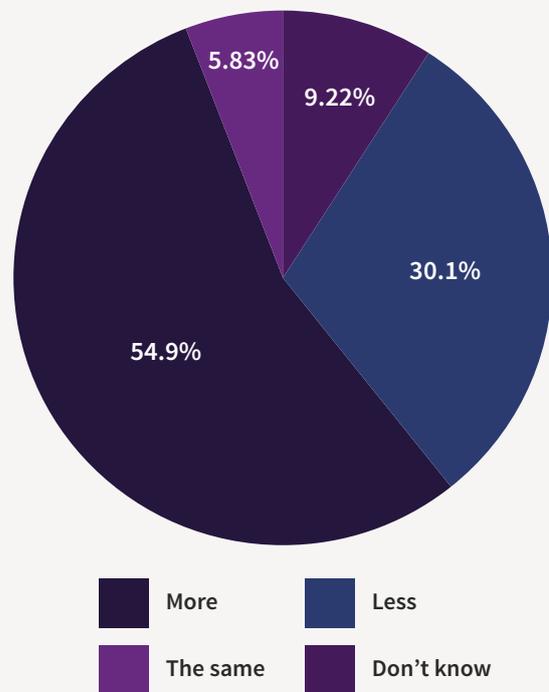
This study illustrates the staggering amounts of personal resources used by Zambian politicians in their attempts to win parliamentary elections. Candidates themselves acknowledge the pressure and 60% of respondents stated that they ended up spending more in the election campaign than they had anticipated. Nevertheless, 54% of candidates stated that they would attempt to spend even more if they were to run again. This pressure of ever higher spending has the potential to derail Zambian politics and further exacerbate problems of representation and corruption.

Figure 17: Spending in relation to expectations and plans for future spending

Did you spend more/less than expected?



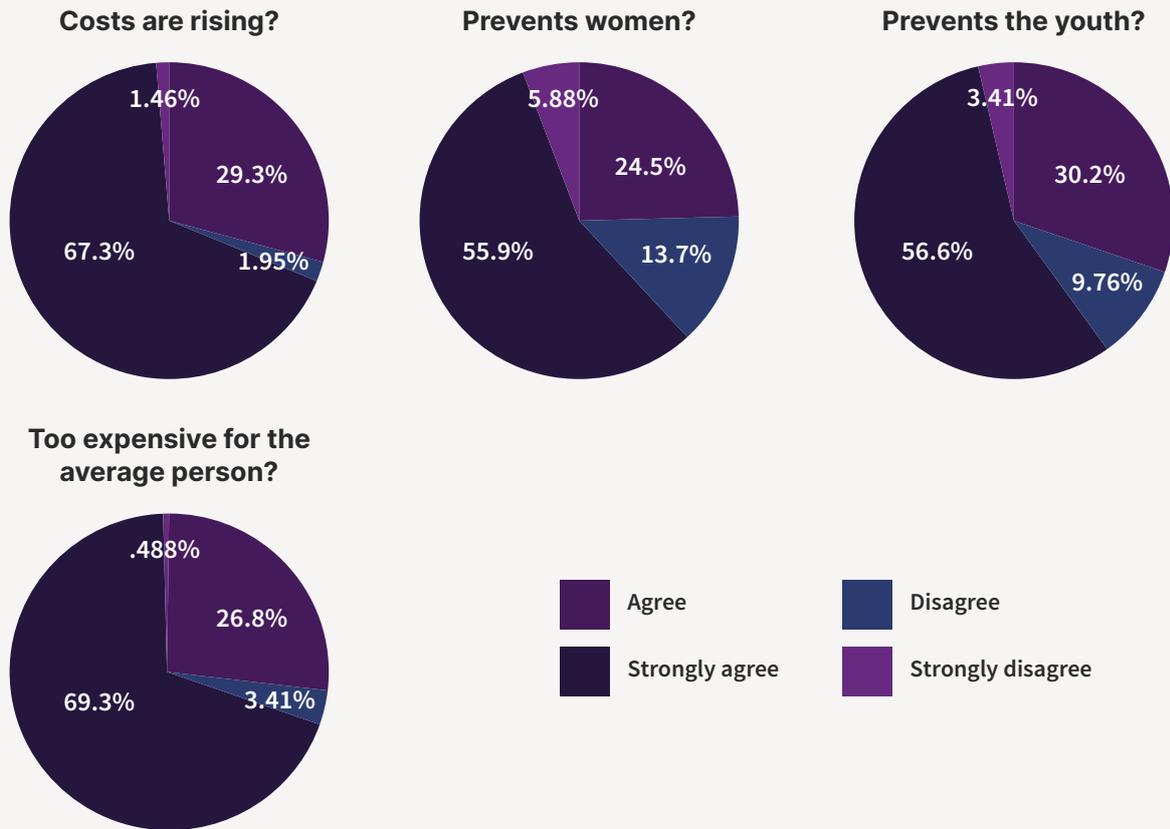
Will you spend more/less next time?



Source: ZCPS

Candidates also assess that costs of campaigning have increased. 97% either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “the financial costs people incur who seek political office is rising.” Furthermore, 96% believe that the costs of running for office is too expensive for the average person. Linked to this there is broad consensus among candidates that the costs of politics leads to unequal representation, with 80% saying that costs makes it difficult for women to run for office and 87% saying that it makes it difficult for youth.

Figure 18: Effects of high costs



Note: "Do not know" omitted from graph. Source: ZCPS

Drivers of costs of politics

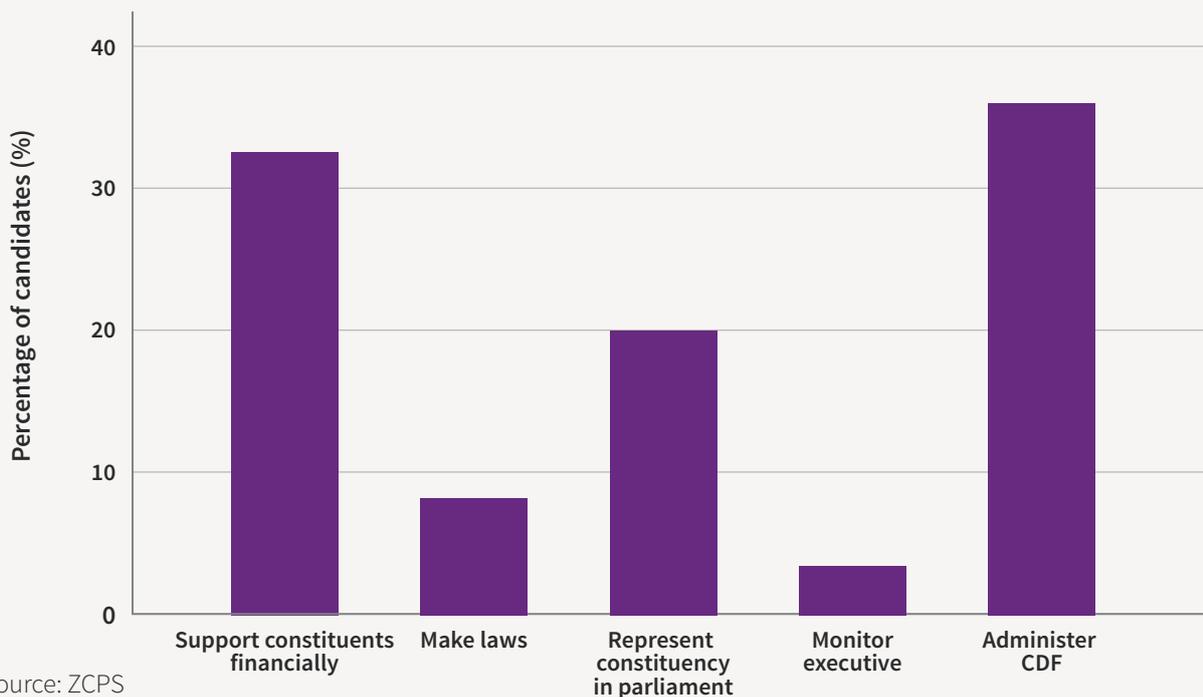
The previous sections have shown general empirical trends in campaign spending, the sources of such spending, and the variation in spending among different groups of candidates. These descriptive statistics in combination with data from the 23 semi-structured interviews suggest six key explanations for spiralling costs of politics in Zambia.

Clientelistic politics

The persistent clientelist nature of Zambian politics is a root cause of high campaign costs (Bwalya 2017). Parliamentary candidates use campaigns to signal their ability and willingness to address acute financial needs of their constituents and promote the development of communities. Respondents interviewed for the study attest to the extraordinary pressure put on parliamentary candidates to provide personal assistance to constituents living in poverty. It has become commonplace for candidates to assist voters with financial support to cover costs for basic needs such as funerals, school fees, and medical expenses. In the absence of effective state service provision, especially in rural Zambia (Hern 2019), citizens often rely on MPs to promote both personal and communal development needs. Surveyed candidates indicate that

citizens often prioritise clientelistic functions of MPs over legislative and executive oversight functions. 33% of surveyed candidates believed that their constituents mostly prioritised personal financial assistance. The only function seen as more important among candidates was administrating the Constituency Development Fund (36%). Issues of oversight and making good laws were of limited importance to constituents in the view of aspirants surveyed. PF and UPND candidates - the typical front-runners with more political experience - tend to particularly identify personal assistance as a main concern among voters. In this group, 40% of candidates expressed that their constituents first and foremost looked to elected representatives to provide personal financial assistance.

Figure 19: Most important function of MP among constituents, according to candidates



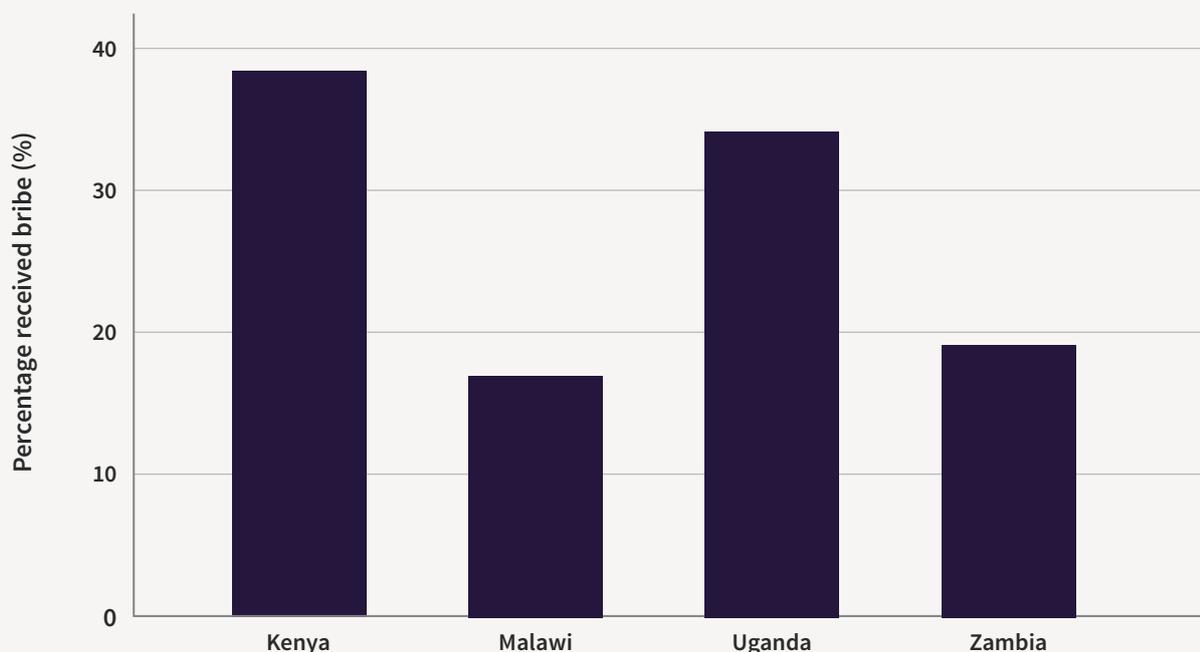
Research in Africa and elsewhere has shown how clientelistic politics is conducive to costly campaign strategies (Kramon 2018; Paget 2019). However, clientelism does not have to take the form of vote buying. Most handouts given to Zambians did not take the form of a quid pro quo exchange where material goods were exchanged with the explicit expectation that the receiving voter would vote for the gifting candidate. Indeed, the vote buying model of politics was significantly challenged in PF’s historic opposition campaign in 2011 when it leveraged the “Donchi Kubeba”⁷ slogan to sensitise voters about the ruling party’s inability to effectively monitor vote choice and enforce vote buying agreements (Bwalja and Maharaj 2018). Looking at Afrobarometer data it is fairly rare for Zambian respondents to report that they have been offered food, gifts or money in exchange for a vote. Only 19% of Zambian respondents reported that they had been offered such bribes at least once in the last election campaign, compared to 38% of Kenyans and 34% of Ugandans (Afrobarometer 2022).

Nevertheless, the relative low prevalence of vote buying does not mean that clientelism is not a major factor in parliamentary campaigns. In Zambia, candidates spend lavishly on high-cost strategies such as

7 Which translates to English as ‘Don’t tell’

organising spectacular rallies and providing large quantities of campaign materials. Such spending is used to create perceptions of clientelistic capacity. Candidates in qualitative interviews generally agreed that candidates unable to finance such extravagant campaigns would be written off by voters and would not be regarded credible front-runners or promoters of constituency interests.

Figure 20: Citizens who have been offered a material gift or money in exchange for a vote



Source: Afrobarometer Round 9

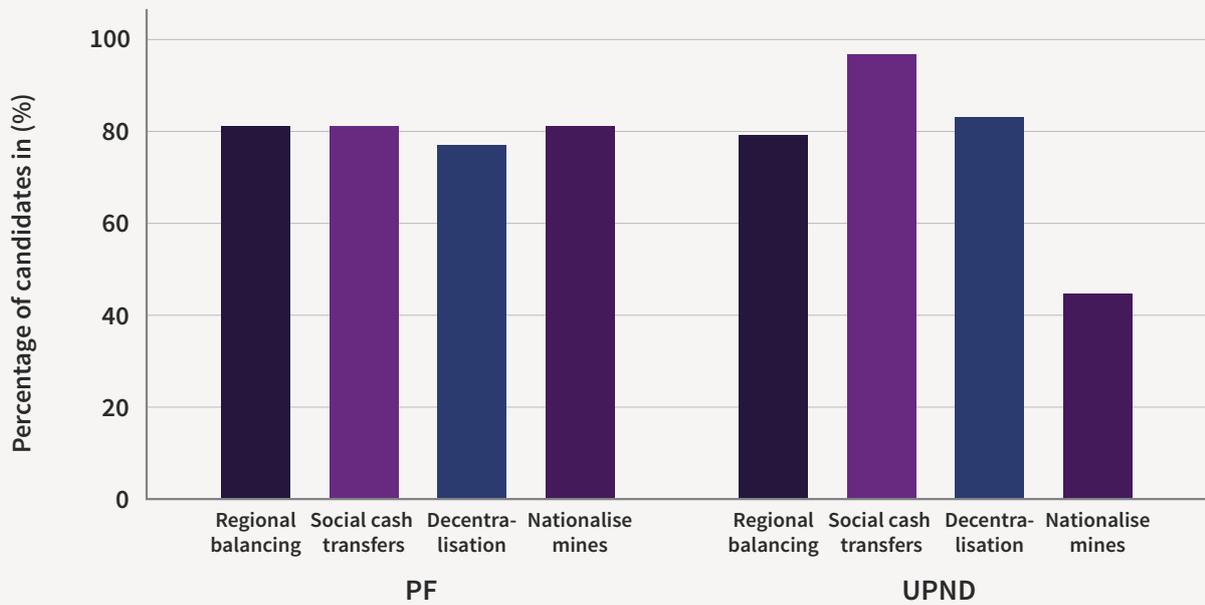
Limited policy linkages

Parliamentary politics in Zambia at the constituency level is not clearly defined by strong policy differences between candidates or parties. In political systems with strongly nationalised parties, candidates can use national partisan policy appeals to distinguish themselves from competitors. Consequently, even poorly resourced candidates can compete against wealthier candidates using popular policy positions to attract voters.

In order to grasp the extent to which candidates in Zambia are clearly sorted along national policy dimensions our survey asked candidates of the two leading parties about their support for a number of salient national policies. On the issues of the need for a policy of regional balancing for key government appointments, greater devolution of powers to local government and social cash transfer programme expansion there is virtually no difference between PF and UPND candidates. The only notable difference from our survey was on views of nationalisation on mines, where PF candidates are more favourable than UPND candidates. However, this policy still has support from close to half of the surveyed UPND candidates.

This is not to say that parties in Zambia are devoid of interest, ideology or policy. However, the data suggest the absence of nationalised politics where parties compete on unifying messages across space. As a result, partisan policy differences will not be a major linkage strategy for parliamentary candidates. They are instead more likely to attract voters either by offering clientelistic appeals or communicate personal competence and qualifications (Kitschelt 2010).

Figure 21: PF and UPND candidates support of select policies



Source: ZCPS

A lack of party backing

Ironically, political parties’ insufficient access to resources have most likely led to more money being spent in parliamentary contests. Parliamentary campaigns in Zambia are held concurrently with the presidential race and parties rely on their parliamentary candidates to foot much of the costs of local election campaign. Strong parliamentary campaigns enhance a party’s position not only in parliamentary contests, but also boosts the party’s visibility in presidential elections.

When political parties lack central resources to finance campaigns, they actively try to recruit parliamentary candidates that can address this shortcoming (Arriola et al. 2022; Wahman and Seeberg 2022). Several respondents in the qualitative interviews described how national selection committees used different strategies to inform themselves about the financial status of prospective candidates, including asking for bank statements and declarations of assets during party nominations. Prominent parties used the money spent in the nomination period as an indication of the general spending capacity of a prospective candidate.

The preference given to wealthy candidates means that campaigns become bitterly fought contests between elites capable and willing to use private resources to attract votes and secure a space in parliament. A system where candidates could depend more on party resources to finance campaigns would likely change the character of candidates and their mode of campaigning.

Corruption

Corruption is both an explanation to and a consequence of costly election campaigns. The high reliance on private resources in campaigns means that elected politicians in Zambia seek to enrich themselves while in office to finance ongoing demands and future campaigns. Similarly, some candidates are also

motivated to run for office by the potential access to government resources when deciding to spend significant private resources in campaigns. Zambian parliamentarians often enjoy preferential access to government contracts, kickbacks, and bribes (Mudenda 2019). This is particularly true for ruling party MPs with strong connections to the central resources handled by the executive branch. In interviews, several candidates with a background in the business sector expressed that a seat in parliament was a gateway to future business opportunities.

Access to external funding

The unregulated and opaque nature of business financing in parliamentary campaigns in Zambia has certainly inflated campaigns costs. While most candidates received little or no support from external business interests, a substantial number of candidates received significant support from such sources. According to the survey data, 21% of sampled candidates received more than 200,000 ZMW (11,100 USD) from business contributions. Figure 16 shows that PF candidates particularly benefitted. However little is known about what business interests are involved. Future research would need to uncover what economic sectors are most involved in financing parliamentary campaigns and whether these funds come primarily from domestic or international businesses. Looking particularly at government party MPs more information about whether business contributions come primarily from parastatal companies or companies with strong connection to key figures in the government is also required.

Absence of effective regulation

Lastly, the high costs of campaigns in Zambia are also associated with the complete lack of enforcement of campaign finance regulations. While the 2016 amended constitution does provide provisions for declaration of funding and a campaign spending cap, none of these provisions were effectively enforced in the 2021 election. Candidates did not declare their assets before the campaign and expenditures were not audited. The lack of effective regulation means that candidates can spend an unlimited amount of money in campaigns and receive contributions from anonymous sources without any restrictions or accountability. Furthermore, there are no mechanisms in place to disqualify candidates based on violations of campaign finance regulations.

Conclusion

This report provides descriptive statistics pertaining to campaign expenditure in the 2021 Zambian parliamentary election. The findings unequivocally show the high financial burden facing legislative aspirants. They also reveal significant inequalities in funding across candidates, and across parties. The greatest source of such inequalities are personal funding. Zambian campaigns are highly reliant on self-funding. As a consequence, the current system will continue to produce a highly unrepresentative parliament in terms of class, gender, and age. There are also inequalities linked to access to external funding, which remains more available to ruling party candidates than others. The influx of external campaign funding towards ruling party candidates raises important questions about a lack of transparency, with possible consequences for corruption.

The findings also have important implications for political competition. The data show a clear difference in spending between candidates representing the two major parties, PF and UPND, and candidates representing other smaller parties. The strong two-party system in Zambia is reinforced by their virtual monopoly on wealthy candidates with the capacity to self-fund expensive campaigns. Smaller parties are unlikely to grow under such hegemony. Importantly, the dominance of PF and UPND in parliamentary campaign funding is likely to also have repercussions for presidential elections. As in order to build strong nationalised coalitions, parties are strongly depending on local parliamentary candidates to fund party campaigns (Arriola et al 2022, Wahman and Seeberg 2022).

Recommendations

The findings in this report should be important to central policy discussions on policy reform to regulate campaign financing. There is a strong recognition among candidates themselves that the status quo is unsustainable, and that regulation and education may be necessary. For actors interested in issues related to political representation, including women's representation, corruption, and accountability, campaign finance reform should be high on the political agenda. Reforms or interventions could include:

- **Campaign spending caps:** The 2016 amended constitution 60 (4) stipulates a campaign spending cap, but this provision is still not enforced, and no cap was set for the 2021 election. Implementing this legal requirement should be a priority in preparation for the 2026 general election and 62% of surveyed candidates either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this policy. A spending cap would ideally not only be enforced nationally, but also set a maximum amount for parliamentary and local candidates. It would also need to be sensitively implemented. Experiences from the 2021 election and the ECZ’s Covid-19 campaign restrictions, show that campaign regulation can easily be turned in to a source of incumbency advantage. The European Union Election Observation Mission noted how the ban on public rallies was more strictly enforced in relation to opposition than government party rallies (EUEOM 2021:4). Procedures need to be put in place to monitor campaign expenditure at the constituency level in a non-partisan manner.
- **State funding of parties:** The 2016 amended constitution 60(4) establishes a Political Parties’ Fund to provide funds for parties with representation in parliament. However, as with most provisions related to party financing in the constitution, state funding of political parties has not been implemented in practice. Effective state funding of political parties could reduce the reliance on wealthy candidates for financing campaigns and prompt parties to prioritise locally popular candidates over those with the most impressive financial muscles. Enhancing the quality and diversity of representation in Zambia in the process.
- **Declaration of campaign contributions:** The constitution requires candidates to declare campaign contributions. Candidates need to submit a declaration of assets and liabilities with the ECZ at nomination, but this declaration is not made publicly available or audited. There is an urgent need for more transparency in this area.
- **Ban on donations from foreign interests and parastatals:** The constitution does not put any limitations to who can contribute to campaigns. Legal reform to protect sovereignty and protect the

distinction between the state and political parties should be considered by banning donations from foreign interests and parastatals.

- **Campaign contribution limits:** Apart from spending caps, campaign contribution limits should also be considered to reduce the costs of politics, enhance competition, and safeguard against corruption. Such campaign contribution limits should also consider in kind contributions as many contributions to campaigns are not made in cash, but through the donation of campaign material, fuel, or vehicles.
- **Civic education:** Voters are not well informed about the role of MPs and expect candidates to distribute money and material benefits. More civic education efforts are needed to sensitise voters about the perils of vote buying and the need for issue-based politics.

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