

COUNTRY PROFILE Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, referred to as a jewel when it achieved independence in 1980 has in the last decade, experienced economic and political turmoil. It has had hyper-inflation, violence, intimidation, denial of freedom of expression and organisation. In response to concerns about democracy and human rights western nations have imposed measures targeting named individuals and companies. The “power sharing deal” of 2008 has led to some improvements, mainly economic, yet there remains considerable tension between the political parties and human rights abuses still occur. The legacy of colonial rule, most noticeably concerning inequality of land ownership, has not been effectively addressed.

SUMMARY FACTS

Population: 12.4 million, UK: 61.2 million	GDP per capita: <US\$ 100 (PPP), UK: \$43,544
Capital: Harare	Monetary unit: Z\$ (suspended form 12/04/09) US\$, ZAR and EUR now in usage
Area: 390, 759 sq km (150, 873 sq miles), UK: 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)	Main exports: Tobacco, cotton, agricultural products, gold, minerals
Major languages: English, Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga	CO₂ emissions share of world total: <0.1%, UK: > 2%
Major religion: Christianity, indigenous beliefs	Population without access to an improved water source: 19%, UK: 100%
Life expectancy at birth: 44 years, UK: 79 years	Population using improved sanitation: 46%, UK: 100%
Under-five mortality rate: 96 per 1,000 live births, UK: 6 per 1,000 live births	Government: ZANU PF & MDC – Inclusive Government
HIV prevalence: 15.3% aged 15-49, UK: 0.2 % aged 15-49	President: Robert Mugabe
Adult Literacy Rate: 91% ages 15 and older, UK: >99%	Year Women received right to vote: 1919, 1957, 1980, UK: 1918, 1928 (equal rights)

Sources: UNICEF 2007, 2008, UN 2008 (Please note that in some cases figures are approximate due to the nature of Zimbabwe’s political situation over the previous decades).



History

Evidence suggests that from as early as **1000AD**, Zimbabweans began mining gold and building stone settlements in the area known as “Great Zimbabwe”. Before European invasion, the country was separated into kingdoms and the inhabitants were ruled by leaders. The earliest record of European involvement in the region dates back to **1837** when Boers from neighbouring South Africa drove the Ndebele people out of the Transvaal area and over the Limpopo River into Zimbabwe. The Ndebele leader Mzilikazi established a settlement in what is now Matabeleland.

Although Zimbabwean resistance to brutal European expansion was strong, Cecil Rhodes’ British South Africa Company, by force, acquired mining rights for the region in the **1880s**, and later the country was renamed Southern Rhodesia. Believing the country was extremely rich in minerals, Rhodes plundered the country of its natural resources and promised large reserves of land, many in excess of 3,000 acres, to the first group of European settlers in Southern Rhodesia; a move that would have a lasting impact on the land situation in modern day Zimbabwe. The indigenous Zimbabweans lost land and were denied any political rights.

In **1923**, and after attempts during the *First Chimurenga (Revolutionary Struggle)* by the Shona and Ndebele to drive the Europeans out of the country, Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing colony with the settler population rising dramatically in the years that would follow. Only white settlers were allowed to vote. **1934** saw the passing of yet more land apportionment acts that would reserve areas for Europeans. Britain consolidated Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi) in **1953** into the Central Africa Federation. Joshua Nkomo and others formed the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) in **1961**. Robert Mugabe and others broke from this and in 1963 formed ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union).

1962 saw the formation of the white supremacist party the Rhodesian Front (RF), led by Winston Field and the party espoused similar racist ideologies to that of the National Party in South Africa, such as opposition to racial integration and provision of separate amenities for different races. After the union of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland ended in **1963**, Ian Smith rose to prominence as leader of the RF. With Zambia and Malawi gaining independence in **1964** following one person one vote, Ian Smith’s RF party announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain in **1965** to allow Southern Rhodesia to remain in the hands of the white settler population.

The *Second Chimurenga* was fought in the years following Smith’s UDI which consisted of guerrilla action against white land-owners and attacks on RF forces. The government responded by launching military strikes on neighbouring countries thought to be harbouring African terrorists. The war intensified and lasted throughout the **1970s** until in **1978** after international condemnation and sanctions Smith signed an agreement with several black leaders to allow for a power-sharing government of which whites would make up 20 per cent of seats. After being named Zimbabwe Rhodesia in **1979**, the British - who were back in temporary control of the colony - called for further elections at the Lancaster House Conference featuring all political parties, including both ZAPU and ZANU. The Agreement ensured that the white minority would retain as much as possible of its political and economic privileges including the ownership of land for the next ten years. Although the Agreement allowed for democratic elections, it did little to help the new ZANU-PF Government redress the gross economic and social inequalities that resulted from white minority rule.

The elections of **1980** saw Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party winning a majority of votes and defeating previous comrade Nkomo and his ZAPU party. With independence now achieved, the country was renamed Zimbabwe ('House of Stone') and Nkomo brought into Mugabe's cabinet. Just two years after independence was gained, Mugabe dismissed Nkomo - thought to be plotting against Mugabe - from the cabinet in **1982**. Tensions between the Shona and Ndebele population increased, culminating in the Matabeleland massacres over several years, with an estimated 25,000 killed by government troops. The government claimed they found arms cache in the area and that apartheid South Africa was seeking to destabilise independent Zimbabwe. An attempt to end the violence and reunite the two parties in **1987** led to Nkomo once again being adopted into the government with Mugabe holding the position of executive president. The future Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai became secretary-general of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in **1988**.

Mugabe won the **1990** elections and the decade was characterised by further attempts from Mugabe to solidify ZANU as the dominant force in Zimbabwean politics. In the same year, the World Bank imposed an Economic Structural Adjustment Process (ESAP) on Zimbabwe which would have serious implications on the country's economic growth as strict free market conditions were established. Unemployment grew and the standard of living for millions of Zimbabweans fell as the promises of ESAP failed to deliver. In the face of a vociferous trade union response, the government clamped down on dissident civil society groups as criticism of Mugabe's handling of the economy grew. Reports of harassment of opposition party members surfaced in the run up to the **1996** elections as plans to appropriate land from the white population gathered momentum. An economic crisis marked by high interest rates and inflation in **1998** proved the catalyst for the formation by trade unionists and civil society activists of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in **1999** in an attempt to challenge Mugabe's reign.

In February 2000 the opposition campaigned successfully to defeat a proposed new constitution which would have conferred even greater power to the President. The new millennium brought with it the *Third Chimurenga* with increasing rates of farm seizures and reports of violence and intimidation in the run up to the elections of June **2000**. Although Zanu PF narrowly "won" the parliamentary elections, the MDC won 57 seats and ZANU-PF lost the power to change the constitution. A list was published by Mugabe of over 800 commercial farms to be appropriated by the state with the responsibility of compensation to land owners given to the British government. The UK maintained that no compensation would be paid as the land reforms benefited the political elite, were not transparent and not directed to reducing poverty. The **2002** presidential elections were won by President Mugabe amidst claims of further violence by election observers. Following these elections and with increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and growing concerns of human rights abuses the EU imposed targeted measures, or sanctions, on specified members of the Zimbabwe government which restricted individuals from travelling to the EU, froze the assets of those thought to be responsible for human rights abuses and introduced an arms embargo on the country.

The **2008** elections proved to be the most important event in Zimbabwe's recent history. In March, supported by exit poll figures, the MDC claimed victory over ZANU PF. The government controlled election commission, however, refused to release the results of the election for over a month. A run-off was declared in June with Mugabe "winning" after Tsvangirai pulled out of the poll citing intimidation from ZANU members. The Southern Africa Development Community for the first time stated the 2008 presidential election run off did not conform with the SADC guidelines for the conduct of democratic elections. This called into question the legitimacy of Mugabe continuing as President. However he could count on the support of military leaders. On September 15, Mugabe, Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and Mutambara (leader of a small

breakaway group from the MDC, referred to as MDC -M signed a Global Political Agreement facilitated by the then South African President Thabo Mbeki on behalf of SADC. The Inclusive Government established by the GPA came into existence in February 2009. Robert Mugabe remained President with executive authority whilst Morgan Tsvangirai became Prime Minister with Cabinet Ministers from all the parties who signed the agreement.

Population

It is unclear how many people currently reside in Zimbabwe. In 2008 it was estimated at 12.4 Million, a figure that is open to debate considering the high numbers of emigrants to neighbouring countries in the wake of the economic and political crisis. The country is made up of mainly Shona (approximately 82 per cent) with Ndebele accounting for around 14 per cent of the population. The small group of white settlers have historically remained the overwhelming minority. Zimbabwe is predominantly Christian, with Catholicism being the largest denomination whilst numerous indigenous beliefs are practiced.

Politics

The power-sharing deal, reached in 2009 through the signing of the Global Political Agreement, led to the formation of an Inclusive Government. It comprises Mugabe's ZANU PF, Tsvangirai's MDC-T and Mutambara's splinter group MDC-M. There have been some improvements, most noticeably the reduction in inflation to 2- 5 per cent. Many schools and hospitals have now reopened and food is back on supermarket shelves although these commodities still remain a luxury for the majority. Political violence still exists, although not as widespread as in the run up to the 2008 elections. However, there remain many failings and outstanding issues to be resolved within the GPA/Inclusive Government. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) states that refusal to share executive powers with Morgan Tsvangirai, refusal to swear-in MDC Provincial Governors, continued farm invasions and refusal to reform the state media are just some of the current issues not being addressed by ZANU PF.

Economy

Zimbabwe, although experiencing positive growth following independence in the 1980s and throughout the majority of the 1990s has in recent years descended into economic chaos, leaving a large amount of the population below the poverty line. The country's involvement in the DR Congo war came at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy and the widespread reappropriation of land has badly damaged the farming sector with imports far outweighing exports. These events, coupled with reported cases of corruption led to the hyperinflation of the economy which at its peak reached a staggering 11,200,000,000 per cent. The introduction of the South African Rand, US Dollar and Euro in 2009 has helped to reduce inflation to single figures and Zimbabwe is now experiencing its first case of economic growth in over a decade.

Civil society and trade unions

Trade unions and civil society groups are active in Zimbabwe despite the human rights abuses and repression that have continued (at a reduced level) following the formation of the Inclusive Government. The ZCTU, formed in 1981, are the most prominent union federation and were instrumental in establishing the main opposition party; the MDC. The aims of the ZCTU are to organize, develop and maintain a powerful and united trade union movement in the country, although its members experience constant harassment from the state in attempts to quell opposition voices. However, there has been a sharp drop in the number of active unionists due to the rise in unemployment levels (approx. 90 per cent) and the membership levels of the ZCTU stand at around 400,000. Active civil society groups include the Zimbabwe

Human Rights NGO Forum, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) which all campaign to end human rights abuses and vocalise the aims and objectives of disenfranchised groups.

Achievements:

1. Independence: The war of independence spearheaded by Robert Mugabe's ZANU party is still regarded as an extraordinary achievement in the struggle for liberation on the continent. As well as inspiring other opposition groups in the region to mobilise politically, the event represented a clear victory for African nationalism in the face of European domination.
2. Economic development and Social provision: In the years following independence, Zimbabwe's economy grew, spending on health doubled, funding for education tripled and infant mortality and literacy levels improved dramatically.
3. Reduction in HIV/AIDS prevalence: The first case of AIDS in Zimbabwe was reported in 1985 and the rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence grew thereafter. In the late 1980s, the figure stood at around 10%, rising to as high as 30% in the mid-1990s. However, in the last 15 years, the rate of infection has decreased rapidly. The figure is now reported to be at around 15.3%, and although this figure is understandably ambiguous, it does suggest that Zimbabwe has made some effort to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
4. Establishment of an Inclusive Government: The formation of the Inclusive Government after years of tension between the two parties demonstrates a willingness from both ZANU PF and the MDC to work in unison to aid the recovery of Zimbabwe's shattered economy and reduce political violence. Although accused of making too many concessions to Mugabe, the MDC have maintained that a coalition government is a positive step for the country. Even those critical of the agreement say that whilst they have considerable doubts and concerns they do want it to work.
5. Cessation of runaway inflation: The introduction of a multi-currency system by Finance Minister Tendai Biti of the MDC(T) - who suspended the use of the Zimbabwe Dollar – helped enormously to restore financial stability and as projected, inflation looks set to remain in single figures by the end of the 2010. There are plans to reintroduce the Zimbabwe Dollar only when the Inclusive Government deem the economy to be in a state of relative stability.

Development Challenges

1. Land Reforms: land reform is both necessary and supported by the majority of Zimbabweans. Racist colonial land ownership was both unsustainable and against equity and justice. The land question has not been effectively addressed by either the British government or by Mugabe's government. The GPA commits the parties to a comprehensive, transparent and non-partisan land audit for purposes of accountability and to eliminate multiple ownership. It also calls on the UK government to accept primary responsibility to pay compensation for land acquired from former owners for resettlement.
2. Sustained economic improvement: The economy, although improved significantly by the multi-currency system is still fragile. Although reduced to single figures, the country is now governed by the success of the US Dollar and South African Rand and inflation rates must be kept low to allow for basic commodities to become affordable.

3. Inclusive Government: Although it has led to some improvements, there is considerable tension between the parties who want to strengthen themselves and weaken their opponents. There are concerns surrounding the democratic nature of the Inclusive Government, with many critics claiming that Mugabe remains in full control of the state machinery and that the two MDC factions have a limited say in, and even less control over, the state machinery.
4. Harassment of trade unions and civil society: Human rights violations have become less frequent than in the run up to the 2008 elections but deep concerns remain over the harassment of trade union members and civil society activists. Arrests and beatings of unionists and activists are still commonplace and further intimidation of MDC members is feared should a possible 2011 election take place.
5. Media Freedom: Recent bans on international media have been lifted with the BBC and CNN now able to report from within the country. June 2010 witnessed the establishment or re-establishment of some local print media independent of the state. Local radio and TV is still controlled by the state and the repressive Access to Information and the Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) is still in place.
6. Utilisation of natural resources: Zimbabwe is rich in natural resources such as gold, diamonds and platinum. However, reserves of diamonds in Chiadzwa, for example, are controlled by part of the government and the companies it has appointed which are supporting Zanu PF. The proceeds of diamond sales are benefiting a powerful elite and not ordinary Zimbabweans.
7. Migration: There are an estimated three million Zimbabweans currently residing in neighbouring South Africa and there have been reports of attacks on the migrant population. In the UK, many Zimbabweans are denied work or study as their status remains unclear. The Zimbabwe government is currently working on a National Migration Policy which, amongst other schemes, would allow for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to open bank accounts, facilitating the remittance of funds back to Zimbabwe.

For more information on Zimbabwe, visit the following websites:

- Launched in 2008, Zimbabwe Europe Network (ZEN) ensures that the EU and its member states stay engaged on Zimbabwe. www.zimbabwееurope.org
- An organisation that produces regular reports on human rights violations in Zimbabwe which has now expanded its objectives to assist victims of organised violence. www.hrforumzim.com
- Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) is not for profit human rights organization whose core objective is to foster a culture of human rights in Zimbabwe. www.zlhr.org.zw
- Sign up to the Zimbabwe Update from ACTSA at www.actsa.org/page-1429-Zimbabwe%20Update.html