

↓ Zimbabwe

Population: 13,500,000

Capital: Harare

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow: Zimbabwe received a downward trend arrow due to the heavy involvement of security forces and government-aligned militias in a campaign of political violence, as well as the government's crackdown on independent Anglican churches.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Rating	6,5,PF	6,5,PF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

Overview:

Parliamentary and presidential elections were held in March 2008 amid a state-directed campaign of violence and intimidation that targeted members and supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Nevertheless, the MDC denied President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party a majority in Parliament for the first time, and MDC presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai outpolled Mugabe. Violence intensified ahead of a presidential runoff in late June, leading to Tsvangirai's withdrawal and an uncontested victory for Mugabe. By August, ZANU-PF militias and security forces had killed at least 170 people, beaten or raped thousands of others, and detained hundreds in areas of suspected MDC support. Members of independent civic and religious organizations, journalists, and trade unionists were also swept up in the crackdown. South African–brokered negotiations eventually resulted in a power-sharing agreement in September. However, disputes over the allocation of cabinet seats—as well as the abduction of scores of MDC officials and activists—prevented the formation of a national-unity government by year's end. Zimbabwe's economic collapse continued in 2008, with hyperinflation reaching an astounding 13 billion percent, while a cholera outbreak late in the year resulted in nearly 1,600 deaths.

In 1965, a white-minority regime in what was then colonial Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declared independence from Britain. A guerrilla war led by black nationalist groups, as well as sanctions and diplomatic pressure from Britain and the United States, contributed to the end of white-minority rule in 1979 and the recognition of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980. Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), first brought to power in relatively democratic elections, have since ruled the country.

Zimbabwe was relatively stable in its first years of independence, but from 1983 to 1987, the Shona-dominated government violently suppressed opposition among the Ndebele ethnic minority in the western portion of the country, and between 10,000 and 20,000 civilians were killed by government forces. Widespread political unrest in the 1990s, spurred by increasing

authoritarianism and economic decline, led to the creation in 1999 of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), an alliance of trade unions and other civil society groups. However, Mugabe and ZANU-PF claimed victory over the MDC in parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2005, as well as in a 2002 presidential poll. All three elections were seriously marred by political violence aimed at MDC supporters, fraudulent electoral processes, and the abuse of state resources, including state-run media. Security forces crushed mass protests and strikes called by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai in 2003.

The 2005 parliamentary elections gave the ruling party a two-thirds majority and the ability to amend the constitution. It subsequently enacted amendments that nationalized all land, brought all schools under state control, and empowered the government to seize the travel documents of people deemed a threat to national interests. The changes also reintroduced an upper legislative house, the Senate. In November 2005 elections for the chamber, ZANU-PF secured 59 out of 66 seats; the MDC, deeply split over whether to participate, fielded just 26 candidates and won 7 seats. Voter turnout was less than 20 percent.

Also in 2005, the government implemented a politically tinged slum-clearance effort known as Operation Murambatsvina (OM), which means “drive out the trash” in the Shona language. It resulted in the destruction of thousands of informal businesses and dwellings as well as thousands of arrests. According to the United Nations, approximately 700,000 people were made homeless, and another 2.4 million were directly or indirectly affected. Initially moved into transit camps near cities, many displaced residents were forced to return to the rural areas designated on their national identity cards. Analysts maintain that OM, billed as part of a law-and-order campaign, actually targeted urban areas that were considered MDC strongholds and sources of antigovernment agitation. In 2007, Amnesty International reported that “almost none of the victims of Operation Murambatsvina have benefited from [home] rebuilding, with only 3,325 houses constructed—compared to the 92,460 homes destroyed.”

A 2007 agreement between ZANU-PF and MDC yielded a 2008 constitutional amendment designed to harmonize and ostensibly improve conditions—including greater freedom of assembly—for presidential and parliamentary elections in March. However, in late January, police violently dispersed an MDC protest in Harare and detained Tsvangirai despite a court ruling declaring the protest legal under the new amendment. The MDC was protesting over unfair preelection conditions; the opposition and independent monitors like the Zimbabwe Election Support Network accused the government of using farm and food aid to bribe and intimidate voters, printing surplus ballot papers that were not subsequently accounted for, and placing tens of thousands of “ghost voters” on the rolls. They also objected to plans to allow police inside polling stations and to centralize the presidential vote count. The heads of various security forces instructed their men to vote for Mugabe and ZANU-PF, while the chief of police stated that he would not allow the opposition to take over.

Violence before the March 28 elections, though serious, was less severe than expected. In the parliamentary poll, the Tsvangirai-led MDC won 99 seats, followed by ZANU-PF with 97 seats, and a breakaway faction of the MDC, led by Arthur Mutambara, with 10. The results denied ZANU-PF a legislative majority for the first time in the country’s 28-year history. The MDC majority survived recounts in 105 constituencies (93 requested by ZANU-PF and 92 by the MDC). However, the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) refused to release the results of the presidential contest between Mugabe, Tsvangirai, and former ZANU-PF finance minister Simba Makoni until May, when it announced that Tsvangirai had outpolled Mugabe, 47.9 percent to

43.2 percent, requiring a runoff between the two. The MDC accused the ZEC of fraud and claimed that Tsvangirai had won the election outright with over 50.3 percent of the vote.

Following the March balloting, ZANU-PF militias and state security forces began a brutal campaign—known as Operation Makavhoterapapi, or “Where did you put your cross”—aimed at punishing and intimidating MDC members and their suspected supporters. In April, police repeatedly raided MDC offices, arresting at least 250 refuge-seekers and sending leaders into hiding. Also that month, state-armed militias reportedly burned hundreds of homes, set up informal detention camps where suspected MDC supporters were tortured, and assaulted MDC activists. By the time the presidential results were released, the MDC was claiming that at least 15 of its activists had been killed and hundreds severely beaten in these attacks.

The violence escalated in May and June, ahead of the runoff between Mugabe and Tsvangirai. ZANU-PF militias continued to threaten, attack, rob, and kill opposition supporters, including scores of teachers in rural areas, while security forces extended their crackdown to civil society groups and journalists. Several trade unionists, human rights lawyers, and journalists were arrested, as were more than 100 election officials; police also raided church-affiliated organizations in Harare. In June, the government banned nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—including aid agencies—from conducting field work; also that month, Tsvangirai was arrested for the eighth time in three months, along with MDC spokesman Tenda Biti, who was accused of treason and detained for two weeks. The wife of Harare’s MDC mayor was murdered, their home was burned down, and many MDC activists sought refuge in neighboring countries. Hundreds of ZANU-PF supporters—many armed with knives, clubs, and rocks—attempted to prevent a large MDC rally in Harare; previous rallies had been banned. A few days before the June 27 election, Tsvangirai withdrew and took refuge in the Dutch embassy, claiming that postelection violence had killed over 85 MDC supporters and displaced 200,000. ZANU-PF and security officials accused the MDC of instigating the violence and exaggerating its scope. Running unopposed, Mugabe won 85 percent of the vote amid low turnout and many spoiled ballots.

In late July, the MDC reported persistent attacks on presumed MDC supporters, 27 deaths since the election, 1,500 officials in prison or police custody, and 18 MDC lawmakers facing criminal charges, many of whom were in hiding. In addition, there were some reports of reprisal attacks by MDC supporters on militiamen and ZANU-PF supporters.

Meanwhile, then South African president Thabo Mbeki mediated intermittent power-sharing talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC that eventually yielded an agreement in mid-September. The deal allowed Mugabe to remain president and created the post of prime minister for Tsvangirai. According to the agreement, fourteen ministries (including defense, justice, and media) were to be assigned to ZANU-PF, 13 to the main MDC faction (including finance and constitutional and parliamentary affairs), and 3 to Mutambara’s faction. The head of the Home Affairs Ministry, which controls the police, was not specified, and in subsequent negotiations, the Tsvangirai-led MDC accused Mugabe and ZANU-Pf of violating the September agreement by attempting to keep all strategically-important ministries within its fold. Citing alleged MDC intransigence, Mugabe threatened repeatedly to form a government without the MDC. The viability of the power-sharing agreement was also threatened by the abduction and detention—beginning in October—of at least 18 MDC activists and officials by state security forces; 16 detainees remained in jail at year’s end. In November, South Africa-brokered talks yielded an agreement on constitutional changes to create the position of prime minister. Nevertheless, a national-unity government had not been formed by the end of 2008.

The government's seizure of most white-owned farmland, which began in 2000, has accelerated the collapse of Zimbabwe's economy. Much of the land went to Mugabe loyalists who lacked farming experience. The country's gross domestic product has fallen by about 45 percent since the confiscations began, and the economy has been plagued by the highest levels of hyperinflation ever recorded: by year's end, the rate reached an astounding 13 billion percent. Recent government attempts at currency devaluation and price controls have generally been enforced by security forces and ZANU-PF militias and have led to thousands of arrests of businesspeople for noncompliance. Zimbabwe's economic crisis has driven the emigration of as many as three million residents in recent years. Unemployment in 2008 was estimated at 80 percent.

The economic breakdown has also resulted in severe shortages of basic goods, including food. In November 2008, the World Food Programme estimated that 5.1 million Zimbabweans—or 45 percent of the population—would require food aid in 2009. The June 2008 ban on field work by NGOs included aid organizations, allowing the government to use state aid as a political tool ahead of the presidential runoff election. Basic utilities such as electricity and water deteriorated during the year. Health services are strained by lack of funding, the emigration of medical workers, and a high HIV prevalence rate; about 20 percent of Zimbabweans are infected with the virus. In late 2008, an outbreak of cholera near Harare spread rapidly throughout the country, exacerbated by the closure or dysfunction of many of the country's health facilities and by state inaction. By year's end, the outbreak had caused some 1,600 deaths and over 30,000 infections.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Zimbabwe is not an electoral democracy. President Robert Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF party have dominated the political landscape since independence in 1980, overseeing 18 amendments to the constitution that have expanded presidential power and decreased executive accountability. Presidential and legislative elections in March 2008 were marred by a wide-ranging and brutal campaign of violence and intimidation, flawed voter registration and balloting, biased media coverage, and the use of state resources—including food aid—to bribe and threaten voters. The government failed to implement changes to electoral, security, and press laws that were agreed to in a 2007 constitutional amendment. The period leading up to the presidential runoff in June 2008 featured accelerated violence against oppositionists, prompting a UN Security Council resolution declaring the impossibility of a fair poll. The election, in which Mugabe ultimately ran unopposed, was declared illegitimate by observers from the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Since the reconstitution of the Senate in 2005, Zimbabwe has had a bicameral legislature. A 2007 constitutional amendment removed appointed seats from the House of Assembly, increased the number of seats of both legislative houses (to 210 seats in the House of Assembly and 93 seats in the Senate), and redrew constituency boundaries. Parliamentary elections are held every five years; in 2008, despite political violence and vote-rigging, the two factions of the opposition MDC won 109 seats in the House of Assembly, edging out ZANU-PF's 97. Appointed seats allowed ZANU-PF to maintain its majority in the Senate; the election saw both ZANU-PF and MDC factions (combined) claim 30 seats. All elected officials serve 5-year terms. In November 2008, ZANU-PF and MDC negotiators agreed to yet another (19th) constitutional amendment re-creating the post of prime minister, along with two deputy prime ministers.

Corruption is rampant throughout the country, including at the highest levels of government. The collapse in public-service delivery and the politicization of food and agricultural aid has made the problem ubiquitous at the local level. Anticorruption prosecutions are almost exclusively motivated by political vendettas. Extensive graft and nepotism have contributed to the stark decline in public and investor confidence in the national economy. Zimbabwe was ranked 166 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedoms of expression and of the press are severely restricted. The country's draconian legal framework includes the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Official Secrets Act, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. In general, these laws restrict who may work as a journalist, require journalists to register with the state, severely limit what journalists may publish, and mandate harsh penalties—including long prison sentences—for violators. Despite government commitments to liberalize these laws ahead of the 2008 elections, only minimal changes were made. Journalists are routinely subjected to verbal intimidation, physical attacks, arrest and detention, and financial pressure by the police and supporters of the ruling party. In 2008, scores of local and foreign journalists were beaten or detained both before and after the elections. Foreign journalists are rarely granted visas, and local correspondents for foreign publications have been refused accreditation or threatened with lawsuits and deportation.

The government dominates the print and broadcast media, which are generally seen as mouthpieces of the regime. The *Daily News*, the country's only independent daily, was shuttered in 2003 for not adhering to the AIPPA. In June 2008, the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) refused to air campaign advertisements from the MDC. The cost of satellite services that provide international news places them out of reach for most Zimbabweans, and in 2005, the government began jamming the shortwave radio signals of foreign-based stations that are perceived as hostile. Mugabe enacted the Interception of Communications Bill in 2007, empowering the state to monitor telephonic and electronic communication with sophisticated technology acquired from China.

While freedom of religion has generally been respected, church attendance has become increasingly politicized, with church groups such as the Solidarity Peace Trust and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) at the forefront of opposition to the Mugabe government. Other church groups, such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, are widely perceived as progovernment. In late 2007, the dominant Anglican church split when African Anglican officials sacked Bishop Nolbert Kunonga for resisting church pressure to criticize Mugabe; Sebastian Bakare was appointed to replace him. Anglican officials and followers of Bakare have accused Kunonga supporters—including state security forces—of attacking them and barring them from places of worship. In June 2008, security forces raided and confiscated materials from the Ecumenical Center in Harare, which houses the ZCA and the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe, arresting 12 people.

Academic freedom is limited. All schools are under state control, and education aid is often based on parents' political loyalties. Security forces and ZANU-PF thugs harass dissident university students, who have been arrested or expelled for protesting against government policy. Following the March 2008 elections, thousands of teachers—many of whom served as polling officials—were beaten by ZANU-PF militias. According to the Progressive Teacher's Union of Zimbabwe, about 600 teachers had been hospitalized and 231 teachers' houses had been burned down by May. As a result, many rural schools were forced to close.

The nongovernmental sector is small but active. However, NGOs have faced increasing legal restrictions and extralegal harassment. The 2004 Non-Governmental Organizations Act increased scrutiny of human rights groups and explicitly prohibited them from receiving foreign funds. The 2002 POSA bans public meetings and demonstrations held without police permission; such meetings are often broken up, and participants are subject to arbitrary arrest as well as attacks by ZANU-PF militias. The POSA also allows police to impose arbitrary curfews and forbids criticism of the president. In April 2008, the police banned political rallies ahead of the presidential runoff and two days before a large MDC rally; the bans and the violence severely restricted the opposition campaign. A court overturned a similar ban in June. In October, police violently dispersed a peaceful demonstration by the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe National Students' Union, reportedly arresting 42 women and beating dozens more. Earlier that month, police had arrested two leaders of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) during a march in Bulawayo and held them for three weeks. In addition to restricting political demonstrations, police cracked down on a number of health-related protests following the cholera outbreak in late 2008. In November, police prevented a Harare march of nearly 1,000 medical workers protesting resource shortages and deteriorating infrastructure in the health sector, sealing off the exits of the country's primary referral hospital. Police forcibly dispersed a similar, though smaller, protest in December.

The Labor Relations Act allows the government to veto collective-bargaining agreements that it deems harmful to the economy. Strikes are allowed except in "essential" industries. Because the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has led resistance to Mugabe's rule, it has become a particular target for repression. Trade unionists were attacked and detained throughout 2008.

While some courts have struck down or disputed government actions, increasing pressure by the regime has substantially eroded judicial independence. The accused are often denied access to counsel and a fair, timely trial. The government has repeatedly refused to enforce court orders and has replaced senior judges or pressured them to resign by stating that it could not guarantee their security; judges have been subject to extensive physical harassment. The vacancy of nearly 60 magistrate posts has caused a backlog of some 60,000 cases.

In general, security forces are accountable to the government but abuse citizens with impunity. They often ignore basic rights regarding detention, searches, and seizures. The government has taken no clear action to halt the rising incidence of torture and mistreatment of suspects in custody. ZANU-PF militias operate as de facto enforcers of government policies and have committed assault, torture, rape, extralegal evictions, and extralegal executions without fear of punishment; the incidence of these abuses increased significantly in 2008. Security forces have taken on major roles in crop collection, food distribution, and enforcement of monetary policy, and both the police and the military are heavily politicized. In June 2008, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that the military—particularly the Joint Operations Command—was actively involved in Mugabe's presidential campaign, arming militias for attacks on oppositionists and ordering security personnel to vote for Mugabe. That month, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai claimed that Zimbabwe was being governed by a military junta.

Pretrial detention is a major problem, with some inmates held for over 10 years without trial. Scores of MDC officials and activists were abducted, charged with treason, and detained without due process throughout 2008; 16 remained in custody by year's end. Prison conditions are harsh and life-threatening. Severe overcrowding and a major shortage of funds have contributed to a rise in HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis infections among inmates and the

deterioration of already poor sanitation facilities. Deaths in prisons are often caused by disease or beatings by guards, and many prisoners rely on family members for food. Women and juveniles are housed separately from men, and pretrial detainees are generally held in separate, common cells.

The minority Ndebele ethnic group continues to suffer political and economic discrimination, and Ndebele areas are often targeted by security forces as opposition strongholds. Restrictive citizenship laws discriminate against Zimbabweans with origins in neighboring African countries.

The state has extensive control over travel and residence. The government has seized the passports of government critics, and foreign critics are routinely expelled or denied entry. In 2008, the authorities confiscated the passports of several MDC officials, including Tsvangirai after his return to Zimbabwe in May.

Property rights are not respected. Operation Murambatsvina featured the eviction of hundreds of thousands of city dwellers and the destruction of thousands of residential and commercial structures, many of which had been approved by the government. Fewer than 400 white-owned farms remain out of the 4,500 that existed when land invasions started in 2000, and any avenues of legal recourse for expelled farmers have been closed. A 2007 law requires that 51 percent of shares in all—including foreign—companies operating in Zimbabwe be owned by black Zimbabweans. In December 2008, the government dismissed an earlier SADC court ruling declaring the land seizures of 70 white farmer applicants as discriminatory and against SADC statute.

Women enjoy extensive legal protections, but de facto societal discrimination and domestic violence persist. Women serve as ministers in national and local governments and hold seats in Parliament. The World Health Organization has reported that Zimbabwean women's "healthy life expectancy" of 34 years is the world's shortest. Sexual abuse is widespread, including the use of rape as a political weapon. A recent upsurge in gender-based violence spurred renewed calls for the enactment of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill, which has lingered in Parliament for eight years. Women oppositionists often face particular brutality by security forces. The prevalence of customary laws in rural areas undermines women's civil rights and access to education. Homosexuality, decried as un-African by Mugabe, is illegal.