

World Report 2025 - Zimbabwe

In 2024, Zimbabwean authorities acted to undermine democratic processes, repressed civil society and restricted political pluralism. They continued to weaponize the criminal justice system against perceived critics and the political opposition. Impunity for the ruling party ZANU-PF violence, intimidation, harassment, and repression against opposition members and civil society activists restricted civic and political space.

The authorities failed to uphold the government's domestic and international human rights obligations to respect peaceful activism.

Intensified Crackdown on Government Critics

Ahead of the August 17 Southern African Development Community (SADC) heads of state summit in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, the authorities intensified the crackdown on opposition members and civil society activists. Security forces arrested more than [160 people](#), including a religious leader, elected parliament and council officials, political activists, union leaders, students, and journalists.

On June 16, police [arrested](#) over 70 people at a private event to commemorate the Day of the African Child at the home of Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party leader, Jameson Timba. The police charged the detainees, including Timba with "participating in a gathering with the intent to promote violence, breaches of peace or bigotry," as well as disorderly conduct. The detainees' lawyers said the police had beaten their clients during arrest, and further ill-treated, tortured, and denied them medical care and other rights in detention. The detainees included a woman with a [year-old child](#). [Tambudzai Makororo](#), whose leg was [fractured](#) during the arrest, was not allowed surgery until 23 days later. Makororo's son died while she was in custody, but the authorities [denied](#) her request to attend the funeral.

On June 24, police [arrested 44 members](#) of the Zimbabwe National Students Union, including its president, Emmanuel Sitima, and required them to pay fines for "disorderly conduct" before releasing them.

At a ZANU-PF meeting on June 27, President Emerson Mnangagwa said he was "[aware of certain rogue elements](#) within the nation who are bent on peddling falsehoods and instigating acts of civil disorder, especially before, during, and after regional and world stage events." He said security agencies were on high alert to decisively deal with the so-called rogue elements.

Police on June 29 arrested in a private home, five members of a movement called [National Democratic Working Group](#), for allegedly holding an "unsanctioned gathering" and "agitating for criminal acts in the country." A spokesperson for the five said they were [meeting to organize](#) food disbursements to needy people in their area. On June 30, authorities [disrupted](#) a memorial event for an opposition supporter killed in 2022 and arrested several participants.

On July 31, suspected state agents [pulled four activists](#) off a plane before takeoff at the Harare International airport, and forcibly disappeared them for nearly eight hours. Lawyers said the agents subjected all four to [torture and other ill-treatment](#), and that the agents [threatened to rape](#) and kill the wife of Robson Chere, one of the detained activists. The authorities charged the four activists with "disorderly conduct" for allegedly participating in a protest on June 27. Three of the four activists were [granted bail](#) after 35 days in detention.

On August 2, Jacob Ngarivhume, leader of the opposition party Transform Zimbabwe, was arrested and charged for allegedly participating in a July 16 event where police arrested over 70 CCC

members. Ngarivhume was [granted bail](#) on October 23, after 82 days in detention.

The authorities have continued to deny those arrested their rights to bail and a fair trial. A leading opposition politician, Job Sikhala, [was freed](#) in January after being jailed for 595 days on charges of inciting public violence.

On August 20, the ZANU-PF spokesperson said activists had been arrested as a “[preventative measure](#)” and could be released following the “success” of the SADC Summit. However, authorities at time of writing are yet to unconditionally release detained activists and opposition members since the SADC Summit ended in August.

Repression of Civil Society Organizations

The authorities have continued to restrict civic space and the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The government has sought to enact, or has enacted, legislation that would substantially compound existing restrictions on human rights. [The Private Voluntary Organizations Amendment Bill 2021](#) passed by parliament in February 2023 failed to get [presidential assent](#) and lapsed in August 2023. A new bill was passed by the senate on October 17 and if signed into law by the president, it will directly affect the structure and management of civil society organizations. It will also allow the authorities to cancel the registration of organizations deemed to have “political affiliation” with little to no recourse to judicial review. Actions considered in violation of certain provisions of the law could be prosecuted, with penalties ranging from heavy fines to imprisonment.

Impunity for Abuses

The authorities’ failure to investigate and prosecute abuses primarily committed by state security agents has entrenched the culture of impunity. On June 29, 2024, media quoted the National Army commander, Lt. Gen. [Anselem Sanyatwe](#), who has been placed under sanctions by the United States government, [as saying](#) that in future elections, people would be marched to polling stations to vote for the ruling ZANU-PF party, “whether you like it or not.”

For decades, Zimbabwe’s military and other state security forces have [interfered](#) in the nation’s political and electoral affairs in violation of citizens’ civil and political rights. The government and military hierarchies have repeatedly ignored the provisions of [Zimbabwe’s Constitution](#), which prohibits members of security agencies from acting in a partisan manner, further the interests of any political party, or cause or violate anyone’s fundamental rights or freedoms.

In March, the US government renewed [sanctions against 11 individuals](#), including President Mnangagwa, and three entities for their involvement in corruption or serious human rights abuses. The announcement noted that Zimbabwe’s security forces had engaged in the violent repression of political activists and civil society organizations.

Proposed Abolition of the Death Penalty

In March, Zimbabwe’s cabinet approved [a bill](#) that, if passed by parliament, would abolish the death penalty. Although Zimbabwe carried out its last executions in 2005, courts have continued to impose the death sentence. There are currently [63 prisoners](#) on death row. The [Constitution](#) protects the right to life, but empowers courts in limited circumstances to impose the death penalty for people convicted of the charge of aggravated murder. The proposed law would prohibit the imposition of death penalty in the country and would require the Supreme Court to substitute the death penalty on appeal, for some other appropriate penalty.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Section 73 of the 2006 Criminal Code of Zimbabwe criminalizes same-sex sexual activities between men. Sentences include a maximum penalty of one year and a fine. Article 78(3) of the Constitution prohibits same-sex marriage. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people frequently face threats, harassment and violence. In August 2024, two men were [arrested and charged under sodomy laws](#) while they were seeking justice for blackmail and extortion.

Children's Rights

[Child labor](#) remained a [serious problem](#), with children participating in hazardous work in [tobacco farming](#) and other sectors. [School fees](#) continued to pose a [barrier to education](#). [Pregnant girls](#) and [adolescent mothers](#) continued to face challenges continuing formal education.