

The State of the World's Human Rights; Zimbabwe 2025

Authorities stifled dissent through the continued use of arbitrary arrests and detention, and harassment of perceived opponents. Those targeted included prominent journalists, opposition supporters and human rights activists. Scores of people were arrested after protesting against President Emmerson Mnangagwa's rule. A law that allowed the government broad powers to interfere in the work of civil society organizations was introduced. Draft legislation promised to protect people's rights to healthcare if enacted. Authorities began re-sentencing people on death row following legislation that abolished the death penalty.

Background

In March Blessed Geza, a former legislator who was expelled from the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party in March, called for nationwide protests to demand President Emmerson Mnangagwa's resignation. He named the protests the "One Million Men March".

In October, ZANU-PF adopted a plan to amend the Constitution to extend Emmerson Mnangagwa's presidential term by two years. If implemented, his presidency, currently set to expire in 2028, would be extended to 2030. Opposition members and supporters denounced the move as unlawful, while authorities increased their use of harsh measures to stifle dissent.

The debt crisis continued, with high and unsustainable public debt limiting Zimbabwe's access to international financing and the government's fiscal capacity to provide social services. Authorities announced plans to transition to a mono-currency system by 2030.

Arbitrary detention and unfair trials

On 24 February Blessed Mhlanga, a journalist with Alpha Media Holdings, presented himself to the police in the capital, Harare, after they made a public call for information on his whereabouts (see below, Freedom of expression, association and assembly). He was arrested and charged the same day with "transmitting data messages that incite violence or damage to property" under the Cyber and Data Protection Act. Prior to his arrest he had interviewed Blessed Geza. Blessed Mhlanga was held on remand and repeatedly denied bail. On 6 May, however, the High Court granted him bail, having previously rejected his appeal against bail refusal and he was released the next day. His trial was ongoing at the end of the year.

Scores of people were arrested and charged in connection with participation in the One Million Men March protests on 31 March. At least 82 of them were charged with participating in a gathering with the intent to promote violence, among other charges. They were released on remand and their trial was scheduled to begin in January 2026. Three others were tried in December on charges including promoting public violence; two of them were acquitted while one was given a two-month suspended sentence on condition that she paid a USD 300 fine. Also in December, a fourth protester was fined USD 100 for obstructing traffic.

On 16 April, University of Zimbabwe lecturers Obvious Vengeyi, Desmond Ndedzu and Boncase Mwakorera were arrested on campus in Harare for picketing during a university strike. They were protesting against low salaries and poor working conditions. The men were released on 17 April after they paid "admission of guilt" fines for disorderly conduct. However, on 22 April their lawyers wrote to the Provincial Magistrate challenging the fines following which, in May, the Resident Magistrate set aside their convictions and ordered the police to repay the fines. He also ordered a full trial where the men would answer charges of disorderly conduct.

On 1 July Faith Zaba, editor of the *Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper, was arrested on charges of "undermining the authority of, or insulting", President Mnangagwa, relating to a satirical article published in her newspaper. She was granted bail on 4 July after spending three nights in custody because the magistrate responsible said a power cut prevented him from promptly typing up the ruling. In the same month, Alpha Media Group, Zimbabwe Independent's parent media house, faced the same charges in connection with the article.

On 21 August, the Harare Magistrates Court acquitted human rights activists Robson Chere, Namatai Kwekweza and Samuel Gwenzi of charges of disorderly conduct following a year-long trial. In July 2024, state security agents had forcibly removed them from a plane at Harare's international airport and held them incommunicado for around eight hours. The arrests took place amid a growing campaign against opposition and civil society members. They were tried alongside other human rights activists, including Vusumuzi Moyo, Phillies Pikitayi, Dephine Gutsa, Simbarashe Blackson, Emmanuel Sitima and Last Chinodya, all of whom were also acquitted of the same charges.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

On 11 April, the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Act (No. 1) of 2025 was introduced. Its provisions gave the government broad powers to interfere with the governance and activities of civil society organizations and threatened to shrink civic space.

On 8 February, Job Sikhala, a former opposition MP, and 39 co-members of his pro-democracy movement, the National Democratic Working Group (NDWG)) were arrested. The police allegedly raided their NDWG meeting at a private resort near the city of Mutare, and assaulted them. They were released without charge hours later.

On 28 October, unidentified assailants carried out an arson attack at the premises of the Southern Africa Political Economy Series Trust, a regional NGO based in Harare. During the

attack a security guard was allegedly abducted. The Trust was due to host a national press conference the same morning to denounce ZANU-PF plans to extend the presidential term. A few hours later, a fire was reported at Gilbert Bgwende's home in the Harare suburb of Highfield. He was a member of the Constitutional Defence Forum, a civil society group that also opposed proposals to extend the presidential term.

On the night of 10 November, university students Lindon Zanga and Malvin Madanda, members of the Zimbabwe National Students Union, were allegedly abducted by unidentified individuals driving an unmarked vehicle at Mzimba shopping centre in the city of Chinhoyi. At the time of their abduction, the men were participating in the Students Representative Council election campaigns at Chinhoyi University. Their abductors had reportedly been seen earlier distributing campaign materials for the Zimbabwe Congress of Students Union, a rival union, on the student campus. Lindon Zanga and Malvin Madanda were released some 12 hours later. They said they were tortured during captivity.

Journalists

On 3 February, police summoned Blessed Mhlanga, only to release him without charge a few hours later. During his interview, the police officers claimed that they wanted to ask him about the status of a civil and criminal case he had brought against incarcerated politician Terence Mukupe.

On 31 March, Canaan Rusike was detained by police while conducting interviews on the street in Harare about the One Million Men March demonstrations. He was detained for nearly six hours at Harare Central Police Station. Canaan Rusike was released without charge after police verified his journalistic credentials, despite having presented his Zimbabwe Media Commission accreditation card to the police prior to arrest. According to the Media Institute of Southern Africa Zimbabwe, nine other journalists were rounded up that day while covering protests and taken to the same police station. They were released soon afterwards, having established their status as accredited journalists.

On 5 September, Nyasha Mariga, chief photographer with the *Masvingo Mirror* newspaper, was reportedly assaulted by police officers in Masvingo while photographing an unlicensed taxi driver resisting the impounding of his vehicle. During the assault Nyasha Mariga's shirt was apparently torn and his camera damaged. He was detained for two hours before being released without charge following intervention by the newspaper's lawyer.

Right to health

In October, the National Assembly approved key changes to the Termination of Pregnancy Act (1977) under the Medical Services Amendment Bill, 2025 — a major step towards modernizing Zimbabwe's reproductive health laws. The Medical Services Amendment Bill, which sought to align the Medical Services Act [Chapter 15:13] with the Constitution, and was gazetted in July 2024, was also approved by the National Assembly in October. It was awaiting the Senate's consideration at the end of the year. The bill focused primarily on safeguarding the right of all citizens to access basic healthcare services, including reproductive and emergency medical care, while extending protections to vulnerable

groups such as children, older people, people with disabilities and veterans of the war of independence. Additionally, the bill set standards for health institutions and healthcare providers, introduced regulations to enhance healthcare, and empowered the minister of health and childcare to offer incentives for the establishment of health facilities in marginalized areas.

Death penalty

Zimbabwe began re-sentencing people held on death row in line with requirements under the Death Penalty Abolition Act. According to information available by the end of the year, this affected approximately 48 men who had been under sentence of death when the legislation was introduced on 31 December 2024.

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