

Freedom in the World 2025 - Zimbabwe

Overview

The Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has dominated Zimbabwean politics since independence in 1980 by carrying out severe crackdowns on the political opposition, critical media, and all sources of dissent. President Emmerson Mnangagwa took power in 2017 after the military intervened to remove longtime president Robert Mugabe amid factional divisions within the ruling party. Mnangagwa has largely retained the legal, administrative, and security architecture of the Mugabe era, and has consolidated his authority through acts of repression and a number of constitutional amendments. Endemic corruption, a vast patronage system, weak rule of law, and poor protections for workers and land rights remain critical challenges.

Key Developments in 2024

- The main opposition group, Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), continued to boycott parliamentary by-elections during the year, demanding electoral reforms in the wake of deeply flawed general elections in 2023; in February and April, ZANU-PF won several additional seats formerly held by the CCC amid extremely low voter turnout. Nelson Chamisa, founding leader of the CCC, had resigned from the party in January, citing interference and infiltration by ZANU-PF and state institutions. Some other CCC figures followed suit, while the party itself remained divided into rival factions.
- Economic conditions continued to deteriorate despite the government's April introduction of a new digital currency backed by gold reserves, which was meant to address hyperinflation. The so-called the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) currency quickly lost value, even though legal mandates required its use for certain transactions. The chief prosecutor warned in May that corruption was costing the country billions of US dollars annually, and investigative media outlets alleged in July that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission had granted inflated contracts to a South African printing company and its local agent in exchange for corrupt payments to Zimbabwean officials, prompting state investigations in both countries that were ongoing at year's end.
- In June, Zimbabwean authorities launched a crackdown on the opposition and civil society activists in a bid to preempt protests as the country prepared to host an August summit of the Southern African Development Community. By early August, more than 160 people had been arrested, including politicians, journalists, and students. While many were eventually acquitted or given suspended sentences, cases of abuse in custody were reported. Separately, former CCC lawmaker Job Sikhala was released in January after spending 595 days in pretrial detention following his 2022 arrest; he received a two-year suspended prison term for allegedly inciting public violence.
- Zimbabwean lawmakers made progress on several important pieces of legislation during the year. A law enacted in September raised the age of sexual consent from 16 to 18 as part of an effort to combat sexual exploitation and reinforce existing rules against marriage before age 18. In December, the president signed a law that eliminated the death penalty and called for those on death row to have their sentences reduced, though one provision allowed the death penalty to be reintroduced during a state of emergency. At year's end Parliament was still considering the controversial Private Voluntary Organisation Amendment Bill 2024, which was ostensibly aimed at curbing money laundering, terrorist financing, and improper political activity by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); critics warned that the bill would lead to onerous registration requirements for NGOs, state interference in NGO operations, and potential criminal

punishments for noncompliance. Even before passage, many NGOs were reporting self-censorship, surveillance, intimidation, and infiltration by state agents.

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For additional background information, see last year's [full report](#).

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

1 /
4

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1 /
4

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1 /
4

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

1 /
4

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 /
4

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to accelerated efforts by the authorities to fragment the main opposition party, reduce its parliamentary representation, and arrest its leaders and supporters since the 2023 general elections.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapartisan means?

1 /
4

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

1 /
4

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

1 /
4

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

1 / 4

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

1 / 4

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

3 /
4

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

2 /
4

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1 /
4

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1 / 4

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? | 1 / 4

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 1 / 4

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 1 / 4

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 0 / 4

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? | 0 / 4

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? | 1 / 4

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? | 2 / 4

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? | 1 / 4

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? | 1 / 4

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? | 1 / 4

