



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located on southern Africa's Great Plateau. Covering 150,803 square miles (390,580 square kilometers), it is slightly larger than Montana. The Highveld, where most major cities are located, is a central plateau with altitudes over 5,000 feet (1,500 meters). The highest mountain peak is Inyangani (8,502 feet, or 2,592 meters). Typical to the Highveld but also found throughout the country are *kopjes*, huge granite rocks often resting on smaller formations. On both sides of the Highveld lies the Middleveld, which sends water from the Highveld into the Zambezi River (north) and the Limpopo River (south). Areas near each of these rivers are called Lowveld, where altitudes are below 1,000 feet (300 meters). Lush forests of the Eastern Highlands run along the border with Mozambique. Zimbabwe has a pleasant and mild climate, although temperatures increase as altitude decreases. Winter (May to August) highs average 55°F to 73°F (13–23°C) and summer (November to March) highs range from 77°F to 86°F (25–30°C). Summer is the rainy season. Some places in the Lowveld can reach above 100°F (38°C).

**History.** Bantu-speaking peoples who migrated from the north developed a strong presence in present-day Zimbabwe by A.D. 500, having replaced native San (Bushmen) tribes. Early Shona groups that began arriving in the 10th century established trade links on Africa's southeastern coast. They developed a major trading empire later called Great Zimbabwe (centered near Masvingo), which flourished until the 15th century. Powerful kings built stone fortresses and were rich in cattle, ivory, gold, and farmland. *Zimbabwe* means "stone houses" and implies power and permanence. Great Zimbabwe's granite ruins stand today as a national monument.

By the 16th century, Great Zimbabwe was in decline, and power splintered among several Shona States, most notably the Mutapa (north), Torwa (southwest), and later the Rosvi (south). Portuguese traders gained influence among the Mutapa but were eventually driven out. The Rosvi Dynasty declined in the early 1800s, and the Shona were subdued by the Ndebele (a branch of the Zulus) migrating from the south.

In 1888, Cecil John Rhodes formed the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and received in 1889 a charter from Britain's Queen Victoria to effectively colonize areas north of South Africa. Rhodes soon controlled Matabeleland (of the Ndebele) and Mashonaland (of the Shona), among other areas. Whites, mostly British, came searching for gold and farmland. These settlers voted in 1923 to become the British colony Southern Rhodesia, not a BSAC possession. In 1930, the Land Apportionment Act gave half of the country's land to whites and set up native reserves for blacks. The resulting inequality later fed the fire of rebellion and civil war.

In 1965, the white-minority government led by Ian Smith declared independence from Great Britain. That prompted UN sanctions and sparked several years of civil war. In 1979, a power-sharing agreement paved the way to multiracial elections in 1980. Zimbabwe was then internationally recognized as an independent republic. Robert G. Mugabe was elected prime minister.

Mugabe was reelected in 1985 as he worked to increase his power and curb opposition. In 1987, his Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) reconciled with its rival, Ndebele-dominated Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), to form a strong ruling party called ZANU-PF (PF stands for Patriotic Front). The national constitution was

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then amended to eliminate the office of prime minister and create a strong executive president (Mugabe).

In 1990, Mugabe was reelected in a landslide. Opposition to ZANU-PF began to grow but was disorganized and divided. Mugabe's government cracked down on dissent and controlled the 1995 elections. ZANU-PF received all but 3 of 150 parliamentary seats. In the 1996 presidential race, Mugabe was reelected unopposed, but voter turnout was very low. In 1997, economic and political troubles reached crisis proportions. Violent protests erupted at times over corruption scandals such as the looting of a war veterans' pension fund, economic mismanagement, land reform benefiting only government officials, and price hikes.

By 2000, Mugabe's attempts at land reform (promised since independence) had been largely unsuccessful. The government sponsored a referendum in February 2000 that would give it authority to acquire white-owned farms (covering 32 percent of all agricultural land) without compensation. To Mugabe's surprise, the referendum failed. Shortly thereafter, thousands of squatters invaded and occupied white-owned farms. Organized by the War Veteran's Association with Mugabe's backing, squatters demanded that white owners leave and sign over their property. More than one thousand farms were occupied. Several farmers were beaten, and a few were killed.

The unrest surrounding the land issue worsened Zimbabwe's economic crisis. Mugabe then made the unpopular and expensive decision to send troops into the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In June 2000, these factors combined to produce the nation's highest voter turnout (65 percent) in parliamentary elections. Voters gave 57 seats to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), slashing ZANU-PF's elected majority to 62. As presidential elections approached in March 2002, Mugabe tightened his control over the media and his party. He was reelected with 56 percent of the vote, although the opposition and the international community accused Mugabe and ZANU-PF of voter intimidation and electoral fraud.

In the years since the election, food shortages have been severe. While the government blames a lengthy drought for the shortages, Mugabe's critics point to mismanaged land reform as the key factor. The shortages, the land reform controversy, the economic crisis, and one of the world's highest rates of HIV have undermined the nation's former stability.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Zimbabwe's population of 12.6 million is growing at 0.08 percent annually. Ninety-eight percent of the population is African. The remaining 2 percent is comprised of people of European descent (mostly British), mixed heritage, and Indian descent. The largest African groups are the Shona (71 percent) and Ndebele (16 percent). Others include the Shangaan, Tonga, and Venda. The Ndebele mostly inhabit western regions and dominate in Bulawayo. The Shona are a combination of several groups, each with its own dialect. The largest of these are the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Korekore, Rozwi, and Ndau. The Karanga dominated during the era of Great Zimbabwe. While urbanization has increased over the years, 70 percent of the people continue to live in rural settings. The largest cities are Harare and Bulawayo.

Race relations, though complex, were relatively peaceful after 1980. Because whites held land and wealth, most blacks acknowledged their important role in Zimbabwe. While

whites had lost political power, they welcomed peace. Unfortunately, when the economy slumped and land reform did not progress, racial cooperation ended on many fronts.

**Language.** English is the official language and is spoken by most educated Zimbabweans. However, people in rural areas converse in their native languages. Shona and Ndebele are most common. Zimbabweans often speak more than one language, and many mix parts of several languages in daily speech. Both Shona and Ndebele are written languages and are taught in school. They are used for instruction in primary school but are being replaced by English in secondary schools. Because learning in English is hard for many students, some rural secondary teachers use indigenous languages to help teach important concepts.

**Religion.** Most Zimbabweans have a mixed belief structure. Various forms of Christianity predominate, but worship is combined with traditional practices and beliefs. These include consulting spiritual mediums or witch doctors (*n'anga*), a strong belief in witchcraft, ancestor veneration, and clan affiliation with totems. A year or two after a family member dies, the Shona hold a *kurova guva*, a weeklong party through which the departed spirit is united with the living. Forgetting a *kurova guva* invites bad luck. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian church, but various Protestant and other denominations also have members. Attendance is high at church services, which are important social events for most rural people. Some Zimbabweans exclusively practice traditional beliefs. Muslims comprise less than 1 percent of the population.

**General Attitudes.** In urban areas, cosmopolitan ideals tend to prevail, while rural customs and attitudes are more traditional. Zimbabweans are generally friendly, cheerful, and courteous. While open and enthusiastic among friends, they are more cautious and reserved with strangers. Humility is esteemed. It is impolite to embarrass or shame someone in public. It is also impolite to convey unpleasant news, so conversation steps around it. Kinship, friendship, and extended family relations are very important.

Black Zimbabweans are individually polite and conciliatory toward whites but often resentful because of continuing inequalities. Economic uncertainties have led many to develop a sense of "living for today," where money is quickly spent or borrowed and future consequences of current choices are considered less often. White Zimbabweans are proud of their heritage and connection to the soil. They value order and education. They believe land reform is necessary but should be conducted within the rule of law.

**Personal Appearance.** Wealth, or the appearance of it, is highly valued. For example, a protruding stomach is admired in a man because it means he can afford to eat meat every day. People bathe or wash daily, even in rural areas. Dressing "smart" in stylish, ironed, and clean clothing is important when not working in the fields. Ironing improves appearance and helps control *tumba* flies, which lay eggs on wet clothing; if eggs hatch, flies can burrow into the skin. Men prefer a suit for conducting business but otherwise wear a shirt and slacks. Women generally wear dresses that reach below the knee, or a wraparound skirt with a blouse. For significant rural gatherings, women also wear a *dhuku* (headscarf). Rural women rarely wear slacks, which are considered a sign of prostitution. Young urbanites wear modern fashions; children wear uniforms to school.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Zimbabweans greet strangers with a single handshake but use a longer handshake with friends. As a sign of respect, one might support the extended right arm with the left hand. Rural Shona usually show additional respect with a series of slow, patterned hand claps. Common Shona greetings include *Mhoroi* (Hello), *Mangwanani* (Good morning), *Masikati* (Good afternoon), and *Manheru* (Good evening). However, a simple greeting is not sufficient. Inquiries about one's family follow. If asked *Makadii?* (Shona for "How are you?"), one replies *Tiripo kana makadiiwo* (We are fine if you are fine). The person is often answering for the family in this group-oriented society. In Ndebele, a typical response to the phrase *Siyabonga, linjani?* (Hello, how are you?) is *Sekona singabusalina* (I am fine).

Children are addressed by first name. Rural parents may be referred to by their oldest child's name: *MaiNgoni* (mother of Ngoni) or *BabaNgoni* (father of Ngoni). Parents are respected and obeyed. The elderly are addressed as "grandmother" or "grandfather." Any elderly person must be shown great respect, be greeted first, and be obeyed by children. Urban adults address each other by first and last name, adding a professional title if appropriate.

**Gestures.** Items are passed and accepted with both hands. Shona may clap hands as a gesture of gratitude or politeness. Women and girls, especially in rural areas, may add a curtsy. Respect is shown by physically lowering oneself, so people sit when they converse (women sit on floor mats; men are higher up on stools or chairs). One does not rise when an elder enters the room. Making direct eye contact with an elder is considered rude. Public displays of affection are inappropriate, but friends of the same sex may walk holding hands. Personal space is limited.

**Visiting.** The concept of time is more flexible in the village than in the city, where people generally expect guests to arrive on time. Unannounced visits are common in villages, but one first calls out a greeting and asks permission to enter the home. Zimbabweans strive to make guests comfortable. Hosts always offer refreshments, including soft drinks or tea and sometimes a snack. Refusing refreshments or meals is impolite. Hosts appreciate a small gift and may also give departing visitors a gift (like garden produce). Rural hosts accompany guests much of the way home. Urban hosts at least go to the front gate. Inviting friends or relatives for afternoon tea is popular, and people also enjoy having guests over for dinner.

**Eating.** Zimbabweans eat breakfast before work and their main meal in the evening. Lunch is usually light. While urbanites use Western utensils, rural residents normally eat with the fingers of their right hand. Everyone washes his or her hands before and after a meal, using a washbasin passed from person to person. It is customary that a younger person pours water for an older person. Rural families may eat from a communal dish, depending on the food. Rural families eat together, but children eat separately if guests are present. Only after all the food is eaten do Zimbabweans take drinks. Chicken is a favorite but expensive meat. Beef is more desirable but even harder to attain. When guests are present, they are served first and given some meat with their meal. One claps softly and says *Ndaguta* (I am satisfied) after a meal to show respect and indicate one has been well provided for. Rural families cook over a small fire or paraffin stove.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** The mother exercises influence in the home, but the father is considered the head of the family, making all final decisions and financially supporting his family (including children, wives, and any mistresses). Polygamy, while practiced, is becoming less common. Women care for the children and household. They often sell produce or other items at roadside stands, and an increasing number hold professional jobs.

The extended family unit provides people with a social safety net. Relatives can expect financial support in hard times and must share in prosperous times. Borrowing (money or items) between relatives is common but is more like giving than lending. Urban families tend to be nuclear, whereas rural extended families often share a household. Children care for their parents when they get old, as the elderly are considered a family treasure. These networks of support are weakening due to urbanization and a severe AIDS epidemic. As adults die of AIDS, fewer people are left to care for children and the elderly. And as young adults move to the city, they participate less in the extended family network.

**Dating and Marriage.** Young Zimbabweans meet at school or social functions; dating is more common in cities. When a couple is ready to marry, a groom's representative visits the bride's family to negotiate gifts and a bride-price (*lobola* or *roora*). A traditional *lobola* involves cattle, but it is now more common to pay with cash. Virginity in women is valued and will bring a higher bride-price. As families demand higher prices, grooms are finding it difficult to pay the *lobola*. Traditional weddings can last more than a day and involve much feasting, dancing, and drinking. It is culturally acceptable for men to openly have extramarital affairs. Men consider this necessary to prove virility. However, it has contributed to a high HIV infection rate.

**Diet.** *Sadza*, a stiff porridge made from white cornmeal, is the staple food served at nearly every meal. *Sadza* is rolled into a ball and dipped in a sauce. A typical sauce is green, leafy vegetables cooked in oil with onions, tomatoes, and seasonings. Local vegetables include kale, spinach, and pumpkin. Stewed meat (particularly goat in rural areas) might also be used as a sauce for *sadza*. Protein can also come from fish or insects such as termites. In the cities, people tend to eat a more Western diet, including meat and potatoes or rice instead of *sadza*. Mangoes, tangerines, bananas, melons, guavas, and papaya (*pawpaws*) are enjoyed at various times of the year. Tea is popular with meals and in the office.

**Recreation.** Soccer is the nation's most popular sport. Basketball is gaining fans. Girls play netball. The wealthy enjoy tennis, swimming, boxing, rugby, cricket, polo, and other sports. Swimming can be hazardous in rivers and lakes, many of which contain the bilharzia parasite. People enjoy watching television and going to movies. Men frequent beer halls to drink, play games, socialize, and dance. Women get together in their homes. Vacations are rare and most often include visiting relatives; the wealthy might visit tourist attractions.

**The Arts.** Most Zimbabweans like to dance. Rural youth dance on Saturday nights to Zimbabwean music on the radio. Urban youth may prefer U.S. or British music, but they still appreciate local pop and traditional music. *Chimurenga*, one of the most popular local styles, combines traditional Shona music with electric instruments. First developed as songs of protest against the white-minority government, *Chimurenga* still draws from political and social themes. Also widespread is music played with the *mbira*, an instrument with small metal

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strips plucked by the thumbs. *Mbira* music has been adapted to electric guitars in a style known as *jiti*.

Zimbabwean sculpture, which has roots in the stone carvings of Great Zimbabwe, experienced a revival in the 1950s. Often using mythology as their inspiration, sculptors create abstract forms of animal and human figures.

Renowned novelist and short-story writer Doris Lessing grew up in Southern Rhodesia and described the experiences of colonial white Africans. Other Zimbabwean authors such as Stanlake Samkange and Tsitsi Dangarembga have received international acclaim for their works.

**Holidays.** National holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (including Good Friday and Easter Monday), Independence Day (18 Apr.), Workers' Day (1 May), Africa Day (25 May), Heroes Day and Defense Forces Day (11–12 Aug.), Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Heroes Day honors casualties of the liberation struggle. Local religious celebrations are also held throughout the year.

**Commerce.** Urban offices, banks, and shops basically are open Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. Small shops selling necessities and perishables are open longer and also on Sundays. Rural shops keep flexible hours. Women sell fresh produce at outdoor markets. Supermarkets are found in urban settings. Most people grow at least some of their own food; even urban people have gardens whenever possible.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Zimbabwe is a parliamentary democracy, although ZANU-PF controls most government offices. President Mugabe is chief of state and head of government. He appoints two vice presidents and a cabinet. The unicameral parliament, called the House of Assembly, consists of 150 members. Of these, 120 members are directly elected, 12 members are appointed by the president, 10 are reserved for traditional chiefs, and 8 are reserved for provincial governors. The presidential term is six years; parliamentary elections are held every five years. The voting age is 18.

**Economy.** Agriculture employs about two-thirds of the labor force. Agricultural products such as tobacco and cotton account for 40 percent of all export earnings. Corn, tea, and sugar are other important products. Manufactured items, including footwear, furniture, and equipment, are key exports. Gold, nickel, coal, asbestos, and other mineral resources are mined. The economy depends heavily on the weather; droughts affect not only crops but also hydroelectric power output and thus industrial production. Corruption and mismanagement have damaged investor confidence, weakened public services, and crippled economic development. The currency is the Zimbabwean dollar (ZWD).

**Transportation and Communications.** Rural Zimbabweans travel mostly on foot, although daily buses provide transportation for longer distances. Urban residents also rely heavily on buses but have access to taxis and *kombis* (minivan taxis). Relatively few people own cars. A railway connects key cities. Zimbabwe trades through ports in South Africa and Mozambique. Zimbabwe's telecommunications system is relatively extensive, but rural people do not have easy access to a phone.

## DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank . . . . .	145 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women . . . . .	113 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita . . . . .	\$2,280
Adult literacy rate . . . . .	93 percent (male); 86 (female)
Infant mortality rate . . . . .	67 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy . . . . .	36 (male); 35 (female)

Word of mouth transmits news in many areas. Zimbabweans often read newspapers, but they appreciate Western magazines that have less biased news than government-owned papers. The government operates the two television and four radio stations. Most rural areas lack electricity, but some people power televisions with car batteries. Nearly every home has a radio.

**Education.** Education is a high priority for Zimbabweans. Nearly all children attend seven years of primary school. About half pass to secondary school; poverty and language barriers keep many students from advancing. After four years of secondary school, students must pass national exams to qualify for two years of precollegiate schooling. They may otherwise pursue vocational training or end their studies. All schools charge fees and will not admit students who cannot pay. Private boarding schools offer the best and most expensive education. Mission schools are also good and less crowded than government-funded schools. Rural district schools, locally funded, are the most disadvantaged. The University of Zimbabwe in Harare is the premier institution of higher learning. Other universities, teacher-training colleges, and technical schools are located in major cities.

**Health.** Towns and cities usually have good plumbing and sanitation systems, but rural areas often lack them. Malaria, cholera, and bilharzia are widespread. Basic health services are free to the poor. Rural clinics, where available, are usually understaffed and poorly supplied. Mission hospitals and clinics offer better care. People often turn to traditional healers for help with certain types of illnesses, including AIDS. Zimbabwe has one of the world's highest HIV infection rates. With an estimated one in four adults infected with HIV, life expectancy rates are falling rapidly.

## AT A GLANCE

### Events and Trends.

- In February 2004, Zimbabwe's Supreme Court supported the government's decision to shut down the only privately-owned newspaper in the country. A 2002 law gives the government the ability to close media outlets whose journalists do not receive a government license.
- The trial of Morgan Tsvangirai entered its second year in February 2004. Tsvangirai, who was Mugabe's main opponent in the 2002 elections, was arrested for allegedly plotting to assassinate the president. Tsvangirai has dismissed the charge as Mugabe's attempt to eliminate him as a political threat.

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