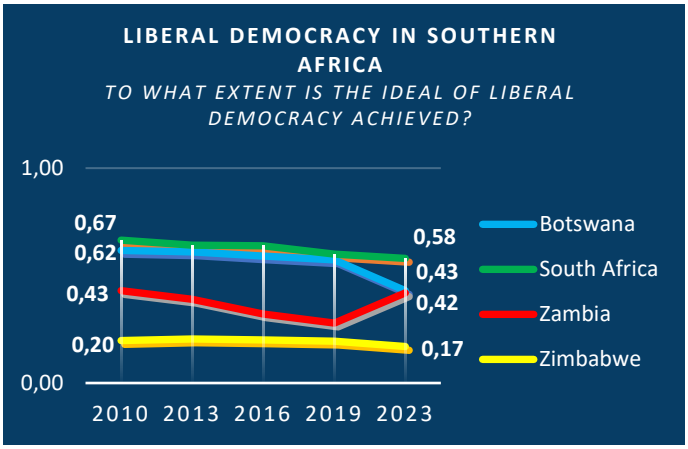
Country Brief
Zambia

Electoral democracy

COUNTRY INDICATORS

Population: 18.921 million (WB)
Urban population: 45% (WB)
Urban population growth (annual): 4.1% (WB)
Access to water: 65% (WHO-UNICEF)
Access to electricity: 45.5% (WB)
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 births): 61 (WB)
GDP (current US$): 21.203 billion (WB)
GDP per capita, PPP (current Int$): 3,624 (WB)
Presence of Violence: None (UCDP)
Global Freedom Status: Partly free, score 51 (FH)
Human Development Index: Medium (0.565), rank 154/191 (UNDP)
Local Government Association: Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ)

Figure 1



Source: V-Dem Institute (2024)

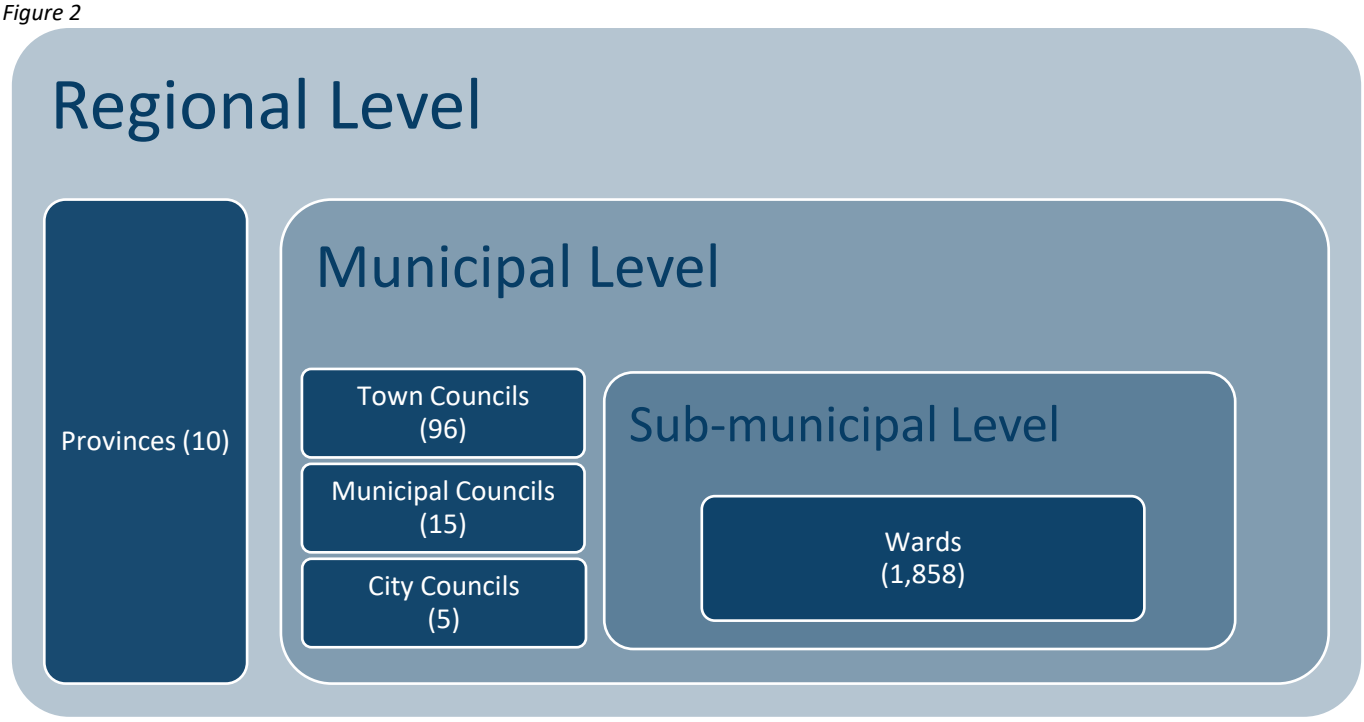
***Clarification**: The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a 'negative' view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.*

Decentralisation

Zambia is a unitary state. Local governments were given constitutional basis in 1996, and a National Decentralisation Policy (NDP) was launched in 2004. In 2009, the Ministry of Local Government and Housing published a Decentralisation Implementation Plan to operationalize the main elements of the decentralisation policy. This policy was reviewed and relaunched in 2013 and again in 2023. Key revisions within the revised 2013 decentralisation policy included the recognition and emphasis on public participation and traditional authority within local governance (UCLG, 2020, p.43).

Zambia is divided in 10 provinces, which are in turn divided into 116 councils, which are further divided in 1,858 wards. There are three types of councils: Town Councils (96); Municipal Councils (15); and City Councils (5). The five City Councils are located in urban areas with substantial economic activity while the Municipal Councils cover suburban areas and Town Councils are located in rural districts (LGAZ communication).

Figure 2



Source: SNG-WOFI Zambia (2019)

Provinces
The provinces are a deconcentrated level of national government. They are headed by provincial ministers. As heads of government in the provinces, ministers are mandated to ensure the implementation of national policies in all districts and that local authorities fulfil their exclusive functions. Ministers are appointed by the President (SNG-WOFI, 2019).

District Level: Councils
The 1991 Local Government Act (amended in 2010 and 2014) provides that each council must be composed of Members of Parliament in the district, two representatives of traditional chiefs and all elected councillors of the district (SNG-WOFI, 2019). Chiefs are appointed by all other district chiefs. Councillors are elected according to the first-past-the-post system for each ward for a five-year term. A mayor and a deputy mayor are elected in the case of City and Municipal Councils, while a chairperson is elected in Town Councils from among the members of the council. The councils have an administrative division, where the Local Government Services Commission is responsible for hiring (SNG-WOFI, 2019).

District Commissioner
The District Commissioner is a deconcentrated level of national government that are placed within the districts. They are appointed by the President. The position is often perceived as a barrier to effective decentralisation because of its overlapping mandates with council executives.

Local Autonomy

Mandates
The Local Government Act lists 63 functions of local councils: Primary healthcare; public health service and protection; housing; town and regional planning; roads; environmental protection; slaughterhouses; theatre and concerts; and parks and open spaces are joint responsibilities of national and local government.

Economic activities, such as agriculture, forests and fisheries; local economic development; trade and industry and tourism are discretionary services provided by local councils (SNG-WOFI, 2019).

Table 1

Main Sectors	Local Government Responsibilities
1.General public services	Real estate management; Civil status; Civil registration
2.Public order and safety	Public order and security including emergency response
3.Economic affairs/transports	Local roads (maintenance and construction); Local public transport; Telecommunications
4.Environmental protection	Zoning and local environmental protection; Waste management (since 2013)
5.Housing and community amenities	Spatial planning (local planning, water and supply sewage treatment, maintenance of landfills); Public areas (including cemeteries); Electricity, gas and heat supply; Housing; Maintenance of buildings and public facilities
6.Health	Health promotion; Primary healthcare services
7.Recreation, culture & religion	Market places; Promotion, management of municipal libraries and other cultural institutions; Monument protection; Promotion of sports
8.Education	Pre-primary and primary education; Kindergarten; Elementary education
9.Social protection	Social services including family benefits (since 2004) through municipal social assistance centres

Source: SNG-WOFI Zambia (2019)

Local Government Finances

Councils are responsible for raising and collecting local taxes and user fees, however not all are able to collect their local revenues as budgeted. There is no comprehensive data available on the level of revenues collected by councils. Councils raise funds through rates, rent, property taxes, fees and charges, licenses, levies, permits and other sources. The main source of revenue, however, are national government grants (SNG-WOFI, 2019).

The level and nature of local government finances in Zambia is not visible at an aggregate level. There is a lack of comprehensive datasets.

Budgets

Council budgets must be approved and aligned to the national budget as approved by Parliament and in line with the National Development Plan. The Ministry of Local Government monitors the preparation of the councils' financial statements and appoints local government auditors to visit and audit the annual financial accounts of all 116 councils (SNG-WOFI, 2019).

Local Democracy

State of Elections

Councillors are elected directly in local elections that are held alongside the presidential and parliamentary elections every five years. The council executive (i.e. mayor) is elected among the councillors for a five-year term. The next local election is set for the fall of 2026.

Zambia has seen a steep improvement in democratic indicators the most recent years, both at the national and local level (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1). In 2021, Zambia experienced its third democratic transfer of power since the first multiparty election in 1991 of power. The opposition United Party for National Development (UPND) won presidential and parliamentary elections. It is notable that the history of peaceful transitions of power sets Zambia apart as a "shining example" in the region (VNR, 2023). The European Union Election Observation Mission reported that it was "a technically well-managed electoral process marred by unequal campaign conditions, restrictions on freedoms of assembly and movement, and abuse of incumbency" (EUEOM, 2021).

Electoral Outcomes

Table 3

Elections	2006	2011	2016	2021
Voter turnout	-	-	54,7%	71% (53,4% female)
Female Cabinet Ministers			27% (9 out of 33)	16% (4 out of 25)
Female Members of Parliament (National Assembly			18,9% (24)	15,2 % (20)
Female Councillors	7,3%	85 (6,2%)	132 (8,1%)	7,5% (139 out of 1858)
Female Mayors/ Chairpersons	N/A	N/A	8,3% (9 out of 116)	13% (15 out of 116)

Source: Voluntary National Reviews Zambia (2023); Gender Links (2012) and communication with LGAZ (CLGF, 2018)

Women's representation

Women's participation in the development process is low, with Zambia having high levels of gender inequalities and being ranked 154 out of 189 (VNR, 2023). Women remain severely underrepresented in the political arena. While the number of female councillors and executive has increased slightly in absolute terms, the 2021 election saw the proportion of female representation decrease (Table 3). In the National Assembly, seats held by women decreased to 15.2 percent from 18.9 percent. Only 16 percent of the Cabinet Ministers and 7,5 percent (139 out of 1858) of the councillors are female. It is however worth noting that 3 out of the 5 City Councils are headed by female mayors (Lusaka, Livingstone and Kitwe). Out of the 15 Municipal Councils, only two are headed by female mayors.

In Zambia's Voluntary National Reviews Report from 2023, the government notes that patriarchal norms remain strong partly because of the influence of traditional structures. Zambia is also divided in 293 chiefdoms with leadership dominated by men. Among all chiefs – the heads of chiefdoms – there are a rising proportion of female chiefs, with 10,2 percent (31 out of 293) in 2023 (VNR, 2023, pg.55).

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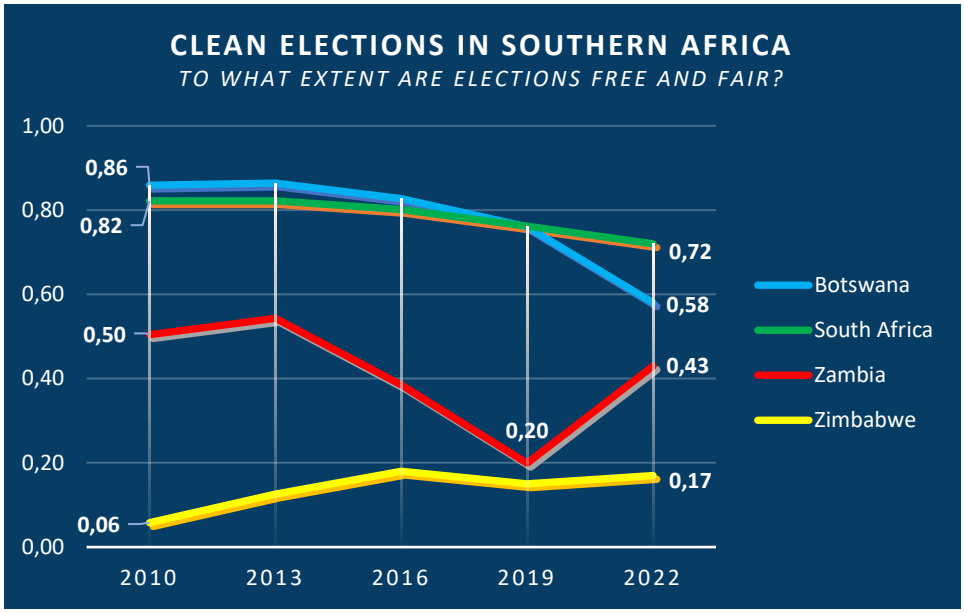
About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organisation is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments. This Country Brief is part of a publication series that investigates the state of decentralisation and local democracy in countries where ICLD programmes operate.

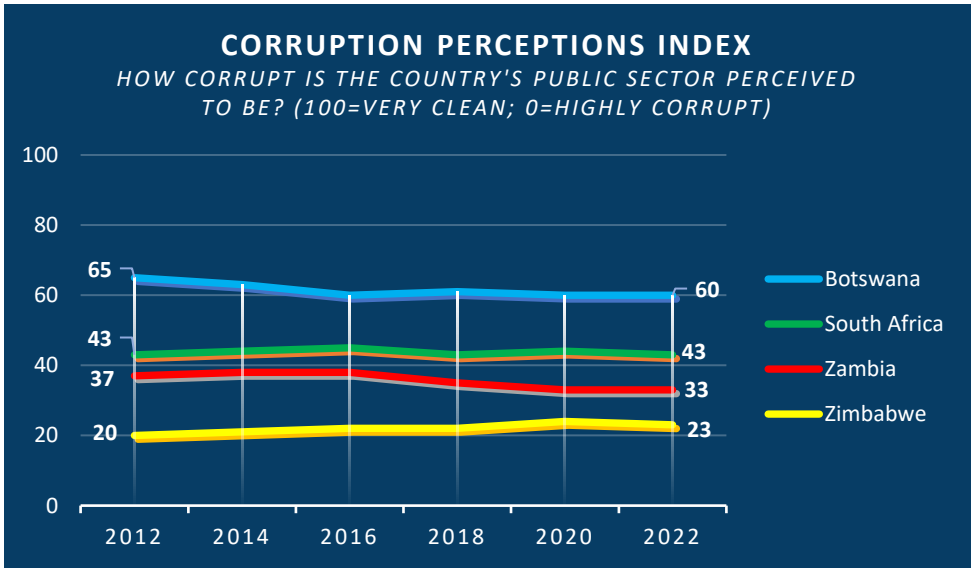
This Country Brief covers events up to October 2023.

Appendix 1: Clean Elections Index

Research Question: *To what extent are elections free and fair?* (Low to High; 0-1)
Clarification: Free and fair connotes an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence.



Source: V-Dem Institute (2022)

Appendix 2: Corruption Perceptions Index

Clarification: CPI measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople.