

Country Brief

Zimbabwe

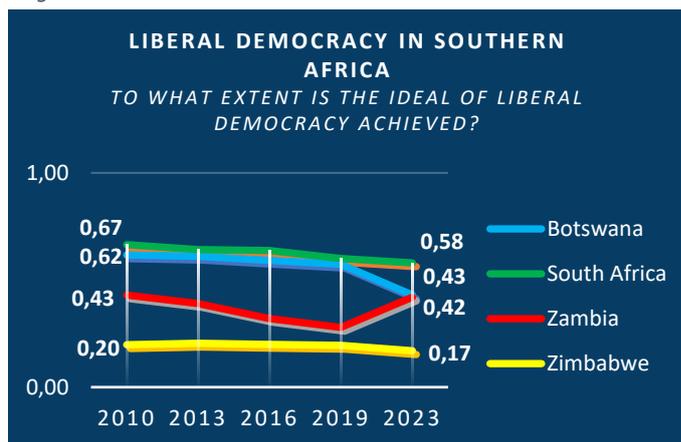
Electoral autocracy



COUNTRY INDICATORS

Population: 15.092 million (WB)
Urban population: 32% (WB)
Urban population growth (annual): 1.7% (WB)
Access to water: 63% (WHO-UNICEF)
Access to electricity: 52.7% (WB)
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 births): 54 (WB)
GDP (current US\$): 26.218 billion (WB)
GDP per capita, PPP (current Int\$): 2,445 (WB)
Presence of Violence: None (UCDP)
Global Freedom Status: Not free, score 28 (FH)
Corruption Perception Index: Score 23, rank 157/180 (TI)
Human Development Index: Medium (0.593), rank 146/191 (UNDP)
Local Government Association: Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA) merged the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) and the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ)

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

Zimbabwe is a unitary state with two levels of local government. The 2013 Constitution recognizes provinces as new layers of government between the national and local levels. The Constitution further acknowledges urban and rural authorities as local authorities in place to manage the affairs of urban and rural areas, respectively. Prior to this, local government functioned as a decentralised level of government that derived its authority from Acts of Parliament and not from the Constitution (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019). This constitutionalisation of the local government system was a major milestone for decentralisation in Zimbabwe.

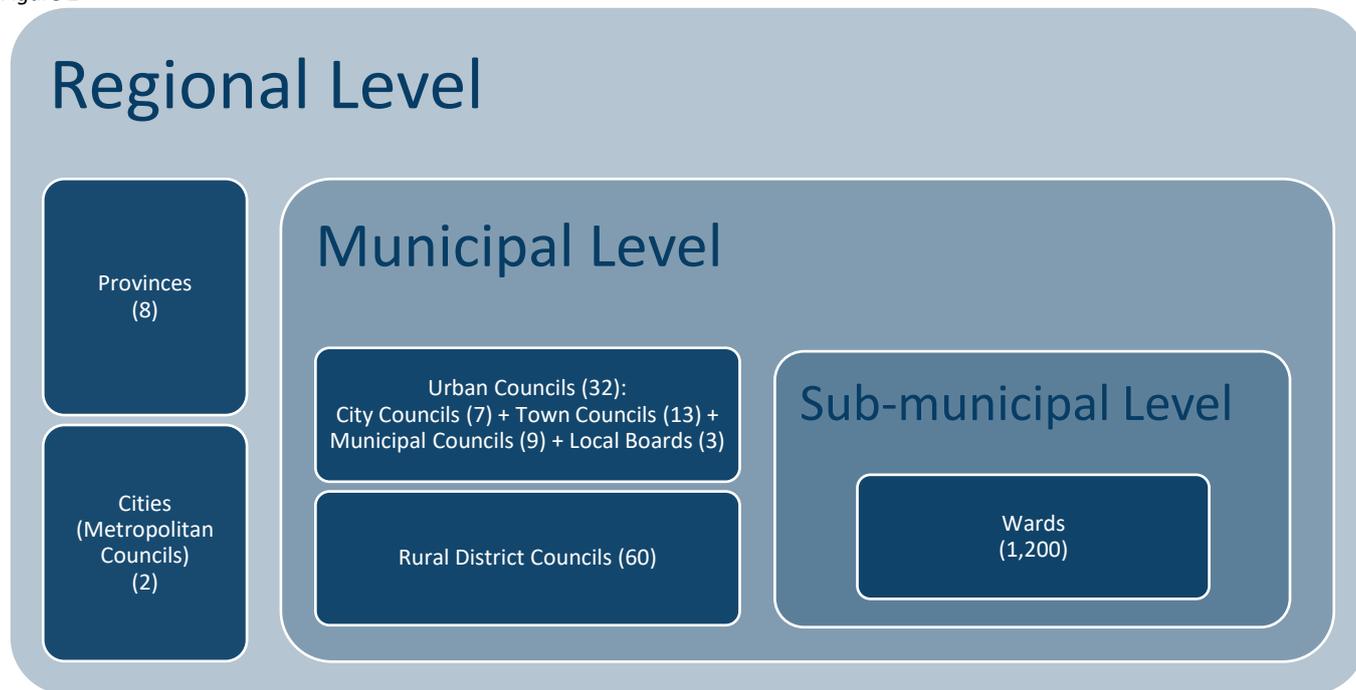
Zimbabwe is divided into 8 provinces¹ and 2 metropolitan councils², which are divided into 92 local councils at the municipal level. There are two types of councils: Urban Councils (32) and Rural District Councils (60). The councils are in turn divided into 1200 wards for administrative purposes. Additionally, the 32 Urban

¹ Province (# of Rural District Councils): Mashonaland West (7), Mashonaland Central (8), Mashonaland East (9), Manicaland (7), Masvingo (6), Midlands (8), Matebeleland North (7), Matebeleland South (7).

² Harare Metropolitan Councils and Bulawayo Metropolitan Councils

Councils are distinguished as one of four different types: Municipal Councils (9), Town Councils (13), City Councils (7³), or Local Boards (3) (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Figure 2



Source: SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe (2019)

Urban & Rural District Councils

The urban councils and rural district councils are divided into wards, each represented by a Councillor elected for a 5-year term. Mayors (urban) and Chairpersons (rural) are the political leaders of a council, elected by the Councillors. Urban councils are also divided into municipal councils, town councils, city councils and local boards. These local authorities are ranked and granted status according to their “status, power, authority and resources”. Local boards are established in settlements with a very small population, or in areas that are not able to sustain themselves without central government assistance. Town councils on the other hand have a sufficient size to stand alone. City councils have the highest status in the country and constitute the large cities. Municipal and city councils have a Mayor democratically elected every five years, while local boards and town councils are headed by a chairperson elected by councillors. In addition, all cities and municipalities are served by an administration headed by appointed Chief Executive Officers or Town clerks. (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Provinces

At the regional level, there are provincial councils and metropolitan councils. The provinces are governed by provincial councils whose members are drawn from local councils, parliamentarians and party leaders within the province, and democratically elected members. The Chair of the provincial council is elected by its members and must be a representative of the political party which gained the highest number of National Assembly seats in the province concerned, while an Act of Parliament provides for the election of the Mayor of the metropolitan council. The provincial and metropolitan councils have greater independence from the central government and broader powers than local governments. At the provincial level (excluding metropolitan) there is also a Provincial Assembly of Chiefs. These Provincial Assemblies of Chiefs in turn appoint representatives to the National Council of Chiefs in Parliament. The participation of traditional leaders in provincial and

³ (Harare & Bulawayo), Gweru, Masvingo, Kadoma, Kwekwe, Mutare, Victoria Falls

national governance is enshrined in the Constitution and the Traditional Leader Act (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Local Autonomy

Mandates

According to the Constitution, provincial and metropolitan governments are responsible for social and economic development, the coordination and implementation of government programs, environmental protection and the promotion of tourism. Urban councils' competencies include water supply, healthcare, maternity and child welfare, housing, transport, schools, libraries, sanitation, environment protection, fire brigades and municipal police, street lighting, public spaces and parks, among others. Rural district councils' competences include the provision of social services such as health and education, construction and maintenance of sewage works, roads and dams, among others (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Local governments also share responsibilities with the national level, including in road traffic control, public transport, environmental protection, water distribution, housing, public healthcare services, education and social welfare. The Constitution states that the national government will endeavour, whenever appropriate, to devolve its powers to provincial councils, metropolitan councils and local authorities which are competent to carry out those responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

Table 1

Main Sectors	Urban and Rural Council Responsibilities
1.General public services	Public buildings and facilities (e.g. town houses)
2.Public order and safety	Traffic Police; Firefighting; Road traffic control; Traffic signs and lights
3.Economic affairs/transport	Road networks and facilities (regional, local); Public transport
4.Environmental protection	Parks and green areas; Environment protection; Waste management (collection, treatment and disposal of waste); Sewerage (waste water management); Street cleaning
5.Housing and community amenities	Drinking water distribution; Public lighting; Housing (subsidies, construction and renovation and management)
6.Health	Primary healthcare (medical centres); Hospital services (general and specialist); Preventative healthcare; Public health services
7.Recreation, culture & religion	Libraries; Museums; Cultural activities
8.Education	Pre-primary education; Primary and Secondary education
9.Social protection	Social care for children and youth; Support services for families; Social welfare centres; Housing subsidies and benefits

Source: SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe (2019)

Local Government Finances

The 2013 Constitution introduced the fiscal transfer to provinces and local authorities of five percent of national revenue raised, but this is not yet the case in practice. Urban and Rural Councils Acts provide a regulatory framework, which include financial provisions, auditing, borrowing and the types of levies and taxes the urban and rural councils can charge. Local authorities are permitted to raise revenue from income generating projects, such as beer halls and farming activities. In 2015, about 69 percent of urban local authorities had income generating projects in their books. However, most projects are poorly managed and not profitable and some have not received ministerial approval (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Revenues collected across local authorities are insufficient to cover service delivery, resulting in local authorities incurring debt, and barely being able to provide adequate services. The main reasons for low revenues include excessive central government control over raising fees or rates, very low central government grants and subsidies, adverse macroeconomic conditions and poor financial management (SNG-WOFI Zimbabwe, 2019).

Budgets

Local governments plan and formulate their budgets annually before submitting to the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works for approval.

Local Democracy

State of Elections

Municipal and city council mayors are democratically elected directly every five years, while chairpersons for town councils and land boards are indirectly elected by members of the council. The next general election is set for 2023.

Democracy in Zimbabwe is not faring well. While the 2017 coup and removal of Robert Mugabe did spark some optimism, the level of democracy remains low (see Figure 1). V-Dem’s Clean Elections Index (see Appendix 2) scores Zimbabwe in the lower end, partly because elections tend to be marred by violence.

Following the 2018 general election, the European Union Election Observation Mission reported that “while political rights were largely respected, there were concerns regarding the environment for the polls and the failure to achieve a level playing field. Observers widely reported on efforts to undermine the free expression of the will of electors, through inducements, intimidation and coercion against prospective voters to try to ensure a vote in favour of the ruling party” (EUEOM, 2018). Observers also noted that Zimbabwe’s history of abuse and autocratic government has led to a low level of trust in the democratic process and institutions (ibid.).

The 2023 general election was criticized by most observers, including the missions from Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union and the European Union. The observers noted unfairly drawn constituencies, bans on opposition rallies, unknown final voters roll and polling stations, controlled voting in rural areas and urban voter suppression. But despite these circumstances, the voter turnout was high. The official result in the presidential election put the incumbent candidate, Emmerson D. Mnangagwa (ZANU-PF), at 53 percent, and the opposition candidate, Nelson Chamisa (CCC), at 44 percent.

Electoral Outcomes

Table 3

Elections	2008	2013	2018	2023
Voter turnout	N/A	N/A	N/A	
National Assembly				
Female Councillors	19%	16%	14%	
Female Mayors/Chairpersons	N/A	N/A	13%	

Source: UN Women (2021) and local sources from Gender Links

Women's representation

Women remain severely underrepresented in the political arena. The 2023 election saw an all-time low of female candidates, which is likely a result of the 'risky climate'. Only 11% of candidates that ran for seats in the national assembly were female, down from 14% in the 2018 election. Only 21 out of the 210 elected seats (10%) in the national assembly were won by women.

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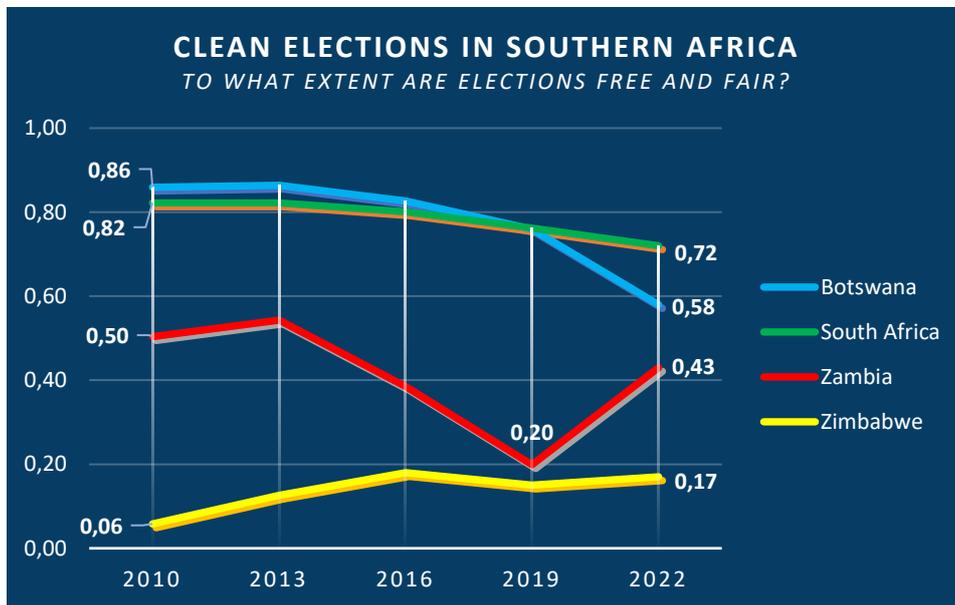
The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organisation is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments. This Country Brief is part of a publication series that investigates the state of decentralisation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

This Country Brief covers events up to September 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 and 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.

