



Ms. Tania María Abdo Rocholl

Chair, Human Rights Committee

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Palais Wilson - 52, rue des Pâquis

CH-1201 Geneva (Switzerland)

Via E-mail: ccpr@ohchr.org; ohchr-ccpr@un.org

31 January 2025

**NGO Report on the Republic of Zimbabwe for the 143rd Session of the
Human Rights Committee / Rapport des ONG sur la République du Zimbabwe
pour la 143e session du Comité des droits de l'homme**

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Barriers Against Participation of Women in Public Affairs</i>	2
Domestic Violence Deterring Women from Engaging in Public Life	2
Low Female Representation in Political Institutions	3
Lack of Women in Public Life	4
Lack of Education for Girls	5
<i>Implications of Military Action & Violence on Civic Participation</i>	6
Military Actions Against Opposition	6
Electoral Violence at Voting Centres.....	9
<i>Structural Government Weakness Stifling Political Rights</i>	10
Corruption’s Impact on Electoral Integrity and Political Participation.....	10
Entrenchment of Economic Elitism and the Violation of Equality	12
Suppression of Civil Society and Democratic Advocacy	14
<i>Weak Plural Legal System Derived from Post-Colonial Fallout</i>	15
Residual Fallout from Post-Colonial Transplantation.....	15
Establishment of Authoritarian State Through Consolidation of Legal Power	16
<i>Conclusion</i>	17

Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action presents this report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee ahead of the 143rd Session for the review of Zimbabwe. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus. The Centre acknowledges there can be no secure tomorrow without ensuring civil societies have knowledge to vote, participate, and engage with the democratic processes.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Human Rights Committee, to promote civil society participation in the public affairs process.
3. The Centre submits this ahead of the second periodic review of Zimbabwe under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Recognising the complex nature of the recent challenges Zimbabwe faces, the Centre hopes to provide valuable information to the Committee regarding the State's compliance with issues exacerbating in compliance under Article 25. Indeed, this report is focused on the scope of Article 25, and we encourage Committee members to understand the nature of civic education as a tool to combat this contemporary turmoil; hopefully, the Committee will find this report valuable.
4. This report is centred on five specific violations: (1) the status of civic education; (2) participation of women in public affairs; (3) implications of military action on civic participation; (4) structural weaknesses stifling political rights; and (5) a weak legal system derived from post-colonial fallout.
5. This report contains many metrics made to help the Committee in understanding the social, political, and economic situation in Zimbabwe as it relates to electoral participation. Perhaps most significant to note before considering this report is the simple solution: an inquiry to the State party on their programmes for youth which relate to civics education. Early civics education can cultivate future prosperity and representation, bringing a young to the voice to the issues faced. Civics education may very well be the root to solving many other issues.

Barriers Against Participation of Women in Public Affairs

Domestic Violence Deterring Women from Engaging in Public Life

6. In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence (GBV) is a large concern. 39.4% of women have been subjected to physical violence, and an estimated 11.6% have faced sexual

violence. Additionally, 16.2% of women were married before the age of 18 as of 2022.¹

7. This abundance of violence has taken a drastic toll on the livelihood of women in Zimbabwe. The cultural traditions in place do not allow them to feel comfortable in society, as their place has narrowed down to supporting the household. This results in less women in the workplace, participating in civic processes, and maintaining social connections. All of this contributes to a less active Zimbabwe and a reduction in their happiness index.
8. Zimbabwe has taken measures to reduce GBV by adopting international and domestic laws, however it has not been sufficient to battle the issue. Zimbabwe needs to find more effective enforcement of GBV legislation and create a legal framework that categorically criminalises GBV acts. There have been mentions of forward progress in the 2013 National Constitution of Zimbabwe, prohibiting gender discrimination and attempting to erase all forms of GBV, but the enforcement of these laws is lacking.²
9. The GBV assessment notes that there simply isn't enough work being done on the legislative front. For example, "The 2007 Domestic Violence Act" needs to be amended to include the harmful cultural practices and extend coverage to GBV incidents outside the domestic sphere.³ The World Bank suggests that Zimbabwe should strengthen the Anti-Domestic Violence Council, along with creating a stronger coordination among groups to enforce these laws.⁴
10. Zimbabwe should create evidence-based awareness campaigns to alter the social and gender norms toward non-violence and respectful relationships, emphasising the promotion of this agenda in GBV hotspots. Additionally, the courts featuring GBV cases should fast-track their cases, improving the justice system and demonstrating the consequences of GBV.

Low Female Representation in Political Institutions

11. Due to the gender disparities in Zimbabwe, women aren't commonly seen in the political sector. To make matters worse, when they do participate, they get threats and online violence from other parties.
12. Women's participation in politics has steadily increased in Zimbabwe's parliament to 31% and 45% in the Senate, due to the introduction of quotas. Despite this, there has been little to no progress in local sectors, with women only accounting for 12% of local authorities.

¹ "Persistent Gender Disparities Hinder Women's Safety and Productivity in Zimbabwe", *The World Bank*, 29 April 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2024/04/29/persistent-gender-disparities-hinder-women-s-safety-and-productivity-in-afe-zimbabwe/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

13. Zimbabwe has a three-tier system of governance: the national government, provincial leadership, and local councils. The quota system was introduced in the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe for two election cycles. This was then extended, through the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 of 2021. This system has increased the number of women participating in government but doesn't provide them with the proper resources. "Quota" representatives do not have access to constituency development funds.⁵
14. The lack of progress in this area is largely due to the amount of online violence faced by women attempting to join the political sector. Studies have shown that women in the global South are most likely to suffer from these attacks because of the engrained gender and identity-based norms of its patriarchal society. Surveys have shown that from January 2013 to April 2018 online violence against women in politics has increased, with 60% of it aimed at women politicians and activists.⁶
15. This online violence has discouraged women all over Zimbabwe from participating in political processes, due to the potential harm they may face. This online violence has created a culture of fear amongst women and has become a great issue within the country. Additionally, the lack of access to proper campaign resources women face has disincentivised women further from engaging with the career.⁷

Indeed, online violence has prevented women from participating in the political processes, despite efforts made otherwise. The Committee should ask Zimbabwe what steps it is taking to address violence against women, particular those running for political positions.

Furthermore, in light of the information provided, the Committee should enquire why "quota" female representatives do not have access to constituency funds despite being elected officials and should push the State party to enact laws ensuring female "quota" political members have the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts.

Lack of Women in Public Life

16. Unemployment is largely shaped by gender; women are four times less likely to be formally employed. Women are less likely to participate in the labour market at all ages, even when they do obtain a job, they're more likely to work informally in family farms or household businesses.
17. Zimbabwe's economy highly favours male workers, the labour force participation rate is 53% for men compared to 34% for women. In the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors, men account for 58% of the industry labour market, while women

⁵ "Women in Politics in Zimbabwe: How Gender Norms are Fueling Online Violence", Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, September 2023, https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/zimbabwe_-_nehanda.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

are only 42%.⁸ The male weekly mean incomes being three times those of women and median incomes about twice as high – this being in the informal economy. Even though women made up much of the informal market, their occupations have the lowest earnings. This creates a large poverty risk for women and makes it difficult for them to financially support their families. To add on, women in Zimbabwe constitute about 22% of unpaid workers. This is due to women's concentration in less remunerated fields, limited work experience and skills, and unequal family and household care responsibilities.

18. Additionally, most women working in the informal sector had children to support. "Align Platform" conducted a survey resulting with 30.3% of women working having 3 children to support. This was then followed by 2 children per respondent at 20% and 4 at 18.7%.⁹ These statistics demonstrate a woman's inability to work and support a family in Zimbabwe. All of this results in women in poverty and unable to create a lifestyle while living in Zimbabwe. This lowers the country's gross domestic production and once again reinforces the culture of fear created by societal norms. Women without an occupation cannot make money for themselves and therefore won't feel strong enough to stand up for their rights.¹⁰

The Committee should ask if Zimbabwe may create new labour laws to accommodate women in the workforce. The Committee should also ask Zimbabwe what progress have they made in terms of how many women are active in the labour force, given the lack of evolving data.

Lack of Education for Girls

19. Girls in Zimbabwe are less likely to complete their schooling. Girls of upper secondary school age are significantly more likely than boys to be out of school, and they lag boys in school completion. Despite these facts, the Zimbabwean Government had committed to provide education for all irrespective of race, gender, or religion. In the Education Act of 1982, education was determined a basic human right, making primary education free and compulsory.
20. However, this education act did not make changes for women's rights at all. Gender inequality, poverty, family pressure, gender-based violence and early marriage, inadequate sanitation among others is keeping girls from completing school. It was not until 2016, that Zimbabwe's government deemed marriage at 16 unconstitutional.¹¹ Even with this amendment, the disparity in education has continued due to many girls already being bonded into marital agreements. The

⁸ "Women in Politics in Zimbabwe: How Gender Norms are Fueling Online Violence", Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, September 2023, https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/zimbabwe_-_nehanda.pdf.

⁹ Marjorie Mpundu and Dhiraj Sharma. "By the Numbers - Lost Opportunities for Girls and Women in Zimbabwe", The World Bank, 30 March 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/nasikiliza/numbers-lost-opportunities-girls-and-women-zimbabwe/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Multiple Indicator Cluster survey (MICS) 2014 declares that 4.9% of girls were first married or in a union before the age of 15. Only 0.3% of boys married before the same age.¹²

21. One of the reasons for higher female dropout from secondary school is early pregnancy. In 2019, 17.6% of women aged 15-19 years old had a live birth and 2.1% of women 20-24 years old had a live birth before the age of 18. There has been an offer or “lifeline” given by the Zimbabwean government to girls who had fallen pregnant, suggesting they complete school after giving birth. However, many girls have faced stigma from their pregnancy and do not take up on this offer.
22. Moreover, sanitation challenges have driven a lot of women away from education. The absence of proper sanitation facilities such as toilets and clean water in rural areas deters girls from attending school.
23. Education plays a pivotal role in combating ignorance, disease and poverty and is key to socio-economic and political transformation. Without education there will be a reduction in the well-being of women across Zimbabwe leading to less women in the workforce and less empowerment among their community. The lack of education increases the fear women experience daily, as they don’t understand fundamental aspects of life such as reading.

The Committee should ask what steps Zimbabwe will take to provide decent education facilities to girls, specifically in rural sectors, too. Zimbabwe should also consider putting new quotas be put in place to ensure a larger number of women in secondary school and create new legislation to protect women from young marriages and abuse.

Implications of Military Action & Violence on Civic Participation

Military Actions Against Opposition

24. Article 25 of the Covenant guarantees every citizen the right to take part in public affairs, vote in free and fair elections, and access public service without unreasonable restrictions. However, Zimbabwean authorities have repeatedly engaged in violent, systematic repression of political opposition, severely undermining these rights.
25. A senior military official declared that ZANU-PF would rule "until donkeys grow horns," signalling military allegiance to the ruling party and discouraging opposition efforts. His statement reflects the broader pattern of security forces acting as an extension of the ruling party, rather than as neutral enforcers of law and order.¹³

¹² "Education for girls, women leads to development", Women Deliver, <https://womendeliver.org/press/education-girls-women-leads-development/>.

¹³ Kate Bartlett. "Zanu PF will rule until donkeys grow horns, boasts Zimbabwe army chief", *The Times*, 4 July 2024, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/africa/article/zanu-pf-will-rule-until-donkeys-grow-horns-boasts-zimbabwe-army-chief-gwnjqcs7b/>.

26. Indeed, military allegiance to the ruling parties represents the intertwined nature of the political and military system; if political issues are to arise in Zimbabwe, most certainly the military would be a dark shadow behind its political force. A fair and free public affairs process requires independence from the military in pursuit of their obligation to civil society. The current presence and rule of ZANU-PF and other paramilitary groups undoubtedly prevents the full extent of public affairs participation in Zimbabwe.¹⁴
27. Furthermore, Zimbabwean authorities have arbitrarily arrested opposition figures and supporters under the auspice of maintaining public order. In June 2024, authorities arrested opposition leader Jameson Timba and 70 youth members during a private meeting at his residence. Reports confirm that those arrested were severely beaten and injured in custody. Zimbabwe's use of force by its authority forces in lieu of political situations is certainly concerning, and whilst it may dilute the influence of opposition powers in the Zimbabwe political system, it undoubtedly undermines the process of fair elections by bringing in factors of force, fear, and intimidation. Should Zimbabwe seek a more fair and equal public affairs process, it must begin to combat arbitrary arrests and political opposition through force to ensure there are no consequences whatsoever for one involving themselves in politics.¹⁵
28. Similarly, in January 2023, authorities arrested Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) MP Costa Machingauta and 25 other opposition members for an alleged "illegal gathering" at his residence. Among those detained was an 82-year-old man who was imprisoned at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison for two weeks before being released. Detainees were denied food, and their legal representative was assaulted, suffering a broken hand at the hands of law enforcement. The arrests marked by inhumane violence and due process violations illustrate the deteriorating rule of law. The repressive tactics – the extent to which state forces operate with impunity – not only silence opposition leaders but establish a culture of fear among potential dissenters, discouraging civic involvement across a diverse plethora of political ideologies and persons in fear of rivalry.¹⁶
29. Beyond legal persecution, opposition supporters face physical violence from state and militia forces. On 27 February 2022, ZANU-PF militias attacked a rally held by opposition leader Nelson Chamisa in Kwekwe. The attackers, armed with machetes, spears, iron bars, and bricks, killed one opposition supporter and injured at least 22 others.¹⁷ Security forces have also obstructed opposition campaigns by erecting

¹⁴ Pan Ho Liu. "Zimbabwe police arrest interim opposition party leader for holding unauthorized political gathering", *Jurist News*, 18 June 2024, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2024/06/zimbabwe-police-arrest-interim-opposition-party-leader-for-holding-unauthorized-political-gathering/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "'Crush Them Like Lice' Repression of Civil and Political Rights Ahead of Zimbabwe's August 2023 Election", *Human Rights Watch*, 3 August 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/08/03/crush-them-lice/repression-civil-and-political-rights-ahead-zimbabwes-august-2023/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

illegal roadblocks staffed by police, military officers, and ZANU-PF activists. In March 2023, CCC members were stopped at a roadblock and forced to denounce their party leader before being beaten and hospitalised. Zimbabwe's continued and widespread reports about the use of force is alarming: the Committee should certainly take note of these incidents and ask with specific reference to these statistics what actions are being taken to reduce the contemporary levels of violence. Should these violations continue, Zimbabwe will continue seeing violations under Article 25 against the political backbone of its country.

The Committee must ask Zimbabwe what steps it is taking to ensure political opposition in favour of political power is being limited. Specifically, the Committee should press the Zimbabwe delegation for laws or proposals it is actively seeking to hold those who seek political power through violence accountable.

State-Sanctioned Electoral Manipulation and Intimidation

30. Zimbabwe's 2018 elections, in which ZANU-PF secured 52.3% of the vote, were marred by allegations of widespread electoral fraud and intimidation. Ahead of the 2023 elections, there were increasing reports of pre-election violence and suppression of opposition campaigns. In several rural areas, traditional leaders compelled citizens to attend ZANU-PF rallies wearing ruling party regalia "for their own protection".¹⁸ The forced participation in ruling party events under the threat of reprisal reveal the extent to which Zimbabwe's electoral landscape is manipulated through coercion. In rural areas where state control is most pronounced, the blending of political and traditional authority ensures voter compliance through fear, diminishing the presence of an opposition, eroding the credibility of elections, and violating fundamental democratic principles.
31. When opposition supporters protested election irregularities, security forces killed at least three people and injured dozens more. Soldiers armed with live ammunition and tear gas were deployed, using brutal force to suppress dissent.¹⁹ The manipulation of elections through coercion, intimidation, and violence – direct violations under Article 25 – undermines civic engagement by fostering political apathy and fear. When citizens believe their votes are meaningless or that dissent invites reprisal, they withdraw from political participation, weakening civil society and democratic resilience.
32. The normalisation of state violence against protesters further suppresses public discourse, leading to self-censorship and disillusionment with democratic institutions. Over time, this erodes public trust in governance, particularly among young voters, who may disengage entirely from formal politics.

¹⁸ Data derived from "Political Succession and Intra-Party Divisions: Examining the Potential for Violence in Zimbabwe's 2023 Elections", *ACLEDA*, 17 August 2023, <https://acleddata.com/2023/08/17/political-succession-and-intra-party-divisions-examining-the-potential-for-violence-in-zimbabwes-2023-elections/>.

¹⁹ Jane Flanagan. "Soldiers fire on protesters as violence flares in Zimbabwe", *The Times*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/1110c318-95a1-11e8-85e3-d844d3177259/>.

Electoral Violence at Voting Centres

33. Electoral violence remains a significant concern in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of the sustained pressure on democratic space observed since the 2018 elections. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, who visited Zimbabwe in 2020, highlighted numerous allegations of arbitrary arrests, detentions, and abductions. These incidents underscore the broader pattern of repression targeting political opposition, civil society, and independent election observers.²⁰
34. Despite repeated calls for peaceful elections from both national and international actors, violence and intimidation escalated as the 2023 election day approached. Reports from the EU Observer Mission detailed instances of battery, arson, and kidnappings, particularly in rural areas. A notable case involved the killing of a Citizens Coalition for Change supporter in an opposition-designated "no-go" area, leading to the arrest of 15 individuals, who remain on trial.²¹ The presence of the Forever Associates of Zimbabwe, reportedly linked to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), at multiple political rallies was documented. Observers also received reports of coerced or incentivised attendance at ZANU-PF events, alongside efforts by its supporters to disrupt opposition gatherings.
35. On election night, security forces carried out four raids in Harare, resulting in the arrest of 39 civil society members, including personnel from the Zimbabwe Election Support Network and the Election Resource Centre.²² These individuals were charged with allegedly coordinating the premature release of election results. The nature of these arrests was widely viewed as disproportionate, significantly impeding independent electoral observation. Following international condemnation from the EU Observer Mission and other organisations, the detainees were granted bail and released on August 25.
36. During the election, a targeted media and social media campaign sought to discredit international observation missions, particularly the EU Observer Mission and the Southern African Development Community. These tactics, which undermine impartial election oversight, contradict Zimbabwe's international commitments to transparency and free elections. Additionally, Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission imposed a USD 400 accreditation fee for certain international observers, a prohibitive cost that likely constrained observation efforts and reduced overall electoral transparency.²³
37. The ongoing political repression and electoral manipulation show that Zimbabwe is becoming a state where democratic institutions are systematically undermined to ensure the continued dominance of the ruling party. The close ties between the

²⁰ "SADC and Zimbabwe's Post-Election Conflict", 24 May 2024, <https://actsa.org/sadc/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

military and the ruling party, crackdown on opposition gatherings, and arbitrary arrests under the use of state-sanctioned violence illustrate a governance structure that prioritises political agendas over fundamental human rights under Article 25. Zimbabwe's contemporary situations illuminate the disregard for Article 25, and, as Zimbabwe approaches future elections, these patterns of repression risk deepening political instability and isolating the country from the international community.

The Committee should ask the Zimbabwe delegation what measures it is taking, and to what extent, to pursue the aim of reducing violence in face of political circumstances. The Committee should further press for increased security measures by the government to ensure voting centres are safe, accessible, and free, for all of Zimbabwe civil society to properly participate in the electoral process without intimidation or threats of violent repercussions.

Structural Government Weakness Stifling Political Rights

Corruption's Impact on Electoral Integrity and Political Participation

38. Zimbabwe's corrupt campaign financing, opaque electoral processes, and misuse of state resources stifle the ability for the civil society to participate in fair and free elections. Specifically, the absence of financial transparency in electoral processes has allowed political elites to use state coffers and illicit financial networks to fund campaigns, outspend opposition candidates, and suppress voter participation.
39. In 2011, Finance Minister Tendai Biti revealed that over 1 billion USD in diamond revenues had disappeared before reaching state accounts, a loss that had direct consequences on election funding, including the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's ability to ensure impartial administration of electoral processes. As he noted, "[t]here is no connection whatsoever [between diamond exports made by Zimbabwe and the revenues realised thereof]".²⁴ These lost revenues could have been allocated to strengthening election security, voter registration efforts, civic education programmes, or myriad other social programmes. Instead, they were siphoned away through state-backed networks of corruption and smuggling.
40. Public trust in Zimbabwe's electoral integrity has sharply declined due to widespread perceptions of financial mismanagement and political favouritism. According to the Afrobarometer Survey (2023), fewer than half (44%) of Zimbabweans say their 2018 election was largely free and fair.²⁵ One in three (33%) say they feared intimidation or violence "somewhat" or "a lot" during the campaign.²⁶

²⁴ Clemence Manyukwe. "Diamonds worth US\$1bn missing", *The Financial Gazette*, 12 August 2011, <https://archive.ph/20120731094003/http://www.financialgazette.co.zw/national-report/9417-diamonds-worth-us1bn-missing.html#selection-239.1-246.0>.

²⁵ Asafika Mpako and Simangele Moyo-Nyede. "Zimbabweans support multiparty competition, say policy preferences inform voter decisions", *Afrobarometer Dispatch*, No. 630, 11 April 2023, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AD630-Zimbabweans-look-to-policy-choices-in-upcoming-election-Afrobarometer-11april23.pdf>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

41. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2023) ranked Zimbabwe 149th out of 180 countries, confirming that public institutions, including those overseeing elections, are widely seen as compromised.²⁷ When a ruling party can outspend opposition candidates by a ratio of 15:1, largely through illicit means, it creates an unlevel playing field that undermines political competition and denies voters a meaningful choice.
42. Election funding disparities have been further exacerbated by foreign patronage networks and illicit mineral sales. Investigations by Global Witness found that diamond revenues have been used to finance off-budget security expenditures, strengthening state security forces that are often deployed to intimidate political opponents and control election outcomes. Additionally, foreign governments and entities with economic stakes in Zimbabwe's extractive industries have secretly funnelled campaign funds to the ruling party, ensuring policies remain favourable to their financial interests while silencing political dissent. These illicit networks subvert democracy by prioritising elite economic agendas over the political will of the people.
43. Election fraud and suppression efforts have also been reported during recent elections. Financial Times found that the 2023 general election was marred by delays, allegations of vote-rigging, and the arbitrary arrest of civil society election observers.²⁸ Ballot papers failed to arrive on time at polling stations in Harare and Bulawayo, areas known to be opposition strongholds, leading to concerns that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was complicit in voter suppression.²⁹ In fact, an Afrobarometer found that "fewer than half (47%) [of the citizens] say they trust the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission 'somewhat' or 'a lot'".³⁰ Political parties such as ZANU-PF have also been accused of intimidating voters through "exit polls" where citizens' names were recorded, potentially as a means of tracking and punishing dissenting votes.³¹
44. The use of illicit financial flows to manipulate Zimbabwe's elections shows how corruption doesn't just give unfair advantages—it weakens democracy itself. When ruling elites use state resources to fund their campaigns, they eliminate real competition, making it nearly impossible for opposition parties to win fairly. The huge financial gap between parties, combined with intimidation tactics, discourages voters from participating and erodes trust in the system. This creates a cycle where those in power use corruption to stay in control, turning elections into empty rituals rather than real opportunities for change. At the same time, institutions like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, which should protect fair elections, are either too

²⁷ Data derived from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>.

²⁸ Joseph Cotterill and Kudzanai Musengi. "Zimbabwe election marred by delays and vote-rigging accusations", *Financial Times*, 24 August 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/51c6cd1c-25bf-4120-94ea-6839292f60d7/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kindly refer to footnote 25.

³¹ Musa Kisa. "Zimbabwe's shambolic yet defining elections", *Democracy in Africa*, <https://democracyin africa.org/zimbabwes-shambolic-yet-defining-elections/>.

weak or too compromised to enforce transparency. Without fixing these financial and structural problems, Zimbabwe's elections will continue to be seen as unfair, deepening public frustration and disengagement from the democratic process.

The Committee should ask how Zimbabwe can strengthen the transparency of electoral funding, perhaps by mandating public disclosure of campaign finances and expenditures. Resources should be allocated to empower the ZEC, ensuring the equitable administration of elections. Independent audits of election-related spending should be implemented to enhance accountability.

Entrenchment of Economic Elitism and the Violation of Equality

45. Article 26 of the Covenant guarantees equality before the law and non-discrimination for civil societies protected under it. However, corruption and illicit financial flows (IFFs) have entrenched vast economic disparities in Zimbabwe, ensuring that the benefits of national wealth remain concentrated in the hands of political and business elites. The state's failure to ensure equitable distribution of resources has deprived marginalised communities of access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Zimbabwe lost over USD 32 B to IFFs between 2000 and 2020, an amount that could have significantly boosted public investments and reduced extreme poverty.³² Despite this vast loss, there has been little political will to recover misappropriated funds, with corruption remaining institutionalised and largely unchecked.
46. One of the most glaring examples of economic elitism through illicit financial flows is the Marange Diamond Fields scandal. Despite generating an estimated USD 15 B billion in revenue, only USD 2 B was accounted for, with the rest allegedly embezzled through state-linked smuggling operations and offshore laundering schemes. Former President Robert Mugabe publicly acknowledged these discrepancies, stating, "[t]here has been quite a lot of secrecy... and lots of swindling, smuggling".³³ The opaque nature of the mining sector, coupled with weak financial oversight mechanisms, has enabled officials and politically connected business figures to extract wealth while neglecting the needs of ordinary citizens. Local communities near the diamond fields suffer from severe environmental degradation, forced displacements, and economic marginalisation, demonstrating how state corruption further deepens inequality. The 2018 Parliamentary Committee investigating the loss of diamond revenues revealed that Kusena Diamonds—a company secretly owned by Zimbabwe's ruling party (ZANU-PF) and the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO)—was involved in illicit financial operations that deprived Zimbabwean citizens of their fair share of wealth.³⁴

³² Jeffrey Kurebwa. "Implications of Illicit Financial Flows on Zimbabwe's Development", *International Journal of World Policy and Development Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue. 2, pp: 27-34, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.32861/ijwpds.72.27.34/>.

³³ "Stones, seed and suffrage", *Global Witness*, 21 February 2020, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/conflict-minerals/stones-seed-and-suffrage/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

47. In addition to diamond smuggling, multinational corporations have also engaged in tax evasion schemes that have deprived Zimbabwe of billions in potential public revenue. The 2016 Panama Papers investigation exposed that Zimplats Holdings, Zimbabwe's largest platinum mining company, used offshore entities to shield executive salaries and evade local taxation. These practices, which have facilitated the externalisation of wealth, reduce the government's ability to fund essential services while ensuring that powerful corporate actors benefit from resource exploitation at the expense of national development.³⁵ The impact of these illicit practices is especially severe in rural communities, where over 70% of the population lacks access to electricity and clean water due to chronic underfunding.³⁶ This selective allocation of resources violates the principle of non-discrimination and perpetuates a system in which access to wealth and services is determined by political loyalty rather than human rights.
48. Beyond tax evasion and mineral wealth extraction, IFFs have also directly funded election-related patronage, reinforcing political elitism. Investigations by Global Witness revealed that revenues from a diamond company secretly co-owned by ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe's Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) were used to purchase cotton seed for distribution to rural communities in the run-up to the 2013 elections.³⁷ These vote-buying schemes, carried out through state-linked agricultural subsidy programmes, demonstrate how corruption subverts democratic choice by financially coercing voters into supporting the ruling party. This is especially alarming given that Zimbabwe's electoral law explicitly prohibits the use of public resources for partisan political gain under Section 136 of the Zimbabwean Electoral Act (2005), yet there has been no prosecution or accountability for these violations.
49. Zimbabwe's cycle of economic elitism not only undermines social mobility but also weakens institutions meant to ensure fairness, such as the judiciary and financial oversight bodies, which are often complicit in shielding corrupt actors from accountability. Without concrete efforts to dismantle these corrupt financial networks and redirect resources toward equitable development, Zimbabwe will continue to see deepening inequality, declining public trust, and a further erosion of basic human rights.

The Committee should ask how the State party can ensure that natural resource revenues are transparently allocated to improve healthcare, education, and infrastructure, particularly in underserved rural areas. The establishment of an independent natural resource fund could ensure that revenues are managed responsibly and equitably.

³⁵ Kindly refer to <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kindly refer to footnote 33.

Suppression of Civil Society and Democratic Advocacy

50. The scope of Article 25, the right to participate in the public affairs process, is not limited to voting but extends to the work of civil society organisations, media, and independent activists who advocate for transparency and government accountability. However, Zimbabwe has systematically repressed civil society and independent journalists who expose corruption and illicit financial flows. The government has increasingly weaponised state security forces, vague legal provisions, and arbitrary arrests to intimidate individuals advocating for free elections, anti-corruption measures, and human rights protections. These efforts have created an environment of fear and impunity, where those who challenge illicit financial practices face severe consequences.³⁸
51. Repression of civil society has been particularly evident in the lead-up to Zimbabwe's elections. The 2023 general election was marred by state-sanctioned crackdowns on civil society organisations. Security forces raided the Election Resource Centre and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, arresting 36 election monitors and confiscating their data on election irregularities.³⁹ Reports indicate that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and state security forces have actively worked to suppress independent election monitoring, making free and fair elections impossible.
52. Further evidence of state repression emerged in 2023 when up to 12 individuals associated with civil society organisations and opposition parties were abducted by intelligence-backed paramilitary units known as "ferret teams." Survivors of these disappearances reported being beaten, stripped naked, injected with unknown substances, and abandoned in remote areas after being warned to cease their political activities. These acts of political violence are directly tied to the ruling party's efforts to prevent anti-corruption advocates from exposing financial misconduct.⁴⁰
53. Internationally, Zimbabwe has faced sanctions and diplomatic isolation due to its ongoing suppression of civic activism. In March 2024, the United States and Britain imposed targeted sanctions on key Zimbabwean officials linked to gold smuggling networks and corruption. These officials were accused of laundering illicitly obtained gold revenues to finance violent crackdowns on journalists and activists who sought to expose corruption.⁴¹ Despite widespread international condemnation, Zimbabwe's Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) remains ineffective, having failed to

³⁸ "Zimbabwe: Joint statement calling on authorities to investigate the escalation of abductions, torture and killing of political activists", *Human Rights Watch*, 15 November 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/15/zimbabwe-joint-statement-calling-authorities-investigate-escalation-abductions/>.

³⁹ "Zimbabwe election marred by delays and vote-rigging accusations", *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/51c6cd1c-25bf-4120-94ea-6839292f60d7/>.

⁴⁰ Kindly refer to footnote 38.

⁴¹ "Treasury Sanctions Zimbabwe's President and Key Actors for Corruption and Serious Human Rights Abuse", *United States Treasury*, 4 March 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jv2154/>.

prosecute high-profile financial crimes despite ample evidence of misconduct. The lack of independent oversight mechanisms ensures that politically motivated corruption cases are routinely dismissed, reinforcing a culture of impunity.⁴²

54. The suppression of civil society in Zimbabwe presents significant challenges to transparency, accountability, and public trust in democratic processes. Restrictions on journalists, activists, and election monitors create an environment where concerns about governance and financial integrity cannot be openly addressed. When civil society organisations face legal and administrative barriers, and election observers encounter intimidation, it discourages broader civic engagement and weakens institutional credibility.
55. Ensuring that all stakeholders, including independent monitors and the media, can operate without fear is essential for strengthening trust in public institutions. Protecting the space for civil society to contribute constructively to governance discussions would not only enhance Zimbabwe's democratic framework but also support efforts to improve transparency and prevent financial misconduct. Establishing clear legal protections for whistle-blowers and ensuring independent oversight mechanisms would help reinforce Zimbabwe's commitment to participatory governance and international human rights standards.

The Committee should ask that the State party oversees robust protections for whistle-blowers and journalists in Zimbabwe. This includes enacting comprehensive whistle-blower protection legislation and restructuring the Anti-Corruption Commission to ensure its independence. International oversight mechanisms should be introduced to monitor compliance with these reforms.

Weak Plural Legal System Derived from Post-Colonial Fallout

Residual Fallout from Post-Colonial Transplantation

56. Zimbabwe has a unique legal system in the sense that their law was adopted from foreign jurisdictions then imposed into the country during the colonial era. Despite several years of Zimbabwe's independence, the legal system still holds residual traits of colonialism from their foreign powers. Indeed, the colonial and legal history of Zimbabwe is interconnected to South Africa's legal developments.
57. When the British settlers arrived in 1890, the area of "Zimbabwe" was ruled by the Shona and Ndebele tribes; the chiefs of these tribes had sovereign powers. Whilst the Shona people ruled the northern half of Zimbabwe, the Ndebele ruled the South. Before the British occupation, laws were not codified and enacted by custom; they were also issued by kings and judges who had the final say. Warriors would enforce these laws.

⁴² "ZIMBABWE: 'The government is using widespread intimidation to silence pro-democracy voices'", *CIVICUS*, 3 September 2024, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/7263-zimbabwe-the-government-is-using-widespread-intimidation-to-silence-pro-democracy-voices/>.

58. After the British settlers arrived, Western legal principles were imposed in Zimbabwe, intertwining with the existing cultural laws, creating a conflicting hybrid system. Following the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, they retained this plural legal structure; whilst customary law was still preserved under the new Constitution, the "weak" pluralism meant that multiple legal systems still exist to this day in Zimbabwe, deeply rooted in the colonial histories and customs of the Zimbabwe tribes.
59. As a result, the presence of multiple legal systems in Zimbabwe creates legal nuances when applying the law. Indeed, to apply the law to a society, one must have conformity and strict adherence; anything against a particular law would undermine the legal system as a whole. The implications of the hybrid legal system are felt today: customary laws have been used to justify the marginalisation of women, for example. In 1999, the Supreme Court case *Magaya v. Magaya* upheld a customary law precedent favouring male heirs for property rights, a result of a deeply rooted cultural tradition which was able to be recognised as law due to the pluralist legal system.

Zimbabwe's pluralist legal system, a mesh of law rooted in customs without code and a Western-imposed colonial era set of rules, affects civil society today by creating ambiguity in the law and preventing the legal frameworks of Zimbabwe from ensuring solid recognition of rights under law. The Committee should ask Zimbabwe what measures it is taking to rid its legal system of customary law; the Centre urges the Committee to recognise their legal framework as the basis for human rights violations and hopes the Committee will move to mandate its removal in the concluding observations.

Establishment of Authoritarian State Through Consolidation of Legal Power

60. Zimbabwe is on the route to evolve into an authoritarian state, made possible by the exploitation of Zimbabwe's weak legal system, notably under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. In late 1987, Constitutional amendments transformed Zimbabwe's political structure. The amendments allowed an executive presidency role to be created, merging the roles of head of state, government, and military into a single position.
61. The consolidation of power granted the position numerous legal authorities to enact control of Zimbabwe's political system, undermining the true rights of Zimbabwe civil society from participating in the decision-making process. Specifically, the consolidation granted the authority to dissolve parliament; declare martial law; and run for an unlimited number of terms.
62. In January 2025, the ruling ZANU-PF party indicated its intentions to extend the current President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, 's term by two years beyond the constitutionally permitted limit, to 2030. Indeed, the contemporary actions of government mirror the past tactics used to consolidate political power. The weak legal frameworks seen in Zimbabwe on the highest levels of government have been

an area for concern both past and in the present: should the consolidation of power through a weak legal system be possible, the true voices of Zimbabwe civil society will continue to be unrecognised, preventing them from realising their ability to properly participate in the Zimbabwe government's public affairs, as such granted under Article 25.

Conclusion

63. In conclusion, the human rights situation in Zimbabwe as it concerns civic participation is deeply troubling. The Centre hopes the Committee has found this report valuable and will focus its concluding observations on the issues outlined. The Centre strongly advocates for comprehensive reforms aimed at ensuring free and fair elections, strengthening civic education, and eliminating systemic barriers to political engagement.
64. In particular, the Committee should centre its dialogue with Zimbabwe on the suppression of political opposition through military and state-sponsored violence, the entrenched gender disparities that prevent women from participating fully in public life, and the widespread corruption that undermines electoral integrity and democratic governance. These critical issues directly violate the core of Article 25 rights for Zimbabwean civil society and threaten the future of democracy in the country. Addressing them is essential to ensuring a secure and just political environment for all Zimbabweans.
65. This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact Executive Director of the Centre, Mr. Samad QURASHI, at squraishi@cvia.ch. Many thanks to the authors / contributors of this report:
- **Mr. Samad QURASHI**, Executive Director, for his contributions on the section regarding the weak legal frameworks in Zimbabwe;
 - **Mr. Vedansh GARG**, Assistant Director (vgarg@cvia.ch) for his work on the status of corruption in Zimbabwe;
 - **Ms. Antonia GOUVIS**, Assistant Director (vgarg@cvia.ch) for her contributions on the role of women;
 - **Ms. Hanna ROHDE**, Assistant Director (hrohde@cvia.ch) for her writing on the implications of military force on the political system; and
 - **Ms. Janhitha VEERAMACHANENI** for her writing on the state of civic engagement (jveeramachaneni@cvia.ch).