



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Watch Country Report: Zimbabwe August 2021

Between 1983 and 1987, the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army killed more than [20,000 ethnic Ndebele](#) civilians in Matabeleland and Midlands. Thousands more were detained, tortured, or raped. The atrocities, known as “Gukurahundi,” constituted genocide because the Shona-dominated Fifth Brigade intentionally destroyed a substantial part of the Ndebele ethnic group.

In 2018, the Zimbabwean government formed the [National Peace and Reconciliation Committee](#). The Committee has not formally acknowledged the Gukurahundi genocide. Perpetrators have not been held accountable for their crimes. Victims’ families have not received compensation. Genocide Watch recognizes Gukurahundi as a genocide and calls on the Zimbabwean government to end its denial.

A [military coup](#) in 2017 ended Robert Mugabe’s oppressive 37-year reign. Mugabe’s successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, was Mugabe’s ZANU-PF comrade. He planned and directed the Gukurahundi genocide. ZANU-PF is dominated by the Shona. ZANU-PF youth militias have a history of violently suppressing political opponents, protestors, and other ethnic groups, especially the Matabele (Ndebele).

When Mnangagwa was officially elected in 2018, large-scale protests ensued. Similar to the [2008 election violence](#) carried out by ZANU-PF thugs, in 2018, [six protestors](#) were killed and 35 were wounded by state security forces. Members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change were beaten or killed. Perpetrators of the 2008 and 2018 repression have never been held accountable.

In January 2019, state security forces responded to civilian protests against increased [fuel prices](#) and severe food shortages with excessive force, killing 17 people. 17 women were arrested and raped.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, government crackdowns on freedom of speech and media intensified. Using vague new laws on misinformation, Zimbabwean authorities [harassed journalists](#) and protestors with arbitrary arrests, detention, and torture.

The LGBT+ community also faces state-sanctioned discrimination. Zimbabwe’s constitution bans same-sex marriage, and a 2006 law criminalizes any actions [perceived as homosexual](#). Such laws encourage homophobia. They officially stigmatize LGBT+ people.

Genocide Watch considers the situation in Zimbabwe to be at **Stage 3: Discrimination**. Ethnic Matabele, political dissidents, and LGBT+ individuals face discrimination and arbitrary arrests by security forces.

Zimbabwe is also at **Stage 10: Denial**. The government’s denial that the Gukurahundi was a genocide and its refusal to hold perpetrators of grave human rights abuses accountable has created a culture of impunity. Political and military leaders believe they will never be prosecuted for their crimes.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- Zimbabwe should recognize the Gukurahundi as a genocide. Zimbabwe’s government should compensate descendants of its victims. Surviving leaders of the genocide should be prosecuted.
- Leaders of the 2018 election violence and January 2019 crackdown should be prosecuted.
- The EU, U.S., and U.N. should maintain financial sanctions and arms embargoes on Zimbabwe.
- Zimbabwe should repeal its legal restrictions on freedom of the media and freedom to protest.
- Zimbabwe should repeal its 2006 law that criminalizes all homosexual acts.