



Country Profile: Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean crisis has been the result of internal and external political forces that have been mounting for years. Internal tensions have been high between the two major political parties, ZANU PF and the MDC. The animosity between these two groups has continuously mutated since the original political rift between Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and Robert Mugabe's ZANU. Mugabe ordered the Gukurahunde, the genocidal massacres by the Fifth Brigade against the Matabele people in the 1980's, and forced Nkomo to dissolve ZAPU so that Zimbabwe became a one party state.

Zimbabwe's external crises began in the 1990's when the Zimbabwean government had a falling out with the British government under Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had recently been elected. His administration decided not to continue funding the land resettlement program in Zimbabwe, a program the Conservative party had honored since the 1989 Lancaster House agreements that brought independence to Zimbabwe. Blair's administration cited misuse of the funds by ZANU, allegations that the Zimbabwean government vehemently denied.

The tides changed for Zimbabwe when a rival political party emerged, posing the first real threat to ZANU-PF. This party called itself MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) and was led by Morgan Tsvangirai, a Shona. Mugabe argued that this party was backed by foreign powers whose motives were to infiltrate the country and impose their agendas upon Zimbabwe. Mugabe then approved the violent farm invasions in which marginalized black people simply approached farms of their choice and ordered the white people off the land. Mugabe asserted that forced land redistribution constituted "liberation" of Zimbabwe from prior forced takeover of land by white colonizers.

In preparation for the 2002 presidential election, draconian laws were enacted by ZANU-PF, which made it virtually impossible for the opposition (MDC) to compete or campaign. An example was the "Public Order Security Act" (POSA), which gave the police power to arrest or harass any public gatherings not sanctioned by the police themselves. This stopped MDC members from campaigning and in the rare event they managed to obtain authorization to gather, the red tape and bureaucracy they encountered proved to be so onerous that they usually ignored the process. Another law enacted in 2002 was the "Access to information and protection of privacy act" (AIPPA) which dictated the limits within which all forms of media could operate. This meant all material that did not sympathize with the ZANU-PF agenda was banned, preventing the MDC from campaigning in newspapers, TV or radio. Imposition of this law caused many foreign media companies to close their doors and leave Zimbabwe. These laws were enforced with a single purpose in mind, to consolidate the power of ZANU-PF and eliminate any possible threats to its dominance.

In addition to these laws, the Zimbabwean government trained a special ZANU-PF youth brigade," which terrorized and intimidated the electorate all over the country before the elections. Even MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai himself was physically attacked. The elections were held and Robert Mugabe was declared the winner despite widespread evidence of voter intimidation and fraud.

In a nation in which many people do not believe in violence, Tsvangirai knew he could not galvanize the people to revolt or fight back, so instead he campaigned for sanctions against the Zimbabwean government with the hope of backing Mugabe's regime into a corner. The sanctions came from the West and the economy of Zimbabwe was brought to its knees by way of mismanagement and the brutal effects of the sanctions. This only made ZANU-PF dig deeper trenches. They labeled Tsvangirai a traitor who wanted nothing but pain and suffering for Zimbabwe and blamed his efforts for the great suffering the people have endured. These sanctions have ultimately had a greater negative effect upon the citizens of Zimbabwe than they have had on the ruling party.

In 2005, the MDC split, with one side led by Morgan Tsvangirai and the other by Arthur Mutambara. As the 2008 elections approached, the atmosphere was calm in comparison with the 2002 elections. People voted, but it took months for the results to be announced, and when they were released, no official explanation for the delay was given. The results announced that Morgan Tsvangirai had received the majority of the votes, but they fell just short of the absolute majority necessary to clinch victory so there



would be a run off election. Tsvangirai feared that violence by the ZANU-PF youth brigades would resume, so Tsvangirai did not participate in the run off election. By default, Mugabe was re-elected President.

Financial sanctions were biting, and the formerly productive commercial farms no longer produced the surpluses they once did before the land invasions, sending food prices sky-rocketing. The Zimbabwean currency became worthless. Due to its clear loss of legitimacy, ZANU-PF decided to create a coalition government with the MDC. Tsvangirai agreed to join this coalition, a decision that was met with disappointment from many MDC supporters. In this coalition government, Mugabe would remain President and Tsvangirai would be the Prime Minister, with Arthur Mutambara as Deputy Prime Minister. Although the purpose of this coalition was to form a power sharing structure, Mugabe marginalized Tsvangirai by placing MDC ministers over powerless ministries while keeping the powerful ministries of defense, public security, and the intelligence service in the hands of ZANU-PF.

The coalition government is set to expire in March 2013, and Robert Mugabe has expressed the desire to hold elections in 2012. Tsvangirai on the other hand, wants a new constitution to be drafted in hopes of creating a level playing field to avoid a repeat of events that occurred during the last election. There is speculation that Mugabe is looking for a successor to take his place after he wins. Factions are emerging within ZANU PF along tribal lines and by political patronage.

Zimbabwe remains deeply polarized and politically unstable. Genocide Watch considers Zimbabwe to be at Stage 5: Polarization.



Zimbabwe: Stage 5 – Polarization

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According to the 8 stages of genocide, Zimbabwe is currently at stage 5: 'polarization'. Like many other African countries, the tensions within the country have much to do with the country's ethnic and colonial history. Polarization has always been high between the Shona and the Matabele and between the black population and the white minority. Robert Mugabe has ruled the country since 1980, after years of guerrilla war against harsh white minority rule. After taking power, Mugabe's party (ZANU-PF) has tried to eliminate all sources of opposition in order to stay in power.

In 1983 and 1984 massacres of over 20,000 Matabele citizens of Zimbabwe were committed by the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe Army. These massacres are called the "Gukurahundi". This mass atrocity meets the definition of genocide because it targeted ethnic Matabele people. The massacres were carried out by the North-Korean trained, exclusively Shona Fifth Brigade under orders from President Mugabe. Genocide Watch called in September 2010 for prosecution of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and other leaders for genocide and crimes against humanity for the Gukurahundi (see below).

The small white minority (under 100,000 people) was targeted by Mugabe's dictatorship in order to gain support from the black population. Mugabe launched a "land reform" campaign to return white-owned land to black Zimbabweans, but without adequate compensation. Much of the land went to Mugabe's political cronies. The rest has returned to subsistence farming. Land invasions by Mugabe's ZANU-PF militias have caused agricultural and economic collapse, as white farmers fled Zimbabwe with their families before black managers could be trained to run the commercial farms that had made Zimbabwe agriculturally self-sufficient.

Agricultural workers fled to Zimbabwe's cities when the commercial farms collapsed, and built shantytowns around them. In a vicious policy called "Drive Out the Filth", Mugabe's government bulldozed the shantytowns and left hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans homeless and starving. This policy was declared a Crime Against Humanity and an early warning sign of genocide in a resolution of the International Association of Genocide Scholars in 2007.

Since 2000, Mugabe's ZANU-PF has faced growing opposition from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which transcends ethnic divisions. After the 2008 elections, which were accompanied by systematic fraud and attacks on thousands of suspected opposition voters, a government of national unity was formed with the MDC. Nevertheless, ZANU-PF is still trying to rule the country on his own.

Mugabe and the ZANU-PF are not facing the truth about the Gukurahundi, despite courageous MDC members like Minister for Education David Coltart who has stated that the Gukurahundi was genocide (see articles "It was genocide - Coltart" and "Rights violations: Zimbabwe must face the truth"). Currently, the 87-year old Mugabe is pushing for a quick election so the MDC cannot organize against him. If ZANU-PF militias again try to steal the next election, the situation could degenerate further into the preparation stage for genocide or politicide.