

General Facts on Zimbabwe

The Republic of Zimbabwe is situated in Southern Africa. It is bordered by South Africa (south), Botswana (southwest), Zambia (west) and Mocambique (east).

The population is estimated at just over 12 million people, consisting mostly of Shona (69 %) and Nguni (17 %).

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Brief History

Several African tribes such as the Shona, Ndebele and Tonga lived in the area that is now known as Zimbabwe for centuries before the arrival of the first Europeans. The ancient stone structures at Khami, [Great Zimbabwe](#) and Dhlo-Dhlo prove that some of these civilizations had indeed reached a high level of sociological, cultural and political development. Trading may have been established with Arabs and other East African groups as early as the 12th century.

In the 1400's, King Motota's Mwene Mutapa (or Monomatapas) empire included all of the Rhodesian plateau as well as large parts of what is now Mozambique. Portuguese traders introduced Roman Catholic Christianity to the area sometime in the 1500's. Conflict with the Portuguese later contributed to the downfall of the Mweni Mitapa empire.

However, several Shona tribes came together to form the Rozwi empire that covered most of present day Zimbabwe. They drove the Portuguese from the Rhodesian plateau and peace and prosperity reigned in the area until about the middle of the 19th century. At about this time, the famous explorer and missionary, David Livingstone, explored the area and became the first known European to see the magnificent Victoria Falls.

Later that century, the Ndebele tribe granted mineral rights to British magnate Cecil John Rhodes, and by the 1890's much of present-day Zimbabwe and Zambia was controlled by Rhodes's British South African Company. More white settlers came to the area which was named Rhodesia with present-day Zimbabwe known as Southern Rhodesia and present-day Zambia known as Northern Rhodesia.

Rebellions by local tribes were crushed mercilessly and the discovery of rich mineral sources brought more Europeans to the area.

In 1923 Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing colony of the British Empire and in 1953 the British government created the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, consisting of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (present-day Malawi). This federation was dissolved in 1963, and the next year Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia was granted independence as Malawi and Zambia respectively.

In spite of Great Britain's objections, Prime Minister Ian Smith's government declared Rhodesia independent in 1965 and it became a republic five years later in 1970. In the meantime, however, voting restrictions, poor labor conditions and low wages led to a growing discontent among many blacks in the country, and this gradually escalated into a full-fledged liberation war.

At the forefront of this struggle for liberation was the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu), mostly Ndebele, led by Joshua Nkomo. It was later joined by Ndabaningi Sithole's Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu), a break-away group that had its power-base mostly among the Shona.

At the height of this guerrilla –war, many rural areas were completely under the control of Zapu and Zanu, and the country found itself largely isolated due to Angola and Mozambique becoming independent. The war lasted until 1979 when a cease-fire was reached between the guerillas and the Rhodesian government.

Following democratic elections in 1980, Zanu came to power with Robert Mugabe, who had since taken over its leadership, elected as president. The country's name was subsequently changed to the Republic of Zimbabwe. Originally committed to Marxist-Leninism, Mugabe later relented to economic and political realities, which enabled the economy to recover from the devastating effects of the civil war.

In the late 1990's, the government committed itself to the redistribution of white-owned farming land to its peasant-supporters. The way in which the redistribution was handled led to civil unrest, economical decline and a mounting political opposition to Mugabe's government. This issue is still not resolved, and may very well be the most important political factor to determine the state of Zimbabwe's well being for the first decades of the new millennium.

General Statistics (1995)

Total Land Area: - 391 000 sq. km (USA: 9 529 000; UK 244 000; RSA: 1 222 000)

Population: - 11,163,160 (July 1999 estimate)

Population growth rate: - 1.78% (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: - 72.7 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

- Total population: 41.35 years
- Male: 39.73 years

Total fertility rate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female: 43.01 years (1995 est.)
People Groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4.93 children born/woman (1995 est.)
Capital:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shona (7 groups) - 70 % • Nguni (Ndebele) - 17 % • Malawians & Mozamb. - 7 % • Other Indigenous - 5 % • European - 1 %
Literacy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harare (former Salisbury) 1 316 000 inwoners - 76% (USA 95 %; UK 97 %; RSA 64%)
Official Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English (total of 19 languages, Shona imost generally spoken)
Economy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mining, commercial farming, indistry.
Labor force:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3.1 million (1987)
Labor by occupation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture - 74% • Transport and services - 16% • Mining, manufacturing, construction 10%
Natural resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coal, chromium ore, asbestos, gold, nickel, copper, iron ore, vanadium, lithium, tin, platinum group metals.
Independance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1980 (1965 – whites only)
Government type:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliamentary democracy (officially a Marxist-Leninist republic)
Administrative divisions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8 provinces and 2 cities* with provincial status; Bulawayo*, Harare*, Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Masvingo, Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Midlands

Religious Statistics (2001)

Religious freedom is guarenteed in the constitution. However, missionaries and other foreign groups sometimes experience hostility from government officials who regard them as unessassary intruders.

Christian - 71 % (growth +2,3 %)

Christian Detail

- Protestant – 17,5 % (growth +3,1 %)
- Independent – 36,5 % (growth +2,4 %)
- Unaffiliated – 13,7 %
- Roman Catholic – 8,7 % (growth –0,1 %)
- Anglican – 2,7 % (growth +2,7 %)
- African Indigenous Churches - 15 % (growth +4,7 %)
- Other Marginal groups – 1 %
- Largest Groups: Z. Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican Church, United Methodist Church, Salvation Army, Methodist Church, Church of Christ, Baptist Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.

Traditional Religions	- 26 % (growth –0,8%)
Muslim	- 1, % (growth +2,7%)
Other/atheist	- 4 % (including Baha'i, Hindu aand Jewish)

NOTE: Some researchers calculated that 50 % of Zimbabwe's population adhere to syncretic Christianity (a mixture of Christianity and traditional beliefs). This would bring the percentage of Christians and adherents to traditional religions down to respectively 25 % and 24 %, with 1 % of the population being Muslim.