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Conflict Risk Diagnostic: Zimbabwe



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Executive Summary

Facing extreme hyperinflation, a history of economic crises, corrupt governance, and frequent droughts due to climate change, Zimbabwe is currently challenged with high poverty rates and the risk of economic collapse. Despite a military coup in 2018, new leadership, and promises of reform, problems persist.¹ Rural-urban tensions and clashes between the leading party and the opposition have maintained a tense environment as the country attempts to recover from the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar. Allegations of the government building its weapons stockpiles have increased concern of violent suppression of opposition.² Our analysis has concluded that Zimbabwe is likely to maintain the status quo and eventually face a risk of intrastate conflict due to growing discontent. These findings are premised upon the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project (CIFP) and were arrived at by utilizing its categorical risk assessment mechanism.

Background

Zimbabwe gained its independence from Britain in 1980 under revolutionary leader Robert Mugabe. President and Prime Minister Mugabe was head of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) for 37 years. In 1999, Mugabe's land acquisition and redistribution policies strained relationships with the United States (U.S.) and the EU. Both imposed long-term sanctions against Mugabe's government for corruption and clamping down on political dissidence and opposition. The state has struggled with hyperinflation since 1998 when the government increased the money supply to cover budget deficits and national debt. In November 2008 the inflation rate reached 98%. The Zimbabwe dollar was suspended by the government and the USD was adopted in its place. Inflation rose to 500% in 2019.³ In November 2018, a 'soft' military coup by ZANU-PF and the military removed Mugabe from power. His replacement, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, has continued violent responses to political dissidence and the targeting of opposition,⁴ prompting a continuation of sanctions by the US. Inflation continues to be a threat for Zimbabwe's economy.⁵

External Stakeholders

United States (Mixed)	U.S. has targeted sanctions against government officials and state-run institutions in Zimbabwe since 2002 for human rights violations. The U.S. is the largest provider of Zimbabwe foreign aid, with USD\$318 million in aid sent in 2019 alone. ⁶
China (Mixed)	China maintains close bilateral relations with ZANU-PF. Mugabe's Look East Policy (LEP) led to China's investment in infrastructure projects within Zimbabwe. Opposition parties criticize investments as a guise for theft of Zimbabwean resources. ⁷
European Union (EU) (Positive)	The EU removed past restrictions and now engages in political dialogue with Zimbabwe. ⁸ In 2020, the EU launched the Zimbabwe European Partnership Agreement Support programme (ZEPA) to help implement a Zimbabwe-EU Free Trade Agreement. ⁹
International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Positive)	The IMF approved a Staff-Monitored Program (SMP) for Zimbabwe for May 2019 to March 2020 to support the government's reform agenda in an effort to facilitate economic stability and improve the country's international engagement. ¹⁰ The IMF has yet to allow Zimbabwe to obtain financing since it began defaulting on its debt in 1999. ¹¹
South African Development Community (SADC) (Negative)	The SADC, comprised of 16 South-African nations, has continuously called for an end to all sanctions against Zimbabwe, blaming the sanctions for Zimbabwe's economic situation. The organization has called on the international community to enhance its economic cooperation with Zimbabwe. ¹²

Internal Stakeholders	
ZANU-PF (Negative)	ZANU-PF is the dominant party in Zimbabwe, supported by the military. President Mnangagwa is its current leader. Mnangagwa has attempted to improve the party's image internationally by promising reform, but has continued to suppress and target opposition within the state. ¹³
Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A) (Positive)	MDC-A is the main opposition party, led by Nelson Chamisa. The party has criticized the current ZANU-PF regime and called for democratic and social reforms. They also maintain that the 2018 elections were neither free nor fair. The opposition and its supporters have been subject to attack and harassment from the government. ¹⁴
Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) (Negative)	The military (the ZDF) takes on the role of enforcing and maintaining power for ZANU-PF. The ZDF led the coup that solidified Mnangagwa's power. However, Mnangagwa has been removing military leaders involved in the coup to decrease the potential for another military coup. ¹⁵ Recently, the ZDF barred recruits from urban regions from joining, in a clear effort to prevent MDC supporters from joining their ranks. ¹⁶

Economic Performance		High Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	In 2018, 48% of Zimbabwe's GDP was attributable to trade. ¹⁷		
Destabilizing Factors	Zimbabwe's government has not provided official economic data since 2018, when its total GDP was \$31,000,519.45 USD, ¹⁸ its GDP per capita was \$3,029.8 USD ¹⁹ and its GDP growth rate was 6.2%. ²⁰ The IMF estimates that Zimbabwe's 2019 GDP growth rate was -7.7%. ²¹ The estimated average inflation rate for 2019 was close to 180% and the average exchange rate was 1 USD : 16.5 ZWL. ²² Hyperinflation in 2019 likely reduced foreign direct investment net inflow from 2.4% of Zimbabwe's GDP in 2018 ²³ and increased the total debt service from 2.0% of Gross National Income from 2018. ²⁴ Zimbabwe's last official inequality score was 43.2 in 2011. ²⁵ 2018 data suggests the number remains relatively close to 40. ²⁶		
Analysis	Lasting hyper-inflation has left Zimbabwe's government incapable of providing basic social services (healthcare, education, power and food security) to its population and has discouraged foreign investment in Zimbabwe. ²⁷ Although about half of Zimbabwe's GDP in 2018 was supplied through trade, the low level of foreign direct investment in Zimbabwe's economy combined with the government's inability to provide social services to its population hinders its future economic development and recovery after inflation levels decrease. ²⁸ Rather than relying on the federal government, Zimbabweans have relied on informal market practices such as bartering and the black market. In 2018, the IMF concluded that Zimbabwe has the second largest informal market in the world, contributing 60% of the country's GDP. ²⁹		

Governance and Political Stability		High Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	According to Freedom in the World 2019, Zimbabwe's freedom status changed from 'Not Free' to 'Partly Free' due to the 2018 Presidential elections. ³⁰ The Zimbabwe Reconstruction Fund (ZIMREF) created by the World Bank ran from May 2014 until December 2019, with projects to improve governance and development. Independent reporting and evaluations were done twice annually to ensure transparency. ³¹		
Destabilizing Factors	Bribery and Corruption: (100-Good / 0-Bad) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency International Corruption Index: 22/100³² • World Governance Indicator - Control of Corruption: 10/100³³ • Corruption Score: 24/100 • Global Corruption Ranking: 158/180 (Country ranking, 180 most corrupt)³⁴ Freedom: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate Freedom Score: 31/100³⁵ • Press Freedom Ranking: 127/180 (180 least free)³⁶ Other: Continued suppression of opposition forces, including through violent means. ³⁷		
Analysis	While there are indicators of minor improvement in governance, high levels of corruption, minimal press freedom, lack of transparency, and a low aggregate freedom score coupled with the continued suppression of opposition by the government make governance and political freedoms high risk issues for Zimbabwe. Continued suppression of protests and opposition forces may risk more frequent clashes with state forces.		

Environmental Stress		High Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	Zimbabweans currently face recurring droughts, limited access to clean water and extreme weather events such as floods resulting from major storms which are directly correlated with climate change in the region.		
Destabilizing Factors	Lack of regulation and monitoring of the mining sector has led to poor practices. ³⁸ Additionally, the increased levels of greenhouse gas emissions have had a direct impact on rainfall levels and frequency. ³⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Carbon Dioxide emissions: 9.4mt⁴⁰ • Carbon Dioxide emissions per capita: 750kg⁴¹ 		
Analysis	According to the CIA's Factbook analysis, Zimbabwe has an array of environmental issues including deforestation, soil erosion, land degradation, air and water pollution, the poaching of the black rhinoceros herds and poor mining practices. In particular, mining activities have led to toxic waste and heavy metal pollution due to a lack of monitoring. ⁴² Over a million people are illegally panning for gold in Zimbabwe's rivers. ⁴³ Consequently, deforestation and digging in river beds have resulted in landslides, siltation of water bodies and destruction of aquatic biodiversity. Additionally, the mining process has polluted water systems with heavy metals such as mercury, iron and cyanide. ⁴⁴ The mean annual rainfall level has decreased by 5% throughout the second half of the 20th century. Surface temperature is expected to rise faster than the regional average. ⁴⁵ Although severe floods and storms are identified as rare, the state capability to deal with such events is low. Thus, man-made environmental issues and recurring drought in addition to low state capacity to handle these issues poses an increasing risk.		

History of Armed Conflict		High Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	According to data on organized violence events and events targeting civilians, there was a significant decline in both in 2019 with 58 and 62 respectively, compared to 162 and 164 in 2017 and 164 and 180 in 2018. ⁴⁶ It is not clear if this is because the protesters have protested less following the ousting of Mugabe and the election, or because the ZANU-PF controlled police and military have acted less against protesters, the latter being unlikely given the reporting of continued suppression and violence against protesters and opposition members. ⁴⁷		
Destabilizing Factors	The ZANU-PF and military continue to coordinate to suppress and scare protesters and opposition to the Mnangagwa ZANU-PF administration. ⁴⁸ While violent events declined significantly in 2019, within the four-year period examined since 2015 (102 violent events and 114 events targeting civilians), a sharp decline in 2016 to 77 violent events and 83 events targeting civilians, was followed in 2017 by an even sharper increase in violence. ⁴⁹ There is also a growing population of refugees and asylum-seekers in Zimbabwe, from 6,950 refugees and 259 asylum-seekers in 2015 to 7,797 refugees and 10,210 asylum-seekers in 2018. ⁵⁰		
Analysis	Whether or not the decline in organized violence and events targeting civilians will continue is unknown, though it is unlikely that either cease altogether as the Zimbabwean Defense Forces and police are preparing for further unrest. ⁵¹ Dealing with a large refugee population during a drought, while the opposition continues to seek a peaceful political solution to the previous election amidst their protests and with growing inflation, President Mnangagwa and the ZANU-PF face threats to their legitimacy, their population and those under their care, and to their economy. Given the history of cracking down on dissidents to maintain control, it is not unlikely that it will happen again.		

Human Development		High Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	Presence of international partners to provide funds for development and means of the monitoring process. Overall the ZIMREF provided over USD\$43 million to projects including water sanitation, efficient governance structure, cost-effective management and administration of procurement process, and transparent allocation of funds. ⁵⁵ The Health Results Innovation Trust Fund Global Financing Facility's grant provides Zimbabwe with \$53 million for the development of the health sector. ⁵⁶		
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Human Development Index (1-perfectly developed / 0- completely underdeveloped):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human development value: 0.563 / 1.⁵⁷ • Global ranking: 150 / 189 (Country ranking, 189 most underdeveloped).⁵⁸ • Poor improvement of the HDI value. Increase of 0.01 points since the last HDI study in 2017.⁵⁹ <p>The end of international aid such as the ZIMREF was set to run until December 2019⁶⁰ and the high levels of corruption in the health and education sector.⁶¹</p>		
Analysis	Education and health services are the most vulnerable sectors to corruption in Zimbabwe. Economic and political instability produced shortcomings in the public sector, including ill management of public resources, especially in the public procurement sector. Although the Procurement Act requires competitiveness on bidding, it lacks more strict regulations in the procurement process, and the government can waive specific requirements. ⁶³ Consequently, the lack of international support programs' monitoring capabilities risks creating a decline in human development levels. Zimbabwe faces significant gaps in water sanitation, food shortages, medicinal supplies and qualified personnel in the education and health systems. The 2020 budget devotes roughly ZWL\$8 billion for infrastructure, personnel and food aid programs, however, it lacks any concrete execution plan to achieve these goals. ⁶⁴		

Militarization		Medium Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	Declining trend of membership in the armed forces relative to the total population, 0.77 military members per thousand people in 2015, 0.76 in 2016 and 0.75 in 2018, is a potential stabilizing factor. ⁵² The annual decline, however, of approximately 0.01 a year is minimal.		
Destabilizing Factors	Zimbabwe's military spending (as a percentage of the GDP) trend is mostly stable, 2.3% in 2015, 2.2% in 2016, 1.9% in 2017 and 2.2% again in 2018 ⁵³ . Zimbabwe's level of spending makes them one of the larger spenders in the region. Zimbabwe, according to media reporting, is using money received for aid on small arms (pistols, assault rifles, sniper rifles, RPGs) and ammunition (rounds of all types, smoke, tear gas and stun grenades) likely to be used on protestors. ⁵⁴		
Analysis	While the declining military population, relative to the overall population, is a minor positive indicator, military spending continues at a relatively steady rate appearing to supply the Zimbabwean military with sufficient arms and ammunition to aid in the suppression of protests. Though military spending as an indicator has not increased overall which could greatly increase risk of conflict, where the budget is being spent and why is of concern.		

International Linkages		Medium Risk	Increasing
Stabilizing Factors	Zimbabwe continues to engage the international community at large through both its 'Look East Policy' (LEP), with a long held Chinese focus, and through some international aid organizations, such as USAID. ⁶⁵ Zimbabwe maintains relationships regionally through organizations such as the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). ⁶⁶		
Destabilizing Factors	The LEP while inviting East-Asian investment has instead encouraged predatory resource extraction and general operating practices, facilitating \$15 billion worth of diamonds in the Chiadzwa mining area in Marange disappearing or the lack of taxation on foreign businesses, for example. ⁶⁷ The 2001 Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA), passed by the U.S. Congress, subsequently amended in 2018, continues to restrict U.S. support for multilateral financing to Zimbabwe until Zimbabwe makes specified political and economic reforms. This, in conjunction with U.S. sanctions applied in 2003, are the reason for LEP. ⁶⁸		
Analysis	The lack of social development and local spillover resulting from the LEP and other trade relationships exacerbates social unrest already present following the removal of Mugabe in 2017, the election and protests, the flooding and the drought. The Mnangagwa administration, like its predecessor, relies heavily on foreign aid to supplement its development efforts, giving lots of power to the East-Asian investing states, stoking more protest and domestic unrest against the government as they put Zimbabweans out of work. ⁶⁹		

Demographic Stress		Low Risk	Stable
Stabilizing Factors	Zimbabwe's population in 2019 was around 14.65 million. The population was widely dispersed (37.5 people per square kilometer) and growing at a rate of approximately 2.27% annually. Only 32% of Zimbabwe's population lived in cities and the urban population growth rate was around 1.5% per year. ⁷⁰		
Destabilizing Factors	In 2019, approximately 42% of the population was between the ages of 0-14. ⁷¹		
Analysis	Zimbabwe's population has been consistently growing at a healthy rate since 2005, although about 37.9% of people live in extreme poverty. Improvements to their living conditions have been made in the last two decades, such as improved access to water for 96% of the population and increased education to bring the literacy rate to 94.5%. ⁷² Since young people constitute over half of Zimbabwe's population, there may not be enough jobs for the growing population in unskilled labor. Alternatively, if the Zimbabwean economy develops in such a way that requires young labor and a growth in demand for employment, there may be opportunities for the economy to develop. ⁷³		

Religious and Ethnic Diversity		Low Risk	Stable
Factors	<p>Ethnicity: 70% Shona, 20% Ndebele, 10% other (Kalanga, Nambya, Tonga, Enda). Official Languages: Shona, Nebele, and English⁷⁴ Religion: Christianity 87.4% (Protestant Christianity 74.8%), 10.5% Atheist or Agnostic, 2.1% other (Muslim, traditional African Religions)⁷⁵ Religious freedom is protected within the Zimbabwe constitution. Few religious groups with political affiliations have been monitored by the government.⁷⁶</p>		
Analysis	<p>Ethnic and religious diversity are not a major threat to Zimbabwe, as the country maintains a high level of religious homogeneity. Monitoring of religious groups by the government has been done on the basis of political affiliations rather than to target any specific religion, therefore this does not factor in as a threat for religious diversity in the state.</p>		

Scenarios	
Worst Case	<p>Zimbabwe faces total economic collapse as well as government collapse. Sanctions against specific individuals prevent American businesses from contributing to development projects, which impact the Zimbabwean population. China and other Southeast Asian companies will continue to exploit the resources of Zimbabwe, draining the country of natural resources, before abandoning them. Discontent constituents increase protests due to dire economic circumstances and corruption. Continued targeting of the opposition and activists by the government leads to more clashes and an eventual civil war ensues. The opposition chooses to arm itself and weapons begin freely flowing into Zimbabwe, increasing the intensity of civil war.</p>
Best Case	<p>Mnangagwa chooses to commit to his reform promises, taking advantage of the IMF SMP and the ZIMREF. International linkages increase and improve, and trade booms, including the confirmation of the EU-Zimbabwe FTA. A more efficient and transparent democratic system is implemented. The government implements anti-corruption measures and stops attacks of opposition, leading to a removal of U.S. sanctions. Inflation level decreases and the currency remains stable. The informal market is formalized by the state to foster economic growth.</p>
Most Likely	<p>The status quo is maintained. Urban - rural tensions grow, opposition to government increases. Clashes do occur but rural/pro-government forces are supported by the government, and opposition is suppressed. Zimbabwe's debt continues to increase. China maintains a system of resource exploitation through investments. U.S. sanctions are maintained and add to the economic deterioration. The Zimbabwean people continue to suffer from economic hardships combined with climate issues and a government that lacks capacity to help them.</p>

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