



# Zimbabwe

## Zimbabwe: Introduction

Jakkie Cilliers

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Chart 1: Political map of Zimbabwe

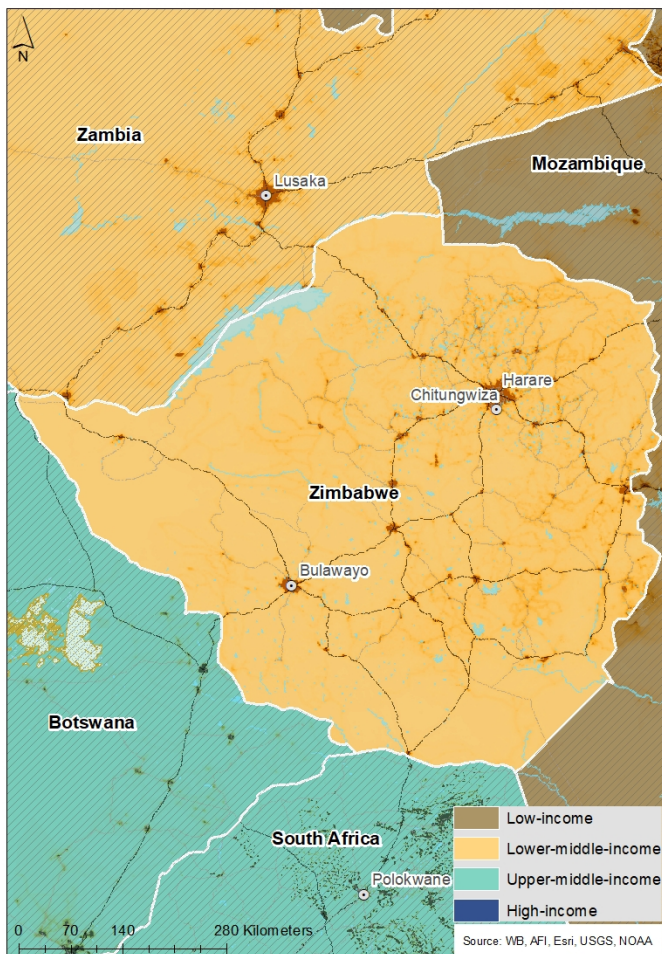


Chart 1 is a political map of Zimbabwe.

**Zimbabwe** is a landlocked, lower-middle-income country in Southern Africa, with a total land area of 390 757 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>). It shares borders with Zambia to the northwest, Mozambique to the east and northeast, South Africa to the south, and Botswana to the southwest. The country has a centralised government based in its capital, Harare, and is divided into eight provinces and two cities holding provincial administrative status. Each province has its provincial capital, from which government administration is typically conducted.

Zimbabwe is a member of several regional economic and political organisations, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the African Union (AU).

Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain on 18 April 1980, following a prolonged liberation war. The late President Robert Mugabe served as Prime Minister from 1980 to 1987 and then as President from 1987 until his controversial retirement in November 2017. He was succeeded by Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The **ethnic composition** of Zimbabwe is primarily made up of the Shona people, who represent approximately 81% of the

population. The Ndebele follow, accounting for about 12% of the population. There are also smaller ethnic groups, including the Ndaou (3%), Tonga (2%), Shangani (0.8%), Venda (0.5%), Kalanga (0.4%), official English (0.3%), and others, including Xhosa, Tswana, Sotho, Nambya, Chewa, Chibarwe and Khoisan (1.2%). Additionally, Zimbabwe has a small but noteworthy population of people of European, Indian, Coloured descent, and East Asians, particularly Chinese. Over the years, these populations have declined, especially the European population and British, largely due to emigration following independence in 1980 and during the land reform program in the early 2000s.

Zimbabwe features a diverse topography that supports unique ecosystems, including grasslands, woodlands and mountainous forests. In the east, Zimbabwe features rugged mountain ranges, such as the Eastern Highlands, which include peaks like Mount Nyangani. To the west and southwest, the terrain transitions into lower, drier areas like the Kalahari Basin. Key rivers such as the Zambezi (north) and the Limpopo (south) form natural boundaries, contributing to diverse landscapes from lush valleys to arid savannas.

Despite its abundant natural resources (e.g., gold, diamonds, platinum, chrome and lithium), fertile agricultural land and strategic location in southern Africa, Zimbabwe has faced challenges related to governance, economic and political instability, and human development since gaining independence.

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## About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees, head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute, and is an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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