

SAL 

International Liaison Dialogue and Research

# Southern African Liaison Office

## Zimbabwe Situation Analysis

### Second Quarter 2021

*By Tebogo Lekubu and Ineke Stemmet*



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## Introduction

Two reports have been made public by international financial institutions, one by the World Bank on Zimbabwe's economic performance, and another by the International Monetary Fund based on a virtual staff visit with Zimbabwe authorities in June 2021. Afrobarometer also put out a survey on Zimbabwean's attitudes on the political landscape. This analysis will unpack these reports as well as look at the recent constitutional amendments, COVID-19 in the country, the clampdown on media and political freedom, and Zimbabwe's relations with South Africa.

## The Zimbabwean Economy

The International Monetary Fund carried out a virtual staff visit with the Zimbabwe authorities from June 1–15, 2021. The report praised the Zimbabwean government for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the drought, and cyclone Idai. However, despite the government's 'timely actions' to protect the most vulnerable in these situations, GDP declined by 4% in 2020. That said, the IMF predicts a 6% growth in GDP over the course of the next year, as a result of a bumper agricultural harvest, increased energy production and greater construction and manufacturing economic activities. The IMF cautioned that this outlook remains uncertain due to the uncertainty of the future of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

The IMF also recognised the policies to stabilise the local currency, lower inflation, contain the budget and reserve money growth and introduce a foreign exchange auction system. It further stated that the National Development Strategy 1 should be fully operationalised and implemented.<sup>2</sup> Zimbabwean Finance Minister, Mthuli Ncube, commented on the recent economic activity:

*“There's so much demand for cement that cement companies cannot cope with the demand. If we look at GDP growth for 2021, we're targeting 7.4% at least, if we're being conservative and the output from the agricultural sector is expected to grow by close to 40% in 2021”.*<sup>3</sup>

Despite these positive projections, Dr Ibbo Mandaza, Southern Africa Political Economy Series (SAPES) Trust Executive Chairman, believes that the growth rate of the economy cannot be based on the development of one sector, namely agriculture. In a public online dialogue hosted by SALO, he noted that the mining sector *“still accounts for much of the corruption and illicit financial flows in Zimbabwe”*.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that the economy will register a 6% growth after contracting by 8.1% in 2019, considering that *“reserve money ballooned by 217% in 2020, inflation reached triple digits and depreciation of local currency vis-à-vis the US dollar*

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<sup>1</sup> International Monetary Fund. 2021. *Press Release No. 21/183: IMF Staff Concludes Virtual Staff Visit to Zimbabwe*. 16 June. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/06/16/pr21183-zimbabwe-imf-staff-concludes-virtual-staff-visit-to-zimbabwe> [21 June 2021]

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Badenhorst, C. 2021. *Fruits of a tough reform journey are beginning to show – Zimbabwe FinMin Mthuli Ncube*. 29 May. Available at: <https://www.biznews.com/africa/2021/05/29/zimbabwe-mthuli-ncube> [21 June 2021]

<sup>4</sup> Southern African Liaison Office. 2021. SALO Public Meeting on Political and Economic Developments in Zimbabwe [Zoom Online]. 24 June.

*depreciated by 70%*".<sup>5</sup> He highlighted the many problems that have only worsened since the onset of COVID-19; from rising unemployment and extreme poverty to soaring prices and poor service delivery. In his view, the situation in Zimbabwe is much direr than the '*superficial reflections*' made by the IMF.

Dr Mandaza posited that the reason for the positive IMF report has to do with international financial institutions trying to reassert their position in Zimbabwe. In 2015, Zimbabwe committed to clearing its debt with the IMF, World Bank, and African Development Bank, as a precondition to accessing new lines of credit and reintegrating into the international community.<sup>6</sup> To date, however, only the debt to the IMF has been cleared.

*"The message is very clear that Zimbabwe cannot survive economically unless and until there is an inflow of monies from the IFIs. So, at the moment there is a tussle between the international financial institutions trying to find a way of moulding themselves back into the Zimbabwean situation, while on the other hand, the Zimbabwean government is having difficulty in meeting even the minimum requirements for reengagement."*<sup>7</sup>

Afrobarometer's survey finds that people in Zimbabwe are not yet feeling the effects of the IMF's reported improvements:

- *"Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Zimbabweans say economic conditions in the country are 'fairly bad' or 'very bad.'*
- *Almost two-thirds (62%) describe their personal living conditions as 'fairly bad' or 'very bad.' About one-third (35%) are optimistic that macroeconomic conditions will be better in 12 months' time.*
- *An overwhelming majority (87%) of Zimbabweans say they went without a cash income 'several times,' 'many times,' or 'always' during the previous year".*<sup>8</sup>

A positive change that is likely to impact everyday Zimbabweans' lives is the increase in remittances received from the diaspora. The first four months of 2021 saw an inflow of remittances of \$411.1 million, compared to \$221.9 million last year. Remittances are Zimbabwe's second-largest inflow of foreign exchange earnings, after revenues generated from platinum exports.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Zimbabwe Situation. 2018. *Implement Lima plan, EU urges Zimbabwe*. 25 January. Available at:

<https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/implement-lima-plan-eu-urges-zimbabwe/> [22 June 2021]

<sup>7</sup> Southern African Liaison Office. 2021. SALO Public Meeting on Political and Economic Developments in Zimbabwe [Zoom Online]. 24 June.

<sup>8</sup> Afrobarometer. 2021. *Country direction and economic situation, government performance, COVID-19, popular trust and political party affiliation and voting intentions. Findings from Afrobarometer Round 8 survey in Zimbabwe*. 11 June. Available at:

[https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/zimbabwe\\_r8\\_diss1-zs-bh-11june21-v2\\_17june2021finalreleaseversion.pdf?utm\\_source=SALO&utm\\_campaign=9cf0195207-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_07\\_20\\_09\\_43\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_6d92a15a28-9cf0195207-400808193](https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/zimbabwe_r8_diss1-zs-bh-11june21-v2_17june2021finalreleaseversion.pdf?utm_source=SALO&utm_campaign=9cf0195207-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_20_09_43_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6d92a15a28-9cf0195207-400808193) [22 June 2021]

<sup>9</sup> *Just in: Surge in remittances boosts Zimbabwe economy – RBZ*. 2021. 11 June. Available at: <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/just-in-surge-in-remittances-boosts-zimbabwe-economy-rbz/> [22 June 2021]

Currently, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are taking their toll on the Zimbabwean people. A World Bank Report published in June of 2021 paints a grim picture of the levels of poverty in Zimbabwe. The report finds that in 2020 the number of people living in extreme poverty in Zimbabwe reached about 7.9 million, which constitutes almost 49% of the population. Approximately 500,000 Zimbabwean households have at least one member who lost their jobs. Those in urban areas are specifically affected as they are more dependent on wage employment than those in rural areas, which rely largely on agricultural activities.<sup>10</sup>

## Constitutional amendments

ZANU-PF has been making attempts to consolidate its power ahead of the 2023 elections in various ways. One of these has been to introduce amendments to the 2013 Constitution, which will significantly reduce the oversight role of Parliament. Some legal experts have claimed that Zimbabwe could be heading towards a constitutional crisis.<sup>11</sup>

An illustration of this is the Constitutional Amendment Bill Number 2, which was rushed through parliament and public hearing. The Bill passed its Second Reading in the National Assembly on 14 April 2021 and the Assembly agreed to fast-track the process. On the 15th of April 2021, the Bill underwent its Committee Stage and the Assembly passed it with all the amendments proposed. The Bill was passed by Parliament on the 4th of May 2021, sparking an outcry from activists and civil society.<sup>12</sup> An online protest was held in response, under the hashtag #ResistDictatorshipConstitution. A rally was streamed online to avoid arrests amid the lockdown.<sup>13</sup> Jestina Mukoko, director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project, and one of the organisers of the event said:

*“Should we just allow a few people to amend the Constitution? As Zimbabweans, should we allow ourselves to be short-changed? It removes the tenets that we want to aspire to get to as Zimbabweans: democracy, transparency, and accountability. If these amendments are allowed to take root, it means what we will have at the end is a dictatorship and this is why we are saying #ResistDictatorshipConstitution”.*<sup>14</sup>

These amendments would allow the President, without the lawmakers’ approval, to appoint judges to the Constitutional, Supreme and High Courts. Furthermore, he would be able to appoint his two Vice Presidents and

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<sup>10</sup> The World Bank. 2021. *Zimbabwe Economic Update*. June. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/563161623257944434/pdf/Overcoming-Economic-Challenges-Natural-Disasters-and-the-Pandemic-Social-and-Economic-Impacts.pdf> [22 June 2021]

<sup>11</sup> Al Jazeera. 2021. *Lawyers challenge tenure extension of Zimbabwe chief justice*. 13 May. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/13/zimbabwe-leader-extends-tenure-of-controversial-top-judge> [10 June 2021]

<sup>12</sup> *Constitution Watch 1/2021 -Constitution Amendment No. 2 Fast-tracked with Unconstitutional Amendments*. 20 April. Available at: <http://www.veritaszim.net/node/4929> [10 June 2021]

<sup>13</sup> Mavhunga, C. 2021. *Zimbabwe Rights Groups, Opposition Stage Online Protest Against Constitutional Amendments*. 7 May. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/zimbabwe-rights-groups-opposition-stage-online-protest-against-constitutional-amendments> [10 June 2021]

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

extend the retirement of the Chief Justice by five years.<sup>15</sup> This has already had implications. On the 13th of May 2021, the President extended the tenure of Chief Justice Luke Malaba by five years.<sup>16</sup> Lawyers challenged this amendment which would increase the maximum age of the chief justice from 70 to 75. Three High Court judges ruled on 15 May that Justice Malaba ceased to be the Chief Justice when he turned 75 and the court ruled that the constitutional amendments should have been done through a referendum before it could become law.<sup>17</sup> This decision was appealed by the government.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this, Chief Justice Malaba continued working in his capacity as the Chief Justice, prompting lawyers to file contempt of court charges against him. On 10 June 2021, the High Court supported Chief Justice Malaba's right to resume work, even though he breached the maximum age restriction but did not give any of the reasons behind this decision.<sup>19</sup>

## The Patriotic Bill

In the more immediate term, Zimbabwe's draconian legislation continues to pose a major challenge for activist and opposition party engagement. The Patriotic Bill would give the Zimbabwe government the discretionary power to prosecute any Zimbabwean who speaks out against Zimbabwe. A motion to pass the Patriotic Bill was moved in Parliament in March 2021. Under the proposed Bill,

- *“corresponding with a foreign government without approval, making false statements that harm the country and conniving with hostile foreign governments to harm the nation”* will be criminalised.
- Furthermore, *“private correspondence with foreign governments or any officer or agent thereof, private citizens travelling to foreign countries as self-appointed ambassadors, and meeting foreign officials to undermine the national interest”* will all be considered illegal as well.<sup>20</sup>

The motion did not go to a vote and was ultimately adjourned. The Bill remained at the proposal stage and will require a majority vote in Parliament for it to be passed. Although it is unclear when the matter will be raised again, a law that infringes on freedom of expression and other fundamental rights has been on the agenda for the ruling party in some form for some time. The SAPES Trust hosted an online policy dialogue in which Dr

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<sup>15</sup> *Constitution Watch 1/2021 - Constitution Amendment No. 2 Fast-tracked with Unconstitutional Amendments*. 20 April. Available at: <http://www.veritaszim.net/node/4929> [10 June 2021]

<sup>16</sup> Al Jazeera. 2021. *Lawyers challenge tenure extension of Zimbabwe chief justice*. 13 May. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/13/zimbabwe-leader-extends-tenure-of-controversial-top-judge> [10 June 2021]

<sup>17</sup> Dzirutwe, M. 2021. *Zimbabwe court rules chief justice's tenure extension is invalid*. 15 May. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zimbabwes-high-court-rules-against-chief-justices-term-extension-2021-05-15/> [10 June 2021]

<sup>18</sup> Reuters. 2021. *Zimbabwe court upholds chief justice's right to resume work despite age*. 10 June. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zimbabwe-court-upholds-chief-justices-right-resume-work-despite-age-2021-06-10/> [10 June 2021]

<sup>19</sup> Reuters. 2021. *Zimbabwe court upholds chief justice's right to resume work despite age*. 10 June. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zimbabwe-court-upholds-chief-justices-right-resume-work-despite-age-2021-06-10/> [10 June 2021]

<sup>20</sup> *Zimbabwe Patriotic Bill*. 2021. 28 April. Available at: [https://www.pindula.co.zw/Zimbabwe\\_Patriotic\\_Bill](https://www.pindula.co.zw/Zimbabwe_Patriotic_Bill) [18 June 2021]

Mandaza encouraged delegates to “mobilise a nationwide petition against this Bill so that it does not turn into law”.<sup>21</sup>

The Patriotic Bill combined with the constitutional amendments are examples of rule by law and aim to consolidate President Mnangagwa’s power by making political opposition all but impossible ahead of the 2023 elections. According to MDC-A legislator Daniel Mlokele:

*"There is really a political agenda to withhold political opinion, to withdraw political participation and more importantly suppress diversity of opinion and views for one particular political party. So, it is a charade to talk about the Patriotic Bill".*<sup>22</sup>

## COVID-19

Zimbabwe has been administering a vaccine rollout since acquiring its first batch of the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccines in February. The country started its vaccination scheme on 22 February and reportedly by 14 May, 571 460 people had received their first dose while 203 781 had received both doses of the vaccine.<sup>23</sup> Zimbabwe has received vaccination doses from China, Russia and India. The government aims to vaccinate 60% of the population of around 14 million people by the end of 2021. There have been instances of shortages reported at certain hospitals in the country. The government refused to make any statements regarding these shortages and instead claimed that Zimbabwe was still on track to meet its year-end target. Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa said:

*"Regarding vaccine procurement, the public is informed that delivery of the 500,000 Sinopharm vaccine doses which were ordered from China is expected in June 2021."*<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, in June Zimbabwe rejected a donation of three million Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines produced in Britain. The government claimed that it did so due to uncertainty over the side effects of this vaccine and that Zimbabwe did not have the capacity to store the vaccines at the required temperature. However, Dr. Norman Matara from the Zimbabwe Association for Doctors for Human Rights claims that the Sinopharm vaccine already available in Zimbabwe is stored at the same temperatures as those of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine:

*"So, we already have those cold chain mechanisms to store vaccines at 2 to 8 degrees (Celsius) which Johnson and Johnson [are] supposed to be stored. So, it does not make sense to say they do not have cold chain reactions. In addition, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is given as a one-dose. So, the cost of rolling out that vaccine is much less than the Sinopharm and Sinovac and the logistics of one dose is much better*

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<sup>21</sup> Muleya, K. 2021. *Patriotic Bill: Are We Encouraging or Enforcing Patriotism?* n.d. Available at: <https://gozim.co.zw/2021/05/27/patriotic-bill-are-we-encouraging-or-enforcing-patriotism/> [18 June 2021]

<sup>22</sup> Ntali, E. 2021. *Zimbabwe: 'Political Agenda Behind the Patriotic Bill'*. 21 June. Available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202106220698.html> [18 June 2021]

<sup>23</sup> Adams, N. 2021. *Zimbabwe leads the way with Covid-19 vaccines*. May 16. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/weekend-argus/news/zimbabwe-leads-the-way-with-covid-19-vaccines-0b2219ca-5dd4-48db-a21c-c5e3ef33f850> [16 June 2021]

<sup>24</sup> Mavhunga, C. 2021. *Zimbabwe Faces COVID-19 Vaccine Shortages*. 28 May. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/zimbabwe-faces-covid-19-vaccine-shortages> [16 June 2021]

*than the two-dose provided by the Sinopharm (and Sinovac). So, we do not get it why they would reject those vaccines”.*

Some critics have claimed that the sour relationship between the Zimbabwean government and the British is the true reason behind this rejection.<sup>25</sup> Zimbabweans took to the streets on 2 June to protest the lack of vaccination doses. Many people have been turned away from hospitals and vaccination sites due to these shortages.<sup>26</sup>

Some health experts have claimed that these shortages will hinder Zimbabwe from reaching its 60% inoculation goal. Other vaccines have arrived in the country, such as the 25 000 Sputnik doses donated from Russia to Zimbabwe on 11 June. A consignment of 500 000 Sinopharm doses was expected in June.<sup>27</sup>

On 14 June the government reinstated a lockdown in an attempt to combat the rising COVID-19 cases in Zimbabwe, citing complacency as the reason for the spike. This will be heavily enforced by police and security forces who have been deployed to monitor adherence to these new COVID-19 measures.<sup>28</sup>

## **Clampdown on media and political freedom**

Zimbabwe has slipped in its ranking from Reporters Without Borders from 126 out of 180 to 130 in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index. It further claims that the Zimbabwe government has not improved media freedom and the plight of journalists. According to the organisation, access to information has improved in Zimbabwe and self-censorship declined, however, journalists are still often attacked or arrested. The security apparatus continues to harass and intimidate journalists. The laws in Zimbabwe are not conducive to free media:

*“Extremely harsh media laws are still in effect and, when new laws have been adopted, their provisions are just as draconian as those they replaced”.*<sup>29</sup>

New York Times freelancer, Jeffrey Moyo, was arrested in Zimbabwe on 26 May on charges of supplying fake press credentials to two of his colleagues visiting Zimbabwe. His colleagues were deported on 8 May for allegedly not having proper accreditation from the Zimbabwe Media Commission. Angela Quintal, Committee to Protect Journalists Africa programme coordinator, is of the opinion that this incident *“shows that Zimbabwe continues to violate the right to press freedom and the public’s right to know”*.

A worrying trend of clampdowns on political freedom has been more prominent in the lead up to the 2023 election. Zimbabwe’s National Youth Service (NYS), or so-called the Border Gezi Youth Militia or Green Bombers

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<sup>25</sup> Mavhunga, C. 2021. *Zimbabwe Rejects Donation of COVID-19 Vaccine Amid Shortages*. 8 June. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/zimbabwe-rejects-donation-covid-19-vaccine-amid-shortages> [16 June 2021].

<sup>26</sup> Mavhunga, C. 2021. *Zimbabweans Protest COVID-19 Vaccine Shortages*. 2 June. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/zimbabweans-protest-covid-19-vaccine-shortages> [16 June 2021].

<sup>27</sup> Bwanya, M. 2021. *Sputnik V lands in Zimbabwe as vaccine shortages sting, 25,000 jabs delivered*. 12 June. Available at: <https://www.zimlive.com/2021/06/12/sputnik-v-lands-in-zimbabwe-as-vaccine-shortages-sting-25000-jabs-delivered/> [16 June 2021]

<sup>28</sup> Samaita, K. 2021. *Business hours in Zimbabwe slashed in new lockdown*. 13 June. Available at: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2021-06-13-business-hours-in-zimbabwe-slashed-in-new-lockdown/> [21 June 2021].

<sup>29</sup> Reporters Without Borders. n.d. *Page not yet turned on Mugabe era*. n.d Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/zimbabwe> [21 June 2021]

is reportedly being revived. The group is known for its alleged crackdown of those opposed to the ruling ZANU-PF party, especially during the last two decades of Robert Mugabe's rule. In April 2021 Cabinet approved resuscitating this programme, as a partnership between the ministries of youth and defence and war veterans. Information and Publicity Minister Monica Mutsvangwa claimed that this development is *"vital and urgent to instil a culture of honesty, patriotism, hard work, discipline and volunteerism"* in Zimbabweans, especially the youth. In 2003 analysts reported that the National Youth Service (NYS) was linked to murder, rape, sexual assault, and torture, both as victims and perpetrators. The NYS have also been accused of being used for political purposes and linked to election-related violence.<sup>30</sup>

## Zimbabwe and South Africa

On 21 May the new Zimbabwean foreign minister, Frederick Shava, went on his first foreign trip since taking up the position to South Africa. He met with International Relations and Cooperation Minister, Naledi Pandor in Cape Town. Pandor explained that she will ask Shava how South Africa could help Zimbabwe but would also raise some issues concerning Zimbabwe and Zim-SA relations. Among these topics discussed were the number of illegal Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa and the shrinking freedoms of the opposition and civil society in Zimbabwe. Pandor said:

*"In our discussions, we'll raise the important need for the opposition to be able to function, but this is something we think Zimbabweans must discuss together... We'd like Zanu-PF to be open to engaging across parties, and not putting any conditions to that in the first instance."*

She also expressed South Africa's wishes to send more envoys to Zimbabwe as the last trip was incomplete – it met with ZANU-PF but not with other stakeholders.<sup>31</sup>

## Zimbabweans in South Africa

The Zimbabwean Exemption Permits, which were first issued in 2010 under the Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project (ZDP), are facing an uncertain future. The South African government has not yet stated whether they would renew the permits which will expire in December of 2021. About 180 000 Zimbabweans currently hold one of these permits and their futures in South Africa are not guaranteed. Some Zimbabweans have claimed that their banks warned them to renew their permits and if they fail to do so, their accounts will be closed. If the permits are not renewed, many Zimbabweans who hold these types of permits will lose what they have invested in South Africa such as funeral and insurance policies and would have to leave behind any immovable property.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kujeke, M. 2021. *Zimbabwe's notorious youth service revived ahead of election season*. 21 June. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-21-zimbabwes-notorious-youth-service-revived-ahead-of-election-season/> [22 June 2021].

<sup>31</sup> Chutel, L. 2021. *'How can we help Zimbabwe?' - Pandor meets country's new foreign minister*. 21 May. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/how-can-we-help-zimbabwe-pandor-meets-countrys-new-foreign-minister-20210521> [22 June 2021].

<sup>32</sup> Chirume, J. 2021. *About 180,000 Zimbabweans in SA face uncertain future over ZEP status*. 27 May. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-27-about-180000-zimbabweans-in-sa-face-uncertain-future-over-zep-status/> [22 June 2021].



**About the Southern African Liaison Office:**



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