

# An Investigation into the Multifaceted Causes and Socioeconomic Effects of Poverty in Zimbabwe (1980 to Date)

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**Abstract** Zimbabwe has endured prolonged misfortunes and immense suffering, leading to widespread disagreement among its citizens regarding the root causes. A quarter of the population has sought better opportunities abroad, fleeing a low-income economy plagued by incessant political disputes. Since 1980, the ruling revolutionary party has accused the fragmented opposition of being foreign-sponsored entities aimed at regime change. The country's trajectory has been irrevocably altered since the end of the 1979 liberation war and the advent of black majority rule. This enduring crisis, including the impact of economic sanctions imposed after the controversial 2000 land reform, prompts further investigation into its causes and effects on this often-overlooked nation.

**Keywords** Zimbabwe, Poverty, Liberation war, Land Reform, Sanctions, Opposition parties, Disputes

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## 1. Introduction

The quest for a better life in the small low income Southern African country of Zimbabwe has been felt and searched by all age groups since 1980 after the country got its Independence in 1980 after staging a war of liberation from Britain which had colonized the country since 1887. Zimbabwe is a Southern African country neighboring Zambia to the North, South Africa to the South, Mozambique to the East and Namibia to the West. Zimbabwe is well known of its great weathers, minerals, vegetation, agriculture, historical monuments such as the Great Zimbabwe ruins, the magnificent Victoria Falls and a very friendly, religious and high literate population. Today, the country has a population of about 17 million people with a quarter of its people having left the country since the year 2000 to the neighboring countries and others have gone overseas in search of greener pastures away from home. Zimbabwe is a country with a rich African culture mixed with a western lifestyle influenced by the history of British colonial years that brought a foreign recipe to the people's lives as far as religion, education, wealth creation and a complicated political system of governance

that has created a lot of internal disharmony, disunity and poverty among the majority of the Zimbabwean people. The generation of the war liberation war veterans who waged a war against the British occupation and won the political war and lost on the economic front still carry a narrative of British's Neo-colonialism as Britain is found in the forefront of ganging up with its allies including the US in imposing economic sanctions on the country after the late Robert G. Mugabe seized the farms from the white commercial farmers who controlled over 80% of the country's prime land while over 91% of black people were left landless since the occupation. However the plight of the majority of Zimbabwean is beyond what the eye can see and what the ear can hear. Those in the opposition politics attribute the problems in the country since 1980 are because of the ruling party and government's mismanagement and gross corruption activities in government.

The Churches believe the problems are because of lack of genuine concern of the government and the opposition parties towards the general populace who are languishing from unending sufferings. Some believe the problems are because of the inherited foreign political system by Zimbabwean government since Independence which looks an impractical monster in the house while others believe the problems are naturally in the blood group backdating centuries of years ago where the African black people never had a place on the moon again since the days of the Egyptian Empire.

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Besides others think the cultural values composed of polygamy, broken marriages, blended families and lack of modern advanced technology makes the people to be backward in many developmental issues.

The Privy Council of 1918 declared that the Crown (Britain) was the rightful owner of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and that the British South Africa Company (BSAC) was entitled to the compensation from the Crown for the administrative expenditure incurred in Rhodesia and that it might reimburse itself by selling land its principle. The issue of land ownership was one of the question which were going to affect the future of the country with the end of the World War 2 (WW2) if the Charter should be terminated and a form of government be adopted. He goes on to assert that there were various claimants over the land," The elected members of the Legislative Council claimed that land belonged to the people, meaning, white and blacks, various societies claiming to represent the Native inhabitants held that the Natives, having arrived first were the rightful owners, the BSAC held that the ownership had been tacitly admitted by the Colonial Office which in one dispatch had said," The Company is in possession of all the assets of the territory, and the British Government, who acted as its agent the land belonged to the Crown (Britain)."

The Lancaster House negotiations that brought the end of the liberation war and the ushering of Independence in 1980 with an election that saw Robert. G. Mugabe winning the majority seats ahead of his rivals that included Bishop Muzorewa, Ndabaningi Sithole, Joshua Nkomo and the white representative leader left the land still in the hands of the few white farmers. The issue of land in these recent years has proven that all former colonies of Britain, France

included has been in the centre of dispute leading to the rise of disputed elections, civil wars and regime changes instigated by the former colonial masters.

Most of African countries, Zimbabwe included officially use their former colonial masters languages in all government and public offices while thinking in their local native languages. This has been proven even at international forums such as the United Nations (UN) that has failed to recognize or adopt even one African language as an official language in the United Nations forums. The demise of Zimbabwean people has not only been caused by internal issues but also by foreign policies of some powerful countries including the United States that have since the year 2001 imposed economic sanctions on this small and low income African country through controversial allegations of human rights abuses while many other countries believe that the economic sanctions imposed by the West were only but a reaction against the seizures of the white owned farms in Zimbabwe by Robert. Mugabe in the year 2000 for redistribution. Zimbabwe through the African Union has managed to stage a campaign every year against the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe since the year 2000. The first 10 years after Independence have been marked with a lot of national development in all areas in Zimbabwe but the trend drastically turned negatively since 1990 with cases of corruption in Government. The Zimbabwe government reposed land from only 4300 white farmers and redistributed to over 300 000 black families who had no place to farm and yet the government of Zimbabwe has pledged to compensate the white farmers who lost their farms through the government led resettlement program. However up to now not very many former white farmers have received their compensation.

**Figure 1.** Projected Nominal GDP for Southern African Countries in 2024

Country	Projected Nominal GDP (USD Billions)	Population (Millions)	GDP per Capita (USD)	Primary Source for 2024
South Africa	384.0	64.01	6,082	World Economics, StatSA
Angola	113.34	36.75	2,214	World Economics, Wikipedia, Worldometer
Democratic Republic of the Congo	79.12	105.79	743	Wikipedia, Worldometer
Malawi	13.96	21.10	552	Wikipedia, Trading Economics
Mozambique	23.77	33.64	604	Wikipedia, Trading Economics
Namibia	13.0	2.96	4,034	World Economics, Trading Economics, Worldometer
Zambia	26.33	20.72	1,346	Trading Economics, Worldometer
Botswana	19.4	2.48	7,021	Wikipedia, Trading Economics, Worldometer
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>16.34</b>	<b>1,421</b>	World Economics, Trading Economics, Worldometer

Data in figure (1) above has been taken from <https://www.worldeconomics.com> and Wikipedia, trading economics.

In 2024, Zimbabwe's projected GDP of \$36.0 billion positions it as a mid-sized economy in Southern Africa, trailing powerhouses like South Africa and Angola, yet surpassing Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Malawi, and Namibia in overall economic output. However, its GDP per capita of \$1,421 paints a different picture, indicating a lower average economic well-being compared to more affluent neighbors like Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia, despite being higher than some lower-income nations. This disparity highlights that Zimbabwe's economic output is distributed among a substantial population, diluting per capita wealth. The country's economic trajectory is significantly hampered by the severe El Niño-induced drought impacting agriculture, persistent macroeconomic instability, a substantial public debt burden, and critical infrastructure and energy shortages. Addressing these interconnected challenges is crucial for Zimbabwe to achieve sustainable growth and improve its citizens' prosperity.

## 2. Literature Review

### Did Zimbabwe inherit an open check in 1980?

Zimbabwe after the independence of 1980 from the white settler government of Rhodesia inherited both an open check and debt.

Among the inherited benefits by the new Zimbabwean government in 1980 were road infrastructure, hospitals, clinics, schools, dams, factory infrastructure, army barracks, towns and cities, electricity supply plants, international trade connections, government structures and many other benefits.

However the new government did not only benefit positively but also negatively. It must be remembered that Rhodesian government after its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1966 the western governments responded to this move by imposing economic sanctions. This did not only derail the development of economic ties with the west but reduced the country's foreign trade and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). [1] p.1 is of the view that Zimbabwe had inherited abundant benefits from the colonial government in 1980 and that the failures of Zimbabwe's economy is the brain child of Zimbabwe African National Unity patriotic front (ZANU pf) government's policies.

[2] p.2,3 points 1996-2004 as the beginning of the breakdown of Zimbabwe's economic infrastructure and structure chronicled with events such as the award of USD50 000 to each war veteran of the war of liberation, the adaptation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party and the Land Reform Program (LRP) in the early 2000.

### Mugabe the darling of the west

After the signing of the Lancaster House Constitution agreement in London which paved way for cessation of military action and conflict between the nationalists forces

and the Rhodesian government forces Mugabe entered into elections and won majority rule. The west did not waste their time but gave Mugabe a green light towards reconciliation with the white Mugabe acting very wisely appeared very forgiving but inside him remained a grudge of future revenge if the west stops loving him. Revenge will be directly targeted on white farmers who after independence still possessed more than three quarters of Zimbabwe's arable farming land. In practical, Mugabe visited most of the western capitals where he was received with red carpet as a darling and trusted African leader whom they could use to influence other nationalists leaders in Africa to dine with the west and support the western powers during United Nations debates. The death of Mugabe regardless of all the good things he has done to the country has been described by [3] p.2 as a villain and not a hero as he had wished through his spin doctoring of events such as the land reform program which brought him widespread media coverage.

### The Zimbabwean white farmers

After the successful dispossession of the most arable land from indigenous black natives in 1880, white settlers shifted their focus to commercial farming, as they did not find the desired gold deposits, making agriculture the primary source of business. Consequently, more land ended up in the hands of a few white settlers, who transformed Zimbabwe into the "breadbasket of Southern Africa." These white farmers became financially and politically powerful, aligning with the African traditional belief that "he who owns the land is the boss." Many unemployed indigenous black natives became farm and factory workers. From 1980 until 1997, white farmers lived in harmony with the Zimbabwean government. However, with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), an opposition political party led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai, Mugabe realized that white farmers supported the MDC. He then decided to initiate a land reform programme, believing that dispossessing white farmers of their land would neutralize their power. During elections since 2000, white farmers allegedly compelled farm workers to vote for the opposition against the ZANU pf party, which was already in a mood of revenge against the white remnant of Zimbabwe. The dispossession of farms from white farmers led to the displacement of farm workers.

[4] p. 5 attributes Zimbabwe's current poverty to the land reform programme of 2000. Even though the occupation of Zimbabwe in the 1890s by white settlers was never paid for the loss of land by the natives Mugabe's land reform in the years 2000-2003 became the talk of the day in many western capitals after the white farmers were driven off the farms without getting their compensation. [5] p.2,3 in view of the land reform program and its way how it was addressed blames Mugabe for initiating the disputed reform which left most of the white commercial farmers without compensation after losing their farms. The issue of property rights became the issue with the west blaming Zimbabwe's land reform.

*“Hi XX, it's XXX from XXX Farm, Marondera, Zim. You know what happened the day when Mugabe forced my family off XXX Estate. I had the opportunity to visit our home in Marondera, Zim last February. We were forced off our home by crowds of aggressive Zimbabwean natives. Our family had developed the farm for 3 generations. (Dairy, Beef, Maize Tobacco.) I had the opportunity to visit our old farm with my Dad earlier this year and was heartbroken to see the totally dilapidated state of affairs with everything was not cared for and dilapidated.*

*To date, we have not been offered any compensation. So sad to see the results of bush encroachment around our home and what were productive fields, buildings and pastures. Yours sincerely XX. XX tells me that we are expecting some compensation.”*

**Above is a letter written to us by a former Zimbabwean white farmer now working in the (UK) who thinks the land reform of year 2000 is one of the most causes of Zimbabwe's poverty today. See appendix 1.**

**Did the “free for all” policy (FFA) contribute to Zimbabwe's woes after independence?**

[6] p.g 9 [7] 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition p.7 [8] p.5 Zimbabwe's economy was already collapsing in the late 1990s when Zimbabwe adopted the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s initiated Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). The first ten years after independence was marked by mixed developments both positive and negative.

Positive on the grounds of the new government's massive infrastructural development of many clinics, hospitals, schools, bridges, roads and urban houses. Mugabe 's government built many schools and hospitals than the previous Rhodesian government. The negative aspect was in the areas of lack of control of urban migration of many people leaving their rural homes in search of a better life in the urban areas which during the Rhodesian government era were only restricted to those who had jobs and places to live.

The independence of 1980 was misinterpreted by many indigenous native majority to leave their rural homes and settle in the urban areas waiting for employment thereby overwhelming the small water, electricity, roads and accommodation infrastructure which was only meant for few residences. Everyone felt that the 1980 independence meant everything was free for all. This only marked the beginning of the future troubles and economic collapse which followed the years late 90s where labor strikes and mob protests began. Unemployment started to rise and cost of living also was starting to be felt by many people.

The despondence led to the formation of an opposition party which took advantage of the economic woes which the government was failing to address.

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was then as a result of the economic troubles the country felt during the first 10 years of ZANU pf government. Mugabe, a darling of the west at this moment felt betrayed by the west which had reluctantly stopped funding the land reform which they

had promised Mugabe whom they had started accusing of mismanagement and misuse of the previous funds intended for land reform program but alleged to have been diverted to other unclear use by Mugabe's government. Mugabe's honey moon was getting to an end.

However Mugabe who was viewed by the west and most by other African and world leaders as one of the most educated and wise leader of his time was waiting for this time for a long time. It was time for him to unleash the most questionable land reform which would see most if not all white farmers to lose ownership of their farms. With this idea in mind for a long time, Mugabe always viewed that the west would not attack him if he took this way. What he also did not know was that the west would not forgive him for touching the remaining white remnant in Zimbabwe.

The west joined hands with the (MDC) and the white farmers to bring regime change in Zimbabwe. Mugabe proceeded and took the farms from the white farmers for resettlement the idea which was meant to please the majority indigenous natives who owned very little land since the days of colonialism where their land was taken away by the white settlers by force. This was viewed as revenge by the west and a noble idea by the indigenous natives Zimbabweans and by many African countries and the global south.

### **Inherent Gender disparities**

[9] p. 3 assert that Zimbabwe's inherent gender disparities across various sectors of life contribute significantly to poverty within the nation. This view highlights a crucial link between systemic social inequality and economic hardship. Such disparities in Zimbabwe often manifest in unequal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and land ownership for women and girls. Consequently, a substantial portion of the population is prevented from fully participating in and contributing to the economy. This limitation on human capital development and productive capacity inevitably hinders overall national economic growth, thereby entrenching and exacerbating poverty cycles. These deeply rooted gender inequalities is, therefore, paramount for any meaningful and sustainable poverty reduction strategies in Zimbabwe.

However [10] p.18 disputes this view by highlighting how Zimbabwe 's Women Economic Freedom (WEF) score in 2023 ranked at 86.9% being the 5<sup>th</sup> out of 46 countries and standing at number 56 out of 164 countries. [11] p.4 blames women poverty due to limited opportunities for women in the economy of the country.

### **Sanctions or Corruption?**

Zimbabwean sanctions in the early 2000s were not a new phenomenon. The Rhodesian government, which ruled the country until 1979, also suffered from Western sanctions after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1966. Regarding corruption, the world has indeed suffered from it; however, Zimbabwe's corruption level has become endemic.

Following the Mugabe-led land reform in 2000, which saw the majority of white farmers losing their farm

ownership, the West responded with economic and targeted sanctions against the Mugabe-led government. Resisting Western sanctions and fighting corruption became an insurmountable task for the ZANU pf government. Whilst the Mugabe-led government blamed Western sanctions for the economic collapse, other segments of the population, especially those led by the opposition party, blamed the government for corruption.

The dispute over land between the Zimbabwean and British governments, the enactment of the US-Zimbabwe Democracy Bill, Zimbabwe's suspension from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), its withdrawal from the Commonwealth, and the subsequent imposition of economic sanctions, as asserted by [12] p. 1, collectively demonstrate that Zimbabwe's poverty is not solely attributable to the Zimbabwean government's corruption.

[13] p. 2 argues and blames the country's polarization and failure to meet any consensus in everything by the two largest political parties of ZANU pf and MDC. [14] p.4,5 asserts that Mugabe and his government blamed the persistent occurrence of droughts in Zimbabwe over the years were to blame for the misfortunes and collapse of the country's economy, however Craig Richardson an economist dismissed this claim by citing how the drought in 2000/2001 as only constituted only 22% below the average.

Misrule and misgovern has always been cited as the main cause of Zimbabwe's economic collapse. Zimbabwe's woes are a contested issue on it's causes [15] p. 1. It must always be remembered too that sanctions induces high corruption therefore the west's sanctions on Zimbabwe maybe the root cause.

### **The Opposition or the Ruling party's fault?**

The rise of the MDC opposition party formed by Morgan Tsvangirayi is assumed to have been instigated by the rise of corruption by ZANU pf government while ZANU pf government alleges the opposition party was a result of the west's reaction to Mugabe's intention to take land from white farmers.

The ZANU pf government blamed the opposition party for going to the west to ask for sanctions for the country for economic collapse while the opposition party blamed ZANU pf government corruption leading to economic collapse. Elections were held countless time but always brought endless election disputes on the outcome which were also claimed by both the ruling party and the opposition party having won. [16] p.2 shows how the west funded Zimbabwe's opposition voices and activists.

Some people however believe that it is neither the problem of the ZANU pf ruling party nor that of the Opposition parties in Zimbabwe that have contributed to the economic woes in the country but the people themselves. [17] accounts to the influx of Nigerian and Chinese traders who are making lots of money and living large at the expense of the "Lazy" locals in Zimbabwe. Gukurume accounts to the situation in Harare shopping squares where Zimbabweans do not make use of their opportunities to operate the shops leaving way to

foreigners who takes over the city with fashion, restaurants shops.

### **Western NGOs' support for the opposition parties**

NGOs are widely known for helping those in need in the world, however in Zimbabwe the ZANU pf government knows them for meddling in internal politics and affairs of Zimbabwe and ultimately regarded as posing a threat to the country's sovereignty. Most of the NGOs in Zimbabwe are funded by the west therefore the Zimbabwe government which has suffered from western sanctions have a suspicion of the NGOs in the country to be serving the interests of the west where they are funded from.

While the west funded NGOs in Zimbabwe try to reach the needy the ZANU pf government accuses their operations as targeting and serving only the opposition infested areas in the country while neglecting the ZANU pf held constituencies.

The opposition also accuses ZANU pf government aid as only targeted for ZANU pf supporters. While the ZANU pf government is accused of targeting its support bases around the country, the western backed opposition party is also accused of playing against the interests of the ZANU pf government therefore creating the vacuum of support for those who neither support the ZANU pf party nor the opposition party to languish in poverty. The question in Zimbabwe is therefore whether poverty is the brainchild of ZANU pf government or the brainchild of the opposition party or by both.

### **The ruling party's grip on power**

[18] p.31 in his concluding remarks accuses ZANU pf 's clinging on power as the main cause of Zimbabwe's problems. The remarks highlights the continuous implementation of the colonial apparatus inherited by ZANU pf government after independence which were used to suppress the majority blacks now being used again by the government against it's own people.

[19] also blames the long reign of ZANU pf as the contributing factor to Zimbabwe's current woes. In his findings Munyikwa asserts that the ESAP effects were followed by the continuous reign of ZANU pf and the the land unwell organized land reform that followed in the years 2000-2006. While some Zimbabweans and other people in the world accuse ZANU pf government's grip on power as the source of the country's poverty levels, other Zimbabweans and other people in the world has full support of the ZANU pf government and policies as they are aimed at resisting Neo-colonialism from western former colonial powers. As many new development measures are being put into place by the ZANU pf government to bring the country out of poverty these efforts are not satisfying to the people of Zimbabwe who sees it as not enough.

Unemployment level still very high, people leaving the country has increased and inflation still high. The impact of the opposition party in the country has been viewed recently as very negative since the main opposition party of the MDC which turned into CCC has been rocked by splits and in fights. At the moment many Zimbabweans and the people of

the world struggle to define whether the grip on power by ZANU pf government is the source of Zimbabwe's poverty. [20] p.2 blamed Mugabe and his cronies for the economic meltdown of Zimbabwe's economy.

[21] p.2 accuses Mugabe's government for poor monetary policies and failure of the fiscal on matters dealing with the control of budget deficit for the economic decline of Zimbabwe.

### **The urban vote vs the rural vote**

Zimbabwe's population demographics shows that most of the country's population resides in the rural areas while less population resides in the urban areas. Over 70% majority of Zimbabweans live in the rural areas. ZANU pf 's majority voter support come from the rural areas while the opposition party 's voter support come from the urban areas. Most Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the past years have concentrated their aid support to the urban areas while ZANU pf government aid is concentrated to the rural areas where chiefs and headsmen supervise the allocation of aid.

The chiefs and headsmen have been ever since been accused of politically not neutral but have been supporting ZANU pf party and usually alleged for voter suppression against the opposition supporters in the rural areas. The situation is however not different in the urban areas where the NGOs and the west heavily support the urban residence by all means and ways. Most of the time after many elections in Zimbabwe urban voters always blame the rural voters for selling out and so do the rural voters say to the urban voters who are blamed for selling out to the west's agenda for a regime change. This usually ends up into economic sabotage by both the two parties. The country is now caught between the two saboteurs who do not take the blame when it counts to their contribution to the country's source of poverty. The opposition party have a slogan "dira jecha" which is translated to mean sabotage. [9] (ibid) P. 4 blames the media both the mainstream media which only broadcast the ruling party activities while the social media and western media also only covers the opposition party's activities and views. [22] p.2 acknowledges the allegation of voter intimidation both in Zimbabwe's rural and urban constituencies instituted by political parties. In the rural areas the chiefs and party leaders usually act in line with ZANU pf 's alleged strategies of voter repression while in urban areas the opposition parties turn to use the social media to intimidate the masses during voting time.

### **The west diaspora vs the east diaspora**

Zimbabwe is one of the country whose people no matter where they relocate to always show their political polarization marked by two camps, those who support the ZANU pf party and those who support the opposition party. The great divide between the people of Zimbabwe at home and in the diaspora has also contributed to the continuous collapse of the country 's economy. The saying "United we stand, divided we fall" is being fulfilled in Zimbabwe. Usually the term "diaspora" is miss-conceptually viewed in a negative way in reference to the biblical movement of the people of Israel from their

country into foreign countries due to wars. In this moment however the term is not in any way near to the same biblical perception because now people move from one country to another due to various reasons either by force or voluntary.

[23] p.3 asserts that brain drain and brain circulation is also a negative effect of migration. There are many Zimbabweans in the world due to various positive or negative reasons. It has been very clear that Zimbabweans in western countries are influenced by the host country's foreign policy to act likewise like the locals of that country. Most Zimbabweans in the west are too political and wish there is a change of government in Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans in the east tend to be more business minded just as the host country's trend. [24] p.34 shows the reasons for leaving Zimbabwe as attributed by lack of employment, political reasons and studying abroad.

*"Chief among the reasons Zimbabwe finds itself in this economic morass is cadre deployment, nepotism and corruption and failure by our leadership to built strong state institutions that plays an oversight role both in government and private sectors. Limited Democratic space to engage robustly, lack of a clear and practical national development plan, we can go on and on the list is endless, misplaced priorities, (nekukara simba) greed for power."*

**Above is an answers we received through a whats-app message from Zimbabwean citizens now living in South Africa in regards to the main causes of Zimbabwe's poverty. See appendix 1.**

### **The west vs China in Zimbabwe**

After the land reform program in 2000 which saw most of the white farmers losing their farms, the west contributed the collapse of Zimbabwe's economy by the imposition of economic and targeted sanctions. Zimbabwe's isolation from the west gave China a free manoeuvre into Zimbabwe's social and economic affairs. Since 2000 China has become Zimbabwe's biggest investor and lender. This has led these two big super powers to take sides in favor and against Zimbabwe in international platforms hence making Zimbabwe the center of China and the west's rivalry. [25] p.2 claims how China has played an important role in Africa which is perceived by the west as a debt trap of African nations by China. Zimbabwe's Look East Policy (LEP) was Mugabe's foreign policy as alluded by [26] p. 2 for Zimbabwe and China to agree on each other's stance in international conferences and forums based on mutual, economic and political co-operations.

### **African Tradition and Religion**

#### **Polygamy, divorces and family disputes**

Zimbabwe like many other African countries is found struggling to return to old African traditional culture and values in the wake of western traditional cultures and values, religion being on the center of dispute. Before Zimbabwe's colonization by Britain local traditions and culture preserved certain values which led to continuous and generational stability in terms of social and economic affairs. The rearing

of livestock and peasant farming made sure that future generations would find something to survive on. The issue of single mothers was rare before colonialism in Africa because there were certain cultural norms which would see that every woman would have someone to call a husband. In Zimbabwe a deceased wife would be given into another marriage to her deceased 's brother or younger brother who would take care of the family of his late brother. In Zimbabwe after colonialism this tradition and culture couldn't persist due to fear of issues pertaining to morality, religion and disease prevention. Zimbabwe is one of the countries which still holds customary marriage law which allows polygamy. Given natural circumstances if the family in a polygamy marriage is faced by death of the bread winner poverty will only be the way to go without choice. Zimbabwe's customary law is however not without reason. Zimbabwe is a country where females outnumber males. [27] p.1 in his research findings shows that marriage conflicts and divorces are rampant in Zimbabwe and the country's resolution systems seems to be failing to tackle the problem.

Concerning religion, Zimbabwe has been besieged by the rise of false gospel preachers and prophets who go around making false miracles and charging congregants huge sums of money for consultation. The preachers would go around selling fruits, wristbands, bricks, perfumes and many other items alleging that the items are anointed and can bring prosperity into their homes. Many congregants have lost valuable properties and money through these modern day false prophets who drive very expensive cars, live in very expensive houses and dress in very expensive fashion attires.

Given these and various other traditions and religions, most Zimbabweans have brooded families with disputes in many things. Disputes from church doctrines, divorces, polygamy and many other reasons have also played a crucial role in the manifestation of Zimbabwe's poverty levels.

### 3. Methodology

The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies when gathering data from the participants. Interviews were carried out to Zimbabweans around the world using the population demographics of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. The survey shows that many Zimbabweans out of the country are found in neighboring South Africa, the UK, US, Canada, Australia and China. twenty participants were involved for interviews. The numbers were divided as follows; ten Zimbabweans in South Africa, two in the UK, two in the US, two in Canada, two in Australia and two in China respectively. Apart from interview methodology the research employed questionnaire methodology targeted two hundred Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe and out of Zimbabwe participated in answering the questions distributed to them online. This mixed-methods approach is a powerful strategy in modern social research, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena.

#### 1) Research Ethics Statement: No Formal Approval Required

**Title of Research Project:** An Investigation into the Multifaceted Causes and Socioeconomic Effects of Poverty in Zimbabwe (1980 to date).

##### 1. Ethical Review and Exemption

This study was conducted in accordance with the core ethical principles outlined in the Hanjiang Normal University Code of Conduct for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanity Researchers' Ethics Guidelines. A formal review and approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was not required for this study as it involved the analysis of a foreign country's internal political and economic affairs.

This exemption was confirmed under the Hanjiang Normal University IRB guidelines, specifically Research involving the collection or study involving internal politics and economics affairs of a foreign country. The data that has been made available so far by the researcher has been deemed adequate for the public and the information was recorded by the researcher in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants due to its political sensibility.

##### 2. Ethical Principles and Data Handling

Despite the exemption from formal approval, the following ethical principles were rigorously upheld throughout the research:

**Source of Data:** All data were collected from the public domain, specifically from the Whats-app platform groups and individuals.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:** To further protect the identity of individuals, all data were fully anonymized during the data processing stage. This involved removing all direct identifiers, including usernames, user IDs.

**Terms of Service:** The data collection and usage complied with the Whats-app Terms of Service and Developer Agreement at the time of data acquisition.

**Minimization of Harm:** The research topic (An Investigation into the Multifaceted Causes and Socioeconomic Effects of Poverty in Zimbabwe (1980 to date)) is considered low-risk for causing harm, embarrassment, or distress to the original posters but politically sensitive especially in Zimbabwe where the political environment is argued to be polarized.

### 4. Results

#### An Analysis of the Root Causes of Poverty in Zimbabwe Since 1980 Based on Interview Data

Figure 2 below shows twenty interview responses regarding the root causes of poverty in Zimbabwe since 1980. The interviewees, located across five continents, offer a clear and consistent perspective on the issue. The overwhelming consensus from the data is that poverty in Zimbabwe is primarily an endogenous issue, stemming from a combination of political, governance, and moral failures within the country. While some responses mention political

polarization and external sanctions, the dominant themes cited are corruption, bad governance, and the long-term impact of the ruling political party. The most frequently cited cause of poverty is corruption, which is mentioned in nearly half of the responses. Interviewees from South Africa, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and China, all point to corruption as a primary driver. Responses such as 'ZANU pf 's bad politics and corruption' or simply 'Corruption' highlight its perceived significance, suggesting it is either a standalone cause or deeply intertwined with other issues. The widespread nature of this response of Zimbabweans across various international locations indicates that a perception of systemic corruption is fundamental.

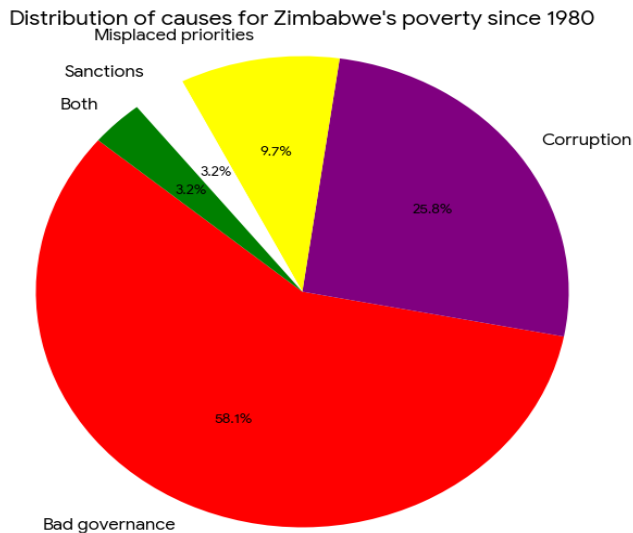
In addition to corruption, the data reveals a strong focus on broader political and governance-related failures. Terms like 'misgovern,' 'bad governance,' and 'bad politics' are recurrent, often appearing alongside corruption in a single response. This suggests a holistic view where corruption is not an

isolated issue but a symptom of a larger systemic breakdown. Several interviewees explicitly name the ruling party, ZANU pf, and its 'long stay in power,' directly linking the political establishment to the country's economic struggles. This perspective views the entrenched nature of the political elite as a barrier to positive change, leading to a lack of accountability. While corruption and governance failures form the central narrative, other factors are also mentioned. Political polarization is cited by interviewees in both South Africa and China, indicating that internal political divisions are seen as a contributing factor to the lack of progress. Furthermore, one response from the UK mentions 'Human Rights abuse,' while an interviewee in China uniquely brings up 'western economic sanctions. The collective data strongly suggests that the root cause of poverty is widely perceived to be internal and a direct result of political and governance issues, with corruption being the most prominent manifestation of this reality.

**Figure 2.** Interviews on the causes of Zimbabwe's poverty since 1980

Interviewee	Location	Date	Source	Question	Response
1.	S.Africa	2025.1.28	Whatsapp	What is the root cause of poverty in Zimbabwe since 1980?	ZANU pf' s bad politics and corruption
2.	S.Africa	2025.4.1	Whatsapp	“ “	ZANU pf's corruption
3.	S.Africa	2025.4.21	Whatsapp	“ “	Misgovern, corruption and lack of priorities
4.	S.Africa	2025.6.8	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption
5.	S.Africa	2025.6.14	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption and bad governance
6.	S.Africa	2025.8.7	Whatsapp	“ “	ZANU pf's bad policies
7.	S.Africa	2025.8.12	Whatsapp	“ “	Bad politics and polarization
8.	S.Africa	2025.8.13	Whatsapp	“ “	ZANU pf's long stay in power
9.	S.Africa	2025.8.13	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption
10.	S.Africa	2025.8.14	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption
11.	UK	2025.7.20	Whatsapp	“ “	Human Rights abuse, bad politics, bad governance
12.	UK	2025.8.7	Whatsapp	“ “	ZANU pf
13.	US	2025.7.20	Whatsapp	“ “	ZANU pf's overstay in power
14.	US	2025.7.21	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption, bad politics and misgovern
15.	Canada	2025.8.26	Whatsapp	“ “	Corruption and misgovern
16.	Canada	2025.8.26	Whatsapp	“ “	Bad governance & bad politics
17.	Australia	2025.4.15	Whatsapp	“ “	Lack of good governance, Corruption and bad politics
18.	Australia	2026.826	Whatsapp	“ “	Lack of good governance and corruption
19.	China	2025.8.14	Wechat	“ “	Political polarization and lack of priority by government
20.	China	2025.8.14	Wechat	“ “	Misgovern, corruption and western economic sanctions

Data shown in figure 2 above is taken from whatsapp and we-chat interviews held at different dates from Zimbabwean individuals across the world. see appendix 1



**Figure 3.** Cause of Zimbabwe's poverty since 1980

Data from figure 3 above was derived from a group of 20 individuals in a whatsapp business group in Zimbabwe using private polls. Six choices of answers were provided to the individuals to show their personal views in regards to the causes of Zimbabwe's poverty since 1980. Zimbabwe's poverty since gaining independence in 1980 is a complex issue with deep roots in bad governance, corruption, misplaced priorities, and sanctions. While sanctions are often cited as the primary cause, a comprehensive analysis reveals that internal factors have played a far more significant role. Based on the figures provided, the distribution of these causes is telling: bad governance and corruption account for a substantial majority of the issues, dwarfing the impact of external sanctions. **see appendix 1.**

## 5. Discussion

### A Comparative Analysis of Poverty Causes in Zimbabwe: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data

This survey provides a critical comparison between the findings of the initial interview data-set and the provided pie chart, both of which seek to identify the root causes of poverty in Zimbabwe since 1980. While both sources point to similar key issues, their weighting and categorization of these causes differ in significant ways, highlighting the distinct insights offered by qualitative and quantitative research methods. The interview data, as previously analyzed, strongly emphasized corruption as a primary cause of poverty. This is consistent with the pie chart, which allocates a considerable portion (25.8%) to the same issue. This congruence suggests that corruption is a deeply ingrained and widely recognized problem, as evidenced by both the detailed, personal responses from the interviews and its prominence in the aggregated, numerical data. The agreement between the two sources on this point strengthens the argument that corruption is a fundamental driver of Zimbabwe's economic

struggles. However, a key divergence emerges in the categorization of other causes. The interview data frequently used terms such as 'bad governance,' 'misgovern,' and 'bad politics.' These were seen as interconnected issues, with 'bad governance' often presented as a broader category that encapsulates 'corruption.' In contrast, the pie chart places 'Bad governance' as the largest single slice at 58.1%. This suggests that while interviewees mentioned governance issues, the quantitative analysis has synthesized and grouped these responses, assigning a much larger weight to this single category than might be immediately apparent from a qualitative reading of the interview transcripts. Furthermore, the pie chart introduces categories that are less prominent in the interview responses. 'Sanctions' (9.7%) and 'Both' (3.2%) are given explicit categories in the chart. The pie chart, by creating these categories, gives more weight to these less common viewpoints. This is an important distinction, as it suggests that while internal factors dominate the conversation, external influences are still considered a significant, albeit secondary, cause by a portion of the population. The two sources offer complementary, rather than identical, perspectives. Both the qualitative interview data and the quantitative pie chart agree that corruption is a major issue. However, the pie chart's aggregation of multiple related concepts into the single, dominant category of 'Bad governance' and its inclusion of less-cited factors like 'Sanctions' provide a more structured and perhaps more comprehensive view of the problem's distribution. This comparison underscores the value of using multiple research methods to gain a more complete understanding of complex social issues.

### Consensus view

Foremost among the causes is the pervasive problem of (**corruption**). This broad category, identified as the largest single cause, encapsulates what is often described as misrule and 'bad politics'. It establishes an environment where effective economic policies cannot flourish and public resources are mismanaged. Deeply intertwined with this is the fundamental issue of systemic (**bad governance**), which is widely recognized as a crippling force that diverts wealth away from national development and undermines public trust. Compounding these issues are specific (**political factors**) that have perpetuated the cycle of poor governance. The analysis highlights the long-standing and unchallenged tenure of the ruling ZANU pf party, which has fostered a political environment marked by intense polarization. This lack of political alternation and contestation has stifled accountability and hindered the development of inclusive, sustainable economic strategies. Finally, while the consensus centers on domestic failures, (**external factors**) are also noted. Specifically, a portion of the analysis attributes a contributory role to Western economic sanctions, which are seen by some as having constrained the country's economic potential. The consensus posits that Zimbabwe's poverty is fundamentally rooted in a nexus of bad governance, corruption, and prolonged political dominance. While external sanctions are acknowledged as a factor, the overwhelming emphasis

remains on these internal political failures as the principal causes of the nation's enduring economic challenges.

## 6. Recommendations

The survey established that the root causes of poverty in Zimbabwe are primarily internal, stemming from systemic corruption and a breakdown in governance since 1980. Building upon this, it is crucial to examine the tangible consequences of this protracted economic decline and to propose a framework of policy recommendations aimed at fostering recovery and sustainable development. The effects of poverty in Zimbabwe are far-reaching, impacting economic stability, social cohesion, and political trust. Addressing these requires a holistic and multi-faceted approach that prioritizes both immediate relief and long-term institutional reform. The economic effects of Zimbabwe's poverty have been particularly devastating. The nation has experienced periods of hyperinflation, which has consistently eroded the purchasing power of its currency and savings, crippling the formal economy. This has led to widespread unemployment and a shift towards informal and often precarious livelihoods. A significant consequence has been the mass emigration of skilled professionals and young people, commonly referred to as a brain drain. This loss of human capital further undermines the country's ability to rebuild its economy and provide essential services. Public infrastructure, including key sectors like healthcare and education, has suffered from chronic under-funding, leading to a decline in standards and accessibility for the majority of the population. On a social level, the effects of poverty have resulted in heightened inequality and social unrest. Food insecurity is a persistent problem for many families, especially in rural areas, and has contributed to malnutrition and public health crises. The lack of economic opportunities has put immense pressure on family structures and contributed to a breakdown of social services. This pervasive hardship has, in turn, led to a deep-seated erosion of public trust in government and state institutions. The political consequences are equally significant; a lack of accountability and the perception of a government that serves its own interests rather than the public's can fuel political polarization and instability, creating a vicious cycle of poor governance and economic stagnation. Given the multifaceted nature of the problem, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations is essential. The most critical step is to implement rigorous anti-corruption measures. This would involve strengthening independent institutions such as an anti-corruption commission, providing them with the necessary authority and resources to investigate and prosecute corrupt officials without political interference. Furthermore, policy must be directed at enhancing transparency and accountability in public finance. This includes regular, independently audited public accounts and a transparent tendering process for government contracts to ensure public funds are used effectively.

## 7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the causes and effects of poverty in Zimbabwe constitute a deeply entrenched and multifaceted nexus of economic, social, and political challenges. This analysis has determined that these conditions are not merely incidental but are the direct consequence of systemic governance failures and pervasive corruption. The resultant economic instability, characterized by hyperinflation and crippling national debt, has precipitated widespread unemployment and the collapse of essential public services. Consequently, the populace endures profound social hardships, including food insecurity, limited access to healthcare and education, and the erosion of social cohesion.

Addressing this complex predicament necessitates a fundamental and courageous commitment to comprehensive reform. The paramount objective must be the unequivocal eradication of corruption through the establishment of robust, transparent, and independent institutions. Concurrently, the implementation of judicious macroeconomic reforms is imperative to stabilize the currency, attract foreign investment, and stimulate sustainable growth. Crucially, these efforts must be underpinned by a dedicated programme to rebuild public trust in governance through demonstrable accountability and equitable policy. Ultimately, whilst the challenges are formidable, a deliberate and sustained commitment to these principles offers the most viable pathway towards a more prosperous and equitable future for Zimbabwe.

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This research has limitations worth mentioning. We take note of our small sample that it does not represent the views of the majority of Zimbabwean population who have suffered poverty since independence in 1980 and we recommend further studies to be carried out on the same topic for greater significance.

**Notes****Appendix 1. Questionnaire****An Investigation into the Multifaceted Causes and Socioeconomic Effects of Poverty in Zimbabwe (1980-Present)****Instructions for Participants:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this academic research study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather perspectives on the complex factors contributing to poverty in Zimbabwe since independence. Your insights are invaluable.

This is an anonymous survey. All responses will be aggregated for analysis, and no individual will be identifiable in any published findings. Your participation is voluntary.

**Section A: Demographic Information**

**A1. Nationality:**  Zimbabwean  Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**A2. Age:**  18-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65+

**A3. Gender:**  Male  Female  Prefer not to say  Other

**A4. Highest Level of Education Completed:**

A. Ordinary Level (O-Level) or equivalent

B. Advanced Level (A-Level) or equivalent

C. Diploma / Certificate

D. Bachelor's Degree

E. Master's Degree

F. Doctorate (PhD)

**A5. General Sector of Employment:**

A. Agriculture

B. Public Sector. Civil Service

C. Private Formal Sector

D. Informal Sector

E. Student

F. Unemployed

G. Retired

**Section B: Structural and Economic Factors**

**B1. To what extent do you agree that each of the following has been a significant cause of Zimbabwe's economic challenges since 1980?** (Please tick one box per row)

Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
a) International sanctions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) The legacy of colonial economic structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The Land Reform Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Hyperinflation and monetary policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Decline in foreign direct investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Climate change and droughts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**B2. In your view, which two factors from the list above (B1a-f) have had the most severe negative impact on the economy?**

**B3. Which international partnerships do you believe would be most beneficial for Zimbabwe's economic development?** (Select all that apply)

- A. The European Union (EU)
- B. BRICS nations (e.g., China, South Africa, Russia)
- C. The Commonwealth
- D. United States of America
- E. Other African regional blocs (e.g., SADC, AU)

### Section C: Governance and Policy Factors

**C1. How would you characterize the prevalence of corruption in Zimbabwe?**

- A. It is endemic and affects all levels of society and government.
- B. It is widespread but primarily within public institutions.
- C. It exists but is not a defining feature of the economy.
- D. It is relatively rare.

**C2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Economic policies since 1980 have effectively reduced poverty levels."**

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

**C3. How would you rate the current level of economic and political freedom in Zimbabwe?** (Please tick one box per row)

	Very High	High	Neutral	Low	Very Low
Economic Freedom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Freedom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**C4. What is your level of trust in the following institutions to effectively address poverty?** (Please tick one box per row)

Institution	High Trust	Moderate Trust	Low Trust	No Trust at All
Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
International Aid Agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traditional Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Section D: Social and Demographic Factors

**D1. In your opinion, to what extent do the following social issues contribute to household poverty?** (Please tick one box per row)

Issue	Major Contributor	Minor Contributor	Not a Contributor	Don't Know
a) The prevalence of female-headed households	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) High dependency ratios (many dependents per worker)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Migration and the breakdown of family structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) The HIV/AIDS pandemic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Limited access to education and skills training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**D2. From your perspective, what is the single most important step that could be taken to reduce poverty in Zimbabwe?**

Thank you for your valuable time and contribution to this academic research.

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