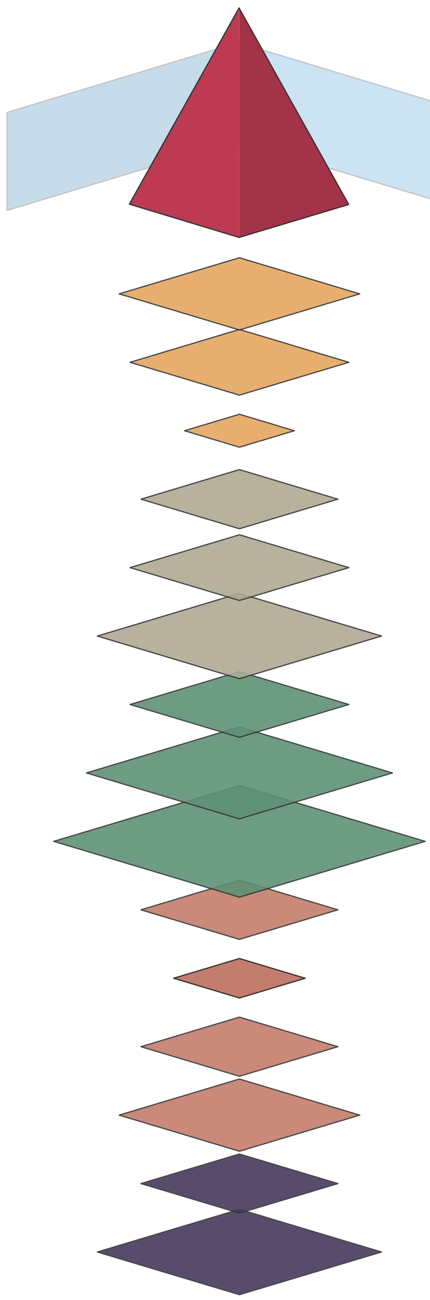
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

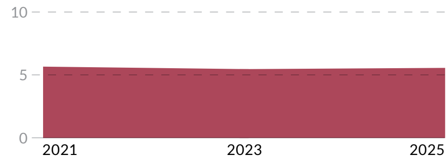
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

ZIMBABWE



5.55 ↗0.08 CRIMINALITY SCORE

73rd of 193 countries ↗3
24th of 54 African countries ↗1
4th of 13 Southern African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.20	↗0.17
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.00	↗1.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.00	↗1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.50	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.00	↗0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	↗0.50
COCAINE TRADE	3.00	↘0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	↘1.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50	↗1.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.90	0.00
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	2.50	↘1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00	↗0.50

This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

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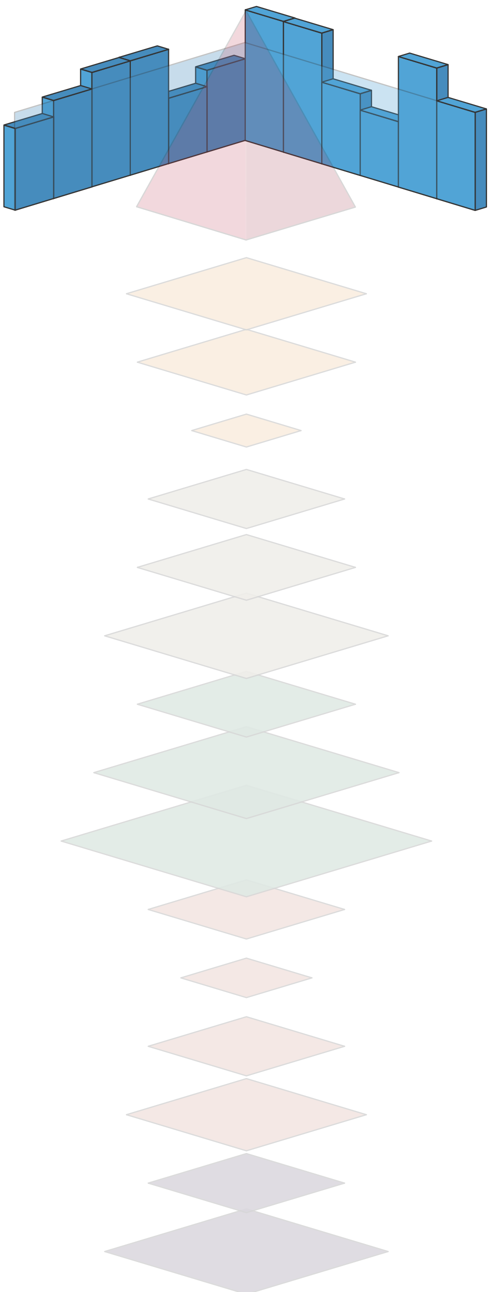
Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

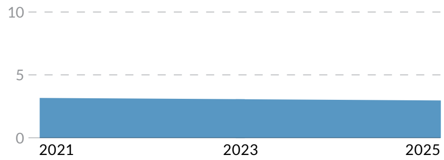
ZIMBABWE



3.04 ↘0.08

RESILIENCE SCORE

167th of 193 countries ↘1
38th of 54 African countries ↗1
12th of 13 Southern African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**2.50**	↗0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**3.00**	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**3.50**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**3.50**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**2.00**	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**2.50**	↘0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**4.00**	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**4.00**	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**2.50**	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**2.00**	0.00
PREVENTION	**4.00**	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**3.00**	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking is common in Zimbabwe, which is a source, transit point and destination for victims of forced labour and sex trafficking. Adults and children are exploited, and minors are often forced into illegal mining and unregulated agriculture, while women are deceived with fake job offers abroad, particularly in Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, leading to passport confiscation and exploitative conditions. Zimbabwean women are also trafficked to South Africa and coerced into sex work at truck stops in border towns such as Musina. Economic hardship exacerbates vulnerabilities as victims are lured by fraudulent job or education opportunities. Organized criminal networks, often with links to state-embedded actors, drive the trafficking market. Widespread corruption among immigration officials, local politicians and law enforcement officers allows traffickers to operate with impunity. Private sector entities, such as farms and illegal mines, are also involved in trafficking and benefit from forced labour. Although human smuggling in Zimbabwe is a largely dynamic and fragmented market in which small independent operators work alongside larger networks, its impact is becoming increasingly significant. Smuggling primarily involves individuals from Ethiopia, Somalia, Malawi and Zambia, as well as Lebanon and Bangladesh, who transit through Zimbabwe en route to South Africa. In recent months, the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor has experienced a significant surge. The permeable border facilitates these activities, particularly along the Limpopo River. One of Africa's busiest migration routes, the corridor is shaped by deep historical ties and complex socio-economic dynamics. The same routes used for human smuggling are also exploited by traffickers. Corruption among border control officers and law enforcement personnel enables smugglers to operate without interference. Financially, smuggling is lucrative, cross-border bus operators and other intermediaries profiting from payments made by undocumented migrants. While migrants face legal and social challenges in South Africa, their remittances are vital for families and communities back home. Economic instability and lack of opportunities drive Zimbabweans to participate in or facilitate smuggling operations. Extortion and protection racketeering are under-reported in Zimbabwe but available evidence suggests their presence in mining and transport sectors. Vigilante groups known as mashurugwi extort artisanal miners, demanding protection payments and controlling access to mining areas. These groups operate with impunity, often with the tacit approval of local law enforcement.

TRADE

The arms trafficking market in Zimbabwe is linked to the country's historical conflicts, including wars in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. Firearms from past military operations remain in circulation and weapons were reportedly stolen during the military coup in November 2017. No dominant criminal group controls arms trafficking but independent criminal networks, security companies and former combatants contribute to the illegal trade. While not a recent development, the regional flow of weapons from South Africa has remained a consistent trend. Zimbabwe has attempted to curb the proliferation of arms through amnesty programmes, resulting in the surrender of weapons. However, the circulation of illegal firearms continues and reports indicate an increase in robberies involving firearms.

The counterfeit goods trade in Zimbabwe is common, affecting several sectors, including electronics, retail and agricultural inputs. The prolonged economic downturn, marked by deindustrialization and high unemployment, has significantly reduced consumer purchasing power, fuelling demand for counterfeit products as cheaper alternatives to legitimate goods. Organized crime networks are heavily involved in manufacturing and distributing counterfeit goods, particularly in major markets such as Mbare's Mupedzanhamo and Harare's Gulf Shopping Complex. Counterfeit alcohol is widely produced and sold in taverns, posing health risks to consumers. There are periodic government crackdowns but enforcement efforts are inconsistent, allowing the counterfeit goods trade to persist.

The illicit trade of excisable consumer goods, including cigarettes and alcohol, is prevalent. Smuggling routes between Zimbabwe and South Africa are used to traffic illicit cigarettes, which are in high demand due to price disparities. Corruption in law enforcement facilitates this trade and officials accept bribes to allow shipments to pass through checkpoints. The market is transnational and domestic and foreign actors profit from the trade.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Zimbabwe involve illegal logging and the illicit trade of rare hardwoods. Timber syndicates and military-affiliated networks facilitate logging operations, taking advantage of regulatory loopholes. Corruption in the forestry sector allows illegal loggers to operate with minimal oversight. Deforestation is exacerbated by the energy crisis, as many communities rely on firewood and charcoal for heating and cooking.

Fauna crimes are highly consolidated, with well-organized poaching networks engaged in the illegal trade of ivory and rhino horns. Corruption among state-embedded actors enables traffickers to operate with little resistance. Smuggling routes overlap with other illicit markets, poachers and traffickers using the same networks as arms and drug smugglers. The demand for wildlife products primarily originates from Asia, Chinese nationals reportedly playing a significant role in the market. The extent to which Zimbabwe is a hub for the local trade of illicit wildlife products is unclear due to data limitations and complexities in measuring illegal activities.

Non-renewable resource crimes are among Zimbabwe's most profitable illicit markets. Illegal extraction and smuggling of gold, lithium and diamonds involve a complex web of criminal syndicates, state-embedded actors and private sector entities. Corrupt officials facilitate these operations by granting unauthorized access to mining permits and ignoring regulatory violations, allowing illicitly mined resources to enter the global supply chain. The international gold market is the primary destination for Zimbabwe's smuggled gold, and Dubai is a key transit point. The immense profitability of this sector has contributed to localized violence, as armed gangs such as the mashurugwi operate in mining areas, coercing labourers and extorting miners. Fuel smuggling has also expanded in recent years, driven by increasing demand and the rising number of vehicles in the country. The illicit trade is transnational, smuggling fuel from Botswana and South Africa. A common method involves diverting fuel initially declared for export to neighbouring countries, such as Malawi, into the domestic market.

DRUGS

Zimbabwe is a transit hub for heroin trafficked from east Africa to South Africa and Europe. Domestic consumption is limited but there is evidence of increasing local use, particularly among wealthier individuals. The market is facilitated by foreign actors and state-embedded officials, who accept bribes to allow shipments to pass through border controls.

The cocaine market in Zimbabwe is poorly documented, making it challenging to determine the extent of its structure and consolidation. Available information suggests that Zimbabwe is primarily a transit point for cocaine shipments moving through the region. Key destination countries include South Africa, India, Thailand, Brazil and the US. Individual arrests for cocaine possession, including those of foreign nationals, indicate the involvement of international actors, but there is no conclusive evidence pointing to a highly organized network controlling the trade.

The cannabis trade is largely fragmented and small-scale operations dominate the market. Medicinal and industrial cannabis cultivation are legal but recreational use remains prohibited. Uncertainty about legal regulations has contributed to the persistence of the illicit market, which is moderate in scale and has a limited influence on society. However, cannabis is the most widely used drug due to perceptions that it does not inflict significant harm. The trade accrues some value for individuals but there is no evidence that organized criminal networks facilitate it.

The use of synthetic drugs, particularly crystal methamphetamine (known locally as mutoriro), has increased, especially among young people. Despite this, the market is fragmented and synthetic drugs are primarily sourced from South Africa and Mozambique. Corrupt military officials facilitate smuggling operations, allowing traffickers to transport synthetic drugs into Zimbabwe to supply the growing domestic market.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime in Zimbabwe is poorly documented, with limited evidence of widespread cybercrime operations. There is evidence of crimes such as malware and hacking being detected, and some reports suggest a rise in cyberattacks. The market is transnational, cybercriminals primarily targeting government institutions and businesses rather than individuals. The low internet penetration rate limits domestic cybercriminal activity, but vulnerabilities in public institutions make the country a target for cyberattacks.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Zimbabwe are pervasive. Corruption, Ponzi schemes, cyber-enabled fraud and the misappropriation of state funds are among the most prevalent offences. State-embedded actors play a role in these crimes, often diverting public resources for personal or political gain. Cyber-enabled financial fraud is an expanding concern and schemes such as online money transfer fraud are becoming increasingly common. The actors involved vary by crime type. State-embedded officials drive large-scale embezzlement and illicit financial flows, while foreign cybercriminals primarily orchestrate digital fraud schemes targeting Zimbabwean citizens.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Zimbabwe has no entrenched mafia-style groups comparable to traditional organized crime syndicates. However, machete gangs in Zimbabwe are often linked to influential politicians involved in gold cartels. The rise in machete violence is driven by multiple factors, including the rapid expansion of artisanal mining, the impacts of climate change, and growing unemployment.

The organized crime landscape is characterized by loosely affiliated criminal networks rather than rigid hierarchical structures. These networks are highly influential, particularly in gold smuggling and money laundering operations. Recent investigative journalism efforts exposed a network of individuals engaged in illicit gold trade and financial crimes extending to South Africa, Kenya and the UAE. These networks are composed of politically connected individuals who exploit their ties to secure state tenders and amass wealth through fraudulent schemes. Notably, figures linked to the ruling party have been implicated in these activities, securing lucrative contracts for infrastructure projects that are often either abandoned, or completed but substandard. Beyond these activities, criminal networks engage in illicit activities including human trafficking, commodity smuggling, wildlife exploitation and armed robbery. The erosion of public trust in government institutions has allowed these groups to thrive, capitalizing on weak governance and regulatory gaps.

State-embedded actors are heavily involved in Zimbabwe's organized crime landscape. High-ranking officials are deeply involved in financial crimes, mineral smuggling and corrupt business practices. Recent journalistic exposés identified extensive gold smuggling and money laundering networks linked to state actors, including high-level political figures. At the lower levels, corruption is pervasive among local government officials and law enforcement officers, particularly in mining and resource extraction. State actors also play a pivotal role in undermining the democratic process by funnelling illicitly acquired funds into political campaigns and sponsoring election-related violence.

Foreign actors also play a significant role in the criminal economy, particularly in the mining, human trafficking and financial crime sectors. The Chinese diaspora has been implicated in forced labour, mineral smuggling and fraudulent financial schemes, including high-profile Ponzi schemes. Reports indicate that Chinese-owned companies are involved in labour trafficking and illegal mining, exploiting regulatory weaknesses to extract valuable resources with minimal oversight. Reports also highlight extensive involvement of individuals from the UAE, Kenyan and various parts of Western Asia in gold smuggling and money laundering. Russian and Belarusian actors are also key players, particularly in the mining sector, where they maintain strong business relationships with political elites to secure lucrative extraction rights. Foreign and local actors are deeply intertwined and many international figures work alongside state officials and private sector entities to sustain illicit operations. These actors also exert economic and political influence, Chinese tobacco company executives reportedly securing regulatory exemptions by leveraging political connections.

The private sector is deeply entangled in Zimbabwe's organized crime landscape, and corporate entities, banks and professional intermediaries facilitate corruption, financial crimes and resource exploitation. Private companies in the gold sector launder illicit funds through legitimate business operations. Financial institutions have also been implicated in facilitating large-scale money laundering schemes, often operating with politically connected individuals. Some corporate entities operate shell companies and offshore accounts to evade scrutiny, enabling the movement of illicit funds beyond Zimbabwe's borders. Recent revelations highlighted how private sector actors, including investment advisers, bankers and property specialists, assist in concealing illicit assets in tax havens.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Political leadership in Zimbabwe has been deeply entangled with organized crime. Elites play direct and indirect roles in illicit economic activities. Political rights and civil liberties are poorly protected and there are media restrictions and frequent suppression of opposition groups. The country faces significant democratic shortcomings, including weak rule of law, flawed electoral processes and severe constraints on fundamental freedoms. The complicity of political leaders in criminal activities undermines the justice system and labour protections, exacerbating national instability and vulnerability. Over time, state institutions have been repurposed to serve the interests of these criminal networks rather than the broader population. Despite official anti-corruption rhetoric, the government has failed to implement substantive reforms and high-ranking officials are implicated in financial crimes and resource exploitation.

Government transparency is a persistent challenge, characterized by entrenched corruption and restricted access to official information. Government processes often lack openness, despite constitutional provisions for transparency. Oversight mechanisms exist but are frequently compromised by political interference, limiting their effectiveness. A longstanding culture of secrecy, originating during the sanctions-busting era and reinforced through years of political conflict, obstructs accountability. The ruling regime maintains executive dominance by systematically weakening the separation of powers among the executive, legislature and judiciary. Recent legal amendments introduced minor improvements but the framework remains inadequate. Sanctions for non-compliance are weak and appeal procedures ineffective. The executive wields control over law enforcement and regulatory agencies to selectively grant or deny immunity to political allies, reinforcing a system of impunity. Corruption investigations and prosecutions have increased in recent years, but critics argue that these efforts overlook misconduct in the ruling party and disproportionately target political opponents. Anti-corruption courts and financial crime recovery initiatives have been established but their credibility is undermined by executive influence over appointments and operations. In July 2024, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament expressed concerns that corruption in Zimbabwe is worsening, citing a lack of political will to combat graft. This inaction is underscored by consistent disregard for the auditor general's recommendations by key institutions responsible for enforcing accountability across various sectors.

Zimbabwe's international cooperation efforts have yielded mixed results. The country has ratified key treaties on organized crime, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the UN Convention against Corruption, and participates in regional law enforcement frameworks such as the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization and INTERPOL initiatives. The legal framework supports cross-border collaboration in detecting, investigating and prosecuting organized crime, and Zimbabwe maintains extradition agreements with more than 50 countries, including regional and international partners. However, the practical application of these agreements is hindered by systemic corruption and capacity constraints. Financial intelligence and law enforcement agencies struggle to effectively combat illicit financial flows, particularly those linked to politically connected individuals and resource smuggling, limiting the impact of international cooperation initiatives.

Zimbabwe has taken some steps to address organized crime through national legislation, but its overall response remains fragmented and inadequate. The legal framework does not fully align with international standards, such as those set by the UNTOC, and lacks a comprehensive national strategy against organized crime. Existing laws target specific criminal activities – such as corruption, financial crimes, drug and human trafficking, and wildlife offenses – through laws such as the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act and the Trafficking in Persons Act. However, major criminal markets including illegal mining, migrant smuggling and arms trafficking remain weakly regulated or uncovered by dedicated legislation. The 2021 Cyber and Data Protection Act addresses cyber-dependent crimes but is only a partial response to broader organized crime threats. Nevertheless, there is no overarching strategy to coordinate efforts across sectors or to guide legislative development, which limits pressure on policymakers and undermines the effectiveness of existing measures.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Zimbabwe's judicial system is highly politicized, judicial independence frequently being undermined by political interference. Judges and prosecutors are often aligned with ruling party interests, leading to politically motivated arrests and prosecutions, and shielding influential individuals from accountability for financial crimes and corruption. The justice system also faces significant operational challenges, including persistent case backlogs, resource constraints and procedural inefficiencies. Recent legal reforms aim to enhance legal protections but their effectiveness in addressing deep-rooted systemic issues is limited. The prison system is characterized by severe overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and insufficient healthcare services. Cramped living conditions, limited access to necessities and growing tensions among inmates contribute to deteriorating prison environments. The lack of medical personnel and shortages of essential medicines exacerbate health risks, leading to the spread of infectious diseases and inadequate treatment for existing medical conditions.

The law enforcement sector faces significant challenges, including widespread corruption, inadequate funding and systemic inefficiencies. Officers often rely on bribes to supplement their low salaries, while political interference undermines impartial policing. Specialized units tasked with combating organized crime are largely ineffective due to insufficient resources and weak investigative capacity, particularly in addressing transnational criminal activities. Zimbabwean police and security forces are frequently accused of using excessive force during arrests, interrogations, and the dispersal of peaceful protests and informal traders, often acting in support of the ruling party. Impunity for politically motivated violence persists across security agencies – including police, military and intelligence services – as well as among the civilian authorities overseeing them. There have been efforts to modernize border controls through drone deployment and increased patrols, but corruption among border officials continues to facilitate the smuggling of minerals, wildlife products and excisable goods. While international organizations and development partners provide occasional support through training initiatives and targeted programmes, these efforts are insufficient to address the entrenched structural issues in law enforcement.

Zimbabwe faces severe challenges in maintaining territorial integrity. Its borders are highly permeable, with numerous undesignated crossing points and weak infrastructure. Corruption among border control officials is persistent, facilitating smuggling operations. Efforts to improve enforcement have been undermined by a lack of resources and political will. Initiatives such as public-private partnerships for border management have yet to yield significant improvements in oversight and security.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Zimbabwe's anti-money laundering framework has seen some improvements, including the enactment of legislation and the strengthening of financial intelligence mechanisms. However, enforcement is weak due to political interference and resource constraints. While Zimbabwe was removed from the Financial Action Task Force grey list, the effectiveness of its anti-money laundering measures is questionable. High-profile money laundering cases linked to state officials expose gaps in regulatory enforcement. Financial institutions and private actors implicated in illicit financial flows operate with limited oversight, and state-embedded actors frequently engage in illicit transactions with impunity.

The broader economic regulatory environment is marked by governance failures and corruption. Zimbabwe is in debt distress, with substantial arrears to international lenders and limited access to external credit. Fiscal mismanagement, regulatory opacity and lack of investor confidence contribute to economic instability. Despite the establishment of agencies tasked with economic oversight, enforcement is undermined by political influence and lack of capacity. Legal frameworks protecting businesses from criminal activities exist, but weak implementation and inconsistent regulatory practices hinder their effectiveness.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government lacks a structured victim protection programme and existing initiatives are underfunded and inconsistent. The cabinet approved the establishment of a witness protection office but the proposed Witness Protection Bill has yet to be tabled, leaving victims and whistle-blowers vulnerable. Whistle-blowing facilities, including hotlines, are available but they face substantial challenges in effectively combating organized crime. Issues such as limited resources, the risk of retaliation against whistle-blowers and public distrust in the confidentiality and effectiveness of these mechanisms hinder their impact. Efforts to assist victims of human trafficking, drug abuse and financial fraud are largely spearheaded by international organizations and non-government groups. However, under the Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan (2024–2030) Zimbabwe aims to reduce the harmful effects of drug abuse through a coordinated, multisectoral approach. The plan focuses on expanding harm reduction services, strengthening healthcare capacity, and promoting evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation to address the impacts on national security, public health, and community well-being.

Prevention efforts against organized crime include public awareness campaigns and community-based initiatives. Mechanisms such as the national anti-corruption strategy and the national cyber security strategy aim to address systemic vulnerabilities but their effectiveness is limited due to weak enforcement and insufficient institutional capacity. Zimbabwe is increasing its cybersecurity awareness initiatives and training programmes with local stakeholders as the digital economy grows. Anti-drug enforcement efforts have intensified through crackdowns on illicit drug markets and increased rehabilitation initiatives. Nevertheless, economic hardship pushes many individuals into criminal enterprises, limiting the overall success of prevention strategies. Community policing programmes, including neighbourhood watches, have had some success in crime prevention but are underfunded and lack adequate state support.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media, are involved in combating organized crime and promoting transparency. However, their ability to operate effectively is significantly hindered by government actions and policies. The state often views independent CSOs – particularly those calling for democratic governance and anti-corruption reforms – as aligned with opposition parties and foreign interests, leading to harassment, legal challenges and financial restrictions. The relationship between the state and non-state actors in addressing organized crime is marked by distrust, limited cooperation and resource constraints. The government selectively engages with CSOs, supporting those aligned with its agenda while suppressing dissenting voices. The media landscape is heavily controlled, independent outlets facing restrictions, intimidation and legal threats. State-controlled media dominates public discourse, limiting diverse perspectives. Journalists reporting on corruption and human rights violations increasingly face legal attacks, the Cyber and Data Protection Act being used to target them. Reports of online threats, harassment and intimidation – particularly related to coverage of corruption in the gold mining sector – further illustrate the hostile environment for independent media. Despite these challenges, efforts persist to promote alternative narratives and raise awareness, though their impact is constrained.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.