



EARLY WARNING COUNTRY REPORT NOVEMBER 2016

SCENARIOS OF REPRESSION

PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES IN ZIMBABWE





SCENARIOS OF REPRESSION

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Summary

Zimbabwe is entering a period of acute risk of mass atrocities that can be expected to last at least through the next planned general elections in 2018. The risk will be heightened should President Robert Mugabe die or become severely incapacitated before the elections. This report describes two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, scenarios that could plausibly lead to mass atrocities, which we define as large-scale and systematic violence against civilian populations:

1. Factional fights within the ruling party could escalate into open violence, with elements of the military, party youth groups, and militia targeting civilian supporters of competing factions.
2. Increasingly threatening anti-government protest activity could lead to a sharp escalation in violent repression by government security forces, informal militia, or both against a widening circle of people associated with the protests.

Table 1 on page ii summarizes each scenario, including potential perpetrators, targeted groups, likely tactics, warning signs, and triggers.

Our research indicates that international attention on Zimbabwe has been declining, exacerbating the inherent tendency for governments and international organizations to defer action until a crisis forces a response. It also appears that many policy discussions about Zimbabwe's economic crisis, response to the drought in southern Africa, and potential political instability around a contested succession are proceeding more or less independently. These patterns are self-defeating and must change. International, regional, and local actors with influence in Zimbabwe should immediately develop and implement comprehensive, flexible strategies to help prevent mass atrocities.

To address underlying risks and strengthen local resilience against atrocities, we recommend investing foreign assistance funds into flexible programs that can address urgent needs in a crisis as well as contribute to longer-term goals in areas such as local conflict resolution capacity, civil society, youth, and inclusive political dialogue.

To dissuade potential perpetrators from committing atrocities, we recommend diplomatic engagement with and by regional leaders to communicate that the use of atrocities will not be accepted as a path to power, and that protection of basic human rights should remain a prerequisite and continuing requirement for economic assistance to the Zimbabwean government.

Finally, to anticipate and plan effective responses to potential mass atrocity contingencies, we recommend greater investment in monitoring and early warning efforts, and integration of potential political crises into humanitarian planning. The United Nations (UN), in particular, should address Zimbabwe through the Secretary-General's Human Rights up Front initiative, including by convening an interdepartmental review and surging expert capacity to the UN Country Team.

TABLE 1: Plausible Scenarios of Mass Atrocities in Zimbabwe

Scenario	Factional competition over succession	Crackdown on anti-government protest activity
Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of either the Lacoste or the G40 faction of ZANU-PF Members of the Zimbabwean army and Central Intelligence Organization aligned with either faction ZANU-PF-linked youth militia groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Zimbabwean Army and Central Intelligence Organization ZANU-PF-linked youth militia groups
Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civilians supporting or perceived to be supporting either faction Rural communities in ZANU-PF strongholds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizers of and participants in protest activity Opposition political leaders and party members Mainly urbanites
Tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted killings Forced displacement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted killings Widespread torture Forced disappearances
Warning signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs of continued uncertainty surrounding Mugabe's succession (e.g., elite support split between factions; no resolution of constitutional ambiguities) Relative parity of force between competing factions Public disputes between ZANU-PF factions in the run-up to the 2018 elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs that protests are perceived to pose severe threat to ZANU-PF rule (e.g., increased frequency, geographic scope, popular reach of protest activity; extreme verbal threats by ZANU-PF leaders) Failure of less severe and non-lethal repressive responses to quell protests Protesters use more confrontational tactics (e.g., street demonstrations vs. stay-aways) Opposition political parties form a coalition that poses an electoral threat in 2018
Triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mugabe's incapacitation or death Major decisions at ZANU-PF party conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Escalating protest activity Overt manipulation or rigging of 2018 elections

Scenarios of Repression: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Sometime in the next few years, Zimbabwe will experience a momentous political change. Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe since the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1980, turned 92 earlier this year. As Mugabe has aged, competition for his looming succession among factions of Zimbabwe's ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), has grown more intense. Additionally, the ZANU-PF government's corruption and severe economic mismanagement have sparked a new wave of protest activity unaffiliated with the country's established opposition parties. Together, these dynamics pose a new challenge to the tight control that Mugabe and his inner circle have maintained over Zimbabwean politics and society.

Violence has been a central strategy of government control since independence, when ZANU-PF—then ZANU—assumed power from the Rhodesian colonial regime. Violence against civilians represents an unusually high proportion—approximately 75 percent, since 1997—of all political violence in Zimbabwe.¹ Human rights groups have documented lethal and nonlethal abuses by government forces against members of opposing ruling party factions, opposition activists, and civil society groups. These abuses have included mass killing, forced displacement, forced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence. The most intense episodes of violence against civilians in Zimbabwe include the systematic attacks on political opposition surrounding general elections in 2002 and 2008, and major military operations such as the Gukurahundi massacres from 1983 to 1987, which killed about 20,000 people in predominantly ethnic Ndebele areas, and Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, which resulted in the forced displacement of more than 700,000 people. The government is also responsible for a variety of rights abuses outside of these major episodes of violence, especially against perceived supporters of opposition groups.

Because of this history, advocates for the prevention of mass atrocities have long voiced concern about Zimbabwe.² Other analysts, by contrast, have tended to emphasize Zimbabwe's lack of a large-scale conflict since 1987, President Mugabe's ability to manage factional conflicts, and the weakness of opposition parties as signs that mass violence is a more remote possibility. This report was motivated to explore these differing assessments at a time when the country seems to be openly laying the foundations for a post-Mugabe future. A major shock that could change the status quo—positively or negatively—seems to be growing nearer.

METHODOLOGY

The Simon-Skjoldt Center launched the Early Warning Project to help policy makers prevent mass atrocities by highlighting cases in which mass atrocities have not started but where risks are detected. Providing governments, advocacy groups, and at-risk societies with earlier and more reliable warning means more opportunity to take action well before killings occur. To date, the project's two main components have been an annual statistical risk assessment of state-led mass killing and a “wisdom of crowds” process using an opinion pool to aggregate individual judgments about atrocity risks. This report represents a new aspect of the Center's work on early warning: research into the country-specific drivers of risk, mitigating factors, and promising preventive actions, conducted by Center staff in partnership with a country expert working as an Early Warning Fellow. The goal is to help stimulate action to address risks of mass atrocities in countries where the risks are

significant, but the countries are not yet in full-fledged crisis. The Center selected Zimbabwe for this pilot effort on the basis of an assessment of its risk profile and the opportunity for this type of research to improve policy action to help prevent mass atrocities.

This report’s conceptual structure builds on existing conflict and atrocity assessment frameworks, including from the US government and the United Nations.³ The report zeros in on two scenarios through which Zimbabwe could plausibly experience mass atrocities. Because this research aims to contribute to the prevention of mass atrocities, which are rare even in countries at relatively high risk, we focus squarely on variations of “worst case” scenarios as long as they can be judged as plausible.⁴ For each scenario,

we describe its key features—including potential perpetrators, groups likely to be targeted, and likely tactics—and discuss the main dynamics driving the risk. We then discuss warning signs—in other words, developments that would point to an increase in the likelihood of the scenario materializing—and potential triggers, or “events or sets of events that precipitate a sharp escalation in violence.”⁵ After presentation of the two scenarios, we identify several more general risk and mitigating factors, which together help create the environment in which the scenarios are plausible, though far from determined. The report concludes with policy recommendations directed at regional and international actors.

The report’s findings are based primarily on interviews of Zimbabweans and Zimbabwe experts conducted by the authors from May to September 2016; the lead author conducted in-country interviews in Harare and Bulawayo from September to October 2016. In addition, the authors received feedback on preliminary findings from a group of experts in Washington, DC, in September 2016.

PLAUSIBLE SCENARIOS THAT COULD LEAD TO MASS ATROCITIES

SCENARIO 1: Increasingly severe intra-ZANU-PF competition leads to targeting of civilians perceived to be supporting competing factions

Tensions between competing ZANU-PF factions over Mugabe’s succession have escalated as his death approaches. While intense factionalism has characterized ZANU-PF’s internal politics since the Zimbabwe



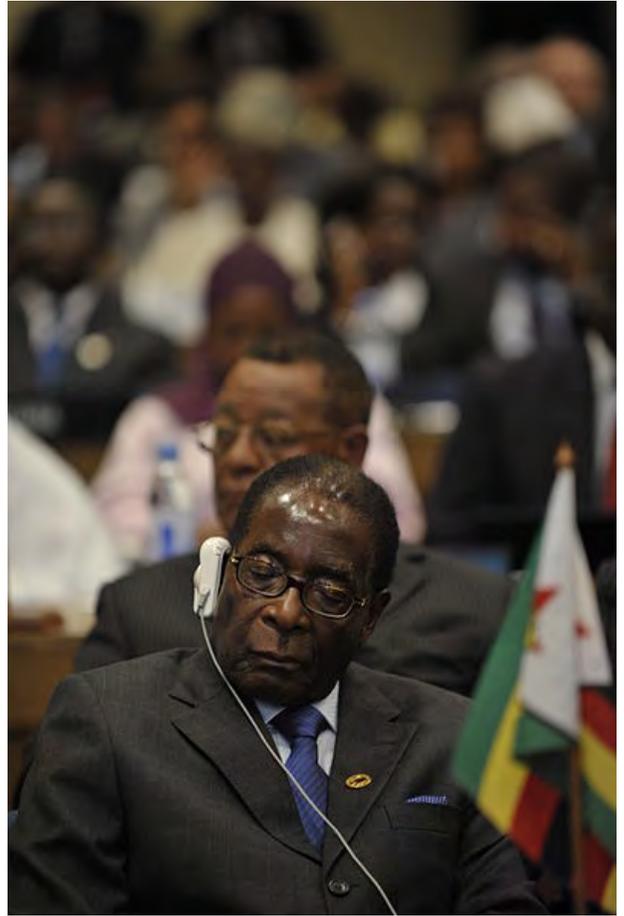
Liberation War from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the expulsion of longtime First Vice-President Joice Mujuru from the ruling party in December 2014 marked a new era of political infighting. In addition to Mujuru herself, ZANU-PF expelled more than 140 national and provincial party leaders from its ranks in the ensuing months. In several cases, the ZANU-PF government followed these purges with acts of beating, intimidation, and forced displacement. These party leaders, many of whom have joined Mujuru's new party, Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF), continue to face targeted abuses by government forces.

The ZANU-PF succession battle is now split between supporters of current First Vice-President and longtime security chief Emmerson Mnangagwa, known as the Lacoste faction, and supporters of First Lady Grace Mugabe, known as the Generation 40 (G40) faction. Although Grace Mugabe, head of the ZANU-PF women's league since December 2014, is the public face of G40, many analysts perceive her role as a proxy for the Mugabe family's influence in ZANU-PF politics after the president's demise. Mugabe's support for either faction appears fluid, as demonstrated by recent attacks on both war veteran groups aligned with the Lacoste faction and senior leaders aligned with G40.

Each faction has used informal security forces such as youth militia groups to wrest local authority from the opposing faction's respective rural base. In some cases, political competition between the Lacoste and G40 factions has resulted in outright violence.⁷ Senior leaders of both factions have also used increasingly inflammatory language in broad public condemnations of their opponents. These factional conflicts may draw in units of the Zimbabwean military, police, and intelligence services allied with either side.

Key Features of the Scenario

If competing factions target groups beyond members of the Lacoste or G40 cadres, civilian supporters of the opposing side would be the most likely targets of mass atrocities by either faction. As during the ZANU-PF government's previous violence against opposition supporters, perceived—rather than actual—support for one faction over another would provide sufficient basis for abuse by formal and informal security forces.



Robert Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe, attends the 12th African Union Summit Feb. 2, 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
DefenseImagery.mil

Violence would most likely occur in ZANU-PF's rural strongholds, the foundation of the ruling party's electoral base and political control. Recent factional disputes have reshaped the balance of ZANU-PF's control over these local constituencies. The G40 faction, led in part by Saviour Kasukuwere, ZANU-PF political commissar and minister of local government, has assumed significant control over much of ZANU-PF's rural party structure since the expulsion of Joice Mujuru, who had previously overseen much of the party's provincial leadership.⁸ These local party structures—including youth militias and other paramilitary groups—would be essential to the coordination and execution of mass violence against civilian supporters of the Lacoste faction in any plausible scenario. Although the Lacoste faction has control over some party structures in Masvingo and Midlands, its ability to mobilize those groups against G40 supporters is unclear.

Targeted lethal violence and land invasions, forced disappearances, and forced displacement are plausible means of political intimidation and coercion by either faction. These abuses make up a well-practiced repertoire of violence against political opponents by ZANU-PF-linked paramilitary groups, including youth militias, and formal security forces.

It remains difficult to assess the likelihood that intra-party violence would spread to include the targeting of civilians beyond those closely associated with party factions and the potential scale of violence against civilians if it were to become more widespread.

Drivers

Current disputes between the Lacoste and G40 factions have their origins in Mugabe's longstanding manipulation of infighting within his inner circle. Throughout his tenure, Mugabe has regularly warned of attempted assassinations, party coups, and other conspiracies against his rule. Since the late 1990s, Mugabe's paranoid style of governance has stoked competition among senior ZANU-PF officials for political control and Mugabe's favor. Disputes within the party have allowed Mugabe to prevent the concentration of power in any one faction.⁹ These disputes have often relied on and drawn in factions of the Zimbabwean security and intelligence services, especially within the Central Intelligence Organization and the Military Intelligence leadership. For example, during the early 2000s, succession battles between Joice Mujuru and her husband, late army chief Solomon Mujuru, and Emmerson Mnangagwa pit much of the party's intelligence leadership against itself.¹⁰

Continued uncertainty surrounding the outcome and process of Mugabe's succession is likely to increase the risk that the Lacoste and G40 factions resolve the country's succession crisis through violence. As yet, neither faction has been able to demonstrate the political support necessary to establish its position as leader of a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. The ruling party's constitutional provisions for succession are also unclear. In the event of a presidential succession, Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution defers the appointment of a permanent successor to the country's ruling party—that is, to ZANU-PF. The ZANU-PF constitution assigns formal electoral authority to the party's ten Provincial Coordinating Committees (PCCs), though their weight, role, and processes of selection are uncertain. The 2014 party congress further muddied the succession process by granting greater electoral authority to the ZANU-PF president—Mugabe—and his so-called presidium.¹¹ The PCCs' prominent formal role, however, has made them a central battleground for factional disputes since Mujuru's ouster.

Warning Signs and Triggers

Many warning signs of potential mass atrocities against civilian supporters of either ZANU-PF faction are opaque because of significant political constraints on local civil society actors and the international community's limited access to Zimbabwe's rural areas. Despite these constraints, observers should focus on two central dynamics for indicators of a change in the risk of mass atrocities against civilians by members of either ZANU-PF faction: (1) continued uncertainty surrounding the selection of the next leader of ZANU-PF (and, therefore, of Zimbabwe); and (2) distribution of support for the two factions by the Zimbabwean army, police, and intelligence services.

Despite public deference to constitutionalism in Zimbabwean politics, ZANU-PF has historically shown little respect for either its own constitution or the country's.¹² Given the party's past actions, some analysts suggest the possibility of a "constitutional coup" surrounding Mugabe's succession, backed by senior officials in the Zimbabwean military.¹³

Continued uncertainty surrounding the outcome and process of Mugabe's succession is likely to increase the risk that the Lacoste and G40 factions resolve the country's succession crisis through violence.

Relative parity in support for both factions by specific wings of the Zimbabwean army, police, or intelligence services at the time of a contested succession would likely mean high risk that violence is targeted against civilian supporters of opposing factions. The extent of either faction's support within the Zimbabwean security services, however, is unclear. In general, senior security officials are thought to back Mnangagwa, who served with much of the Joint Operations Command (JOC) leadership during the Liberation War, against Grace Mugabe, 51, and the younger G40 cadre.¹⁴ This support, however, is far from homogenous.¹⁵ Some members of the military and intelligence leadership also continue to support Mujuru and ZimPF despite her husband's death in 2011 and her expulsion from ZANU-PF. Some war veterans' organizations, which have historically served as ZANU-PF proxies against opposition groups, defected to ZimPF in January 2016; others have thrown their support behind the Lacoste faction in defiance of Mugabe's warnings. However they split, the organizational, generational, and political fissures within the formal and informal Zimbabwean security services would influence the severity of violence against civilians, especially if neither group establishes clear dominance over their opponent in advance of Mugabe's incapacitation or death.

Beyond Mugabe's demise, the clearest potential triggers for the escalation of mass atrocities are those events or political moments that bring the two ZANU-PF factions into direct conflict over control of party structures, especially if they could lead one faction to believe the balance of power is shifting in its opponent's favor. The link between limited factional violence and moments of political conflict within the ruling party were on display at the annual ZANU-PF national conference in December 2015, for example. With the stakes of factional

conflict increasing as Mugabe's death approaches, this year's conference in Masvingo, reportedly a Mnangagwa stronghold, might center on disputes over control of provincial party structures. Although these disputes might not escalate into mass atrocities in the near term, limited fighting between paramilitary supporters of both factions could worsen tensions and lead to future large-scale violence against civilians in specific contested areas.

SCENARIO 2: Increasing anti-government protest activity leads to severe repression by government security forces, informal militia, or both

Zimbabwe has seen a significant increase in protest activity since 2014.¹⁶ The most recent wave of protests began in March 2016, as a loose coalition of civil society groups and social movements such as #ThisFlag and Tajamuka organized protests online and in the streets to call attention to human rights abuses, corruption, and the government's mismanagement of the economy. The ZANU-PF government's lagging response to the economic crisis encouraged similar protests during the following months. Although a protracted ban on protests in Harare has limited recent demonstrations, protest actions during June and July grew in scale and scope to include a national strike of civil servants and demonstrations in small towns throughout Zimbabwe. The government's response to these protests has included limited violence against protesters and mass arrests of opposition leaders and movement activists. If anti-government protests not only continue but also escalate, despite government efforts to thwart them, the ruling party can be expected to search for other options to prevent a "Zimbabwe spring."¹⁷

The government is more likely to commit atrocities if it perceives protests to be a profound threat to its continued rule.

Key Features of the Scenario

The basic scenario envisaged is one in which escalating protests lead government leaders to sharply increase attacks on those perceived to be organizing and supporting protests. Youth communities in urban centers might be targeted, with opposition activists and social movement leaders being abducted and disappeared. There have already been reports since mid-2015 of increased abductions, disappearances, torture, and harassment of civil society activists. One Zimbabwean nongovernmental organization reported 37 percent more incidents of political violence from January through late October 2016 than in all of 2015.¹⁸ It is plausible that the breadth and severity of these repressive tactics would increase in response to escalating anti-government protests. Our research suggests that this kind of escalation from targeted to more widespread attacks is more likely than the massacre of large numbers of protesters by Zimbabwean security forces using live fire on the streets.

To the extent that protests are closely associated with particular opposition parties or organized civil society groups, the ensuing repression is likely to remain targeted at these groups and their leaders. If a widening cross-section of Zimbabweans joins in anti-government protests, there is a risk that ZANU-PF leaders would lash out broadly in hopes of reasserting control and re-instilling fear among the population. Opposition political parties

have not been a major driver of the recent protests, and they are generally perceived to be quite weak, posing little threat to ZANU-PF. If opposition parties manage to forge a coalition with broad public support in the run-up to the 2018 elections, they and their perceived supporters may become a more likely target for atrocities in a manner similar to attacks around the 2008 elections.

Drivers

The main drivers of this scenario are ZANU-PF leaders' perceptions that protesters and their supporters could constitute a grave and growing threat to their hold on power. Beyond their size and frequency, the recent protests were notable in a number of respects, which together almost certainly would increase the government's assessment of how great a threat they pose. First, most of the protests were not organized by opposition political parties or professionally organized civil society groups. Zimbabweans who had never before been politically active were joining stay-aways and taking to the streets. Second, in contrast to past waves of protest, the mobilizing issues and rhetoric from the bulk of recent protests have been decidedly nonpartisan, aside from their focus on decrying a lack of government accountability. In several cases, specific government actions, such as announcing a plan to issue bond notes, a ban on imported goods, and delays in payment to civil servants, have triggered significant protests. Third, many people have observed that the caution and risk aversion that Zimbabweans have exercised historically appears to be waning. In particular, Zimbabweans have been more willing to openly criticize Mugabe and other ZANU-PF leaders, though a long legacy of public aversion to dissent remains.

The violence surrounding the 2008 elections is an important precedent, especially for considering the variant of this scenario in which opposition parties coalesce and pose a serious electoral threat to ZANU-PF in 2018. The violence hit its peak from March to June 2008, after Movement for Democratic Change Zimbabwe - Tsvangirai (MDC-T) won a plurality—but, according to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, not the requisite majority—of votes in the first round of the presidential election. At the order of senior JOC officials, ZANU-PF-linked youth and war veteran militias, and formal security forces organized a systematic campaign of atrocities against MDC-T organizers and the opposition party's supporters. The campaign resulted in the deaths of about 200 civilians and the torture, forced disappearance, and sexual abuse of thousands more. The violence secured ZANU-PF's victory in the runoff elections in June and dealt a significant blow to opposition party structures.¹⁹

Warning Signs and Triggers

As this scenario is the result of a dynamic interaction between protesters and the Zimbabwean government, the most effective way to gauge the risk at any point in time is to watch the actions and reactions by both sides. As noted, the government is more likely to commit atrocities if it perceives protests to be a profound threat to its continued rule. Protests are likely to be judged more threatening to the extent that they are more frequent, include more people—especially people beyond those already organized by political parties or civil society organizations—include people across multiple opposition parties and across more diverse geographic areas, and are spurred by multiple anti-government grievances. If repressive government measures are followed by continued or increased protest activity, the government is likely to use different and more severe tactics. If targeted repressive measures are seen to be effective, on the other hand, the likelihood of mass violence is lower. For example, the relative quiet that has followed the government's response to protests in the summer of

2016, including arrests and bans on demonstrations, among other repressive measures, suggests the risk of even more severe or widespread repression may have stabilized unless protests reemerge.

The specific tactics that protest organizers choose and the alliances they forge also affect the likelihood of mass violence. For example, the decision of activists in September 2016 to challenge the government ban on demonstrations in court rather than on the streets undoubtedly reduced the risk of atrocities. More generally, stay-aways and strikes are inherently less combustible than are street demonstrations, which put large numbers of angry people in close proximity to armed representatives of the state. In addition, evidence of support for protest movements or political opposition from outside of Zimbabwe would likely increase ZANU-PF's perception of threat and in turn the risk of large-scale violence. It is important to note, however, that to date the government has used the specter of Western-backed "regime change" operations to discredit local protest movements without real evidence of such a conspiracy.

Although economic concerns appear to have spurred many recent protests, it is not entirely clear how the economy will affect the propensity for protests going forward. Zimbabwe's current economic crisis has many manifestations and these differ for different segments of the population (e.g., urban vs. rural, civil servants vs. workers in the informal sector). The protests have mostly resonated with unemployed young people whose risk aversion has lowered as the economy has worsened. As the economic crisis persists, plausible signs of escalating protests might be met by new state repression, including mass arrests and forced disappearances—which in turn may be met with violent protest tactics by civilians such as arson, property damage, and attacks on security personnel.

As Zimbabwe moves toward the 2018 elections, it will be important to watch for signs that the elections could be truly competitive (or may require substantial rigging to ensure ZANU-PF victory). Comparative research on electoral violence suggests that the more competitive the election, the greater the chance for violence.²⁰

ANALYSIS OF UNDERLYING RISKS AND MITIGATING FACTORS

RISK FACTORS

Zimbabwe has consistently ranked around 30th of more than 160 countries on our statistical risk assessment for state-led mass killing, driven largely by characteristics of the country's national politics ("partial democracy with factionalism," by far the least stable category of governance types).²¹ Other structural factors that contribute to the relatively high assessed risk of state-led mass killing include having had an episode of mass killing in the past (see sidebar "A History of Mass Atrocities in Zimbabwe"), current salience of elite ethnicity, and low gross domestic product growth per capita. Our consultations with Zimbabwe experts underscored those factors, in their particular Zimbabwean form, and others as contributing to the risk of mass atrocities.

Factionalism

The ZANU-PF government's history of exclusionary politics has entrenched fissures within and political grievances against the ZANU-PF government. While the current economic crisis has undermined the government's ability to maintain a stable patronage-based system of party governance, factional competition for

political power and commercial gain remains an important feature of ZANU-PF governance. Partisan and ethnic alliances shaped by this factionalism leave little space for accountable and transparent governance. This lack of accountability, including for past government abuses against civilians, has undermined citizens' confidence in the rule of law.

Economic crisis

Faced with new protests over its economic mismanagement, the government has a strong interest in restoring economic confidence. Disputes over Mugabe's succession, however, have led to unbridled policy inconsistency and paralysis, eroding residual confidence among citizens and hopes for reform. Unlike Zimbabwe's experience of hyperinflation in 2007–08, which the Zimbabwean government resolved by adopting a multi-currency regime, Zimbabwe's government now has few paths for economic relief beyond a full international bailout. Economic relief through new international lines of credit is unlikely—even from Russia and China—without a clear agenda for economic and political reform. South Africa, Zimbabwe's leading trading partner and a regional economic powerhouse, is constrained by pressing domestic demands that include outstanding debts from Zimbabwe.

Government capacity for extreme repression

The government's expansive military, police, and intelligence services are the dominant coercive force in Zimbabwe. These forces have also overseen a wide proliferation of ZANU-PF-linked youth militias, war veteran groups, and other paramilitary organizations. As Zimbabwe's security services have become more active in the country's politics, critical command structures such as the JOC have taken a greater role in

A HISTORY OF MASS ATROCITIES IN ZIMBABWE

The most severe episode of mass atrocities in Zimbabwe's post-independence history occurred during the so-called Gukurahundi massacres from 1983 to 1987. During the massacres, special forces from the Zimbabwean Army's elite Fifth Brigade killed more than 20,000 people in predominantly ethnic Ndebele areas of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, and forcibly displaced tens of thousands more.²² The massacres concluded a decade and a half of factional fighting between ZANU and its armed wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and Joshua Nkomo's opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and its force, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). To date, few ZANU-PF officials have been held to account for their role in the violence. In fact, several senior officials in the current government—including Mnangagwa and, allegedly, Mugabe himself—helped orchestrate the massacres.²³

The ZANU-PF government has also used violence against opponents to strengthen the party's authority. This violence often corresponds with ZANU-PF's participation in national elections. In 2000, for example, the government's "fast-track land reform" resulted in the systematic confiscation of white-owned commercial farms and widespread assaults against farm owners and workers thought to support ZANU-PF's opposition.²⁴ Opposition supporters met similar violence during and after the 2002 presidential election.²⁵ During Operation Murambatsvina ("Restore Order") in 2005, Zimbabwean security forces exacted similar abuses against more than 700,000 urban dwellers across Zimbabwe thought to be supportive of opposition candidates during the 2005 parliamentary elections.²⁶ ZANU-PF's intimidation campaign against opposition and civil society leaders surrounding the general election in March and June 2008 killed about 200 civilians, the most severe case of large-scale lethal violence since the Gukurahundi massacres.

civilian affairs. The Zimbabwean military, for example, has played an active role in repressive policing activities in response to previous protests. In addition, our research suggests that the coercive organizations used to commit violence against civilians in 2008 have been revived. Some analysts view the recent deployment of government initiatives such as the so-called command agriculture program—the appropriation and redistribution of a percentage of agricultural yield by government authorities—as a thin veil for increased military activity in rural communities.

Increasing political salience of ethnicity

Our research also suggests an ethnic dimension to the conflict between the Lacoste and G40 factions. This does not mean it should be understood as an “ethnic conflict,” but rather that ethnicity may be taking on increased political salience in the context of uncertainty around the future leadership of the party and the state. Manipulation of ethnic differences is not new to Zimbabwe’s politics. Tensions between leaders of Shona-Zezuru and Shona-Karanga origin, however, have become more pronounced as senior party officials have promoted co-ethnics through the ranks of their respective agencies. In the context of a contested succession, elite manipulation of these ethnic affiliations for political gain may increase the severity of violence against civilians. Accordingly, preferential treatment of co-ethnics by ZANU-PF leaders in political appointments and patronage merits continued attention.²⁷

MITIGATING FACTORS

Several factors appear to act as counterweights to the risks previously discussed. These mitigating factors include (1) the relative effectiveness of ZANU-PF’s targeted repression of opposition activists; (2) the ZANU-PF government’s sensitivity to criticism by fellow governments in the Southern African Development Community; (3) the ZANU-PF government’s interest in a bailout by international financial institutions or other donors; (4) a degree of professionalism within state institutions; and (5) Zimbabwean civil society groups’ well-established capacity to monitor and report human rights abuses.

The atrophy and politicization of the Zimbabwean state since the late 1990s have weakened some—but not all—of these mitigating factors against future atrocity risks. Multiple cycles of fiscal crises have severely depleted basic social services such as food assistance, primary education, and basic health care programs, and services that do exist are often subject to political exploitation.²⁸ Our research indicates that multiple months of withheld or delayed police, military, and intelligence salaries have left the rank-and-file more prone to predatory abuses against civilians. It is also plausible that Zimbabwe’s current economic crisis will limit the capacity of civil society groups responsible for monitoring human rights abuses and warning signs of violent conflict.

Effectiveness of targeted repression

Although the ZANU-PF government has committed mass abuses against its citizens since assuming power in 1980, it has also used targeted lethal and nonlethal violence short of large-scale, systematic atrocities against opposition leaders and civil society groups. Targeted repression has deterred challengers to ZANU-PF and made it very difficult for them to organize effectively. Research suggests that the Zimbabwean government’s sustained repression has increased electoral support for the ruling party and aversion to dissent among poor

Zimbabweans.²⁹ If the ZANU-PF government and the Zimbabwean security services perceive these targeted actions as being effective in protecting their vital interests, they would see little reason to commit further large-scale atrocities.

Sensitivity to regional criticism

During previous crises, external diplomatic efforts have constrained violence by ZANU-PF party officials, formal security forces, and youth militia groups. As the Zimbabwean government's response to the Khampepe report on Zimbabwe's 2002 elections and the report by South African military generals about Zimbabwe's 2008 election crisis suggest, South African criticism of the ZANU-PF government may constrain abuses.³⁰

Growing divisions within the South African liberation elite and the African National Congress, who both have historically been staunch supporters of the ZANU-PF government, and South Africa's deep ties to the Zimbabwean economy may create incentives for South Africa to exert greater pressure on senior ZANU-PF and security leaders to avoid large-scale violence. However, experts warn not to expect the same level of engagement from South Africa as seen in 2008. South Africa is managing its own domestic political challenges and economic stagnation on top of its general wariness of interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. Political crises in Mozambique, Lesotho, and the Democratic Republic of Congo also limit the attention that SADC and its member states can devote to Zimbabwe.

Need for an economic bailout

Although the current economic crisis creates significant risks of political instability, the ZANU-PF government may well moderate its behavior in the interest of securing economic support. As of November 2016, the Zimbabwean government owes more \$1.1 billion in arrears to the World Bank, and \$600 million to the African Development Bank. (The International Monetary Fund announced in late October 2016 that Zimbabwe had cleared its arrears with that organization.) Our research suggests that the Zimbabwean government's campaign for debt relief and a subsequent bailout by these international financial institutions (IFIs) has limited its use of violence in response to recent protests. Senior ZANU-PF members, including Mnangagwa, have encouraged a fiscal policy centered on the government's re-engagement with the IFIs. These "reformers"—many of whom have overseen large-scale violence against civilians in the past—may encourage the ZANU-PF government to refrain from mass atrocities against internal opponents or opposition and civil society groups in pursuit of this bailout.

Professionalism of state functionaries

Though unpredictable, some levels of professionalism still exist in state institutions, including the rank and file of the security services and the judiciary. Some observers suggest that the behavior of state functionaries, in particular law enforcement agents, might be somewhat constrained by widespread formal respect for the rule of law. In addition, despite the existence of multiple informal militias, our research indicates that military and party leaders retain control of most of the coercive forces in the country. These factors suggest that large-scale and systematic violence would be very unlikely to occur absent a clear decision by small numbers of senior political and military leaders.

Civil society monitoring capacity

A large network of Zimbabwean civil society organizations responsible for monitoring and responding to human rights abuses has been active since the era of Rhodesian settler rule. Although limited international funding has reduced these organizations' capacity, a surge of peacebuilding funds and community-based violence monitors would give new life to their efforts. The information these groups collect about human rights abuses and conflict warning signs has advanced previous efforts to prevent atrocities, provide accountability for past abuses, and secure restitution for victims and their families. A growing body of regional early warning mechanisms such as the SADC Regional Early Warning Center may also strengthen these ongoing initiatives.³¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

All efforts by international, regional, and local actors to avert mass atrocities should adhere to three general principles:

1. *Focus immediately on developing and implementing prevention strategies, not just responding in moments of crisis.* Our research indicates that international attention to Zimbabwe has been declining, exacerbating the inherent tendency for governments and international organizations to defer action until a crisis forces a response. This approach is self-defeating and must change. A coordinated preventive strategy should aim to advance three separate but related goals: (1) address underlying risks and bolster the resilience of local actors; (2) dissuade or deter potential perpetrators from committing atrocities; and (3) plan for potential mass atrocities that may require local, regional, or international response. Each requires forethought and anticipatory action.
2. *Address the risks of atrocities in Zimbabwe comprehensively instead of tackling discrete issues independently or lapsing into institutional stovepipes.* The complex mix of political, security, economic, and humanitarian issues in Zimbabwe demands a comprehensive approach, including integrated planning and coordinated implementation. Currently, however, it appears that many policy discussions about the economic crisis, response to the drought in southern Africa, and potential political instability around a contested succession are proceeding more or less independently. To counteract this, a comprehensive approach requires senior-level engagement at an early stage to deliver diplomatic messages and dislodge impediments to preventive action.
3. *Build flexibility into operational strategies and adapt to changing circumstances.* The fluidity of the situation in Zimbabwe was a consistent theme of our consultations. In such a context, the influence of any actor will depend in large part on its capacity to detect changes and adapt to them quickly.

To the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Their Member States:

- Use regional early warning mechanisms such as the SADC Regional Early Warning Center to track and respond to mass atrocity warning signs, including those identified in this report.
- Engage in public and private diplomacy with senior and mid-level Zimbabwean security officials and ZANU-PF and opposition party leaders to underscore that atrocities against civilians are unacceptable

and that the region will not recognize as legitimate any political leader who commits atrocities en route to power.

To the International Financial Institutions and Their Governors:

- Ensure that protection of basic human rights remains a prerequisite and continuing requirement for economic assistance to the Zimbabwean government, including any effort to clear the government's sizable arrears with the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

To the United Nations (UN):

- The UN Development Programme, the UN Department of Political Affairs, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should agree to discuss Zimbabwe at an upcoming Regional Quarterly Review of the UN's Human Rights up Front initiative. The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide should participate in this interdepartmental discussion on Zimbabwe, among other UN entities.
- The UN Resident Coordinator for Zimbabwe should request the deployment of Peace and Development Advisers, Human Rights Advisers, or both to help integrate the prevention of mass atrocities into ongoing work of the UN Country Team.
- All professional staff on the UN Country Team should receive training on early warning signs of mass atrocities and the Resident Coordinator should direct all staff to report information related to relevant warning signs.
- Prepare humanitarian contingency plans that address potential political crises as well as the ongoing drought-related food crisis.

To the United States, the European Union (EU), and Other International Donors:³²

- Send high-level officials to the region to deliver the key messages described in this list, signaling the importance given to preventing atrocities in Zimbabwe.
- Engage in public and private diplomacy with senior Zimbabwean officials, including leaders of the security services, to underscore the importance of preventing mass atrocities.
- Communicate discreetly to all political leaders in ZANU-PF and opposition parties that international donors will hold individuals accountable if they are implicated in the perpetration of atrocity crimes.
- Communicate to regional leaders, including the AU, SADC, and especially SADC member states, that they should not recognize any Zimbabwean leader who commits atrocities en route to power.
- Invest foreign assistance funds into programs focused on local conflict resolution capacity, civil society, youth, and inclusive political dialogue. Build flexibility into these programs so they can be used for urgent needs in a crisis or new opening as well as contribute to longer-term goals.

- Support local human rights monitoring and early warning efforts in coordination with the constitutional commissions and African regional and subregional early warning mechanisms.
- Provide assistance to civil society groups that offer legal, medical, and psychosocial support to victims of atrocities.
- Prepare humanitarian contingency plans that address potential political crises as well as the ongoing drought-related food crisis.

List of Acronyms

AU	African Union
EU	European Union
G40	Generation 40
IFI	International financial institution
JOC	Joint Operations Command
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change Zimbabwe – Tsvangirai
PCCs	Provincial Coordinating Committees
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (armed wing of ZANU-PF)
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People’s Union
ZimPF	Zimbabwe People’s First
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (armed wing of ZAPU)

Endnotes

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Cover: A man carries a street sign as opposition party supporters clash with police in Harare, Zimbabwe, August 26, 2016. *Reuters/Philimon Bulawayo*



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