

Zimbabwe

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| Country name | Zimbabwe |
| State title | Republic of Zimbabwe |
| Name of citizen | Zimbabwean |
| Official languages | Chewa (<i>nya</i>), Chibarwe (<i>seh</i>), English (<i>eng</i>), Kalanga (<i>kck</i>), Koisan (-), Nambya (<i>nmq</i>), Ndau (<i>ndc</i>), Ndebele (<i>nde</i>), Shangani (<i>tso</i>), Shona (<i>sna</i>), sign language (-), Sotho (<i>sot</i>), Tonga (<i>toi</i>), Tswana (<i>tsn</i>), Venda (<i>ven</i>) and Xhosa (<i>xho</i>) ¹ |
| Country name in official languages | Zimbabwe |
| State title in principal official languages | Rudhende rwe Zimbabwe (sn) Republic of Zimbabwe (eng) (no source for Ndebele) |
| Script | Roman script |
| Romanization System | Not required |
| ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3) | ZW/ZWE |
| Capital | Harare |
| Area / Population | 391,000km ² / 15.5million (2023 est.) ² |

Introduction

Zimbabwe gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1980³. Landlocked, it shares land boundaries with Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. Its average elevation is almost 1000m.

Geographical names policy

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official sources from Zimbabwe, where these are available. The national mapping agency is believed to be the Department of the Surveyor General (*Zimap*) though no further information or sources are known.

If no national official sources can be found, the [Africa Geoportal](#) may be used as a helpful source of geospatial data and names⁴; the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) can also be used as a source for names.

¹ ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile where they exist.

² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zimbabwe/>

³ Zimbabwe was adopted as the country name on independence, previously having been Southern Rhodesia.

⁴ This is a source collated from multiple sources, including Esri, organisations working in Africa and crowdsourced information. It should be used as a supplementary reference.

Languages

Article 6 of Zimbabwe’s 2013 Constitution records 16 official languages, namely Chewa (*nya*), Chibarwe (*seh*), English (*eng*), Kalanga (*kck*), Koisan (-), Nambya (*nmq*), Ndau (*ndc*), Ndebele (*nde*), Shangani (*tso*), Shona (*sna*), sign language (-), Sotho (*sot*), Tonga (*toi*), Tswana (*tsn*), Venda (*ven*) and Xhosa (*xho*).

Of these, Shona and Ndebele are significantly the most widely spoken⁵. English, as the former colonial language, is used by very few as a home language, but widely as a commercial language.

Shona⁶ and Ndebele⁷ are Bantu languages; both are written in Roman script, Shona additionally using an apostrophe after /n/ for the sounds /ng/.

Map of Zimbabwe



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

⁵ Zimbabwe’s population is made up predominantly of two ethnic groups: the majority Shona (around 71%) and the Ndebele (approximately 16%).

⁶ Shona includes whistled sibilants (fricative and affricate) sounds, and some dialects include dental clicks.

⁷ Ndebele is very close to Zulu and includes multiple click sounds. It is written in Roman script, and its alphabet contains all the letters of the English alphabet with the exception of “r”.

Administrative structure

Zimbabwe is composed of 8 provinces and 2 cities with provincial status (Bulawayo and Harare) at the first-order administrative level.⁸

| ADM1 | ISO 3166-2 code | Administrative centre | Location of centre |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Bulawayo | ZW-BU | Bulawayo | 20°09'00"S 28°35'00"E |
| Harare | ZW-HA | Harare | 17°49'04"S 31°02'41"E |
| Manicaland | ZW-MA | Mutare | 18°58'15"S 32°41'50"E |
| Mashonaland Central | ZW-MC | Bindura | 17°18'07"S 31°19'15"E |
| Mashonaland East | ZW-ME | Marondera | 18°11'07"S 31°33'07"E |
| Mashonaland West | ZW-MW | Chinhoyi | 17°22'00"S 30°12'00"E |
| Masvingo | ZW-MV | Masvingo | 20°03'49"S 30°49'40"E |
| Matabeleland North | ZW-MN | Lupane | 18°55'53"S 27°48'25"E |
| Matabeleland South | ZW-MS | Gwanda | 20°56'10"S 29°00'25"E |
| Midlands | ZW-MI | Gweru | 19°27'00"S 29°49'00"E |

Post-independence name changes

In the years immediately following Zimbabwe's independence many name changes were made, not only of towns and rivers, but also of buildings and streets. These changes both altered colonial names (such as Salisbury to Harare), and rectified spellings of place names in local languages (such as Sinoia to Chinhoyi).

A list of changes to significant features is shown in the PCGN paper [Zimbabwe-March 2002.pdf](#) (nationalarchives.gov.uk) and a more complete list in the PCGN paper *List of name changes since independence, 1987* [available on request].

⁸ <http://www.zimstat.co.zw/dmdocuments/CensusPreliminary2012.pdf>

Other Significant Locations

| PCGN Recommended Name ⁹ | Variant Names/Spellings | Location | Feature Type |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| Inyangani | | 18°17'44"S 32°50'31"E | Mountain (2,592 m) |
| Lake Kariba | | 17°00'00"S 28°00'00"E | Reservoir (world's largest reservoir by volume: Zambia, Zimbabwe) |
| Limpopo | | 25°12'22"S 33°30'40"E | River (South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique) |
| Victoria Falls | | 17°55'00"S 25°51'00"E | Waterfalls (Zimbabwe, Zambia) |
| Zambezi | Zambezi River (<i>eng</i>); Rio Zambeze (<i>por</i>) | 08°34'14"S 36°28'13"E | River (Zambia, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique) |

Useful references

- Africa Geoportal: <https://www.africageoportal.com/>
- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14113249>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zimbabwe/>
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- FCDO Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/zimbabwe>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- PCGN country name change timeline: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names/timeline-of-country-name-changes-in-hmg-use-1919-to-present>
- PCGN paper on the toponymy of Zimbabwe, 2002: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140402151908mp_/http://www.pcgng.org.uk/Zimbabwe-March%202002.pdf
- PCGN paper: *Zimbabwe: List of name changes since independence*, 1987 [available on request]
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](https://www.nga.mil)

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⁹ PCGN usually recommends conventional English names for international features, unless national variants are specifically required, or the relevant countries share an official language.