

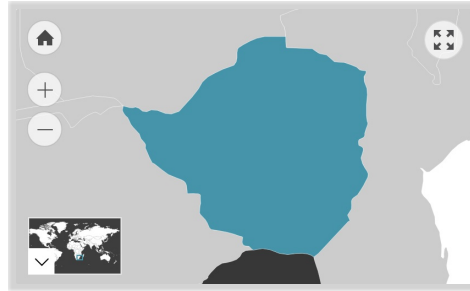


Zimbabwean Culture

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General Information



Zimbabwe

Population

14,546,961

[July 2016 est.]

Languages

Shona (official)

Nbebele (official)

English (official)

Minority languages: Chewa, Tonga,
Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau,
Shangani, sign language, Sotho, Tonga,
Tswana, Venda and Xhosa

Note: All minority languages listed are
officially recognised.

Religions

Protestant Christianity (75.9%)

Roman Catholic Christianity (8.4%)

Other Christianity (8.4%)

No Religion (6.1%)

Other (1.2%)

[2011 est.]

Ethnicities

African (99.4%) [predominantly Shona,
Nbebele is second largest ethnic group]
Other (0.4%)

Unspecified (0.2%)

[2012 est.]

Australians with Zimbabwean Ancestry

16,937 [2016 census]

Zimbabweans in Australia

Population

34,787

[2016 census]

This figure refers to the number of Australian residents that were born in Zimbabwe.

Average Age

38

Gender

Male (49.3%)

Female (50.7%)

Religion

Anglican Christianity (19.6%)

Catholic Christianity (18.1%)

No Religion (11.3%)

Christianity n.d. (9.0%)

Other (41.9%)

Ancestry

English (30.6%)

Zimbabwean (23.6%)

African, so described (9.7%)

Scottish (7.3%)

Other (28.7%)

Language Spoken at Home

English (67.0%)

Shona (23.9%)

Ndebele (3.2%)

Afrikaans (1.6%)

Other (4.2%)

Of those who speak a language other than English at home, 96.8% speak English fluently.

Diaspora

Western Australia (32.5%)

Queensland (27.6%)

New South Wales (18.6%)

Victoria (12.5%)

Arrival to Australia

Prior to 2001 (33.4%)

2001-2006 (34.1%)

2007-2011 (30.6%)

Where do we get our statistics?

The figure of the total population of each country is drawn from the global estimates listed in the [CIA World Factbook](#) unless otherwise stated. Statistics describing the country's linguistic, religious and ethnic demographics are based on its most recent national census. However, if these statistics are out-dated, unavailable, unreliable, or the country's statistical department does not formally gather information on the categories listed, the Cultural Atlas substitutes the most recent global estimates cited in the CIA World Factbook.

The number of Australian residents that share ancestry with each country is based on the 2016 Australian

Housing and Population census. This recorded people's ancestry by the birthplace of their parents, not distant heritage.

The figure describing the country's migrant population size in Australia is based on the number of Australian residents that were born in that country. Hence, this represents the population of first-generation migrants only, not the entire number of people living in Australia who identify with the culture in question.

All other statistical information on this country's migrant population in Australia (the second section) reflects the 2011 Australian Census data. This was retrieved from the [Department of Social Services' Community Information Summaries](#). These 2011 figures will be updated with the forthcoming release of 2016 census data relating to migrant communities.

You can find a direct link to all these sources under the 'References' tab at the bottom of the page. The date this profile was published is also listed here, indicating when these statistics were last updated.

Core Concepts

- [Politeness](#)
- [Obedience](#)
- [Warmth](#)
- [Ancestry](#)
- [Respect](#)
- [Education](#)
- *Tsika*

Zimbabwe (formerly known as Rhodesia and southern Rhodesia) is a country in southern Africa, bordering South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. It is mostly populated by the Shona people, the majority of whom are Christian. However, the country also has a great diversity of languages, communities, beliefs and customs. The dominant culture of Zimbabwe has significantly changed from its traditional form under the influence of British [colonisation](#), technology and contemporary social pressures. While some Zimbabweans in rural areas continue to practise and maintain traditional customs and beliefs, they represent a relatively small segment of the population. Today, for many Zimbabweans the value of the British education system, Christianity and economic prosperity has taken priority over certain cultural practices. This being said, social etiquette and identity are still deeply informed by the traditional social structures and conventions of tribal groups. Most Zimbabweans maintain deep respect for and connection to their ancestors and heritage, despite urban migration and globalisation.

Ethnic Groups and Languages

The indigenous people of Zimbabwe trace back to Bantu origins and are believed to have populated the land for more than 10 centuries. The Shona and Ndebele people are the two biggest [ethnicities](#). The Shona form the majority of the population – approximately 80%. They traditionally have a strong regional clan structure, with six

main groups: the Manyika, the Ndaou, the Zezuru, the Karanga, the Korekore and the Rozvi. These groups are formed on the basis of linguistic and cultural similarities. The Ndebele comprise roughly 14% of the population and have two main tribal groups: the Ndebele and Kalanga. Smaller **ethnic** groups include the Venda, the Batonga/Balonka and the Shangani/Shangane people. Some white Zimbabweans (mainly of British origin) remain in the country and there are also some Asian communities in the cities. However, both these groups make up less than 1% of the population. Most white Zimbabweans migrated when the country achieved independence from British rule.

Almost all Zimbabweans can speak a native Bantu language, with Shona being the most widely spoken. Zezuru, Kalanga, Manyika and Ndaou are the four main dialects of Shona that have a common vocabulary and similar tonal and grammatical features. However, English is used in government, administration, schooling and higher education. Hence, many Zimbabweans also speak English expertly. Urban Zimbabweans can generally alternate between Shona and English fluidly; however, some of the younger generation may be less fluent in their native tongue and need to substitute some Shona words with English words.

Social Changes

Zimbabwe achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1980, following decades of British **colonisation**. The effects of **colonisation** remain imprinted on aspects of society. This is especially visible in the widespread use of English, the adoption of Christianity and associated Christian family values. **Colonial** impact has left a dualism in the practices and values of Zimbabweans. For example, the country operates under a twofold legal system incorporating both traditional law and Roman Dutch Law. Traditional chiefs enforce traditional law whereas Roman Dutch Law is the conventional law. Both legal systems are legitimate and any decision made independently by them is legally binding.

Increased urbanisation and globalisation have also influenced the traditional culture of Zimbabwe. Pop culture and the Internet have introduced ideas of personal and individual choice, leading some to value those new ideas over societal obligation and communal organisation. Young people in particular are challenging ideas of the cultural **hierarchy**. Furthermore, while traditional Zimbabwean culture takes quite a fluid approach to timekeeping, the growing population living in the larger cities is becoming more time-bound. Many native Zimbabweans see these changes posing a negative effect on the traditional family and social structures. Others would argue that access and exposure to technology has enhanced their practices to suit the contemporary environment. Either way, the globalisation of cities has created a power imbalance between urban dwellers and rural dwellers. Most rural households are partly or totally dependent on the **remittances** sent back by a family member in an urban area.

Zimbabwean society has also been significantly changed by immediate social pressures and necessity. President Robert Mugabe and his ruling party held power undemocratically for almost 40 years since independence. Under this leadership, the economy and infrastructure deteriorated, and political freedom and dissent was suppressed. In 2017, Mugabe was pressured to resign in a historic turn of events following a coup that ended his dictatorship. His removal from power has given many Zimbabweans a renewed sense of hope. Nevertheless, the country now faces a transitional period as it continues to struggle with massive inflation that has impoverished many and hinders social mobility. HIV/AIDS has also devastated communities. In 2009, it was estimated that 1.3 million children have been orphaned by AIDS in Zimbabwe (National Aids Council, 2010). Indeed, it is worth noting that the population is very young, meaning that the effects of these problems are felt

most acutely by adolescents. Almost 60% of the population is under 25 years of age and almost 37.8% are 14 years old or younger (CIA World Factbook, 2016).

Social Hierarchy

There is also a strong cultural [hierarchy](#) of respect based on age that affects all interactions in Zimbabwe. Those who are older are presumed to be superior, wiser and more knowledgeable. Hence, heightened respect should be shown to elders. One is expected to always allow their opinion to prevail, never argue with them and never answer back. Expect social situations to be slightly segregated by age whereby children are noticeably excluded from jokes and 'adult conversations'.

Zimbabweans are generally status-conscious as the differences between social classes are also quite noticeable. People tend to be quite proud of their achievements and show off their wealth. Compliments about someone's wealth are more likely to boost their confidence than make them feel awkward. The way people dress and eat can also be a social indicator between those that are impoverished, those that work in agriculture and live in rural areas, and those that live in the cities. Zimbabweans generally identify themselves by their region of birth when getting acquainted with someone, as this implies their linguistic background and, in some cases, their social attitudes and politics.

Zimbabweans take deep pride in the educational standards of their country. According to UNESCO, 91.75% of Zimbabwean youths are literate while the adult literacy rate is 86.87% (UNESCO, 2015). One's education level and English proficiency are often seen as the pathway to foreign exposure, travel and employment outside of agriculture. It is also thought to indicate good family background and wealth. Despite varying political opinions, many Zimbabweans remained proud of the fact that their long-term President (Robert Mugabe) was the most educated in Africa.

Origins and Ancestry

Zimbabweans generally have an innate awareness of their ancestors that follows them throughout their life and keeps them grounded. Traditionally, it was believed that their spirits could be communicated with to provide guidance (see 'Traditional Beliefs' under *Religion* for more information on this). They were deeply revered and worshipped. Today, Christian churches in Zimbabwe generally frown upon ancestor worship and discourage people from calling on the spirits. However, some Zimbabweans living mostly in rural areas (including Christians) have continued the tradition. Though there is a reduced belief in the spiritual realm and the ability of ancestors to intervene with life, one's heritage remains crucial to Zimbabweans' concept of personal identity.

Zimbabweans learn of their origin through stories told by elders; everyone's origin is connected to the original province that their people came from centuries ago. Every person also has a totem (*mutupo*) that represents their heritage, bloodline, origin and identity. Someone who does not know their totem is considered 'lost', for it means they do not know their identity. Totems are usually animals (e.g. a zebra or buffalo); however, they can also be objects (e.g. a leg). They are passed down through the father's lineage the way a surname is carried through a family in the English-speaking West. In this way, two people with the same totem can be forbidden from marrying as it is seen in a similar light to incest.

Traditional Customs

Zimbabwean tribes and communities are traditionally **collectivistic**. People tend to put their group or family's interests before their own, receiving support, protection and a sense of belonging in return. There is a great emphasis on communal gathering within tribes, where people share stories, music, songs and dance. Indeed, Zimbabwean culture has a long tradition of storytelling and folklore that provides each generation with a sense of connection to their history and ancestors. These stories also provide communities with a unified understanding of their group's origins. Storytelling gatherings may be accompanied with theatrical and musical performances.

Music and dance are also central to Zimbabwean culture. The traditional sounds, rhythms and instruments are distinctive and showcase the colour, creativity, spirit and joy of the Zimbabwean people. The '*mbira*' (a piece of wood with metal keys) has a light, warm, acoustic sound and is used in most celebrations. The mbira may be used to contact spirits, govern the weather and chase away sickness (among other purposes) and can be considered sacred in some communities.

There are many other rituals and ceremonial practices in Zimbabwe. Some are specific to certain tribes whilst others are more widely practised. Many relate to celebrating milestones in people's lives, such as marriage, the installation of chiefs or the circumcision ceremony that marks a boy's transition to manhood. Traditional ceremonies, festivals and rituals also usually involve contacting the spirit world and making offerings (see 'Traditional Beliefs' under *Religion* for more information on this). However, it should be noted that many urbanised Zimbabweans do not believe in the spirit realm, especially among those in Australia.

Politeness and '*Tsika*'

Zimbabweans are often observed as being very warm, welcoming and engaging. They are also quite formal and non-confrontational. People generally seek to appease and avoid any disagreement or friction that could offend someone's honour. Hence, Zimbabweans may be overly accommodating of other people's opinions or reluctant to speak their mind if they feel their honesty could embarrass others. This is partly because there is a strong cultural value placed upon considerate behaviour, manners and **politeness**. One's manners are generally thought to reflect their integrity and quality as a person. Every distinct social and **ethnic group** in Zimbabwe has a particular model for what they consider to be correct and polite decorum. For example, the largest group, the Shona, refer to one's knowledge and compliance with socially acceptable behaviour as '*tsika*'.

Tsika is the virtuous, polite and moral way of behaving in accordance to the Shona cultural standard. This involves being respectful to elders, obedient to parents and figures of authority, having self-control and patience, as well as observing cultural customs and the social structures in place. Often, there is a strong emphasis on communal values, warmth, prudence and considerate behaviour. The Shona see tsika as something one learns and develops in adolescence to eventually foster self-control. Someone who has been taught and raised well to have good manners is said to have '*hunhu*' (in Shona) or '*ubuntu*' (in Ndebele). Hunhu and ubuntu cannot be accurately translated into English, but they mean something similar to 'the essence of humanity/humaneness'.

The values that underpin the **norms** of etiquette vary between cultures. Hence, native Zimbabweans often think that '*varungu*' (white people) do not have hunhu/ubuntu; this is because people outside of Zimbabwe often do not follow the same social rules that constitute tsika. For example, the English-speaking West doesn't give the same amount of reverence and respect to people based on their age. Someone who does not act according to the Zimbabwean code of **politeness** and social appropriateness is considered to be without manners – '*hanna*'

Greetings

- Greet anyone older than yourself first. Greetings are performed in order of age. If someone doesn't greet you, it may be because they are older than you and are waiting for you to make the first gesture.
- The common greeting is a firm handshake with the right hand. This may linger for longer than you are accustomed to. Some Zimbabweans may slide their hands up to grasp each other's thumbs during the handshake.
- The traditional greeting involves a clap after the handshake. The first person claps twice whilst saying “*Makadii*” (‘How are you?’ in Shona). The other person responds with two claps in return. Men clap with their fingertips and palms touching, whilst women clap with their hands on an angle (like a golf clap). However, both men and women keep their hands cupped so when they clap it makes an air-pocket.
- Women may lower their body briefly, kneel or curtsy whilst shaking hands out of respect. Men may go down on one knee.
- Family and friends may hug and pat one another on the back.
- All greetings should be followed by a brief enquiry into the other person's well-being before proceeding with normal conversation. A simple “How are you?” suffices and is met with plain answers like “I'm fine”.
- Do not use a person's first name unless they invite you to do so. Titles of ‘Mr’ and ‘Miss’ are acceptable. In rural areas, people who have children are referred to as “Mother of ___” or “Father of ___”.

Religion

Most Zimbabweans are Christians. Statistics estimate that 75.9% identify as Protestant (including Apostolic – 38%, Pentecostal – 21.1% or other Protestant denominations – 16.8%), 8.4% identify as Roman Catholic and 8.4% identify with another denomination of Christianity (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Approximately 1.2% of Zimbabweans identify with another faith, such as traditional beliefs or Islam, and 6.1% do not identify with any faith. However, these estimates may understate the number of people practising traditional religions or philosophies in Zimbabwe.

The 2011 census found that most Zimbabweans living in Australia identified with Anglican Christianity (19.6%) or Catholic Christianity (18.1%). A further 51% identified with another religion, including other variations of Christianity. The remaining 11.3% identified with no religion.

Christianity

Christianity is the most dominant faith in Zimbabwe, followed by roughly 93% of the population (CIA World Factbook, 2011). It was introduced to the Zimbabwean people by British missionaries as early as the 14th century. Today, it has become a powerful cultural force. Christian values relating to the family and marriage

have modified traditional practices, for example, encouraging smaller nuclear families and reducing the practice of [polygamy](#).

There has been a recent increase in Evangelical worship towards the Apostolic and Pentecostal churches. Two very large and publicly visible groups are the Vapostori and Zion Christian Church. Vapostori is an amalgamation of traditional religion with Christianity. Its worshippers often gather outdoors in white robes. The Zion Christian Church also fuses African traditions with Christian values. Its followers often wear a metal star badge with a dark green cloth background on top of their everyday clothes.

Traditional Religion

Both Shona and Ndebele traditions recognise an ever-present creator that oversees all living beings. The Shona god is known as '*Mwari*' whilst the Ndebele god is called '*uMlimu*'. There is a widespread belief that the spirits of ancestors (*vadzimu* in Shona or *amadlozi* in Ndebele) and deceased chiefs (*mhondoro*) continue to exist in the community influencing and affecting life. They are believed to care for their descendants and share their experience, though the living eye cannot see them. Communication with these ancestral spirits is usually achieved through mediums, '*nyanga*' (witch doctors) and powerful members of the community. People may seek guidance and search for solutions to problems related to health, harvest and drought in this way. It is also believed that one can communicate with Mwari or uMlimu through these ancestors/spirit elders. Many events in life are understood to occur because of the spirit world; some people may believe that spiteful spirits are the cause of bad luck, illness or death. They may even call upon these spirits for punishment or vengeance.

Family

In Zimbabwe, the "family" traditionally refers to an expansive kinship network. Though these networks may not continue in their traditional form, extended family relationships are still very close and important to one's life. As an example, there is no such thing as a "cousin" in Zimbabwean culture. Cousins are referred to and understood as one's brothers and sisters. Sometimes, even friendships can be as strong as brotherhood or sisterhood. However, growing urbanisation, Christianity and the effects of European [colonialism](#) have contributed to a trend towards nuclear families, monogamous marriages and [individualism](#) in the cities.

Extended family units comprising multiple generations are still visible in rural areas, meanwhile the immediately family usually lives alone in urban areas. However, even in nuclear households, one still has deep connections and obligations to other relatives, especially in times of need. For example, if elders get sick, they will move in so the family can take care of them. Furthermore, if relatives have recently moved into town, the family will allow them to live in their house until they find suitable arrangements.

The extended family and community can also play a large role in raising and caring for children, especially in rural areas. A Shona proverb says, "*you do not educate your child for yourself alone; education is for society, by society*". This emphasises the [collectivistic](#) nature of the culture and the approach to parenting. A person's behaviour is seen as the community's responsibility, as well as their responsibility to the community.

There is strong disapproval of people who wish not to marry or bear children in Zimbabwe. The choice not to have children is incomprehensible to many, whilst people who cannot conceive are often considered worthless and inadequate. In rural areas, a greater number of children is seen positively as they can provide more assistance around the house as the parents age.

Traditionally, the Shona, Ndebele, Shangani and Venda people have patrilineal groups and families. Women move into their husband's families' houses at marriage; descent and leadership are also passed down through the male side of the family. However, there is an exception among the Shangani people. Some groups traditionally follow a matrilineal social organisation (the husband moves into the wife's home at marriage).

Gender Roles

Zimbabwean society is generally very **patriarchal**. While there are some minority tribal groups that are matrilineal and matrilineal, men generally hold more decision-making power. Within the family, the oldest male (usually the father) is the **patriarch** and is expected to be the breadwinner for the entire household. The oldest brother/male child is then thought of as the second father. The women are typically expected to be obedient to their husband and not to disagree or challenge his views. A woman may have more authority over family members that are not her husband. For example, an aunt (*tete*) has more power to openly criticise and preside over family disputes. However, generally men are more commanding of the public sphere and political leadership is male dominated.

Those women who are educated and engaging in wage-labour are starting to seek more decision-making power. Currently, law based on cultural customs discriminates against their rights to part-time work and inheritance. Traditionally, Zimbabwean women engage in much of the labour and farming required in day-to-day operation. Their traditional economic activities include gardening, raising poultry and baking to supply additional household goods and income.

Many men have migrated to urban centres for work, leaving elders, women and children in rural areas. This has led to a rise in female-headed households whereby women have to look after everyone in the family. Women now outnumber men in the agricultural sector.

Marriage and Dating

Marriage and dating practices vary between the rural and urban areas. The practices may also be influenced by the couple's social attitudes and reasons for marriage. For example, online dating can be very popular in the cities, whereas in some regional areas, parents may exclusively choose their children's partners. Commonly, Zimbabwean couples date privately and only tell their parents of their relationship once they are ready to get married.

Zimbabwean law recognises both civil marriages and customary marriages. Civil marriages are monogamous unions that can be ended by death or divorce – similar to the legal system followed in Australia. Customary marriages are unions that are guided by cultural practices and are usually only able to be ended by death (divorce is uncommon depending on the cultural group's practices). Customary marriages are only legally available to native Zimbabweans (not European Zimbabweans). They may be polygamous, with the man having more than one wife, and are often initiated through cultural ceremonies. They also often involve the exchange of a bride price (known as '*roora*' in Shona and '*lobola*' in Ndebele, Zulu and Xhosa). This is common in both rural and urban areas. Often, a Christian marriage ceremony will occur a few months after the bride price has been

exchanged.

The most common unions among Zimbabweans are unregistered customary marriages. These are customary marriages that are not legally recognised because the man and woman have fulfilled the cultural marriage ceremonies without signing the marriage register. Many Zimbabweans may not know they have to register their marriage for the couple to get the legal benefits, or do not wish to travel to the nearest city or church to get the official approval by a registered marriage officer. However, the result is that not all married couples are entitled to the same benefits and rights – particularly women.

Polygyny is a traditional practice in Zimbabwe (whereby a man has a polygamous marriage with multiple wives). This type of marriage contract has become less common with the influence of Christian values. However, in households with more than one wife, each woman is usually provided with her own kitchen and living space. The practice of '*kurarira*' has also become unpopular. This is an alternative to the bride price by which the man is incorporated into his prospective wife's family and works for them until they permit him to marry their daughter.

Divorce is generally rare in Zimbabwe as it is highly stigmatised. Being a predominantly Christian nation, marriage is regarded as a sacred union, and to break it can be interpreted as a sin. While rates of divorce are increasing, numbers remain low.

Naming

- Most Zimbabweans have a first name followed by a surname with no middle name, e.g. Mutamwa MATAKA (male), Bright MUJURU (male), Joyce CHITEPO (female).
- Many Zimbabweans may have an English personal name and a traditional family name. This English name often has British roots (e.g. Robert, Trevor and Abigail). Some may represent an aspiration or positive connotation (e.g. Innocent, Hope, Happiness and Lucky).
- Surnames are usually in the traditional vernacular of the language group the Zimbabwean's family is from (e.g. BULAWAYO, MAGWA, KABWEZA).
- If you are older than 50, you may be referred to as "*Sekuru*" (Old man) or "*Ambuya*" (Granny). While this may sound like a slur on your age in the Western context, the terms are actually a mark of respect in Zimbabwe. They are affectionate terms showing the reverence for age.

Dates of Significance

- New Years Day (1st of January)
- Easter (varies each year)
- Independence Day (18th of April)

- Worker's Day (1st of May)
- Africa Day (25th of May)
- Heroes Day (11th of August or nearest Monday)
- Defence Forces Day (12th of August or nearest Tuesday)
- National Unity Day (22nd of December)
- Christmas Day (25th of December)
- Boxing Day (26th of December)

Etiquette

Basic Etiquette

- Stand up to greet people who have recently entered a room.
- Respect is shown by physically lowering oneself below another person's stature. When meeting or interacting with someone older or of a higher status, it is polite to lower one's head or body below theirs. Women commonly give a slight curtsy or bend at the knees, whilst men bow slightly.
- People should address elders and those of a higher status first, using their title and surname and formal pronouns.
- It is extremely rude to talk back to an elder or challenge their opinion, even if they are incorrect.
- Offer guests hot water to wash their hands before giving them tea.
- Gratitude is often shown nonverbally with claps to show respect. People clap twice to say "thank you" if someone is passing them something. If one hand is full, they may clap a hand on their chest instead.
- It is respectful to pass and receive items with both hands together. If being more casual, use the right hand only.
- When passing something of value to another person, touch the forearm of the right hand holding the object with the left hand. This is meant to give the impression of supporting the deep value (weight) of the object.
- It is considered bad taste to wear provocative clothing. Skirts and pants should reach the knee; shoulders and midriffs should be covered.
- If wearing a hat, take it off when talking to someone or entering indoors.
- You can expect to be asked questions about your personal life and family when initially meeting someone. For example, they may ask whether you have a spouse and how many children you have.
- Timekeeping is quite fluid in Zimbabwe and people are commonly late. Appointments rarely begin punctually and engagements often run overtime. Avoid being offended if someone does not arrive or forgets to apologise for being late as it is rarely a reflection on the personal relationship. People are more punctual surrounding business.

Visiting

- When visiting a Zimbabwean's house, it is the norm to arrive with a small gift for the host. Food is usually appropriate.
- It is not usually necessary to take off your shoes when entering a home. However, remove your hat.

- Expect to be offered refreshments of tea or coffee at any visit and accept the gesture out of [politeness](#).

Eating

- People say “*Pamusoro*” in Shona before eating. This is similar to saying “Bon Appetite” before a meal, but it means something similar to “Excuse me while I eat”.
- In Zimbabwe, people usually sit to eat on low stools or gather around a mat on the floor.
- Utensils are commonly used, but it is also normal to eat with one’s fingers.
- Water is always provided to wash one’s hands before and after a meal. Women give men a dish to wash their hands so they don’t have to get up and do it themselves.
- The host usually serves everybody individually.
- Do not talk whilst you are eating/have food in your mouth.
- It is rude to be on your phone at the table.
- Ask people’s permission as to whether it is okay to leave the table when you are done.
- The national dish of Zimbabwe is called ‘*sadza*’. It is a maize paste similar to a cornmeal dumpling.
- Some Zimbabweans may not eat pork for religious reasons.
- Beer is popular in Zimbabwe.
- If eating out, it is expected that the oldest or wealthiest male will pay for everyone’s meal. If everyone present has the same earning ability and age, they will split the bill.

Gift Giving

- There is a big gift-giving culture in Zimbabwe. A gift represents a gesture of friendship; thus, refusing a gift can seriously offend the person who offered it. It is taboo to do so. Always accept a gift given by a Zimbabwean.
- Zimbabweans may directly ask you if you have a gift for them if they’ve been expecting it. For example, if you are coming home after travelling, they may ask if you brought them back something. Avoid perceiving this as presumptuous, rude or greedy.
- If you are visiting Zimbabwe for the first time, you can expect that they will give you something to bring back home.
- The most common occasions for giving gifts are births, birthdays, weddings, graduations, installations of pastors, Christmas and farewell services.
- Gifts may be wrapped or given unwrapped. There is no strong cultural preference regarding the presentation.
- Give and open gifts in front of everyone in attendance.
- People commonly show gratitude by clapping, whistling, jumping or even dancing. A verbal “thank you” may not actually be said.
- Food is a common gift that is appropriate to be given at all occasions.
- Consider that Zimbabwe struggles with corruption and very expensive gifts may be interpreted as bribes.

Do's and Do Not's

Do's

- Respect those who are older than you. Contradicting them, criticising them, disagreeing with them or ignoring them will give them a poor opinion of you. They are likely to think that you are not '*hunhu*' (well-mannered) and be dismissive of you from then on.
- Try to control your emotions in public and express them in private. Zimbabweans are conscious of how they (and their family) are perceived by the public and generally try to restrain themselves from being angry or shouting in front of other people. Laughter or tears are acceptable. However, Zimbabwean men in particular rarely cry in public.
- Expect Zimbabweans to be open and enthusiastic among those they know. However, understand that they may be more formal and reserved around strangers or when meeting someone for the first time.
- Expect a Zimbabwean to talk themselves up by telling you about their level of education and occupation. The culture is quite status-conscious and these attributes can earn a person respect in another's eyes.

Do not's

- It is best not to criticise the country of Zimbabwe. Many Zimbabweans do so themselves, but foreign criticism may offend their pride.
- Avoid raising discussion of politics unless you have a strong understanding of the situation. There has been a lot of political upheaval in Zimbabwe.
- It is very impolite and offensive to imply that someone is poor.
- Avoid talking about HIV/AIDS as many Zimbabweans have lost family members to the disease, or know someone who has.
- **Race** relations may be openly talked about; however, be aware that Zimbabweans are generally sensitive to racism and discrimination. Many years of **colonial** subjugation have left an impact in this regard.
- Avoid bringing up unpleasant topics of discussion or bad news around others. It can be seen as impolite to do so in social situations. If you do need to tell someone something negative, do so alone in private and try and deliver the news as indirectly as possible.
- Do not be rowdy in front of someone's family or those who are a lot older than yourself. Men may be very casual in front of other men of the same age. Some social groups may also make jovial comments in front of the other gender. However, it is inappropriate to swear or make derogatory jokes outside of a close group of friends.

Communication

Verbal

- **Indirect Communication:** Zimbabweans are indirect communicators. They generally seek to avoid friction in any conversation. Thus, to be blunt and frank is not advisable. In an effort to be respectful, Zimbabweans come across as quite agreeable and accommodating. They rarely openly express criticism and prefer to take an indirect approach to any corrective remarks. The level of directness in conversation will vary depending on your

relationship with a person. For example, if there is a large age difference, the younger person will adopt a very deflective and respectful tone. Among two peers of the same age, a Zimbabwean is likely to be more open about how they feel. Generally, if a Zimbabwean disagrees with something or is discontent, they are more likely to show it nonverbally. For example, they may become colder to you and choose not to follow your instructions.

- **Humour:** As Zimbabwean culture is quite formal, humour can be misplaced and seen as a lack of respect. Be careful in how you introduce it, who is around to hear it, and avoid making fun of others. Around family, those who are older or members of the opposite gender, jokes should not have any inappropriate undertones. Their humour generally relies on telling anecdotes and stories. It's best to avoid being sarcastic as the Australian style of sarcasm can be misunderstood by Zimbabweans and taken at face value.

Non-Verbal

- **Personal Space:** It's common to keep an arm's length of personal space. However, Zimbabweans from rural areas may sit and stand slightly closer together. Men and women usually keep their distance from one another.
- **Physical Contact:** Physical affection between men and women can embarrass Zimbabweans, especially those from rural areas. Holding hands is acceptable. However, if you are a man, do not touch a married Zimbabwean woman even in a friendly way. This is socially unacceptable in Zimbabwe.
- **Eye Contact:** Direct eye contact is normal during conversation, especially in casual situations. However, people divert their gaze from those who are older or of a higher status than them and women generally lower their gaze from men. It is best to look away intermittently to avoid appearing disrespectful. To stare directly at someone older than you is considered disrespectful.
- **Gestures:** People salute a political party (*Movement for Democratic Change*) by raising a the hand with fingers spread and palm forward. This can look similar to the 'stop' signal or waving, so be aware of this when using these gestures.
- **Kneeling:** Shona women may kneel when talking to their father or husband and when serving a meal. This involves keeping their head lower than a man's and avoiding direct eye contact. The gesture continues until they leave the room. This is meant to show humility and respect. Some educated women may not follow this custom.
- **Expressions:** It is considered rude to frown, stick out one's tongue or make a hissing sound with one's mouth. It's very rude to lick one's lips whilst looking at a person of the opposite gender.
- **Body Language:** Slouching and having one's hand in one's pockets are considered bad manners.

Other Considerations

- Drinking alcohol is frowned upon in Zimbabwe. Few people drink socially, and those who do are often considered 'drunkards' even if they do not drink excessively. This differs significantly from the Australian drinking culture.
- HIV/AIDS has seriously affected families in Zimbabwe. Whole generations of parents have passed away in some communities, meaning there are many orphans being raised by their grandmothers.
- It is common for people to pay casual car guards a tip while they run errands. These people stop parking inspectors from ticketing the car.
- Pets are rarely allowed indoors in Zimbabwean homes. Therefore, if you have a pet and you are inviting a

Zimbabwean to your house, inform them in advance about the pet.

- Homosexual activity is illegal in Zimbabwe and strongly stigmatized. The [LGBTQI+](#) community may face conservative attitudes.
- Some Shona and Ndebele groups practise permanent body modification to show a particular lineage, identity or social class. Scarification (*nyora*) and piercing (*kuboora* or *ringindi*) are common.
- There is a language called Chilapalapa that is a fusion of Bantu, Afrikaans and English languages. It was developed for African workers and [colonial](#) bosses to communicate and is not appropriate to use. It implies a hierarchical [colonial](#) relationship.

Business Culture

Meetings

- Arrive on time. Though your Zimbabwean counterpart may be late, your punctuality is likely to give a good impression.
- Greet everyone individually, starting with the person who is standing closest to you and so on.
- It is important to greet everyone using their proper title.
- Offer and receive people's business cards with your right hand.
- The meeting may commence with an opening prayer.
- It is advisable to be honest about the price of a deal rather than giving a misleading first pitch. Such honesty will be respected and fare better in a longer-term business relationship.
- Expect negotiations to be quite drawn out. Zimbabweans may take some time to deliberate and think through their decision.
- Consider that unless you are speaking with higher management, a representative may not be able to give you an answer or decision without referring back to their superiors. Hence, multiple meetings may be necessary.

Considerations

- Personal relationships are somewhat essential to business in Zimbabwe. You may find that your Zimbabwean counterpart invites you to dine with them in order to further your personal relationship with them. If this occurs, accept the invitation graciously.
- Zimbabwean business culture is generally hierarchical. Employees expect decisions to be made by higher management and generally don't question them. Consensus-based decision making is not the norm.
- Some Zimbabweans may ask you to grant favours for their friends and family on the basis of your working relationship with them. It is advisable not to do so unless you have a strong personal friendship as it can become a common expectation.
- Be aware that there is a big economic gulf between most Zimbabweans and foreigners who have access to valuable currency like that of the English-speaking West. This is unlikely to cause hostility but can potentially fuel mistrust and resentment if problems arise from other factors during business.
- On the [Corruption Perception Index](#) (2017), Zimbabwe ranks 157th out of 180 countries, receiving a score of 22

(on a scale from 0 to 100). This perception suggests that the country's public sector is somewhat corrupt.

Zimbabweans in

Zimbabweans have migrated to Australia quite steadily over the past few decades. Those that arrived during the 20th century were mostly white Zimbabweans of British ancestry. However, ongoing economic difficulty has prompted higher migration in recent years. The 2011 census revealed that most Zimbabweans have arrived since 2001 (64.7%). This influx of migration has included increasing numbers of native Zimbabweans, mostly seeking a better economic or educational advantage.

It is important to recognise that the Zimbabweans migrating to Australia are generally from a privileged, urbanised and educated demographic of their country. The opportunity to migrate is not typically available to the poor or those living in isolated rural areas. Be careful to avoid stereotyping those Zimbabweans who have immigrated as being 'poor', 'needy' or 'undereducated'. Generally, they have been arriving as skilled migrants. The 2011 census found 74.5% of Zimbabweans living in Australia held some kind of higher qualification. They also usually have excellent English proficiency, with 96.8% speaking it well (2011 Census). Indeed, as a result of British rule and education in the country, many Zimbabweans speak English very eloquently.

The Zimbabwean community in Australia is not particularly close when compared to other African migrant communities. However, they generally maintain strong ties with people back in Zimbabwe. It is considered quite prestigious to live in Australia; hence, Zimbabwean [expatriates](#) may have many friends or relatives asking for them to send money home.

Glossary

Collectivism

Collectivist cultures are group-centric. A 'group' is a faction of people one shares an interest or identifying trait or characteristic with (e.g. religion, ethnicity, gender, age, education). Groups are usually bonded through a shared history or goal. Examples of 'groups' include one's family, business, community or country. In collectivist cultures, groups reflect or come to define who its members are and often entail overriding loyalty. For instance, individuals may tend to privilege the group's interests over their own, even if they conflict. Furthermore, those who are in the same group often expect to receive preferential treatment from other group-members. In return for this loyalty, an individual gains a sense of belonging, protection and unity.

People in collectivist cultures are generally interdependent and feel a sense of responsibility to those around them. Co-operation and collective achievement is emphasised over self-fulfilment and personal gain. Therefore, individuals may be less enticed to act independently. Harmony is considered highly important and competition can sometimes be considered to be counterproductive as individuals are expected to conform and share the same goal as those in their group.

You can understand collectivism further by learning about the opposite cultural orientation of [individualism](#). For more explanation on collectivism and individualism, try the [Cultural Competence Program](#).

Related Terms:

collectivist, collectivistic

Source:

James W. Neuliep & Geert Hofstede

Colonisation

Colonisation is the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.

Related Terms:

colonisers, colonialism, colonial

Source:

Oxford Dictionary

Corruption Perception Index

Based on expert opinion, the Corruption Perceptions Index measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide.

A score of 0/100 indicates a highly corrupt public sector whilst a high score closer to 100 suggests the country's public sector is cleaner, but not perfect. A mid range score perceives that the public sector fares well, but corruption among public institutions and employees is still common. A country's ranking is based on how

their score fares relative to the 176 countries also measured.

All scores and rankings in the Cultural Atlas are taken from the 2016 [Corruption Perceptions Index here](#).

Source:

Transparency International

Democracy

A system of government in which citizens exercise power directly or elect representatives from among themselves to form a governing body.

Related Terms:

democratic

Ethnicity

An ethnicity or ethnic group is a population group whose members identify with each other on the basis of common nationality or shared cultural traditions. They are commonly formed or defined in terms of shared genealogy, whether actual or presumed by geography. Typically, if people believe they descend from a particular group, and they want to be associated with that group, then they are in fact members of that group.

Ethnicity connotes shared cultural traits and a shared group history. Some ethnic groups also share linguistic or religious traits, while others share a common group history but not a common language or religion. Ethnic groups distinguish themselves differently from one time period to another. They typically seek to define themselves but also are defined by the stereotypes of dominant groups.

Related Terms:

ethnic, ethnic group, ethnicities

Source:

Diffen

Expatriate

A person who lives outside their native country.

Related Terms:

expatriates, expat, expats

Source:

Oxford Dictionary

Hierarchy

A system in which members of an organisation or society are ranked according to relative status or authority. For example, they may be ranked by their age, experience, wealth or education.

Related Terms:

hierarchies

Source:

Indirect communication

Indirect communication is a form of communication that tends to rely less on words and more on nonverbal behaviours to draw meaning. Verbal communication is often understated or laced in ambiguity. Therefore, attention is paid to the speaker's posture, expression, gestures or tone of voice to draw further meaning. Being implicit instead of explicit has the purpose of maintaining harmony throughout the conversation and preventing offence or confrontation. Indirect communication is used in high context cultures where people's position or intentions in society are easily distinguishable by their appearance or status (for example, China, Japan, Africa, the Middle East). Thus, people also often assess each other's status to help realise the context of the conversation as well.

You can understand indirect communication further by learning about [direct communication](#), which is the opposite cultural orientation. For more explanation on both direct and indirect communication, try the [Cultural Competence Program](#).

Source:

James W. Neuliep

Individualism

Individualist cultures are self-centric. Each person is viewed as uniquely endowed with potential and possessing distinctive talent. People are often taught to subconsciously think of themselves as 'special' or 'unique' as they grow up. Everybody's individual ability to be creative, assertive, self-reliant and self-directed is emphasised. Taking action, having agency over one's life and choices and being a 'self-made man' are seen as positive qualities. In individualist societies, interpersonal competition and personal achievement is emphasised. People tend to look after themselves and their immediate families primarily.

You can understand individualism further by learning about the opposite cultural orientation of [collectivism](#). For more explanation about individualism and collectivism, try the [Cultural Competence Program](#).

Related Terms:

individualist, individualistic

Source:

James W. Neuliep & Geert Hofstede

LGBTQI+

This acronym stands for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning or intersex. More recently an 'A' has been added to the acronym to accommodate for those identifying as asexual. The plus (+) seeks to ensure that all identities of gender and sexuality will always be included in the community. This can also include straight allies of the LGBTQI+ community.

Norms

Standards or patterns of social behaviour that are typical or

expected.

Source:

Oxford Dictionary

Patriarchy

A system of society in which authority is held by the oldest male. In a patriarchal family, the father is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line.

Related Terms:

patriarchal, patriarch

Source:

Oxford Dictionary

Politeness

The act of putting constraints on interactions to build rapport, establish understanding and show sensitivity to feeling or face.

Source:

James W. Neuliep

Polygamy

The practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

Source:

Oxford Dictionary

Polygyny

A form of polygamy in which a man has more than one wife.

Race

The term race refers to the social concept of categorically dividing humankind based on people's distinct physical characteristics which usually result from genetic ancestry (e.g. skin colour, cranial or facial features and hair texture).

Race presumes shared biological or genetic traits, whether actual or asserted. In the early 19th century, racial differences were ascribed significance in areas of intelligence, health, and personality. There is no evidence validating these ideas.

Racial categories result from a shared genealogy due to geographical isolation. In the modern world this isolation has been broken down and racial groups have mixed. People of the same race often share experiences of racial bias; however, they do not necessarily share cultural, historical or linguistic backgrounds. A person's race is not determined by cultural or behavioural factors (see ethnicity instead).

Related Terms:

racial, racialised, races

Source:

Diffen

Remittance

A *remittance* is a transfer of money by a foreign worker to an individual in their home country.

Related Terms:

remittances

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