

# Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe

September 10, 2019

**Source:** *The Hindu*

**Manifest pedagogy:** UPSC has targeted the Decolonisation process multiple times after inclusion of World History into syllabus. There have been many idiosyncratic questions on West African decolonisation and Malayan peninsula decolonisation. These kinds of questions have broadened the horizon of the exam. There is a need for students to have the broadest possible coverage of the decolonisation process. In this light the colonisation, decolonisation and peculiar settler problem of Zimbabwe are very important in light of the death of Robert Mugabe.

**In news:** Robert Gabriel Mugabe, a Zimbabwean revolutionary and politician who served as prime minister and president of Zimbabwe died.

**Placing it in syllabus:** World history – significant events

## **Dimensions:**

- Course of colonisation of Zimbabwe
- Settler colonies in Zimbabwe
- Emergence of Independence movement
- Robert Mugabe's rule
- Post independence continuing settler problem
- International sanctions against Zimbabwe
- Fall of Mugabe

**Content:** Zimbabwe's founding leader, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, died on September 6th, 2019.

## Course of colonisation of Zimbabwe:

- In the 1880s, the British arrived with Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company.

- In 1888, British colonialist Cecil Rhodes obtained a concession for mining rights from King Lobengula of the indigo Ndebele people.
- He by presenting this concession persuaded the government of the United Kingdom to grant a royal charter to his **British South Africa Company (BSAC)** over Matabeleland.
- Rhodes sought permission to negotiate similar concessions covering all territory between the Limpopo River and Lake Tanganyika, then known as **'Zambesia'**.
- In 1895 the BSAC adopted the name **'Rhodesia'** for the territory of Zambesia, in honour of Cecil Rhodes.
- In 1898, **'Southern Rhodesia'** became the official denotation for the region south of the Zambezi, which later became Zimbabwe.
- The region to the north was administered separately by the BSAC and later named **Northern Rhodesia** (now Zambia).
- The ancestral Shona people staged unsuccessful revolts against encroachment upon their lands, by clients of BSAC and Cecil Rhodes in 1896 and 1897.
- Following the failed insurrection of 1896–97 European settlements precipitated, which led to land distribution disproportionately favouring Europeans, displacing the Shona, Ndebele, and other indigenous peoples.
- Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing British colony in October 1923, subsequent to a referendum held in 1922.
- In 1953, **Britain consolidated the two colonies of Rhodesia with Nyasaland** (now Malawi) in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which was dominated by Southern Rhodesia.
- Growing African nationalism and general dissent, particularly in Nyasaland, persuaded the UK to dissolve the Union in 1963, forming three colonies.

Settler colonies in Zimbabwe:

Southern Rhodesia grew as a settler-dominated colony under the rule of the British South Africa Company (BSAC). Whites laid out farms along the railroad. In order to provide cheap labor for the colony's farms and mines, colonial administrators imposed heavy monetary taxes on black inhabitants and encouraged immigration from Mozambique.

The settlers established a legislative council, and when the BSAC charter expired in 1923, a referendum was held on whether to join South Africa. The vote went against union, and Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing British colony. This marked the beginning of decades of prosperity for white settlers in Southern Rhodesia.

In **1930 the colonial government passed the Land Apportionment Act**, which divided the colony into separate areas for whites and blacks. The act allocated white settlers, who were less than 5 percent of the colony's population, approximately 50 percent of the land. The Great Depression of the 1930s held back economic prosperity and white immigration. By 1950 the white population had risen to about 125,000. In **1953**, white settlers pressured the British government to unite Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (also known as the **Central African Federation**).

The federation lasted until 1963 and saw rapid economic expansion, as Southern Rhodesia industrialized and became the second-most powerful economy in southern Africa, after South Africa. By 1960, black opposition to white settler rule grew more active and vocal. The first African labor unions began to appear in the 1920s, and in the 1950s African nationalist parties formed. As support for the parties grew, the colonial government became increasingly repressive and resisted the idea of majority rule.

Emergence of Independence movement:

- As colonial rule was ending throughout the continent and as African-majority governments assumed control in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the white-minority Rhodesian government led by **Ian Smith made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI)** from the United Kingdom on 11 November 1965.
- Although Smith's declaration was not recognised by the United Kingdom nor any other foreign power, Southern Rhodesia dropped the designation "Southern", and claimed nation status as the Republic of Rhodesia in 1970 although this was not recognised internationally.
- Lacking international recognition, after about three months, the country was taken back into the hands of Britain, as per the **Lancaster House Agreement** which was meant to facilitate transition.
- The country once again became a British colony known as Southern Rhodesia.
- The **white minority government declared itself a republic in 1970.**
- **A civil war ensued, with Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and Robert Mugabe's ZANU** using assistance from the governments of Zambia and Mozambique.
- The country gained official **independence as Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980** when Southern-Rhodesia gained independence from the British, taking the name Zimbabwe.
- In the April 1980 elections, Robert Mugabe, head of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) won the majority and became the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe.

#### Robert Mugabe's role:

He was heavily influenced as a young man by the leaders of the Indian independence movement, including Gandhi and Nehru. In 1960 in Southern Rhodesia he joined the movement led by Joshua Nkomo, who was the patriarch of the African nationalist struggle in the country. Mr. Mugabe formed the Zimbabwe African National Union.

In 1963, Mr. Mugabe and many of his allies were arrested, and he spent 11 years in prison. After his time in prison Mr. Mugabe left Rhodesia in 1975 for Mozambique, and worked to win the acceptance of the guerrillas from his political party.

After British-brokered peace talks in 1979 that established the independent state of Zimbabwe and set the stage for a national election, Mr. Mugabe returned home from exile. Mr. Mugabe was reluctant to agree to the British pact. He won a resounding victory in the new country's election to become prime minister in 1980.

From one viewpoint he is Zimbabwe's founding father, the man who led his comrades through an armed struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe's black majority from Rhodesian white-minority rule. His achievements included more emphasis on health, education and women's empowerment, thus opening up possibilities to many Zimbabweans, particularly the rural poor, who were shut out from Rhodesia's opportunities.

Tourism and mining flourished, and Zimbabwe was a regional breadbasket.

From another viewpoint, his 37-year rule was characterised by massive human rights abuses, from the **Gukurahundi massacres** and persecution of supporters of the rival Zapu party of Joshua Nkomo just after independence, to the persecution of perceived enemies, both in the opposition and within his own party, whom he considered threats to his power.

The economic problems of Zimbabwe are often traced to the violent seizures of thousands of white-owned farms that began around 2000. Under **Land reforms**, instead of redistributing farms to poor blacks, Mugabe gave prime farms to ruling party leaders, party loyalists, security chiefs, relatives and cronies. Swift sanctions soon followed from the west that, together with Mugabe's own inconsistent economic policies and widespread corruption in his government, plunged the economy

into an almost permanent recession for nearly two decades.

### Fall of Mugabe:

Mr. Mugabe became president in 1988 and for the next 12 years, he went relatively unchallenged, as government investments in education and health led the country to prosper for a time. But in 2000, facing newly empowered political opponents, Mr. Mugabe supported gangs of young men who had begun to seize white-owned farms. Soon afterward, he decreed that the government itself could seize farms without paying the landowners.

The uprising came at a high cost, as food shortages increased and the economy declined. Mr. Mugabe faced increased international pressure to step down. In 2008, Mr. Mugabe was hastily sworn in for a sixth term in office after being declared the winner of a one-man election.

The beatings and killing of opposition supporters forced his opponent to withdraw from the race, even after he had outpolled Mr. Mugabe in the presidential vote.

Mugabe was re-elected in 2013 in another ballot marred by alleged irregularities. Amid the political turmoil, the economy of Zimbabwe, traditionally rich in agriculture and minerals, deteriorated. On 15 November 2017, the Zimbabwe National Army placed Mugabe under house arrest. On 19 November, 2017 he was sacked as leader of ZANU-PF, and Mnangagwa was appointed in his place.

The party gave Mugabe an ultimatum to resign by noon the following day, or it would introduce an impeachment resolution against him. When Mugabe refused to resign, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) deputies introduced an impeachment resolution on 21 November 2017, and with both major parties supporting the motion, Mugabe's impeachment and removal appeared all but certain. However, in July 2018, the Zimbabwe Supreme Court ruled that Mugabe had resigned

voluntarily.

### Post independence continuing settler problem:

Following independence in 1980, the country's white people lost most of their former privileges. A generous social welfare net (including both education and healthcare) that had supported white people in Rhodesia disappeared almost in an instant. White people in the artisan, skilled worker and supervisory classes began to experience job competition from black people. Indigenisation in the public services displaced many white people. The result was that white emigration gathered pace.

In the ten-year period from 1980 to 1990 approximately two thirds of the white population left Zimbabwe. However, many white people resolved to stay in the new Zimbabwe. Only a third of the white farming community left. Although small in absolute numbers, Zimbabwe's white people formed a high proportion of the upper strata of society.

A white who remained in Zimbabwe and accepted the situation is known as a "Zimbo". The lifting of UN-imposed economic sanctions and the end of the Bush War at the time of independence produced an immediate 'peace dividend'. One area of economic growth was tourism, catering in particular to visitors from Europe and North America. Many white people found work in this sector.

Another area of growth was horticulture, involving the cultivation of flowers, fruits and vegetables which were air-freighted to market in Europe and many white farmers were involved in this. The country settled and the white population stabilised. A new class of "young white millionaires" appeared in the farming sector. These were typically young Zimbabweans who had applied skills learned in agricultural colleges and business schools in Europe.

White Zimbabweans with professional skills were readily

accepted in the new order. In 1999 the government initiated a "fast track land reform" programme. This was intended to transfer 4,000 white farms, mostly prime farmland, to black ownership. By mid-2006 only 500 of the original 5,000 white farms were still fully operational. However, by early 2007, a number of the seized farms were being leased back to their former white owners.

The post-2000 recession has seen the emergence of a class of "poor white people". These are typically persons who lack capital, education and skills and who are therefore unable to migrate from Zimbabwe. As rich white landowners emigrated or fended for themselves financially, their white employees who mainly worked as supervisors of black labour, found themselves destitute on the streets in urban centres.

Sympathisers of the expropriated white farmers have claimed that lack of professional management skills among the new landholders has resulted in a dramatic decline in Zimbabwe's agricultural production. Indeed, in an effort to boost their own agricultural output, neighbouring countries including Mozambique and Zambia offered land and other incentives to entice Zimbabwe's white farmers to immigrate. By June 2008, it was reported that only 280 white farmers remained and all of their farms were invaded.

#### International sanctions against Zimbabwe:

The European parliament in February, 2019 has recommended more sanctions against the Zimbabwean government as a result of state sponsored violence. Over the past few years, the EU has reduced the number of officials on sanctions from the initial list of 200 that were placed under the measures first imposed in 2002. Mnangagwa's administration has been accused of deploying soldiers that fired live ammunition at unarmed civilians and committed a litany of human rights abuses in response to protests over a fuel hike.



To date, none of the implicated soldiers have been brought to book while more than 1,000 mainly opposition officials and supporters have been arrested. The EU said any long term support from the EU would be given to Zimbabwe based on "comprehensive reforms rather than mere promises".

US President Donald Trump has extended sanctions against Zimbabwe in March, 2019 by a year, saying that the new government's policies continue to pose an "unusual and extraordinary" threat to the American foreign policy. Trump administration officials have said the sanctions will remain until the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa changes Zimbabwe's laws restricting media freedom and allowing protests.

According to US officials, there are 141 entities and individuals in Zimbabwe currently under US sanctions, including Mnangagwa and former president late Robert Mugabe. Mnangagwa has called for the sanctions to be lifted against the ZANU-PF ruling party and some government-owned firms, which were imposed during Mugabe's rule over what the US said were human rights violations and undermining of the democratic process.