

## Series Title

# Reclaiming Zimbabwe: A Civic Revolt Against Democratic Betrayal

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## Series Overview

This two-paper civic dossier excavates the moral, constitutional, and generational crisis at the heart of Zimbabwe's political decay. It traces the arc from democratic betrayal to the urgent necessity of a second liberation—one grounded not in arms, but in civic imagination, constitutional fidelity, and continental responsibility.

The first paper, ***The Republic in Ruins***, documents the systematic dismantling of the post-1980 promise. It exposes the corrosion of state institutions, the betrayal of liberation values, and the rise of a predatory political order sustained by fear, propaganda, and elite complicity. It functions as a people's ledger—an unflinching record of democratic vandalism and the lived consequences of authoritarian governance.

The second paper, ***The Second Liberation***, advances a sovereign counter-project. It reframes resistance as a constitutional, civic, and generational mandate. It articulates a pathway out of elite capture, restoring the republic through lawful defiance, institutional renewal, and a reawakening of the people's political agency. Where the first paper diagnoses collapse, the second prescribes reconstruction.

Together, these manuscripts form a unified intellectual intervention—an indictment of authoritarian continuity and a blueprint for democratic rebirth. They speak not only to Zimbabwe's crisis, but to the broader African struggle against constitutional manipulation, militarised politics, and the erosion of civic dignity across the continent.

## Paper Titles and Sequence

1. **THE REPUBLIC IN RUINS: A PEOPLE'S DOSSIER ON DEMOCRATIC BETRAYAL IN ZIMBABWE**
2. **THE SECOND LIBERATION: RECLAIMING ZIMBABWE FROM CONSTITUTIONAL VANDALISM AND ELITE CAPTURE**

# **THE REPUBLIC IN RUINS: A PEOPLE'S DOSSIER ON DEMOCRATIC BETRAYAL IN ZIMBABWE**

## **I. INTRODUCTION: THE SLOW VIOLENCE OF A BETRAYED REPUBLIC**

A republic does not collapse in a single moment. It erodes quietly, through the slow violence of broken promises, the corrosion of institutions, and the steady normalization of the unacceptable. Collapse begins not with explosions, but with silences — the silence of intimidated citizens, the silence of captured institutions, the silence of a political class that has traded principle for proximity to power. Zimbabwe's tragedy is not simply that it has failed to achieve democracy; it is that it has perfected the performance of democracy while hollowing out its substance. What remains is a simulacrum of a state — a republic in name, a patrimonial estate in practice.

This paper is written from exile, a vantage point that sharpens clarity and strips away the illusions that proximity once demanded. Exile is not merely a geographical condition; it is a political diagnosis. It is the lived evidence that the state has ceased to tolerate dissent, that the social contract has been ruptured, and that the republic has turned against its own children. Exile is the moment when the nation declares that truth is treason, that independence of thought is a threat, and that those who refuse to kneel must be cast out.

From this distance, one sees Zimbabwe not only as it is, but as it has been forced to become: a nation governed by fear, sustained by illusion, and betrayed by those who once claimed the mantle of liberation. The rituals of democracy remain — elections, courts, parliaments, slogans — but their meaning has been emptied out. Institutions exist, but they do not function. Laws exist, but they do not protect. Citizens exist, but they are not sovereign. The republic has become a theatre, and the people have been reduced to spectators in a drama scripted by those who fear accountability more than they fear national collapse.

The purpose of this dossier is not to lament. It is to record — with precision, with moral clarity, and with the intellectual rigor demanded by the liberation tradition that birthed the nation. Zimbabwe's crisis is not an accident. It is the predictable outcome of a political project that has abandoned the ethics of liberation and embraced the logic of domination. It is the culmination of decades in which power was treated not as a public trust, but as private property; in which the liberation legacy was invoked not as a moral compass, but as a shield for impunity.

This dossier is therefore an act of civic memory. It is a refusal to allow the slow violence of decay to masquerade as normalcy. It is a reminder that a republic is not a building, a flag, or a slogan — it is a covenant between a people and their future. And when that covenant is broken, the people must record the betrayal so that the next generation may understand what was lost, and what must be reclaimed.

## **II. THE MANUFACTURED DEMOCRACY: FANON'S PROPHECY FULFILLED**

Frantz Fanon warned that the greatest danger facing post-colonial Africa was the emergence of a national bourgeoisie that would inherit the machinery of colonial domination and wield it against its own people. He described this class as parasitic, unimaginative, and obsessed with the preservation of privilege. Zimbabwe stands today as one of the most painful confirmations of that prophecy. The liberation movement that once promised emancipation has transformed into a custodial elite that governs not through consent, but through the management of fear,

scarcity, and political spectacle. It has perfected the art of appearing democratic while ensuring that democracy never threatens its hold on power.

Elections, in this context, have become rituals of obedience rather than instruments of sovereignty. The people are invited to participate in a performance whose outcome is predetermined — a theatre of inevitability designed to mimic democratic legitimacy while ensuring that power never changes hands. Ballots are cast, but they do not count. Campaigns are held, but they do not matter. The spectacle of choice is maintained only to conceal the absence of choice. This is not democracy. It is what Paulo Freire would call the domestication of the oppressed — a system in which participation is permitted only to neutralize the possibility of genuine empowerment.

Zimbabweans vote, but they do not choose. They speak, but they are not heard. They participate, but they do not influence. The result is a population trapped in what Freire described as a “culture of silence,” where fear and fatigue replace civic imagination. The ruling elite has mastered the art of manufacturing consent through coercion, manipulation, and the strategic deployment of hopelessness. Citizens are taught to expect nothing, to demand nothing, to accept the unacceptable as normal. This is not apathy; it is exhaustion engineered from above.

This is not merely political manipulation. It is a pedagogy of domination — a deliberate project to teach citizens that resistance is futile and that power is permanent. It is a curriculum of fear, delivered through institutions that no longer serve the public, through laws that no longer protect the innocent, and through elections that no longer express the will of the people. The state has become both the teacher and the enforcer of this pedagogy, shaping a political culture in which obedience is rewarded, dissent is punished, and hope is treated as a subversive act.

Fanon foresaw this moment. Freire explained its mechanics. Zimbabwe now lives its consequences.

## II-A. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MANUFACTURED LEGITIMACY

Authoritarian systems do not survive on coercion alone. Coercion is expensive, visible, and ultimately unsustainable. What sustains them is something far more subtle: **the internalization of power by the oppressed**. Manufactured legitimacy is not simply a political strategy; it is a psychological project. It seeks to shape how citizens think, how they interpret reality, how they understand their own agency, and ultimately how they imagine the possible.

The first tactic is **normalization**. When citizens are exposed to repeated violations of democratic norms — rigged elections, partisan courts, militarized policing — these violations gradually lose their shock value. What was once intolerable becomes familiar. What was once outrageous becomes routine. The ruling elite relies on this psychological drift, knowing that a population accustomed to abnormality will eventually treat it as the natural order of things.

The second tactic is **fatalism**. Citizens are taught, implicitly and explicitly, that nothing can change. That elections are predetermined. That institutions are captured. That resistance is futile. This fatalism is not accidental; it is engineered. It is reinforced through propaganda, through selective violence, through the visible punishment of dissenters, and through the strategic reward of compliance. A population that believes change is impossible will not attempt it.

The third tactic is **fragmentation**. Authoritarian systems thrive when citizens distrust one another more than they distrust the state. Communities are divided along political, ethnic, generational, or regional lines. Suspicion replaces solidarity. Isolation replaces collective action. The ruling elite cultivates these fractures because a divided population cannot mobilize. Manufactured legitimacy is therefore not only about controlling the narrative; it is about controlling the relationships between citizens.

The fourth tactic is **emotional exhaustion**. When people are overwhelmed by economic crisis, unemployment, inflation, and daily survival, they lose the psychological bandwidth required for political engagement. Exhaustion becomes a political tool. A hungry citizen is easier to govern than a hopeful one. Scarcity becomes a method of social control, a way of shrinking the horizon of possibility until survival becomes the only political priority.

The final tactic is **symbolic appropriation**. The ruling elite monopolizes the language of liberation, the imagery of struggle, and the symbols of the nation. By presenting itself as the sole custodian of national identity, it delegitimizes all opposition as unpatriotic. Citizens are psychologically conditioned to associate loyalty to the state with loyalty to the nation — even when the state has betrayed the nation. This symbolic capture is one of the most powerful tools of manufactured legitimacy.

Together, these tactics create a political environment in which domination feels natural, resistance feels dangerous, and obedience feels rational. This is the psychology of manufactured legitimacy: a system in which the oppressed internalize the logic of their own subjugation, not because they are weak, but because the state has spent decades teaching them to doubt their own power.

Fanon warned that the post-colonial elite would rely on psychological domination to maintain its rule. Freire explained how the oppressed are conditioned to accept their own silence. Zimbabwe today stands as a living demonstration of both theories — a nation where legitimacy is not earned, but engineered; not granted by the people, but manufactured in their minds.

### **III. THE VANDALISM OF THE CONSTITUTION: A SOCIAL CONTRACT IN ASHES**

A constitution is not a legal document; it is the moral architecture of a nation. It is the covenant that binds the state to its people, the agreement that transforms power from domination into stewardship. It is the instrument through which citizens consent to be governed, and through which the state earns the right to exercise authority. In Zimbabwe, that covenant has been desecrated. The constitution has been amended, manipulated, and mutilated to serve the interests of a ruling elite that fears accountability more than it fears national collapse.

The emerging project to extend presidential tenure to 2030 is not an isolated ambition. It is the culmination of a long, calculated assault on constitutionalism — a slow, deliberate erosion of the guardrails that once protected the republic from authoritarian drift. Judicial appointments have been politicized, turning the bench into an extension of the executive. Parliamentary processes have been reduced to ceremonial endorsements, where debate is theatre and voting is choreography. Checks and balances have been eroded until they resemble decorative relics rather than functional safeguards.

In the language of social contract theory, Zimbabwe has crossed the threshold at which the state ceases to be a legitimate custodian of the people's will. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau all argued that when the state violates the social contract, the people are released from their obligation to obey. Zimbabwe's rulers have not merely violated the contract; they have

incinerated it. What remains is not a republic, but a political estate in which power is inherited, protected, and insulated from public scrutiny.

This constitutional vandalism is not accidental. It is the logical outcome of a political culture that treats power as property, not responsibility. Amílcar Cabral warned that liberation movements must resist the temptation to convert political power into personal entitlement. Zimbabwe's leadership has succumbed to that temptation completely. The constitution has become a malleable instrument, reshaped at will to protect incumbency and eliminate accountability. It is no longer a shield for the citizen; it is a weapon for the powerful.

The tragedy is not only legal; it is moral. When a constitution is vandalized, the nation loses more than institutional integrity — it loses its moral compass. Citizens lose faith in the possibility of justice. Institutions lose the capacity to restrain excess. The state loses the legitimacy that only constitutional fidelity can confer. What remains is a hollowed republic, where legality is manufactured, legitimacy is performed, and power is maintained through coercion rather than consent.

This is not governance.

It is constitutional vandalism — the systematic destruction of the very foundation upon which the republic rests.

### **III-A. THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AS A TOOL OF AUTHORITARIAN DRIFT**

Authoritarianism rarely announces itself with a single dramatic rupture. It advances through incremental legal adjustments that appear technical on the surface but are transformative in effect. Constitutional amendments become the preferred instrument of this drift — a way to alter the political landscape without appearing to abandon legality. In Zimbabwe, amendments have become the scalpel with which the ruling elite reshapes the state to its advantage, carving away constraints while preserving the façade of constitutional order.

The genius of authoritarian drift lies in its subtlety. Each amendment is presented as administrative housekeeping, a necessary reform, or a response to “national interest.” But beneath the rhetoric lies a consistent pattern: every alteration expands executive power, weakens oversight, and entrenches incumbency. The constitution becomes a living document only in the sense that it is continually wounded.

The extension of presidential tenure is the clearest expression of this logic. It is framed as continuity, stability, or the completion of a “vision,” but its true purpose is to convert temporary authority into permanent entitlement. Term limits — one of the few remaining guardrails against authoritarian consolidation — are treated not as democratic safeguards but as inconveniences to be negotiated away. The amendment becomes the mechanism through which the ruler negotiates with the law rather than being bound by it.

Judicial amendments follow the same pattern. By altering the rules of appointment, retirement, or disciplinary processes, the executive secures a judiciary that is loyal rather than independent. Courts become predictable, not principled. Constitutional interpretation becomes an extension of political will. The amendment thus becomes a tool for transforming the judiciary from a check on power into a collaborator in its consolidation.

Parliamentary amendments complete the architecture. By adjusting electoral rules, altering legislative procedures, or redefining the powers of committees, the ruling elite ensures that Parliament cannot meaningfully restrain the executive. The legislature becomes a chamber of

applause, not accountability. Debate becomes ritual. Voting becomes choreography. The amendment becomes the instrument through which representation is hollowed out.

This pattern is not unique to Zimbabwe; it is a hallmark of authoritarian drift across the world. Leaders who cannot openly abolish democracy instead amend it into irrelevance. They do not tear down the constitution; they edit it. They do not suspend the rule of law; they reinterpret it. They do not declare dictatorship; they legislate it.

In this context, constitutional amendments are not legal reforms. They are political weapons. They are the means through which the ruling elite transforms the republic into a personal estate while insisting that everything remains constitutional. This is the paradox of modern authoritarianism: it destroys democracy through the very instruments designed to protect it.

Zimbabwe's constitutional amendments are therefore not administrative adjustments. They are milestones in a long journey away from constitutionalism and toward authoritarian permanence. They mark the slow, deliberate transformation of the state from a custodian of the people's will into a fortress of incumbency.

This is the anatomy of authoritarian drift — not a sudden collapse, but a steady legal suffocation of the republic.

#### **IV. THE ECONOMY OF EXTRACTION: WHEN THE STATE FEEDS ON ITS CHILDREN**

Zimbabwe's economic collapse is often described as a failure of policy. It is not. It is the predictable outcome of a political system built on extraction rather than governance. The economy has been captured by a network of elites whose survival depends on the continuous plunder of national resources. Corruption is not an aberration; it is the organizing principle of the state. It is the logic through which power is accumulated, distributed, and protected.

Fanon described the post-colonial elite as a class that “steps into the shoes of the former colonizer” and transforms the state into a mechanism for personal accumulation. Zimbabwe's political economy is a textbook illustration of this prophecy. Minerals disappear across borders under the protection of political patrons. Gold, diamonds, lithium, and chrome are siphoned off through networks that operate with impunity because they are embedded in the architecture of the state itself. Public institutions are hollowed out and replaced by private monopolies controlled by the same individuals who engineered their demise. The national budget serves the interests of a few, while the majority are condemned to poverty, unemployment, and despair.

This is not an economy in crisis; it is an economy designed to produce crisis for the many and wealth for the few. Scarcity is not a failure of governance — it is a tool of governance. A hungry population is easier to control than a prosperous one. Economic collapse becomes a political strategy, a way of shrinking the horizon of possibility until survival becomes the only priority citizens can afford to think about.

Freire would describe this as a society where the oppressed are denied the tools of liberation — economic, political, and psychological. Zimbabweans are not merely impoverished; they are disempowered. They are trapped in a cycle where economic dependence reinforces political subjugation. The state does not simply fail to provide livelihoods; it actively undermines them, ensuring that citizens remain too exhausted, too fragmented, and too economically vulnerable to challenge the system that exploits them.

This is not mismanagement. It is predation — a deliberate political economy of plunder. It is a system in which the state feeds on its own children, consuming the very future it claims to protect. It is the transformation of the republic into a marketplace of extraction, where citizenship confers no rights, only vulnerabilities, and where the wealth of the nation is treated as the private property of those who occupy its institutions.

The tragedy is not only economic; it is moral. A state that devours its own people cannot endure. A nation built on extraction cannot prosper. And a political elite that survives by plundering the future will eventually be confronted by a generation that refuses to inherit despair.

#### **IV-A. PATRONAGE AS POLITICAL ECONOMY: CARS, CASH, AND THE BUYING OF CONSENSUS**

Authoritarian systems do not survive on ideology; they survive on transactions. In Zimbabwe, the distribution of luxury vehicles, cash, and material rewards to political loyalists has become one of the most visible expressions of a state that governs through patronage rather than principle. These acts are presented as generosity, philanthropy, or “empowerment,” but their purpose is unmistakable: to purchase loyalty, manufacture consent, and secure support for the 2030 agenda.

The recent gifting of high-end vehicles and large cash payments to provincial political leaders illustrates this logic with painful clarity. These are not random acts of benevolence. They are investments — calculated expenditures designed to ensure that those who control provincial structures remain aligned with the ambitions of the ruling elite. Patronage becomes the currency through which constitutional vandalism is legitimized and political continuity is engineered.

This economy of inducement extends beyond formal political actors. Artists, influencers, and public personalities have also been drawn into the orbit of patronage, rewarded for their public endorsements and their willingness to sanitize the regime’s image. Their role is symbolic but strategic: to create the illusion of popular support, to drown out dissenting voices, and to convert cultural capital into political propaganda. Names are unnecessary; the pattern is unmistakable.

In this system, loyalty is not ideological — it is transactional. Support is not earned — it is purchased. Public figures become instruments of political theatre, deployed to normalize the abnormal and to present authoritarian ambition as national consensus. The state does not cultivate legitimacy; it buys it.

This is not governance.

It is the monetization of politics.

It is the conversion of national wealth into private loyalty.

It is the transformation of the republic into a marketplace where allegiance is traded like a commodity.

Patronage is therefore not a side effect of Zimbabwe’s political economy — it is its organizing principle. It sustains the ruling elite, neutralizes internal dissent, and manufactures the appearance of inevitability around the 2030 project. It is the economic engine of authoritarian drift, powered by public resources diverted into private hands.

A state that must purchase loyalty has already lost legitimacy.

A state that must bribe its own elites has already lost authority.

And a state that relies on artists and influencers to mask its failures has already lost the people.

## **V. REPRESSION AS THE FINAL LANGUAGE OF A FAILED STATE**

When a state loses moral authority, it compensates with force. When it loses legitimacy, it compensates with fear. Zimbabwe has perfected the art of governing through intimidation. Abductions, torture, extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, and the forced exile of political opponents have become normalized tools of statecraft. The security apparatus operates not as a protector of the people, but as a shield for the ruling elite — a fortress built not on consent, but on coercion.

Fanon wrote that violence becomes the language of a regime that has exhausted its political imagination. Zimbabwe's rulers have embraced this language fully. They do not govern; they intimidate. They do not persuade; they coerce. They do not lead; they dominate. Violence becomes not a last resort, but a first instinct — the default grammar of a state that no longer knows how to engage with its citizens except through fear.

Freire warned that oppression creates a “necrophilic” political order — one obsessed with control, silencing, and the destruction of life-affirming possibilities. Zimbabwe's security apparatus embodies this necrophilia. It does not enforce law; it enforces obedience. It does not protect citizens; it disciplines them. It does not uphold the constitution; it polices the boundaries of permissible thought. The result is a society where fear becomes ambient, where silence becomes rational, and where hope becomes dangerous.

Cabral insisted that the true measure of a liberation movement is its ability to remain accountable to the people. Zimbabwe's rulers have inverted this principle completely. They demand loyalty from the people while offering nothing in return. They invoke the liberation struggle not to honour it, but to weaponize it. They speak of sovereignty while violating the sovereignty of the citizen. The result is a political culture in which fear replaces trust, silence replaces dialogue, and survival replaces citizenship.

This is the final stage of social contract collapse: when the state becomes indistinguishable from the forces it once fought. When the liberator becomes the oppressor. When the institutions built to protect the people are repurposed to control them. When the republic becomes a security project, and the citizen becomes a suspect.

Repression is not a sign of strength. It is the confession of a regime that knows it has lost the people — and fears the day the people remember that they are the majority.

### **V-A. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FEAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF OBEDIENCE**

Authoritarian regimes do not endure because they are strong. They endure because citizens are made to believe they are powerless. Fear becomes the central technology of governance — not simply as an emotion, but as a psychological architecture that shapes how people think, behave, and imagine their own agency. Zimbabwe's rulers have mastered this architecture, constructing a political environment in which obedience appears rational and resistance appears suicidal.

Fear works first by **anticipation**. Citizens learn to fear not only what the state has done, but what it might do. The unpredictability of repression — the sudden abduction, the unexplained disappearance, the arbitrary arrest — creates a climate in which people police themselves.

This is the genius of authoritarian fear: it turns citizens into their own jailers. The state does not need to punish everyone; it only needs to punish enough people to make everyone else imagine themselves next.

The second mechanism is **isolation**. Fear convinces individuals that they are alone in their suffering, alone in their anger, alone in their desire for change. When people believe they are isolated, they do not act — not because they lack conviction, but because they believe no one will stand with them. Authoritarian systems cultivate this illusion deliberately, knowing that the collapse of solidarity is the collapse of resistance.

The third mechanism is **learned helplessness** — a psychological condition in which repeated exposure to uncontrollable harm leads individuals to stop trying to change their circumstances. Zimbabweans have endured decades of economic collapse, political violence, and institutional decay. Over time, many come to believe that nothing they do can alter the trajectory of the nation. This is not apathy; it is exhaustion engineered by the state. It is the psychological residue of living under a system that punishes initiative and rewards silence.

The fourth mechanism is **the internalization of inevitability**. Citizens are taught to believe that the ruling elite is permanent, immovable, and invincible. Elections reinforce this illusion. Courts reinforce it. The security apparatus reinforces it. The message is simple: nothing will change. But inevitability is a myth — a psychological construction designed to suppress the imagination of alternatives. Once citizens begin to question this myth, the architecture of fear begins to crack.

And that is the paradox of fear: **it is powerful, but it is brittle**. It can suppress action, but it cannot eliminate resentment. It can silence voices, but it cannot erase memory. It can delay change, but it cannot prevent it. Fear accumulates pressure beneath the surface of society until the smallest spark — an injustice, an economic shock, a moment of collective recognition — triggers a collapse of obedience.

When fear collapses, it collapses suddenly.

When obedience ends, it ends collectively.

When citizens realize that the state cannot punish everyone, the psychology of domination unravels.

This is the moment authoritarian regimes dread: the moment when the people remember that they are many, and the rulers are few. The moment when fear loses its power. The moment when obedience becomes impossible.

Zimbabwe has not yet reached that moment — but the architecture of fear is weakening. And once fear collapses, no authoritarian system can survive its aftermath.

## **VI. CONCLUSION: A REPUBLIC AT THE EDGE OF ITS OWN HISTORY**

Zimbabwe stands at a precipice. The republic is in ruins, but ruins are not the end of a nation. They are the beginning of a reckoning. They are the moment when a people confront the truth of what has been done in their name, and what must be done in their time. A people who have been betrayed eventually remember their power. A constitution that has been vandalized can be restored. A democracy that has been hollowed out can be rebuilt. A social contract that has been burned can be rewritten.

This dossier is not a call to revolt. It is a call to truth — and truth, once spoken, becomes the first act of liberation. Truth breaks the spell of inevitability. Truth exposes the architecture of

fear. Truth reminds a nation that power does not reside in the institutions that have been captured, but in the citizens who were meant to command them.

The republic may be in ruins, but the people are not.

They have endured collapse without surrender.

They have survived repression without forgetting.

They have carried the memory of what the nation was meant to be — and what it can become again.

History teaches that no republic is beyond repair when its people refuse to be broken. The ruins of a betrayed state can become the foundations of a renewed one. The silence imposed by fear can give way to the clarity born of courage. And a nation that has been forced to the margins of its own story can reclaim its place at the centre.

Zimbabwe stands at the edge of its own history — not as a nation condemned, but as a nation waiting to be rebuilt by those who still believe in its promise.

**The republic may be in ruins.**

**But the people are not.**

**And a people who refuse to be broken will one day rebuild what was destroyed.**

**Delta Force, Over.**