

# YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, & COVID-19

## THE SITUATION IN ZAMBIA, ZIMBABWE & TANZANIA



**GLOBAL YOUTH  
MOBILIZATION**

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Through the work being done under the project “Political Freedom During Pandemics: Building Back Better after Restrictions”, Virtual Planet Africa is working towards building awareness on the political situation in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, showing how youth participation in politics has been affected by Covid-19 restrictions. This short report is the first of a series of useful tools developed by Virtual Planet Africa to show how youths in the three countries have been affected in their political participation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## GOALS AND STRATEGY

Our main goal is to ensure that every young person enjoys fundamental rights and freedoms, gets the chance to participate in shaping their own future, and has a voice that impacts societal progress. In order to achieve this, we are making a number of useful tools available to everyone. In addition, we are engaging youths at different levels so that we can incorporate their views in all our programmes. Youth have the right to be heard and we will work tirelessly to make sure they are heard despite the pandemic-related restrictions! Youth stories can be found on our website and social media platforms.

**LET’S WORK TOGETHER TO AMPLIFY YOUTH VOICES!!!!**



# ZAMBIA



## COUNTRY POLITICAL OVERVIEW

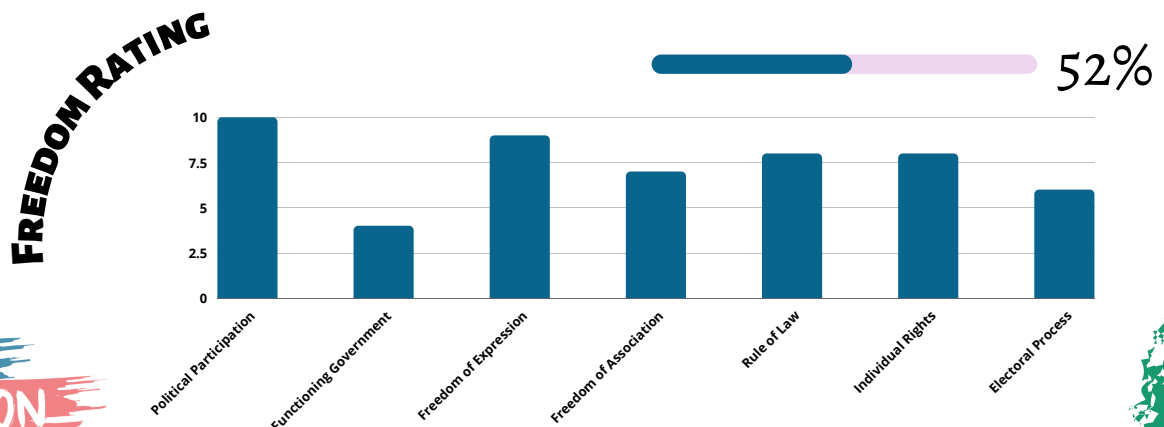
Zambia experienced an electoral transition in 2021. The previous government led by former President Edgar Lungu had employed repressive measures to intimidate opposition. Political violence, military repression and the shrinking of the public sphere were the order of the day. During Lungu's tenure in office political unrest increased and discontent was widespread. The 2021 Presidential elections were marred by violence and accusations of vote rigging attempts by the ruling party. However, the opposition won the elections and a peaceful transition of power took place.

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION DURING COVID-19

Although the ruling Patriotic Front party tried to repress activism through closing down a popular private TV station and controlling online activism, the youths in Zambia mobilised online, making the government's efforts obsolete. The year 2021 was dominated by youths sharing messages of change and hope online and it bore fruit with the electoral success of Hakainde Hichilema.

## POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The Zambian Government that presided over the start of the Covid-19 pandemic introduced a number of repressive policies including the Public Order Act that barred opposition rallies and the Cyber Security Law which attempted to stop online activism. However, Zambian youths ignored these restrictions and massively mobilised online, leading to the opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema winning the elections. The repressive policies that were introduced by previous governments are still intact six months into Hichilema's term.



# ZIMBABWE



## COUNTRY POLITICAL OVERVIEW

When President Emerson Mnangangwa assumed power in 2017, Zimbabweans thought they finally became free. Former President Robert Mugabe had clung on to power since 1980 and was only removed through a coup. However, all the hope was quickly eroded when Mnangangwa began consolidating power through appointing former military leaders in key positions. Elections were carried out in 2018 amidst accusations of election rigging, violence and irregularities. On 1 August 2018 protesters and civilians walking in the Harare CBD were shot down, injured and killed by soldiers when the government delayed the announcement of election results. What has followed is a continued erosion of political freedoms and almost total disregard of human and individual rights.

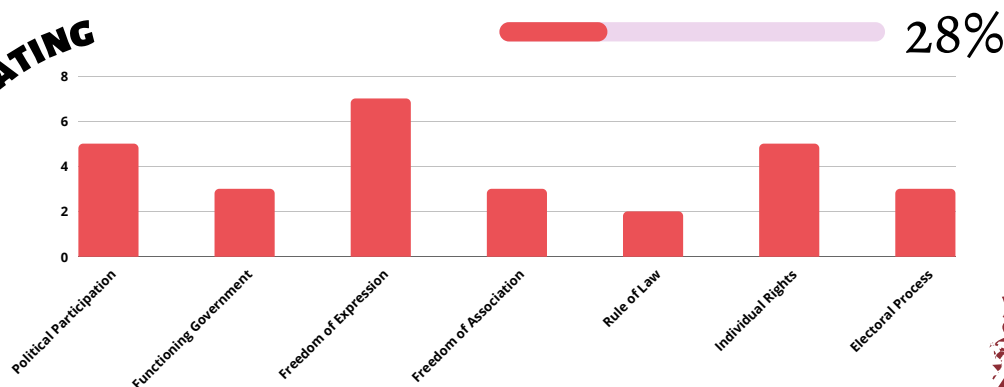
## YOUTH PARTICIPATION DURING COVID-19

Covid-19 came at a time when corruption and political persecution was at an all-time high. Civil unrest was increasing due to the betrayal which the people felt against the government. Corruption increased, with the government misusing funds meant for Covid-19 response. Journalists and activists were arrested when they reported or protested against corruption. Information became dangerous, with others who were vocal disappearing.

## POLICY ENVIRONMENT

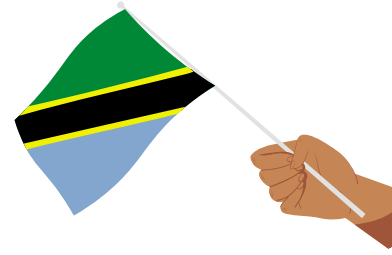
The Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill was introduced in 2020 in order to thwart all political dissent on social media. It was meant to stop people, especially youths, who were active on social media from discussing politics online.

**FREEDOM RATING**



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# TANZANIA



## COUNTRY POLITICAL OVERVIEW

Tanzania's ruling party, Chaka Cha Mapinduzi has held on to power for more than 50 years. Since former President John Magufuli assumed power in 2015, there have been a series of accusations from opposition of a shrinking political space. There were allegations of vote-rigging, violence and arrests prior to the 2020 presidential elections. Magufuli won the elections with a landslide victory of 84.5%. Magufuli's Covid-19 response was highly political, with him claiming to have 'defeated the pandemic' and stopping publishing cases of the virus. However, after his death Samia Suluhu Hassan took over and started publishing the results and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. She also promised to grant freedoms to the media and political parties.

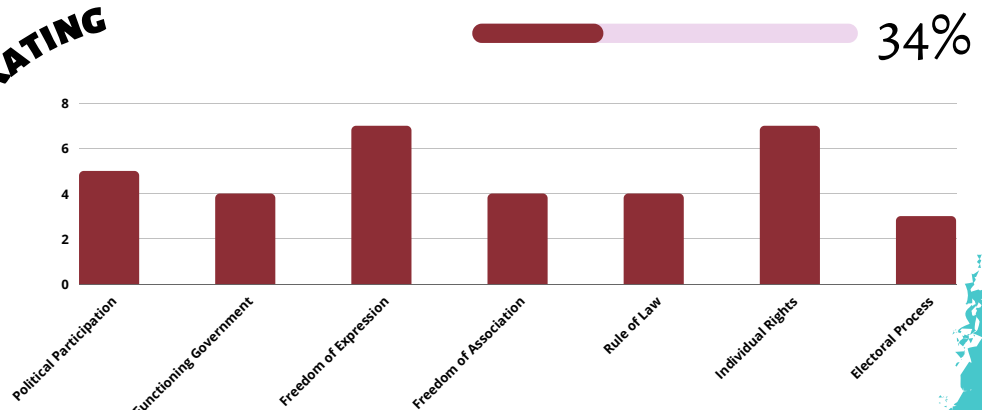
## YOUTH PARTICIPATION DURING COVID-19

Although in theory everyone has full political rights in Tanzania, in practice youths, women and other groups not in power have very little say in policy. The publication of Covid-19 information online or any other platform was penalised by the CCM government and labelled as 'false information'. Because of the heavy censorship of information, it is hard to truly measure participation of youths during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania. There is also very low youth voter turnout in the country.

## POLICY ENVIRONMENT

A number of repressive policies like the Political Parties Act of 2019 (which penalises unlawful assembly, rioting and sedition) and the use of the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) stopped opposition from campaigning and penalised any exposition of the government's shortcomings. During the Covid-19 pandemic news sites, online TV stations and other broadcasters were fined or closed down.

**FREEDOM RATING**





# *Virtual Planet Africa*

A forward-looking youth



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