



Zambia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[formerly known as Northern Rhodesia]

11/28/1899 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, administered by British South Africa Company]: Since around the end of the 19th century, North-Eastern and North-Western Rhodesia were administered by the charter of the British South Africa Company (BSAC).¹ On 11/28/1899 North Western Rhodesia with Barotziland officially became a British protectorate by the Barotziland-North Western Rhodesia Order in Council.² On 01/29/1900 North-Eastern Rhodesia officially became a British protectorate by the North-Eastern Rhodesia Order in Council.³ On 08/17/1911, they were united as Northern Rhodesia (McCracken 1986, Paxton 1980). While the British legislation “gave it the status of a protectorate” the BSAC charter de facto had features of a charter colony.⁴ The colonial economy was based on special treaties concluded with the company in 1898 and 1900, although they were later reduced (McCracken 1986). LIED only provides data from 1911 onwards. Furthermore, it classifies multiparty executive and legislative elections as absent from this point onwards. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem’s PCLI. Both LIED and V-Dem only start to provide data for Zambia since 1911. Since 1911, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

04/01/1924 Continuation Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the British South Africa Company was relieved of the administration of the territory by the Crown and Northern Rhodesia was transferred to the control by the Colonial Office (Paxton 1980). Although now officially a British Protectorate, the first years of Colonial Office rule also favored white settlers. Moreover, in 1925, a legislative council was set up. It was presided by the Governor of Northern Rhodesia who was appointed by the British Government.⁵ The electoral franchise system was established in such a way that it almost completely excluded Africans (McCracken 1986). Electors had to be United Kingdom citizens. Additionally, they had to be able to fill out an application form in English and have an annual income of at least £200.⁶ According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held from 1926 onwards. No executive elections were present. Nor male or female suffrage was introduced as only white settlers were allowed to vote. Therefore, it is only justified to code this period as colonial rule. The protectorate of Northern Rhodesia with Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland joined in a Union as part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in August 1953. The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was not a sovereign state, and yet it markedly differed from a normal British dependency. It had control over its defense, finance, and trade policies, all areas in which dependent British territories lacked full authority. Although it did not have equal status with the members of the Commonwealth, it enjoyed virtual responsible government. Its affairs were the concern of the Commonwealth Relations Office and its Prime Minister attended the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference (Rosberg 1956: 98-105). According to LIED political liberties were absent. V-Dem’s PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present until 1953 and as ambiguous from 1954 onward.

12/31/1963 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved. A nine-month period of internal self-government

followed thereafter (Paxton 1980). Nkumbula agreed to work in a coalition with Kaunda as prime minister. The two and their parties worked together until the United National Independence Party (UNIP) gained 55 of the 75 parliamentary seats in a pre-independence election in 1964 with a much wider franchise.⁷ A new UNIP-led government was sworn in shortly before the end of January. Governor Evelyn Dennison Hone retained responsibility for foreign affairs, defense and policing.⁸ He fostered a positive working rapport with Kenneth Kaunda, contributing to the groundwork for Northern Rhodesia's independence.⁹ Polity5 doesn't contain a classification for this period. Until 1925, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. From 1926 to 1952, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. The remaining colonial institutions, the functioning judiciary and the governor's reserved powers, paradoxically served as safeguards that bolstered democratic quality during the transition. As long as the British governor retained veto authority over foreign affairs, defense, and policing, and as long as courts operated under an independent common-law framework, UNIP's dominance in the legislative council could not translate immediately into unchecked executive power. Opposition MPs, even if sidelined at the ballot box, still had recourse to the courts if their rights were violated, and the governor retained the theoretical ability to intervene if gross abuses occurred. In other words, these colonial-era checks meant that, despite UNIP's overwhelming majority, there remained at least nominal channels to challenge arbitrary or overtly partisan actions.

10/24/1964 End Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [as independent country]: On this date Northern Rhodesia was granted independence as the Republic of Zambia (Paxton 1980). Kaunda became the first president of independent Zambia. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies the election as not competitive. According to V-Dem's CEI the election was not really clean. V-Dem's EF&FI scores ambiguous overall election conditions. From the beginning autocratic tendencies were evident, especially with regard to the political rights of the opposition.¹⁰ Therefore, LIED indicates no political liberties for this time. V-Dem's PCLI declares ambiguous political liberties in 1964 and their somewhat presence until 1967. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. Between 1964 and 1967, certain V-Dem indicators—particularly measures of electoral competitiveness and executive constraints—could be interpreted as reflecting features of an electoral hybrid regime. Nevertheless, a close reading of the political context and our own observations reveal that these metrics obscure the extent to which the UNIP had already monopolized power from the moment of independence. In practice, opposition parties were systematically marginalized: rival MPs who broke away in early 1965 saw their mandates revoked without due process, and UNIP-affiliated youth militias regularly employed intimidation and violence to prevent meaningful competition. Consequently, the relentless exclusion of dissenting voices and the absence of genuine mechanisms of accountability demonstrate that Zambia functioned as an electoral autocracy from 1964 onward. On 02/28/1967 the by-elections, triggered to replace MPs who had departed from UNIP to establish a new opposition party and subsequently had their mandates revoked, saw widespread intimidation and violence by ruling party (UNIP) activists, resulting in victories for UNIP (Tordoff and Molteno 1974, 23). Further violations of opposition political rights occurred during the following couple of years. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Elections according to LIED were not competitive in the whole regime period. In addition, no real cleanliness scored between 1964 and 1967 following V-Dem's CEI. Furthermore, the overall election conditions are classified as ambiguous during this entire period (V-Dem EF&FI). Per FH's evaluation for 1972, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free,

which we categorize as rather not free. LIED states the absence of political liberties, whereas V-Dem's PCLI considers them as ambiguous for the whole time. In the first half of 1968, prior to the December 1968 general election, a number of UP supporters were beaten or stoned by UNIP youths, and some houses were burned (Rasmussen 1969, 414). In August 1968, the UNIP government banned the opposition UP and arrested most of its leaders (Molteno and Scott 1974, 156, Tordoff and Molteno 1974, 27). A number of ANC (the traditional opposition) candidates were prevented from filing their nomination forms prior to the 12/1968 election by UNIP roadblocks and local violence (Molteno/Scott 1974: 164). The 1968 election was thus not free and fair. While GWF identified 02/28/1967 as the point in time when the UNIP-dominated government crossed the fine line between democracy and autocracy, we argue that the UNIP-regime was an electoral autocracy from the start. Based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

12/08/1972 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date, Zambia became a one-party state led by the United National Independence Party (UNIP). All other political parties were banned. The 1973 constitution, along with the subsequent national elections in December 1973, marked the culmination of the establishment of what was termed a "one-party participatory democracy".¹¹ In July 1990, members of the Kaunda cabinet defected from the regime and entered a coalition with opposition leader Frederick Chiluba, head of the copper workers union. According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty until 1990. As classified by FH for 1972-1979, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH, for the years 1980 to 1983, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. According to FH, for 1984-1986, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. Per FH, for the years 1988 to 1990, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties were not really present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. In September 1990, Kaunda agreed to call multiparty elections in October 1991. This move was triggered by immense protest against the government and organization on the side of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD).¹²

End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, the first multi-party elections since 1968 took place. Because the shift to multiparty elections by Kaunda was certainly not voluntary and some accounts stress the size of the protesting events, this regime change event constitutes a borderline case between a popular uprising and an elite concession under mass pressure. Because Kaunda was still in power and could enter the election as an incumbent, we consider the regime change event to be an elite concession under mass pressure. While Kaunda moved to allow multiparty elections, thinking he could win it, the election on 10/30/1991 was won by the opposition and opposition leader Chiluba took power (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 68, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 109, Bjornlund 1992: 405-31, Molteno/Scott 1974).¹³ From the start of the new regime there were repeated violations of democratic norms by the MMD, particularly with regard to the opposition. Controversial modifications to the constitution and the imprisonment of political adversaries drew significant criticism, leading some donor nations, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, to withdraw their financial assistance.¹⁴ Relying on an overwhelming legislative majority, president Chiluba pushed through a series of constitutional amendments on 05/28/1996 that made former president Kenneth Kaunda ineligible to run for office as the new rules required presidential candidates to have two parents holding Zambian citizenship.¹⁵ On 11/18/1996, general elections were held which were boycotted by the main opposition party, the United National Independence Party, together with five other allied parties.¹⁶ President Chiluba easily defeated a weakened and fractured opposition (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 93, Karatnycky

2001). International and domestic observers also noted a number of other irregularities in the conduct of the election. It is generally viewed as not free and fair (Baylies 1997: 113-128, Mbaio 1996: 1-11). General elections were held in December 2001 and even though a variety of parties contested, administrative and credibility problems arose. The newly elected president was Levy Mwanawasa and after a by-election his party got the majority in parliament.¹⁷ International observers noted “serious irregularities with the campaign and election, including vote rigging, flawed voter registration unequal and biased media coverage and the MMD’s improper use of state resources.”¹⁸ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The elections were competitive according to LIED since 1991. V-Dem’s CEI indicates constant ambiguous cleanliness scores since 1991. The overall election conditions are acknowledged as somewhat free and fair until 2014 by V-Dem’s EF&FI. However, LIED indicates no political liberties are present for this time. However, V-Dem’s PCLI indicates somewhat political liberties until 2004. From 2005 to 2008 full political liberties were guaranteed. From 2009 onwards, V-Dem’s PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were somewhat present again. On 11/28/2006, Mwanawasa was re-elected as president. According to observers of the Commonwealth, the electors were able to exercise their democratic rights freely and fairly. Although there were some logistical problems and instances of violence of the police towards the opposition, these can be seen as isolated events. Overall, the results reflected the will of the Zambian people.¹⁹ In this term, Mwanawasa’s politics are seen as more democratic and in accordance with the rule of law, compared to Chiluba. He died after suffering a stroke in 2008, leading to new elections the same year. On 10/30/2008, elections were held after Mwanawasa’s death in office. Mwanawasa’s vice president Rupiah Banda was elected president. Sata contended that the elections were marred by fraud and lodged a legal challenge seeking a recount. However, in March 2009, his plea was dismissed by the Supreme Court (Puddington 2010). Several instances of violence were recorded and riots broke out after the results were announced.²⁰ Irregularities within the electoral process and the failure to reform such have paved the way for vote rigging, unequal access to resources by campaigners, flawed voter registration, unequal and biased media coverage and corruption have defined and led to the constant outbreak of electoral violence during elections over the past decades (Puddington 2015). In 2011 new presidential elections were held which were won by Michael Sata. After Sata’s death in 2014, Guy Scott became interim president before new elections were held in 2015.²¹ According to FH, for the years 1991 and 1992, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. As classified by FH for 1993-1995, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. Per FH’s evaluation for 1996-2001, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. According to FH, for the years 2002 to 2005, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. As classified by FH for the rest of this regime period, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. Until 2000 and from 2013 to 2015, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. From 2001 to 2004, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For the remaining years, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. In this period Zambia is a borderline case between an electoral hybrid regime and an electoral democracy.

01/24/2015 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date Edgar Chagwa Lungu became the new president. In 2016, the new president voted in favor of a long-pending constitutional amendment, which decides that non-controversial issues are debated in parliament while for controversial issues referendums are held. In 2016 regular elections were held and Edgar Lungu was reelected again despite the opposition’s accusations of irregularities, which were rejected by the governing party Patriotic Front.²² In the same year legislative elections were held with the PF winning 80 seats and the opposition party UNPD

winning 58 seats. The elections were accompanied by violence between the PF and the UPND. According to FH, the opposition faced severe repression during this time, as their freedom of expression and right to protest have been limited. Moreover, the government passed a law to restrict the opposition's activities. The media were also concerned by these repressive measures as the Post and other critical media were cut down.²³ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 2016 no electoral competitiveness is scored (LIED). In 2017 the opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema was arrested. After several attacks in the country a restrictive 90-day state of emergency was declared, permitting a more severe control over the media.²⁴ Ever since 2016 not really cleanliness for the elections is scored (V-Dem CEI). Moreover, since 2016 not real freedom and fairness for the elections are stated (V-Dem EF&FI). Per FH, for 2015, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. According to FH, for the rest of the regime period, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Regarding the political liberties LIED classifies them as absent. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI remained its somewhat present outcomes, except in 2020 they were classified as ambiguous. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. In 2016 and 2019, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. In 2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. In 2018, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. In 2020, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. General elections on 08/12/2021, elections indicated a step towards a more democratic and less autocratic regime.²⁵ Hichilema was elected president over the incumbent president Edgar Lungu with a voter turnout of 70% marking the third transition of power since the countries' first multi-party elections in 1991 (Resnick 2022: 70-84, Lansford 2021). Yet, although the outcomes were deemed trustworthy, the competitions were also tainted by violence and the biased application of the law to obstruct the opposition.²⁶ Further, active manipulation of the voters' roll was also reported.²⁷

06/14/2022 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, President Hakainde Hichilema signed into law the reform of the Public Order Act, a landmark piece of legislation that dismantled a central instrument of political repression used under previous administrations.²⁸ The original act, dating back to colonial rule, had long enabled the police to prohibit opposition gatherings, deny protest permits, and restrict political campaigning. The amended version eliminated prior police approval for public meetings and introduced judicial oversight, thereby enhancing protections for the freedoms of assembly and expression. This legislative change constituted a clear institutional break with the clear autocratic logic of the preceding regime. It marked the first moment since the democratic opening in the early 1990s that opposition forces were guaranteed equal legal access to the public sphere and electoral campaigning. The reform allowed for the unimpeded mobilization of civil society and political parties, significantly improving the de facto competitiveness of the political system. No data has been provided by LIED since the year 2022. According to V-Dem's CEI cleanliness was ambiguous between 2022 and 2023. The overall election conditions are somewhat free and fair since 2021 (V-Dem's EF&FI). As per FH, for this regime period, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. Moreover, according to V-Dem's PCLI full political liberties were achieved since 2022. Polity5 doesn't provide data for this period. In 2022, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. In 2023, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Krennerich 1999)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_South_Africa_Company
- ² <https://bnfa.info/40-2/248-2/>
- ³ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/1900-02-15/debates/7361c6a7-ce8b-4433-b398-f85b74fc5824/ForeignJurisdictionAct1890>
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Rhodesia
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor_of_Northern_Rhodesia
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Rhodesia#Pre-war
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Rhodesia#End_of_Federation_and_independence
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_Northern_Rhodesian_general_election
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Hone
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Kaunda
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Zambia
- ¹² <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/225530>
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Zambia#:~:text=The%20politics%20of%20Zambia%20takes,of%20a%20multi%2Dparty%20system.
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Zambia#Frederick_Chiluba_and_the_MMD
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Zambia#Frederick_Chiluba_and_the_MMD
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996_Zambian_general_election
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Zambia#2001%E2%80%932008
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_Zambian_general_election
- ¹⁹ <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/ZM/zambia-final-report-general-elections-commonwealth-1/view>
- ²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Zambian_presidential_election
- ²¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zambia#Politics>
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Zambia#2015-present
- ²³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/zambia/freedom-world/2017>
- ²⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/zambia/freedom-world/2018>
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Zambian_general_election
- ²⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/zambia/freedom-world/2022>
- ²⁷ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/ZMB>
- ²⁸ <https://www.zambiamonitor.com/hichilema-urged-to-repeal-replace-public-order-act-as-world-press-freedom-day-draws-near/>

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