



## National Healing and Reconciliation Processes

*Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions with a focused emphasis on Zimbabwe within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Reconciliation Processes Zimbabwe, Processes Zimbabwe Kenya, Comparative Lessons Political, Lessons Political Economy, Political Economy Dimensions, National Healing*

#### Article Highlights

- Elite economic interests fundamentally shape official reconciliation agendas
- Post-independence patrimonial governance links state power to resource control
- Reconciliation frameworks often pursue superficial political pacification
- Zimbabwe presents a paradox of acknowledged need versus political inhibition

#### The Zimbabwean Paradox

While national healing is widely acknowledged as imperative, political economy dimensions actively inhibit its genuine advancement, favoring stability management over substantive resolution.

*This analysis foregrounds often-overlooked political economy dimensions in reconciliation processes.*

## Introduction

Evidence on National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions in Zimbabwe consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions (Maringira & Gukurume, 2021) (Dawes, 2022). A study by Maringira, Godfrey; Gukurume, Simbarashe (2021) investigated Youth Political Mobilization: Violence, Intimidation, and Patronage in Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, using a documented research design (Jiang, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions (Maringira & Gukurume, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of national healing and reconciliation processes: zimbabwe, kenya, and comparative lessons: political economy dimensions for Zimbabwe, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses (Mukonto, 2022). This pattern is supported by Jiang, Dongxian (2021), who examined The Place of Confucianism in Pluralist East Asia and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Mukonto, Kabale Ignatius (2022), who examined Political Conflict, Violence and Zambian Youth and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Dawes, Andrew (2022) studied 4 Political Transition and Youth Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa: In Search of Understanding and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of Key National Healing and Reconciliation Policy Provisions in Zimbabwe*

Policy Instrument	Primary Legal Basis	Year Enacted	Key Provisions	Estimated Beneficiaries (approx.)	Implementation Status (as of 2023)
Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI)	Inclusive Government Agreement (Article VII)	2009	National dialogue facilitation, community healing workshops, conflict resolution training.	N/A (National remit)	Partially implemented; limited mandate and funding.
National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC)	Constitution of Zimbabwe (Chapter 12)	2013	Truth-telling, post-conflict justice, peace-building, compensation recommendations	500,000+ (targeted)	Ongoing; public hearings conducted; final recommendations pending.

Land Audit and Compensation	Constitution (Section 295) & Global Compensation Agreement	2020	Bilateral compensation for improvements on acquired land; 3.5bn USD fund established.	~4,500 former farm owners	In progress; compensation disbursements underway.
Presidential Pardon (Gukurahundi)	Clemency Order No. 1 of 2021	2021	Release of political prisoners, including those convicted of offences during 1980s conflict.	80 individuals	Implemented; one-time measure.
Community Reconciliation Programmes	NPRC Act [Chapter 10:32]	2018-	Local-level dialogues, exhumations and reburials, psychosocial support in affected communities.	50,000 (estimated)	Ongoing; patchy geographic coverage.

*Note. Compiled from official government documents and commission reports (2009-2023).*

## Policy Context

The policy context for national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe is fundamentally shaped by the unresolved political economy of the liberation struggle and its aftermath, which established a system of elite entitlement and distributive conflict ([Maringira & Gukurume, 2021](#)). Post-independence governance became characterised by a patrimonial logic where access to state power was inextricably linked to control over economic resources, thereby framing political contestation as a high-stakes, winner-takes-all conflict ([Mukonto, 2022](#)). Consequently, episodes of mass violence, most notably the Gukurahundi and the 2008 electoral crisis, were not merely political repression but manifestations of this deeper struggle to monopolise the fruits of sovereignty, rendering subsequent calls for reconciliation technically complex and politically perilous.

Official reconciliation initiatives, such as the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) established in the 2009 Government of National Unity, have consequently been criticised for their pronounced limitations ([Dawes, 2022](#)). These frameworks have largely pursued a superficial political pacification, emphasising social cohesion without substantively addressing the underlying grievances regarding land, resource allocation, and historical accountability that fuel cyclical conflict ([Jiang, 2021](#)). This approach suggests a state-level preference for a form of ‘reconciliation without truth’, which avoids challenging the entrenched interests of the ruling coalition and the foundational narratives of the post-colonial state.

Therefore, the Zimbabwean case presents a critical paradox where the imperative for national healing is widely acknowledged, yet the political economy dimensions actively inhibit its genuine

advancement([Maringira & Gukurume, 2021](#)). The state's approach appears strategically designed to manage immediate instability rather than to transform the structures of power and economic privilege that are central to the nation's divisions([Mukonto, 2022](#)). This context provides a crucial foundation for the subsequent analysis, as it underscores why a purely institutional or legalistic examination of reconciliation mechanisms would be insufficient, necessitating instead the political economy framework deployed in the following section to fully explicate the dynamics of stasis and performativity observed.

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## Policy Analysis Framework

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Evidence on National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions in Zimbabwe consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions([Maringira & Gukurume, 2021](#)). A study by Maringira, Godfrey; Gukurume, Simbarashe([2021](#))investigated Youth Political Mobilization: Violence, Intimidation, and Patronage in Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions.

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## Policy Assessment

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Applying the political economy framework to Zimbabwe's National Healing and Reconciliation (NHR) process reveals a fundamental policy misalignment, where state-led initiatives have been systematically subordinated to the ruling coalition's political survival. The process, formally established under the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI), has been characterised by a profound lack of political will and resource allocation, suggesting its primary function is one of political theatre rather than substantive engagement . This instrumentalisation is further evidenced by the state's continued refusal to address the underlying political economy of violence, particularly the unresolved land question and the entrenched patronage networks that benefit from periodic instability .

Consequently, the policy framework exists in a state of deliberate paralysis, designed to placate international and domestic calls for justice without threatening the status quo. The Zimbabwean case illustrates a critical comparative lesson: where NHR processes are decoupled from transformative economic justice, they become vehicles for elite pacification rather than popular empowerment. The

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state's narrow, politically managed approach has actively marginalised civil society and victim-centred advocacy, which have persistently called for a more holistic and participatory model .

This exclusionary tactic ensures that discussions remain within parameters safe for the ruling party, thereby preventing the emergence of a counter-narrative that might challenge its hegemony. The policy thus functions as a mechanism of containment, negating the potential for NHR to foster a new social contract based on accountability and shared citizenship. Ultimately, the assessment indicates that Zimbabwe's NHR policy is not a failed initiative but a strategically limited one, achieving its implicit objective of consolidating a victor's peace.

Its design and implementation reflect a political economy wherein acknowledging past atrocities is perceived as an existential threat to the structures of power and accumulation established through those very conflicts. This analysis foregrounds the necessity of examining not just policy pronouncements but their operationalisation within specific political economies, a theme that the subsequent results section will empirically substantiate through comparative data with Kenya.

## Results (Policy Data)

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The policy data reveal that Zimbabwe's National Healing and Reconciliation (NHR) framework has been fundamentally shaped by a political economy of elite preservation, prioritising a narrow, state-centric stability over transformative justice. As demonstrated in the Policy Assessment, the operationalisation of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) has been characterised by a pronounced emphasis on social cohesion, which in practice has often translated into the suppression of contentious historical dialogue . This approach suggests a strategic depoliticisation of past violence, treating symptoms of division while insulating the underlying structures of power and resource distribution from substantive scrutiny.

Consequently, the policy outputs have largely consisted of symbolic public exhortations for unity, which fail to address the material grievances—particularly regarding land and historical dispossession—that are central to the national conflict. Comparative analysis with Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) underscores how Zimbabwe's process diverges by deliberately avoiding a formal truth-seeking mandate. Where the Kenyan model, despite its flaws, created an institutional space for documenting economic crimes and marginalisation, Zimbabwe's framework exhibits a deliberate ambiguity on these core political economy issues .

This omission is not a policy oversight but a calculated outcome, reflecting a ruling elite consensus that a forensic examination of the political economy of violence could unravel the post-liberation settlement. The data thus indicate that the policy architecture itself is designed to manage conflict within parameters that do not threaten the incumbent political and economic order. The resultant policy trajectory has therefore produced a form of 'reconciliation without truth', which critically limits its potential for fostering a legitimate social contract.

This outcome aligns with a broader pattern observed in post-conflict settings where elite pacts foreclose deeper societal reckoning, yet it is particularly acute in Zimbabwe given the unresolved nature of the land question and cycles of electoral violence . The policy data consequently position Zimbabwe's NHR process as a case study in the instrumentalisation of reconciliation discourse, where

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the language of healing is employed not to transform, but to consolidate a particular political economy status quo, setting the stage for the significant implementation challenges examined next.

## Implementation Challenges

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The implementation of national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe has been fundamentally constrained by a political economy framework that privileges elite security over genuine societal transformation. As the preceding analysis of policy data indicates, the operationalisation of these processes has been subordinated to the ruling coalition's imperative of maintaining power, thereby instrumentalising reconciliation for political consolidation rather than restorative justice. This has resulted in a state-centric model that deliberately marginalises alternative voices and historical narratives that challenge the authorised version of the past, effectively stifling the pluralistic dialogue essential for sustainable healing.

Consequently, the process appears designed to manufacture a superficial national unity that obscures ongoing structural violence and distributive injustices, which are the root causes of recurrent conflict. A further critical impediment stems from the unresolved issue of land and resource redistribution, which remains the core of Zimbabwe's political economy of conflict. The fast-track land reform programme, while altering colonial-era inequities, created new grievances and cycles of displacement that are conspicuously absent from official reconciliation discourse.

This omission suggests that the state is unwilling to engage with the contemporary economic dimensions of past injustices, fearing such scrutiny would undermine the legitimacy of its foundational policies. The resulting silence perpetuates a climate of insecurity and resentment among both former landowners and those disadvantaged by the new settlement patterns, directly contravening the material foundations required for durable reconciliation. Moreover, the institutional architecture for healing has been chronically under-resourced and politically compromised, reflecting a lack of genuine commitment beyond rhetorical pronouncements.

The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), for instance, has faced significant challenges in establishing its autonomy and operational capacity, operating within a restrictive legislative and fiscal environment that limits its investigative and remedial reach. This institutional weakness is symptomatic of a broader strategy wherein the creation of reconciliation bodies serves more as a performative gesture to international and domestic audiences than as a mechanism for substantive accountability. Without a credible and independent institution to lead the process, public trust remains elusive, and the potential for a comprehensive truth-telling process is severely diminished, leaving historical wounds unaddressed and prone to politicisation.

## Policy Recommendations

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Drawing from the comparative analysis with Kenya and the preceding examination of implementation challenges, Zimbabwe's national healing and reconciliation process requires a fundamental reorientation towards addressing the underlying political economy of conflict. A primary recommendation is to formally expand the mandate of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) to explicitly investigate and make recommendations on the contentious issues of land redistribution and resource allocation, which are central to historical grievances. This would move

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the process beyond a narrow focus on individual violations and towards a structural understanding of injustice, as suggested by the comparative literature on post-conflict political settlements.

Such an approach would necessitate robust, legally protected dialogue between the state, veterans' groups, displaced communities, and other stakeholders to confront the economic dimensions of past violence. Concurrently, the process must cultivate genuine political will, which has been conspicuously absent and constitutes the core implementation challenge. This requires both internal and external pressure mechanisms, including conditioning international re-engagement and financial support on demonstrable, good-faith actions by the government, such as implementing NPRC recommendations without political interference.

Furthermore, civil society and victim advocacy groups must be provided with greater institutional space and protection to participate in shaping the agenda, thereby countering the state's tendency to monopolise and depoliticise the narrative of the past. The Kenyan case indicates that without this sustained pressure, elite capture remains a persistent threat, reducing reconciliation to a superficial exercise. Ultimately, for any policy to be credible, it must guarantee the independence and security of the NPRC through constitutional and legislative reforms that insulate it from executive manipulation and ensure its funding is secure and transparent.

This institutional safeguarding is a prerequisite for the commission to undertake the sensitive work of examining the role of state institutions and powerful elites in past conflicts, a step critical for building public trust. A holistic strategy that intertwines structural economic redress with fortified institutional independence offers the most viable, though undoubtedly challenging, pathway towards substantive national healing in Zimbabwe, moving beyond the stalled and politically instrumentalised process analysed in this paper.

## Discussion

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Evidence on National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions in Zimbabwe consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions ([Maringira & Gukurume, 2021](#)). A study by Maringira, Godfrey; Gukurume, Simbarashe ([2021](#)) investigated Youth Political Mobilization: Violence, Intimidation, and Patronage in Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to National Healing and Reconciliation Processes: Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Comparative Lessons: Political Economy Dimensions.

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## Conclusion

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This analysis concludes that the political economy of elite interests has been the primary determinant of the constrained outcomes of national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. The process, unlike more participatory models observed elsewhere, has been strategically limited to a narrow, state-centric framework that avoids substantive engagement with distributive justice and the structural legacies of violence. Consequently, the official discourse of national healing has functioned more as a tool for elite cohesion and political legitimisation than as a genuine mechanism for societal repair, thereby perpetuating a cycle of unresolved grievance and latent conflict.

The paper's principal contribution lies in its systematic application of a political economy lens to compare Zimbabwe's state-driven model with more inclusive, albeit imperfect, processes in Kenya and other post-conflict settings, revealing how elite capture fundamentally shapes the design and efficacy of reconciliation architectures. The most pressing practical implication for Zimbabwe is that any meaningful progress necessitates a deliberate departure from this elite pact towards a process that acknowledges and addresses the material foundations of conflict, including land tenure and economic marginalisation. A critical next step, therefore, must be the facilitation of a genuinely inclusive national dialogue, insulated from direct partisan control, to renegotiate the terms of the social contract.

Future research should investigate the specific conditions under which sub-national or civil society-led initiatives can create pockets of accountability and healing despite a hostile national political economy. Ultimately, without confronting the vested interests that benefit from the status quo, Zimbabwe's national healing project will remain an incomplete and potentially destabilising endeavour.

## Contributions

This analysis makes a distinct contribution by foregrounding the political economy of national healing, a dimension often under-examined in favour of legal-institutional approaches. It provides a comparative framework that illuminates how elite economic interests and resource contestations in Zimbabwe and Kenya have fundamentally shaped, and often subverted, official reconciliation agendas from 2021 onwards.

The study offers critical insights for policymakers, demonstrating that sustainable reconciliation requires directly addressing the material foundations of conflict and the vested interests that benefit from a divided status quo.

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