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## Gambia: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

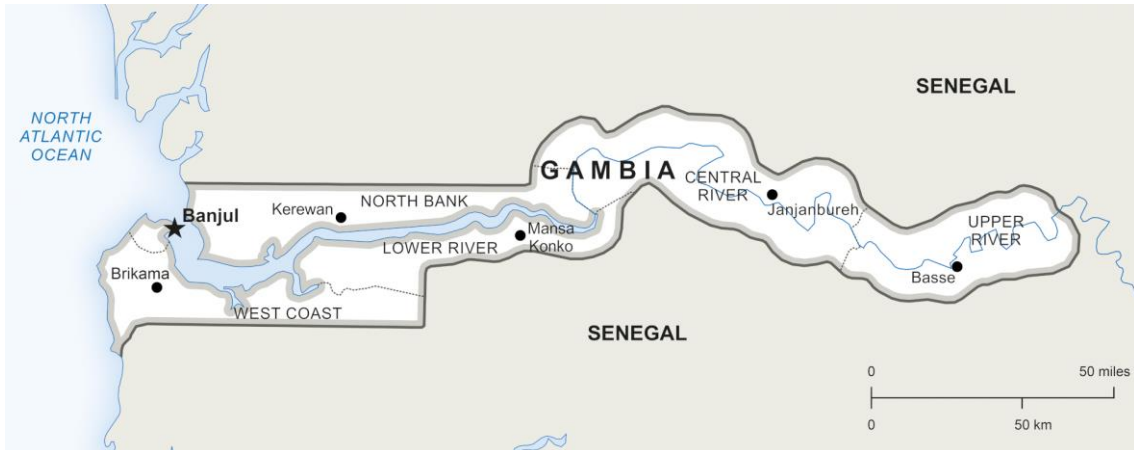
# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Gambia

## Brief country details

Gambia: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
2,631,000	118,000	4.5

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Gambia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	47	73
WWL 2023	44	75
WWL 2022	44	72
WWL 2021	43	70
WWL 2020	43	67

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Gambia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

## Brief description of the persecution situation

In Gambia, the already challenging environment for Christian converts is exacerbated by rising concerns over regional Islamic militancy. Converts, especially those from Muslim or Animist backgrounds, face familial and communal scrutiny, often enduring physical abuse, social ostracization and forced, non-Christian religious education. Christians struggle with bureaucratic hurdles for such matters as church registration. Adding to this already fraught landscape is a palpable fear among Christians that the region is tilting toward extremism. The awareness of radicalization in neighboring regions has heightened the community's existing fears and can lead to intensified hostility at familial, communal and governmental levels. While Gambia has so far remained insulated from jihadist activities, in the WWL 2024 reporting period the country nevertheless experienced a rise in attacks on churches, with three such incidents recorded. Properties owned by Christians were targeted as well. Additionally, the Christian community faced various forms of physical and psychological violence. Thus, Christians are facing an increasingly hostile environment.

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Churches and Christian properties were attacked.
- Christians were forced to flee their homes.
- Christians were physically and psychologically abused.

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Gambia

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Gambia country report	AI Gambia 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/gambia/report-gambia/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/gambia/report-gambia/</a>	21 September 2023
BBC News Gambia profile - updated 12 April 2023	BBC Gambia profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13376517">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13376517</a>	21 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 Gambia report	BTI Gambia Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GMB">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GMB</a>	21 September 2023
Crisis24 Gambia report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Gambia report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/gambia">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/gambia</a>	21 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit 2022 Gambia summary	EIU 2022 Gambia summary	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/gambia">https://country.eiu.com/gambia</a>	21 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Gambia	FSI 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	21 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries (Gambia not included)	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – Gambia	Global Freedom Index 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2023</a>	21 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-net/2023</a>	22 March 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 - Gambia	GIWPS 2021 Gambia	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/gambia/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/gambia/</a>	21 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Gambia report	Girls Not Brides Gambia	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/gambia/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/gambia/</a>	21 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 (Gambia not included)	HRW 2023	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023</a>	
Internet World Stats 2023 Gambia	IWS 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#gm">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#gm</a>	21 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – Gambia	World Press Freedom 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/gambia">https://rsf.org/en/gambia</a>	21 September 2023
Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index – Gambia	CPI 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/gambia">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/gambia</a>	22 March 2024
UNDP Human Development Report Gambia - data updates as of 13 March 2024	UNDP HDR Gambia	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/GMB">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/GMB</a>	22 March 2024
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Gambia	IRFR 2022 Gambia	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/gambia/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/gambia/</a>	21 September 2023

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL (Gambia not included)	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Gambia data – 2021	World Bank Gambia data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=GMB">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=GMB</a>	21 September 2023
World Bank Gambia overview – updated 10 March 2023	World Bank Gambia overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview</a>	21 September 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Gambia – April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Gambia	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-gmb.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-gmb.pdf</a>	21 September 2023
World Factbook Gambia - updated 13 March 2024	World Factbook Gambia	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gambia-the/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gambia-the/</a>	22 March 2024

## Recent history

Gambia is a small West African state fully surrounded by Senegal except for its Atlantic coastline to the west. The Portuguese arrived at the Gambian coast in 1455 and established a trading post, but in 1618 the Portuguese sold Gambia to the British, effectively making Gambia Great Britain's initial foothold in West Africa. Its present boundary was set up through an agreement between Great Britain and France in 1889. The country became a British protectorate in 1894. (Source: [History World](#), accessed 9 September 2022). English remains the official language, despite statements to the contrary made by the previous president. Banjul is the capital city.

Great Britain accorded Gambia autonomous status in 1963. In 1965 the country became an independent nation. Under the leadership of the People's Progressive Party, Gambia successfully established a democratic parliamentary form of government, and the People's Progressive Party won elections held in 1966, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987 and 1992. A year after a 1981 coup-attempt, Gambia and Senegal formed a loose confederation and named it Senegambia. The intention was to "integrate their military and security forces; form an economic and monetary union; coordinate their foreign policies and communications; and establish confederal institutions. The larger partner, Senegal, would dominate these institutions, controlling the confederal presidency and two-thirds of the seats in a confederal parliament" ([Britannica](#), accessed 9 September 2022). However, Gambia's increasing concern over its future autonomy and fear of being swallowed up by Senegal led to a dissolution of the confederation in 1989.

On 22 July 1994, Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh conducted a bloodless coup that ousted President Dawda Jawara, who had been democratically elected and had been in power since 1970. Jawara had survived a previous coup-attempt in 1981 with the help of the Senegalese army. Since 1996 the dominant party has been the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction under Yahya Jammeh. Other parties are also active in the country, for instance, the People's Progressive Party.

Jammeh did not return to the barracks with his fellow soldiers as he had promised. Instead, he remained in power until his defeat in the December 2016 elections. He often resorted to the idea of pan-Africanism to maintain the support of the citizens. In 2014, the year of a failed coup while he was abroad, he vowed to drop English as an official language and also [withdrew from British Commonwealth membership](#) saying the country would "never be a member of any neo-colonial institution" (The Telegraph, 9 March 2014). In 2015, Jammeh [declared](#) that the country should be referred to as the Islamic Republic of Gambia: "In line with the country's religious identity and values I proclaim the Gambia as an Islamic state. As Muslims are the majority in the country, Gambia cannot afford to continue the colonial legacy" (The Guardian, 12 December 2015).



After ruling the country for 22 years, Yahya Jammeh lost the presidential election in December 2016. Even though he initially resisted handing over power, pressure from the international community forced him out. In December 2017, he was [officially accused](#) of human rights violations (US Treasury Press Release, 21 December 2017).

Adama Barrow took office in January 2017 and has improved the human rights situation to a certain extent. He vowed to reverse some of the decisions taken by Yahya Jammeh. For example, the country [rejoined](#) the British Commonwealth and also changed the name of the country back from the 'Islamic Republic of The Gambia' to 'Republic of The Gambia' (The Commonwealth, 8 February 2018). Local government elections were held in April and May in 2018 without major incident. In October 2018 the "Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission" was set up to investigate human rights abuses committed during the Jammeh era. These and many other improvements have lifted the country from Freedom House classification of 'not free' to 'partly free' (Global Freedom Index 2022 and 2023 Gambia).

In December 2021, Barrow was [re-elected as president](#) with 53% of the vote (BBC News, 6 December 2021). In April 2022, legislative elections were held in the country. President Adama Barrow's National People's Party won 19 of the 53 contested parliamentary seats, overturning the main opposition United Democratic Party's (UDP) majority, however, it fell short of securing the majority needed to govern the country alone (Al-Jazeera, 10 April 2022).

In [April 2023](#), Switzerland's Attorney General indicted Ousman Sonko, Gambia's former interior minister, for crimes against humanity committed under the regime of former authoritarian leader Yahya Jammeh. Sonko is accused of supporting, participating in, and failing to prevent systematic attacks against Jammeh's political opponents. Sonko served as Gambia's interior minister from 2006 to 2016, fleeing to Sweden and then Switzerland, where he applied for asylum. Arrested in Switzerland in January 2017 following a complaint by the Geneva-based legal group TRIAL International, Sonko has been in custody there ever since.

## Political and legal landscape

Gambia is a multi-party republic. The president is the head of both the government and the state. It has a unicameral legislative body with 53 members. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial organ in the country. The Constitution also allows Sharia courts to assume jurisdiction over family matters.

Three years after the dramatic fall of long-time strongman Yahya Jammeh a new political crisis arose. Analysts believe that the new president made some unrealistic promises: For example, the new president came to power with a promise of only serving for three years and then stepping down on 19 January 2020. However, in late December 2019, Barrow formed a new political party, the National Peoples Party, to allow him to contest in the December 2021 presidential election. That move led to protests and harsh crackdowns.

Freedom House categorized Gambia as 'partly free' in its Freedom in the World 2023 report and several significant events shaped the political landscape of the country throughout 2022. In April 2022, legislative elections saw President Adama Barrow's National People's Party (NPP) securing 18 of the 53 elected seats in the National Assembly. Although this made the NPP the largest party, it did not grant them a majority. In May 2022, the Barrow administration released a White

paper that mostly endorsed the recommendations from the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC). The Commission was established to address human rights abuses during the rule of former authoritarian leader Yahya Jammeh. The government confirmed that prosecuting Jammeh should be a priority. Additionally, in late December 2022, there was a crackdown on several members of Gambia’s armed forces, who were arrested for an alleged coup attempt (see below). These events suggest a complex and unsettled political environment in Gambia.

Issues such as corruption and economic stagnation persist. Barrow had promised to create jobs and repeal Jammeh-era laws during the 2016 campaign, but very little progress has been made to that end.

### The attempted coup in December 2022

As reported by Reuters on 21 December 2021, the Gambian government alleged that it had [thwarted a coup](#) aimed at overthrowing President Adama Barrow and arrested four soldiers involved in the plot. This follows a history of coup attempts in the small West African nation, which spent over two decades under the authoritarian rule of former President Yahya Jammeh. Jammeh, who himself came to power through a coup in 1994, was ousted in a 2016 election by Barrow, an event seen as a win for democracy. However, discontent with Barrow's administration has been rising due to its inability to address the pressing issues of poverty and inflation. The government revealed that the army was searching for three additional suspects connected to the coup attempt. It remains unclear if this plot was connected to the previous regime.

### Third Term?

President Adama Barrow, who initially pledged to be a transitional leader for three years, has hinted at running for a third term. Despite his 2017 promise of a brief tenure, he completed a full five-year constitutional mandate and was re-elected in 2021. According to [AllAfrica.com](#) (13 June 2023), Barrow has indicated a willingness to extend his presidency beyond this second term, suggesting a significant shift from his earlier commitment to a short-term presidency.

## Religious landscape

Gambia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	118,000	4.5
Muslim	2,352,000	89.4
Hindu	400	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	125,000	4.8
Jewish	0	0.0

Gambia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Bahai	21,100	0.8
Atheist	110	0.0
Agnostic	15,000	0.6
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Gambia is a Muslim majority country, mostly Sunni, but other Muslim communities also exist. Some citizens mix indigenous beliefs with Islam and Christianity.

## Economic landscape

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Gambia:

- **GDP:** In 2022, Gambia saw a stable economic growth of 4.3%, fueled by gains in agriculture, public consumption, and infrastructure investment. However, this growth is threatened by rising import prices, the impact of the Ukraine war, and climate-related disruptions, contributing to increasing poverty and high food costs. Although the country has made strides in macroeconomic stabilization, it still faces challenges such as low revenue collection, a weak business climate, and economic reliance on low-value-added sectors like tourism and groundnut production. These challenges hinder job creation, economic diversification, and long-term sustainability.

GDP growth is expected to hit 5.5% between 2023-25, a rate still below the pre-pandemic levels of 6.2% in 2019. Inflation is likely to remain high through 2023 before decreasing to 7.3% in 2024-2025, impacted by global uncertainties like the prolonged Ukraine war. Although projected agricultural growth and cash transfers might alleviate poverty, these gains are likely to be offset by continued high food prices, resulting in a poverty rate nearing 22% through 2025.

- **Fiscal deficit:** In 2022, Gambia's fiscal deficit worsened to 4.8% of GDP, primarily due to decreased domestic revenues and increased expenditures. These expenses were driven by more spending on infrastructure and civil service wages, along with subsidies to counterbalance higher import costs, which in turn impacted tax revenues. The country's total debt stock remained largely stable at 83.9% of GDP, keeping Gambia at a high risk of debt distress.

The fiscal deficit is expected to shrink to 2.1% of GDP between 2023-25, aided by reduced war and pandemic-related spending, completion of key infrastructure projects, and efforts to boost domestic revenue, including improvements in tax and customs administration. Despite these positive outlooks, public debt is projected to fall only modestly to 73% of GDP in the same period, maintaining Gambia's high risk of debt distress.

According to the Africa Development Bank's [Gambia Economic Outlook 2023](#) (accessed 21 September 2023):

- Despite global economic disruptions from the war in Ukraine, Gambia's real GDP grew by 4.3% in 2022, fueled by advancements in agriculture, increased public consumption, and infrastructure investments. However, high inflation, averaging 11.5% year-on-year, curbed private demand. Both food and non-food inflation rates stood at 14.5% and 8.6%, respectively, contributing to rising living costs. These elevated food prices hindered efforts to reduce poverty. According to international poverty standards (\$2.15 in 2017 PPPs), poverty levels in Gambia are expected to have risen to 20.3% in 2022, up from 18.4% the previous year. The significant uptick in poverty can be largely attributed to weaker per capita GDP growth and high inflation rates that erode the purchasing power of households.

In the [2023 Economic Freedom Index](#), Gambia scored 57.9, keeping its economy at the 101st position globally, which is essentially the same as in the 2022 Index. It ranks 11th among 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet its overall score lags behind the global average. Institutional drawbacks continue to restrict full economic liberty. The judicial system is inadequately equipped to protect property rights, and corruption remains a significant barrier to long-term economic growth.

According to an [Amnesty International](#) report on 31 May 2023, livelihoods are highly affected by overfishing: Fish plays a critical role in both the economy and daily sustenance of Gambians, particularly in coastal communities like Sanyang. These communities are highly dependent on pelagic fish not only for their dietary protein but also for economic stability. Despite its importance, the fishing sector has faced escalating challenges due to increasing competition over marine resources in recent years. This has led to overfishing, causing negative socio-economic and environmental repercussions.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Gambia and UNDP Human Development Report Gambia:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mandinka/Jahanka 33.3%, Fulani/Tukulur/Lorobo 18.2%, Wolof 12.9%, Jola/Karoninka 11%, Serahuleh 7.2%, Serer 3.5%, other 4%, non Gambian 9.9%. The Wolof live mainly in the capital, Banjul. There are also Mauritians, Moroccans and Lebanese resident in the country who are mainly traders and shopkeepers.
- **Main languages:** English (official), Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, other indigenous vernaculars
- **Average rate of population growth:** 1.82% (2021 est.)
- **Urban population:** 63.2% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.75% annual rate of change (2015-2020 est.)
- **Median age:** 21.8 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.9 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (% ages 15 and older):** 50.8
- **Employment to population ratio (% ages 15 and older):** 54.0
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 9.1
- **Unemployment, youth (% ages 15-24):** 12.5

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Gambia ranked 172nd out of 189 countries with a value of 0.496
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 62.0 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.846
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.612

According to [UNHCR data](#) (published 15 March 2024):

- **Refugees:** As of February 2024, there were a total of 4,263 refugees including asylum seekers in Gambia.

## Technological landscape

Different sources provide varying statistics about the state of technology in Gambia. According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Gambia):

- **Internet usage:** 18.9% of the country's population (survey date: December 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 18.9% penetration rate (survey date: January 2022)

As per DataReportal's [Digital 2024: The Gambia](#) (23 February 2024):

- **Internet usage:** 54.2% of the population (January 2024).
- **Social media usage:** 14.4% of the population (January 2024)
- **Active mobile cellular connections:** Penetration rate of 107.5%.

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Gambia report:

- (Overview) "The online environment has markedly improved in The Gambia since 2017, when President Adama Barrow succeeded Yahya Jammeh, who had ruled for more than two decades and consistently violated political rights and civil liberties. Gambians now take to the internet to express views on many sensitive issues. Harassment of internet users for their online activity has declined, though arrests of online journalists and users who criticize or insult the president still occur. "
- (C8) "In November 2022, the Central Bank of The Gambia was hit with a ransomware attack that resulted in the theft of at least two terabytes (TB) of sensitive data, with hackers demanding a ransom of \$2.5 million. It is unclear if the bank paid the ransom."

## Security situation

While there is currently no immediate external or internal threat to national security, especially given that the influence of Islamic militant groups remains minimal in the country, other concerns loom. For instance, an incident in late January 2022 demonstrated the ongoing presence of Senegalese insurgents from the Casamance-based Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance in Gambia. During a confrontation near Bwiam, four Senegalese soldiers from the ECOMIG peacekeeping force were killed and seven captured, although they were later released. In March 2022, the conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal [spilled over](#) into southern Gambia, leading to significant instability and forcing over 5,600 Gambians to evacuate their homes (Al-Jazeera. 23 March 2022).

Human security also remains a concern, particularly in the context of human rights. According to the US State Department's 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, issues such as government-sanctioned torture, degrading treatment, harsh prison conditions, and a lack of accountability for gender-based violence remain prevalent. Trafficking in persons is another critical issue cited in the report.

For Christians specifically, the primary security risks are cultural or religious in nature, including practices like forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

## Trends analysis

### **1) Major reforms yet to take shape, constitutional changes still in limbo**

Following more than two decades under the oppressive regime of Yahya Jammeh, Gambia's current president pledged to usher in an era of prosperity and stability. However, the eagerly awaited reforms are stalling. A draft for constitutional reform was presented to the National Assembly in September 2020, but it was subsequently rejected. While the constitution is still in the draft process, it appears unlikely to substantially alter the state of religious freedom in the country.

### **2) Christians welcome positive changes but fear Islamic extremism on the horizon**

Since President Barrow assumed office in December 2016, Gambia's Christian minority has seen notable political developments taking place such as the label "Islamic Republic of Gambia" being dropped, rejoining the Commonwealth, and widening civic freedoms. However, Barrow faces challenges from radical Muslims who were empowered under the previous administration, as well as from nations that financially backed Jammeh's agenda of Islamization. Gambia has transitioned from being one of the most repressive regimes to a 'partly free' state, according to Freedom House. Yet, this progress is tenuous and can be easily undone by the country's intricate political dynamics, both internal and regional. The mounting crisis in West Africa concerning Islamic extremism could inevitably seep into Gambia, making life increasingly complicated for Christians.

### **3) Uncertainty surrounds transition**

The democratization process in Gambia, initially met with high expectations, has faced setbacks. The drafting of the new constitution was delayed, and President Adama Barrow, who initially promised a term-limited tenure, has hinted at seeking a third term. Amid this political landscape, uncertainty and frustration are growing among the citizens. Security and safety concerns have also risen; a local resident stated to a country expert that, unlike during the previous presidency, areas like tourist spots and hotels now need constant military guard. The resident noted a contrast between the past and present, stating, "Life was cheaper during the previous president. But now, we can speak up and write things in papers and social media, yet we struggle with food and basic necessities." This situation reflects the complexities of the country's transition, balancing newfound freedoms with economic and security challenges.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: History World - <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad47>
- Recent history: Britannica - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Senegambia-confederation-Africa>
- Recent history: withdrew from British Commonwealth membership - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/gambia/10686147/Gambia-president-rejects-English-language.html>
- Recent history: declared - <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/12/gambia-now-an-islamic-republic-says-president-yahya-jammeh>
- Recent history: officially accused - <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0243>
- Recent history: rejoined - <http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/gambia-rejoins-commonwealth>
- Recent history: re-elected as president - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59542813>
- Recent history: April 2023 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/19/swiss-charge-ex-gambian-minister-with-crimes-against-humanity>
- Political and legal landscape: thwarted a coup - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/gambia-foils-military-coup-arrests-four-soldiers-govt-2022-12-21/>
- Political and legal landscape: AllAfrica.com - <https://allafrica.com/stories/202306130572.html#>
- Economic landscape: Gambia Economic Outlook 2023 - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/gambia/gambia-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: 2023 Economic Freedom Index - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/gambia>
- Economic landscape: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr27/6644/2023/en/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR data - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107387>
- Technological landscape: Digital 2024: The Gambia - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-gambia>
- Security situation: spilled over - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/23/over-6000-displaced-in-gambia-and-senegal-after-casamance-missio>

## WWL 2024: Church information / Gambia

### Christian origins

Christianity arrived in Gambia with Portuguese sailors in 1456 when they sailed upriver and landed on James Island. However, the Roman Catholic Church did not begin putting down roots until the mid-19th century. In the early 19th century freed slaves who were Christian converts came to settle in Gambia after the founding of the city of Bathurst on St. Mary's Island. In 1849 a Catholic mission was established in the settlement. (*Source: Anthology of African Christianity, Oxford, 2016*)

Methodists first arrived in the country as early as 1821. The first Anglican mission church was established in 1855. Early church missions around this time were established by the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG) and the Church Mission Society (CMS). The World Evangelical Crusade (WEC) entered the country in 1957. The Association of Baptist's for Evangelism came to the country in 1978, followed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1982.

## Church spectrum today

Gambia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,700	1.4
Catholic	76,000	64.4
Protestant	19,700	16.7
Independent	19,300	16.4
Unaffiliated	1,700	1.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,400</b>	<b>100.3</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	7,900	6.7
Renewalist movement	24,300	20.6

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Christians in Gambia make up only 4.5% of the population. The majority are Roman Catholic but there are also small vibrant evangelical groups in the country, most of which are concentrated in the major cities.

### Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Hotspots for *Clan oppression* in particular are rural and remote areas.

### Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Gambia are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included in WWL scoring and analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** These are found mostly in the west and south of the country and are predominantly Roman Catholic. There are also several Protestant groups including Anglicans and Methodists. In most ethnic groups, Christians are seen as aliens and are not viewed as belonging in the country. Such views affect how Christians belonging to historical churches are perceived and treated.

**Converts to Christianity:** These are mainly converts from Islam or traditional African religions. Converts suffer most from societal pressure and from persecution from family and extended



family. In rural settings where life is more communal, they are more vulnerable to pressure since every individual relies to a great extent on cooperation within the community for survival.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These communities suffer more persecution than the historical Christian communities because they are stigmatized and less respected. They are often regarded as newcomers and not given formal recognition. Their lack of organization and strong external support (often through international networks) also makes them more vulnerable. They are more likely to try to integrate converts or work with communities of converts and this exposes them to greater risk and danger. Christians in this category tend to come from an economically disadvantaged background.

## WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Gambia

### Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

### Position on the World Watch List

Gambia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	47	73
WWL 2023	44	75
WWL 2022	44	72
WWL 2021	43	70
WWL 2020	43	67

Gambia's score in WWL 2024 increased by 3 points and reached 47 (WWL 2023, 44 points). The pressure on Christians in this predominantly Muslim country remained the same as WWL 2023 with an average score of 8.6. However, there was a notable shift in the violence score, which increased significantly from 1.1 in WWL 2023 to 3.7 in WWL 2024, an increase of 2.6 points. Under a steady level of pressure, Christians continue to face numerous restrictions, such as the complex process for new church registrations and persecution from families and local communities. Additionally, there is a concern about jihadist groups in the region leveraging anti-government sentiments among the youth, who are frustrated with the slow pace of reforms, potentially extending their influence.

## Persecution engines

Gambia: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*

### Islamic oppression (Strong)

The influence of radical Islam has become increasingly visible in educational institutions, media, and even in governmental circles. While this rise was particularly noticeable during the rule of former President Jammeh, it has not completely dissipated under the new government that took over in January 2017. During Jammeh's rule, Gambia formed a strong alliance with Saudi Arabia with the intention of endorsing and spreading a conservative brand of Islam. Since then, every government institution has been mandated to construct a mosque within its premises, and Islamic studies have become a mandatory part of the curriculum in schools. For Christians, and particularly those who convert from Islam, life remains challenging, especially in remote areas where the government's influence is minimal.

### Clan oppression (Medium)

Conversion from Islam or African Traditional Religions (ATR) often leads to significant social consequences. Converts may face animosity or even ejection from their families and communities. A considerable portion of Gambia's population still blends various religious beliefs and are notably resistant to Christianity. This opposition becomes particularly stark in situations where churches are actively evangelizing, creating a palpable tension in communities where religious beliefs are already mixed.

### Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Gambia serves as a strategic location for organized criminal networks, particularly in the area of drug trafficking. The country acts as a conduit for transporting narcotics from Latin America to Europe via the West African corridor. This organized crime is not just a law enforcement issue; it also raises questions about the stability and security of the country. The pervasiveness of these

networks suggests a troubling degree of corruption within various levels of government and law enforcement, complicating efforts to combat these illicit activities effectively.

## Drivers of persecution

Gambia: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK			WEAK	MEDIUM
Government officials								Weak	
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very weak								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks									Medium

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

## Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The legacy of the former president's promotion of radical Islam still permeates various levels of government and society. While the new administration under President Barrow has been striving to adopt a more moderate stance since 2017, the shift is not universally accepted throughout the administrative chain. Radical imams and sheiks, empowered by past governmental policies, remain resistant to this new direction. Friday sermons are often fraught with divisive and inflammatory remarks against Christians and other non-Muslim faiths.
- **Citizens (Medium):** In line with other countries in the region, the general populace plays a notable role in perpetuating persecution. Whether in neighborhoods or workplaces, Christians and especially converts from Islam encounter consistent discrimination and harassment.
- **Family (Medium):** Within families, particularly those influenced by the conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, persecution is intimate and personal. Converts to Christianity from Islam face vehement objection from their families on multiple fronts, from prayer and Bible ownership to the very act of baptism and potentially, Christian marriage.

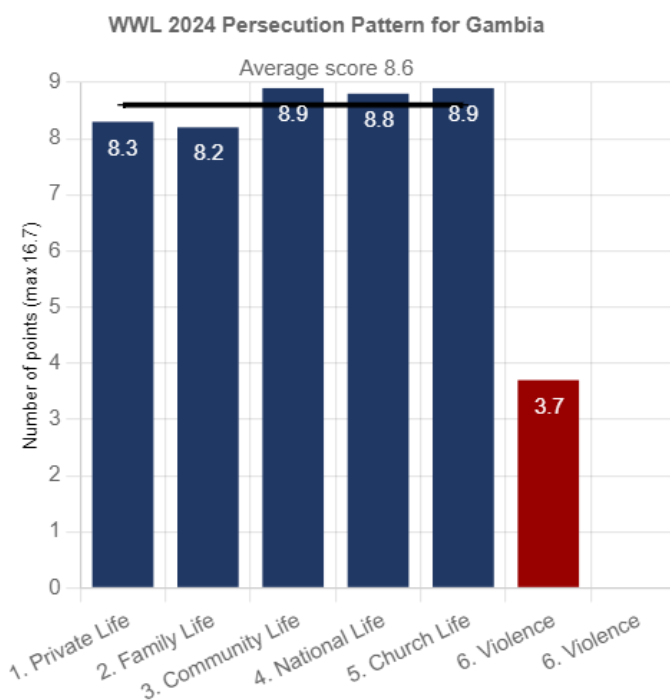
### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In rural areas, ethnic leaders actively engage in oppressive practices. They wield significant influence to pressure converts into renouncing Christianity and to stifle any evangelistic efforts from Christian organizations.
- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** Similar to Islamic oppression, families of converts, whether from Islam or African Traditional Religions (ATR), mount considerable social and emotional pressure on the individual to abandon their newfound faith. The family often sees the conversion as a betrayal of tradition and will go to lengths to force a recantation.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

- **Organized crime and cartel or networks (Medium):** As organized crime networks grow in scope and influence, particularly in collusion with religious leaders, they are increasingly destabilizing not just law and order, but also religious freedom. Cartels, especially those rooted in Latin America, are using smaller West African nations like Gambia as transit points for drug trafficking to Europe. This underbelly of corruption weakens governance structures and the rule of law. Christians or religious minorities who speak out against these activities often find themselves on the receiving end of threats and intimidation, further stifling religious freedom.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Gambia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Gambia rose very slightly to 8.6 points.
- All *spheres of life* have scores within the range of 8.2 - 8.9 points. The *Church sphere* and *Community sphere of life* scored highest with 8.9 points, closely followed by the *National sphere* (8.8 points).

- There was a notable shift in the violence score, which increased significantly from 1.1 in WWL 2023 to 3.7 in WWL 2024, an increase of 2.6 points.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)**

Converts encounter significant societal challenges throughout the country. Opposition to conversion is deeply rooted in societal norms, reflecting widespread beliefs and expectations. The resistance extends beyond disagreement, presenting a formidable societal barrier with potential consequences for individuals seeking to change their religion. Families will experience changes if someone in the family converts.

#### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)**

Participating in religious discussions, particularly regarding Christianity, poses significant challenges for Christians. Some individuals may perceive these discussions as attempts at conversion and respond with harm or hostility. This can result in expulsion from social circles, mob attacks, and even the denial of societal benefits such as access to community resources. The fear of these repercussions often discourages Christians from openly engaging in dialogue about their faith. If the individual engaging in such discussions is a convert to Christianity, the challenges become even more pronounced. Converts face heightened risks of backlash and persecution from their communities and families due to their perceived betrayal of their former faith.

#### **Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)**

Converts from Muslim backgrounds face numerous and severe challenges, particularly when they reside within Muslim communities or families. Worshiping in such environments carries significant risks, given the societal and familial pressures to conceal their Christian identity. These individuals often encounter intense resistance and hostility, making solitary acts of Christian worship, like prayer and Bible reading, extremely risky.

#### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.50 points)**

Speaking openly about their faith poses grave dangers for Christians, especially converts, who risk expulsion from their families or even being targeted by mobs. This threat extends beyond

familial conversations, impacting their entire lives.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (2.50 points)**

Christian converts face hurdles in registering birth, weddings, and deaths within a Muslim-majority country.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.50 points)**

Children of Christians often face bullying in schools, exclusion from social activities, or denial of essential services.

**Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.25 points)**

Spouses and children often endure prolonged separations where they have been forced to flee, or one is detained or subjected to house arrest due to their Christian beliefs. Additionally, they may face the loss of rights within their families, such as restricted access to resources or decision-making authority, further exacerbating their plight.

**Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (2.25 points)**

Inheritance rights for converts are often determined by Sharia laws, presenting a daunting challenge. Following conversion, individuals may receive significantly reduced inheritances or be entirely excluded from family estates due to their change in faith.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)**

Children of Christians, especially those from convert backgrounds, often have limited options for education, with joining Islamic schools being the primary alternative. However, there are often no affordable or accessible alternatives for families. Moreover, if families opt not to send their children to Islamic schools, they risk being ostracized and isolated from the community, making the situation even more challenging for them.

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)**

Christians in certain regions face daily challenges related to their faith, including community pressures that extend to forced dress codes for women and restrictions on activities like eating during Ramadan. These impositions put significant pressure on Christians' daily lives, further

exacerbating their already difficult circumstances.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)**

Christians, especially converts and evangelicals, have faced pressure to participate in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. This is particularly the case in the month of Ramadan.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Pressure from radical Muslim groups leads to discrimination against Christians in both public and private employment.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (3.75 points)**

The court system often exhibits bias against Christians, particularly converts, depriving them of equal treatment. Additionally, Christians frequently encounter serious challenges as their complaints are often inadequately investigated, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished and potentially re-offend.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)**

Christian civil society organizations in Gambia encounter significant obstacles in their operations, including restrictions on providing goods and services and limitations on their ability to advocate for Christian interests. Moreover, they often face barriers to renovating or rebuilding Christian-run buildings, further impeding their ability to function effectively.

**Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Christians often face obstacles in accessing public office and struggle to get hired or promoted.

**Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (3.25 points)**

The media frequently disregards Christians, with their reporting often biased or even entirely false. This creates unnecessary misconceptions about Christians within the community and exposes them to further danger.

**Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.25 points)**

In certain areas, openly displaying religious symbols as Christians can lead to mob attacks.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)**

Working with youth, particularly if Muslim youth are involved, poses significant challenges for churches, as even offering assistance could be perceived as an act of proselytizing and thus a threat by those seeking to restrict Christian activities. Elders and officials often monitor church involvement in youth activities closely.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)**

Openly integrating converts poses significant dangers for both the church and the converts and their families. Monitoring groups closely observe a church suspected of such activity and the individuals it welcomes into its compounds.

### **Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.25 points)**

The process of securing registration or legal status for churches is intentionally made cumbersome by authorities, possibly due to concerns about public backlash. This intentional barrier hinders the formal recognition of churches, severely limiting their ability to operate freely.

### **Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

A pattern observed in many African countries is the targeting of church leaders to disrupt congregations and church services, and Gambia is no exception. Church leaders are frequently singled out in their communities, homes and workplaces and intimidated.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*



**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. The use of symbolic numbers**

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Gambia: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10*
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10*

Gambia: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

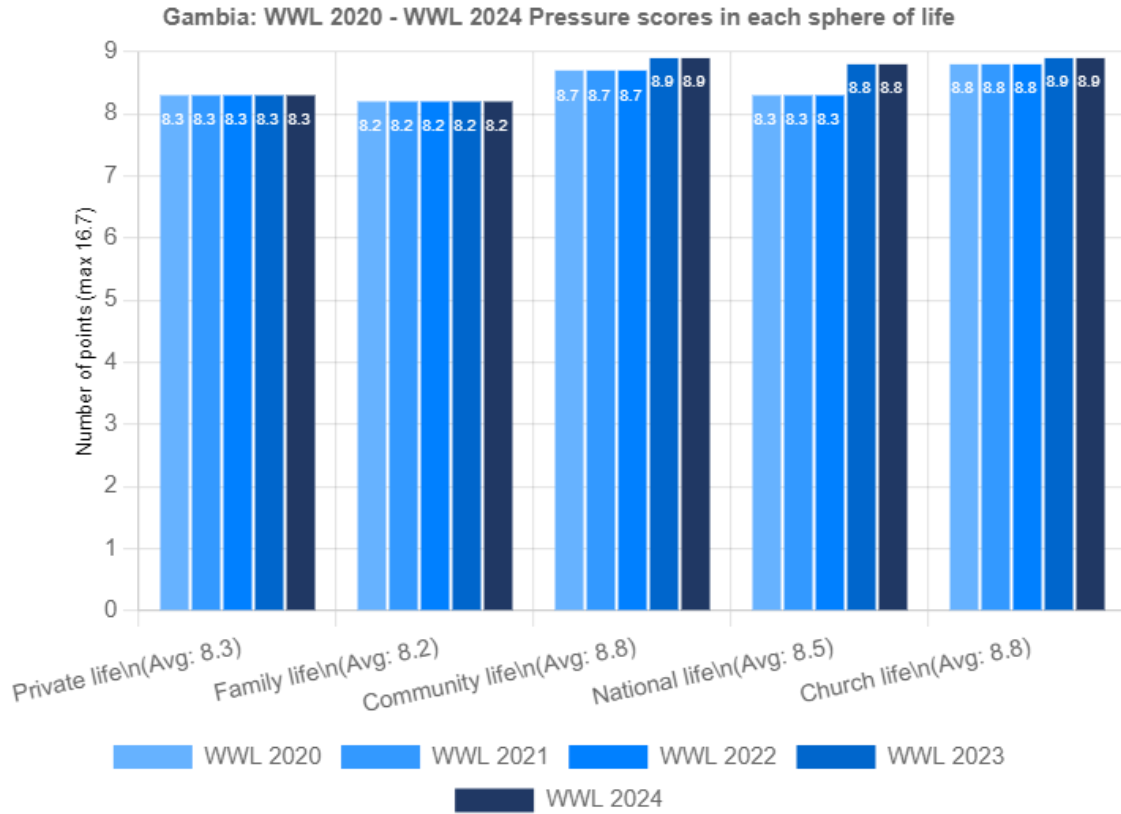
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Gambia: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	8.6
2023	8.6
2022	8.5
2021	8.5
2020	8.5

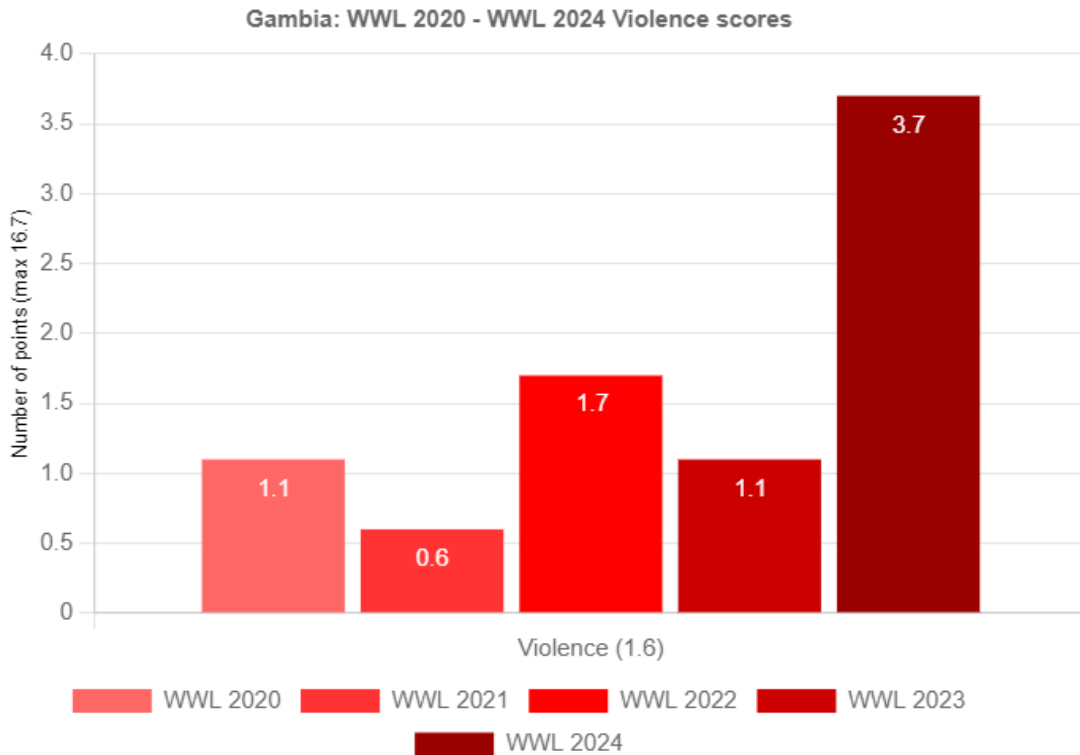
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has remained very stable within the range of 8.5 - 8.6 points in the last four WWL reporting periods. It shows the fact that pressure has not lessened for Christians despite the improvement reported in the country in various democracy and human rights indexes.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below shows that the average score for every *sphere of life* has overall been stable in the five WWL reporting periods. *Church and community life* scored highest with five year average of 8.8 points followed by the *national sphere of life* scoring on average 8.5 points. The *Private* and *Family spheres* scored the lowest with a five year average of 8.3 and 8.2 points respectively.



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The average score for violence against Christians over the past five reporting periods is just 1.6 points. The pattern of violence against Christians and the church fluctuates, with periods of inconsistency characterized by ups and downs. During WWL 2024, it reached a peak of 3.7 points. This was due to the rise in attacks on churches and properties owned by Christians and to an increase in physical and psychological abuse.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

While the Gambian State Constitution ensures that women are of equal legal standing to men and grants equal rights, [in practice](#) Gambia is a patriarchal society where men are the head of the household and women and girls are socialized into assuming a subordinate status (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, Gambia”). In a country where over 90% of the population are Muslims, it is challenging for Christian families to live according to Christian values. In a context of widespread child marriage – where 23.1% of girls are married before their 18th birthday – and poor education for women and girls, female converts face additional vulnerabilities on the basis of their faith and gender (Girls Not Brides Gambia). Girls without an education tend to marry at a younger age – [51% of women](#) with no education were married as children (MICS, The Gambia – Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018).

Female converts to Christianity face the greatest pressures for their faith, both those from a Muslim and animist background. When converts share their new-found faith with their families, they may face physical and verbal abuse, disinheritance, abandonment and threats for betraying their parent’s religion. “New converts to Christianity are subjected to house arrest to suppress their new-found faith and could sometimes if not all the time, be denied food and water for days”, a country expert commented. The isolation of Christian women from other family members or like-minded individuals is a stark reality, indicative of the conservative societal norms prevalent in the region. Forced marriage is also used as a weapon to apply pressure on converts, to encourage them to reject Christianity. Due to cultural norms, women are forced to convert to the religion of their husbands. An expert explained: “A Christian woman that marries a non-Christian will have to convert to the husband's religion and raise the children in accordance with his religion. This results in a somewhat coercive conversion.”

Families may incentivize girls to enter these marriages freely by finding wealthy Muslim men who can provide for their material needs, or alternatively threaten them with the prospect of

kidnapping and forced marriage. If already married, converts may also be divorced and have their children removed from them, in order to ensure the children do not grow up to be Christians. Women and girls may also be at risk of being impregnated and being left with the option to convert to Islam or be a single mother. While no such instances have been recorded in the past reporting year, these remain live threats. Any family or church community that receives rejected women and girls will automatically become an enemy of those who evicted and disowned them.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Persecution in Gambia for Christian men and boys often occurs in the form of physical, psychological, and verbal abuse for their faith. Converts are most at risk and can face severe punishment for betraying the religion of their Muslim or animist families. Pastors and church leaders are also subject to harassment, mockery, and death threats for their faith. In addition, Christian men may face discrimination at the workplace or be denied promotions. These forms of persecution negatively impact his wider family, as the man is usually the financial provider.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

The US State Department (IRFR 2022 Gambia) reported:

- "The Supreme Islamic Council (SIC), a religious body tasked with providing Islamic religious guidance, continued to state that the minority Ahmadiyya Muslim community does not belong to Islam. The council continued to exclude members of the Ahmadiyya community from its events and activities and to ban the burial of Ahmadis in Muslim cemeteries."

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

Though the transition of power in 2017 prevented the transformation of Gambia into an Islamic Republic, the social fabric remains deeply conservative, affecting Christians in both overt and subtle ways. There is pervasive social scrutiny and potential persecution against Christians, particularly those who are converts from Islam. The issue is deeply rooted and is likely to endure in the foreseeable future. In the current context, the projection is grim; signs of progress are

incremental at best, while systemic issues continue to enforce a climate of Islamic oppression that permeates through society.

### **Clan oppression**

While education and broader exposure to Christianity in isolated areas offer a glimmer of hope for transforming attitudes within African Traditional Religions, the path to change remains strewn with obstacles. Converts from a Muslim background often face social alienation, familial ostracization, and sometimes even violent reprisals. Given the current trends, it's likely that this form of persecution will persist for years to come, maintaining an oppressive atmosphere that makes religious freedom a distant dream for many.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

This form of persecution has the potential to escalate, especially given the rise of jihadism and organized crime in the West African region. These networks could further destabilize the already fragile political and social systems, which would have cascading effects on religious freedom and human rights. While ongoing democratic processes and constitutional reforms aim to instill accountability and strengthen governance, their success is not guaranteed. In the current scenario, the outlook remains concerning. Even if domestic reforms are successful, the persistence of organized criminal networks in the region poses a continuing threat.

In summary, whether it's *Islamic oppression*, *Clan oppression* or *Organized corruption and crime*, the present landscape offers little cause for optimism. The continuation of these oppressive 'engines' not only impacts the day-to-day lives of citizens but also poses significant hurdles to the actualization of a pluralistic and tolerant society in Gambia.

### **Transition, third term presidency?**

There was optimism in Gambia for a transition to full democracy following the ousting of Yaya Jameh through elections. The incumbent president pledged to transform the country, but the constitutional drafting process has been prolonged and contentious. Worse still, President Barrow has hinted at running for a third term, potentially causing unnecessary tension in Gambia.

## **External Links - Persecution Dynamics**

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: in practice - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/GM.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 51% of women - [https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/West%20and%20Central%20Africa/Gambia/2018/Survey%20findings/The%20Gambia%202018%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings%20Report\\_English.pdf](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/West%20and%20Central%20Africa/Gambia/2018/Survey%20findings/The%20Gambia%202018%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings%20Report_English.pdf)

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Gambia>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.