World Watch Research

Gambia:

Persecution Dynamics

February 2025

Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- [Persecution dynamics](#) (published annually in January/February).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading "External links". These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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/.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Gambia: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
2,842,000	134,000	4.7

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Gambia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	134,000	4.7
Muslim	2,520,000	88.7
Hindu	460	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	146,000	5.1
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	25,400	0.9
Atheist	130	0.0
Agnostic	16,400	0.6
Other	0	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country
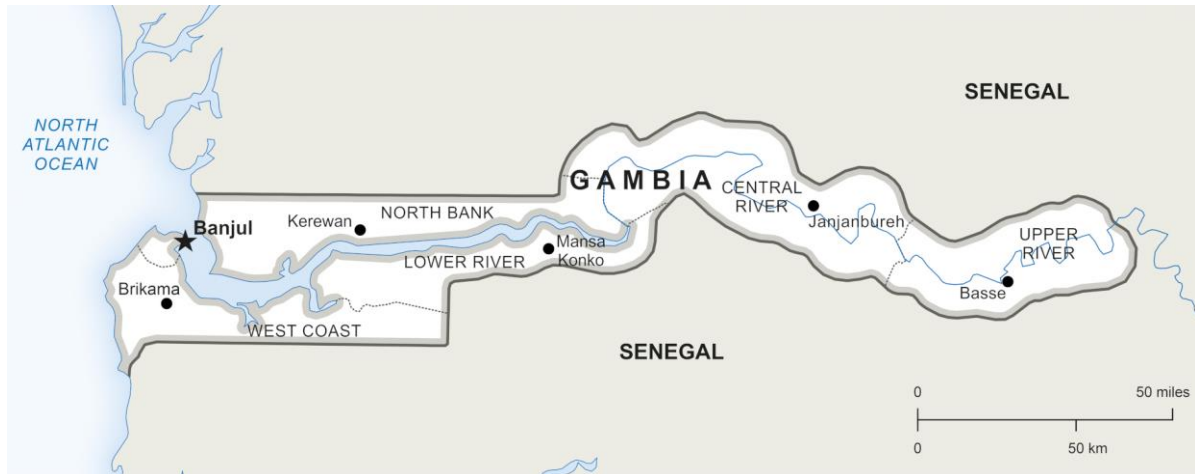
Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family

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 largely insulated from jihadist activities, there have nevertheless been attacks on churches and properties owned by Christians in recent months. 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

- Christian properties were attacked, leading to significant loss and damage.
- Churches faced targeted attacks, creating fear among the Christian community.
- Christians - especially converts - endured physical and psychological abuse, often exacerbated by pressure from family, community, and Islamic religious leaders, further marginalizing them in society.

Specific examples of positive developments

Christians in Gambia make up only 4.7% 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.

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.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

Position on the World Watch List

Gambia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	48	75
WWL 2024	47	73
WWL 2023	44	75
WWL 2022	44	72
WWL 2021	43	70

Over the last five WWL reporting periods, Gambia's overall score has seen a progressive increase; in WWL 2025 the score rose from 47 points in WWL 2024 to 48 points. This change is attributed primarily to an increase in the violence score, which rose from 3.7 points to 4.4 points. Despite the rise in violence, the average pressure on Christians remained the same as before in WWL 2024 at 8.6 points. The *Church* and *Community spheres* continue to face the highest levels of pressure, both scoring 8.9 points, with the *National sphere* close behind at 8.8 points.

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			Medium					
Organized crime cartels or networks									Strong

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

WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Gambia
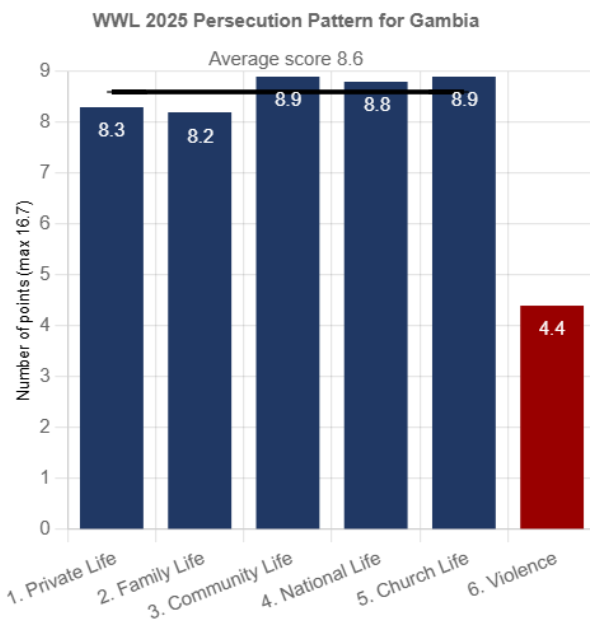
The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Gambia shows:

- Christians face an average pressure score of 8.6 points.
- Pressure across the various spheres ranges from 8.2 to 8.9 points. The highest pressure is found in the *Church* and *Community spheres*, both scoring 8.9 points, followed by the National sphere which scored 8.8 points.
- The violence score rose from 3.7 in WWL 2024 to 4.4 in WWL 2025, marking an increase of 0.7 of a point.

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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/.

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)

Conversion is generally unacceptable in Gambian Muslim society, where converts face significant challenges shaped by prevailing societal attitudes and norms. Resistance to conversion is widespread, often starting within families who strongly oppose changes in religious affiliation. This opposition is rooted in deeply entrenched beliefs and societal expectations, making conversion a highly sensitive issue.

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)

Christians in Gambia face substantial difficulties when attempting to share their faith beyond their immediate family, particularly for converts. Both converts and established Christian groups encounter societal resistance and potential threats, especially when other family members are not Christians. The need to conceal their faith arises not only from the fear of family rejection but also from broader community pressure, making open discussion about religion a sensitive and risky endeavor. In this context, sharing faith openly can provoke hostile reactions, including verbal or physical threats and social exclusion.

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)

Engaging in solitary Christian worship, such as prayer and Bible reading, poses a considerable risk for converts. In a communal society like Gambia, where many people live closely together, maintaining privacy is exceptionally difficult. This makes it challenging for converts to conceal their religious identity, as any deviation from shared practices or routines can quickly draw attention and lead to exposure.

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

Discussing their faith is a perilous endeavor for converts who face challenges both within their families and the wider community. In Muslim families, resistance to conversion is particularly intense, often leaving no room for open dialogue about Christianity. Converts who share their faith with immediate family members risk severe consequences, including expulsion from the household and the loss of social and economic rights, such as inheritance.

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)

The registration of births, weddings and deaths presents obstacles for Christians, particularly converts. While the legal framework may not explicitly prohibit such registrations, prevailing societal practices create significant barriers. Christian families often face targeted discrimination during these processes due to their faith, with converts experiencing heightened scrutiny and opposition. The issue lies not with the law but with the attitudes of those responsible for facilitating these registrations.

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

Children of Christians face harassment and discrimination directly tied to their parents' faith. These challenges emerge in various aspects of daily life, impacting the children's sense of safety and belonging. While tending to cattle or engaging in shepherding activities, Christian children may become targets of verbal abuse and social exclusion from their peers. At school, they often endure bullying, ostracism or unfavorable treatment from teachers and classmates who view their family's faith as unacceptable. Even routine activities like fetching water can expose them to ridicule and discriminatory behavior, further isolating them within their communities. These experiences are particularly severe for children of converts, who not only face societal prejudice but also carry the stigma associated with their family's shift away from the dominant religion.

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)

Christian spouses, particularly converts, face severe repercussions when their faith is discovered. These repercussions often lead to forced separation; in some cases, Christian spouses are confined to isolated houses, cut off from their families and broader community, as a means of punishment or to pressure them into renouncing their faith. The situation becomes even more distressing when the community intervenes, at times taking children away from their parents under the pretext of shielding them from an unacceptable faith. This creates profound emotional and psychological trauma for both the parents and children, while also dismantling the family unit.

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)

Converting to Christianity can lead to challenges, particularly concerning inheritance, even though there is no legal requirement tying inheritance to religion. In some parts of Gambia, societal norms dictate that remaining loyal to the family's historical or traditional religion is considered essential for being included in inheritance decisions. Converts are often excluded from inheritance not due to legal restrictions but because of deeply rooted societal perceptions and practices. This unwritten expectation is used to enforce conformity within families, with conversion seen as a rejection of shared heritage and values. As a result, those who adopt a different faith may face disinheritance or be denied their rightful claims, regardless of their entitlement under the law.

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)

Education for Christians in Gambia is deeply affected by the pervasive influence of Islamic culture and principles within society and institutions. Christian students often face disadvantages, particularly in contexts where Islamic courses are mandated as part of the curriculum without providing an opt-out option. This practice places Christian families in a difficult position, forcing them to reconcile their faith with an education system that prioritizes Islamic teachings. The structure of the curriculum raises serious concerns about religious freedom and equitable treatment for students from diverse religious backgrounds. Christian students may experience exclusion or discomfort in classrooms where their beliefs are marginalized or ignored. In some instances, societal attitudes and institutional practices further disadvantage Christian students by creating an environment where they feel unwelcome or pressured to conform.

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 Gambia face harassment and obstructions in their daily lives due to their faith, stemming from societal pressures and deeply ingrained cultural norms. During Yaya Jammeh's presidency, these challenges were particularly pronounced, as tensions between religious groups escalated. Christians often encountered discrimination in public spaces, workplaces, and even within their communities, where their faith was viewed with suspicion or hostility. While the current administration under President Adama Barrow has created a comparatively more relaxed environment, the potential for increased conservatism remains. Christians still face difficulties, including exclusion from communal decision-making, marginalization in educational and social institutions, and subtle but persistent societal pressures to conform to the dominant religious norms.

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

Christians, particularly converts and evangelicals, have consistently faced pressure to engage in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events, often as a way of asserting societal conformity. Efforts to promote a conservative Sunni ideology, particularly Wahhabism, continue to shape the socio-

religious landscape and Christians are frequently compelled to participate in Islamic rituals or community gatherings.

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

The societal emphasis on the concept of "brotherhood," rooted in shared religious and cultural identity, often excludes those who do not adhere to the dominant faith. This principle, while fostering solidarity among members of the majority religion, creates a significant barrier for Christians seeking employment. Known Christians frequently struggle to secure jobs, as employers may prioritize candidates who align with the prevailing religious norms. In the public sector, opportunities for Christians can be limited by informal networks that favor co-religionists. In the private sector, similar biases prevail, with many businesses preferring employees who share their religious identity to maintain cultural harmony.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Christians in Gambia often face unequal treatment in courts, particularly outside the capital, Banjul, where biases against them are more pronounced. This disparity is exacerbated by the societal and cultural pressures that influence judicial proceedings, regardless of the legal framework. Even in cases where judges are brought in from other countries, they may still act in ways that disadvantage Christians. One expert observed, "The foreign judges, in fact, do not want to offend the government or the society. If they do that, they would not be renewed for another term." This dynamic creates an environment where many Christians encounter obstacles in securing impartial decisions.

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 face considerable hindrances and restriction which affect their ability to exercise their rights and operate effectively within the societal landscape. The limitations imposed on Christian organizations reflect broader societal resistance to religious diversity, hindering their participation in advocacy, development initiatives, and other activities essential to community building.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)

Christians face pressure, both from societal expectations and, in some cases, informal enforcement of norms, to act against their conscience. This coercion often forces individuals to engage in practices that conflict with their faith as a means of survival within the community. In certain instances, Christians are compelled to choose between engaging in corrupt activities or facing severe consequences, such as losing their livelihood or access to critical resources. Additionally, they may be forced to participate in specific rituals or cultural practices that are contrary to their beliefs in order to maintain their jobs or social standing.

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

Media reporting often subtly reflects biases against Christians, influenced by the dominant religious and cultural norms. Coverage of issues involving Christians can exhibit inaccuracies or portray them in a negative light, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. In some cases, the framing of stories skews narratives to align with the perspectives of the majority religion, marginalizing Christian voices and experiences. This bias is not always overt but manifests through selective reporting, omission of critical details, or an emphasis on narratives that reinforce societal prejudices. Such practices contribute to a broader climate of misunderstanding and discrimination, where Christian communities feel misrepresented and excluded from fair and balanced public discourse.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Engagement with youth, particularly in religious activities, faces considerable restrictions in the country due to prevailing religious demographics. Christian organizations or individuals attempting to involve young people in faith-based initiatives often encounter significant obstacles. These challenges include the risk of having licenses revoked or facing administrative and societal pressures designed to curtail such activities. The restrictions imposed reflect a broader societal resistance to religious diversity in youth engagement, limiting opportunities for young people to explore or practice their faith freely.

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

Converts are frequently required to navigate their newfound faith in secrecy, fearing backlash from family, community, or authorities. As a result, churches often face challenges when attempting to integrate converts into their communities, as societal dynamics necessitate caution to avoid detection. This issue highlights broader concerns about religious freedom, particularly in environments where conversion is viewed as a betrayal of cultural or religious identity.

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

Obtaining registration or legal status for churches has increasingly become a tool for gatekeeping, a pattern observed in many countries. Authorities often exhibit reluctance to issue licenses to Christian organizations, using this as a means to limit their formal recognition. This reluctance is also influenced by concerns over potential backlash from the general population, reflecting societal resistance to religious diversity. As a result, churches face significant obstacles in gaining legal standing, which restricts their ability to operate freely. These limitations hinder their capacity to contribute to the religious and social fabric of the community.

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)

Christian pastors, leaders, and their families are increasingly targeted for harassment due to their faith, reflecting broader challenges faced by religious minorities in various regions. This targeting often stems

from societal resistance to their religious identity, making pastors and their families particularly vulnerable.

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.*

| Gambia: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
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?	4	3
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)?	1	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	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 *
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?	0	3
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?	2	10 *
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 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	8.6
2024	8.6
2023	8.6
2022	8.5
2021	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 over the five most recent 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

Gambia: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Pressure scores in each sphere of life
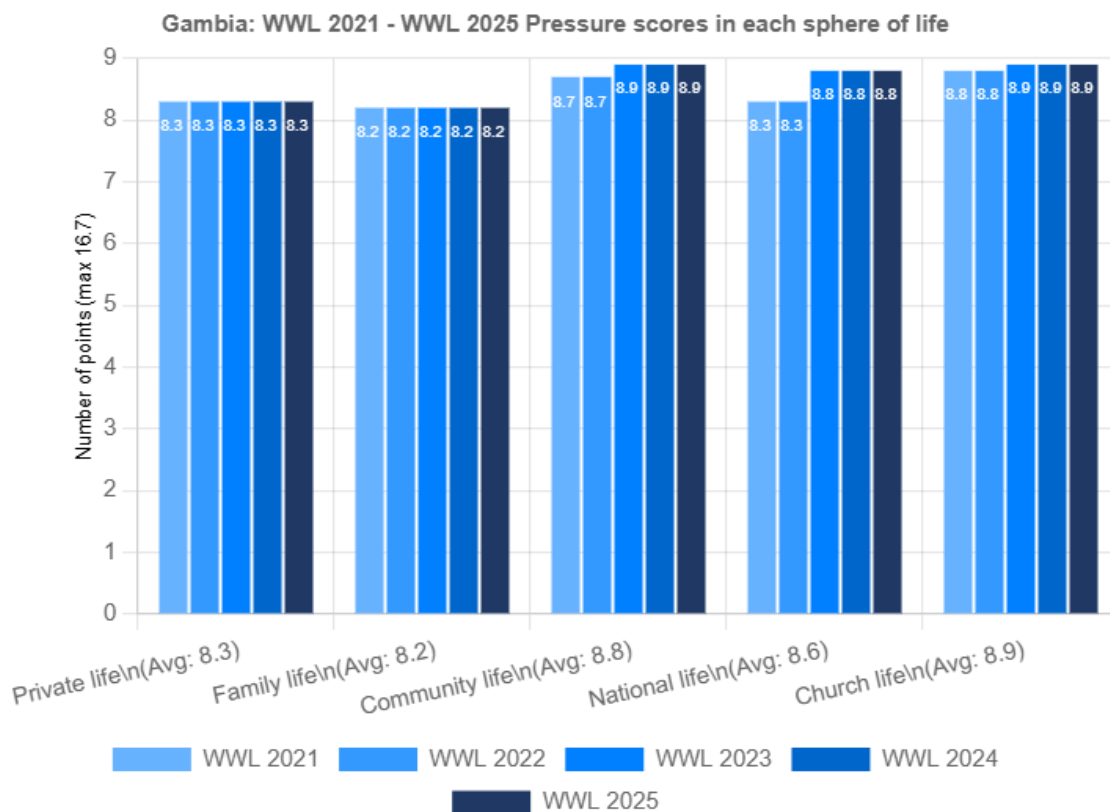
The chart above illustrates the stability of average scores across various spheres of life over five WWL reporting periods (2021–2025). The *Church sphere* recorded the highest five-year average score of 8.9 points, followed closely by the *Community sphere* with 8.8 and the *National sphere* with 8.6 points. Meanwhile, the *Private* and *Family spheres* scored lower and remained stable at their score-level throughout the five-year period.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Gambia: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Violence scores
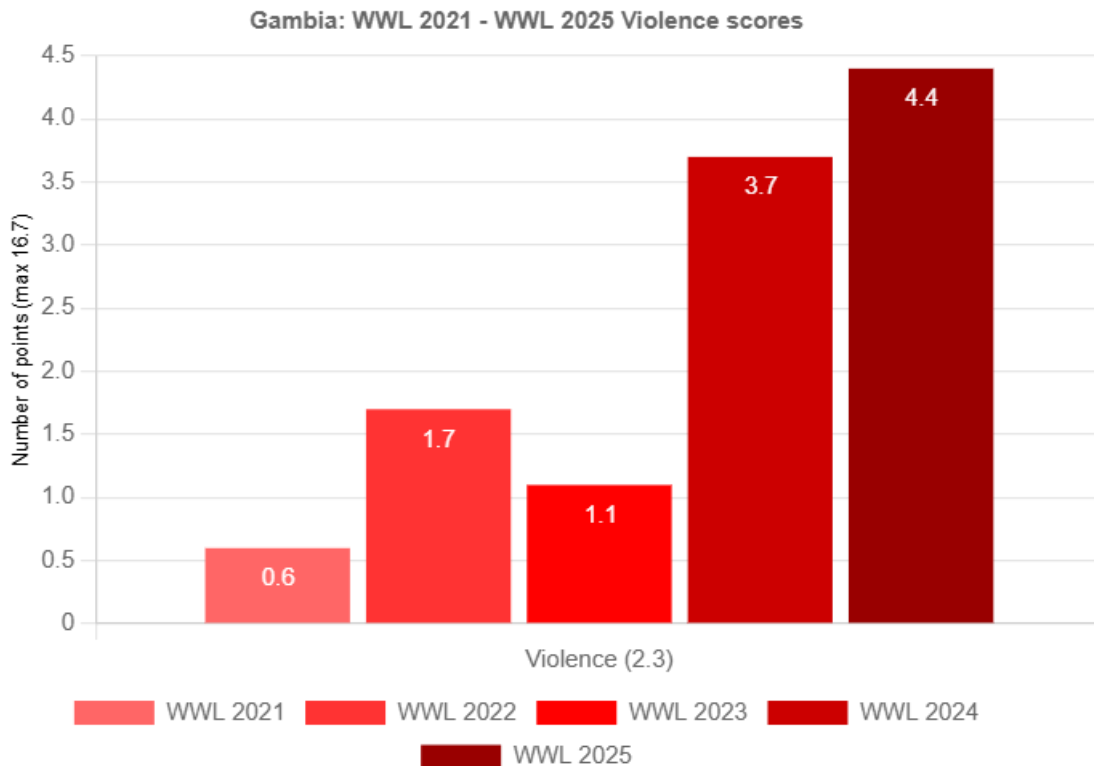
The average score for violence against Christians over the past five reporting periods stands at 2.3 points. In the first three years, the level of violence fluctuated, showing a pattern of inconsistency with notable ups and downs. During WWL 2024 and WWL 2025, violence increased dramatically, first reaching 3.7 points and then 4.4 points. These increases were due to a rise in attacks on churches and properties owned by Christians, as well as an escalation in incidents of physical and psychological abuse.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

While the Gambian 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 88% 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, accessed 19 February 2025). 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 violation of rights 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. 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

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 promotion. 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 2023 Gambia) reported:

- The Supreme Islamic Council (SIC), a religious body tasked with providing Islamic religious guidance, continued to state that "Ahmadiyya Muslims did not belong to Islam, and it therefore did not include Ahmadiyya members in SIC events. Since 2015, the SIC has banned Ahmadis from burying their dead in Muslim cemeteries. Ahmadiyya Muslims said they believed themselves free to practice their religion without interference but expressed frustration with the SIC's refusal to integrate them into the broader Muslim community. The Ahmadiyya community has deep links to the educational and medical sectors in the country and operates one of the largest affordable sharia compliant schools in the country."

Trends Summary

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. According to some insiders, the rejection was primarily due to disagreements over the inclusion of presidential term limits, which has been a contentious issue. While the Constitution is still in the draft process, it appears unlikely to substantially alter the state of religious freedom in the country.

2) Fears of Islamic extremism on the horizon

Since President Barrow assumed office in January 2017, Gambia's Christian minority has seen notable political developments such as the country officially dropping the label "Islamic Republic of Gambia", rejoining the Commonwealth, and widening civic freedoms. However, President 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 the Freedom in the World 2024 report. 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 amid regional instability

The democratization process in Gambia, initially met with high expectations, has faced setbacks. The drafting of the new Constitution was delayed, and President 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 freedom with economic and security challenges.

4) Regional expansion of jihadists and coup trends

The broader West African region is experiencing significant volatility, with the expansion of jihadist activities and a disturbing trend of military coups. The Sahel region, in particular, has seen the spread of Islamic militancy, which threatens to destabilize neighboring countries, including Gambia. The rise of jihadists across the region is a growing concern for Gambian authorities. Additionally, the wave of coups that has swept through West Africa in recent years adds to the instability, with Gambia itself experiencing an attempted coup in 2022. These regional dynamics pose serious threats to Gambia's fragile democracy and overall security.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and 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/wwl-background/
- https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/.
- Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/
- 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: Girls Not Brides Gambia - https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/gambia/
- 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
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Gambia - https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/gambia/
- Trends Summary: Freedom in the World 2024 - https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2024
- Further useful reports: Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023 - https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups