



GAMBIA: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

¹ These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

GAMBIA – Country Dossier (June 2018)

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)¹ including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))². Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)³ and WWR staff.

GAMBIA		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	No published details	-
WWL 2017	No published details	-
WWL 2016	No published details	-
WWL 2015	No published details	-
WWL 2014	No published details	-

¹ See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

² WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

WWL 2018: Keys to understanding GAMBIA

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13376517>

Recent country 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 British⁴, effectively making Gambia Great Britain's initial foothold in West Africa. Its present boundary was set up through agreement between Great Britain and France in 1889. The country became a British protectorate in 1894.⁵ English remains the official language, despite statements to the contrary made by the 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 idea 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."⁶ 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. 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, the former President Yahya Jammeh was officially accused of human rights violations.⁷

The religious landscape

Gambia is a Muslim majority country. According to WCD estimates the population is 89% Muslim and 4.5% Christian. According to the US State Department 2016 Religious Freedom report (which estimates Muslims to be over 95% of the population), most of the population are Sunni: "Other Muslim communities include Tablighi, Malikite, Qadiriyyah, and Sufism/Tijaniyyah. There are also small numbers of Ahmadi and Ndigal Muslims. The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south of the country, is 4.2 percent of the population (U.S. government 2013 estimate). Most Christians are Roman Catholic, but there

⁴ See: <http://www.gateway-africa.com/countries/gambia.html>, last accessed on February 10, 2016.

⁵ See: <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad47>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁶ See: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Senegambia-confederation-Africa>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁷ See: <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2017/12/21/u-s-sanctions-former-gambia-president-human-rights-law/>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

are several Protestant groups including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and various evangelical denominations.”⁸

The political landscape

Gambia is a multi-party republic. The president is the head of both the government and the state. It has 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. Since 1996 the dominant party has been the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction under Yahya Jammeh. Other parties are active in the country, for instance the People’s Progressive Party. On July 22 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 military.

Jammeh did not bring prosperity as he promised. He and his fellow soldiers did not return to the barracks as he had vowed. Rather, he remained in power until his defeat in the December 2016 elections. He often resorted to pan-Africanism to maintain the support of the citizens. In 2014, he vowed to drop English as an official language. Jammeh also withdrew from British Commonwealth membership saying the country would “never be a member of any neo-colonial institution.”⁹ 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 Gambia as an Islamic state. As Muslims are the majority in the country, Gambia cannot afford to continue the colonial legacy.”¹⁰ In December 2014, there was a coup attempt by soldiers while Jammeh was out of the country. The coup was a total failure and those involved were arrested. President Adama Barrow, who took office in January 2017, has vowed to reverse some of the decisions taken by Yahya Jammeh. For example, the country rejoined the Commonwealth.¹¹

The socio-economic landscape

Gambia’s economy mainly depends on tourism and groundnuts. Due to the Ebola crisis, economic growth contracted from 4.3% in 2013 to an estimated -0.7% in 2014.¹² According to the World Bank, the country’s GDP was \$964.6 million in 2016.¹³ In its 2016 report, Heritage Foundation rated the country’s economy as “mostly unfree” with corruption, property rights and business freedom being the main areas of concern.¹⁴

⁸ See <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁹ See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/gambia/10686147/Gambia-president-rejects-English-language.html>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹⁰ See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/12/gambia-now-an-islamic-republic-says-president-yahya-jammeh>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹¹ See <http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/gambia-rejoins-commonwealth>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹² See: <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/country-notes/west-africa/gambia/>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹³ See: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/Gambia>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/gambia>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

Concluding remarks

After suffering under Yahya Jammeh's rule for more than two decades, Gambia has finally managed to elect a new president who has vowed to bring prosperity and stability to the country. Even though the former president was authoritarian, he was very tough on cracking down on radical elements that had developed into militancy in the region. The hope is that the new president will bring more stability and prosperity and at the same time fight radicalization that has threatened the lives of many Christians in the region.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
2,120,000	94,000	4.5

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

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.

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.

What church networks exist today? ¹⁵

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
620	60,700	14,300	15,900	3,400	0	5,800	20,600

Source: WCD, May 2017

The Christian minority is situated mostly in the west and south of the country. It is predominantly Roman Catholic, but there are also several Protestant groups including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and various small evangelical denominations. In 1963 the Gambia Christian Council was formed as an ecumenical association of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ¹⁶
94,900	1,887,000	340	0	109,000	0	17,400	12,294

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics, 89% of the population is Muslim. Most of these are Sunni, but other Muslim communities include Tablighi, Malikite, Qadiriyyah, and Sufism/Tijaniyah. There are also small numbers of Ahmadi and Ndigal Muslims.¹⁷

There are eight main ethnic groups: Aku, Fula, Jola, Mandinka, Serahule, Serer, Tukolor, and Wolof. These eight ethnic groups constitute more than 95% of the country's total population. The Mandinkas are the majority with 42%.¹⁸

Notes on the current situation

- Due to the radicalization of Islam in the region (West Africa and Sahel region) many Christians live in fear.
- Even though they are trying to contribute to the peaceful coexistence among different religious groups, Christians face societal discrimination.
- Muslims are a majority in many school classes and Christian schoolchildren cannot opt out of the obligatory Islamic instruction.

¹⁵ **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:** Believers 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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

¹⁶ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 16 February 2016.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.rootsgambia.gm/ethnic-groups.php>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

- The law forces Christian private schools to include Islamic instruction in their curricula, if they have a majority of Muslim students attending.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Where persecution comes from

The unilateral declaration by the former President Yahya Jammeh, which turned Gambia into an Islamic state, signified the rise of *Islamic oppression* as an engine of persecution in Gambia during his rule. The influence of radical Islam has been increasingly visible in educational institutions, media and other sectors as well. The growing dominance of Islam is occurring in various ways. For example, a mosque is built in every government institution and Islam is taught in every school. The government was promoting Islam aggressively during Jammeh's rule. The former president had also been strengthening Gambia's relationship with Saudi Arabia with a view to promote the brand of Islam that exists in Saudi Arabia. Although Jammeh declared Gambia to be an Islamic state in 2015, this was revoked by the newly elected President Barrow in January 2017. Although the new government tries hard to fight the radical Islamic influence on society, the situation is hard for converts from Islam and for Christians in general, especially in remote areas.

How Christians are suffering

Christians from Muslim or animist families cannot speak about their faith with immediate family members. Some families in rural areas will beat and ostracize converts, especially in the eastern part of the country. Therefore, converts are careful not to reveal their conversion in their private acts of worship. In some schools where the leaders or founders are Muslim, children of Christians are often forced to receive non-Christian religious instruction. Muslim and animist parents also try to force family members to separate if married to Christians. Converts to Christianity of whatever religious background are sometimes threatened or harassed in their daily lives, often being forced to take part in annual traditional rituals to continue being regarded as part of the family and community. The pressure to renounce their new faith is strong. Sometimes they are under threat of abduction and forced marriage. It is sometimes difficult to get registration or legal status for churches. Because of their minority status, Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings.

Examples

In the WWL 2018 reporting period:

- A church was attacked by a mob and damaged.
- Two female converts were abducted and forced into marriages.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Score and rank are not available for publication.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Gambia ¹⁹	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Weak
Denominational protectionism	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Strong):

The unilateral declaration by the former President Yahya Jammeh, which turned Gambia into an Islamic State, signified the rise of *Islamic oppression* as an engine of persecution in Gambia during his rule. The influence of radical Islam has been increasingly visible in educational institutions, media and other sectors as well. The growing dominance of Islam is occurring in various ways. For example, a mosque is built in every government institution and Islam is

¹⁹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

taught in every school. The government was promoting Islam aggressively during Jammeh's rule. The former president had also been strengthening Gambia's relationship with Saudi Arabia with a view to promote the brand of Islam that exists in Saudi Arabia. Although Jammeh declared Gambia to be an Islamic state in 2015, this was revoked by the newly elected President Barrow in January 2017. Although the new government tries hard to fight the radical Islamic influence on society, the situation is hard for converts from Islam and for Christians in general, especially in remote areas.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Gambia	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Very weak
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Weak
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Until recently, *Islamic oppression* was not strongly felt in Gambia. However, in the later days of the former president, things changed dramatically. In its attempt to find a new basis of legitimacy and to strengthen his government's hold on power, the former president tried to promote radical Islam. As a result, government officials became drivers of Islamic oppression. Furthermore, in some rural areas, ethnic group leaders also act as drivers by exerting pressure against converts to Christianity. Despite the changes made by the new president, they have yet to make their way down the administrative hierarchy. Radical Muslims who were encouraged over the past few years are in particular not willing to embrace the new president's new direction. Persecution from extended family members is also very strong especially where Muslims convert to Christianity.

Context

Gambia is a small West African state completely surrounded by Senegal except in the west where it is bordered by the Atlantic. In 1965 the country gained independence from Great Britain. Under the leadership of Jammeh, the human rights record of the country was poor and in the December 2016 election, Jammeh suffered a surprise defeat. The property developer, Adama Barrow, won more than 45% of the vote in a peaceful election. Although Jammeh was reluctant to hand over power, due to intense pressure from the Economic Community of West

Africa and the broader international community he was forced to step down from the presidency.

In 2015, President Jammeh had declared Gambia to be an Islamic Republic. This was partly due to his strengthened ties with Saudi Arabia and also an attempt to get more support and legitimize his autocratic rule. Although Islam is the religion of the overwhelming majority of the population, historically the treatment of religious minorities has been fairly good and tolerant. President Barrow has raised expectations that he will improve the country's human right situation and economy. Despite being a peaceful country that has not been rocked by civil war and conflict like most countries in the region, the Gambia is still a very poor country. Tackling this and youth unemployment will be among the major challenges facing the new President.

Besides Christians, the Bahai and Ahamadi Muslims are religious minorities that face pressure from the majority Muslim population.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist as a separate WWL category in Gambia.

Historical Christian communities:

Historical Christian communities in Gambia are mostly situated 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 view affects how Christians belonging to historical churches are perceived and treated.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

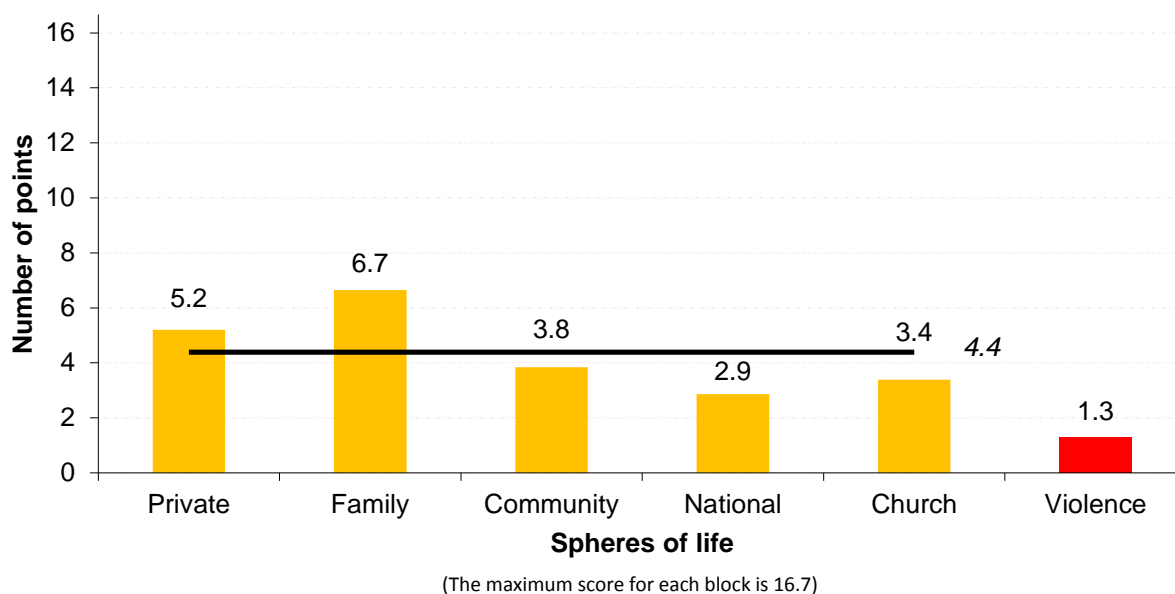
These are communities that are mainly made up of converts from Islam or traditional African religions that exist in the country. Converts suffer most from societal pressure and from persecution from family and extended family. In rural settings where life is more communal, they are more vulnerable to pressure from the community since individuals rely 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 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.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Gambia



The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Gambia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Gambia is 4.4 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Family and Private spheres* reflecting the difficulties converts to Christianity face in very strict Muslim families and families that adhere strictly to traditional African religions.
- The score for violence is 1.3 which shows that violent incidents against Christians are relatively rare in Gambia.

Private sphere:

Christians from Muslim or animist families cannot speak about their faith with immediate family members.

Some families in rural areas will beat and ostracize converts, especially in the eastern part of the country. Therefore, converts are careful not to reveal their conversion in their private acts of worship. Many of Gambia's Islamic religious leaders, especially its powerful Supreme Islamic Council, are influenced by the version of Islam that is taught in Saudi Arabia and has influenced ordinary people as well. Despite the changes made by the current president, converts living with their Muslim families will continue face strong objection to Christian prayer, possession of a Bible, baptism and possibly marriage.

Family sphere:

Every citizen is considered a member of the Islamic *umma* from birth and is thus expected to practice the religion of his people. When the parents of a young Christian couple are Muslim or animist, they are likely to hinder their Christian wedding ceremony. Muslim and animist parents want their children, even Christian children, to be buried traditionally with non-Christian rites. In some schools where the leaders or founders are Muslim, children of

Christians are often forced to receive non-Christian religious instruction. Muslim and animist parents also try to force family members to separate if married to Christians. It is usual for Muslim or animist parents to cease all contact with children who become Christians and cause them to lose inheritance rights.

Community sphere:

Converts to Christianity of whatever religious background are sometimes threatened or harassed in their daily lives, often being forced to take part in annual traditional rituals to continue being regarded as part of the family and community. The pressure to renounce their new faith is strong. Sometimes they are under threat of abduction and forced marriage. The Gambian authorities have also closed down Christian schools that refused to teach Islamic courses, forcing them to hire Islamic scholars in order to remain open. These kind of measures put in place by the previous president are still in force in some rural parts of the country.

National sphere:

Gambia's new president, Adama Barrow, has revoked his predecessor's decision to make Gambia an Islamic state. Barrow has also pledged to remove laws which violate freedom of religion as enshrined in Gambia's Constitution. In December 2015, ex-President Yahya Jammeh had declared the West African country an Islamic republic, saying the decision was made because Islam is the religion of the majority of Gambian citizens. This raised fear among Christians and human rights groups. Despite the changes made recently within the country, local authorities have still been discriminating against Christians and other minority Muslim groups. Some business opportunities are also reserved for Muslims only, allowing no access for Christians.

Church sphere:

Many zealous Muslims monitor, hinder, disturb and obstruct activities of churches in rural areas of the country where radical forms of Islam are becoming more visible. It is sometimes difficult to get registration or legal status for churches. Because of their minority status, Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings. During the period of Ramadan, the police prohibit churches from using drums, singing and dancing in services. Evangelistic programs held outside churches are opposed and obstructed.

Violence:

Violent persecution in Gambia is still relatively rare. In the WWL 2018 reporting period a church was attacked by a mob and some converts were abducted and forced into marriages. Despite the efforts of the previous president and the subsequent rise of more radical versions of Islam, there is still a degree of tolerance and reluctance to get too violent among most people in the country. Furthermore, the influence of radical militant groups has not been felt in the country so far.

Gender profile of persecution

Female / Male: No data currently available.

Future outlook

Since the new president has taken office, the prospect for Christians in Gambia has improved. Nevertheless, the new president has to go a long way to implement the promises he has made in terms of improving the human rights situation in the country. He will face resistance from the radical Muslims who were favored in the administration of the previous president. He will also face pressure and be offered inducements from the countries that have financed and supported the previous president's clear agenda for Islamizing the state. The future of the country very much depends on the resolve and the ability of the current president to effectively implement the reformist causes he has promised to champion.

Policy considerations

Taking in to account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors suggests the following recommendations:

- The International community should urge Gambia's new administration to persist and reconfirm its commitment to improve the human right situation in the country, including freedom of religion.
- The international community should support the administration of President Barrow in its effort to undo the restrictive policies and laws put in place by the previous administration.
- The government of the Gambia should redouble its efforts to respect, promote and protect the freedom of religious minorities and particularly that of individuals who change their religion.

WWR in-depth reports

There are currently no in-depth reports on Gambia are available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Gambia available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

At the time of publishing, there were no WWM news articles on Gambia available.

Any recent updates will be found at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

At the time of publishing, there were no items on Gambia available.

Any recent updates will be found at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).

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