

World
Watch
Research

Gambia: Full Country Dossier

March 2023



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

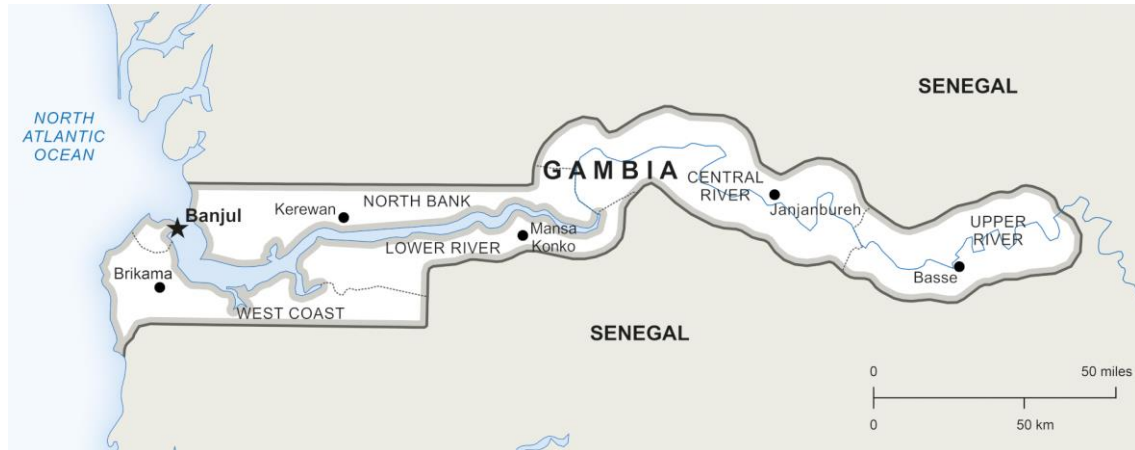
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Gambia

Brief country details

Gambia: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
2,558,000	116,000	4.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Gambia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	44	75
WWL 2022	44	72
WWL 2021	43	70
WWL 2020	43	67
WWL 2019	43	66

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

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, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Christian converts from Muslim or Animist families cannot speak safely 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 through private acts of worship. In some schools where the senior staff 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 experience harassment in their daily lives and are often 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. Because of their minority status, Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings and it has sometimes been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Expulsion from home and denying access to property
- Forced marriage
- Discrimination at workplaces
- Harassment while buying on the streets and at school

Specific examples of positive developments

The democracy that has become established following the electoral ousting of Yaya Jammeh in December 2016 is holding its ground so far. There have been attempts to draft a new Constitution, but there have been many setbacks. (See below: *Political and legal landscape*)

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Gambia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries (Gambia not included)	AI country report 2021/22	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13376517	9 September 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/GMB	9 September 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gambia-the/	9 September 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/gambia	9 September 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 - p.57	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	9 September 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	9 September 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries (Gambia not included)	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2022	9 September 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-net/2022	14 March 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries (Gambia not included)	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022	
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#gm	9 September 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/gambia	9 September 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/gambia	9 September 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/GMB	9 September 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/gambia/	9 September 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL (Gambia not included)	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	

World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview	9 September 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://data.worldbank.org/country/gambia-the?view=chart	9 September 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 - Sub-Saharan Africa pp. 38-39	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf	9 September 2022

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).

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).

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.

Gambia is on the brink of a new political crisis, just three years after the dramatic fall of long-time strongman Yahya Jammeh. 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.

According to [Amnesty International \(AI\)](#) reporting on 27 January 2020, the police arrested over a hundred protesters:

- This "crackdown on protesters had alarming echoes of Gambia's brutal past. There have been some significant improvements in the country's human rights record since President Adama Barrow came to power, but the use of excessive force by security forces to disperse protesters risks fueling tensions and steering the Gambia back to dark days of repression."

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.

On 15 November 2019, the country released a proposed draft for a new Constitution. Christians were worried that it placed noticeable restrictions on them and did not explicitly define the majority-Muslim Gambia as a secular state. They feared that the draft Constitution reflected a drift toward a religiously discriminatory state and church leaders therefore demanded the declaration of their country as a secular state ([World Watch Monitor, 7 December 2019](#)). In September 2020, legislators rejected the draft Constitution. No efforts were made in 2021 to resurrect the constitutional reform process (US State Department IRFR 2021).

Religious landscape

Gambia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	116,000	4.5
Muslim	2,280,000	89.1
Hindu	390	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	127,000	5.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	20,700	0.8
Atheist	110	0.0
Agnostic	14,600	0.6
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 2022 (for Sub-Saharan Africa):

- **GDP:** "GDP grew by 5.6 percent (2.6 percent in per capita terms) in 2021, after falling by 0.2 percent in 2020 (-3 percent pc). All sectors grew, as tourist arrivals were above-expectations, rainfall was higher than average (supporting poor, rural and industrial workers) and record-high remittances continued to support the construction and distributive trade sectors. On the demand side, growth was supported by private consumption and investment while imports grew."
- **Inflation:** "Inflation decreased from 7.1% in 2019 to 5.9% in 2020, driven by a demand drop, low fuel prices, a stable exchange rate, temporary administrative price controls on essential goods and the dissipation of the postal rate increase of April 2019."

- **Poverty:** "Poverty increased in 2020 – for the first time since 2016 - driven largely by COVID-19. Survey data indicate large employment losses and near universal income losses at the peak of the pandemic. However, the extreme poverty rate declined from 9.2 percent in 2020 to 8.5 percent in 2021, lifting over 10,000 people out of poverty, driven by the recovering agriculture labor market. Additionally, ongoing cash transfers in rural areas, where most of the poor live, is likely to have contributed to the decline in poverty."
- **COVID-19 impact:** "Growth stagnated in 2020, driven by a pandemic-induced fall in tourism and private consumption. Despite the crisis, the external and fiscal deficits were kept in check due to increased donor support. Growth and poverty reduction are expected to gradually recover over the medium term, as the pandemic recedes."

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Agriculture:** "The government has invested in the agriculture sector because three-quarters of the population depends on the sector for its livelihood and agriculture provides for about one-third of GDP, making The Gambia largely reliant on sufficient rainfall. The agricultural sector has untapped potential - less than half of arable land is cultivated and agricultural productivity is low. Small-scale manufacturing activity features the processing of cashews, groundnuts, fish, and hides. The Gambia's reexport trade accounts for almost 80% of goods exports and China has been its largest trade partner for both exports and imports for several years."
- **Remittances and tourism:** "The Gambia has sparse natural resource deposits. It relies heavily on remittances from workers overseas and tourist receipts. Remittance inflows to The Gambia amount to about one-fifth of the country's GDP. The Gambia's location on the ocean and proximity to Europe has made it one of the most frequented tourist destinations in West Africa, boosted by private sector investments in eco-tourism and facilities. Tourism normally brings in about 20% of GDP, but it suffered in 2014 from tourists' fears of Ebola virus in neighboring West African countries. Unemployment and underemployment remain high."

According to Heritage Foundation's [2022 Economic Freedom Index](#):

- Gambia's economic freedom score is 58.0, making its economy the 102nd freest in the 2022 Index. Gambia has recorded a 4.6-point overall gain in economic freedom since 2017 and remains in the upper half of the "Mostly Unfree" category. Scores for tax burden and government spending are relatively good, but financial freedom and rule of law exhibit weaknesses.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and UNDP Human Development Indicators (HDI country data profile):

- **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 (last updated 31 January 2023):

- **Refugees:** As of January 2023, there were a total of 3,691 refugees (mainly from Senegal) in Gambia.

Technological landscape

The Republic of Gambia is not an advanced country in terms of technology and infrastructure.

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 18.9% of the total population – survey date: December 2021 (Most recent survey available at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 18.9% penetration rate – survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 139.5 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 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. Arrests and harassment of internet users for their online activity have steadily declined. Although the Barrow administration's crackdown on Three Years Jotna (TYJ) protest movement in 2020 raised fears of a return to Jammeh-era repression, social media has nevertheless been widely used for campaigning during post-Jammeh electoral periods."
- (C1) "In August 2021, President Barrow signed the Access to Information Act, which guarantees users' right to government information, into law".

- (C7) "Online journalists and activists continue to face intimidation and harassment for their online reporting".

Security situation

There is currently no external or internal threat to national security, mainly due to the fact that the influence of Islamic militant groups has not been felt in the country so far. However, a major incident in late January 2022 provided evidence of the continuing strong presence in Gambia of Senegalese insurgents from the Casamance-based Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance, as four Senegalese soldiers from the ECOMIG peacekeeping force were killed in a confrontation near Bwiam and seven captured before being released ([The Defense Post](#), 1 February 2022).

Additionally, there are issues related to human security in terms of human rights. The US State Department's [2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#) lists "... torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government or on behalf of government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including but not limited to domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation and other harmful practices; trafficking in persons...."

There are no other significant security risks for Christians except forced marriage or female genital mutilation in the context of culture/religion.

Trends analysis

1) The much anticipated reform has not materialized

After suffering under Yahya Jammeh's rule for more than two decades, Gambia now has a president who has vowed to bring prosperity and stability to the country. However, the much anticipated reform has not made significant progress. This stagnation looks set to continue. The president formed a new party to run for a second term in the December 2021 presidential election, which he won. The more or less peaceful election was deemed fair by observers and showed how much the country has moved on since the one man rule of Yahya Jammeh (Reuters, 7 December 2021). A draft constitutional reform was debated in the National Assembly in September 2020, but rejected (The Point, 23 September 2020). Even if the reform is later to succeed, it is unlikely to bring any major changes to the religious freedom landscape.

2) Prospects for the Christian minority have improved, but there is still some fear

Since President Barrow first took office after winning the election in December 2016, prospects for the Christian minority in Gambia have improved. Examples were the immediate dropping of the name 'Islamic Republic of Gambia', re-joining the Commonwealth and improving civic spaces. He faces both resistance from radical Muslims who were favored in the previous president's administration, as well as pressure from the countries that 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. In a short period of time, the country moved

from one of the most repressive regimes to a 'partly free' state (as per Freedom House classification). But the fragile nature of the country means, this improvement can easily be lost due to the regional as well as the country's political dynamics.

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>
- Political and legal landscape: Amnesty International (AI) - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/gambia-mass-arrests-risk-fuelling-tensions/>
- Political and legal landscape: World Watch Monitor, 7 December 2019 - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/12/for-gambian-christians-theres-a-lot-to-like-and-one-big-worry-in-the-proposed-constitution/>
- Economic landscape: 2022 Economic Freedom Index - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/gambia>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/gmb>
- Security situation: The Defense Post - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/02/01/rebels-senegal-gambia/>
- Security situation: 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/gambia/>

WWL 2023: 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	1.5
Catholic	74,000	63.8
Protestant	19,100	16.5
Independent	18,700	16.1
Unaffiliated	2,200	1.9
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	115,700	99.7
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	7,600	6.6
Renewalist movement	23,500	20.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Gambia

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Gambia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	44	75
WWL 2022	44	72
WWL 2021	43	70
WWL 2020	43	67
WWL 2019	43	66

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Gambia's score in WWL 2023 remained at 44 points: Although the average pressure on Christians increased very slightly, the violence score dropped. Christians continue to face many restrictions in this country with Muslim population of over 89%. Registration for new churches is a lengthy and complicated procedure. Converts face persecution from their families and local communities. There is also fear that jihadist groups in the region could easily expand their areas of control and take advantage of the existing antigovernment sentiment among the youth who are disillusioned by the pace of the reform in the country.

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 other sectors. The government was promoting Islam aggressively during Jammeh’s rule, when Gambia had been strengthening its relationship with Saudi Arabia with a view to promoting the brand of conservative Islam that exists there. Although the new government has made attempts to reduce the radical Islamic influence in society since taking over power in January 2017, the situation remains hard for converts from Islam and for Christians in general, especially in remote areas. 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.

Clan oppression (Medium)

Converts from Islam or ATR will experience hostility and possible expulsion from their homes by their families. Some of the population in Gambia still mix religious beliefs and oppose Christianity, especially where churches are involved in evangelization.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Gambia is used as a location for drug-smuggling networks for channeling drugs from Latin America to Europe via West Africa.

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								

Gambia: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK			WEAK	MEDIUM
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very weak								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium			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 former president had tried to promote radical Islam and as a result, government officials became drivers of *Islamic oppression*. Despite the changes made by the new president since 2017, they have not made their way down the administrative hierarchy. In particular radical Muslims who were encouraged by government policies over the past few years are unwilling to embrace President Barrow's more moderate direction. Imams and sheiks still often make inflammatory comments against Christians during their Friday sermons.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Like many other neighboring countries, ordinary citizens are at the center of persecution, particularly where converts from Islam are involved. In a Muslim community, all categories of Christians face regular discrimination and harassment.
- **Family (Medium):** Persecution from extended family members also occurs where Muslims convert to Christianity. Families do not believe it possible that anyone would want to leave Islam. The Wahhabi brand of Islam has influenced both religious leaders and ordinary people as well. Despite the changes made by President Barrow, converts living with their Muslim families will continue to face strong objection to Christian prayer, possession of a Bible, baptism and possibly marriage.

Drivers of Clan oppression

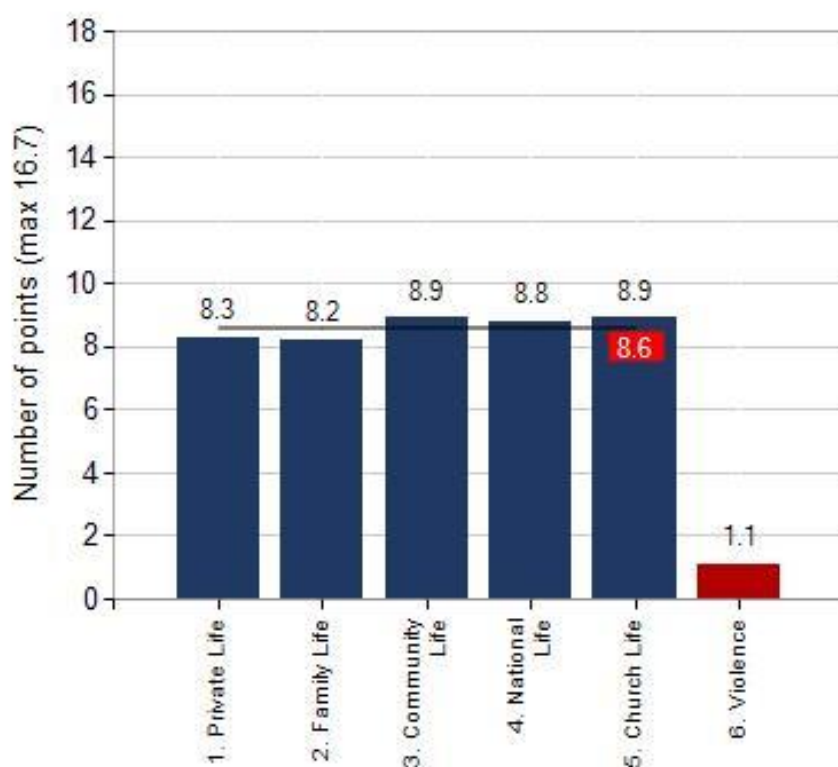
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In some rural areas, ethnic group leaders act as drivers by exerting pressure on converts to make them renounce Christianity. They will also make concerted efforts to curtail evangelization carried out by Christian groups.
- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** Muslim or ATR families will strongly object to a convert's Christian activities and will put pressure on him/her to recant.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

- **Organized crime and cartel or networks (Medium):** Corruption cartels and networks (including some religious leaders) are becoming a serious threat to many countries in West Africa, especially since cartels from Latin America are targeting smaller countries in West Africa for transit routes to Europe. This is affecting freedom of religion in the sense that it undermines rule of law. Christians who would dare to speak against this are quickly targeted and silenced through intimidation.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Gambia



the WWL 2023 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).
- The score for violence was 1.1 points, a decrease from 1.7 points in WWL 2022. Violent persecution in Gambia is relatively rare.

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 2023 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)

Gambia is a Muslim majority country. As in many Muslim-majority countries in the region, those who decide to leave Islam and become Christians face persecution due to their conversion. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden within Muslim homes and converts in such instances are regarded as outcasts. Some families in rural areas will beat and ostracize converts, especially in the eastern part of the country. Both converts from Islam and from African traditional religions are therefore careful not to reveal their conversion in their private acts of worship.

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)

In a country where Christianity is a small minority and the level of tolerance is low, discussion one's Christian faith with non-Christians is always challenging in Gambia. Christians from Muslim or Animist families cannot speak about their faith, since some families in rural areas will beat and ostracize converts, especially in the eastern part of the country. It is very dangerous for converts from Islam, but also for other categories of Christians, to talk to (extended) family members, neighbors or colleagues about their faith, especially in areas where a more fanatical type of Islam is being preached, and in Animist areas as well. Family members who talk about Christian faith face being cursed by their own parents.

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)

In areas of high concentrations of mosques and Muslims, Christian worship, prayers, and Bible readings are restricted. Christians who disobey the Muslim norm will be met with strong opposition. This is especially the case for converts, who as a result take care not to reveal their conversion through private acts of worship. Families think that conversion means abandoning family values and betraying one's ancestors.

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

For many converts in Gambia, persecution starts at home. Christians from Muslim or Animist families cannot speak about their faith with immediate family members. If they speak and reveal their conversion, they would be thrown out of the house; they would lose their belongings; they would lose access to various basic goods and services. In order to avoid this, converts usually try

to keep their Christian faith secret.

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 problem lies not in government law but in the attitudes of society in general. The understanding in society is that every citizen is considered a member of the Islamic *umma* from birth and is thus expected to practice that religion. When the parents of a young Christian couple are Muslim or Animist, they are likely to hinder their Christian wedding ceremony. The latter does not recognize the conversion of their children to Christianity and will want non-Christian ceremonies carried out. In a country which is not far off 90% Muslim, it is always difficult for a Christian family to live their lives according to Christian values. This is particularly challenging for converts.

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

Children of convert Christians from a Muslim background face many difficulties. This is especially true in Muslim-dominated areas where Christians are already facing several forms of harassment and discrimination. This affects all types of Christianity. Most of the time, the children of church leaders and other Christians are discriminated against because of their parents' faith; either in schools, in administrative or socio-cultural affairs. Muslim and Animist parents will usually want their children, even Christian children, to be buried traditionally with non-Christian rites. In some schools where the senior staff or founders are Muslim, children of Christians are often forced to receive non-Christian religious instruction.

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)

A family and local community use various ways to punish or force converts to renounce Christian faith. Christian spouses who are converts from Islam are usually separated from their children or partners because of their faith. Muslim or Animist families often separate converts from their children in an attempt to force them to recant their alien faith.

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)

This is similar to what is described under 2.10. It is usual for Muslim or Animist parents to cease all contact with children who become Christians and cause them to lose inheritance rights. They are not entitled to the family inheritance since they are no longer considered children. Denying inheritance is seen as a punitive measure that would force a convert to recant their 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)

Education is one of the areas where Christians face systemic challenges. During the era of President Jammeh, the Gambian authorities closed down Christian schools which refused to teach Islamic courses, forcing them to hire Islamic scholars in order to remain open. In certain rural areas, it is still the case that Christian schools face pressure to employ Muslim teachers and teach Islamic courses. Access to scholarships, school fees, and other educational benefits are managed by Muslim administrators, and there are clear cases of discrimination against Christians.

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)

This is one of the most prevalent forms of pressure that Christians are facing in the country. Cases of threats, harassment and obstruction are numerous and come in many forms. Muslim parents use insults and sometimes death-threats to discourage converted family members from advertising Christian faith in any way.

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

In many West African countries, it is common for adherents of Islam and Christianity to mix religion with voodoo and other traditional belief system, and there is often local pressure to do this. Converts to Christianity of whatever religious background sometimes experience harassment in their daily lives and are often forced to take part in annual traditional rituals in order to continue being regarded as part of the family and community. Converted girls and boys are challenged by their Muslim or Animist parents to participate in initiation ceremonies and rites which are needed as signs of maturity for integrating into local society.

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

Some Muslim or Animist employers do not want to work with Christians in their enterprises, preferring those who are of the same faith. Recruitment in the private sector, as well as the public, is done by Muslims on behalf of employers, business owners and Muslim organizations and priority is being given to young Muslims.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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)

The situation has improved compared to what used to be the case under President Jammeh, and yet there have not been many changes as far as freedom for civil society organizations is concerned. In general, there are no Christian political parties in the country. In addition, Christian organizations operate with caution and limitations, since the government is not putting pressure on Muslim communities to respect Christians because that might offend them.

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)

This pressure is related to cultural practices. Christians in the country are a minority. In addition to Islam there are also communities which mix traditional beliefs with their practice of Islam. These groups are often forcing Christians to act against their conscience.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

This is a Muslim majority country and Christians are not seen as equals. This is said to happen quite often when Christians have to deal with Animist or Muslim officials in remote areas. In most administrative and governmental affairs, Christians are very often victims of discrimination or are simply ignored. Obtaining land as well as authorizations and attestations are regularly refused or given only after long periods of waiting. In at least one instance, a Christian man in the army was dismissed without any warning because of his faith.

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

This is related to 4.5 above. Christians who refuse to compromise their faith, cannot be selected for early promotion and are sometimes not promoted at all. This is still happening in some areas despite the positive step of having three Christians appointed to serve in President Barrow's cabinet.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Youth-work faces many restrictions. The youth is seen as the most vulnerable group in the society, particularly when it comes to protecting them from exposure to Christianity. Especially in areas where churches organize open activities to which Muslim youth are also invited, parents and community are likely to fiercely oppose this. This would not stop with opposing one area of church-work; the church might be forced, as a result, to limit its activities in general.

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

In many parts of the country, Christians are often put under pressure not to encourage conversion among locals and not to integrate converts. Churches cannot openly integrate Christians with Muslim or Animist backgrounds because of death-threats and other forms of family hostility. For their own safety, church leaders often help converts to grow in faith away from their parents, away from their home. Openly converting people is dangerous, since conservative Muslims monitor, hinder, disturb and obstruct activities of churches in rural areas of the country where radical forms of Islam are becoming more visible.

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)

Targeting Christian leaders is very common in countries where persecution exists. In conservative Muslim communities, pastors and other Christian leaders, including their family members, face harassment, mockery, death-threats or kidnapping for reasons related to their faith. This is done under the assumption that 'if we focus on the leaders and their family, we can curtail all Christian activities'.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.00 points)

Church activities are monitored in many different ways. During the period of Ramadan, the police prohibit churches from using drums, singing and dancing in services. Not only that, in general churches are monitored by the youth and community leaders. Sometimes, churches are under serious pressure to not even have singing. Also, the sale or distribution of Bibles has to be carried out quietly because of threats from Muslims.

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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. 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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Gambia: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	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 *

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	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?	0	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

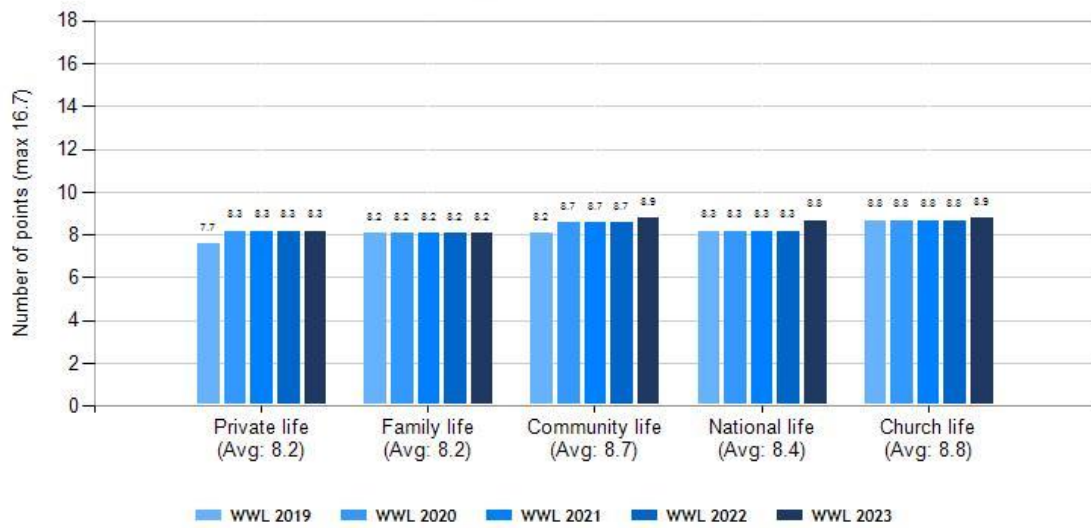
Gambia: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	8.6
2022	8.5
2021	8.5
2020	8.5
2019	8.2

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

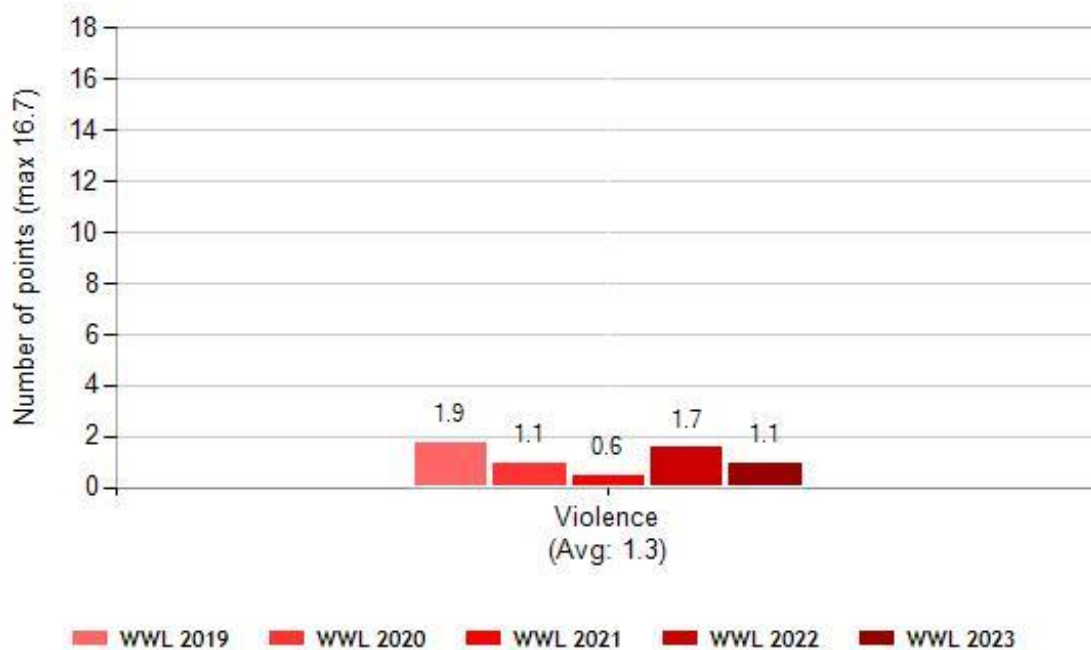
The chart below shows that the average score for every *sphere of life* has overall been stable in the five WWL reporting periods. *Church life* scored highest with five year average of 8.8 points followed by the *Community sphere of life* scoring on average 8.7 points. The *Private* and *Family spheres* scored the lowest with a five year average of 8.2 points.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Gambia
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Gambia
(Violence)



The average score for violence against Christians over for past five reporting periods is just 1.3 points. This shows that violence in Gambia is very low compared to some other countries in West Africa.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
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 close to 90% of the population are Muslim, it is challenging for Christian families to live according to Christian values. In a context of widespread child marriage and poor education for women and girls, female converts face additional vulnerabilities on the basis of their faith and gender ([Girls Not Brides, accessed 6 January 2023](#)).

Female converts to Christianity, both those from a Muslim and animist background, face the greatest opposition. 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 explained. 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. A country 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. While no such instances have been recorded in the WWL 2023 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	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; 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 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 2021) reported:

- "Ahmadi Muslims said they believed themselves free to practice their religion without interference but expressed frustration with the SIC's [Supreme Islamic Council's] refusal to integrate them into the broader Muslim community."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

The change in government at the beginning of 2017 halted the attempt by the former president to make the country an Islamic republic. However, Gambian society is still conservative enough to curtail the freedom of Christians. This problem will likely continue for years to come.

Clan oppression

In the long run, as education and the Christian faith become more known in remote areas, the exposure is likely to positively change attitudes among adherents of African traditional religions towards converts to Christian faith. However, this Persecution engine will remain influential due to the difficulties all converts from a Muslim background face.

Organized corruption and crime

This Persecution engine could become stronger in the future since the activities of organized corruption and drug cartels are tied to the rise of jihadism in West African countries. If the demo-

cratic process and constitutional reform that aims to strengthen democracy and accountability are fulfilled, this engine will disappear in the near future even though the threat of organized criminal networks in the region might remain a serious threat to any country in West Africa.

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: Girls Not Brides, accessed 6 January 2023 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/gambia>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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