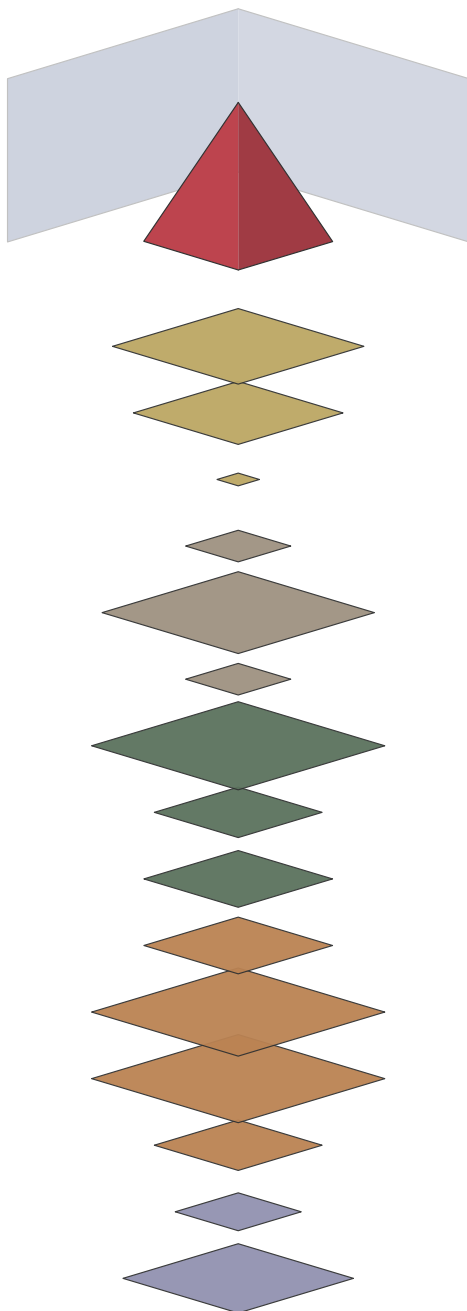




# GAMBIA




## 4.53 CRIMINALITY SCORE

39<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
14<sup>th</sup> of 15 West African countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS **4.67**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.5
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.5
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	2.5
FLORA CRIMES	7
FAUNA CRIMES	4
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.5
HEROIN TRADE	4.5
COCAINE TRADE	7
CANNABIS TRADE	7
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.5



### CRIMINAL ACTORS **4.4**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	4
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4

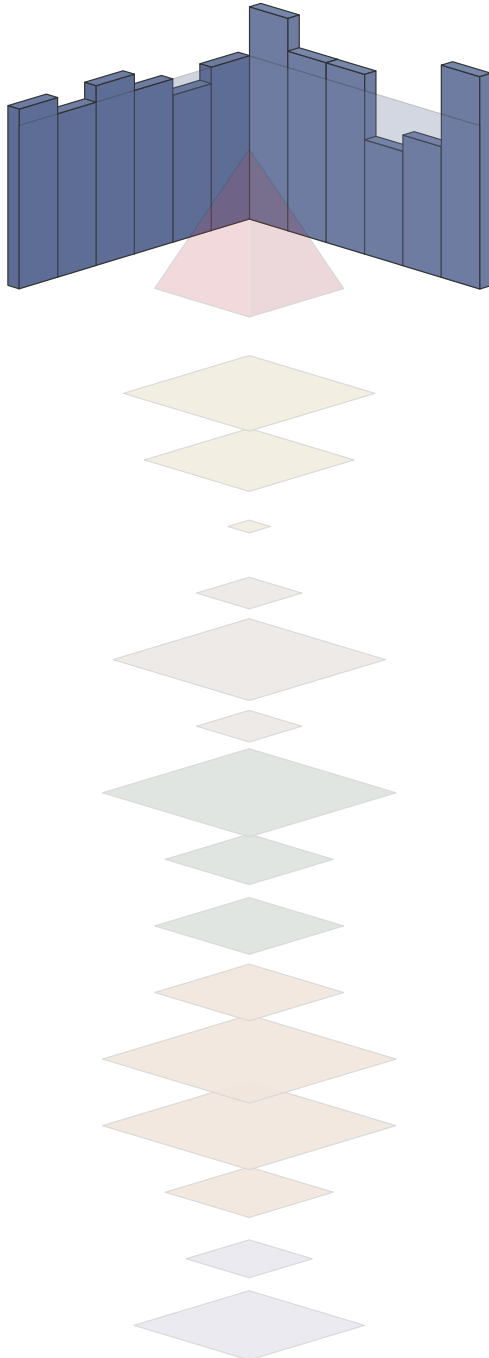


## 5.17 RESILIENCE SCORE





# GAMBIA




## 5.17 RESILIENCE SCORE

11<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
5<sup>th</sup> of 15 West African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.5
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.5
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.5
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.5
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.5
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.5
PREVENTION	4
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.5



## 4.53 CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.67
CRIMINAL ACTORS	4.4



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal Markets

### PEOPLE

Although the human trafficking market in The Gambia is in decline it is still pervasive, with the country serving as a source of and transit destination for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Most of the victims are women and girls, but boys are increasingly affected and exploited in various sectors, including sex trafficking, forced labour in street vending and domestic servitude in the country. Gambian children are found in forced labour in neighbouring West African countries and Mauritania, while Gambian women face forced labour and sex trafficking in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon and Kuwait. The sexual exploitation of victims is fuelled by child-sex tourists from European and North American countries, who frequently rely on the assistance of travel agencies. In recent years, sex traffickers have adopted new tactics, hosting child-sex tourists in private residences located outside the main tourist areas. Traffickers have also been exploiting social media platforms to recruit victims, adding another dimension to their operations. However, efforts made by the government to control human trafficking have made the country less vulnerable to this threat.

The Gambia is also a source country for human smuggling. A previously repressive government (until the change in power in 2016) and widespread poverty have contributed to the formation of a well-established smuggling industry with strong ties to Europe. The Gambia's membership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) allows for the free movement of citizens within the region, meaning people typically do not need the services of smugglers to move intra-regionally. However, in their attempts to cross the Mediterranean, Gambians often seek irregular routes known as 'the Backway'. In addition, the internet has played a prominent role in recruiting individuals for smuggling. There is no evidence suggesting widespread extortion and protection racketeering related to organized crime.

### TRADE

The Gambia is considered a high-risk country for arms trafficking; however, most reports of arms possession are only linked to drug crimes and are not considered to be evidence of an organized market. The country's proximity to the Casamance region of Senegal makes it

vulnerable to being used as a transit point for firearms and a safe haven for Casamance separatists involved in arms trafficking. Stringent laws govern the use and possession of dangerous weapons and severe penalties are imposed, with military-style firearms strictly prohibited.

The trading of counterfeit goods, particularly fake medicines and household electrical appliances, is a significant concern. The products are primarily sold on the streets, but are occasionally also found in supermarkets. Although there is some legislation addressing intellectual property crimes, competing political and social priorities and limited enforcement resources mean the issue has not received sufficient attention. Historically, traffickers have imported fake pharmaceutical products from China, storing them in local markets before transporting them via sea, road and river to neighbouring countries such as Senegal. The illicit trade in excise goods is considered to be negligible, with evidence suggesting tobacco products are being smuggled into the country, albeit in limited volumes.

### ENVIRONMENT

The Gambia is grappling with significant challenges related to illegal logging, exacerbated by ineffective policy enforcement, corruption and weak institutions, resulting in an escalating environmental crisis. Despite publicized efforts by the new government to combat timber trafficking, which was rampant under the previous administration, it remains a pressing issue. The country serves as a transit point for illegally trafficked timber from neighbouring countries such as Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, resulting in substantial financial losses. Although The Gambia implemented a ban on timber exports and revoked all timber export licences in an attempt to curb illegal logging, timber continues to be exported from the country, including to China. Trafficking routes extend along the southern borders, involving the Casamance province in Senegal, and supply chains reach from Guinea-Bissau through Casamance to Banjul. The illicit timber trade involves political actors and insurgency groups, capitalizing on political volatility and generating revenue through the trade.

While wildlife crimes and smuggling are considered a low priority because of the absence of the large animals and charismatic mega-fauna typically associated with high-profile wildlife trafficking, the country does face challenges related to illegal, unreported and unregulated



(IUU) fishing practices. In the Gunjur region concerns have been raised about dwindling fish populations due to IUU fishing activities, resulting in food insecurity, as fishing is crucial for the livelihoods of Gambians. The illegal export of fish feed and fish oil for global aquaculture supply chains contributes to both traditional and IUU fishing, which involves a significant portion of the country's catch. Unsustainable exploitation strategies have put certain species such as lobsters, sharks, catfish and white grouper at risk.

There is very little, if any, illicit gold mining in The Gambia and the country does not play a role in regional gold flows. However, illegal sand mining has emerged as a major source of public unrest. These operations have caused severe environmental damage, including soil erosion, adversely affecting agricultural activities and contributing to rising sea levels.

## DRUGS

The Gambia serves as a transit country for heroin en route to Europe and the United States. Weak coastal and border controls, coupled with corrupt individuals within the border control service, make the country an ideal transit point. The Gambia also plays a significant role in cocaine trafficking, connecting South America to European and African markets. Organized drug trafficking groups have established the country as a hub, using its maritime ports and airports to transport large quantities of cocaine. There has also been an increase in the domestic cocaine market, fuelled, in part, by tourism of mainly European visitors. Drug traffickers transport cocaine and cannabis in canoes along rivers that connect to Senegal.

The cannabis trade is significant, and cannabis is the most commonly seized drug in the country. While most cannabis originates from the Casamance region in Senegal and Sierra Leone, it also grows naturally within The Gambia, making it easily accessible. The government opposes the decriminalization of cannabis and confiscates more than a metric ton of marijuana annually. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in cannabis production and informal sector sales as people sought income opportunities. Individuals of all ages, including children as young as nine, are involved in the cannabis trade and have been arrested for possession.

The use of synthetic drugs, including opioids, amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances, is on the rise in Africa. While synthetic drugs play a relatively small role in The Gambia, there is reported growth in the local ecstasy market. The

abuse of drugs such as Diazepam and Clonazepam is also increasing among the youth, and according to officials, there have been some seizures of synthetic cannabinoids. Benzodiazepines are commonly traded in the country and the fact that the pharmaceutical market is poorly regulated has led to the diversion and misuse of drugs, resulting in tragic consequences, including the deaths of children. While there have been some reports of local methamphetamine production, these have not been fully substantiated. The Gambia, in fact, is known to predominantly serve as a transit point for methamphetamine manufactured in Nigeria.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

There has been a steady increase in recent years of cyber-dependent crimes as a result of the absence of cybercrime legislation, inadequate detection mechanisms and the fact that the judiciary does not recognize e-evidence as admissible. There is limited information about the specific types of cyber-dependent offences and few convictions. However, arrests made in connection with these crimes indicate that hacking of banking institutions is the most common form.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

The Gambia has long been plagued by financial crimes, with widespread corruption and embezzlement involving public officials and company executives. During the previous two decades patronage networks operated similarly to organized crime syndicates, resulting in the misappropriation of hundreds of millions of dollars from state coffers. Corrupt networks included members of the Cabinet, high-level civil servants, military commanders, central bank officials, NGOs and private sector executives. While specific details about financial crimes under the current administration are limited, incidents such as attempted embezzlement during the COVID-19 pandemic and charges of embezzlement against executives highlight the persistence of these crimes in the country's political environment, regardless of the administration in power. Furthermore, with regard to cyber-enabled financial crimes, fraudulent online schemes offering unrealistic high returns on investments have targeted an increasing number of vulnerable individuals.

## Criminal Actors

Available evidence suggests that there are no mafia-style groups in The Gambia. However, criminal networks pose a significant threat to the country's security, rule of law and development. There are widespread reports that



drug trafficking, illicit trade, street crimes and organized crime activities have increased following the 2016 political transition. In addition, there is violence and armed banditry in the border region between Senegal and The Gambia, primarily related to the ongoing separatist conflict in Senegal's Casamance region. Separatist militants target military installations, convoys, military personnel and civilians in the area, while criminal elements also contribute to the insecurity. Farafenni, located near the porous border between The Gambia and Senegal, serves as a hub for criminal activities involving individuals from both countries. Networks in Farafenni engage in various illicit pursuits, including drug trafficking (particularly cannabis and cocaine), human trafficking (including the trafficking of children) and property theft.

With regards to state-embedded actors, corruption and extortion by public officials, bribery, abuse of office and false assumption of authority are common occurrences. Certain criminal activities, such as illicit trading of rosewood, are reported to be facilitated by police officers who accept bribes from criminal actors. Corruption, particularly bribery of officials, also provided protection for foreign nationals engaged in illegal mining and fishing practices. Foreign-owned fish processing plants operate along the coastline near the Senegal border, contributing to the illegal export of fish intended for human consumption.

Fishmeal and fish oil are allegedly sent to Vietnam and re-labelled on the black market for re-export to China, bypassing Chinese food-safety controls. There are also reports of Asian firms in the country being linked to the illicit timber business. Moreover, Senegalese soldiers are reportedly involved in the direct transit of illegally stolen timber from Casamance, passing through The Gambia to reach end markets in China. Lastly, there are instances where the country serves as a safe haven for Bissau-Guinean drug traffickers and other criminal networks from neighbouring countries such as Mauritania, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Many private companies, including mining companies, engage in fraudulent arrangements involving state officials to combine their legal activities with illegal ones. For nearly a decade, companies have transported illegal timber from Africa to Asia, and authorities have been aware of the trafficking schemes despite the official ban. Money laundering is a significant concern, particularly in the Serekunda and Senegambia regions, where hotels and restaurants are used as fronts for these illicit activities. Some establishments are alleged to have been constructed by individuals associated with drug trafficking and illegal timber exports, who have invested corruption money from the previous regime in Senegambia.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

In 2016 the Gambia underwent a significant political transition, with the current government granting more freedoms than the previous repressive regime. However, there has been no fundamental change in policies to counter the rise of organized crime and there is still limited proactive response. The current president was re-elected for a second term in credible but imperfect elections, while the new and more diverse National Assembly is a more effective counterweight to the executive.

Governance across The Gambia's state institutions remains flawed. Progress in reducing corruption has been limited. Allegations against government officials, including of accepting bribes and engaging in corrupt public procurement practices, are common. While some cases of abuse and corruption have been investigated and prosecuted, a lack of enforcement allows similar cases to persist with impunity. Efforts to establish an

anticorruption commission have yet to materialize, and bribes to officials, particularly the police, are a daily occurrence. Government operations lack transparency and asset declarations are not accessible to the public. Despite some anti-corruption measures, recent accusations of corruption levelled against high-profile members of the government cast doubt on the government's commitment to eradicating corruption. Members of the previous administration have not been held accountable for their misdeeds.

The Gambia has ratified most international treaties related to organized crime, except for the Arms Trade Treaty and one of the Palermo Protocols. The legal framework in the country includes various policies and laws aimed at promoting integrity, transparency and accountability in public office. However, their application is flawed because of a lack of inter-departmental and inter-ministerial information sharing, poor cooperation



and an ineffective information and communications technology system, among other problems. Internal anticorruption monitoring and enforcement measures are either non-existent or are yet to become law. The Gambia has laws that either classify certain forms of organized crime as 'serious offences' or criminalize the organized crime groups themselves.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

There are no units in The Gambia's judicial system that specifically target organized crime, but elements of the judiciary are considered functional, and the institution has sought to enhance its effectiveness. The government reconstituted the Judicial Service Commission to advise the president, and the judiciary has demonstrated overall a higher level of independence than is the case in other government institutions. However, prison facilities continue to face significant challenges such as overcrowding, poor food quality, shortages of drinkable water, sanitation issues and limited access to basic services. Allegations of mistreatment have been investigated and various NGOs have been granted access to conduct inquiries.

During the former regime the intelligence agency was responsible for arbitrary detention and torture. Under the new administration there have been efforts to reform law enforcement agencies and combat corruption, including ending arbitrary detention and arrest. However, these agencies have not been comprehensively vetted. Reports have surfaced about the police using excessive force against protesters. While there has been significant progress towards democracy, there is growing discontent about the government's inability to maintain security, with increasing armed robberies, banditry and murders being reported.

The Gambia's relatively small size and manageable land and sea boundaries make border control easier than it is in larger African countries. The country employs regular patrols and different agencies collaborate to manage its borders effectively. Efforts are underway to establish a national border control system in partnership with international organizations. The Gambia's relationship with neighbouring countries, especially Senegal, has improved under the current government. However, there are challenges related to its proximity to Senegal, whose internal conflicts can spill over the borders. The Casamance border region of Senegal is known for illicit activities, including drug trafficking, and rebels often seek temporary refuge in The Gambia before launching operations in their own country. While controls and patrols have increased, the risk of cross-border incidents

persists. The absence of cybercrime legislation renders the country's cyberspace vulnerable, posing risks to its digital integrity.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The Gambia has taken significant steps to combat money laundering and financial crime by establishing a Financial Intelligence Unit and cooperating actively with international organizations. Although there have been some improvements in the country's anti-money laundering efforts under the current government, there is a need to further strengthen enforcement capacity.

The economic regulatory environment also requires significant improvement, but the government has recently shown commitment to deepening democratic governance and establishing a sustainable economic regulatory capacity. To this end, various efforts have been made, including enhancing the legal framework, and fostering greater political freedom. One of the key economic reforms initiated by the government focuses on streamlining the process of starting new businesses and addressing key obstacles. Proposed measures include facilitating electricity connections, reducing costs, expanding the social registry and digitalizing the tax system. These reforms are aimed at creating a more favourable environment for businesses to thrive and contribute to the country's economic growth, but their effects on the overall national performance are yet to be fully seen.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The support and protection provided to victims of organized crime in The Gambia have generally been limited due to the absence of a comprehensive policy and to insufficient resources available, but the government has made efforts to increase protection measures, such as victim identification. A short-term shelter has been established to provide support and services to vulnerable individuals, particularly those affected by human trafficking. The shelter offers access to medical care and counselling. The government has also established a centre for victims of human rights violations, which aims to advocate for their interests in transitional justice processes. Its activities include truth-seeking, accountability, prosecutions, reparations and institutional and legal reforms. However, there is still no comprehensive witness protection and the identities of witnesses are not typically kept confidential.



In terms of prevention, The Gambia currently lacks a specialized drug treatment facility, despite drug use among the youth population. To combat human exploitation and trafficking, The Gambia collaborates with NGOs to conduct advocacy, training and research into child protection issues. These partnerships aim to provide support to communities, with a particular focus on children, to address human exploitation and trafficking. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with NGOs, has implemented a programme to educate students about trafficking and prevent forced begging. This initiative includes providing food and monthly cash transfers to schools that have demonstrated their commitment to eliminating begging among their students.

The country's transition from the previous era of suppression of the press has faced challenges, but significant efforts have been made to create an environment conducive to

media development. While there have been occasional pressures on media outlets and instances of brutality by security forces, no journalists have been arbitrarily detained in recent years. NGOs have also enjoyed increased freedom to operate, resulting in a greater presence and influence in the country. However, the requirement for NGOs to register with the authorities poses a potential hurdle, as the authorities have the power to deny, suspend or cancel an NGO's right to operate. NGOs have played a vital role in challenging restrictive laws and securing favourable judgments in the ECOWAS Court, calling for the repeal or amendment of laws that curtail press freedom. Despite these advances, remnants of past practices can still be observed, such as the closure of privately-owned media stations.

