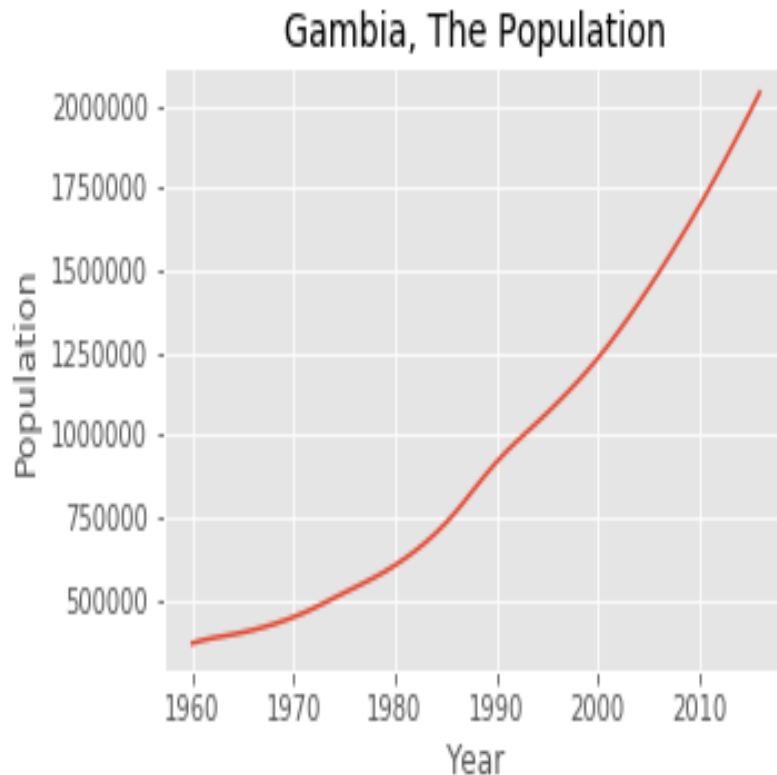


# Gambia, The



The Gambia ( [listen](#)), officially the Republic of the Gambia, is a country in West Africa that is entirely surrounded by Senegal except for its coastline on the Atlantic Ocean at its western end. It is the smallest country on mainland Africa. The Gambia is situated on either side of the Gambia River, the nation's namesake, which flows through the centre of The Gambia and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Its area is 10,689 square kilometres (4,127 sq mi) with a population of 1,857,181 as of the April 2013 census. Banjul is the Gambian capital and the largest cities are Serekunda and Brikama. The Gambia shares historical roots with many other West African nations in the slave trade, which was the key factor in the placing and keeping of a colony on the Gambia River, first by the Portuguese, during which era it was known as A Gâmbia. Later, on 25 May 1765, The Gambia was made a part of the British Empire when the government formally assumed control, establishing the Province of Senegambia. In 1965, The Gambia gained independence under the leadership of Dawda Jawara, who ruled until Yahya Jammeh seized power in a bloodless 1994 coup. Adama Barrow became The Gambia's third president in January 2017, after defeating Jammeh in December 2016 elections. Jammeh initially accepted the results, then refused to accept them, which triggered a constitutional crisis and military intervention by the Economic Community of West African States, resulting in his exile. The Gambia's economy is dominated by farming, fishing and, especially, tourism. In 2008, about a third of the population lived below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day. == Etymology == The name "Gambia" is derived from the Mandinka term Kambra/Kambaa, meaning Gambia river. According to the CIA World Factbook, the US Department of State, the Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use, The Gambia is one of only two countries whose self-standing short name for official use should begin with the word "The" (the other one being The Bahamas). Upon independence in 1965, the country used the name The Gambia. Following the proclamation of a republic in 1970, the long-form name of the country became Republic of The Gambia. The administration of Yahya Jammeh changed the long-form name to Islamic Republic of The Gambia in December 2015. On 29 January 2017 the new President Adama

Barrow said the country's name will go back to Republic of The Gambia. == History == Arab traders provided the first written accounts of the Gambia area in the ninth and tenth centuries. During the tenth century, Muslim merchants and scholars established communities in several West African commercial centres. Both groups established trans-Saharan trade routes, leading to a large export trade of local people as slaves, also gold and ivory, as well as imports of manufactured goods. By the 11th or 12th century, the rulers of kingdoms such as Takrur, a monarchy centred on the Senegal River just to the north, ancient Ghana and Gao had converted to Islam and had appointed to their courts Muslims who were literate in the Arabic language. At the beginning of the 14th century, most of what is today called Gambia was part of the Mali Empire. The Portuguese reached this area by sea in the mid-15th century, and began to dominate overseas trade. In 1588, the claimant to the Portuguese throne, António, Prior of Crato, sold exclusive trade rights on the Gambia River to English merchants. Letters patent from Queen Elizabeth I confirmed the grant. In 1618, King James I of England granted a charter to an English company for trade with the Gambia and the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Between 1651 and 1661, some parts of the Gambia were under the rule of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, and were bought by Prince Jacob Kettler. During the late 17th century and throughout the 18th century, the British Empire and the French Empire struggled continually for political and commercial supremacy in the regions of the Senegal River and the Gambia River. The British Empire occupied the Gambia when an expedition led by Augustus Keppel landed there following the Capture of Senegal in 1758. The 1783 First Treaty of Versailles gave Great Britain possession of the Gambia River, but the French retained a tiny enclave at Albreda on the river's north bank. This was finally ceded to the United Kingdom in 1856. As many as three million people may have been taken as slaves from this general region during the three centuries that the transatlantic slave trade operated. It is not known how many people were taken as slaves by intertribal wars or Muslim traders before the transatlantic slave trade began. Most of those taken were sold by other Africans to Europeans: some were prisoners of intertribal wars; some were victims sold because of unpaid debts; and many others were simply victims of kidnapping. Traders initially sent people to Europe to work as servants until the market for labour expanded in the West Indies and North America in the 18th century. In 1807, the United Kingdom abolished the slave trade throughout its empire. It also tried, unsuccessfully, to end the slave trade in the Gambia. Slave ships intercepted by the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron in the Atlantic were also returned to the Gambia, with people who had been slaves released on MacCarthy Island far up the Gambia River where they were expected to establish new lives. The British established the military post of Bathurst (now Banjul) in 1816. === Gambia Colony and Protectorate (1821–1965) === In the ensuing years, Banjul was at times under the jurisdiction of the British Governor-General in Sierra Leone. In 1888, The Gambia became a separate colony. An agreement with the French Republic in 1889 established the present boundaries. The Gambia became a British Crown colony called British Gambia, divided for administrative purposes into the colony (city of Banjul and the surrounding area) and the protectorate (remainder of the territory). The Gambia received its own executive and legislative councils in 1901, and it gradually progressed toward self-government. Slavery was abolished in 1906 and following a brief conflict between the British colonial forces and indigenous Gambians, British colonial authority was firmly established. During World War II, some soldiers fought with the Allies of World War II. Though these soldiers fought mostly in Burma, some died closer to home and a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery is in Fajara (close to Banjul). Banjul contained an airstrip for the US Army Air Forces and a port of call for Allied naval convoys. After World War II, the pace of constitutional reform increased. Following general elections in 1962, the United Kingdom granted full internal self-governance in the following year. === Post-Independence (1965–present) === The Gambia achieved independence on 18 February 1965, as a constitutional monarchy within the Commonwealth, with Elizabeth II as Queen of the Gambia, represented by the Governor-General. Shortly thereafter, the national government held a referendum proposing that the country become a republic. This referendum failed to receive the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution, but the results won widespread attention abroad as testimony to The Gambia's observance of secret balloting, honest elections, civil rights, and liberties. On 24 April 1970, The Gambia became a republic within the Commonwealth, following a second referendum. Prime Minister Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara assumed the office of President, an executive post, combining the offices of head of state and head of government. President Sir Dawda Jawara was re-elected five times. An attempted coup on 29 July 1981 followed a weakening of the economy and allegations of corruption against leading politicians. The coup attempt occurred while President Jawara was visiting London and was carried out by the leftist National Revolutionary Council, composed of Kukoi Samba Sanyang's Socialist and

Revolutionary Labour Party (SRLP) and elements of the Field Force, a paramilitary force which constituted the bulk of the country's armed forces. President Jawara requested military aid from Senegal, which deployed 400 troops to The Gambia on 31 July. By 6 August, some 2,700 Senegalese troops had been deployed, defeating the rebel force. Between 500 and 800 people were killed during the coup and the ensuing violence. In 1982, in the aftermath of the 1981 attempted coup, Senegal and The Gambia signed a treaty of confederation. The Senegambia Confederation aimed to combine the armed forces of the two states and to unify their economies and currencies. After just seven years, The Gambia permanently withdrew from the confederation in 1989. In 1994, the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) deposed the Jawara government and banned opposition political activity. Lieutenant Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, chairman of the AFPRC, became head of state. Jammeh was just 29 years old at the time of the coup. The AFPRC announced a transition plan for return to democratic civilian government. The Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC) was established in 1996 to conduct national elections and transformed into the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in 1997 and became responsible for registration of voters and for the conduct of elections and referendums. In late 2001 and early 2002, The Gambia completed a full cycle of presidential, legislative, and local elections, which foreign observers deemed free, fair, and transparent, albeit with some shortcomings. President Yahya Jammeh, who was elected to continue in the position he had assumed during the coup, took the oath of office again on 21 December 2001. Jammeh's Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) maintained its strong majority in the National Assembly, particularly after the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) boycotted the legislative elections. (It has participated in elections since, however). On 2 October 2013, The Gambian interior minister announced that The Gambia would leave the Commonwealth of Nations with immediate effect, ending 48 years of membership of the organisation. The Gambian Government said it had "decided that The Gambia will never be a member of any neo-colonial institution and will never be a party to any institution that represents an extension of colonialism". Incumbent President Jammeh faced opposition leaders Adama Barrow from the Independent Coalition of parties and Mamma Kandeh from the Gambia Democratic Congress party in the December 2016 presidential elections. The Gambia sentenced main opposition leader and human rights advocate Ousainou Darboe to 3 years in prison in July 2016, disqualifying him from running in the presidential election. Following the 1 December 2016 elections, the elections commission declared Adama Barrow the winner of the presidential election. Jammeh, who had ruled for 22 years, first announced he would step down after losing the 2016 election before declaring the results void and calling for a new vote, sparking a constitutional crisis and leading to an invasion by an ECOWAS coalition. On 20 January 2017, Jammeh announced that he had agreed to step down and would leave the country. On 14 February 2017, The Gambia began the process of returning to its membership of the Commonwealth and formally presented its application to re-join to Secretary-General Patricia Scotland on 22 January 2018. Boris Johnson, who became the first British Foreign Secretary to visit The Gambia since the country gained independence in 1965, announced that the British government welcomed The Gambia's return to the Commonwealth.

== Geography == The Gambia is a very small and narrow country whose borders mirror the meandering Gambia River. It lies between latitudes 13 and 14°N, and longitudes 13 and 17°W. The Gambia is less than 50 kilometres (31 miles) wide at its widest point, with a total area of 11,295 km<sup>2</sup> (4,361 sq mi). About 1,300 square kilometres (500 square miles) (11.5%) of The Gambia's area are covered by water. It is the smallest country on the African mainland. In comparative terms, The Gambia has a total area slightly less than that of the island of Jamaica. Senegal surrounds The Gambia on three sides, with 80 km (50 mi) of coastline on the Atlantic Ocean marking its western extremity. The present boundaries were defined in 1889 after an agreement between the United Kingdom and France. During the negotiations between the French and the British in Paris, the French initially gave the British around 200 miles (320 km) of the Gambia River to control. Starting with the placement of boundary markers in 1891, it took nearly 15 years after the Paris meetings to determine the final borders of The Gambia. The resulting series of straight lines and arcs gave the British control of areas about 10 miles (16 km) north and south of the Gambia River.

=== Climate === Gambia has a tropical climate. A hot and rainy season normally lasts from June until November, but from then until May, cooler temperatures predominate, with less precipitation. The climate in The Gambia closely resembles that of neighbouring Senegal, of southern Mali, and of the northern part of Benin.

== Politics == Following independence in 1965, the Gambia conducted freely-contested elections every five years. Each election was won by The People's Progressive Party (PPP), headed by Dawda Jawara. The PPP dominated Gambian politics for nearly 30 years. After spearheading the movement toward complete

independence from Britain, the PPP was voted into power and was never seriously challenged by any opposition party. The last elections under the PPP régime took place in April 1992. In 1994, following allegations of corruption within the Jawara régime and widespread discontent in the army, a largely bloodless and successful coup d'état installed army lieutenant Yahya Jammeh in power. Politicians from deposed President Jawara's PPP and other senior government officials were banned from participating in politics until July 2001. A presidential election took place in September 1996, in which Yahya Jammeh won 56% of the vote. The legislative elections held in January 1997 were dominated by the APRC, which captured 33 out of 45 seats. In July 2001 the ban on Jawara-era political parties and politicians was lifted. Four registered opposition parties participated in 18 October 2001 presidential election, which the incumbent, President Yahya Jammeh, won with almost 53% of the votes. The APRC maintained its strong majority in the National Assembly in legislative elections held in January 2002, particularly after the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) boycotted the legislative elections. Jammeh won the 2006 election handily after the opposition coalition, the National Alliance for Democracy and Development, had splintered earlier in the year. The voting was generally regarded as free and fair, though events from the run-up raised criticism from some. A journalist from the state television station assigned to the chief opposition candidate, Ousainou Darboe, was arrested. Additionally, Jammeh said, "I will develop the areas that vote for me, but if you don't vote for me, don't expect anything". On 21 and 22 March 2006, amid tensions preceding the 2006 presidential elections, an alleged planned military coup was uncovered. Jammeh immediately returned from a trip to Mauritania, many army officials were arrested, and prominent army officials fled the country. Some believe that the President fabricated the planned coup for his own purposes, but no proof has been found. For their roles in an alleged 2009 coup plot, eight Gambians (including the former Chief of Defence Staff of the Gambian Armed Forces, a former head and deputy head of the National Intelligence Agency, and others) were tried for treason, found guilty, and sentenced to death in July 2010. One of the convicted, a businessman, disappeared while in custody awaiting his appeal. Before that trial concluded, the former Chief of Defence Staff and the former Chief of the Gambia Naval Staff were charged with treason for their complicity in the failed 2006 coup. A key prosecution witness, serving a lengthy prison sentence for his role in the 2006 coup plot, received a presidential pardon, apparently in return for his testimony. The 1970 constitution, which divided the government into independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches, was suspended after the 1994 military coup. As part of the transition process, the AFPRC established the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) by decree in March 1995. In accordance with the timetable for the transition to a democratically elected government, the CRC drafted a new constitution for the Gambia, which was approved by referendum in August 1996. The constitution provides for a strong presidential government, a unicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, and the protection of human rights. In November 2011, elections took place under conditions that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) characterised as "not to be conducive for the conduct of free, fair and transparent polls". These elections, which were not monitored by ECOWAS, returned Jammeh for another five-year term. On 22 August 2012 the Gambia announced it would execute all death-row convicts, 42 men and two women, by September 2012. The country had not executed anyone in the previous 30 years. Nine were executed in August 2012. In December 2014 a failed coup attempt by American-Gambian dual-citizens, including US military veterans, was reported in the Gambia. On 11 December 2015 Jammeh declared the Gambia an Islamic republic, in a move he said was designed to distance the country further from its colonial past. The opposition leader criticised the declaration, describing it as unconstitutional. Nevertheless, media outlets in the state began referring to the country as the Islamic Republic of the Gambia. On 25 October 2016 Jammeh signed a decree to initiate the process of withdrawal from the Rome Statute - which established the International Criminal Court (ICC). On 1 December 2016, after 22 years of presidency, Jammeh was defeated by Adama Barrow in the presidential election. After first conceding defeat and announcing he would step down, on 10 December Jammeh declared that he would not accept the results and called for a new election. On 17 January 2017, Jammeh declared a 90-day state of emergency. In response to that, ECOWAS launched an intervention in the Gambia with the objective of restoring democracy in the country. Barrow took his oath of office in exile in neighbouring Senegal. On 20 January 2017 Barrow announced that Jammeh had agreed to step down and would leave the country. On the same day the chief of the Gambian Military, Ousman Badjie, pledged his allegiance to Barrow. On 13 February 2017 Barrow revoked Jammeh's plan to withdraw from the ICC. Barrow promised to return the Gambia to its membership of the Commonwealth as a Commonwealth republic and on 14 February 2017, The

Gambia began the process of returning to its membership of the Commonwealth, formally presenting its application to re-join to Secretary-General Patricia Scotland on 22 January 2018. === Foreign relations === The Gambia followed a formal policy of non-alignment throughout most of former President Jawara's tenure. It maintained close relations with the United Kingdom, Senegal, and other African countries. The July 1994 coup strained the Gambia's relationship with Western powers, particularly the United States, which until 2002 suspended most nonhumanitarian assistance in accordance with Section 508 of the Foreign Assistance Act. After 1995 President Jammeh established diplomatic relations with several additional countries, including Libya (suspended in 2010), and Cuba. The People's Republic of China cut ties with the Gambia in 1995 - after the latter established diplomatic links with Taiwan - and re-established them in 2016. The Gambia plays an active role in international affairs, especially West African and Islamic affairs, although its representation abroad is limited. As a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Gambia has played an active role in that organisation's efforts to resolve the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone and contributed troops to the community's ceasefire monitoring group (ECOMOG) in 1990 and (ECOMIL) in 2003. The Gambia has also sought to mediate disputes in nearby Guinea-Bissau and the neighbouring Casamance region of Senegal. The government of the Gambia believes Senegal was complicit in the March 2006 failed coup attempt. This has put increasing strains on relations between the Gambia and its neighbour. The subsequent worsening of the human rights situation has placed increasing strains on US–Gambian relations. The Gambia withdrew from the Commonwealth of Nations on 3 October 2013, with the government stating it had "decided that the Gambia will never be a member of any neo-colonial institution and will never be a party to any institution that represents an extension of colonialism". Under the new President, The Gambia has begun the process of returning to its status as a Commonwealth republic with the support of the British Government, formally presenting its application to re-join the Commonwealth of Nations to Secretary-General Patricia Scotland on 22 January 2018. The Gambia returned to its status as a Commonwealth republic on 8 February 2018. ===== List of International Organization Memberships ===== Commonwealth of Nations Organization of Islamic Cooperation United Nations African Union === Military === The Gambian Armed Forces consist of the Gambian National Army, Republican Guards comprising a well-trained and equipped Presidential Guards and the Special Forces, and the Navy, all under the authority of the Ministry of Defence (a ministerial portfolio held by Jammeh). Prior to the 1994 coup, the Gambian Armed Forces received technical assistance and training from the United States, United Kingdom, People's Republic of China, Nigeria, and Turkey. With the withdrawal of most of this aid, the Army has received renewed assistance from Turkey, Pakistan and others. A number of junior Gambian Army officers are regularly trained at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and sergeants from the Royal Gibraltar Regiment were observed training Gambian troops in Bakau in November 2010. The Gambia allowed its military training arrangement with Libya to expire in 2002. Members of the Gambian military participated in ECOMOG, the West African force deployed during the Liberian Civil War beginning in 1990. Gambian forces have subsequently participated in several other peacekeeping operations, including Bosnia, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, and East Timor. The Gambia contributed 150 troops to Liberia in 2003 as part of the ECOMIL contingent. In 2004, the Gambia contributed a 196-man contingent to the African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Responsibilities for internal security and law enforcement rest with the Gambian police under the Inspector General of Police and the Secretary of State for the Interior. Alex Bellamy and Paul Williams classify the Gambia as a Tier 2 peacekeeping contributor, and the NYU Center on International Cooperation describes the Gambia as a regional leader in peacekeeping. === Administrative divisions === The Gambia is divided into eight local government areas, including the national capital, Banjul, which is classified as a city. The Divisions of the Gambia were created by the Independent Electoral Commission in accordance to Article 192 of the National Constitution. The local government areas are further subdivided (2013) into 43 districts. Of these, Kanifing and Kombo Saint Mary (which shares Brikama as a capital with the Brikama Local Government Area) are effectively part of the Greater Banjul area. === Human rights === Homosexual acts are illegal in Gambia, and punishable with life imprisonment. == Economy == The Gambia has a liberal, market-based economy characterised by traditional subsistence agriculture, a historic reliance on groundnuts (peanuts) for export earnings, a re-export trade built up around its ocean port, low import duties, minimal administrative procedures, a fluctuating exchange rate with no exchange controls, and a significant tourism industry. The World Bank pegged Gambian GDP for 2011 at US\$898M; the International Monetary Fund put it at US\$977M for 2011. From 2006 to 2012, the Gambian economy grew annually at a pace of 5–6% of GDP. Agriculture accounts for roughly 30% of

gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about 70% of the labour force. Within agriculture, peanut production accounts for 6.9% of GDP, other crops 8.3%, livestock 5.3%, fishing 1.8%, and forestry 0.5%. Industry accounts for about 8% of GDP and services around 58%. The limited amount of manufacturing is primarily agricultural-based (e.g., peanut processing, bakeries, a brewery, and a tannery). Other manufacturing activities include soap, soft drinks, and clothing. Previously, the United Kingdom and other EU countries constituted the major Gambian domestic export markets. However, in recent years Senegal, the United States, and Japan have become significant trade partners of the Gambia. In Africa, Senegal represented the biggest trade partner of the Gambia in 2007, which is a defining contrast to previous years that had Guinea-Bissau and Ghana as equally important trade partners. Globally, Denmark, the United States, and China have become important source countries for Gambian imports. The UK, Germany, Ivory Coast, and the Netherlands also provide a fair share of Gambian imports. The Gambian trade deficit for 2007 was \$331 million. In May 2009, 12 commercial banks existed in the Gambia, including one Islamic bank. The oldest of these, Standard Chartered Bank, dates its presence back to the entry in 1894 of what shortly thereafter became Bank of British West Africa. In 2005, the Swiss-based banking group International Commercial Bank established a subsidiary and now has four branches in the country. In 2007, Nigeria's Access Bank established a subsidiary that now has four branches in the country, in addition to its head office; the bank has pledged to open four more. In May 2009, the Lebanese Canadian Bank opened a subsidiary called Prime Bank. == Society == The urbanisation rate in 2011 was 57.3%. Provisional figures from the 2003 census show that the gap between the urban and rural populations is narrowing as more areas are declared urban. While urban migration, development projects, and modernisation are bringing more Gambians into contact with Western habits and values, indigenous forms of dress and celebration and the traditional emphasis on the extended family remain integral parts of everyday life. The UNDP's Human Development Report for 2010 ranks the Gambia 151st out of 169 countries on its Human Development Index, putting it in the 'Low Human Development' category. This index compares life expectancy, years of schooling, gross national income (GNI) per capita and some other factors. The total fertility rate (TFR) was estimated at 3.98 children/woman in 2013. === Ethnic groups === A variety of ethnic groups live in the Gambia, each preserving its own language and traditions. The Mandinka ethnicity is the largest, followed by the Fula, Wolof, Jola/Karoninka, Serahule, Serers, Manjago, Bambara, Aku Marabou and others. The Krio people, locally known as Akus, constitute one of the smallest ethnic minorities in the Gambia. They are descendants of the Sierra Leone Creole people and have been traditionally concentrated in the capital. The roughly 3,500 non-African residents include Europeans and families of Lebanese origin (0.23% of the total population). Most of the European minority is British, although many of the British left after independence. === Languages === English is the official language of the Gambia. Other languages are Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Serer, Krio, Jola and other indigenous vernaculars. Owing to the country's geographical setting, knowledge of French (an official language in much of West Africa) is relatively widespread. === Education === The constitution mandates free and compulsory primary education in the Gambia. Lack of resources and educational infrastructure has made implementation of this difficult. In 1995, the gross primary enrolment rate was 77.1% and the net primary enrolment rate was 64.7%. School fees long prevented many children from attending school, but in February 1998, President Jammeh ordered the termination of fees for the first six years of schooling. Girls make up about 52% of primary school students. The figure may be lower for girls in rural areas, where cultural factors and poverty prevent parents from sending girls to school. Approximately 20% of school-age children attend Quranic schools. === Health === Public expenditure was at 1.8% of the GDP in 2004, whereas private expenditure was at 5.0%. There were 11 physicians per 100,000 persons in the early 2000s. Life expectancy at birth was at 59.9 for females in 2005 and for males at 57.7. According to the World Health Organization in 2005, an estimated 78.3% of Gambian girls and women have suffered female genital mutilation. The 2010 maternal mortality rate per 100,000 births for Gambia is 400. This is compared with 281.3 in 2008 and 628.5 in 1990. The under-5 mortality rate, per 1,000 births, is 106 and the neonatal mortality, as a percentage of under-5 mortality, is 31. In Gambia, the number of midwives per 1,000 live births is five and the lifetime risk of death for pregnant women is one in 49. In October 2012, it was reported that the Gambia had made significant improvements in polio, measles immunisation, and the PCV-7 vaccine. The Gambia was certified as polio-free in 2004. "The Gambia EPI program is one of the best in the World Health Organization African Region," Thomas Sukwa, a representative of the WHO, said, according to the Foroyaa newspaper. "It is indeed gratifying to note that the government of the Gambia remains committed to the global polio eradication initiative." According to Vaccine News Daily: The

Gambia is tied for third place in Africa for measles immunisation among one-year-old children. The Gambia is tied for fourth place in the world for the DTP3 immunisation for one-year-old children. The Gambia is ranked second in Africa for "feverish children under the age of five who received antimalarial treatment, according to Trading Economics." A group called Power Up Gambia operates in the Gambia to provide solar power technology to health care facilities, ensuring greater access to electricity. Recently, Riders for Health, an international aid group focused on sub-Saharan countries in Africa, was noted for providing enough health-care vehicles for the entire country. Riders for Health manage and maintain vehicles for the government. The initiative addresses a major barrier to universal health care—transport—and allows health workers to visit three times as many villages every week. ===

**Religion** === Article 25 of the constitution protects the rights of citizens to practice any religion that they choose. In December 2015, Reuters reported that the Gambia was declared to be an Islamic state by the country's president, Yahya Jammeh. Islam is practised by 95% of the country's population. The majority of the Muslims in the Gambia adhere to Sunni laws and traditions, while large concentrations follow the Ahmadiyya tradition. Virtually all commercial life in the Gambia comes to a standstill during major Muslim holidays, including Eid al-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr. Most Muslims in the Gambia follow the Maliki school of jurisprudence. Also, a Shiite Muslim community exists in the Gambia, mainly from Lebanese and other Arab immigrants to the region. The Christian community represents about 4% of the population. Residing in the western and the southern parts of the Gambia, most of the Christian community identifies themselves as Roman Catholic. However, smaller Christian groups are present, such as Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and small evangelical denominations. It is unclear to what extent indigenous beliefs, such as the Serer religion, continue to be practiced. Serer religion encompasses cosmology and a belief in a supreme deity called Roog. Some of its religious festivals include the Xoy, Mbossseh, and Randou Rande. Each year, adherents to Serer religion make the annual pilgrimage to Sine in Senegal for the Xoy divination ceremony. Serer religion also has a rather significant imprint on Senegambian Muslim society in that all Senegambian Muslim festivals such as "Tobaski", "Gamo", "Koriteh" and "Weri Kor" are loanwords from the Serer religion as they were ancient Serer festivals. Like the Serers, the Jola people also have their own religious customs. One of the major religious ceremonies of the Jolas is the Boukout. Due to immigration from South Asia, Buddhists, Hindus and followers of the Bahá'í Faith are present. ==

**Culture** == Although the Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa, its culture is the product of very diverse influences. The national borders outline a narrow strip on either side of the River Gambia, a body of water that has played a vital part in the nation's destiny and is known locally simply as "the River". Without natural barriers, the Gambia has become home to most of the ethnic groups that are present throughout western Africa, especially those in Senegal. Europeans also figure prominently in Gambian history because the River Gambia is navigable deep into the continent, a geographic feature that made this area one of the most profitable sites for the slave trade from the 15th through the 17th centuries. (It also made it strategic to the halt of this trade once it was outlawed in the 19th century.) Some of this history was popularised in the Alex Haley book and TV series *Roots* which was set in the Gambia. ===

**Music** === The music of the Gambia is closely linked musically with that of its neighbour, Senegal, which surrounds its inland frontiers completely. It fuses popular Western music and dance, with sabar, the traditional drumming and dance music of the Wolof and Serer people. ===

**Cuisine** === The cuisine of the Gambia includes peanuts, rice, fish, meat, onions, tomatoes, cassava, chili peppers and oysters from the River Gambia that are harvested by women. In particular, yassa and domoda curries are popular with locals and tourists. ===

**Media** === Critics have accused the government of restricting free speech. A law passed in 2002 created a commission with the power to issue licenses and imprison journalists; in 2004, additional legislation allowed prison sentences for libel and slander and cancelled all print and broadcasting licenses, forcing media groups to re-register at five times the original cost. Three Gambian journalists have been arrested since the coup attempt. It has been suggested that they were imprisoned for criticising the government's economic policy, or for stating that a former interior minister and security chief was among the plotters. Newspaper editor Deyda Hydara was shot to death under unexplained circumstances, days after the 2004 legislation took effect. Licensing fees are high for newspapers and radio stations, and the only nationwide stations are tightly controlled by the government. Reporters Without Borders has accused "President Yahya Jammeh's police state" of using murder, arson, unlawful arrest and death threats against journalists. In December 2010 Musa Saidykhan, former editor of *The Independent* newspaper, was awarded US\$200,000 by the ECOWAS Court in Abuja, Nigeria. The court found the Government of the Gambia guilty of torture while he was detained without trial at the National Intelligence Agency. Apparently he was suspected of

knowing about the 2006 failed coup. === Sports === As in neighbouring Senegal, the national and most popular sport in Gambia is wrestling. Association football and basketball are also popular. Football in the Gambia is administered by the Gambia Football Association, who are affiliated to both FIFA and CAF. The GFA runs league football in the Gambia, including top division GFA League First Division, as well as the Gambia national football team. Nicknamed "The Scorpions", the national side have never qualified for either the FIFA World Cup or the Africa Cup of Nations finals at senior levels. They play at Independence Stadium. The Gambia won two CAF U-17 championships one in 2005 when the country hosted, and 2009 in Algeria automatically qualifying for FIFA U-17 World Cup in Peru (2005) and Nigeria (2009) respectively. The U-20 also qualified for FIFA U-20 2007 in Canada. The female U-17 also competed in FIFA U-17 World Cup 2012 in Azerbaijan. == See also == Outline of the Gambia Index of Gambia-related articles Communications in the Gambia Transport in the Gambia Lists List of birds of the Gambia Public holidays in the Gambia == Notes == == References == == External links == Government State House and Office of the President General information Gambia Guide – Comprehensive information Gambia Daily news – Daily news from the Gambia through various media sources The Gambia – A comprehensive website about the Gambia "The Gambia". The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. The Gambia from UCB Libraries GovPubs The Gambia at Curlie (based on DMOZ) The Gambia from the BBC News Wikimedia Atlas of The Gambia Key Development Forecasts for the Gambia from International Futures Tourism Visit the Gambia – The official website of the Gambia Tourism Board. Birdwatching in the Gambia – Website about Birdwatching in the Gambia including photo galleries of Gambian birds Trade Gambia 2011 Trade Summary Statistics