

Country Focus Report

The Gambia 2026



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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES



Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms



Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework



Accessible and Sustainable Resources



Open and Responsive State



Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society



Access to a Secure Digital Environment

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Reporting period covered: June 2025 – May 2026

Between June 2025 and May 2026, The Gambia witnessed some level of [economic progress](#), while its [democratic reforms stalled](#). A key issue is that President [Barrow announced](#) he would seek a third term in the December 2026 elections. These elections have been made possible because of the [National Assembly's repeated rejection](#) of a new constitution on 7 July 2025. The debate surrounding the bill was highly polarised, with disagreements over key provisions, including presidential term limits and the balance of executive powers. As a result, The Gambia continues to be governed by the 1997 Constitution, which does not impose presidential term limits and leaves several governance reforms proposed under the draft constitution unimplemented.

The defining scandal of the reporting period was the sale of former dictator [Yahya Jammeh's forfeited assets](#). A [report](#) alleging insiders were reselling the assets far below value sparked the youth movement Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA) and a [Banjul protest](#) that ended in nearly 30 arrests. The National Assembly did eventually order a serious investigation, producing a critical [report](#) on governance failures, but the original protesters are still on trial. When GALA marked its own anniversary a year later in May 2026, [police arrested](#) 15 more members despite their having a valid permit. Meanwhile, a new criminal law revived a "[false publication](#)" offence from the Jammeh era, a [cybercrime bill](#) raised similar surveillance concerns. The government [recently](#) moved to license journalists in April 2026 and even prominent social media users, prompting press groups to refuse to even join the consultation. Police also gained broader warrantless-arrest powers under a new [Criminal Procedure Act](#). On top of this, the Auditor General was [abruptly removed](#) just three years into a nine-year post after refusing a sideways demotion, fuelling allegations of preferential treatment for those close to power.

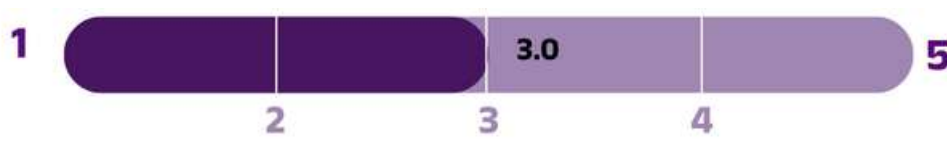
Economically, the outlook is a little more positive: [growth hit](#) an estimated 5.9% in 2025, debt-to-GDP fell, inflation dropped into single digits, and extreme poverty edged down. However, this progress has occurred alongside a political system that keeps failing to lock in real accountability as the country heads into a contested election in December 2026 with a fragmented opposition and a president whose own third-term bid triggered much of this scrutiny in the first place.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: ¹



Respect for fundamental freedoms in The Gambia during the assessment period remained generally stable, with constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, association, and assembly remaining in place. Civil society organisations (CSOs), journalists, and citizens operated within a dynamic ecosystem, and engaged in public dialogue across media platforms including traditional online media. However, [Freedom House](#) continues to classify the country as “Partly Free”, noting that while civic space has expanded since the end of authoritarian rule, legal constraints and selective enforcement practices continue to limit the full exercise of these freedoms.

Overall, Principle 1 is partially enabling: constitutional guarantees for freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression continued to provide an important foundation for civic space during the assessment period. However, selective enforcement of laws, administrative constraints, and increasing pressure surrounding politically sensitive advocacy are evidence that these freedoms remain unevenly realised in practice rather than fully protected.

1.1 | Freedom of Association

Freedom of association remained broadly intact from mid-2025 to mid-2026, with CSOs able to form and operate without systematic obstacles. That openness was clearly put to the test during GALA’s own registration experience. In July 2025, the GALA movement alleged that its

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2025.

application was [obstructed](#) because its preferred name referenced “Gambia” directly. This claim prompted public debate on whether the registration rules were being applied consistently in GALA’s case, given the organisation’s origins in anti-corruption protests.

More structurally, the lack of decentralisation outside Banjul and Kanifing continued to function as a quiet barrier to associational life, according to the expert panel: youth organisations such as Galleh Manda Youth Development Association, Sare Kanimang Youth Development Association, and Manneh Kunda Youth Association each faced practical difficulties registering because of the cost and logistics involved in travelling to the capital. New advocacy groups nonetheless continued to emerge throughout the year, particularly around the themes of anti-corruption, youth, and governance, suggesting that associational life remains active even where formal recognition is uneven.

Overall, freedom of association in The Gambia has remained broadly protected in law and CSOs have continued to form and operate without systematic political restrictions. However, inconsistent administrative practices, geographic centralisation of registration services, and practical barriers affecting grassroots organisations continue to limit equal access to freedom of association across the country.

1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The [Public Order Act](#) continued to be the legal framework governing protests and public gatherings in 2025 and 2026, requiring notice to the police under Section 5.

The year’s defining test of the right to peaceful assembly was GALA’s May 2025 mobilisation against the sale of Jammeh-era assets, widely regarded as one of the largest youth-led protests in recent Gambian history. The authorities did not authorise the protest, and the demonstration ended with the arrest of nearly 30 protesters, many of whom continued to face legal proceedings during the reporting period. For instance, [CIVICUS recorded](#) close to 70 incidents of harassment or arrest against journalists and civic actors between January and October 2025 alone, the majority of which were attributed to state actors: the pattern over the reporting period was therefore one of generally tolerated assembly punctuated by selective, more restrictive responses to the protests that most directly challenged state accountability.

Overall, demonstrations generally proceeded without blanket prohibitions, but with selective arrests of protesters and journalists coupled with inconsistent policing of demonstrations relating to governance and accountability. This indicates that the right to peaceful assembly is not exercised consistently in practice.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression during the assessment period showed the same mixed pattern as the previous sub-principles that also fall under respect and protection of fundamental freedoms.

The National Assembly’s passage of the 2025 [Criminal Offences Act](#) in March replaced two colonial-era laws but preserved custodial penalties of up to one year for false publication and six months for insulting the president or other public officers. In response, the [Gambia Press Union Warned](#) these provisions could be used against journalists and digital media workers. Investigative outlets such as *The Republic*, *Foroyaa*, Kerr Fatou, and Fatu Network continued to publish without systematic threats of closure, including [The Republic’s](#) exposé titled ‘*The assets of Gambia’s former dictator go for a song*’ on the Jammeh asset sales, which itself became a catalyst for parliamentary action. However, journalists reported increased informal pressure around coverage of protest and accountability stories. [Flex Dan](#), a journalist from

Askanwi, and [Bakary Tamba](#), a journalist from Gambia Talent Promotion, were detained in September 2025 while covering or participating in GALA-organised demonstrations: the first over high internet data tariffs and the second at the National Audit Office due to unconstitutional and forceful removal of the Auditor General.

Overall, the media landscape remained diverse and independent, with journalists and CSOs continuing to investigate and debate matters of public interest. However, the retention of criminal offences relating to false publication and insulting public officials, together with reports of informal pressure on journalists covering politically sensitive issues, continued to create legal uncertainty and had a chilling effect on critical expression.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



The legal and regulatory framework is partially enabling. During the assessment period, CSOs continued to register under the dual structure established under the [NGO Decree No. 81 of 1996](#), involving both the Ministry of Justice and the NGO Affairs Agency. The legal and regulatory environment remained open and accessible overall, with no evidence of widespread or systematic denial of registration on political grounds. Modest improvement on the protection-from-interference dimension reflected the absence of any prominent case of arbitrary CSO closure during the year. However, administrative complexity, compliance burdens, and informal forms of state pressure continued to constrain the practical operating environment, particularly for smaller organisations and those engaged in governance and accountability advocacy.

2.1 | Registration

Registration remained generally accessible in 2025, without the kind of arbitrary or systematic denial that would mark a more restrictive environment.

The clearest exception was GALA's experience, which raised questions about the consistency and transparency of administrative discretion in the registration process. Although this appears to have been an isolated case rather than a systemic pattern, such instances can have broader implications for the enabling environment by creating uncertainty among emerging organisations about whether registration decisions will be applied consistently and predictably. This uncertainty may discourage some civic groups from formalising their operations or engaging in advocacy on politically sensitive issues.

According to experts engaged in the assessment, geographic centralisation continued to function as a quieter barrier previously mentioned under freedom of association.

The dual structure linking the Ministry of Justice and the NGO Affairs Agency continued to create duplication and generate delays. Organisations seeking to operate as registered NGOs are required to interact with both the Ministry of Justice and the NGO Affairs Agency, each serving a different legal purpose. Registration with the Ministry of Justice, typically through the [Registrar of Companies](#), establishes an organisation as a legal entity with legal personality, enabling it to enter into contracts, own property, and open bank accounts. To be formally recognised as an NGO and legally undertake NGO activities, organisations must then also register separately with the NGO Affairs Agency under the [NGO Affairs Agency Act](#). This second registration requires organisations to submit additional documentation, pay registration and annual renewal fees, undergo mandatory external audits, and comply with annual reporting and monitoring requirements.

As a result, many organisations are required to submit similar governance, financial, and programme information to more than one government institution, creating duplication, increasing compliance costs, and delaying registration and project implementation. This is a particularly large burden for smaller community-based organisations with limited administrative and financial capacity. In addition, the cost of attaining formal NGO status remained steep, with D10,000-D15,000 (US\$135-US\$200) in registration fees, a D5,000 (US\$70) annual registration fee, and mandatory external audits ranging from D40,000 to D350,000 (US\$540-US\$4730). Set against a [gross national income](#) per capita of roughly US\$750-US\$800, these costs can equal or exceed an average citizen's annual income, placing NGO status out of reach for many community-based organisations.

Overall, registration in The Gambia is partially enabling, being generally open and accessible, with no evidence of widespread political denial of legal status. However, the dual registration system, significant financial costs, geographic centralisation, and administrative duplication continued to create disproportionate barriers for smaller and community-based organisations seeking formal registration.

2.2 | Operational Environment

CSOs registered with the NGO Affairs Agency continued during the assessment period to operate under Protocols of Accord required under the [NGO Decree No. 81](#). These protocols are signed between each registered NGO and the NGO Affairs Agency on behalf of the government and define the terms governing the relationship between the government and NGOs. In practice, organisations also coordinate with relevant line ministries according to their sector of work, particularly when implementing government or donor-supported programmes: making no difference between domestic and foreign-funded programmes.

Annual reporting obligations – including audited financial statements submitted to both the NGO Affairs Agency and, in some cases, the Ministry of Justice – remained resource-intensive, particularly given mandatory external audit costs. For smaller and community-based organisations with limited human and financial resources, these requirements divert scarce funds and staff time away from programme implementation and service delivery. In some cases, organisations reported postponing planned activities, relying on volunteers, or reducing operational costs to meet statutory compliance requirements. Others increasingly depended on project-specific donor funding to cover audit and reporting expenses or partnered with larger umbrella organisations for technical support in meeting compliance obligations.

Civic actors also reported difficulties securing venues for public events and the presence of security personnel at gatherings addressing governance and accountability themes during the year, consistent with a broader climate of caution around sensitive programming.

According to the expert panel, many CSOs strengthened coordination with local authorities before organising events, opted for smaller stakeholder dialogues rather than large public forums, collaborated with established networks to convene joint events, or increasingly used radio programmes, community outreach, and digital platforms to disseminate information and engage citizens where appropriate. These adaptations enabled organisations to continue their work, although they often reduced the reach, spontaneity, and flexibility of civic engagement activities.

Overall, this dimension is partially enabling. CSOs generally continued to operate without systematic restrictions on their activities. Nevertheless, cumulative compliance obligations, mandatory reporting and audit requirements, and occasional administrative constraints on civic activities increased operational costs and reduced organisational flexibility, particularly for smaller organisations with limited institutional capacity.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

The legal framework in The Gambia continues to provide a reasonable basis for protecting (CSOs) against arbitrary dissolution. Section 25 of the 1997 Constitution guarantees freedom of association, while the [NGO Decree No 81](#) of 1996 and [the 2013 Companies Act](#) continued to provide a credible legal basis for protecting CSOs against arbitrary dissolution, and no prominent cases of arbitrary closure were recorded during the reporting period.

In principle, the framework includes procedural and judicial safeguards against arbitrary administrative action. Decisions relating to suspension or deregistration by regulatory authorities may be challenged through administrative review processes and, ultimately, by appeal to the ordinary courts of law. CSOs may also seek redress through the Ministry of Justice or judicial review procedures where they believe regulatory decisions are unlawful or disproportionate. These mechanisms are intended to provide checks against potential abuse of administrative discretion. The framework's main shortcoming remains the breadth of its exceptions: grounds for suspension or deregistration tied to acting "against national interest" remain undefined, and the courts and Ministry of Justice's appeal processes that exist to challenge administrative decisions are often slow and too costly to be practically accessible for grassroots organisations.

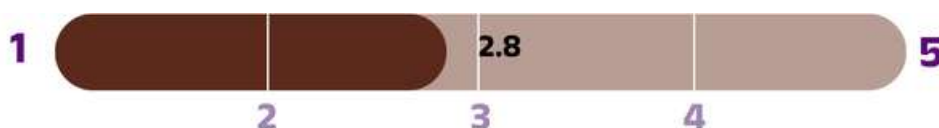
The debate over the [female genital mutilation](#) (FGM) ban provided the clearest illustration of interference operating below the threshold of formal legal action. According to the expert panel, organisations advocating against FGM experienced informal "soft signals" from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare intended to discourage continued engagement. Such pressure leaves no legal trace and triggers no appeal, yet it remains a real constraint on organisations working on socially or politically sensitive issues.

Overall, the legal framework continued to provide meaningful safeguards against arbitrary dissolution of CSOs, and no prominent cases of politically motivated deregistration or closure were recorded during the reporting period. While informal pressure on organisations working on politically or socially sensitive issues persists, these practices remained the exception rather than the norm and did not fundamentally undermine the legal protection afforded to CSOs.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



The accessibility and sustainability of resources continue to be among the most significant constraints on the enabling environment for civil society in The Gambia. CSOs remain heavily dependent on external donor funding, leaving many organisations vulnerable to shifts in international development priorities and limiting their long-term financial sustainability and institutional autonomy.

Over the reporting period, one of the most significant developments affecting resource accessibility was the continued suspension of funding from the United States government, which resulted in the suspension or reduction of grants that many Gambian CSOs had relied on. This funding shortfall affected organisations across sectors, disrupting programme implementation, reducing staffing levels, and increasing competition for increasingly limited donor resources. These developments reinforced long-standing concerns about the need to diversify funding sources and strengthen the financial resilience of CSOs.

Overall, access to sustainable resources is partially enabling. While external donor funding continues to sustain an active civil society sector, persistent dependence on international financing, limited domestic resource mobilisation, and weak institutional sustainability continue to constrain the sector's long-term effectiveness and autonomy.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Resource accessibility in 2025 to 2026 continued to rest almost entirely on international development partners, including the European Union (EU), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United States, French, and British embassies, with domestic funding sources remaining minimal and largely informal. The sector absorbed a direct shock during 2025 when the US government's [funding freeze](#) led to the suspension of several CSO programmes and the discontinuation of long-standing grant lines, including US Embassy annual grants and support channelled through USAID, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute. These cuts removed funding streams that organisations such as the National Youth Parliament had come to depend on, and CSOs are still feeling the effect. Capacity-building support, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) [Gender Promotion Initiative](#) (GPI), offered some organisations training in fundraising and

organisational strengthening. But according to the expert panel, beneficiaries considered the duration of these interventions to be too short to produce any long-lasting change.

With no dedicated national database or coordinated platform for disseminating funding opportunities, access to external resources continued to favour organisations with established international networks, experienced proposal writers, and stronger administrative systems capable of meeting donor compliance requirements. This places smaller, community-based, youth-led, women-led and newly established organisations at a structural disadvantage. While these organisations are not formally excluded from funding opportunities, they often lack timely access to information, technical proposal-writing skills, financial management systems and the organisational track record required by many donors. As a result, they are less competitive in securing grants and are more likely to rely on short-term partnerships as sub-grantees or implementers rather than accessing funding directly, limiting their institutional growth and long-term sustainability.

The accessibility of resources is thus partially enabling in The Gambia, as CSOs continue to access substantial support from international development partners. However, overwhelming dependence on external funding, limited domestic philanthropy, and unequal access to funding opportunities constrain the financial sustainability and resilience of the sector.

3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

The effectiveness of civil society programming remained constrained by donor-driven design and compressed implementation timelines. Civil society organisations in The Gambia continue to rely heavily on externally funded, project-based grants, with donors generally defining broad [funding priorities](#), eligibility requirements, implementation periods, and reporting obligations. While these arrangements provide important resources for CSO activities, experts noted that they can limit organisations' flexibility to set priorities based on community-identified needs and to invest in longer-term institutional development. Short funding cycles and compressed implementation timelines can also make it difficult for organisations to sustain engagement with communities beyond the immediate project period or achieve deeper institutional and behavioural change.

Within this broader funding model, experts identified direct implementation arrangements used by some UN agencies as one example of a more hierarchical funding structure.

According to the expert panel, where UN agencies used a direct implementation modality — thereby retaining control over programme design and financial management — CSOs were engaged primarily as implementing partners rather than co-designers. The experts working in governance, gender, and transitional justice reported that this limited their institutional development even where projects were delivered on schedule. An expert on transitional justice added that short project cycles and unrealistic timelines limit the depth of engagement achievable with communities within a single funding period, with many initiatives concluding before meaningful institutional or behavioural change can take hold.

Hence, the donor-CSO relationship remained predominantly hierarchical, with limited input from recipient organisations into priorities, timelines, or evaluation criteria. Experts consistently reported that many CSOs adjusted their programming to align with donor-defined thematic priorities and funding windows to remain eligible for financial support. While this enabled organisations to access essential resources, it often reduced their flexibility when responding to community-identified needs and pursue locally determined priorities, particularly where these fell outside donor funding priorities.

The effectiveness of resources is thus partially enabling in The Gambia: donor support continues to enable the delivery of important civic programmes, but donor-driven priorities,

direct implementation modalities, and short project cycles reduce local ownership, institutional development, and the long-term effectiveness of civil society interventions.

3.3 | Sustainability of Resources

Structural overdependence on foreign funding left the civil society sector exposed to exactly the kind of shock it experienced from January 2025, when the shift in US funding priorities forced several organisations to scale back their activity. Media commentary throughout the year – noted by media personalities and experts – repeatedly observed that high-profile, donor-supported campaigns lost public visibility almost as soon as their funding cycles ended, reflecting the absence of any sustainable planning built into project design. No domestic funding architecture comparable to community foundations or diaspora-giving structures exists to cushion this dependency. Experts consistently expressed their concern over shrinking donor priorities and intensifying competition for a diminishing pool of grants, with staffing levels, advocacy activity, and community outreach widely acknowledged to expand and contract in step with whichever grants happened to be active at a given time. This funding model also has significant implications for organisational sustainability.

Employment within many CSOs is predominantly project-based, with staff contracts tied to the duration of donor-funded projects. Consequently, organisations frequently experience staff turnover when projects end or funding gaps emerge, making it difficult to retain experienced personnel, preserve institutional knowledge, and invest in long-term organisational development. Smaller organisations are particularly affected, as they often lack unrestricted funding to retain core staff between projects. This contributes to recurring cycles of recruitment and capacity rebuilding, ultimately reducing institutional resilience and limiting the continuity and effectiveness of civil society programming.

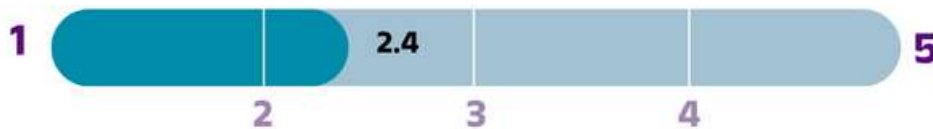
The absence of sustainable domestic funding mechanisms, combined with heavy reliance on project-based external financing, continues to undermine institutional resilience and act as a disabling factor which, by causing funding interruptions, directly affects staffing, organisational continuity, and the long-term sustainability of CSOs.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



The state's relationship with civil society in 2025 continued to combine moderate openness on transparency and participation with limited follow-through on accountability, and is thus overall disabling. Government openness has shown some improvement through stronger legal frameworks, greater opportunities for civic participation, and increased transparency initiatives – with formal consultation mechanisms existing and being used frequently during the reporting period (including in response to GALA's anti-corruption agenda). However, inconsistent implementation, limited responsiveness to civil society input, and uneven accountability mechanisms continue to prevent these reforms from fully translating into open and participatory governance.

4.1 | Transparency

The [Access to Information Act](#) (ATI) of 2021 remains the key legal achievement underpinning transparency. Institutional activity around its implementation – including the Information Commission's public pressure campaign urging greater compliance by public institutions – remained the highlight of the reporting period.

The Access to Information Act establishes a legal right for citizens, journalists, and CSOs to request information held by public bodies, sets statutory timelines for responding to requests (Section 14), and creates an independent appeal mechanism through the Information Commission where requests are denied or ignored. While the act recognises limited exemptions including the protection of personal information (Section 24), commercially confidential information (Section 25), national security (Section 27), international relations (Section 28), the economic interests of the State (Section 29), law enforcement (Section 30), and privileged communications (Section 31) it also requires, through a public interest test (Section 35), that these restrictions may only be applied where the harm caused by disclosure demonstrably outweighs the public interest in releasing the information. Despite this robust legal framework, implementation continues to be constrained by gaps in institutional capacity,

inconsistent compliance by public institutions, and limited awareness of obligations under the act.

In practice, however, the gap between the law and its implementation persisted. The Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice ([EFSCRJ](#)) reported routine delays and non-responses to ATI requests. After information requests went unanswered, the investigative outlet *The Republic* [filed appeals](#) before the Information Commission against six institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of The Gambia, and the Gambia Revenue Authority. As late as November 2025, the Information Commission was still [publicly urging](#) major institutions to designate the Information Officers required under a law that had by then been in force for four years.

A part of the challenge is that enforcement against non-compliance with ATI remains rare. This leaves the legal right to information formally intact but practically dependent on sustained, often public, follow-up. While the Information Commission is legally empowered to investigate complaints, hear appeals, and order public institutions to disclose information, its effectiveness has been constrained by its relatively recent establishment, limited institutional and financial capacity, and weak compliance by many public institutions. Several ministries and agencies have yet to fully operationalise their ATI obligations, including appointing designated Information Officers and strengthening records management systems. Consequently, the legal right to access information remains formally protected, but in practice applicants often rely on repeated follow-up, appeals to the Information Commission, or public advocacy to obtain information.

Overall, this dimension is partially disabling: the Access to Information Act and the Information Commission provide an important legal foundation for government transparency. However, inconsistent implementation, weak institutional compliance, and limited enforcement continue to restrict timely and effective public access to information.

4.2 | Participation

Civil society's participation in governance processes remained visible and relatively frequent during the 2025–2026 reporting period, with CSOs regularly invited to participate in policy consultations, legislative reviews, and national dialogue processes. However, as evidenced below, while opportunities for participation increased, concerns persisted regarding the extent to which civil society inputs influenced final policy outcomes.

In June 2025, the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs held consultations on the development of the National Land Policy ahead of preparation of the Zero Draft. Traditional authorities, CSOs, women's organisations, and local government representatives were [invited](#) to provide technical and community-based recommendations intended to inform the drafting process.

In July 2025, the Ministry of Justice convened a post-Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) stakeholder [forum](#) to update CSOs on the progress made in implementing the government's White Paper and transitional justice commitments. While primarily an information-sharing exercise, the forum also enabled dialogue between government institutions, victims' organisations, and human rights groups on implementation priorities.

In October 2025, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance IDEA Gambia Office – together with national stakeholders – facilitated [consultations](#) on constitutional reform, bringing together CSOs, political parties, youth groups, women's

organisations, and professional associations to discuss constitutional reform proposals. Participants welcomed the opportunity for engagement but questioned the extent to which recommendations would shape the final constitutional reform process.

Similarly, in November 2025, consultations on the [National Gender Policy](#) (2025–2034) brought together women’s organisations, youth representatives, development partners, and government institutions to review the draft policy. Participants called for stronger commitments to ensure that recommendations generated during consultations would be reflected in legislative and policy reforms rather than serving merely as consultative inputs.

A more collaborative model of participation was evident in the transitional justice sector throughout 2025 and 2026, where sustained [engagement](#) between the Reparations Commission, the Alliance of Victim-Led Organisations, and victim groups enabled civil society actors to contribute more substantively to discussions on implementing reparations and improving victim support. This was evidence that more meaningful collaboration is achievable where government institutions establish sustained partnerships rather than one-off consultation exercises.

By contrast, concerns regarding the quality of participation became particularly evident during consultations on proposed media regulation reforms. Between March and April 2026, the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services ([MoIMBS](#)) and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority ([PURA](#)) initiated consultations on the proposed National Press Accreditation Policy, Broadcasting and Online Content Regulations, and Journalist Registration [Guidelines 2026](#). Media organisations and civil society groups argued that the consultations were conducted after key policy positions had already been determined and expressed concern that their recommendations were unlikely to influence the final framework. These concerns culminated in a joint resolution adopted on 8 April 2026, through which the Gambia Press Union ([GPU](#)), the Media Council of The Gambia ([MCG](#)), and numerous CSOs withdrew from the consultation process, [arguing](#) that the proposed regulations would replace the country’s independent self-regulatory framework with a state-controlled licensing and accreditation system administered through PURA. This episode reinforced broader concerns that, despite increasingly frequent consultation processes, opportunities for participation do not always translate into meaningful influence over public policy decisions.

Overall, civil society participation is partially enabling, as CSOs continue to participate actively in policy dialogue, legislative consultations, and governance processes. Nevertheless, many consultation processes remain largely advisory, with limited evidence that civil society recommendations consistently influence final policy decisions.

4.3 | Accountability

Government responsiveness to civil society input in The Gambia from mid-2025 to mid-2026 remained mixed. Government institutions continued to engage CSOs through consultations on governance and public policy issues, but evidence that civil society recommendations consistently influenced final decisions or were accompanied by structured feedback remained limited.

The Ministry of Justice continued to engage CSOs through the [post-TRRC platform](#), providing updates on progress in implementing the recommendations of the TRRC and creating opportunities for civil society to raise concerns and make recommendations on implementation priorities.

Similarly, the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs [consulted CSOs](#) and other stakeholders in mid-2025 during the development of the National Land Policy. Constitutional reform [consultations](#) facilitated by International IDEA enabled CSOs to contribute to discussions on constitutional reform. CSOs also participated in consultations on the draft National Gender Policy (2025–2034), where government institutions sought stakeholder input before finalising the policy.

These consultation processes demonstrate that the government continues to recognise civil society as an important stakeholder in policymaking. However, public consultation did not consistently translate into meaningful responsiveness. Panel experts reported that while opportunities to provide input were generally available, there were few formal mechanisms through which the government communicated whether recommendations had been accepted, modified, or rejected, or explained the rationale behind final policy decisions. As a result, many stakeholders perceived these exercises to be performative and informative rather than as genuinely able to influence decisions.

The government's response to concerns regarding the sale of former President Yahya [Jammeh's assets](#) further illustrates this mixed pattern. Following investigative reporting by [The Republic](#) in April 2025 and sustained advocacy and public demonstrations organised by Gambians Against Looted Assets ([GALA](#)), the government published the list of asset buyers, and the National Assembly established a Special [Select Committee](#) to investigate the matter. These actions reflected a degree of institutional responsiveness to sustained public and civil society pressure. Nevertheless, CSOs continued to express concerns over the pace of follow-up actions and the limited communication regarding implementation of the Committee's recommendations and broader accountability measures.

Overall, while government institutions continued to create spaces for dialogue and consultation during the reporting period, responsiveness remained uneven. Opportunities for CSOs to participate in policymaking have expanded since the democratic transition, but mechanisms to demonstrate how civil society input influences government decisions remain underdeveloped, undermining confidence in the effectiveness of participatory governance.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public perception of civil society remained strong and continued to improve in 2025, even as political discourses around governance-focused organisations grew more polarised. The combination of high public trust and increasingly adversarial official rhetoric toward accountability-focused CSOs defined this principle's trajectory over the year and its assessment as partially enabling.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

Between June 2025 and May 2026, public discourses on civil society continued to draw on a genuinely active media ecosystem. For instance, West Coast Radio's [Coffee Time](#) with Peter Gomez, [Paradise TV](#) and Paradise FM's Kinkiliba and Cafe Arjana programmes, [Kerr Fatou's](#) Grand Bantaba, and [The Fatu Network's](#) online discussions offered regular, well-attended platforms where CSOs, politicians, and citizens debated governance and development issues in the open.

However, according to the expert panel, this openness coexisted with discourses that grew more adversarial over the course of the year, particularly towards organisations engaged in governance and accountability work. In January 2026, [public remarks](#) by the Minister of Information targeting civil society figures such as Madi Jobarteh reflected a recurring pattern in which civic actors are framed as politically oppositional whenever their positions on constitutional reform or budget transparency diverge from government messaging. Equally, government officials dismissed objections raised by media organisations and civil society during the 2026 April consultations on proposed regulations requiring the registration of journalists, online media, and influential social media users. Following a boycott of the validation workshop by CSOs and media groups, the Minister of Information publicly [downplayed their concerns](#), illustrating an increasingly adversarial relationship between the government and governance-oriented civil society.

Furthermore, organisations advocating to maintain the ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) were subjected to [criticism](#) from some religious leaders, traditional authorities, and segments of the public, who portrayed them as promoting foreign values or undermining cultural and religious traditions. This illustrates that public discourse surrounding civil society varies depending on the issue being advocated. The net effect over the past 12 months was a civic discourse that remained genuinely open as a platform but increasingly polarised in tone.

Overall, this dimension remains partially enabling. The Gambia continues to benefit from a vibrant and pluralistic public discourse in which CSOs regularly engage through traditional and digital media. However, increasingly polarised political rhetoric towards governance and accountability-focused organisations, particularly on politically sensitive issues, has weakened the quality of constructive dialogue and reduced the space for collaborative engagement.

5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public trust in civil society remained strong during the reporting period. [Afrobarometer's Round 10](#) data in January 2025 found that roughly 67% of respondents trust NGOs and CSOs, while 23% associate them with corruption, a confidence level that reflects the sector's sustained, close engagement with communities, particularly in rural areas, as a credible intermediary between citizens and the state.

That trust, however, was not uniform across every form of civic engagement. Activists campaigning to preserve the FGM ban continued to face [social backlash](#) despite their broad public legitimacy, and the 2025 to 2026 [CSO-CBO-Media](#) Governance Forum expressed a recurring concern about the divide between urban-based NGOs and grassroots community-based organisations, with rural participants describing a sense of exclusion from national advocacy agendas according to panel experts.

Perceptions of civil society can thus be characterised as enabling, benefiting from high levels of trust, especially in rural areas. Only organisations working on sensitive societal topics face negative perceptions, and only among some segments of society.

5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion

Structural barriers to inclusive civic and political participation persisted through mid-2025 to mid-2026. Women hold only [9% of parliamentary](#) seats and [persons with disabilities](#) remain effectively absent from national decision-making structures. Panel experts observed that campaign activities routinely failed to provide accommodations such as sign language interpretation, limiting engagement even where formal exclusion was not intended.

The Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination, while the [Persons with Disabilities Act](#) (2021) establishes legal protections for accessibility and participation in public and political life. In addition, the National Gender Policy provides a framework for improving women's participation in governance and decision-making. However, these instruments have not yet translated into substantive representation or inclusive practice in political life.

CSOs made targeted efforts to narrow these gaps: the Women Journalists' Association of The Gambia ([WoJAG](#)) advanced women's leadership and media representation initiatives, and an increasing share of donor-funded programming built in minimum inclusion requirements as a condition of support. These efforts, while genuine, remained fragmented relative to the scale of the underlying disparities, and have not translated into a durable institutional change in parliamentary composition or decision-making structures.

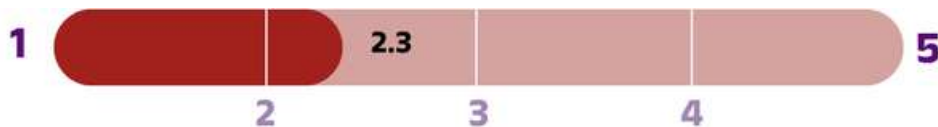
Civic equality and inclusion can thus be characterised as partially enabling: a supportive legal framework exists on paper, but structural barriers keep women and persons with disabilities largely absent from parliamentary and decision-making structures, and civil society efforts to close these gaps, while genuine, remain too fragmented to bring about durable institutional change.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



A significant change in The Gambia's digital environment was the passing of the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act to regulate data privacy which raises some legal risks for online expression. The digital environment in The Gambia was disabling over the reporting period: while the absence of internet shutdowns or large-scale filtering kept the space technically open, rising arrests, harassment, and the cost of access practically constrained the extent to which civil society can operate safely, securely, and inclusively online.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

The Gambian government did not impose nationwide internet shutdowns or engage in systematic website blocking, preserving the open internet environment that has largely prevailed since the 2017 democratic transition. However, digital rights came under increasing pressure through legal restrictions and targeted enforcement measures rather than technical disruptions.

In March 2025, the National Assembly replaced two colonial-era laws – the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code – with the [Criminal Procedure Act](#) which preserves custodial penalties of up to one year for false publication and six months for insulting the president or other public officers. Of particular concern is Section 113 which criminalises false publication and broadcasting and provides for penalties of up to one year's imprisonment. In addition, Section 107(2) criminalises "parental insults" directed at the president, vice president, ministers, members of the National Assembly, civil servants, and other public officers, carrying penalties of up to six months' imprisonment and fines. The Gambia Press Union has [warned](#) that these provisions could be applied against journalists and digital media workers. Freedom House's Freedom on the [Net 2025](#) assessment reflected this context by classifying The Gambia as "Partly Free": crediting genuine digital civic engagement while flagging legal pressure, misinformation, and harassment as the dimensions most actively constraining expression during the year.

This dimension can thus be characterised as partially enabling: the absence of shutdowns or systematic blocking has preserved an open internet environment, but the codification of custodial penalties for false publication and insults to officials, combined with arrests of journalists and activists covering protests, meant that legal risk rather than technical restriction became the primary constraint on digital expression during the year.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

The [passage](#) of the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act (PDPP) in 2025 marked a genuine legal milestone for digital privacy in The Gambia. The act introduced the country's first comprehensive legal framework for the protection of personal data. The act establishes key data protection principles governing the lawful processing of personal data (Part III), sets out the rights of data subjects including the rights to access, rectify, erase, and object to the processing of their personal data (Part IV) and imposes obligations on data controllers and processors to ensure the security and confidentiality of personal information (Part V). It also establishes an independent Data Protection Commission with responsibility for oversight, investigations, complaints, and enforcement (Part II). Together, these provisions significantly strengthen the legal framework for protecting digital privacy and bring The Gambia more closely into line with international data protection standards. However, enforcement mechanisms remained weak, and, up to date, the law had not translated into meaningful operational protection for civil society actors' communications and data. The [Information and Communications Act](#) of 2009 continued to give state authorities surveillance and interception powers without robust judicial oversight, sustaining a climate of caution around digital engagement even in the absence of confirmed large-scale technical intrusions. Although there were no publicly confirmed cases of large-scale or systematic technical surveillance or cyber intrusions during the reporting period, the existence of these legal powers contributed to a climate of caution among journalists, activists, and CSOs.

This caution emerged primarily because individuals and organisations were aware that their digital communications could, in principle, be lawfully accessed or monitored under broadly framed provisions without clear procedural safeguards or consistent judicial scrutiny. As a result, civil society actors often adopted self-protective communication practices, such as avoiding sensitive topics on unsecured platforms, limiting the use of digital channels for confidential discussions, and shifting sensitive exchanges to in-person meetings or encrypted messaging applications. In this way, the chilling effect stemmed not from confirmed widespread surveillance, but from the perceived possibility of lawful interception under a weak oversight framework.

Principal threats to digital civic space over the past 12 months stemmed from legal exposure and harassment rather than widespread technical interference. Although individuals whose privacy or digital rights would be violated may theoretically seek remedies through the courts, the National Human Rights Commission, or the regulatory bodies established under the new legislation, these mechanisms were not yet fully operational or readily accessible in practice. Panel experts reported that pursuing legal remedies remained costly, time-consuming, and beyond the capacity of many smaller organisations. As a result, digital security during the reporting period was shaped less by sophisticated technical attacks than by concerns over legal liability, online harassment, and the limited availability of effective remedies for digital rights violations.

This dimension can thus be characterised as partially enabling: the passage of the PDPP Act marked genuine legal progress, but weak enforcement, the Information and Communications

Act's broad surveillance powers, and inaccessible redress mechanisms left civil society actors operating under a chilling uncertainty about the protection of their digital communications.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility continued to expand gradually over the reporting period without closing the structural gaps that limit its civic value. [DataReportal](#) estimated that 45.9% of the population used the internet in 2025, with mobile cellular subscriptions exceeding the total population, a reflection of multi-SIM use rather than universal individual access. [Connectivity](#) in Greater Banjul remained markedly stronger than in rural areas, where weaker coverage, slower speeds, and higher relative data costs persisted, a disparity compounded for the year by PURA's imposition of a [data price floor](#). These structural inequalities in access had direct implications for CSOs.

National-level CSOs were able to maintain strong visibility through digital platforms, particularly in urban areas where connectivity is more reliable, but their reach into rural communities remained uneven and was often dependent on intermediaries such as community radio, local CSOs, and in-person mobilisation. As a result, digital advocacy, online campaigns, and fact-checking initiatives tended to have a higher impact among urban, youth, and educated populations, while rural populations remained less consistently engaged through digital channels. This reinforced existing inequalities in participation and information flows, limiting the extent to which digital civic engagement translated into broad-based national inclusion.

Digital literacy remained a binding constraint on meaningful engagement, though civil society's emerging fact-checking ecosystem, including Fact-Check Gambia, Malagen, and Askanwi, continued to build capacity for information verification, and youth organisations such as Activista and Think Young Women continued to demonstrate effective digital engagement despite accessibility constraints.

Digital accessibility remains disabling for civil society: while digital connectivity continues to improve and has expanded opportunities for civic engagement – particularly in urban areas – persistent disparities in affordability, connectivity, and digital literacy continue to limit equitable access to digital participation, especially for rural communities and smaller CSOs.

C) Recommendations

1. Government of The Gambia

Legal and Regulatory Reforms:

- **The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's Office** should amend the NGO Decree No. 81 of 1996 within 12 months to streamline the dual registration structure, establish a clear 30-day approval timeline, and review the proportionality of NGO Affairs Agency registration, annual, and audit fees against typical CSO budgets.
- **The National Assembly** should review and substantially amend the provisions on false publication and “insult” of public officials in the Criminal Offences Act 2025 within 18 months. These provisions (including Section 113 on false publication and Section 107(2) on insulting public officers) are broadly framed and may risk criminalising legitimate expression. Any regulatory framework should align with international human rights standards on freedom of expression, and defamation should be addressed primarily through proportionate civil remedies rather than criminal sanctions, in line with submissions from the Gambia Press Union.
- **Public institutions**, including the Central Bank, NAWEC, GRA, IEC, Geology Department, and Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, should designate Information Officers within six months, and ensure compliance with ATI request timelines.
- **The National Assembly** should reform its internal rules of procedure to strengthen transparency and ensure proactive publication of key parliamentary materials, including committee reports and findings. In particular, it should ensure that the findings of the Special Select Committee on the Jammeh-era asset sales, as well as any recommended corrective measures, are formally published and followed by clear institutional reporting on implementation progress.
- **The Ministry of Justice** should operationalise the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act within 12 months, including establishing the Data Protection Commission with adequate enforcement capacity and clear complaint mechanisms accessible to CSOs and individuals.

Institutional Strengthening:

- **The Office of the President** should establish systematic consultation mechanisms across ministries for civil society participation in policy development, with mandatory consultation periods, fixed feedback timelines, and published responses explaining how civil society input shaped final decisions.
- **The Cabinet** should moderate negative rhetoric toward CSOs through an official communications approach that recognises CSOs' legitimate watchdog role rather than framing accountability-focused organisations as political adversaries.

- **The Public Utilities Regulatory Authority** should reassess the 2025 data price floor against its impact on internet affordability for citizens and CSOs, particularly in rural areas, and prioritise infrastructure investment to reduce the urban-rural connectivity gap.

2. CSOs

- **Individual CSOs** should develop funding diversification strategies within six months that reduce exposure to single-donor shocks, including exploring domestic philanthropy and fee-for-service models.
- **The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) and other networks** should strengthen coordination to present unified positions on shared priorities, such as ATI implementation and the GALA-driven accountability agenda, reducing duplication and resource competition.
- **CSO advocacy coalitions** should build on the momentum generated by GALA and the asset-sale accountability campaign to develop joint position papers and shared monitoring of National Assembly follow-through commitments.
- **All CSOs** should invest in digital security capacity, including secure communication tools and staff training, given the rise in harassment and legal risks documented around digital civic engagement in 2025.

3. Development Partners

- **EU, US, and other bilateral donors** should work toward more predictable, multi-year funding commitments and simplified application processes for grassroots organisations.
- **All development partners** should support the establishment of local funding mechanisms, including community foundations and diaspora-giving structures, to reduce long-term donor dependency. This should include seed funding for the creation of community foundations at national and regional levels, as well as technical assistance to design transparent governance and grant-making systems for these institutions. In addition, donors should support the development of structured diaspora-giving platforms, including matched funding schemes where development partners match contributions raised from Gambian diaspora communities to incentivise sustained local philanthropy. Such mechanisms could be implemented through pooled funds managed by independent fiduciary agents to ensure accountability, transparency, and alignment with civil society priorities.
- **Diplomatic missions** should continue monitoring civic space developments in 2026, including the treatment of journalists and protesters, and reinforce government commitments to civic freedoms through both public statements and private engagement.
- **Infrastructure development partners** should support investment in digital infrastructure and affordability, particularly in rural areas, complementing PURA's regulatory role.

The implementation of these recommendations requires sustained political will, adequate resources, and coordinated action across all stakeholders. Success depends on government commitment to democratic consolidation, civil society unity while pursuing reform, and international community willingness to provide patient, flexible support for long-term democratic development, particularly as The Gambia approaches the 2026 Presidential and 2027 Parliamentary and Local Government elections.

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 – which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly – the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EU SEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The panel for this report was convened in May 2026. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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