

The Gambia

	2013	2014		
Internet Freedom Status	N/A	Not Free	Population:	1.9 million
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	n/a	19	Internet Penetration 2013:	14 percent
Limits on Content (0-35)	n/a	21	Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	Yes
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	n/a	25	Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
TOTAL* (0-100)	N/A	65	Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
			Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- In May 2013, the government began the process of liberalizing international gateway services (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- Internet cafe registration regulations were tightened in September 2013, requiring operators to provide thorough details for a license, as well as mandating the physical layout of cafes and the signs that must be displayed (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- Access to the internet was disconnected for 48 hours in March 2014. Shortly after, the popular voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) platform Viber was blocked (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- Amendments to the 2009 Information Communication Act were passed in July 2013, criminalizing the use of the internet to criticize the president or spread false news with up to 15 years in prison (see **Violation of User Rights**).
- Prominent TV presenter Fatou Camara was arrested and accused of using the internet to defame the president in September 2013. She fled the country upon release on bail. Another individual was arrested in December for broadcasting an opposition political rally via Skype without a license (see **Violation of User Rights**).

Introduction

The Gambia first adopted the internet in 1998 through the United Nations Development Program's Internet Initiative that helped establish the country's infrastructural capacity to provide internet access.¹ In more recent years, the Ministry of Communication Infrastructure and Information Technology has invested considerable attention to the development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for the purposes of economic growth.

Nonetheless, under the repressive rule of President Yahya Jammeh, who has been in power since overseeing a military coup in 1994, political rights and civil liberties are severely restricted in The Gambia, with conditions for press freedom and freedom of expression particularly tenuous. As access to information via ICTs has proliferated over the past two decades, the government has proactively applied its notably harsh media censorship tactics to the internet, beginning as early as 2006 with the blocking of two critical online news outlets. In 2014, at least 15 news and opposition websites were blocked, most of which are based abroad and operated by exiled Gambian journalists.

The government strengthened its ability to control the internet in 2013 and 2014 through both technical and legal means. In March 2014, internet access was disconnected for 48 hours, enabled by state control over the country's telecommunications infrastructure, while the popular Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) application, Viber, was blocked a few weeks later. Internet cafe registration regulations were initiated in April 2013, requiring an onerous application process, and in September 2013, the regulator issued further guidelines that mandated specific requirements on the physical layout of cyber cafes and the signs that must be displayed.

Existing legal restrictions on freedom of expression were explicitly applied to the internet in July 2013 with the passage of amendments to the 2009 Information and Communications Act, which prescribed up to 15 years in prison, a fine of up to GMD 3 million (US\$100,000), or both, for using the internet to criticize, impersonate, or spread "false news" about public officials. The law applies to Gambians both in the country and abroad.

These new amendments were also used in September 2013 to prosecute well-known TV journalist Fatou Camara (and former director of press and public relations for the office of the president), who was accused of spreading false news on the internet and defaming the president in an article published in the U.S.-based online outlet, *Freedom Newspaper*. Facing up to 15 years in prison if convicted, Camara fled to the United States upon release on bail. Another individual, Lasana Jobarteh, faced charges under the new internet law in December 2013 when he was arrested after an opposition political rally and accused of broadcasting the rally without a license. Jobarteh was using Skype on his iPad to transmit coverage of the rally to the *Freedom Newspaper* online outlet based abroad.

Technical attacks against opposition websites and critical news outlets are also common and widely believed to be perpetrated by the government. In June 2013, the email accounts belonging to the editors of U.S.-based *American Street News* (ASN) were hacked. While the government's technical surveillance capabilities remain unknown, there is a pervasive belief that citizens' communications are proactively filtered and monitored, legally enabled by the sweeping powers given to national

1 "Internet Initiative for Africa," UNDP, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.ungambia.gm/undp/ict/raf97021.htm>.

security agencies to intercept communications without judicial oversight under the 2009 Information and Communications Act.

Obstacles to Access

Access to the internet in The Gambia has increased steadily over the past decade, from a penetration rate of less than 4 percent in 2004 to 14 percent in 2013, according to the latest data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).² Fixed-broadband subscriptions are still paltry, however, at a penetration rate of a mere 0.02 percent in 2013,³ and internet infrastructure is virtually nonexistent in rural areas, resulting in a significant urban-rural divide in access. By contrast, The Gambia has one of the highest mobile phone penetrations in Africa, with an access rate of nearly 100 percent in 2013, up from 13 percent a decade ago,⁴ though only 1.2 percent of the population has access to mobile broadband.⁵

At a cost of about US\$8 per month, fixed-line subscriptions are expensive for individual users in The Gambia, where average monthly household incomes are less than US\$50.⁶ Consequently, most internet access in The Gambia is via dial-up at public internet cafes, which charge about US\$1 per hour of access. The recent introduction of 3G wireless internet connections via mobile devices has made internet access more attainable, albeit only for a small subset of the population who can afford the unlimited 3G wireless packages that begin at about US\$62 per month.⁷

Meanwhile, connection speeds are very slow, averaging 1.2 Mbps (compared to a global average of 3.9 Mbps), according to May 2014 data from Akamai's "State of the Internet" report.⁸ In addition, The Gambia's broadband adoption rate (characterized by connection speeds greater than 4 Mbps) was about 5 percent of the internet population,⁹ while the country's narrowband adoption rate (connection speed below 256 kbps) was 9 percent.¹⁰

Rural areas suffer from poor cellular reception and network coverage, which is compounded by poor infrastructure, frequent power cuts, and a lack of electricity.¹¹ Moreover, network coverage of rural

2 International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2013," <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

3 International Telecommunication Union, "Fixed (Wired)-Broadband Subscriptions, 2000-2013."

4 International Telecommunication Union, "Mobile-Cellular Telephone Subscriptions, 2000-2013."

5 International Telecommunication Union, "Gambia Profile (Latest data available: 2013)," *ICT-Eye*, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/net4/itu-d/icteye/CountryProfileReport.aspx?countryID=8>.

6 Gambia Bureau of Statistics, "Integrated Household Survey Income and Expenditure Poverty Assessment-2010," Government of The Gambia, December 2011, <http://www.gbos.gov.gm/uploads/survey/2010%20INTEGRATED%20HOUSEHOLD%20SURVEY.pdf>.

7 The Gambia Telecommunications Company, "Tariff Profiles," accessed August 8, 2014, http://www.myweb.gamtel.gm/web/tariff_profiles.htm

8 Akamai, "Average Connection Speed: The Gambia," map visualization, *The State of the Internet Q1* (2014), <http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/soti-visualizations.html#stoi-map>.

9 Akamai, "Broadband Adoption (connections to Akamai >4 Mbps): The Gambia," map visualization, *The State of the Internet, Q1* 2014, <http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/soti-visualizations.html>

10 Akamai, "Narrowband Adoption (connections to Akamai <256 kbps): The Gambia," map visualization, *The State of the Internet, Q1* 2014, <http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/soti-visualizations.html#stoi-map>.

11 Kebba Camara, "Electricity Blackout Within Kanifing Municipality Creates Outcry," *Foroyaa Newspaper*, September 25, 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309261255.html>.

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areas has not been a priority for most service providers,¹² making rural provinces in The Gambia one of the most “disconnected regions of the world.”¹³ Radio remains the principal mass medium through which most Gambians stay informed.

There are four internet service providers in The Gambia—Gamtel, QuantumNet, Netpage, and Airtip—that deliver service only in urban areas.¹⁴ Four GSM companies provide internet service for mobile devices: Africell and QCell, which are privately owned; the state-owned Gamtel’s subsidiary, Gamcel, which provides 3G internet services; and Comium, the newest private player in the market, which provides 2G internet services in addition to regular calls.¹⁵

The Gambia Telecommunications Company Limited, Gamtel, owns the fiber-optic cable that runs across the country and is the sole fixed-line provider. As a state-owned entity, Gamtel also controls the international gateway, allowing private telecoms to lease the gateway for data services only. In May 2013, however, the government began the process of liberalizing international gateway services by granting international data transmission licenses to private telecom operators.¹⁶ Voice communications, on the other hand, remain purely state-owned and controlled as part of the government’s effort to protect Gamtel’s monopoly.

Meanwhile, the ACE (Africa Coast to Europe) submarine cable system landed in The Gambia in December 2012, connecting the country to the 14,000 kilometer fiber-optic cable that stretches from France down the west coast of Africa to South Africa.¹⁷ Controlled by Gamtel, the ACE cable was expected to boost bandwidth and drive new services at more affordable rates, but as of mid-2014, such improvements have yet to be realized.

Despite the recent liberalization of the international gateway, the Gambian government still exerts a significant level of control over internet access in the country. In April 2013, the regulator PURA issued a press release banning internet cafes from offering Voice over IP (VoIP) calling services such as Skype, citing the need to protect the country’s “national interest.”¹⁸ Cybercafes were also banned from offering internet dating services, providing no justification. In response to public outcry over the ban, the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure issued another press release two days later, clarifying that the use of VoIP services was not in fact prohibited. Rather, the government restricted internet cafes from commercializing VoIP services, or charging additional rates for VoIP calls on top of standard internet access rates.¹⁹ People continued to use these services freely, especially on their personal devices.

12 Interviews by Freedom House, February 2014.

13 Enrico Calandro et al., “Mapping Multistakeholderism in Internet Governance: Implications for Africa,” Research ICT Africa, June 27, 2013, http://www.researchictafrica.net/docs/Mapping_Multistakeholderism_in_Internet_Governance.pdf.

14 “Information Technology in Gambia,” Access Gambia, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.accessgambia.com/information/information-ict.html>.

15 Henry Lancaster, “Gambia – Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband,” BuddeComm, February 14, 2014, <http://www.budde.com.au/Research/Gambia-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband.html>.

16 Michael Malakata, “Gambia opens up international gateway for data,” Computerworld Zambia, May 23, 2013, <http://www.cworld.com/strategic-finance/64710/gambia-opens-international-gateway-data>.

17 “The African Coast to Europe (ACE),” Gambia.com, December 3, 2012, <http://www.gambia.com/gambia-news/the-african-coast-to-europe-ace/>.

18 PURA, “Internet dating services prohibited,” press release, April 19, 2013, <http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/pura-internet-dating-services-prohibited>.

19 “Gov’t says Skype, Viber not banned,” Daily Observer, April 23, 2013, <http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/govt-says-skype-viber-not-banned>.

In March 2014, users within the country reported experiencing an internet blackout for 48 hours.²⁰ Though the reason for the blackout remains unknown, observers suspected that the disruption was a result of the government's efforts to block VoIP applications.²¹ The popular VoIP application, Viber, was subsequently blocked a week later.²² While the government denied involvement and hinted that the block may have been engineered by services providers,²³ the government is said to believe that platforms such as Viber are enabling exiled Gambian journalists to deliver objectionable information to the public.²⁴ Users reported that Viber was unblocked in July 2014 for unclear reasons.²⁵ Meanwhile, the popular messaging application, WhatsApp, is unavailable for download in the country as of mid-2014, though users who have the application preinstalled are still able to use it.²⁶

The telecommunications sector is not well regulated, and like in many other sectors, businesses must contend with inefficient bureaucracies. Registration for internet and mobile phone service providers is an onerous and expensive process with numerous requirements to fulfill. In addition, corruption among the authorities is rife. For example, when Qcell, one of the leading GSM companies in country, was forced to suspend its mobile money service known as QPOWER in March 2013, it reportedly gifted two new cars to Gambian President Yahya Jammeh for his birthday, which subsequently led to a resumption of the QPOWER service in June.²⁷

Internet cafe operators must also contend with onerous and opaque regulatory obstacles. For example, cybercafe owners are required to register with the regulatory agency for an operating license (in addition to a requisite business license) through an application that requires details of the ISP, the number of computers installed, and services provided.²⁸ The registration requirement was initiated in April 2013, shortly after another directive was issued banning cybercafes from commercializing dating and VoIP services.²⁹ Existing cybercafes were given the deadline of May 27, 2013 to submit their applications and registration fees to the regulatory agency or face closure.³⁰

20 "Netizen Report: 48-hour internet blackout hits Gambia," Global Voices Advocacy, March 26, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/03/26/netizen_report_48_hour_internet_blackout_hits_gambia.html.

21 Sidi Sanneh, "Gambia without internet service for 48 hours," Sidi Sanneh (blog), March 21, 2014, <http://sidsanneh.blogspot.com/2014/03/gambia-without-internet-service-for-48.html>.

22 Demba Kandeh, "Viber Chat App Blocked in The Gambia," Global Voices Advocacy, March 31, 2014, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2014/03/31/viber-chat-app-blocked-in-the-gambia/>; Sanna Camara, "Viber confirms service jam in Gambia," *The Standard*, May 21, 2014, <http://standard.gm/site/news/3712-Viber-confirms-service-jam-Gambia.html>.

23 The then Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure, Mr Lamin Camara was quoted saying: "The blockade of Viber has nothing to do with Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA), the blockage is at operators' level. I am not pointing fingers at any operator. I know there are other services that Viber has affected and it is not good for them. We are working together to see how we can come to a better solution that would be acceptable to all parties."

24 Buya Jammeh, "Government suspected of blocked Viber," Index on Censorship, March 26, 2014, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/03/gambia-internet-cuts-social-media/>.

25 Freedom House interview, July 14, 2014.

26 According to sources on the ground. Freedom House interview, April 2014.

27 Modou S. Joof, "QPOWER service is back," Front Page International (blog), June 14, 2013, <http://frontpageinternational.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/qpower-service-is-back/#more-1127>.

28 "Internet/Cyber Café Registration Form," Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, accessed August 8, 2014, http://www.pura.gm/images/DG_Final_Docs/Internet%20Cafe%20Registration%20Form%20Final%20version%20for%20Publication_final_v2.pdf.

29 Paul Adepoju, "Authority bans internet dating services, VoIP in Gambia," *HumanIPO*, April 22, 2013, <http://www.humanipo.com/news/5393/authority-bans-internet-dating-services-voip-in-gambia/>.

30 Modou S. Joof, "PURA tells internet cafes: register or stop operations," Front Page International (blog), May 15, 2013, <http://frontpageinternational.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/pura-tells-internet-cafes-register-or-stop-operations/>.

Later in September 2013, the regulator issued further guidelines that dictated specific requirements on the physical layout of cybercafes and the signs that must be displayed.³¹

The internet and other public utilities are regulated under The Gambia Public Utilities Regulatory Authority Act 2001, which established the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) in 2004 to regulate the activities of telecom service providers and other public utilities.³² To some consumer activists, PURA has been an ineffective regulator that seems more concerned about its image than the interests of consumers.³³ As it stands in 2014, PURA neither has the expertise, equipment, nor enforcement power to effectively carry out its mandate.³⁴ Furthermore, PURA is not independent, at least in its composition. The president appoints the governing board of the regulatory body on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs.³⁵

Limits on Content

During the coverage period, Voice over IP (VoIP) applications were targeted for blocking, along with numerous critical news outlets and opposition websites that are unavailable to Gambian citizens.

The Gambian government has been suspected of censoring the internet since at least 2006,³⁶ with political websites targeted in particular. As of 2014, critical news outlets such as *Freedom Newspaper*, *The Gambia Echo*, *Hello Gambia*, *Jollof News*, and *Gainako* are blocked in the country, among a host of other news sites known for their criticism of the government.³⁷ The blocked outlets are all based abroad and managed by exiled Gambian journalists, most of whom have been targets of the regime. At present, at least 15 webpages are blocked in the country overall, including webpages of activists based abroad.³⁸

The popular VoIP platform, Viber, was blocked in March 2014³⁹ and unblocked in July 2014 for unclear reasons.⁴⁰ The government denied involvement and hinted that it may have been engineered

31 Yaya Bajo, "PURA sets guidelines for internet café operators," *FOROYAA Newspaper*, September 19, 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309191580.html>.

32 "Pura Act," Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), accessed August 8, 2014, http://pura.gm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=112&Itemid=137.

33 Interviews by Freedom House, February 2014.

34 Interviews by Freedom House, January 2014.

35 PURA, "Organizational Structure," accessed August 8, 2014, http://www.pura.gm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=70.

36 "US-based online paper inaccessible from Gambia, deliberate blocking by government suspected," Media Foundation for West Africa, March 14, 2008, http://www.ifex.org/the_gambia/2008/03/14/us_based_online_paper_inaccessible/.

37 Baboucarr Ceesay, "Gambia: Government's internet phobia and censorship," *Africa Review*, March 29, 2014, <http://www.africareview.com/News/Gambia-Government-Internet-phobia-and-censorship-/-/979180/2261770/-/3uqtqtz/-/index.html>.

38 Freedom House interviews, April 2014.

39 Demba Kandeh, "Viber Chat App Blocked in The Gambia," *Global Voices Advocacy*, March 31, 2014, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2014/03/31/viber-chat-app-blocked-in-the-gambia/>; Sanna Camara, "Viber confirms service jam in Gambia," *The Standard*, May 21, 2014, <http://standard.gm/site/news/3712-Viber-confirms-service-jam-Gambia.html>.

40 Freedom House interview, July 14, 2014.

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by service providers,⁴¹ though the government is said to believe that platforms such as Viber are enabling exiled Gambian journalists to deliver objectionable information to the public. Otherwise, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and international blog-hosting platforms were freely available.

There is no transparency behind the blocking of internet content in The Gambia, and efforts to access a blocked URL typically times out. While the government denies any involvement in the blocking of critical news websites, state control over the country's single telecommunications provider, Gamtel, gives the authorities direct power to restrict access to any internet content. Expert opinions suggest that the country targets specific internet protocol (IP) addresses and domain names at the level of the internet gateway. Meanwhile, tech-savvy Gambians use virtual private network (VPNs) and other proxies to access blocked content from within the country.⁴²

There have been no known reports of the government requiring content providers to remove content from the internet, preferring instead to block critical websites altogether. The extent to which the government may require websites to take down certain content is obscured by the overwhelming number of progovernment, if not state-owned, news outlets based in the country, which often receive directives to depict the government in a positive light. Furthermore, pressure from the authorities in the form of arbitrary arrests, extralegal harassment, and blatant threats has led to a climate of fear and a severe degree of self-censorship among journalists, both online and offline.⁴³ Independent online journalists are typically based abroad, while bloggers and online activists based in the country work anonymously.

Independent online media outlets also face the challenge of economic sustainability in a country where many businesses avoid advertising with critical outlets out of fear of government reprisals. Most critical news outlets are based abroad, operated by exiled dissidents and blocked within the country. Consequently, the online news and information landscape does not represent a diversity of political and social viewpoints. Nonetheless, there are small groups of locally based independent journalists and netizens who courageously push the boundaries of free expression and media freedom within The Gambia. One popular news blog, Front Page International (FPI)—managed and published by journalists based in country—is working to rally support for a more vibrant press.⁴⁴

While there is no concrete evidence that the authorities employ progovernment commentators to manipulate online content, observers assert that comments by trolls on many online forums distort the news and information landscape. Progovernment trolling activity tends to surge during times of political or social controversy. More often than not, online conversations between activists and regime apologists become abusive, resulting in quarrels and sometimes the use of hate speech.

41 The then Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure, Mr Lamin Camara was quoted saying: "The blockade of Viber has nothing to do with Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA), the blockage is at operators' level. I am not pointing fingers at any operator. I know there are other services that Viber has affected and it is not good for them. We are working together to see how we can come to a better solution that would be acceptable to all parties."

42 "Blocking the VoIP services for national security reasons is illogical – Says Sam Phatey," *Hello Gambia*, accessed September 29, 2014, <http://hellogambia.com/blocking-the-voip-services-for-national-security-reasons-is-illogical-says-sam-phatey/>.

43 Buya Jammeh, "Gloomy days for Gambian journalists," Index on Censorship, January 20, 2014, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/01/gloomy-days-gambian-journalists/>.

44 Front Page International, <http://frontpageinternational.wordpress.com/about-u/mission-vision/>

Unfortunately, there have been no successful mass mobilization efforts through the use of ICTs for any particular issue in The Gambia. Sporadic efforts have been small and unsuccessful, mainly due to heavy-handed government repression against criticism and dissent.

Violations of User Rights

In July 2013, existing legal restrictions on freedom of expression were explicitly applied to the internet with the passage of amendments to the 2009 Information and Communications Act. A prominent TV presenter and an opposition supporter were arrested and charged with violations of the new internet restrictions. Technical attacks targeted the editors of an online news outlet based abroad.

The 1997 constitution categorically guarantees freedom of speech and press freedom, though fundamental freedoms are severely restricted in practice. President Jammeh is known for his utter disregard for constitutional rights, stating publicly in March 2011 that he would “not compromise or sacrifice the peace, security, stability, dignity, and the well-being of Gambians for the sake of freedom of expression.”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, a number of draconian laws further undermine freedom of expression, and in recent years, the government has successfully amended existing legislation to increase penalties for certain offenses. The criminal code, which already criminalized defamation with a minimum prison sentence of one year plus heavy fines, was amended in April 2013 to penalize individuals for “giving false information to public servants” with up to five years in prison, up from six months.⁴⁶ The increased penalty is likely an effort to intimidate journalists and whistleblowers from seeking legal recourse for abuses at the hands of the authorities.⁴⁷

In July 2013, parliament passed amendments to the 2009 Information and Communication Act that specifically criminalizes online dissent, imposing prison sentences of up to 15 years, fines of up to GMD 3 million (about US\$100,000), or both on individuals living in the Gambia or abroad found guilty of using the internet to criticize, impersonate, or spread “false news” about public officials.⁴⁸ The government reportedly introduced the harsh internet law in response to online activism and the growing influence of critical news outlets, stemming primarily from abroad.⁴⁹

The new law was used in September 2013 to prosecute well-known TV journalist Fatou Camara (and former director of press and public relations for the office of the president), who was accused of spreading false news on the internet and defaming the president in an article published in the

45 Baboucarr Senghore, “President Jammeh meets with the Independent Press,” *The Point*, March 17, 2011, <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/president-jammeh-meets-with-the-independent-press>.

46 Article 19, “The Gambia: ARTICLE 19 condemns new attacks on freedom of expression,” statement, April 24, 2013, <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3712/en/the-gambia-article-19-condemns-new-attacks-on-freedom-of-expression>.

47 Article 19, “The Gambia: ARTICLE 19 condemns new attacks on freedom of expression,” statement, April 24, 2013, <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3712/en/the-gambia-article-19-condemns-new-attacks-on-freedom-of-expression>.

48 Demba Kandeh, “New Internet Law in The Gambia Puts Gag on Government Criticism,” Global Voices Advocacy, July 12 2013, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/07/12/new-internet-law-in-the-gambia-puts-gag-on-government-criticism/>.

49 “Gambia Government admits growing online media pressure; Pass drastic measures against Internet Activism,” *Gainako*, July 4, 2013, <http://gainako.com/?p=1176>.

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U.S.-based online outlet, *Freedom Newspaper*.⁵⁰ Before she was formally charged, Camara was held illegally for over three weeks without trial, during which she was reportedly forced to give intelligence officers her Facebook and email passwords.⁵¹ Concerned fans reported seeing her Facebook account active for unknown reasons while she was in detention.⁵² After Camara was granted bail of GMD 5 million (approximately US\$153,000), she and the guarantors of her bail deposit were smuggled out of the country and now live in exile in the United States.⁵³

In December 2013, opposition supporter Lasana Jobarteh was arrested at a political rally and accused of broadcasting the rally without a license.⁵⁴ Jobarteh was using Skype on his iPad to transmit coverage of the rally to the *Freedom Newspaper* online outlet based abroad, which the authorities cursorily determined to be a violation of the broadcast license requirements under the 2009 Information and Communications Act.⁵⁵ He was found guilty in July 2014 and sentenced to one year in prison or a fine of GMD 50,000 (about US\$1,250), which he paid with support from members from his opposition party.⁵⁶

The government places restrictions on anonymous communication through SIM card and local domain name registration requirements,⁵⁷ the latter of which is managed by the regulatory authority.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the 2009 Information and Communications Act gives sweeping powers to national security agencies to “monitor, intercept and store communications” while also giving the regulator PURA the authority to “intrude communication for surveillance purposes,” all without judicial oversight.⁵⁹ In addition, service providers are required to “implement the capability to allow authorized interception of communications.” Consequently, observers believe the government proactively monitors and intercepts citizens’ communications, particularly of activists and independent journalists whom the government perceives as a threat to national security.⁶⁰ Intercepted phone and email communications are often used as evidence in trials against government critics. However, the scope of the government’s technical surveillance capabilities remains unknown.

50 “Fatou Camara arrested, detained,” *The Point*, September 23, 2013, <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/fatou-camara-arrested-detained>.

51 “Embattled GTRS journalist Fatou Camara freed on bail,” *Kibaaro News*, October 28, 2013, <http://kibaaro.com/embattled-grts-journalist-fatou-camara-freed-on-bail/>.

52 Mustapha Jallow, “Gambia: Fans of Fatou Camara React to Her Arrest,” *Foroyaa Newspaper*, October 1, 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201310020596.html>.

53 “Gambia TV host Fatou Camara flees to the US,” *BBC News*, November 5, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24828059>.

54 Yankuba Jambang, “Gambia’s lethal secret police arrest opposition stalwart,” *Senegambia News*, December 15, 2013, <http://www.senegambianews.com/1333/58871/a/gambias-lethal-secret-police-arrest-opposition-stalwart>.

55 Kadjatou Sowe & Fatou Gassama, “Lasana Jobarteh Convicted,” *The Daily Observer*, July 11, 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201407111227.html>.

56 Sanna Camara, “UDP pays Lasana Jobarteh’s court fine, says they will appeal,” *The Standard*, July 24, 2014, <http://standard.gm/site/news/4297-UDP-pays-Lasana-Jobartehs-court-fine-says-they-will-appeal.html>.

57 “SIM registration,” Public Utilities Regulatory Agency (PURA), accessed September 30, 2014, http://www.pura.gm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127&Itemid=131.

58 Article 9 of the Information and Communications Act, 2009, <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gm/gm006en.pdf>.

59 Article 138 of the Information and Communications Act, 2009, <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gm/gm006en.pdf>.

60 Freedom House Interviews, February 2014.

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The Gambia has one of the highest numbers of exiled journalists in the world, reflecting an environment extremely hostile to freedom of expression. Extralegal violence and intimidation against journalists are common, and the government routinely tries to prevent journalists from critical news outlets from covering certain events.⁶¹ Fortunately, there were no reports of online journalists or internet users targeted with violence or threats during the coverage period.

Technical attacks against opposition websites and critical news outlets are also common and widely believed to be perpetrated by the government. In June 2013, the email accounts belonging to the editors of U.S.-based *American Street News* (ASN) were hacked; the editors were reportedly informed by webmail host Yahoo that the hackers had redirected two days' worth of all incoming emails to other accounts. Around the same time, there were two attempted hacking attacks against ASN's website, which the online outlet's IT staff was able to thwart.⁶² Further investigations traced the hacking efforts to a single IP address in The Gambia.⁶³

61 United States Department of State, "Zambia," Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220328.pdf>.

62 "Gambia: ASN editors' email accounts hacked," *ASN American Street News*, June 5, 2013, <http://en.africatime.com/gambie/articles/gambia-asn-editors-email-accounts-hacked>.

63 "ASN hacking traced; Editors react," *ASN American Street News*, June 9, 2013, <http://americanstreetnews.com/news/asn-hacking-traced-editors-react>.