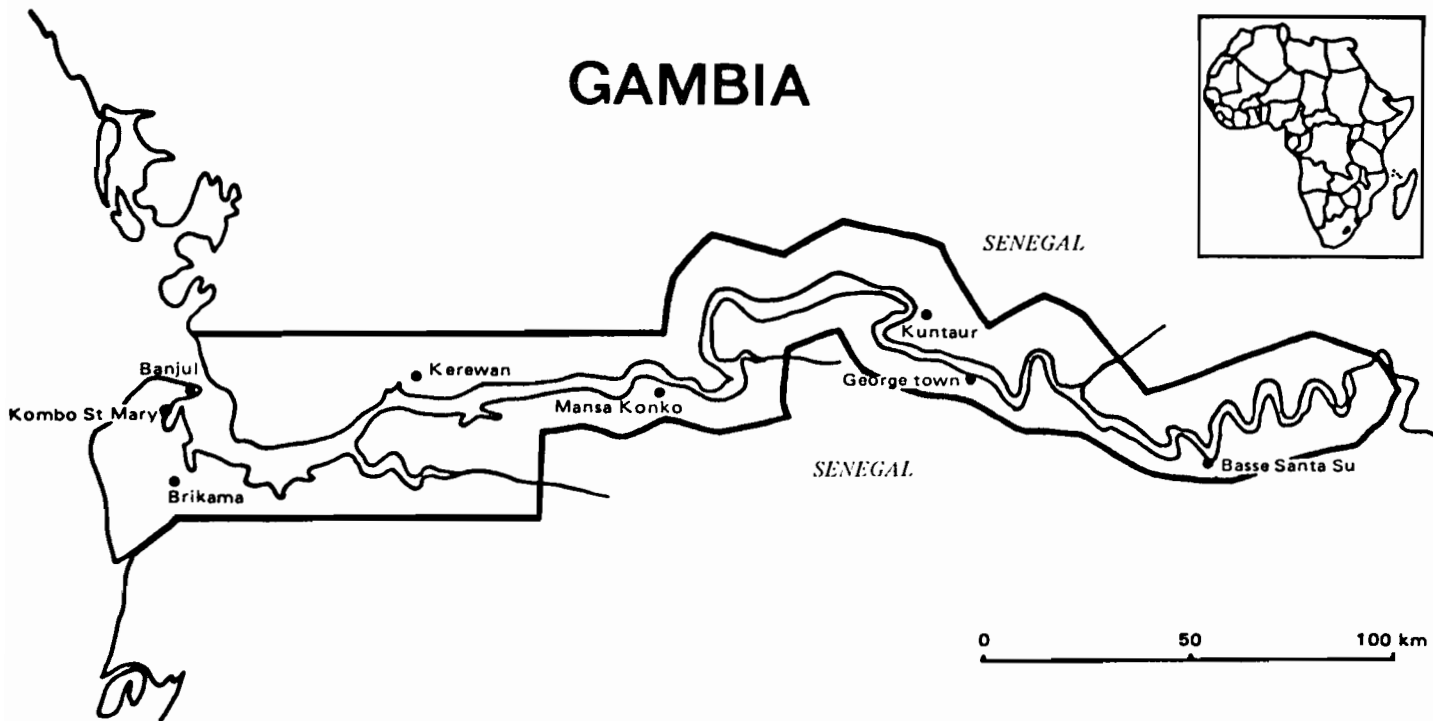


GAMBIA

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G A M B I A

I. SOURCES OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The first attempts at estimating the Gambia's population were made in 1881 and 1891. However, estimates derived from these attempts are not comparable with figures from later censuses due to boundary changes. The estimates of the country's population derived from subsequent censuses are given in Table 38 below.

Censuses prior to 1963 do not appear to have been very reliable. For these censuses the whole country was covered by only four travelling Commissioners, each with a staff of one clerk. The Commissioners personally over a period of months counted the people of each village as they toured their areas. Kuczynski [4, p.33] states that "the 1911 count was certainly incomplete, though more complete than that of 1901". With regard to the 1921 census he states that, "there is no evidence that this (1921) count was incomplete". Even if the 1921 count was complete, the 1931 count which recorded a lower figure than 1921 does not seem to have been so. The population estimates from these censuses thus seem to be of doubtful reliability.

Table 38

GAMBIA - POPULATION AT SUCCESSIVE CENSUSES

YEAR	POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL INTERCENSAL GROWTH RATE
1901	90 404	
1911	196 101	4.9
1921	210 611	3.7
1931	199 520	-0.6
1963	315 486	1.4
1973	493 499	4.6

No censuses of the country were conducted in the years between 1931 and 1936. In 1944 only Banjul was enumerated whilst in 1951 only Kombo St. Mary was covered. The 1963 census was the first simultaneous census to be carried out in the country. It was followed 10 years later by the 1973 census. These censuses form the main source of data on the Gambian population. The only other relevant data available consist of studies of small groups of the population.

Table 38 shows the estimates of the Gambian population derived from censuses. The trend over the years is rather irregular and suggests coverage errors. The average annual growth rates derived from the censuses prior to 1963 seem quite unreliable, the period between 1921 and 1931, for example, showing a negative rate of growth. Caldwell concludes that "taking the record at face value we could draw the conclusion that prior to 1931 (or perhaps some subsequent turning point) population growth was slow or even uncertain, with increase or decrease determined almost at random by the occurrence and timing of epidemics".[1] The reason for the marked fluctuations in the growth rates are not known for certain but it is still unlikely that the true values have followed a declining trend. There have been no major disasters, emigrations or evidence of declining birth rates. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that mortality rates must have declined as a result of expansion and improvement of medical and health services, and that migration into the country has been on the increase as a result of the relatively better economic circumstances compared with neighbouring countries. These would point to an increasing rate of population growth.

It is also likely that the coverage achieved by the censuses has varied over time. With the censuses prior to 1963 "people were bidden from near and far to a meeting place, and there made to give a report on the number of persons living in their village"[5]. As such not every village was visited and no enumeration of individual persons made.

For the 1963 census the country was divided into enumeration and supervisory areas, short training courses of census officials held, a specific time period set for the enumeration and some effort made at controlling the quality of the data collected and published.

For the 1973 census, even more meticulous procedures were adopted. Enumeration and supervisory areas were better defined and mapped, more comprehensive training courses were given and field supervision was more stringent. Thus the results of these two censuses are perhaps the only reliable source of data on the country's population.

Some estimates of the evolution of the Gambian population over the past thirty years have been made and are given below in Table 39. These are derived mainly from back-projections of the 1963 and 1973 censuses using various assumptions. The estimates show a wide range of variation and are presented here merely to give an idea of the possibilities. The plausibility of these estimates is open to question and cannot for sure resolve the question of the evolution of the Gambian population with any great degree of certainty due to the 30 year gap between the 1931 and 1963 censuses and the absence of accurate age data.

Table 39
GAMBIA - POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR 1950-1965
 (in '000)

SOURCE	1950	1955	1960	1965
United Nations	347	366	391	422
U.S. Bureau of the Census	282	317	357	404

II. STUDY OF SOURCES - 1963 AND 1975 CENSUSES

Table 40
GAMBIA - POPULATION ENUMERATED IN 1963 AND 1973 BY AGE AND SEX

AGE	1963		1973	
	M	F	M	F
0 - 4	22 253	22 264	41 232	41 751
5 - 9	22 454	21 821	36 825	36 435
10 - 14	15 454	14 340	24 587	22 868
15 - 24	27 044	33 191	40 236	43 774
25 - 34	29 438	32 681	40 382	42 749
35 - 44	18 678	14 802	26 395	24 146
45 +	25 528	15 538	39 864	30 450
N.S.	-	-	865	940
TOTAL	160 849	154 637	250 386	243 113

Table 40 shows the population by age and sex recorded for the 1963 and 1973 censuses. The age groups are those used in 1963 and do not permit comprehensive comparisons with the more detailed breakdowns used in 1973. These two censuses provide the basis of demographic measures on the Gambian population.

1) De facto Population

Both the 1963 and 1973 censuses were 'de facto' counts of the population. In 1963 the unit of enumeration was 'households' for Banjul and 'compounds' for the rest of the country. In 1973, however, 'households' were used for the whole country. The choice of 'households' defined as groups of "persons who normally live and eat together", led to confusion. Thus although interviewers were trained to enumerate people according to "where they happened to be at census moment" (de facto), they were to do so according to the household they happened to be in implying a "de jure" enumeration. In practice, a "de facto" enumeration was employed as people were enumerated in the household they were found in, whether they normally lived and ate there or whether they were strangers and happened to be there. But the confusion created by this definition of household, in the minds of both the census agents and those enumerated led, as a subsequent study of tape recorded interviews showed, that "in the majority of interviews, the household concept was either misinterpreted or not used at all." [3]

Because of the variety of living and eating arrangements in the country, interviewers and respondents were often confused as to what household to allocate a respondent to or whether a particular respondent should be enumerated or left out. Although it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the resultant numbers of persons double counted would be balanced out by the numbers omitted, this may not have been so. A study of the census documents on 4 villages in Kiang West District which involved the matching of respondents with records of residents of these villages (kept and updated continuously by the Medical Research Council) showed that the number of persons missed by the census was nearly twice the number double counted. [2] One can conclude that it is perhaps likely that the total population may have been understated for both censuses although the 1973 census may have attained a relatively better coverage. The implication here is that though it is possible that the 1973 census undercounted the country's population, the apparent growth rate between the 1963 and 1973 censuses may be misleading as part of this increase is due to coverage errors.

2) Migration and Inter-Censal Growth

The 1963 and 1973 censuses suggest that the country's population increased from 315 486 to 493 499 thus showing an apparent annual rate of increase of 4.5% for the country. After detailed analysis of the data on fertility, mortality and place of birth for the two censuses, it was estimated that 2% per annum could be attributed to natural increase, 0.8% per annum to net migration into the country and 1.7% to an undercount of the population in 1963.

However, more recent evidence seems to suggest that migration into the country takes place on a larger scale than was originally thought to be the case. The study on 'foreign farmers' (agricultural migrant labourers) estimated the number of non-Gambians engaged in this activity in 1974-1975 at 24 000 [7]. Of this number, 58% had moved into the country during that year. Of the remainder (i.e. those who were already in the country during 1973-1974) three-quarters had also been there during the 1973 wet season and furthermore 82% of these people expressed a desire to settle in the country. When one

considers the fact that there are other migratory streams into the country, with possibly similar consequences as for foreign farmers, a figure of between six to seven thousand migrants settling annually in the country is perhaps a conservative estimate. This figure is about twice that estimated for the 1963-1973 intercensal period.

It thus seems that a perhaps significant proportion of the intercensal apparent rate of increase originally attributed to an undercount of the population in the 1963 census was probably due to immigration, wrong reporting of nationality or place of birth being greater in 1973 than in 1963. This implies that the rate of population growth is likely to be higher than the 2.8% per annum previously estimated (2% for natural increase and 0.8% for immigration.) In contrast the highest U.N. estimates for the periods 1965-1970 and 1970-1975 are 1.8% and 1.9% per annum respectively.[8]

3) Foreigners

Table 41 shows a breakdown of the population by nationality for the 1963 and 1973 censuses. It shows that over ten percent of the population in 1973 were foreigners.

Table 41

GAMBIA - POPULATION BY NATIONALITY 1963 AND 1973

	1963	1973	% Increase	Annual Average Growth Rate
Gambians	279 931	440 706	57.4	4.8
Other Africans	34 938	50 843	45.4	3.9
Non-Africans	617	1 159	88.0	
N.S.	-	791	-	
Total	315 486	493 499	56.4	4.5

In the analysis of the 1973 census data, after making due allowance for mortality among the foreign born population in 1963, the rate of net migration into the country during the intercensal period was estimated at 0.8% per annum. This gives a figure of 34 000 immigrants during the period, which accounts for 14% of the intercensal increase. Thus of the 52 000 foreigners enumerated during the 1973 census, more than half were estimated to have moved into the country during the intercensal period. However, it is very likely that there was a significant amount of misreporting of birth place or nationality resulting in an underestimation of the number of foreigners. With

the changing political and economic circumstances in many African countries foreigners usually have some motive to conceal their nationality. Furthermore the study of migrant farmers, mentioned previously, suggests that "the foreign farmer system might be a means of transitional mobility - leading to permanent settlement" [7]. The size of the migration flows suggests that the estimates of the contribution of migration to the 1963-1973 estimated population growth rate was too low and that consequently the undercount of the 1963 census may therefore have been less than was estimated. It is estimated by the author that 17.8% of the intercensal growth is attributable to net immigration (against 14% for the first estimate) and 37.8% to the underestimation of 1963 (against 44%).

4) Households

The application of this concept posed a number of problems mainly due to the difficulty of conveying its meaning in the local languages and the variety of living arrangements in the country frequently resulting in difficulty in deciding whether to include or exclude a particular respondent in a given household.

Subsequent study of a sample of recorded interviews showed that for only 5% of the interviews was the census definition of household correctly utilised. For 46% of the households interviewed, the concept was defined variously as "yard/compound", "those who slept here", "house", or even "farming unit". For another 48% of the interviews, no definition at all was used [3].

It is difficult to estimate the degree to which the misapplication of the household concept would have biased the census count towards either an under- or overenumeration of the population. However, it does seem to have been a significant source of error.

5) Fertility

Another factor which must have affected the estimate of the total population in 1973 is that of fertility reporting. Because of cultural factors, women would normally report adopted children or children of relatives, living with them, as their children. Though the concept of women's biological children was stressed in the census as well as that of 'live birth', interviewers generally avoided specifying the biological aspect (presumably to avoid offending respondents). The first factor (biological) would tend to result in an over reporting of children (i.e. assuming that adopted children are reported on both by their adopted as well as biological mothers). Similarly non-application of the live birth concept would tend to result in still births and abortions being counted as births. However, one factor of even stronger cultural bias is that of reluctance to count all children a woman has given birth to. Also there are problems associated with memory lapses and difficulties in handling high numbers all of which may result in an understatement of fertility. It is perhaps reasonable to assume, in the absence of contrary evidence that the effect of all these factors would be to balance each other out. However, more detailed study of these is needed.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND CURRENT ESTIMATES

Prior to 1963, the course of evolution of the Gambian population is not clear for certain. Though censuses have been conducted since 1881, their results are of doubtful reliability. Census procedures were very rudimentary and the figures derived from them can only be regarded as rough estimates. Also the 32 year gap between the 1931 and 1963 censuses leaves much room for conjecture.

Whilst the 1963 and 1973 censuses represented substantial improvements on previous censuses, problems still remain in the estimation of the rate of growth of the country's population. These are due to difficulties in collecting reliable age data in censuses, estimation of the contribution of migration to growth, determination of the degree of undercoverage in these censuses and the complete absence of vital statistics data for the country as a whole. In such a situation, it is difficult to be dogmatic. However, this is not peculiar to Gambia and is faced by many African countries. Table 42 shows estimates of the population between 1965 and 1975. It should be borne in mind that though the 1963 census reported 315 000 people, this figure is perhaps an undercount. Analysis of the 1973 census resulted in an adjusted figure of 382 000 for 1963. This estimate was arrived at using the reverse survival techniques.

Table 42

GAMBIA - RECENT ESTIMATES OF THE POPULATION, 1965-1975

(in thousands)

SOURCE	1963	1965	1970	1973	1975
United Nations	-	422	463	-	509
U.S. Census Bureau	-	404	458	-	524
Statistics Department - Gambia	382	-	-	496	524

Based on the assumption that the fertility and migration rates remain constant during 1973-1975, and that the death rate declines slightly, the projected population of the country for 1975 is 524 000 [6]. This figure follows from the hypothesis that the birth rate of 49 per thousand estimated from 1973 census data remains constant over the projection period. This assumption is based on the fact that with the young age structure of the population, fertility increase which would be the logical outcome would perhaps be balanced out by the impact of the expansion of family planning programmes and improvements in educational and socio-economic standards, at least for the foreseeable future.

As regards mortality, it is assumed that improvements in medical and health services would result in a slight mortality decline between 1973 and 1975 such that expectation of life increases by about one third of a year annually. The estimated rate of net migration of 0.8% per annum is also assumed to have continued beyond 1975.

Table 42 shows that the United Nations projections estimates a lower figure for the Gambia's 1975 population. However, it appears more likely than not that the Gambian population in 1975 was perhaps greater than the figure of 524 000 estimated by the Statistics Department of Gambia.

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