PUBLIC PERCEPTION

on National Risk 2025

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A2Zurvey
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At a glance

Top National Concerns

95.3%	Access to Quality Healthcare
94.6%	Rising Cost of Living
93.1%	Crime & Security Issues
91.1%	Corruption
91.3%	Government Transparency

Drivers of Concern:

Economic Instability Safety Poor Governance

Trust in Government to Address National Issues

% Reporting "No Trust at All":

66.7%	Corruption
55.9%	Transparency
52.2%	Increased in crime
50.9%	Unemployment
49.1%	Healthcare Access
47.8%	Drug Abuse

Only 4.6% of respondents expressed full trust in the government to address key national challenges

Substance Use Concern Zones

79.5%	Street corners
63.5%	Nightclubs & Bars
22.8%	Residential Spaces
21.1%	Beaches/tourist areas
17.1%	Border regions

Other areas, garages (16.3), schools (14.5), marketplaces (11.2), online shopping or social media (2.3)

Who's Most Aware?

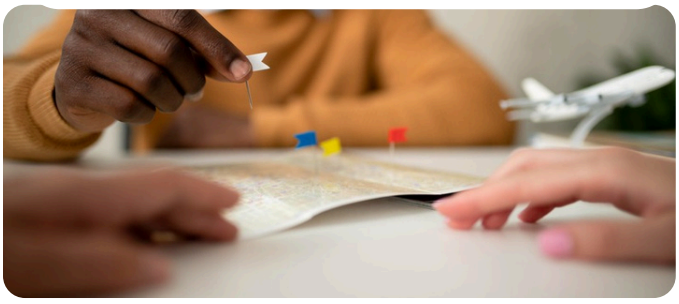
69.4% of respondents Have tertiary

89% aged 18-35 Youth-led perceptions dominate

Education is linked to higher concern over

- Misinformation
- Crime and security issues
- Corruption
- Cost of Living

Key Areas Needing Urgent Reform



(Top sectors cited for urgent improvement)

92.0% Healthcare **65.9%** Education

60.7% Food security **54.3%** Security and justice

Others

Employment (51.0%), youth empowerment (33.5%), Basic social amenities (26.1%), Road safety (18.4%), Government transparency (3.7%), Women's rights (11.2%), Environmental protection (8.1%), Digital access (4.4%), transportation (4.4%)

How Gambians Stay Informed

90.0% use Social Media (Top source)

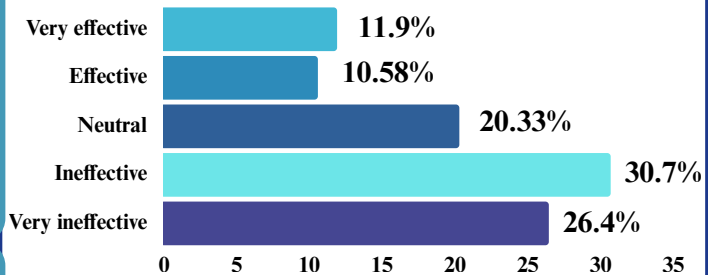
TV (58.3%)
Peer-to-peer (40.7)
Radio (38.1%)

Only 5.34% are disengaged

Schools (33.3%), Newspapers (30.3%), Government reports (19.5%), International organization (16.5%), Community Leaders (12.8%)

Gov't Communication on Risk Awareness

Perceived Effectiveness (%):



Only 1 in 5 respondents feel the government communicates risks effectively.

All findings based on a 2025 national survey conducted by A2Zurvey. Data reflects public perception and not official crime or policy statements.

ABOUT

A2Zurvey is an independent research and data collection firm based in The Gambia, delivering accurate, high-quality insights across all sectors. We turn complex questions into clear answers that help businesses, NGOs, and governments make better decisions.

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Abstract

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted in The Gambia to assess public perceptions of risk, institutional trust, and the effectiveness of government response across key sectors. Drawing on data from diverse regions and demographic groups, the study captures citizens' views on a range of issues, including healthcare, governance, corruption, youth vulnerability, drug abuse, and access to basic services. The results reveal widespread concern over institutional performance, particularly regarding corruption, transparency, service delivery, and the growing prevalence of drug-related challenges.

The analysis highlights a pattern of declining trust in key government institutions, such as the National Assembly, Judiciary, and law enforcement agencies, alongside increased demand for accountability and reform. Social media emerged as the dominant channel for information on national risks, yet knowledge gaps remain significant, especially regarding drug rehabilitation services and legal frameworks. Communities perceive drug abuse as a multi-dimensional problem that intersects with youth unemployment, crime, mental health, and education.

Policy implications drawn from the findings emphasize the need for inclusive governance, strengthened communication systems, responsive public service delivery, and comprehensive drug prevention and rehabilitation programs. By aligning national responses with the concerns and lived realities of Gambians, the findings offer a foundation for more citizen-centered policymaking and institutional reform.

Introduction and Executive Summary

In 2025, The Gambia continues to grapple with a complex mix of economic, social, and institutional challenges that shape everyday realities for its citizens. Amid rising living costs, limited access to essential services, and growing public concern over issues such as drug abuse and corruption, understanding how Gambians perceive national risks is vital for effective policymaking and governance. This report presents the findings of a nationally representative survey designed to assess public sentiment on key issues affecting their lives and communities. It captures not only the level of concern citizens express toward specific national risks but also the degree of trust they place in government institutions to address those challenges.

The data reveal a public that is deeply concerned about basic needs and service delivery. Access to healthcare, the cost of living, and national security emerged as the most urgent issues, each cited by more than 90% of respondents as causes for serious concern. These worries cut across demographic lines, suggesting that concern is widespread and not limited to particular groups. At the same time, institutional trust is low. A majority of respondents expressed little or no confidence in the ability of the National Assembly, the Judiciary, and public service agencies to address national problems. In the area of corruption and transparency, the data were especially stark, with nearly two-thirds of respondents reporting having no trust in the government's ability to curb these issues.

The report also explores how information flows within Gambian society. Social media has overtaken traditional platforms like television and radio as the most common source of information on national risks and governance issues. Yet over 40% of respondents reported being unaware of available drug rehabilitation services, and 25% said they had no idea whether existing drug laws were effective. This highlights a persistent gap between the state and the population, especially in matters related to public health and security.

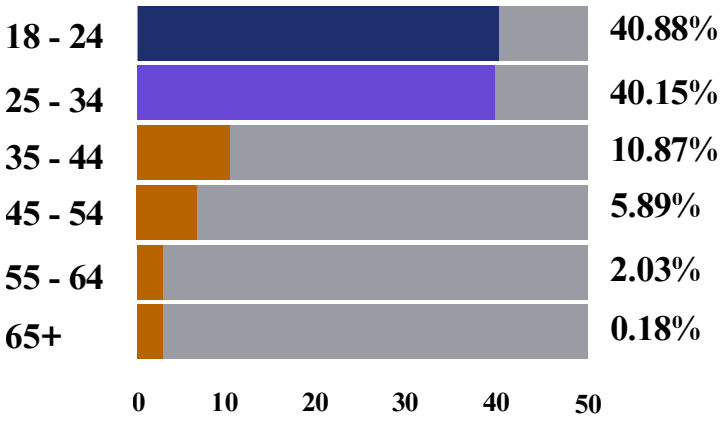
Drug abuse stands out as a particularly urgent and multifaceted concern. Respondents pointed to cannabis, Kush, and alcohol as the most commonly used substances, while ghettos, bars, homes, and even schools were identified as key distribution points. Despite the breadth of concern, fewer than 10% of respondents believe that drug laws are sufficient or that the Drug Law Enforcement Agency (DLEAG) is adequately addressing the problem. Over half of respondents cited crime, mental health problems, health complications/long-term illness, a rise in theft and school dropouts as common consequences of drug use, reflecting a view that the issue affects nearly every aspect of community life, from education and safety to family cohesion.

Policy implications arising from the survey are broad but urgent. Strengthening healthcare and education systems remains critical, as does rebuilding public trust in institutions through transparency, responsiveness, and localized engagement. In the context of drug abuse, a multi-sectoral approach is needed, one that pairs enforcement with prevention, rehabilitation, and public education. Communication strategies must also be overhauled to ensure that accurate, timely information reaches the population across both digital and traditional platforms.

Sample Size: 543

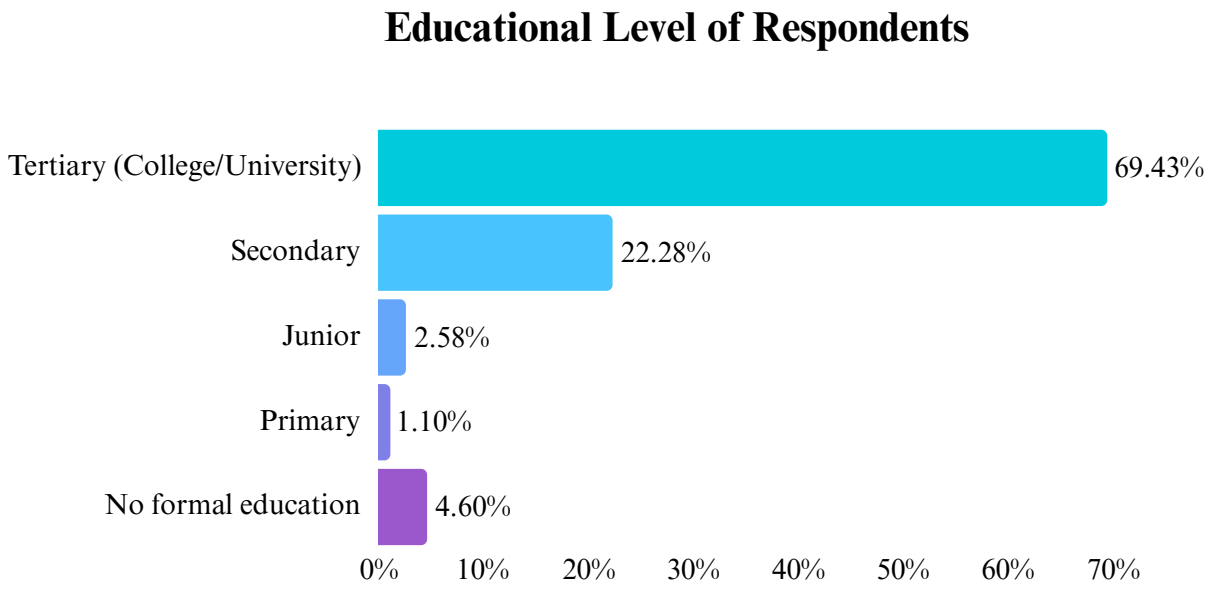
56% Male

44% Female



METHODOLOGY

This report explores public perceptions of national risks in The Gambia. The data was gathered using structured questionnaires through a mixed method, combining both face-to-face interviews and online surveys. A complete randomization technique was applied to reduce bias and ensure fair distribution across the country's various regions. The final sample comprised 543 respondents, of whom 55.8% reported as male and 44.2% were female. The age distribution was notably skewed toward younger demographics, with 40.88% of respondents aged 18–24 and 40.15% aged 25–34. This skew is primarily attributed to the online data collection method, which accounted for approximately 75% of the total responses. Given that the survey was randomly distributed, the overrepresentation of younger participants likely reflects their greater accessibility and responsiveness to online surveys.



The graph above demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the respondents. Overall, 543 respondents were interviewed across four regions in The Gambia. Of the respondents, 69.43% reported attaining tertiary education, while 22.28% attained secondary education, and then 4.60% non-formal education. Primary and junior were reported by 1.1% and 2.58% of the respondents. This indicated a highly educated sample. The gender distribution was moderately imbalanced, with males constituting 55.8% of the respondents, while females constituted 44.2%.

The age distribution reveals a predominantly youthful population, with 40.88% of the respondents aged 18-24 and 40.15% aged 25-34, which jointly constitute about 81% of the respondents. The remaining percentage was shared among the remaining age groups. This implies that the datasets capture the views of the youths and young adults.

Voices of Concern: Governance Socioeconomic Challenges

The Gambia's public mood in 2025 reflects a heightened state of concern across nearly all domains of governance and service delivery. When respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on key national risks using a 5-point scale, they overwhelmingly selected the highest levels of concern, highlighting not just awareness but urgency of the underlying issues.

Access to quality healthcare emerged as the most alarming issue: a staggering 95.39% of respondents indicated being either "concerned" or "very concerned," with over 79% selecting the top concern level. Closely following were the rising cost of living (94.65% concerned or very concerned) and worsening crime and security conditions (93.15%). These findings suggest that Gambians are not simply worried about single issues but are experiencing the convergence of multiple systemic stressors affecting daily life.

Perceptions of governance were equally critical. Around 91% of respondents expressed concern about corruption and the lack of government transparency; two issues often cited in open-ended remarks as eroding trust in public institutions. These concerns appear consistent across demographic groups, pointing to a widespread belief that institutional failure, rather than isolated mismanagement, is driving national challenges.

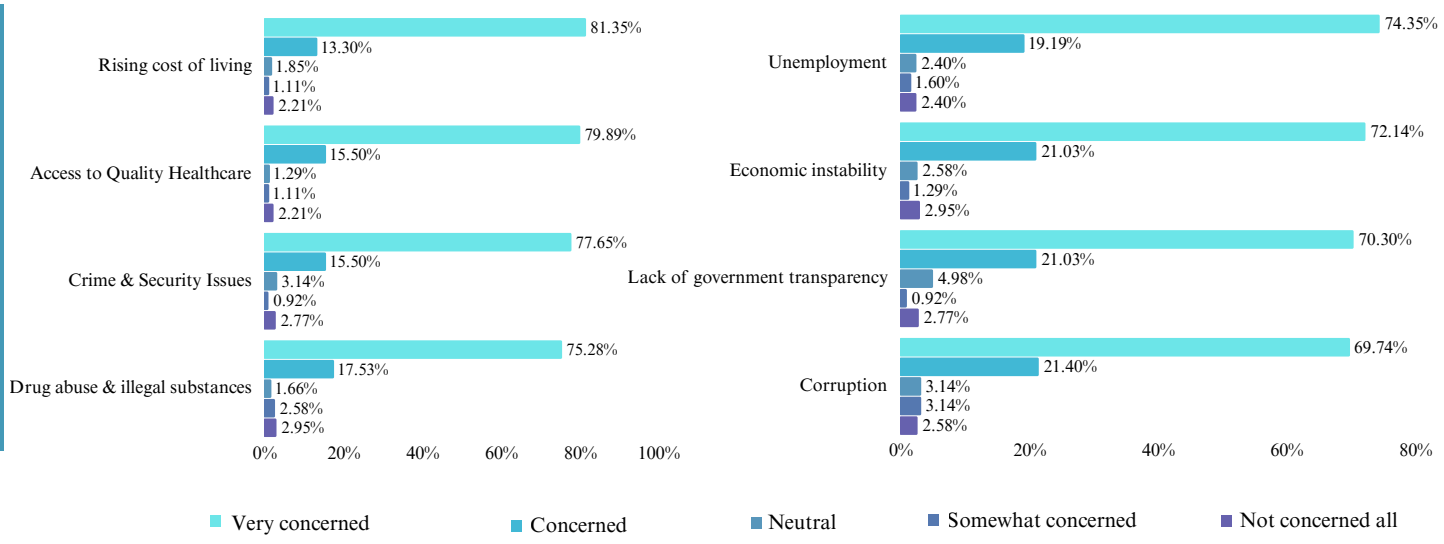
Even global concerns like climate change, often lower on national priority lists in developing contexts, triggered notable anxiety: over 72% expressed moderate to high concern. Meanwhile, drug abuse and illegal substances scored higher than anticipated, with 75.28% of respondents saying they are concerned or very concerned, highlighting growing fears of youth vulnerability and a fragile social fabric.

Only a very small minority (less than 5%) across all categories reported being unconcerned. This pattern indicates a national sentiment marked by broad disillusionment with the current status quo and low confidence in government effectiveness. The high mean scores across all indicators (ranging from 3.98 to 4.71) further support this interpretation.

"Roughly 9 in 10 Gambians express concern about access to quality healthcare, with most saying they are very concerned"

PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON NATIONAL RISKS

How concerned are you about the following risks in The Gambia?



Policy Implications

The data reveal a clear message: Gambians are navigating overlapping crises that demand an urgent, multi-sectoral policy response. The widespread concern about healthcare access, living costs, corruption, and public safety points to a population that is not only aware of national risks but increasingly frustrated by institutional inaction.

Strengthen public healthcare infrastructure and equity. With access to healthcare ranked as the most critical concern by over 95% of respondents, the government must prioritize equitable investment in healthcare facilities, especially in underserved rural areas. This includes increasing the availability of medical personnel, essential drugs, and emergency response capacity. Policies that integrate community health workers and mobile clinics could help bridge service delivery gaps and reduce pressure on urban hospitals.

Invest in employment creation and youth economic empowerment. With high unemployment consistently ranked among the top public concerns, especially among young people, policies should prioritize inclusive job creation. This includes expanding vocational training, supporting entrepreneurship through microfinance and startup incubation, and incentivizing private sector investment in sectors like agriculture, ICT, construction, and renewable energy. Public works programs and community-based employment schemes could also serve as temporary relief while building infrastructure.

Address cost-of-living pressures through targeted social protection. Given the overwhelming concern about rising living costs, there is a need for responsive economic policies that protect vulnerable populations. Expanding cash transfer programs, introducing food price stabilization mechanisms, and supporting small-scale farmers and informal traders could ease household burdens. Such interventions should be paired with policies aimed at creating decent employment opportunities, particularly for youth.

Rebuild public trust by tackling corruption and improving transparency. Public perception of corruption and lack of transparency reached over 90%, highlighting the need for stronger anti-corruption enforcement. This may include digitizing government transactions to reduce rent-seeking behavior, publishing public procurement data, and strengthening watchdog institutions. Civic engagement platforms and citizen reporting mechanisms could also help hold institutions accountable and enhance government responsiveness.

Integrate drug prevention and youth-focused interventions into national policy. With over 92% citing drug abuse as a growing concern, national risk mitigation efforts should include substance abuse prevention, rehabilitation services, and youth-centered outreach programs. A national anti-drug strategy that brings together schools, families, and enforcement agencies could help reduce the social harm associated with drug use.

Risk Perception and Education: Does Schooling Shape Concern?

This section explores how a person's level of education affects the way they see and prioritize national problems in The Gambia. The findings show that education plays a major role in shaping people's understanding of key challenges, particularly those connected to governance, accountability, and the strength of public institutions.

People with university or college education were far more likely to say they were "very concerned" about issues such as economic instability, corruption, lack of government transparency, and the spread of false or misleading information. For example, more than 9 out of 10 people with higher education said they were deeply concerned about economic instability. This suggests that higher education can give people a broader understanding of how national policies, leadership decisions, and economic trends affect the country in the long run.

This difference is also clear when it comes to concerns about misinformation. Those with more schooling were more likely to see false or misleading information as a serious threat. This could be because they are more exposed to a variety of news sources, have received civic education, or have learned skills for checking and analyzing information. By contrast, people with little or no formal schooling were less likely to highlight these issues, which may be due to limited access to information or fewer opportunities to connect these big-picture problems to daily life.

However, some challenges were viewed as equally serious by almost everyone, no matter their education level. Unemployment, young people leaving the country for opportunities abroad, and climate change were all seen as major issues by people across the board. These problems directly affect people's lives and livelihoods, so they tend to unite public opinion regardless of schooling.

For issues such as access to quality healthcare and drug abuse, there were only small differences between education levels. This means that while concern was shared across groups, the reasons or urgency might vary. For example, differences could be linked to how much people know about health risks, how easily they can reach health services, or whether they have received health education. Still, these remain among the most important issues facing the country and require consistent attention.

The results point to a mixed picture. Some risks are seen very differently depending on a person's education, while others cut across all social groups. For leaders and policymakers, this is an important insight. Education not only shapes how people understand national risks but also how they respond to proposed solutions. Ignoring these differences can lead to public messages that fail to reach everyone, exclude certain groups from decision-making, or make policies less effective.

Policy Implications

The analysis of educational differences in risk perception provides essential insights for policy formulation and public engagement in The Gambia. While some risks such as unemployment and youth migration were widely acknowledged regardless of educational background, others, including economic instability, corruption, transparency, and misinformation, showed strong variation depending on respondents' education levels. This suggests that individuals' ability to recognize and prioritize systemic issues is linked to their educational exposure

Design Differentiated Risk Communication Strategies

The significant association between education and concern over governance-related risks highlights the need for multi-tiered public communication strategies. Highly educated individuals respond to data-rich, policy-focused messaging, while populations with limited formal education may benefit more from community-led, vernacular-based awareness campaigns. Using storytelling, visuals, local radio, and drama can help ensure critical national issues are not only heard but understood by all segments of the population.

Invest in Civic and Policy Literacy for Underserved Groups

Government and civil society actors should expand civic education programs, especially in rural or underserved areas. These efforts can increase understanding of governance structures, citizen rights, and institutional accountability laying the groundwork for more inclusive public participation in national decision-making processes

Rebuild public trust by tackling corruption and improving transparency. Public perception of corruption and lack of transparency reached over 90%, highlighting the need for stronger anti-corruption enforcement. This may include digitizing government transactions to reduce rent-seeking behavior, publishing public procurement data, and strengthening watchdog institutions. Civic engagement platforms and citizen reporting mechanisms could also help hold institutions accountable and enhance government responsiveness.

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Balance Structural Policy Reforms with Broad-Based Social Programs

While those with tertiary education are more likely to highlight systemic risks (e.g., economic governance, policy coordination), the widespread concern over unemployment and health among all groups points to the **need for universally felt improvements**. This calls for a **dual-track policy approach**:

- implementing technical reforms in fiscal policy, transparency, and accountability that resonate with educated constituencies, and
- simultaneously expanding access to health, education, and jobs for marginalized groups through targeted social interventions.

Public Trust in Government's Ability to Address Key National Challenges

Trust in the government's ability to address core governance and service delivery issues appears critically low. When asked about corruption, 66.74% of respondents said they had no trust at all in the government to resolve it, while just 5.88% expressed any trust. This marks corruption as the single most distrusted area in the survey and suggests that confidence in institutional integrity is severely lacking among most Gambians.

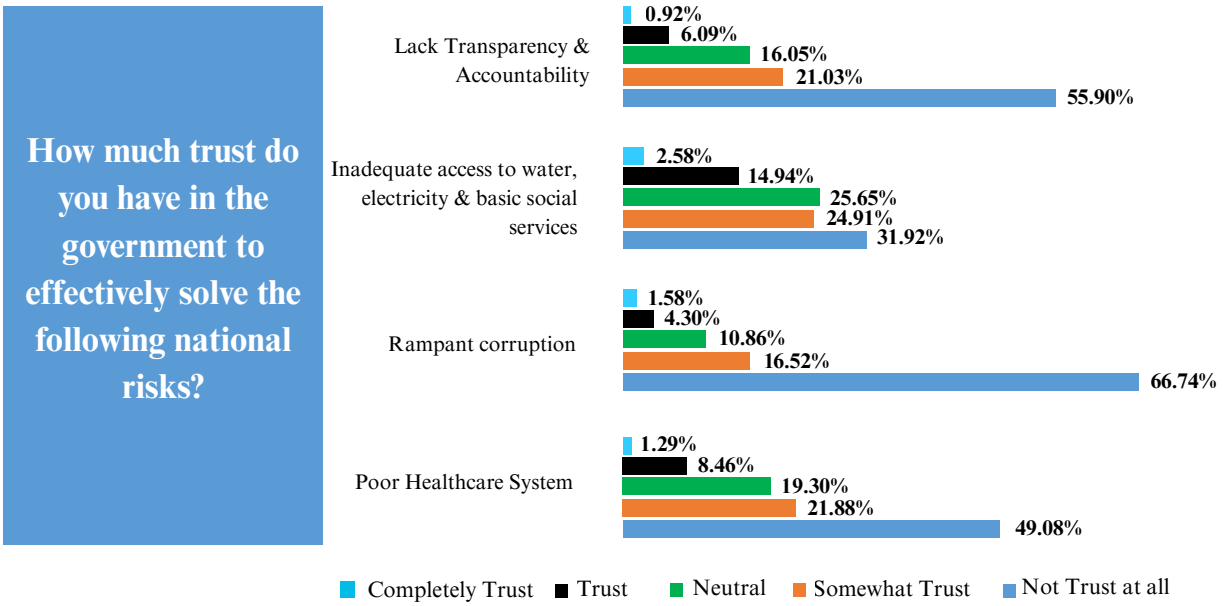
The issue of transparency and accountability follows closely. A majority of respondents, 55.90%, reported having no trust at all in the government to manage this challenge, and only 7.01% said they had any trust. While not as severe as corruption, this still reflects a strong perception of limited state openness or responsiveness.

In healthcare, public sentiment also leans heavily toward skepticism. Nearly half of respondents, 49.08%, reported no trust at all in the government's ability to improve the health system, compared to just 9.75% who reported some trust. Although the gap is smaller than in the governance indicators, healthcare remains among the sectors with the lowest levels of public confidence.

Access to basic services such as water and electricity fares slightly better, but still reflects widespread doubt. While 31.92% of respondents said they had no trust at all in the government to provide adequate access to these services, only 17.52% expressed any trust. This was the highest positive rating among the four issues, yet it still points to more distrust than confidence overall.

Across all four categories, corruption, transparency, healthcare, and basic services, the majority of respondents either had no trust or remained skeptical of the government's ability to deliver meaningful solutions. Complete trust was rare, and in some cases, nearly absent from the dataset. The results suggest that a large portion of the population does not feel confident in the government's ability to manage the issues they consider most urgent.

Public Trust in Government's Ability Address Key National Challenges



Trust in the government's ability to address drug abuse and trafficking is notably low. Nearly half of respondents (47.79%) stated they have no trust at all in the government's capacity to handle the issue, while only 11.51% expressed any level of trust. The remaining responses were either neutral or mildly skeptical, indicating that most of the public lacks confidence in current drug-related interventions.

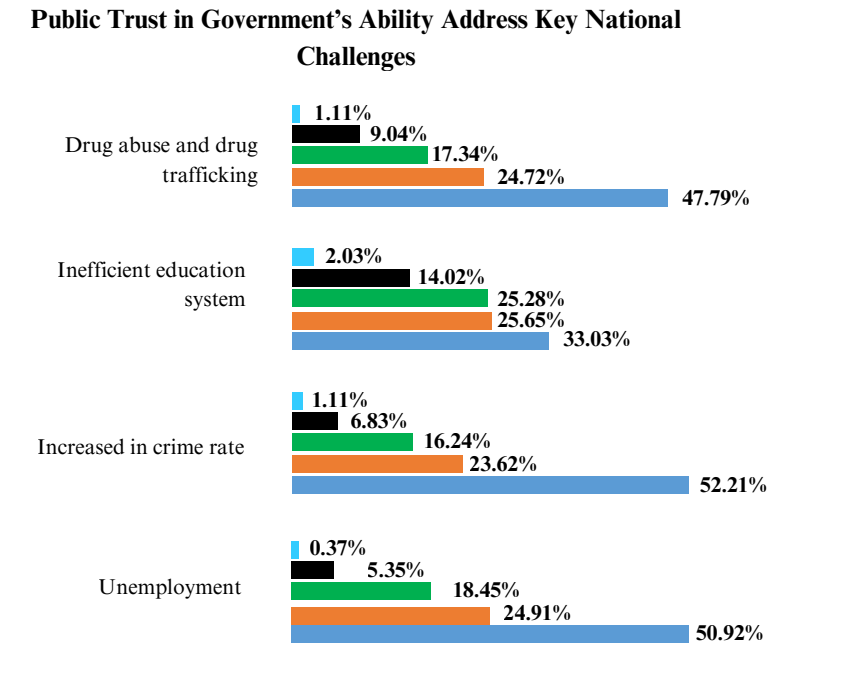
Perceptions of the education system follow a similar pattern. One in three respondents (33.03%) reported no trust at all in the government's ability to improve the sector, while just 16.05% said they trust the government to manage education effectively. The distribution suggests that while education is not the least-trusted area, public dissatisfaction is still widespread and persistent.

When asked about rising crime, a majority of respondents again expressed strong doubt. More than half (52.21%) said they have no trust at all in the government's ability to manage or reduce crime. Less than 10% expressed any level of trust, making this one of the most severe indicators of mistrust among all categories assessed in the survey.

Unemployment generated equally strong reactions. Over half of respondents (50.92%) indicated no trust at all in the government's ability to address joblessness, while only 5.7% said they trusted the government on this issue. This marks unemployment as one of the areas with the highest public dissatisfaction, aligned with broader national concern over economic opportunities.

Across all four issues, drug abuse, education, crime, and unemployment, the most frequent response was "no trust at all." Levels of full or even partial trust remained consistently low, reinforcing a broader trend of public disillusionment with the government's ability to address key social challenges.

How much trust do you have in the government to effectively solve the following national risks?



Policy Implications

For The Gambia, the findings suggest an urgent need to rebuild public trust by addressing governance weaknesses, improving service delivery, and responding directly to the social and economic challenges that citizens have identified. Key implications include:

Prioritize anti-corruption and transparency reforms. With more than two-thirds of respondents expressing no trust in the government to fight corruption, the state must commit to visible anti-corruption actions. This includes empowering independent oversight bodies, enforcing public disclosure of assets by officials, and creating open procurement systems. Establishing local feedback mechanisms, such as citizen report cards or public budget hearings, can also improve accountability at the community level.

Strengthen basic public services through targeted investment. Sectors such as healthcare, water, and electricity require immediate attention. The government should invest in rehabilitating health centers, training and deploying more health workers, and ensuring consistent access to essential medicines. Expanding access to clean water and electricity, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, will demonstrate responsiveness to basic needs and help close the equity gap.

Address drug abuse through community-based interventions. Nearly half of respondents reported no trust in the government's ability to tackle drug abuse. Instead of relying solely on punitive measures, authorities should develop a multi-pronged approach that includes prevention programs in schools, public education campaigns, rehabilitation centers, and local partnerships with youth organizations and religious leaders.

Improve trust in education and crime response through local engagement. Public doubts about the government's ability to improve education and reduce crime reflect years of unaddressed concerns. Investments in teacher training, curriculum reform to suit the Gambian reality, and school infrastructure should be matched by improved coordination between local government, law enforcement, and community leaders. Community policing strategies and youth engagement programs can help improve security while fostering cooperation between the state and citizens.

Tackle unemployment through job creation and skills development. With over half of respondents expressing no trust in government job efforts, new strategies are needed. The government can scale up vocational training centers, provide small grants or low-interest loans for youth enterprises, and work with the private sector to expand employment in agriculture, construction, digital services, and tourism. Public works programs, especially in rural areas, can also provide short-term relief while building essential infrastructure.

Public Perception of Sectors Needing Urgent Improvement in The Gambia

92.08%
Healthcare

65.93%
Education

60.77%
Food security & Agriculture

54.33%
Security & Justice

51.01%
Employment & Skill dve

33.52%
Youth empowerment

Highest Priority **Lowest Priority**

The peoples' responses reflect mounting pressure on the country's essential services and core institutions. While the government has made periodic commitments to improving service delivery and governance, the data suggest that for most citizens, the pace and depth of change remain insufficient. The vast majority of respondents (92.08%) pointed to healthcare as the sector in most urgent need of improvement. The overwhelming majority points to healthcare as the top public concern, suggesting widespread dissatisfaction or unmet expectations with the current state of the system.

Education followed at 65.93%, also reflecting broad concern. While not as overwhelmingly selected as healthcare, the response still signals that nearly two-thirds of participants see the education sector as a priority. Food security and agriculture was the third most cited sector at 60.77%, indicating that concerns about food systems and agricultural support remain high across communities.

Security and justice (54.33%) and employment and skills development (51.01%) were also selected by over half of respondents. This places them firmly within the top five priority sectors, suggesting that issues of safety, justice, and economic opportunity are widely recognized as requiring urgent attention.

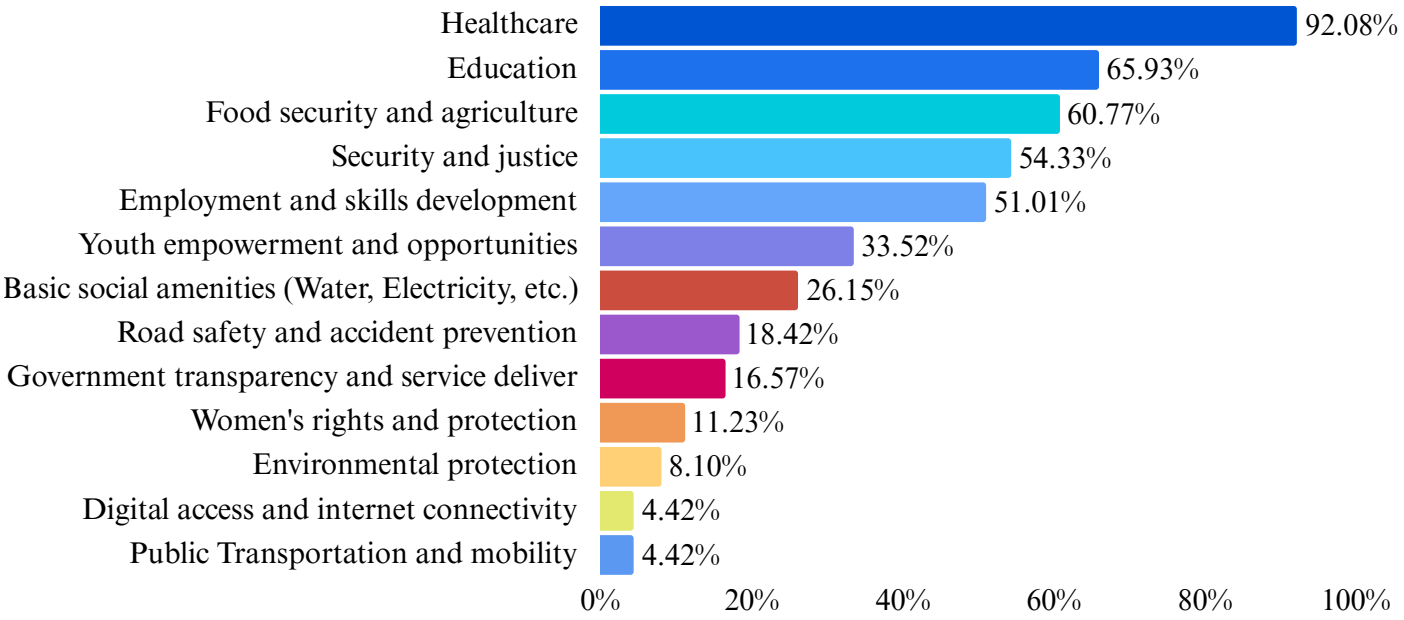
Youth empowerment and opportunities was selected by 33.52% of respondents. While lower than the sectors above, the figure still represents a significant portion of the population. Basic social amenities such as water and electricity were identified by 26.15%, suggesting that infrastructure and access to essential services are still concerns for many.

A second tier of responses included road safety and accident prevention (18.42%), government transparency and service delivery (16.57%), and women's rights and protection (11.23%). These sectors were less frequently cited but still noted by meaningful portions of the population. Environmental protection (8.10%), digital access and internet connectivity (4.42%), and public transportation and mobility (4.42%) were the least selected, though their presence in the responses indicates that they are not ignored altogether.

The tone of the responses is not just about dissatisfaction but a sense of being left behind. There is little indication that people believe reform is impossible but rather that they have not yet seen the benefits of reforms often promised. What emerges from the data is a layered portrait of unmet expectations: healthcare systems that do not heal, education systems that do not prepare, jobs that do not materialize, and institutions that do not respond. These are not abstract frustrations. They are woven into daily life, shaping how people see their communities, their government, and their future.

Which of the following sectors do you think needs the most urgent improvement in The Gambia? (Select up to 5)

Public Perception of Sectors Needing Urgent Improvement in The Gambia



Policy Implications

The data present a clear picture of public expectations. Citizens across the country are calling for urgent improvements in sectors that are fundamental to daily life: healthcare, education, food security, justice, and employment. These priorities reflect deep-rooted concerns about basic service delivery and national development. A policy response that aligns with these signals will not only address practical gaps but can also rebuild public confidence in the role of government institutions.

Make healthcare system reform a top-tier priority. Healthcare ranked far above all other sectors, reflecting broad dissatisfaction with the current state of services. Policy efforts should focus on expanding access to primary healthcare, upgrading health facilities, and improving the availability of medicines and trained personnel. Decentralizing health budgets and services can help ensure that rural and remote communities receive timely and adequate care. In the long term, national health planning must also address system sustainability through improved data tracking, staff retention strategies, and investment in preventive care.

Improve education access, infrastructure, and learning outcomes. Education was another high-ranking concern. Many respondents appear to view education not only as a right, but also as a pathway out of poverty and inequality. Priorities should include upgrading school infrastructure, reducing teacher shortages, and ensuring that materials are available and up to date. At the same time, policies must look beyond enrollment and focus on outcomes: literacy, retention, and school-to-work transitions. Stronger coordination between education and labor ministries will be key to aligning learning with skills needed in the job market.

Boost food security through rural investment and support to smallholders. The prominence of food and agriculture among public concerns suggests that households are facing persistent economic strain linked to food access. Government interventions should support small-scale farmers with tools, inputs, and extension services. In parallel, strengthening post-harvest storage, transportation, and market access can reduce waste and improve local food availability. Special attention should be given to regions that are climate-vulnerable or face recurrent food price shocks.

Rebuild trust in security and justice institutions through transparency and accessibility. The justice and security sectors were also flagged by a large portion of respondents. This calls for better policing, more efficient court systems, and expanded access to legal aid. Community-based approaches can be useful here, offering both accountability and a direct connection with citizens. Improving the visibility and responsiveness of justice institutions can gradually restore confidence in public authority, especially where distrust has been high.

Strengthen employment pathways and skills development for youth. Employment concerns were prominent across the dataset. The policy response should focus on making skills training more relevant to actual market needs, especially in sectors like agriculture, construction, tourism, and digital services. Expanding vocational programs and linking them to internship or job placement schemes can help bridge the gap between training and real-world opportunity. Youth entrepreneurship initiatives, especially those tied to local economic development, should be expanded with mentorship, financing, and incubation support.

Communication and Risk Awareness

In The Gambia, the information landscape on national risks and governance matters is increasingly shaped by digital and informal channels. The survey shows that an overwhelming 90.06% of respondents rely on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to stay informed. This figure reflects the central role these platforms now play in daily communication and news consumption. Whether due to affordability, speed of access, or the informal nature of content shared, social media has become the dominant space where national issues are discussed and followed.

Television still holds relevance, cited by 58.38% of respondents. Its reach appears strong across urban and semi-urban areas where electricity and broadcast infrastructure are more consistent. Although its influence is not as dominant as social media, television remains a key source of structured and visual information for a significant portion of the population.

Peer-to-peer information sharing also plays a notable role, with 40.70% of respondents stating they stay informed through direct conversation and informal exchanges. This highlights the continued importance of interpersonal communication, particularly in close-knit communities where trust in formal media may be limited. Radio, mentioned by 38.31%, continues to be a reliable medium, especially in rural areas where access to digital services may be more limited. Its portability and low cost make it a valuable channel for mass communication.

Educational institutions (33.33%) and newspapers (30.39%) were selected by roughly a third of respondents. While these are not the leading sources, their influence remains important, particularly in shaping civic awareness among students, teachers, and literate audiences. Government reports (19.52%) and international organizations (16.57%) were cited by smaller portions of the population. These channels, while official and often data-rich, may face challenges in accessibility, trust, or public engagement. Community leaders were mentioned by 12.89% of respondents, pointing to some continued role of local authority figures in disseminating national information.

Notably, 5.34% of respondents indicated they are not concerned about national risks or governance matters at all. This small but significant figure suggests that a portion of the population may feel detached from civic issues or lack access to trusted information sources.

The data point to a communication ecosystem where informal and digital platforms have overtaken traditional institutional channels. While television, radio, and schools still contribute meaningfully, they are increasingly supplemented, and in many cases, overshadowed by the immediacy and accessibility of social media and word-of-mouth networks. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for how national issues are communicated, understood, and acted upon across Gambian society.

Primary Information Sources on National Risks and Government Matters

How do you stay informed about national risks and government policies? (Select all that apply.)

Policy Implications

For The Gambia, the findings point to an urgent need to modernize and diversify public communication strategies to reflect how people actually access information. The overwhelming reliance on social media signals a shift in the country's information ecosystem, requiring a more integrated approach to public messaging.

Embrace digital communication as a core public outreach tool. With social media emerging as the top information source, cited by the overwhelming majority of respondents, government institutions should build stronger, more consistent digital engagement. This could involve real-time updates on platforms like Facebook, the use of local languages in messaging, and short video explainers on national policies. Ministries can also collaborate with trusted digital creators and media influencers to broaden the reach of official messages, especially among youth. As misinformation can spread rapidly in these spaces, it is critical to also use these same platforms for fact-checking and prompt clarification of rumors or false claims.

Sustain traditional media platforms for inclusivity. Television and radio still play meaningful roles, especially in rural or low-connectivity areas. These channels should not be phased out but enhanced with targeted programming, weekly civic education segments, and listener interaction formats that help reinforce public trust and ensure no segment of the population is excluded from national risk information.

Leverage peer networks and community leadership. The fact that many respondents get information from interpersonal sharing and a smaller but notable portion from local leaders shows that trust in informal channels remains important. This trust can be harnessed to reduce misinformation by training local communicators and village heads to share verified updates and counter false narratives. Their involvement in awareness campaigns can ensure that messages are not only received but also understood and trusted at the grassroots level.

Improve the accessibility and usability of official content. Although government reports and documents were cited by a smaller group, this does not necessarily indicate low importance. Rather, it suggests a need to simplify content and share it through more approachable and infographic formats. Short summaries, mobile-friendly designs, or community bulletin formats can improve reach and comprehension.

Address information inequality through inclusive strategies. While digital access is high, not all communities engage with content in the same way. Efforts should include feedback mechanisms to understand what information citizens want, how they use it, and where confusion or misinformation may persist. Trusted community figures, including leaders or youth advocates, can be part of the response.

A2ZURVEY
Polls

Goverment and Effective Public Communication

Perceptions of government communication on risk awareness and preparedness reveal more skepticism than confidence among the population. A combined 57.19% of respondents rated the government's efforts as either ineffective (30.74%) or very ineffective (26.45%), indicating that more than half of the surveyed sample is dissatisfied with how risk information is currently communicated. These results suggest that many citizens find the government's messaging insufficient, unclear, or disconnected from their expectations.

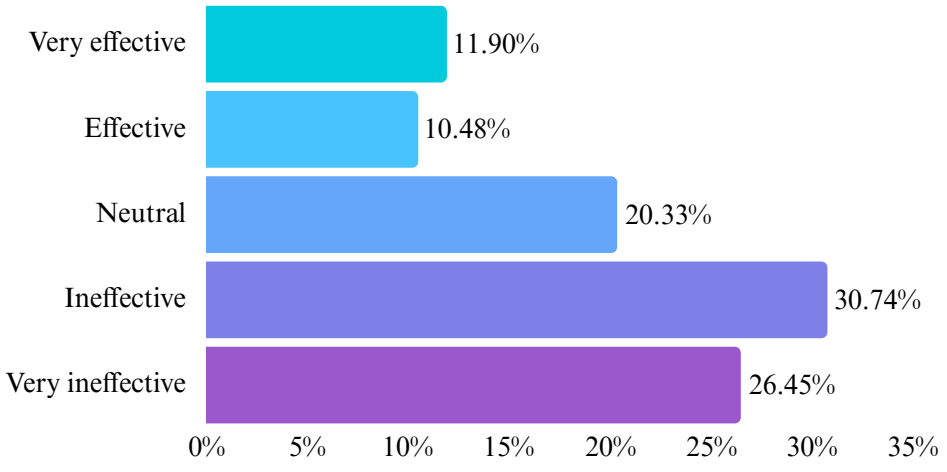
"Almost 3 in 5 Gambians view government communication on risks as ineffective, while only about 1 in 5 believe it is working. At the same time, nearly 9 in 10 rely on social media to stay informed, revealing a major gap between where people get information and how government messaging is received."

In contrast, only 11.90% of respondents said the communication was very effective, and another 10.58% rated it as effective. Together, just 22.48% expressed a favorable view of the government's communication efforts. This leaves a sizable portion of the population—20.33%—in the neutral category, suggesting uncertainty or limited exposure to communication efforts around risk preparedness.

The findings point to a communication gap that undermines public confidence in preparedness initiatives. While a portion of the population does view government messaging positively, the dominant sentiment is one of dissatisfaction, highlighting the need for improved clarity, consistency, and reach in official communications.

Perceived Effectiveness of Government Communication on Risk Awareness and Preparedness

How do you stay informed about national risks and government policies? (Select all that apply.)



Policy Implications

The findings point to a need for stronger, clearer, and more inclusive government communication around risk awareness and emergency preparedness.

Improve clarity and consistency of messaging. With over half of respondents (57.19%) rating government communication as ineffective, public messaging must be simplified and delivered with greater consistency. Using clear language and offering regular updates, especially during times of heightened risk, can improve understanding and reduce confusion. Messages should explain not just what risks exist but what people are expected to do.

Expand use of trusted communication channels. Previous findings showed that social media, television, and radio are the most commonly used platforms. These should be prioritized for risk communication, with tailored messaging adapted to each format. For example, brief public service announcements can run on radio and TV, while infographics or short videos can be shared on WhatsApp or Facebook. The goal should be to meet people where they already seek information.

Engage communities more directly.
The government can work with community leaders, teachers, youth groups, and local NGOs to co-deliver risk information at the grassroots level. Training local actors to serve as communicators or first responders can increase the reach and credibility of preparedness messages, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

Use two-way communication to build trust. Rather than only pushing information out, government agencies should create feedback mechanisms such as SMS surveys, radio call-ins, or community forums where people can ask questions, voice concerns, or report misinformation. Engaging the public in this way helps build trust and ensures communication strategies remain relevant.

Institutionalize risk communication within national policy. Effective public communication should be treated as a core function of emergency preparedness, not an afterthought. This includes allocating funding, staff, and technical training to ensure that each relevant ministry or local authority has the capacity to inform the public quickly and reliably during crises.

Public Assessment of Government Institutions in Tackling National Challenges

Public confidence in key government institutions appears limited, with large portions of the population rating them as ineffective in addressing national challenges. Parliament received the most critical assessment, with 42.8% of respondents rating it as ineffective and 25.5% as very ineffective. This means that roughly 7 in 10 people do not believe the National Assembly is performing effectively. Only 1 in 10 respondents rated Parliament as effective, and just 1.5% said it was very effective, making it the least trusted institution in the data set.

Local Government Authorities were similarly viewed, with 37.5% rating them as ineffective and 20.8% as very ineffective. Together, this amounts to 58.3% expressing negative views, just slightly better than Parliament but still signaling widespread dissatisfaction. Positive views remained low, with only 12% considering them effective and fewer than 2% saying they were very effective. Notably, Local Government Authorities and Parliament shared almost identical public approval gaps, despite operating at different levels of governance.

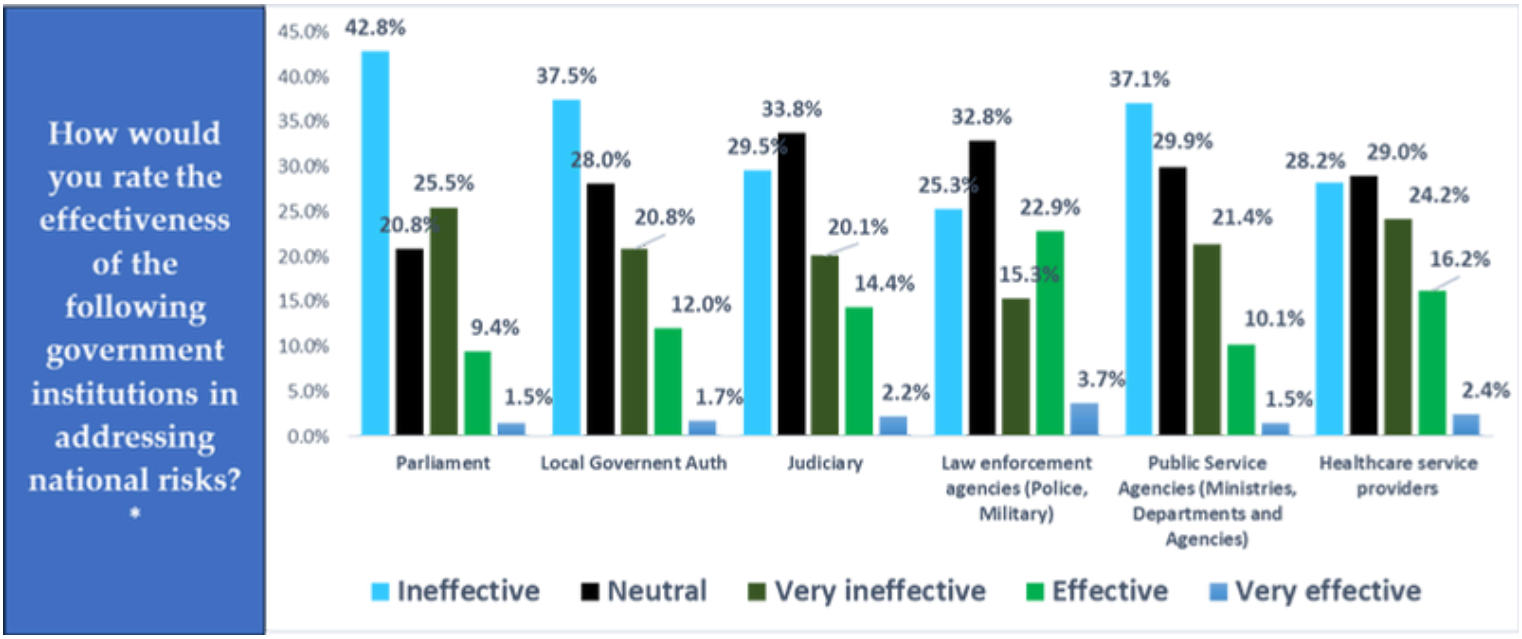
The Judiciary's performance was also rated unfavorably by many. Combined, 33.8% of respondents considered it ineffective and 29.5% very ineffective. This totals 63.3%, positioning it as the third least trusted institution overall. In contrast, only 14.4% of respondents said the Judiciary was effective, and 2.2% found it very effective. This suggests that while the Judiciary is constitutionally central to justice and oversight, a significant portion of the population lacks confidence in its ability to uphold that role.

Law enforcement agencies, including police and the military, also faced critical views. Although slightly less harshly rated than the Judiciary, they were still marked as ineffective by 32.8% and very ineffective by 25.3%, bringing the combined negative rating to 58.1%. Around 15.3% of respondents rated law enforcement agencies as effective, and only 3.7% saw them as very effective. Compared to Parliament and the Judiciary, law enforcement received slightly more moderate scores, yet more than half of the population still expressed dissatisfaction.

"Roughly 7 in 10 Gambians say Parliament is ineffective in addressing national challenges and more than 6 in 10 feel the same about the Judiciary. Trust in core governance institutions remains critically low across the board."

Public Service Agencies, encompassing ministries, departments, and agencies, were perceived with similar skepticism. A total of 37.1% of respondents rated them as ineffective and 21.4% as very ineffective, leading to a combined 58.5% disapproval rate. Just 10.1% of respondents saw them as effective and a mere 1.5% as very effective. When comparing this to healthcare service providers, the results become more telling. Healthcare providers had the most balanced distribution among the six institutions, yet the dominant view remained negative. A combined 52.4% of respondents rated them as ineffective, with 28.2% selecting ineffective and 24.2% very ineffective.

Public Ratings of Government Institutions' Effectiveness in Addressing National Risks



Policy Implications

For The Gambia, the findings reflect widespread dissatisfaction with institutional performance and point to an urgent need for government-wide reforms that prioritize accountability, service quality, and citizen trust.

Strengthen institutional accountability mechanisms. With over two-thirds of respondents rating Parliament as ineffective or very ineffective, there is a clear demand for stronger legislative oversight and public accountability. This could include the introduction of performance-based reviews, more transparent reporting on parliamentary activities, and regular public engagement through constituency outreach and dialogue forums.

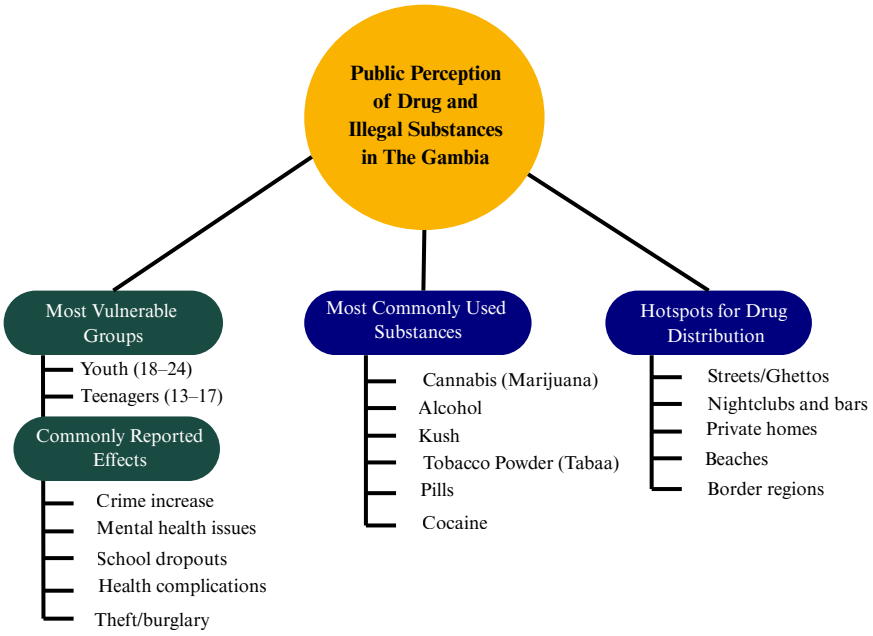
Improve local governance and service delivery. Local Government Authorities were also poorly rated, with more than half of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. This suggests the need to invest in capacity building for local councils, improve coordination between central and local authorities, and ensure equitable allocation of resources to improve basic service provision at the community level.

Restore confidence in the Judiciary. Nearly two-thirds of respondents viewed the Judiciary as ineffective. Judicial reform efforts should focus on improving case resolution times, expanding access to legal aid, and strengthening independence and public transparency. Public trust could also be improved through regular court-user satisfaction surveys and simplified legal communication in local languages.

Enhance professionalism and accountability in law enforcement. With more than half of respondents critical of police and military performance, the government should strengthen community policing models, expand human rights training, and invest in complaint mechanisms where civilians can report abuse or misconduct. Promoting transparency in law enforcement operations is also essential to reduce mistrust.

Reform public service agencies for better responsiveness. Ministries, departments, and agencies were also viewed as underperforming. Civil service reform should focus on improving service delivery standards, reducing bureaucratic delays, and promoting a results-based culture. Clear performance benchmarks and citizen charters can help align agency actions with public expectations.

Public Perception of Drug and Illegal Substances



Public perceptions about drug and intoxicant distribution in The Gambia reveal a strong concern about visible, community-based locations. The majority of respondents (79.56%) identified streets and ghettos as the most common hotspots for drug distribution. This means roughly 4 out of every 5 people associate drug circulation with informal, public street settings, spaces often perceived as loosely monitored and socially vulnerable.

Nightclubs and bars were the next most cited areas, with 63.54% of respondents pointing to them as distribution points. This reflects concern about nightlife environments, where limited supervision and youth presence may make these locations susceptible to drug activity. The data suggest that, in the public's view, drug access is not confined to hidden corners but embedded in visible and frequented social spaces.

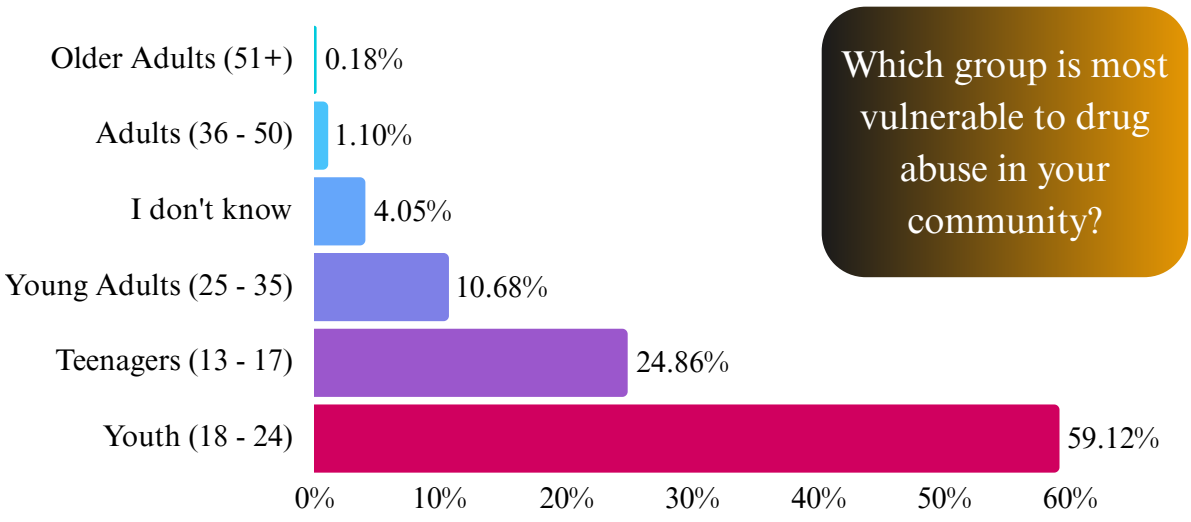
Private homes (22.84%) and beaches or tourist areas (21.18%) also featured prominently. About 1 in 5 respondents saw these as key venues for distribution, indicating that concerns extend to semi-private or leisure-oriented settings. These responses suggest that some of the drug trade may be perceived as moving out of purely illicit corners into more normalized, everyday spaces.

Border regions (17.13%) and public transport garages (16.39%) were each cited by about 1 in 6 respondents. This points to concerns about mobility, either through substances being brought into communities or distributed via public transit systems. School zones were identified by 14.55% of respondents, a troubling signal that educational spaces may be viewed as points of vulnerability. Similarly, marketplaces (11.23%) were noted as potential hubs, reinforcing fears about the reach of drug activity into areas of commerce and daily life.

In contrast, online platforms or social media were cited by only 2.39% of respondents. This low figure could reflect a belief that drug distribution is largely physical rather than digital, or it might indicate limited awareness of the role digital platforms could play.

The data suggest that the public sees drug distribution as deeply embedded in both public and semi-private spaces. While traditional hotspots like ghettos remain at the forefront, the presence of schools, homes, and transport hubs in the responses points to a more complex and widespread concern, one that spans both high-traffic and intimate community spaces.

Most Vulnerable Groups to Drug Abuse



Drug Rehabilitation and Support Systems

Public perception regarding the adequacy of drug rehabilitation and support services in The Gambia reflects widespread uncertainty and dissatisfaction. A majority of respondents (50.64%) indicated that they do not believe existing services are adequate to support drug users. This response reflects a commonly held belief that the country lacks sufficient infrastructure or accessible programs to address drug addiction and recovery.

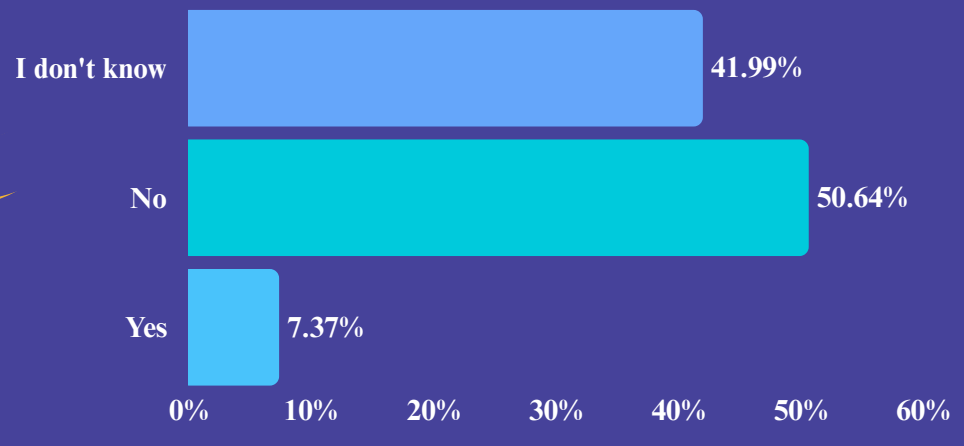
In addition, 41.99% of respondents said they do not know whether adequate services exist. This high level of uncertainty may suggest a lack of visibility or public communication around available rehabilitation and support programs. The fact that nearly 1 in 2 respondents are unaware of what services exist indicates a significant information gap.

Only 7.37% of respondents reported that they believe rehabilitation and support services are adequate. This is the lowest percentage across all categories and reflects limited public confidence in the country's current response to drug dependency and treatment needs.

The survey reveal a public perception shaped by doubt and lack of awareness, with most respondents either rejecting the adequacy of existing services or indicating they are unsure. This suggests that both service provision and public awareness about drug rehabilitation in The Gambia remain critically low.

Are there adequate rehabilitation and support services for drug users in The Gambia?

Perceived Adequacy of Drug Rehabilitation and Support Services in The Gambia



Public Doubt Over Government's Role in Tackling Drug Abuse

Public perception of government and law enforcement efforts in tackling drug abuse in The Gambia reveals a high level of dissatisfaction. When asked to rate these efforts, 33.0% of respondents described them as very ineffective, while another 25.6% rated them as somewhat ineffective. Combined, 58.6% of the population expressed a negative view, making this one of the most critically viewed areas of public intervention.

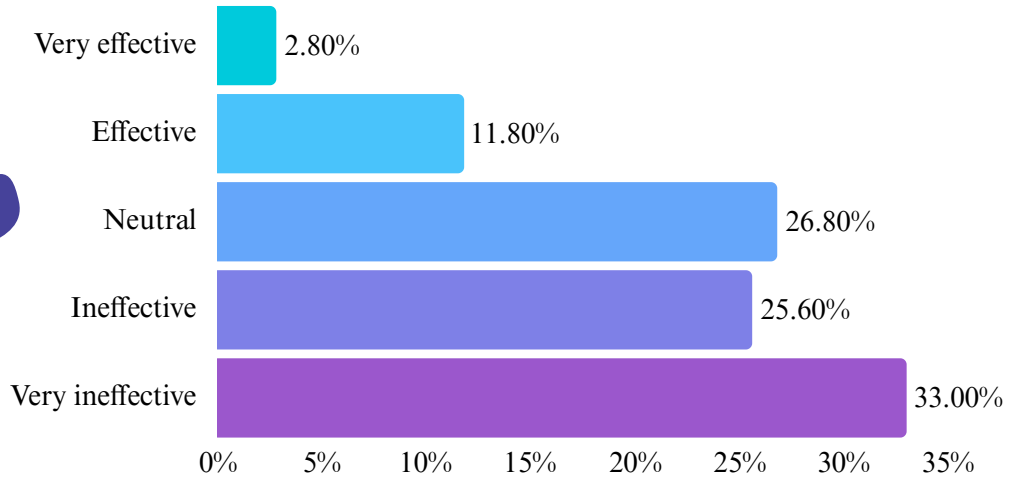
By contrast, only 11.8% of respondents said the government and law enforcement were effective in addressing the issue, and an even smaller share (2.8%) rated their performance as very effective. Together, this makes just 14.6% of respondents with a positive perception of the current response. A notable portion of respondents (26.8%) selected a neutral option, which could reflect uncertainty, lack of information, or mixed experiences with how drug-related issues are handled in their communities.

The results point to a widespread perception that existing policies and law enforcement strategies are falling short. With fewer than 1 in 7 respondents expressing confidence in current efforts, there appears to be a significant gap between institutional action and public expectations. This indicates a pressing need to strengthen the capacity of enforcement agencies, improve coordination, and ensure that anti-drug interventions are both visible and effective at the community level.

"More than 6 in 10 Gambians say the government is not doing enough to tackle drug abuse — only 1 in 7 express confidence in current efforts."

How would you rate the effort of the government and law enforcement in tackling drug abuse?

Perceived Effectiveness of Government and Law Enforcement in Tackling Drug Abuse



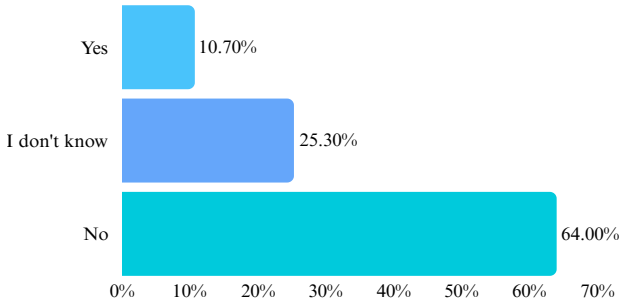
Effectiveness of Drug Laws and Penalties

Public perception of the effectiveness of current drug laws and penalties in deterring drug abuse in The Gambia reflects a clear lack of confidence. A majority of respondents (64.0%) stated that the existing legal framework is not sufficient to discourage drug use. This suggests that many in the population view the laws as either too weak, inconsistently enforced, or disconnected from the realities of rising drug use in their communities.

Only 10.7% of respondents said they believe the current laws and penalties are effective in deterring drug abuse, while 25.3% responded that they did not know. This relatively high share of uncertainty points to a possible lack of public awareness about what the laws are, how they are applied, or what penalties exist for drug-related offenses.

Do you believe the current drug laws and penalties are enough to discourage drug abuse?

Public Perception of the Effectiveness of Current Drug Laws and Penalties in Deterring Drug Abuse



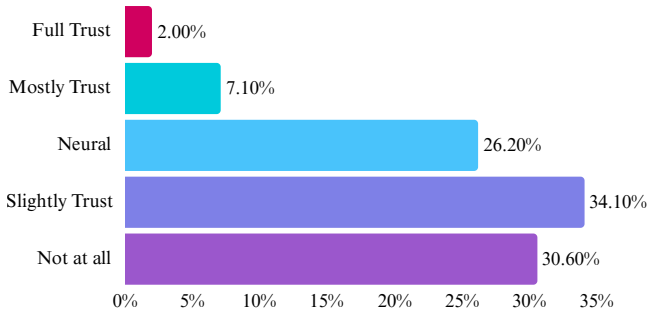
The data reflect a general sentiment that the current approach is not working. With nearly two-thirds expressing doubt and one-quarter unsure, confidence in the legal system's ability to address drug abuse is low. This highlights the need for stronger public education on existing drug laws and a review of how they are enforced. It also suggests the importance of updating legal frameworks and strategies to make them more visible, community-responsive, and aligned with prevention and rehabilitation efforts.

DLEAG's Addressing Drug-related Issues

Public trust in The Gambia's Drug Law Enforcement Agency (DLEAG) appears to be limited, with a large portion of the population expressing low confidence in its ability to effectively address drug-related issues in their communities. According to the data, 30.6% of respondents reported that they do not trust DLEAG at all. In addition, 34.1% said they have only slight trust in the agency. Together, this accounts for 64.7% of respondents who expressed low or no confidence in DLEAG's effectiveness.

To what extent do you trust The Gambia's Drug Law Enforcement Agency (DLEAG) to effectively address drug-related issues in your community?

Public Perception of DLEAG's Effectiveness in Addressing Drug-related Issues in Communities



By contrast, only 2.0% of respondents reported full trust in the agency, and an additional 7.1% said they mostly trust it. Combined, these two groups make up just 9.1% of the sample, indicating that very few respondents currently have strong confidence in DLEAG. Meanwhile, 26.2% selected a neutral response, possibly reflecting uncertainty or limited interaction with the agency's activities.

Hotspots for Drug and Intoxicants
Most Commonly Distributed

Public perception of where drugs and intoxicants are most commonly distributed points to certain areas as clear hotspots. Streets and ghettos were identified as the most common locations, with 79.56% of respondents selecting them. These public and often densely populated areas are widely viewed as central points for drug activity within communities.

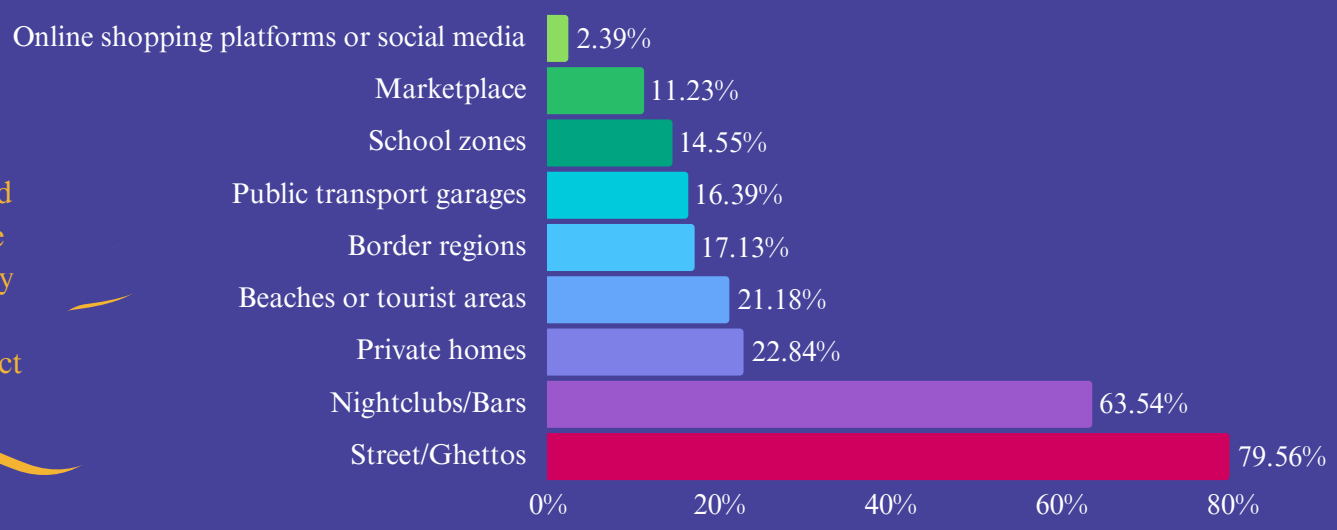
Nightclubs and bars followed closely, cited by 63.54% of respondents as distribution hubs. The association of nightlife environments with substance availability reflects a concern that drug access may be increasing in social or recreational settings. Private homes were also noted, with 22.84% of respondents indicating that drug distribution often takes place in residential spaces, suggesting that the issue extends into more private and less regulated areas.

Beaches or tourist zones were selected by 21.18%, while border regions (17.13%) and public transport garages (16.39%) were also identified, indicating concerns about drugs moving through points of transit. School zones were flagged by 14.55% of respondents, reflecting fears about the proximity of drugs to educational environments. Marketplaces (11.23%) and online platforms or social media (2.39%) were the least cited, although their presence on the list shows that no single environment is viewed as entirely free from risk.

The studies indicate that drug distribution is perceived as occurring across a mix of open, social, and even private locations. While hotspots like ghettos and nightclubs dominate public concern, the inclusion of homes, beaches, and schools highlights the complexity of the issue and suggests that effective response strategies must consider multiple types of environments.

Most Commonly Used Substances as Reported by Respondents

Where do you think drugs and intoxicants are most commonly distributed in your area? [Select all that appl



Most Commonly Used Substances

Cannabis is overwhelmingly perceived as the most commonly used substance in Gambian communities, with 80.48% of respondents citing it. This means that roughly 4 out of every 5 people surveyed identified cannabis as the most visible or accessible substance in their local areas. Its dominance likely reflects not only its availability but also its embeddedness in social environments where peer influence and stress relief play a role in shaping usage patterns.

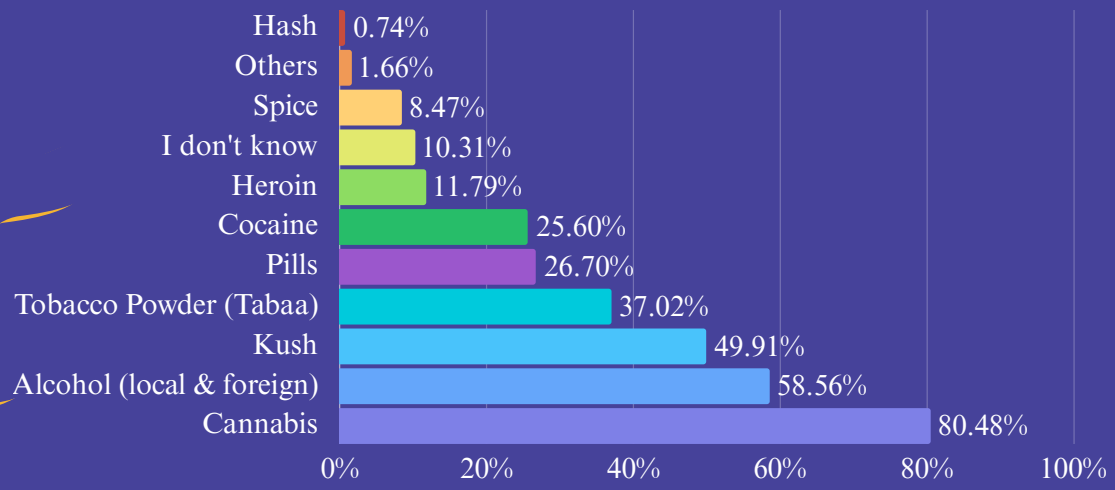
Alcohol, both local and foreign, was the second most reported substance at 58.56%, signaling that despite its legality, it remains a significant component of substance use. Nearly 1 in 2 respondents (49.91%) also cited Kush, a relatively newer drug that has generated increasing concern due to its severe and often unpredictable effects, particularly among youth.

Tobacco powder, known locally as Tabaa, was mentioned by 37.02%, suggesting its continued prevalence in everyday life. Pills and cocaine followed closely, cited by 26.7% and 25.6%, respectively, indicating a non-negligible exposure to harder substances. Other substances such as heroin (11.79%) and spice (8.47%) were also cited, alongside smaller shares of respondents who either mentioned unspecified drugs or indicated uncertainty by selecting “others” or “I don’t know.”

Although usage rates for hash and some synthetic drugs remain low, the overall spread suggests that communities are dealing with a wide spectrum of substances, both familiar and emerging. The prominence of multiple high-risk substances, including cannabis, Kush, and cocaine, highlights the need for multi-pronged responses that go beyond enforcement to include education, health interventions, and prevention strategies grounded in the social realities of Gambian communities.

Which of the following substances do you believe are most commonly used in your community? (Select all that apply)

Most Commonly Used Substances as Reported by Respondents



The Commonly Reported Effects of Drug Abuse in the Community

Community responses reveal widespread recognition of the far-reaching consequences of drug abuse. Topping the list was the increase in crime and violence, cited by 88.21% of respondents, or roughly 9 in 10. This reflects the strong public association between drug activity and rising insecurity, particularly in urban neighborhoods where street-level dealing or use has become more visible. Mental health issues followed closely, with more than three-quarters (77.72%) identifying it as a major concern. This aligns with growing anecdotal accounts of users, especially younger ones, exhibiting erratic behavior, emotional instability, or signs of long-term psychological distress, often attributed to substances like Kush or synthetic drugs.

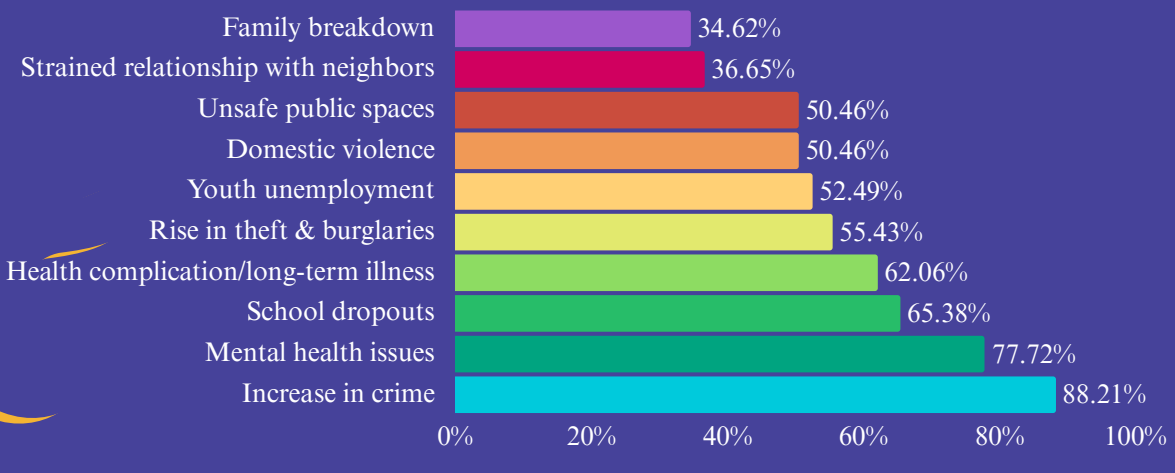
Concerns around youth development also came through clearly. School dropouts were reported by 65.38% of respondents, suggesting that substance use is seen as derailing educational paths. In some communities, there is a pattern where students begin to disengage, miss classes, or abandon their studies altogether once involved in drug use. Long-term health complications were also prominent (62.06%), reinforcing the understanding that drug use carries not just social consequences but lasting physical costs as well.

The data also point to strong public concern about theft and burglary (55.43%), youth unemployment (52.49%), and domestic violence (50.46%). Together, these reflect how drug use is intertwined with economic vulnerability and household instability. In some areas, respondents noted that job loss and lack of opportunities push young people toward dependency, while in others, substance abuse itself leads to dismissal or inability to secure work. The fact that both unsafe public spaces and domestic violence were selected by roughly half of respondents points to an environment where community and family settings alike are increasingly seen as threatened.

At the lower end, strained relationships with neighbors (36.65%) and family breakdown (34.62%) were still cited by over a third of respondents, highlighting the quiet but persistent social erosion taking place behind closed doors. These figures suggest that many Gambians see drug use not just as a health or policing issue but as one that fractures trust within and between households.

The pattern across the data suggests that Gambians perceive drug abuse as a destabilizing force touching on nearly every aspect of community life, from education and employment to family cohesion and safety. While the issues vary in intensity, they are linked by a common thread: a growing sense that drug-related harm is both personal and communal, and that its effects are becoming more difficult to contain.

What are the common consequences of drug abuse in your community? **(Select all that apply.)**



Policy Implications: A National Priority for Drug Control and Community Stability in The Gambia

The survey findings reflect a growing national concern: drug abuse is no longer perceived as an isolated criminal issue but a deepening social crisis that affects safety, education, health, trust in institutions, and the cohesion of Gambian communities. With cannabis, Kush, and alcohol cited as the most common substances, and ghettos, bars, and even homes and schools named as distribution points, public sentiment is clear—drug abuse is embedded in daily life and is weakening the social fabric. Addressing this challenge cannot rely on policing alone. It demands a coordinated, multi-sectoral strategy that combines law enforcement with education, prevention, treatment, and social development.

Expand access to rehabilitation and support because enforcement alone is not enough

Only 7% of respondents believe that adequate rehabilitation and support services exist for drug users in The Gambia. This points to both a lack of services and a lack of awareness. Without a strong treatment pillar, the system will continue to cycle users through punishment, stigma, and relapse. Government must prioritize the expansion of rehabilitation centers, not just in urban areas but in regional towns where addiction is also growing. Mobile clinics and community-based counseling services can supplement fixed centers and reach those unwilling or unable to travel. Just as importantly, these services must be visible. Awareness campaigns must explain where to go, what support exists, and reassure families and users that recovery is possible.

Restore public confidence in institutions through reform and visibility

The public's trust in DLEAG and broader enforcement efforts is critically low. Over 64% of respondents say they have little or no confidence in the agency's ability to tackle drug-related issues. This level of skepticism poses a major risk to public cooperation and enforcement effectiveness. To rebuild credibility, enforcement agencies must shift toward a more transparent and community-centered model. Officers should be trained not just in law enforcement but in communication, youth engagement, and the principles of fair and respectful policing. Public visibility is also key; enforcement actions must be seen, explained, and understood by the communities they serve. Involving local leaders in oversight or outreach can help close the trust gap and reduce perceptions of impunity or bias.

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Shift legal responses to reflect public health and social realities

The belief that current drug laws are not effective, shared by 64% of respondents, should prompt a national review of legal strategy. While drug trafficking must remain a serious offense, minor possession or use, particularly among youth, should be addressed through diversion programs focused on counseling, education, or community service. The legal system must distinguish between the supplier and the user. This would reduce prison overcrowding, free up law enforcement resources, and increase the chances of rehabilitation. Reforms should also include awareness-raising about existing laws. When 1 in 4 Gambians say they do not know if the laws are sufficient, the issue is no longer just policy, it is a communication failure.

Protect schools and public spaces from infiltration

Drug distribution is not confined to back alleys or nightclubs. School zones, homes, beaches, and markets were all cited as distribution points. This should be alarming. It means that the environments meant to nurture, protect, and serve the public are being encroached upon. Schools must be declared and enforced as safe zones, with regular inspections, confidential reporting systems, and the inclusion of drug education in the national curriculum. Local governments should work with enforcement and community leaders to monitor public transport hubs, garages, and recreational zones where distribution may be taking place. But this must be done in a way that respects rights and avoids unnecessary criminalization.

Tackle the root causes: youth unemployment, education failure, and mental health

The data show a clear link between drug use and social and economic vulnerabilities. Over 50% of respondents cited school dropout, unemployment, and mental health breakdown as outcomes of drug abuse. These are not isolated consequences; they are also causes. Young people lacking access to jobs, guidance, or mental health care are more vulnerable to substance use. The policy response must integrate employment programs, vocational training, school retention strategies, and mental health services into the national drug strategy.

This is not about creating entirely new systems but coordinating existing ones, ensuring that schools, clinics, job centers, and youth programs speak to each other and are aligned with anti-drug efforts.

Build national awareness through targeted, inclusive communication

One of the strongest undercurrents in the data is the gap in awareness—awareness of services, of laws, and of the broader impacts of drug abuse. Effective policy must include an equally robust communication strategy. This means using local languages, trusted messengers such as youth leaders or religious figures, and the media formats people actually use including radio, social media, and community forums. Education materials must be clear, consistent, and adapted for different age and literacy levels. By normalizing informed conversations around drug use and recovery, the government can begin to reduce stigma and improve early intervention.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey present a clear and urgent message: Gambians are deeply concerned about the state of essential services, governance, and social stability, with healthcare, the rising cost of living, corruption, and crime emerging as the most pressing issues. Public trust in key institutions such as Parliament, the Judiciary, law enforcement, and public service agencies remains critically low, highlighting the widespread perception that current systems are not adequately addressing the nation's most urgent challenges.

Beyond governance concerns, the report highlights a growing social crisis in the form of drug abuse, which is seen as both a public health and security threat with far-reaching consequences for youth, families, and communities. While enforcement is essential, the public strongly indicates that prevention, rehabilitation, and education must be equally prioritized to break cycles of addiction and social harm.

The data also reveal a shifting communication landscape where social media has become the dominant source of information. However, gaps in the clarity, reach, and credibility of official communication are undermining public engagement and preparedness. Addressing this will require not only more transparent and consistent messaging but also the integration of community voices and trusted local networks into risk communication strategies.

Taken together, these insights call for an inclusive, multi-sectoral approach that strengthens service delivery, enhances institutional accountability, and directly responds to the lived realities of Gambians. Aligning policy actions with public priorities while fostering trust through transparency and engagement offers the most promising path toward a more resilient, equitable, and secure national future.

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