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DJIBOUTI

The Republic of Djibouti is the smallest and most stable country in the Horn of Africa and the East Africa region. When it gained its independence in 1977, a single party began directing the affairs of the country. However, an armed rebellion was started in 1991 in the north, and a new constitution that introduced a multi-party system was passed in 1992. In December 1994, the government and the rebel group Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) signed a peace agreement, which has secured lasting peace in Djibouti.

According to the panelists, the government states that Djibouti, as a young country, uses its mass media to ensure its sovereignty and national unity. Such safeguards appear necessary as instability in the East Africa region continues, with the breakup of Somalia into several autonomous authorities following the Ogaden War, the Ethiopia-Eritrean conflict, the crisis of the Hanish Islands, the intervention of Ethiopian troops in Somalia, and the recent phenomenon of Eritrean troops along Djibouti's northern border.

All news media organizations are controlled by the Ministry of Communications, Culture, Posts and Telecommunications (MCCPT), created after Ismail Omar Guelleh became president in April 1999. (Between February 1986 and April 1999, the state media of Djibouti was under the auspices of the General Secretariat of Information, part of the presidential administration.) Djibouti's public media include Radio Television of Djibouti (RTD), which forms a single entity with the same staff and the same leadership; the Djibouti News Agency (Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, or ADI); the Arabic-language newspaper *Al Qarn*; and *La Nation*, published four times a week and the only French-language newspaper in the Horn of Africa. In addition to the official press, newspapers of the political parties are also available, though not on a regular basis.

Several international broadcasters operate freely in Djibouti, including established terrestrial radio channels such as BBC, VOA, RFI, and RMC, broadcast in FM.

Overall, the Djiboutian government is supportive of the media sector, at least the state media. Recently, the Minister of MCCPT, Ali Abdi Farah, introduced a bill to the cabinet and parliament aimed at promoting media workers by recognizing the rights and the contribution of journalists in a pluralistic society. The bill was passed by the parliament and signed by President Guelleh, but its tenets have not yet been implemented, pending an execution plan from media houses.

Djiboutian media struggle with professionalism. Informed media reports with balance are largely absent. Citizens do not have a trusted media sector that is able to convey facts, support responsible debate, or represent the country's diversity of communities and views. Parties with a political, rather than a journalistic, orientation directly run the media. And the high rate of illiteracy (approximately 49% of the population over 15 years) and the low number of inhabitants in the country (approximately 700,000) constitute a serious handicap to the development of a multifaceted and independent press owned and run by Djibouti citizens.

DJIBOUTI AT A GLANCE

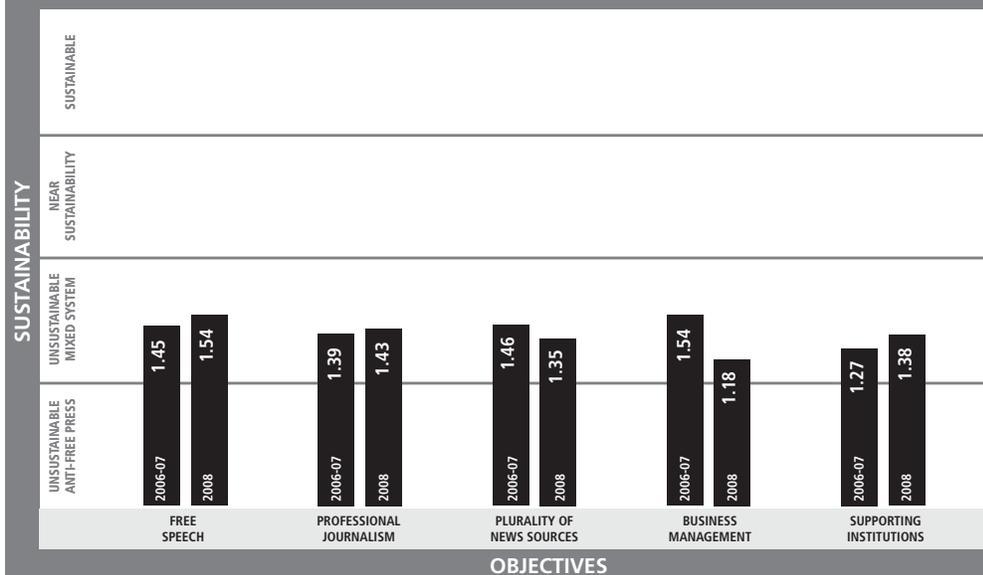
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 516,055 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*) <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/DJ.html>
- > **Capital city:** Djibouti
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 60%, Afar 35%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 94%, Christian 6% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$908 million (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$2,260 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 78.0%, female 58.4%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Ismail Omar Guelleh (since May 8, 1999)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** *Le Nation*, *Al-Qarn* and Radio Television de Djibouti (RTD)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation : *Le Nation* (circulation 1500), *Al-Qarn* (circulation 500)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Djibouti News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 11,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: DJIBOUTI



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.54

Djiboutian media enjoy relative freedom that is nonetheless limited by the predominance of state media, sporadic opposition media, and the absence of independent newspapers and radio stations.

The constitution of Djibouti fully guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of information, and freedom of the media. Given that media outlets in Djibouti are run either by the state or opposition political parties, some politicians argue that the current provisions in the constitution have not been implemented. Opposition newspapers do not necessarily adhere to the principles of free press as stated in the Djiboutian constitution or serve as an independent voice in accordance with international standards, according to the panelists.

The media regulation law under which the sector currently operates is a draconian inheritance from the previous administration of late president Hassan Guled Aptidon. Although this law was not implemented by either of the administrations succeeding Aptidon, it includes articles that severely restrict media freedom. For this reason, Farah proposed the aforementioned new media law that promotes journalistic work, improves working conditions of journalists, secures the rights of media professionals, and grants more rights to members of the media sector that are not government employees.

Djibouti is a safe place for journalists to practice their profession. There are no pending court cases on freedom of expression, and no journalist has ever been killed, jailed, or charged with criminal defamation. Due to the lack of such problems, the panelists did not mention any crimes committed by journalists that required a court hearing, although panelists said that some staff members of opposition newspapers were arrested a few years back.

Opposition politicians accuse the government of not allowing free expression, yet the panelists could not recall a case of ordinary Djiboutian citizens that wanted to establish a private/apolitical media house but were disallowed by the government. Opposition politicians also say that the government prohibits plurality of the media and that it utilizes state media to advocate particular agendas, panelists commented.

Djibouti has only one Internet service provider, Djibouti Telecom, which is under control of MCCPT. The panelists agreed that all websites are accessible in Djibouti, and the government does not block access. People use free calling

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Internet services such as Skype. Djibouti Telecom and other foreign web hosting companies have not been held legally responsible for the Internet content of individual website owners who use their services to create web pages.

The only television and radio stations in the country are state-owned news media organizations. MCCPT is responsible for licensing and accrediting media. Because Djibouti has only one broadcaster, panelists could not say whether or not the procedures for licensing are fair and competitive.

News media organizations that are established in Somalia and western countries have offices and relays in Djibouti. There are no restrictions for these media organizations, apart from making a formal request to MCCPT. The ministry also accredits journalists coming to the country.

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Reporters and editors are encouraged to cover key events in Djibouti, but one panelist said that such events must be either under the patronage of the government or have the blessing of the government.

As part and parcel of being under government control, state media do receive preferential treatment from the government. Djibouti has no law yet that addresses editorial independence, even for state media. The non-functional old media law favors state media over any other media. State media editors and management are closely linked to MCCPT or other governmental departments. Large businesses rarely play roles or have any influence with the state media.

The criminal code is sometimes used in cases in which staff of opposition media are accused of defaming government officials. But no journalist has served a complete sentence for libel, and accused opposition journalists are acquitted or pardoned. For libel cases, courts determine guilt or innocence. Public officials are sometimes held for libel as well, according to panelists. Since judges are well paid and under heavy control from the top levels of government, no corruption cases have been reported.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.43

The Djiboutian media community is increasing, as more workers join the state media outlets, the state news agency, and international news media organizations. Some became journalists because they are fluent in other languages, such as Somali or Afar. "They never went to journalism school—perhaps attended one or two workshops. They devote very little of their time to reading journalism books," one panelist said.

Journalism schools do not exist in Djibouti, but journalists occasionally take advantage of training opportunities abroad. Djiboutian journalists do not often interact with other media members in the region or at journalism institutions, partially due to language barriers.

Journalists working at state-controlled media strive to inform the public on all political, economic, social, health, cultural, educational, scientific, religious, and sporting events and developments in the country and abroad. Media outlets also

aim to ensure open and free discussion on all issues of public interest, as long as they do not contradict the policies of the government. RTD has made significant strides in presenting the diverse opinions of local residents and covering the issues of their villages/districts, including concerns of public services, without bias or partiality.

However, panelists said that state media give priority to political considerations of the government. Opposition politicians accuse the government of not allowing the state media to treat impartially all political, economic, and health issues.

The panelists agreed that Djiboutian journalists do not have a professional code of conduct to guide their work. They do not adhere the journalistic values of openness, equality, balance, independence, reliability, and variety of sources. Editors and producers exercise self-censorship in dealing with news that is critical of the government and the ruling party.

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Journalists are highly paid in comparison to journalists working in other parts of Horn of Africa, but the standard of living in Djibouti is very high as well. The law improving the working conditions of journalists was enacted to aid journalists in maintaining a living sufficient to discourage corruption.

State media are well equipped with the latest technology, allowing their journalists to more easily perform their day-to-day activities. Opposition journalists, however, do not work under such conditions. Opposition politicians do not

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

make a priority of updating technology, and opposition media have difficulty generating funds to help equip their journalists.

Aside from state media, the Djiboutian media sector features print publications of political parties. Those papers include *Le Renouveau*, *La Réalité*, and *La République*. All are run mainly by politicians or activists with no journalism training, and lack any real graphic design or images. They are distributed very sporadically, most often to sway the public at the approach of elections. Their content is very critical of the government, the panelists said.

Given these realities, the MSI panelists said that effort is needed in helping Djiboutian journalists professionalize through training and media development, and in establishing independent media institutions in Djibouti.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.35

Djiboutian media is dominated by the government and the opposition, and thus does not portray the entire political spectrum of the country. However, citizens have unrestricted access to news and information from the world's major news organizations, including BBC, CNN, VOA, RFI, RMC, and Al Jazeera (in Arabic and English). Foreign news agencies such as AFP, Reuters, and AP have correspondents in Djibouti, as do the Somali television networks Universal TV and Raad TV. Foreign news media organizations produce their own news programs and have the liberty to send to their main offices the news they deem appropriate.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

La Nation and Al-Qarn newspapers, which are both run by the government, have better circulations than opposition newspapers. Only about 15 percent of the population read newspapers because of the strong oral culture in Djibouti.

As for the international press, major newspapers in Arabic, French, and English are available at newsstands but are quite expensive for the average Djiboutian. Major newspapers are brought from Dubai and Paris.

Most Djiboutian newspapers are in French and Arabic. *La Nation* and *Al-Qarn* newspapers, which are both run by the government, have better circulations than opposition newspapers. Only about 15 percent of the population read newspapers because of the strong oral culture in Djibouti.

The Horn of Africa Journal, a monthly magazine in English, has just been launched and is in its sixth edition. The magazine targets mainly the business community and presents the potential and economic advantages of Djibouti as a hub for international shipping. The cultural and promotional magazine *Djib-Out* is also in publication.

Anyone can create and use a blog in Djibouti. SMS news alerts through Djibouti Telecom are being used to communicate within the country and to receive messages from abroad. But SMS messages cannot be sent outside Djibouti, which may change with ongoing improvements to the telecommunications system.

Ownership of Djiboutian media is transparent. State media is clearly owned, run, and controlled by the government; opposition newspapers are clearly owned, run, and controlled by the opposition politicians.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.18

State media are well financed and well managed. Dedicated professionals handle accounting, marketing, and human resources duties for the state media and established procedures govern their operations. On the other hand, opposition newspapers are under-financed and poorly managed by young men who were not recruited for their managerial knowledge, competence, or experience.

Unlike the newspapers of the opposition parties, The Progress is a journal published by the National Printing House. Its circulation is mainly aimed at party members, but the public can also buy it.

RTD and *La Nation* inherited an infrastructure from France, which operated the media in Djibouti's colonial period. RTD is the heir to the French regional channel Outremer (FR3-Djibouti), and the weekly *Le Réveil* became *La Nation* in 1980. The newspaper is preparing to transform from being published four times a week into a daily, with about 1,500 copies in each run. ADI was established in 1999, which boosted *Al Qarn* (founded in October 1998) to a circulation of 500 copies.

The main party in power, the Popular Rally for Progress, has its own newspaper, *The Progress*. The paper is facilitated and funded by members of the governing party, and some editors are senior executives of the party, according to the panelists. Unlike the newspapers of the opposition parties, *The Progress* is a journal published by the National Printing House. Its circulation is mainly aimed at party members, but the public can also buy it.

Apart from the government funding they receive, Djibouti's three major state media organizations are supported by donations, advertisements, and selling of their services. Advertising accounts for about 11 percent of the media

sector's total revenue. Advertising agencies have yet to be established in the country. Djiboutian media members are unfamiliar with market research; the country has no companies or agencies that produce audience ratings or circulation figures.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.38

The Association of Djibouti Journalists (MAJD) is the only journalists' association in the country. The association was properly constituted in early 2008, due to efforts by the International Federation of Journalists and Eastern Africa Journalists' Association, along with financial support from American Center for International Labor Solidarity. Due to the small number of Djibouti nationals who are practicing journalists, time was needed to establish a professional association.

MAJD has been working to bring together journalists and other media staff to show solidarity and address key issues as one body. The association represents mainly state media members—editors, reports, camera operators, and freelancers. Opposition media members are not involved in the association; they are not considered "journalists" by MAJD.

NGOs that support media freedom, freedom of expression, or other media development activities do not operate in Djibouti. The US Embassy in Djibouti previously provided limited support to the media sector. There are also no trade associations, given the limited ownership of media aside from the government.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

As reported last year, Djibouti also suffers from a lack of educational institutions that provide interested students with practical training instead of theoretical knowledge. Specifically in the field of media studies, no journalism schools or trained faculty exist in Djibouti, and opportunities to study abroad are limited. Media outlets have hired some journalism graduates from neighboring Somalia, and a few journalists have graduated from programs in other countries.

However, short-term training opportunities do exist. The training programs are organized in collaboration with international organizations. Basic journalistic skills classes are among the more popular courses, but investigative journalism and editing classes are also needed.

Supporting industries and facilities are not apolitical and most are not privately held. Distribution and printing firms are barely adequate to support the media in its current state. To date, distribution and printing firms have not been manipulated into interfering with media operations. All broadcast transmitters are owned and operated by the state for exclusive use by RTD.

List of Panel Participants

The MSI panelists in Djibouti agreed to participate only if they were not named publicly.