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DJIBOUTI

When President Ismael Omar Guelleh signed a peace agreement with a holdout belligerent faction of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) in 2001, a stable peace finally took hold. Djibouti is now an important transshipment point and serves as Ethiopia's outlet to the sea. It is also home to thousands of French soldiers, sailors, and airmen, as well as a slightly smaller contingent of U.S. troops involved in anti-piracy efforts, anti-terrorism operations, and regional humanitarian assistance. The country is stable, particularly when compared to most of its neighbors.

The government protects this stability by limiting dissent. A sidelined political opposition is allowed to operate a newspaper (*Le Republique*), but government media dominate local reporting. The government controls domestic broadcasting through ownership of Radio Television of Djibouti (RTD). The sole news service, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, and two highest-circulation newspapers (French-language *La Nation* and Arabic-language *Al Qarn*) belong to the government. Government media exert no editorial free-thinking and serve the authorities. Closed in 2007, one opposition newspaper, *Le Renouveau*, remains silenced. Foreign news sources are available, though news about Djibouti is infrequent.

An example of one story from 2009 is that of the Borrel Affair. Bernard Borrel, a French judge working with the Djibouti Ministry of Justice, reportedly on an arms smuggling case, was found dead under suspicious circumstances in 1995. Initially ruled a suicide, further investigations led to a French court sentencing Djibouti's attorney general and head of intelligence in absentia for pressuring witnesses in the case. In May of 2009, a French appeals court overturned these sentences. Djibouti's official media hailed this as a victory for the country without delving into allegations that Borrel's death was linked to Guelleh or that the French government was attempting to protect its base agreements with the country.¹

Opposition reporting is also not balanced. Therefore, Djibouti lacks a media capable of providing insightful reporting that credibly holds government and politicians to account.

Due to the polarized state of the media in Djibouti, in which all media outlets are politicized, IREX was unable to find sufficient number of media professionals willing to discuss the media situation due to the risk of negative consequences. This study reflects a combination of research and interviews with those knowledgeable of the media in Djibouti.

¹ Compare coverage of the issue by the BBC and Djibouti's *La Nation*: "France Acquits Djibouti Officials," May 29, 2009 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8073407.stm>) and "Trois questions à... Djama Souleiman Ali," June 4, 2009 (<http://www.lanation.dj/news/2009/ln88/national5.htm>)

DJIBOUTI AT A GLANCE

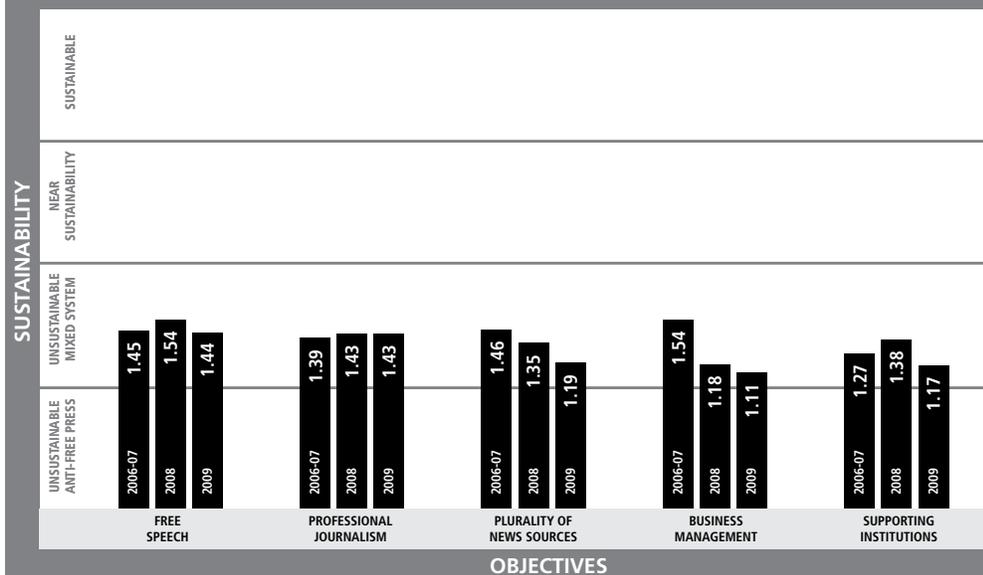
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 740,528 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Djibouti
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 60%, Afar 35%, other 5% (includes French, Arab, Ethiopian, and Italian) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 94%, Christian 6% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$1.106 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$2,480 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 78%, 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*, *Le Republique* (opposition), and Radio Television de Djibouti
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *La Nation* (circulation 1,500), *Al-Qarn* (circulation 500)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Agence Djiboutienne d'Information (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 13,000 (2008 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: 1.44

Djibouti's constitution includes provisions that guarantee free speech, freedom of the press, and free access to public information. However, current media regulations are a legacy from the previous administration of late president Aptidon. Although this law has not been fully implemented by the present government, it includes articles that severely restrict media freedom.

There is space allowed for some dissent by the opposition, marginalized though it is, which is reflected in the newspaper they operate. But serious limits to freedom of the press exist. Signs that the government is not fully committed to the spirit of the constitution are manifest by the near monopoly over communications and media held by the government.

For example, the Ministry of Communications, Culture, Posts and Telecommunications (MCCPT) oversees media licensing. However, there are no private broadcasters; state-run RTD holds a monopoly on the airwaves. One could only speculate on whether any licensing would be handled transparently and fairly. Past years' panelists could not point to the government prohibiting the establishment of any media, but none exist to cover news that are outside the control of political parties or the government.

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.

Djibouti has no law that addresses editorial independence for state media. State media editors and management are closely linked to MCCPT or other government agencies.

Furthermore, the government has indeed closed media that threatened its image: Freedom House, in its 2010 edition of *Freedom in the World*, noted that *Le Renouveau* newspaper, aligned with opposition parties, remained shuttered in 2009 after being ordered to close after losing a libel case. *Le Renouveau* reported that a bribe was paid to the governor of the national bank, who is the president's brother-in-law.

Panelists from years past have pointed to freedom on the Internet, despite the fact that MCCPT oversees the country's sole Internet service provider. People freely use Voice Over Internet Protocol services such as Skype. However, in its 2009 *Human Rights Report*, the U.S. State Department reported that the government blocks internal access to the Association for Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti's website.

Panelists from past studies asserted that Djibouti is a safe place to practice journalism and that no media professionals are subject to violence. How much of this is because journalists adhere to certain boundaries about what to cover is difficult to assess.

Djibouti has no law that addresses editorial independence for state media. State media editors and management are closely linked to MCCPT or other government agencies. Large businesses rarely play roles or have any influence with the state media. Opposition politicians charge that the government utilizes state media to advocate particular agendas.

Panelists from past studies reported that the defamation and libel sections of the criminal code are sometimes used against staff of opposition media when they write about government officials. But they pointed out that no journalist has served a complete sentence for libel. Public officials are sometimes held for libel as well, according to past panelists. Judges are not independent of the government, but are well paid and no corruption scandals involving libel cases have come to light.

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.

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 favorable conditions.

Foreign news organizations 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.

Although there are no legal hurdles to joining the media profession, given the high degree of political control over the media such considerations affect entry in practice.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.43

First and foremost, journalists in Djibouti work for the political parties or governmental owners of their media outlet. Impartiality and balance are not the primary goal of reports carried by these media. Further, most journalists do not have the necessary training to undertake professional reporting. Panelists from previous years reported that Djiboutian journalists do not have a professional code of conduct to guide their work.

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).

Editors and producers exercise self-censorship in dealing with news that is critical of the government and the ruling party. Freedom House reported that, in light of libel laws, "Journalists generally avoid covering sensitive issues, including human rights, the army, the FRUD, and relations with Ethiopia." Last year's panelists noted that 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.

Journalists are highly paid in comparison to journalists working in other parts of Horn of Africa, but the cost of living in Djibouti is very high.

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 favorable conditions. Opposition politicians do not make a priority of updating technology, and opposition media have difficulty generating funds to help equip their journalists. Such newspapers lack any real graphic design or images.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.19

There is little plurality of national news in Djibouti, even if some dissenting opinions are allowed. Although the population is relatively small (about 750,000) the media sector still lacks the depth to adequately serve the public.

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.

The government's newspaper *La Nation* is published four times per week; *Al Qarn*, in Arabic, is another government offering. Only about 15 percent of the population read newspapers because of the strong oral culture in Djibouti. This makes broadcasting an important medium, but RTD is the sole broadcaster and offers one radio channel and one television channel. These government media do not criticize the government.

Opposition newspapers do not serve as an independent alternative voice, rather they promote the causes of their party. The State Department's *Human Rights Report* indicates, "Each registered political party is permitted to publish a public journal or newspaper," however none are published regularly beyond *La Republique*.

The Horn of Africa Journal, a monthly magazine in English, targets mainly the business community and presents the potential and economic advantages of Djibouti as a hub for international shipping. Other publications that do not carry news exist.

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. 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.

One news agency exists, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, but it is state-run and hardly independent.

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. However, this duopoly in practice has the same effect as media controlled by conglomerates; there is no effective competition. Further, given the government monopoly on broadcast media, there is no independent broadcast news production.

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OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.11

Last year's panel reported that state-owned media are well financed and well managed. Dedicated professionals handle accounting, marketing, and human resources duties and established procedures govern their operations. On the other hand, opposition newspapers are under-financed and poorly managed by inexperienced personnel who were not recruited for their managerial knowledge, competence, or experience.

In neither case do media outlets receive revenue from multiple sources. They are funded by political patrons and do not strive to increase sales of advertisements or turn a profit. Last year's panelists said that advertising accounts for about 11 percent of the media sector's total revenue. Advertising agencies have yet to be established in the country.

Similarly, no efforts are made to undertake market research or to measure audience size or circulation figures. In the

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.

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case of circulation, it is recognized that it is limited and this is not required to boost sales, since financing comes from political funders.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.17

The Association of Djibouti Journalists (MAJD) is the only journalists' association in the country. The association was founded 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. However, only a small number of Djibouti nationals are practicing journalists. 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, reporters, 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

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.

Djibouti. The U.S. 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.

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 journalism skills classes are among the more popular courses.

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. Djibouti has only one Internet service provider, Djibouti Telecom, which is under control of MCCPT.

List of Panel Participants

Due to the polarized state of the media in Djibouti, in which all media outlets are politicized, IREX was unable to find sufficient number of media professionals willing to discuss the media situation due to the risk of negative consequences. This study reflects a combination of research and interviews with those knowledgeable of the media in Djibouti.