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DJIBOUTI

The last of the African French colonies to secure its independence in 1977, Djibouti continues to hold deep ties to France. In a region rocked by violence, President Ismael Omar Guehallah has held the country in relative stability since signing a peace agreement in 2001 with a belligerent faction of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD). Djibouti takes advantage of its calm coastline and hosts French and U.S. troops involved in the fight against terrorism and piracy, and serves as a key shipping center for the region.

One casualty of the country's stability is the freedom of the press, which the government restricts by dominating the media scene and controlling all publications strictly. One opposition paper, *Le Renouveau* ("Renewal"), remained banned throughout 2010. As the owner of Radio Television of Djibouti (RTD), the government controls domestic broadcasting. The sole news service, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information (ADI), and the two highest-circulation newspapers (French-language *La Nation* and Arabic-language *Al Qarn*) belong to the government as well.

Freedom House reported that in April 2010, as Djibouti approached the 2011 election year, parliament amended the constitution and cleared the way for President Guelleh to run for a third term.<sup>1</sup> Within the current media climate, there is little hope that the media will present any unbiased content to inform the vote. As noted in last year's MSI, neither the state nor the private media provide balanced reporting, depriving citizens of a platform to hold the government and opposition politicians accountable.

*Due to the polarized state of the media in Djibouti, in which all outlets are politicized and vocal media members are at risk of negative consequences, IREX was unable to find a sufficient number of media professionals willing to participate in the MSI. This study reflects a combination of research and interviews with individuals knowledgeable of the media in Djibouti.*

<sup>1</sup> "Freedom in the World 2011." Freedom House, 2011. Available at: <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011&country=8026> (Accessed December 2, 2011.)

# DJIBOUTI AT A GLANCE

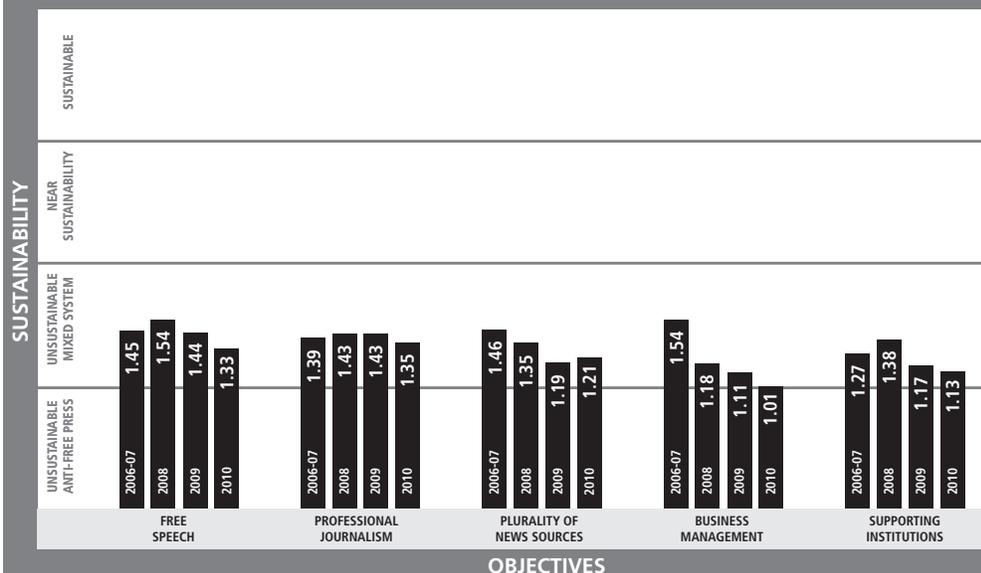
## GENERAL

- > **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 (2010-Atlas):** \$1.105 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$2,460 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **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:** 25,900 (2009 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: 1.33

The Djibouti constitution has provisions that support the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, and free access to public information. But media regulations, enacted by the late President Hassan Gouled Aptidon, contradict these freedoms and are used to stifle the press. As the U.S. Department of State confirmed in its *2010 Human Rights Report: Djibouti*, "The government did not respect these rights in practice."<sup>2</sup> The same report notes that opposition leaders complain commonly that the government obstructs the freedom of expression, although there are signs that citizens exercise the right to free speech.

With a monopoly on Djibouti's airwaves through RTD, the government dominates the broadcast media sector completely. The Ministry of Communications, Culture, Posts and Telecommunications (MCCPT) oversees media licensing, as well as the country's sole Internet service provider. Given these facts, as noted in last year's MSI, observers can only speculate on whether any licensing would be handled transparently or fairly. In past years, MSI panelists have described the broadcasting field as closed, and could not give examples of any media outlets that attempted to gain licensing.

DJIBOUTI

#### 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.

<sup>2</sup> "2010 Human Rights Report: Djibouti." U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, April 8, 2011. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154343.htm> (Accessed November 30, 2011.)

*Concerning the question of preferential treatment for the state media, there is little argument that the editors and managers of the state-run outlets are linked closely to MCCPT and other government agencies.*

For the most part, journalists may practice their profession fairly safely in Djibouti, free from outward violence. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists,<sup>3</sup> Djibouti ranks seven on a list of the top host countries; for example, recently Djibouti accepted 15 journalists who fled other countries such as Somalia. However, given the pervasiveness of self-censorship, this is of small comfort to media advocates.

Djibouti is not necessarily safe for other groups, however. Human rights activists have faced threats and intimidation; for example, Jean-Paul Noël Abdi, president of the Djiboutian League of Human Rights (known by its French acronym, LDDH), was arrested in February 2011 for investigating and reporting on arrests following recent student protests in Djibouti.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the question of preferential treatment for the state media, there is little argument that the editors and managers of the state-run outlets are linked closely to MCCPT and other government agencies. Past MSI studies noted that large businesses rarely play influential roles with the state media, and opposition politicians charge that the government utilizes state media to advocate for particular agendas.

Previous MSI panelists have said that authorities use the defamation and libel sections of the criminal code against opposition media members, but no journalists have served a complete sentence for libel. Past panelists also reported cases of public officials being held for libel. Judges are not considered independent from government influence, but corruption among judges is a minor issue, according to the panelists.

The government creates no legal hurdles to becoming a journalist, but political considerations affect the selection of state media journalists. Foreign journalists are allowed in the country if they make a formal request to MCCPT and apply for accreditation from the ministry.

<sup>3</sup> "Journalists in Exile 2010: An exodus from Iran, East Africa." Committee to Protect Journalists, June 17, 2010. Available at: <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2010/06/journalists-exile-2010-iran-africa-exodus.php> (Accessed November 30, 2011.)

<sup>4</sup> "Djibouti: Human Rights Activist Arrested in Djibouti: Jean-Paul Noël Abdi." Amnesty International, February 11, 2011.

*Self-censorship is pervasive; journalists toe the line of their publications, either for fear of losing their jobs or violating the country's laws on libel.*

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.35

Assessing the strength of journalists' adherence to professional standards is difficult in Djibouti, because no media outlets operate independently of political agendas, whether those of the government or opposition parties. Few journalists have had access to formal training in professional reporting and the importance of objectivity, and most do not set out to present impartial or balanced stories.

Panelists from previous years reported that Djiboutian journalists do not have a professional code of conduct to guide their work. Self-censorship is pervasive; journalists toe the line of their publications, either for fear of losing their jobs or violating the country's laws on libel. Editors and producers exercise self-censorship to bury any news that is critical of the government or the ruling party. Freedom House has reported that, in light of libel laws, "journalists generally avoid covering sensitive issues, including human rights, the army, the FRUD, and relations with Ethiopia."

Previous MSI panelists said that reporters and editors are encouraged to cover key events in Djibouti, but one panelist emphasized that such events must be either under

#### 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).

the patronage of the government or have the blessing of the government.

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

Previous MSI studies noted that state media are well equipped from a technical standpoint—unlike their counterparts in the opposition press, who typically suffer from insufficient funding. Last year's MSI noted that the difference is apparent in the output of opposition publications, which typically have poor quality graphic design and photographs.

## OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.21

With only a handful of media sources in the country—primarily the government's one newspaper, one radio station, and one website—citizens do not have access to credible, objective media.

The government-owned *La Nation* is the main national newspaper, published three times a week, and it has an online version as well ([www.lanation.dj](http://www.lanation.dj)) with content in French. Another government publication is *Al Qarn*, in Arabic. As noted by the U.S. state department report on Djibouti, the government allows each registered political party to publish a public journal or newspaper. The only opposition party that regularly exercises this right is the National Democratic

#### 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.

Party (PND), with *La Republique*. Additional political and civil society groups publish papers and other materials sporadically. The state department report also confirmed that the ban on the opposition newsletter *Le Renouveau* remains.<sup>5</sup>

Djiboutians have access to *The Horn of Africa Journal*, an English-language monthly magazine that focuses mainly on the business community, angling to advance Djibouti's prospects as a hub for international shipping. In addition, the sector has other publications not focused on news.

La Voix de Djibouti is an opposition radio station that broadcasts by shortwave from Europe, but the government blocks the station frequently, according to opposition leaders. Citizens do have access to cable news and foreign stations, but as noted in last year's MSI, finding out information on their own country is difficult. The BBC's media profile on Djibouti noted, "A powerful mediumwave [AM] transmitter in the country broadcasts U.S.-sponsored Arabic-language Radio Sawa programmes to East Africa and Arabia. Local FM relays carry the BBC (99.2) and Voice of America."<sup>6</sup>

According to a report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Djibouti has one of the highest rates of Internet use in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly 60 percent of survey responders reported at least occasional use, although the survey did not specifically ask about the use of the Internet for news.<sup>7</sup> Other surveys, such as the International Telecommunications Union, measure this quite differently, placing the rate closer to 6.5 percent in 2010.

In addition to the governmental control over media, literacy is a major barrier to media access for Djibouti citizens. Last year's MSI noted that because of the strong oral culture in Djibouti, only about 15 percent of the population read newspapers—making the government's monopoly on broadcasting even more significant.

Some foreign newspapers in Arabic, French, and English are flown in from Dubai and Paris, but they are expensive and thus out of reach for the average Djiboutian. Previous MSI panelists have said that citizens have otherwise 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.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, U.S. Department of State.

<sup>6</sup> Djibouti profile. BBC, April 28, 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13231765> (Accessed December 2, 2011.)

<sup>7</sup> "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa." Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, April 2010. Available at: [http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Belief\\_and\\_Practices/sub-saharan-africa-full-report.pdf](http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Belief_and_Practices/sub-saharan-africa-full-report.pdf) (Accessed November 30, 2011.)

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Djibouti Telecom is the only telecommunications company in Djibouti. Considered the strongest provider in Eastern Africa, Djibouti Telecom is looking to expand its influence beyond the country's borders, capitalizing on Djibouti's important position geographically in the region.

The opposition does have some access to RTD broadcasting time, according to the U.S. Department of State, but the allotments are extremely limited.

In an interview with Wardheernews.com (Somalia), Ahmed Rayale, a spokesperson for Djiboutian opposition based in Europe and in-country, said that the government uses national media to advance the president's agenda and "demonize the policies of the opposition." He explained that opposition members have bought a radio station based in Europe, and have used the airwaves and the Internet in a bid to get around governmental barriers, but authorities always block their signals. He continued, "We turned to using the larger Somali media, and within a short time, the censorship board of the dictator managed to deny access to any website, radio, and/or satellite television [station] that carries our message. The owners of televisions and websites blacklisted us because we are treacherously made, by president Gueleh's shadowy actions, to appear as very expensive customers that are putting unbearable strain on their businesses."<sup>8</sup>

The government-owned ADI is the only national news service, and can hardly be described as independent. It offers web content in French, and apparently plans to add more English and Arabic content. Djibnet is a website that offers RTD electronic content, including news articles, photos, and videos in English and French.

While the country has no private broadcasting outlets to assess against indicator 5, regarding whether or not

<sup>8</sup> "An Interview with Ahmed Rayale: The spokesperson of Djiboutian opposition groups." Wardheer News, July 04, 2011. Available at: [http://wardheernews.com/Wareysiyo/July\\_04\\_interview\\_Rayale\\_Djibouti\\_opposition\\_.html](http://wardheernews.com/Wareysiyo/July_04_interview_Rayale_Djibouti_opposition_.html) (Accessed December 2, 2011.)

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independent outlets produce their own programming, Djibouti-based foreign news media organizations produce their own news programs and have the liberty to send to their main offices the news they deem appropriate.

Ownership of Djiboutian media is considered transparent; state media are clearly owned, run, and controlled by the government, and obviously private media are owned by opposition politicians. Past MSI studies have noted that in practice, this duopoly has the same effect as media controlled by conglomerates, effectively eliminating any competition.

According to Freedom House, minority groups including the Afar people, Yemeni Arabs, and non-Issa Somalis suffer social and economic marginalization. As for broadcast languages, RTD airs programs in Arabic, Somali, Afar, and French. The media do little reporting on minority and social topics (environmental problems, gender issues, etc.) and the thrust of it is government-related. A study by the Eastern Africa Journalists' Association addressed the question of women working for the media, and noted that very few women work in traditional media, leaving out their perspective from much reporting. However, the study showed that the disparity is slowly improving, with RTD hiring more women gradually.<sup>9</sup>

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

##### **Djibouti Objective Score: 1.01**

Last year's panel reported that state-owned media are financed and managed well, with dedicated professionals handling accounting, marketing, and human resources duties. In contrast, opposition newspapers are run on shoestring budgets and managed poorly by inexperienced workers.

It cannot be said that any media in Djibouti receive revenue from multiple sources, nor are they profit-minded. They are funded by the government in the case of the state-run media, and political patrons in the case of the opposition.

<sup>9</sup> "Enhancing Gender Equality in the Media in Eastern Africa." Eastern Africa Journalists Association, 2008. Available at: <http://africa.ifj.org/assets/docs/175/137/cb6f4af-8ab2089.pdf> (Accessed December 2, 2011.)

#### **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.

According to previous MSI studies, advertising accounts for about 11 percent of the media sector's total revenue. Advertising agencies have yet to be established in the country, and very little data is available on the role of advertising in the country. Similarly, no media outlets undertake market research or measure audience size or circulation figures. Circulation is limited, as publications depend on political patrons, not sales.

#### **OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

##### **Djibouti Objective Score: 1.13**

Given the limited ownership of media beyond the state-owned outlets, and the absence of any non-governmental broadcasters, Djibouti has no trade associations focused on the needs of media owners.

The Association of Djibouti Journalists (MAJD) is one of two journalists' association in the country. MAJD was founded in 2008, with prodding from the International Federation of Journalists and Eastern Africa Journalists' Association and the financial support of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. MAJD represents state media workers mainly; it does not include members of the opposition press, nor does it consider them journalists.

In addition to MAJD, the Eastern African Journalists' Association is headquartered in Djibouti, and defines its mission as "fostering press freedom, protecting journalists, and promoting conflict resolution regionally."

While no NGOs in Djibouti are focused on the media specifically, two human rights organizations support press freedom and occasionally wade into press violations. The Djibouti League of Human Rights addresses some issues surrounding the press; for example, its website, [www.iddh-djibouti.org](http://www.iddh-djibouti.org), includes articles criticizing the government's stranglehold over the media.

Similarly, the Association for the Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti (known by its French acronym, ARDHD), sometimes dares to criticize the government—which has responded by blocking access to its website, [www.ardhd.org/](http://www.ardhd.org/). The U.S. state department report referenced this issue, stating, “ARDHD claimed access to its Web site was blocked by the local Internet provider, although those with satellite connections were able to access the site.”<sup>10</sup>

Another drawback to media development is Djibouti's lack of educational opportunities providing hands-on experience for journalists. The country has no journalism schools or even faculty trained specifically in media studies, and the opportunities to study abroad are quite limited. Last year's MSI noted that some media outlets have hired journalism graduates from neighboring Somalia.

Some short-term training opportunities exist, generally organized in collaboration with international organizations. The most popular courses remain basic journalism skills.

As for industries supporting the press, such as printers and distributors, they are neither apolitical nor held privately. Previous MSI panelists have claimed that print companies and distributors do not interfere with media operations; however, the government tightly controls publication in other ways,

#### 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.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, U.S. Department of State

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as described in the U.S. state department report. “The law regulates the publication of newspapers. Circulation of a new newspaper requires authorization from the communication commission, which requires agreement from the Djiboutian National Security Service following an investigation. The only publishing houses equipped for broad distribution are government owned, obliging antigovernment sources to print privately.”<sup>11</sup>

With the government's broadcasting monopoly, all broadcast transmitters are owned and operated by the state for exclusive use by RTD. Djibouti has only one Internet service provider, the aforementioned Djibouti Telecom, which MCCPT controls.

### List of Panel Participants

*Due to the polarized state of the media in Djibouti, in which all outlets are politicized and vocal media members are at risk of negative consequences, IREX was unable to find a sufficient number of media professionals willing to participate in the MSI. This study reflects a combination of research and interviews with individuals knowledgeable of the media in Djibouti.*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, U.S. Department of State.