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DJIBOUTI

The elections of 2011 ushered in a third term for incumbent President Ismael Omar Guellah following the hotly debated amendment to the constitutional limit of two terms for presidents. While a number of international observers declared the election to be free and fair, the governing coalition was able to maintain its stability partly by repressing anti-government protests and by enforcing a blanket ban on opposition rallies during the election campaign period.

The government continued to dominate the media scene through its control over Radio Television of Djibouti (RTD), the only broadcasting service, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information (ADI), the sole news service, along with *La Nation* and *Al Qarn*, the two highest-circulation newspapers. While opposition parties are legally allowed to publish newspapers, only one—the National Democratic Party—does so on a regular basis (*La République*). As noted in previous years, the political ownership of media creates a lack of balanced reporting.

The years 2011 and 2012 proved to be the beginning of a disturbing trend of increased legal and extra-legal repression of opposition reporters and activists, with correspondents of the European-based opposition radio station *La Voix de Djibouti* targeted with arrests, detention, and alleged torture at the hands of the gendarmerie. These reprisals, along with continued government domination of the media landscape, serve to reinforce the environment of self-censorship that is already rampant in Djibouti.

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.

DJIBOUTI AT A GLANCE

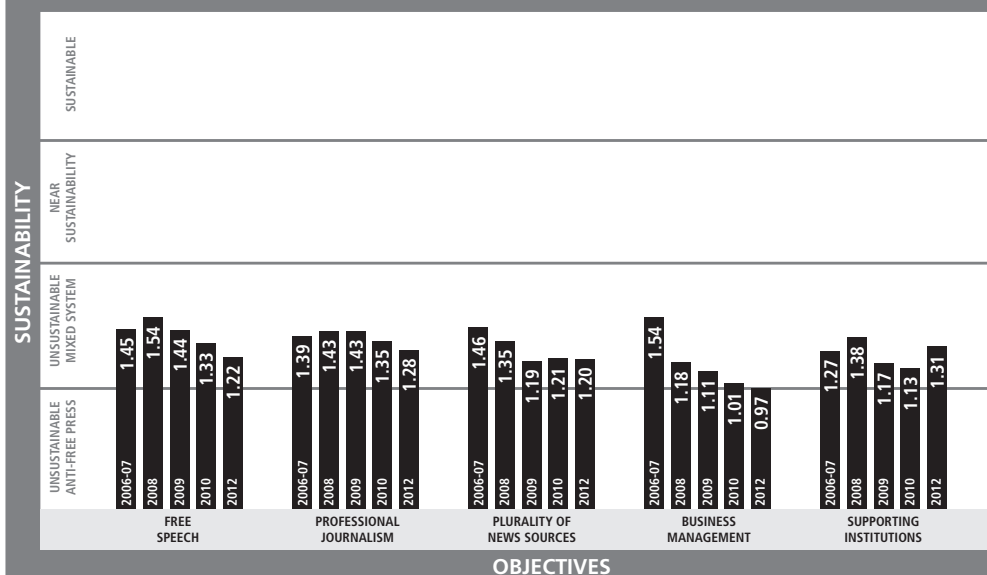
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 774,389 (July 2012 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 (2011-Atlas):** \$1.105 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$2,450 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **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: 1.22

Article 15 of the 1992 Djibouti constitution protects freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In theory, the people of Djibouti should enjoy these rights. In practice, however, the government pays little respect to the constitution when it comes to media and opposition freedoms, going so far as to create laws explicitly contradicting the constitutional precedent when it comes to those freedoms. Furthermore, there is still no access-to-information law in place.

The Freedom of Communication Law and the Criminal Code contain provisions prohibiting the publication of false news and libel, with a criminal punishment for media violations. It should be noted that both laws violate international standards on the right to freedom of expression, as the definitions of false news and libel are left quite broad, and thus the government frequently abuses the laws to suppress

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.

Such reprisals against the opposition press further preserve the rampant self-censorship that has been noted in previous years.

dissent and imprison those who publicly express views contrary to official statements.

These laws were used as justification in 2011-2012, along with what appeared to be falsified threats to national security, for the repeated imprisonment and torture of several human-rights activists, along with reporters and contributors for La Voix de Djibouti. Such reprisals against the opposition press further preserve the rampant self-censorship that has been noted in previous years.

Citizens, unlike journalists, have much fewer limits on their freedom of speech, although even in this area the government has engaged in repression. A protest of the decision to eliminate constitutional term limits for the president was violently suppressed, which resulted in some of the arrests mentioned above. The government extended this repression through a blanket ban on opposition rallies during the election campaign period.

This had the effect of limiting freedom of the press, due to the lack of independent, non-opposition media outlets and the state domination of the media, secured through their control over RTD, the highest-circulation newspapers, and the Ministry of Communications, Culture, Posts, and Telecommunications (MCCPT), which oversees licensing. Through the MCCPT, with the aid of laws mandating Djiboutian nationality or age limits on certain positions in media management and ownership, the government is able to strongly influence the ownership and licensing of new media organizations. This influence is indicative of the preferential treatment the state media receive for purportedly advocating specific agendas.

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 and are usually not subject to state pressure with regards to the stories they choose to send to their home offices.

While previous panelists have said that reporters are encouraged to cover key events in Djibouti, this is not always possible to do.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.28

With no truly independent media outlets, few training opportunities for journalists, and no professional code of ethics or conduct, it is difficult to evaluate journalists' adherence to professional standards. This is particularly true due to the political nature of media coverage in Djibouti.

Most journalism is approached not from a standpoint of providing biased coverage, but rather of promoting particular agendas, either pro-government or pro-opposition, depending on the outlet. Within those outlets there is also the issue of self-censorship, characterized on the opposition side by fear of reprisals, and on the state-run side by fear of lost jobs. This extends up to editors and media managers,

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).

who bury news stories that are critical of the government or run counter to its accepted doctrine. Furthermore, the presence of American and French troops in Djibouti, and the revenue in trade and foreign relations their presence brings, creates additional impetus for censorship.

While previous panelists have said that reporters are encouraged to cover key events in Djibouti, this is not always possible to do. Particularly during the ban on opposition rallies during the election campaign period of 2011, reporters were either unable or unwilling to present the opposition case in a balanced way. The opposition press is also constrained often by very limited budgets, a problem that past panelists have noted is not an issue for the state-run media, which are well-equipped from both a budgetary and technical standpoint.

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

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.20

With so few media outlets operating in Djibouti, and the partisan nature of those that do operate, it cannot be said that the people of Djibouti have access to a plurality of news sources.

The government-owned *La Nation* is the country's main national newspaper, along with the Arabic-language *Al Qarn*, also government-owned. As expected, these news sources do not regularly offer a broad spectrum of political views, choosing instead to focus on partisan issues and promoting the government's agenda.

Registered political parties are legally allowed to publish a public journal or newspaper, but the only one that exercises this right regularly is the National Democratic Party, with *La République*. Due to high costs, state control over public printing and distribution apparatuses, and other difficulties, other parties publish materials only sporadically.

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.

There is a small presence of foreign print media in Djibouti, ranging from regional journals to foreign newspapers. Access to these is typically available, but many individuals cannot afford their higher prices, such that in practice, access is restricted. 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. However, the only national news service is the government-owned ADI. Through its ownership of RTD, the only broadcaster in Djibouti, the government maintains a virtual monopoly on broadcast news.

La Voix de Djibouti, an opposition radio broadcaster, does broadcast by shortwave from Europe, but the government frequently blocks the station, according to opposition leaders. Correspondents and contributors also have been frequent targets for arrest by the government, including three—Farah Abadid Hildid, Robleh Dabar, and Houssein Ahmed Farah—who were reportedly tortured multiple times while detained.¹

¹ "Two radio reporters freed conditionally after being held for four days, tortured." RSF/IFEX. November 25, 2011. Available at: http://www.ifex.org/djibouti/2011/11/25/hildid_tortured/ Accessed December 3, 2012. And "News website correspondent arrested, held incommunicado in Djibouti." RSF/IFEX, August 10, 2012. Available at: http://www.ifex.org/djibouti/2012/08/10/farah_arrested_incommunicado/ Accessed December 3, 2012.

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The lack of broadcast news options is particularly troublesome due to low literacy rates and the importance of oral culture in Djibouti, which combine to make radio and television the most used news sources. Despite this, and the great growth that community radio has seen across much of Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years, Djibouti has no community radio at all.

A further limit is placed on news sources by the lack of Internet access in Djibouti, with most estimates of Internet access, including that of the International Telecommunications Union, putting usage at around 7 percent of the population. The websites related to government outlets also dominate online news, as opposition leaders allege that the government often blocks access to other pages.

The ownership of media is considered relatively transparent in Djibouti, but this does little to facilitate editorial balance. It is readily apparent which outlets are run by the state, and thus owned by the government, and which are connected to opposition parties.

Most languages are represented in Djiboutian media—if not in print, then in broadcast—with news going out in French, Somali, Arabic, and Afar. This does not, however, mean that there is any significant coverage of minority issues or social topics, as most news focuses on the government.

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.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Djibouti Objective Score: 0.97

Previous panels have said that state-owned media are financed and managed reasonably 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. Revenue from circulation and advertising is negligible at best. While there are no independent outlets to judge against indicator 5, the government does not give subsidies to outlets that are not state-owned.

The advertising sector in Djibouti is mostly underdeveloped, with no established advertising agencies, or research and data on advertising. Furthermore, no media outlets undertake

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.

market research or measure audience size or circulation figures. Broadcast ratings are likewise not sought after or even produced in many cases.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Djibouti Objective Score: 1.31

Due to the limited number of non-state media outlets, and their political ownership, it is not surprising that Djibouti has a distinct lack of supporting institutions for the development of the media.

While there are no trade associations that focus on the needs of media owners or managers, there are two journalists' associations operating in Djibouti. The Association of Djibouti Journalists (MAJD) was founded in 2008 with prodding from the International Federation of Journalists and Eastern Africa Journalists' Association, and with financial support from the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. MAJD represents state media workers, as it does not consider members of the opposition press to be journalists. As well, the Eastern African Journalists' Association is headquartered in Djibouti and defines its mission as "fostering press freedom, protecting journalists, and promoting conflict resolution regionally."

There are no NGOs in Djibouti that focus specifically on the media, but two human-rights organizations support press freedom and have engaged with press violations. The Djibouti League of Human Rights and the Association for the Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti (ARDHD) both address media issues on occasion and have criticized the government's

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.

media control on their websites. ARDHD has had its website, www.ardhd.org/, blocked for doing so.

Media development is further hindered by the lack of journalism training schools or faculty in media studies. There is little to no opportunity to study journalism, either inside of Djibouti or for citizens attempting to study abroad. The few opportunities that exist are sporadic and focus on short-term trainings organized in collaboration with international organizations. The most popular courses remain basic journalism skills, pointing to the lack of baseline knowledge among media professionals.

Djibouti is not lacking in supporting industries, such as printers and distributors, but they are largely owned by the government. Government control limits the use of these printers and distributors to almost exclusively the government-owned outlets through tight regulations on both the publication of newspapers, as well as ownership and management of media organizations. Because the government-owned organizations are the only ones equipped for broad distribution, the opposition press is left to print privately, a much more difficult proposition.

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.