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SOMALIA

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Somalia's political landscape changed dramatically since the last MSI study of the country in 2010. The central authority has reached most of the southern and central regions of the country—including all of the capital, Mogadishu—as domestic and foreign security forces pushed the militant group Al Shabaab from the capital and nearby areas. This turn of events has left the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in control, and for the first time in two decades, peace seems possible in Somalia.

Those previous 20 years of civil war in this isolated country virtually destroyed the Somali press. Hundreds of qualified journalists fled to Europe, the United States, and other countries in the region in search of security and employment. Only two printed newspapers remain in Mogadishu: the privately owned *Xog-Ogaal* and the state-run *Dalka*.

The present relative calm in the media sector was hard-fought. At least six journalists were killed in the first half of 2012 by unknown gunmen. Prosecutors have not identified perpetrators in any of these cases, leading some of their few remaining colleagues to leave the country, fearing for their own safety. TFG security forces blame Al Shabaab elements for these crimes, though the authorities have failed to stop the violence. While the peace dividend has brought some improvements to the media, the country's modest overall score increase was tempered by these attacks and the effects they have on reporters.

In semiautonomous Puntland, the regional government continues to harass local media through arbitrary detentions and arrests. Attacks against journalists there have risen since 2010.

Institutions that would normally support an independent media are particularly weak or non-existent in Somalia. No laws govern the profession, and many written civil laws go unheeded anyway. Without media trade or professional associations, Somalia has no one to set uniform codes of conduct or standards. Media representation of women in this conservative society is low, and women are largely confined to the lowest news-reader and correspondent positions.

FM radio continues to dominate the media scene, and the number of new station startups continues to skyrocket. TFG inaugurated the first state television network since the collapse of the former regime; the network is watched primarily in urban areas. Private satellite television has begun to grow, as has a nascent online media segment. The media profession continues to attract young men and women to its ranks.

Somaliland, the country's northern breakaway region, has continued to govern itself and its media sector independently of the rest of Somalia. As such, a separate chapter and set of MSI scores has been assessed for that region, following this chapter.

SOMALIA AT A GLANCE

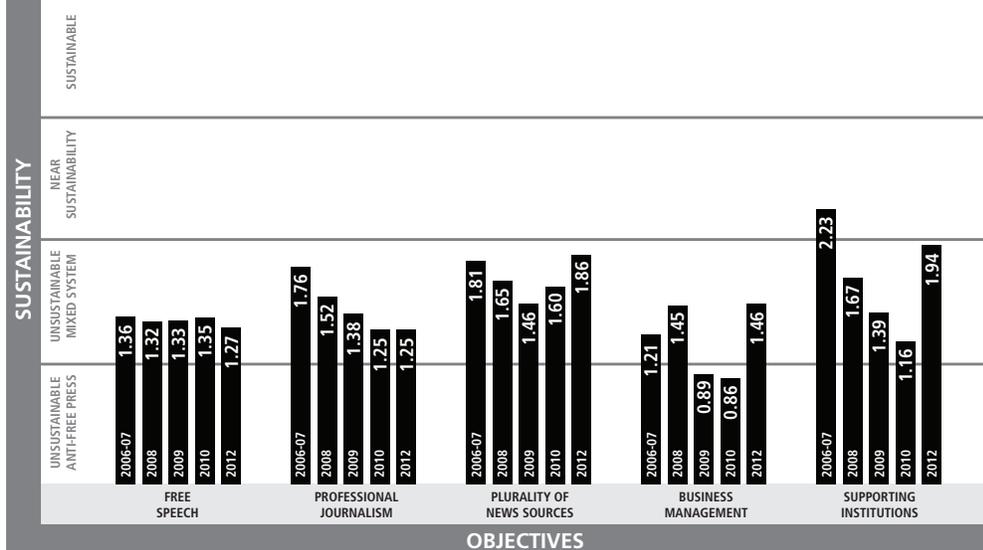
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 9,925,640 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Mogadishu
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions:** 100% Sunni Muslim (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Somali (official), Arabic, Italian, English (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** N/A
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** N/A
- > **Literacy rate:** 37.8% (male 49.7%, female 25.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Transitional Federal President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (since January 31, 2009)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 20 print media, 20 radio stations, 3 television stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top newspapers and estimated circulation: *Xog-Ogaal* (800), *Qaran* (500) and *Ayaamaha* (400) in Mogadishu; *Jamhuuriya* (1000) in Hargeisa.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Shabelle Radio, Somali Broadcasting Corporation, and Horn Afrik. Universal TV covers the whole country, Somaliland TV covers an area with an estimated 1500 television-watching households, and Somali Broadcasting Corporation TV covers an area with an estimated 1000 television-watching households
- > **News agencies:** Somali Independent News Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 106,000 (2009, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX SOMALIA



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

Somalia Objective Score: 1.27

Somalia's performance on freedom of speech was pulled in opposite directions by the trends that have defined the media environment since 2010. The transitional government is increasing its establishment in the capital, so it is less inclined than Al Shabaab to use its authority to directly stifle speech, and is more willing to improve or enforce legal protections in this area. However, crimes against journalists have increased dramatically, and the lack of prosecutions against the perpetrators seriously undermines the willingness of journalists to report openly on political issues.

Some legal and social norms exist to enshrine the protection of free speech in Somalia. In spite of their limited reach, authorities violate free speech laws, while journalists themselves also tend to misuse the right by fabricating content.

Crimes against journalists have continued unabated, despite the relative calm of the last year. The government is preoccupied with military security of the areas that it now controls, leaving crime prevention and investigation priorities aside.

According to the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, 18 journalists were killed and 20 injured in the country in the first 10 months of 2012, making it the

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.

Contradictory political power centers and interests would also stymie any effects of any legal reform, even with TFG's outright backing.

deadliest year yet for the country's journalists. To compare, three were killed in 2010 and four in 2011.

In May 2012, the African Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution condemning the rising attacks against journalists in Somalia.¹ Somalia's government itself condemned the violence in 2012. In September, shortly after the election of President Hassan Sheikh Makhmud, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution backed by Somalia that emphasized "the need to hold perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses accountable, and to bring them to justice."

Laws regulating the media sector are largely absent or ignored. While defamation is a criminal offense, most cases are settled by informal courts or out-of-court agreements. While journalists have called for legal reform to enshrine their rights to access and disseminate information, the practical implications of such reforms in a chaotic security environment would be limited. Contradictory political power centers and interests would also stymie any effects of any legal reform, even with TFG's outright backing. The panelists noted that even those officials sympathetic to a more open, legally protected media sector are poorly informed about the media.

Journalist and human rights organizations have attempted to promote the right of free speech, though they have little ability to influence policy or force helpful action by the government.

In some cases, the law is used to punish journalists harshly. In February 2013, as the MSI was headed to press, a court convicted Abdiasis Abdinur Ibrahim for libel, spreading false information, and bribery of witnesses in connection to his coverage of the taboo subject of a rape accusation. Both Ibrahim and the alleged victim were sentenced to a year in prison.

One bright spot in this otherwise dire environment for speech rights is the comparative freedom of market entry for firms, and professional entry for young new journalists. This might be considered the silver lining to the government's inability to secure the country. Should the security condition of the

¹ <http://www.defenddefenders.org/en/2012/11/somalia-end-impunity-for-killing-of-media-workers/>

Owners force their news teams to censor for the same reason, according to Jamal M. Barrow. "I personally witnessed an editor who was ordered by the owner of his FM station to stop coverage of a certain event," he said.

country continue to improve, analysts will look to whether entry restrictions to the profession are imposed for the first time.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Somalia Objective Score: 1.25

It should come as no surprise, given the chaos that has gripped the country for decades, that Somali journalists lack basic professional ethics, training, equipment, and other resources necessary to do their jobs. They require capacity building and media outlets require institutional development in every aspect of the profession, according to the MSI panelists. However, opportunities for such activities are returning. Somalia's professionalism score was generally unchanged from 2010.

Self-censorship is widespread, as journalists consider their content carefully in order to protect themselves from militia or criminal reprisals. Owners force their news teams to censor for the same reason, according to Jamal M. Barrow.

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).

"I personally witnessed an editor who was ordered by the owner of his FM station to stop coverage of a certain event," he said.

Most journalists are equipped poorly. While sufficient equipment is available to establish FM radio transmissions over a small range, other sophisticated forms of information gathering and dissemination remain out of reach of journalists, the outlets for whom they work, and their audiences. Owners have little incentive to purchase new equipment, given the threat of theft or loss amid the conflict. Few could afford such investments even if they could be secured.

Low pay, combined with unprecedented risks, continually sap the corps of new and established journalists. Most of the panelists were acutely concerned with issues of compensation and resources available to members of the profession, even more than more traditional issues such as the ability to conduct fair and balanced reporting. Only those professionals working for international agencies earn decent wages.

Some radio stations provide significant music programming, though with the preponderance of urgent and dangerous events unfolding in Somalia, news programming is not superseded. However, little reporting is available from outside Mogadishu in the south or the main cities in Puntland.

Niche reporting on complex issues such as business, health, and education development fall short of what is offered from other countries in the region.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Somali Objective Score: 1.86

The panelists agreed that Somalia has some diversity in its sources of news, and the proliferation of new sources has allowed the citizenry to become better informed of events. Somalia's Objective 3 score improved from 2010 due to these new entrants. Most new sources are low-cost outlets relying on the Internet to spread news to the diaspora, or community radio stations with a limited broadcast range.

Those citizens living in urban areas, or with access to more expensive satellite receivers, now enjoy modestly better access to balanced coverage as a result of the new outlets and voices entering the market. The panelists said that these are welcome changes from previous years, when Al Shabaab's control of Mogadishu severely limited the range of discussion permitted in the areas that it controlled.

Due to the shattered economy, particularly outside the capital, the vast majority of radio stations cannot upgrade equipment and rely on outdated transmitters with a broadcast range of a single town or village.

News outlets, particularly radio stations, have proliferated quickly, stoking competition in the market for the country's listeners. With the international community playing an important role in the country's political future, all sides have reached out to broader audiences to relay their messaging. The transitional government as well as Al Shabaab maintain robust Internet presences. Both sides even maintain Twitter accounts, despite occasional efforts by Twitter to block Al Shabaab from using the service.

Somalis also have access to the UN's radio station, Bar-Kulan. The station is based in Kenya, where it reaches that country's significant Somali refugee community, and is rebroadcast in Mogadishu.

Multiple, conflicting reports on an event can confuse and frustrate an audience seeking clarity on life-or-death issues. However, the public does tend to heed warnings on security issues issued via radio, according to the panelists. If a report advises that a security sweep is underway in a part of Mogadishu, citizens listen and avoid the area. Such evidence suggests the media enjoy at least some credibility with the public.

Though Internet access is essentially limited to central Mogadishu, some media outlets use the online format to cover events. These sources are used by the country's growing population of Internet users, who tend to rely on online social

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networks for much of their information. Satellite reception of external services such as the BBC and Al Jazeera is also becoming more common.

The panelists had the view that official media serve the interests of the public as well as the state, though their reports tend to exaggerate the government's effectiveness.

Local independent media outlets often plagiarize reports from international agency reports, without compensation. This is a missed opportunity for credibility, as international agency reports go through more rigorous editorial processes than fully local reports, and citizens might accept the veracity of local reporting more readily if its sources are made clear.

Ownership structures are generally opaque, making it difficult for citizens to determine the potential interests behind an outlet's reports.

International media with reporters in Somalia cover a range of topics, including the most pressing political, security, health, education, and social issues.

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.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Somalia Objective Score: 1.46

Somalia's business management score improved significantly from 2010, as the economy is showing signs of life for the first time in decades. Advertising from international donors remains modest but has risen in line with the increased donor presence in the country. Security improvements have allowed media firms to consider capital improvements. Still, much remains to be done before sustainable media enterprises emerge.

The panelists agreed that most media firms cannot be described as well managed. While a few permit editorial independence, their ability to attract revenues, equip staff, and disseminate their product is impeded by myriad fiscal and security challenges.

As owners and editors themselves are members of clans, the ability of clan leaders to influence coverage of politically

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important events merits mentioning. Generally, journalists follow the editorial guidelines set out by their employers, who in turn might be influenced by the clan interests.

Media firms earn most of their revenue through advertisements, and that funding is sufficient to cover their low expenses. However, the advertising market is insufficient to support capital investments that would allow media outlets to expand coverage and potential audience.

The ad hoc advertising market is just starting to function in Mogadishu. In Puntland, the advertising market is impoverished, which hampers the development of larger-scale radio stations.

Rates for advertising buys are determined by demand factors alone; for instance, radio advertisement buys for a given station will fluctuate according to the time and day of the week. Advertising is not subjected to political obstruction, according to the panelists.

No serious attempts at market research or audience statistics are currently underway in Somalia that would benefit the media industry or advertisers trying to determine which media outlet would best serve their needs.

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.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Somalia Objective Score: 1.94

Somalia's score for supporting institutions improved markedly from 2010, as the military reverses suffered by Al Shabaab permitted the return of foreign and domestic NGOs to the capital and much of southern Somalia. Still, the effectiveness and reach of support groups are limited.

Professional institutions are not in a position to provide significant support for the development of independent media. Journalism training institutions are sorely needed, the panelists agreed, but it is the country's multitude of other acute needs that have captured the attention of Somalia's best advocates for change.

Somali journalists are represented by the National Union of Somali Journalists, an active union that tries to advocate for their interests. The union has organized demonstrations to speak out against the violence that journalists have suffered at the hands of those who would silence them for their work—be they militant, government, cultural, or business in nature. The union issues press releases condemning the jailing of its members, including the February 2013 case of Abdiasis Abdinur Ibrahim.

Those institutions that can support the sector provide erratic levels of service and effectiveness. Staff turnover hampers their ability to deliver quality training and persistent advocacy for journalists' rights before local and international bodies.

Laws do not restrict the import or distribution of equipment, but in southern Somalia, there are practical barriers of economic isolation and a chaotic security situation in many areas.

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.

List of Panel Participants

Fadumo Jama, executive Director, Galkayo Television, Galkayo

Abdigani Irbad, editor, Radio Garowe, Garowe

Amin Khasaro, member, Mogadishu Media House, Mogadishu

Shafici Ahmed, producer, Hornconnect Broadcasting Services, Mogadishu

Mohamedkafi Moumin, head of staff, Risaala Media Corporation, Mogadishu

Aideed Salad, journalist, Daynile website, Mogadishu

Shador Mohamud, producer, Radio Umma, Mogadishu

Liban Nor, editor, Somali National Television-Radio, Mogadishu

Ismail Mohamed, editor, *Xog-Ogaal*, Mogadishu

Abdullahi Ahmed, reporter, Radio Benadir, Mogadishu

Hamdi Hassan, reporter, Somali Channel TV, Mogadishu

Mariam Abdi, women's rights activist, Coalition for Reforms and Democracy, Mogadishu

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