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## Djibouti

**Country:**

Djibouti

**Year:**

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**PFS Status:**

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**PFS Score:**

75

**Legal Environment:**

24

**Political Environment:**

28

**Economic Environment:**

23

The media environment in Djibouti is one of the most restrictive in Africa, and journalists continued to face arrests and detentions in 2014.

### Legal Environment

Djibouti's laws and constitution provide for freedoms of speech and of the press, but in practice the government imposes serious curbs on independent media. The penal code and the 1992 Freedom of Communication Law allow criminal penalties, including jail time and heavy fines, for media offenses such as libel and distributing false information.

Djibouti does not have a law guaranteeing access to public information. The Freedom of Communication Law imposes citizenship, residency, and age requirements on those holding senior positions at media outlets. The National Communication Commission, tasked with issuing private radio and television broadcasting licenses, accepted its first application in 2012, though it has yet to respond and has never authorized a private broadcast outlet.

### Political Environment

The official media, which account for almost all of the country's outlets, practice self-censorship and do not criticize the government. Journalists generally avoid covering sensitive issues, including human rights. The economically important U.S. military presence in Djibouti creates additional pressure to self-censor, as journalists are discouraged from reporting on soldiers' activities. Social media are closely monitored for plans of demonstrations or criticism of the government. The Association for Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti and La Voix de Djibouti, a Europe-based radio station, claim that their websites—the main sources for independent views in the country—are regularly blocked. La Voix de Djibouti's shortwave radio broadcasts are also allegedly disrupted.

Journalists are subject to detention without charge, intimidation, and violence, which further contributes to self-censorship. La Voix de Djibouti website technician and journalist Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh, who had been detained previously for posting Facebook photos of police brutality, was arrested and beaten by police in January 2014 while covering the release of a prominent rights activist from jail. Okieh was arrested again in March for covering an opposition meeting and jailed for nearly three weeks before being released. Mohamed Ibrahim Waiss, a La Voix de Djibouti reporter who had been arrested by authorities at least twice before, was detained in August for covering an opposition protest and denied medical treatment for injuries sustained during his violent arrest; he was released two weeks later.

## Economic Environment

The domestic media sector is very limited. Because of high poverty levels, radio is the most popular news medium. The government owns the principal newspaper, *La Nation*, as well as Radio-Television Djibouti, which operates the national radio and television stations. Community radio, which has gained great popularity across Africa, is nonexistent, and Djibouti is one of the few countries on the continent without any independent or privately owned newspapers. Djiboutian law technically permits all registered political parties to publish a newspaper, and opposition groups and civil society activists are able to distribute written materials that are critical of the government. Printing facilities for mass media are government owned, making it difficult to print criticism of the government for wide circulation.

While there are no private radio or television stations in the country, foreign radio broadcasts are available from the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, and Radio France Internationale, offering alternative sources of information to the public. La Voix de Djibouti started broadcasting in 2010 as a clandestine independent radio station operating from abroad. Despite Djibouti's location at the intersection of a network of undersea fiber-optic cables, less than 11 percent of the domestic population was able to access the internet in 2014, and the only internet service provider is owned by the government.

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