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Djibouti

Country:

[Djibouti](#)

Year:

2016

Press Freedom Status:

Not Free

PFS Score:

75

Legal Environment:

24

Political Environment:

28

Economic Environment:

23

Overview

The government strictly controls the media environment in Djibouti. Few independent news sources are available to the public, and journalists are subject to arbitrary detention. Political tensions increased as 2015 came to a close, due in part to elections scheduled for 2016.

Key Developments

- Police repeatedly harassed and detained a journalist for an overseas-based Djiboutian radio station during 2015.
- The lack of impartial reporting in the country resulted in unresolved, conflicting accounts of a deadly clash between security forces and participants in a religious gathering in December.

Legal Environment: 24 / 30

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 defamation 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: 28 / 40

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 international military presence in Djibouti creates additional pressure to self-censor, as journalists are discouraged from reporting on military 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.

The dearth of independent media coverage was underscored in December 2015, when security forces attempted to disperse a religious gathering and touched off deadly violence. The government maintained that seven people were killed in the clashes, while opposition and human rights activists said that as many as 30 people died, with conflicting accounts of how the incident unfolded.

Journalists are subject to detention without charge, intimidation, and violence, which further contributes to self-censorship. La Voix de Djibouti website editor Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh, a frequent target of harassment, was arrested in May 2015 and detained for two days in connection with his alleged failure to pay a fine from a 2013 case in which he was found to have defamed the police. Okieh was arrested again in November for reporting at an opposition rally, beaten by police, and released after a few hours.

Economic Environment: 23 / 30

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 has no 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. In August 2015, the opposition party began circulating a monthly newspaper, *Aurore*. However, 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 and Voice of America. La Voix de Djibouti started broadcasting in 2010 as a clandestine radio station operating from abroad. Despite Djibouti's location at the intersection of a network of undersea fiber-optic cables, only 12 percent of the domestic population was able to access the internet in 2015, and the only internet service provider is owned by the government.

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