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Freedom Of The Press - Djibouti (2011)

Status: Not Free
Legal Environment: 24
Political Environment: 26
Economic Environment: 23
Total Score: 73

In 2010 the media environment remained restrictive, with almost complete government ownership of print and broadcast media, very low levels of internet access, severe limitations on free speech, and frequent harassment of journalists. Although Article 15 of the constitution affords the right to free expression, in practice the government imposes restrictions on the independent press. Free speech is limited by prohibitions on libel and distributing false information. The U.S. military presence in Djibouti creates additional pressures for self-censorship, as journalists are encouraged to refrain from reporting on soldiers' activities. Journalists generally avoid covering sensitive issues, including human rights, the army, the Assa rebel group the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy, and relations with Ethiopia. The official media, which makes up almost all the media in the country, does not criticize the government and practices widespread self-censorship.

The domestic media sector is very limited. Because of high poverty levels, radio is the most popular news medium, as few Djiboutians can afford newspapers, televisions, or computers. 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 in Africa without any independent newspapers (one periodical run by an opposition party still publishes). Although Djiboutian law technically permits all registered political parties to publish a newspaper, the opposition-oriented *Le Renouveau* newspaper was permanently closed by the authorities in 2007 on the grounds of libel, after it printed an article stating that a businessman had paid a bribe to the national bank governor, the president's brother-in-law. Printing facilities for mass media are government-owned, which creates obstacles for those publishing antigovernment news media. While there are no private radio stations within the country, a clandestine independent radio station operating from abroad, *La Voix de Djibouti*, started broadcasting in the country in January 2010. Foreign newspapers and magazines are sold freely in Djibouti, and foreign radio broadcasts are available from the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, and Radio France International, offering alternative sources of information to the public. The only internet service provider is owned by the government. Although there are no reports that the government monitors e-mail or internet activity, the Association for Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti claims that its site is regularly blocked. Less than 5 percent of the population was able to access the internet in 2010.