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2013 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score: 84

Legal Environment: 27

Political Environment: 35

Economic Environment: 22

The media environment in Somalia varies significantly from region to region, with different conditions in unstable south-central Somalia, semiautonomous Puntland in the northeast, and the breakaway territory of Somaliland in the northwest. The year 2012 was one of the deadliest on record for journalists in Somalia, with 12 killed across the country, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). This is a significant increase from 2011, when two journalists were killed. The security situation remains challenging despite political progress in south-central Somalia. A draft constitution was passed in August, and a new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, was elected in September. Nevertheless, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the new government that succeeded it, both backed by African Union (AU) troops, continued to battle with the Shabaab, a militant Islamist group, and other local militias for control of areas outside Mogadishu.

Somalia's new provisional federal constitution, adopted by the National Constituent Assembly in August 2012, provides for freedoms of speech and of the press. However, due to pervasive violence across much of the country, journalists continue to face restrictions on their reporting in practice. There is no freedom of information law to guarantee access to public information, and defamation is a criminal offense, although many cases are resolved outside the formal court system, either according to *xeer* (customary law) or in Sharia (Islamic law) courts. At the end of the year the government was debating new legislative initiatives, including a telecommunications bill, a revised media law approved by the Transitional Federal Assembly (TFA) in late 2007, and a Communications Act. There was significant international support for media law reform, and an intensive effort to undertake such changes was expected in early 2013. However, given the

government's inability to impose its authority over much of Somalia, the practical implications of any new laws remained unclear.

The ongoing violence has dramatically affected the media environment in south-central Somalia. Numerous journalists have been killed in recent years, either for their perceived political affiliations or as accidental casualties in armed clashes. Media outlets have aligned themselves with political factions as a means of survival, making neutral or objective reporting a rarity. In October 2012, Jamal Osman wrote an article in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper in which he noted that Somali journalists were "dying from corruption as much as conflict." The article sparked a broad debate and was met with protest and condemnation by the media, despite the fact that such corruption had been documented before by journalist groups, including the National Union for Somali Journalists (NUSOJ). While there is self-censorship, it is often along political or clan lines. Concerns about safety also make journalists who gain access to militant leaders reluctant to conduct critical interviews or edit the resulting products. Direct censorship also remained a problem in 2012, as armed factions took over some broadcast stations and forced others to close.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and other media workers. Several journalists from the Shabelle Media Network were killed during the year. In January, the director, Hassan Osman Abdi, was shot dead as he was entering his home in Mogadishu. This was followed by the April murder of correspondent Mahad Salad Adan in Beledweyne, central Somalia, after he reported on a conflict between the Shabaab and the progovernment militia Ahlu Sunnah Waljamaa; the May murder of presenter Ahmed Addow Anshur; and the October murder of Shabelle's web editor, Mohamed Mohamud Turyare. Shabelle was one of south-central Somalia's most important media outlets, and the repeated attacks on its journalists have seriously degraded its operations. In addition, three journalists – Abdirahman Yasin Ali, director of Radio Hamar ("Voice of Democracy"); Abdisatar Daher Sabriye, head of news for Radio Mogadishu; and Liban Ali Nur, head of news for Somali National TV – were killed in a September suicide bombing at a Mogadishu café frequented by media workers and civil servants.

Despite the violence, dozens of radio stations continued to broadcast in Mogadishu and other parts of the country. The government supports Radio Mogadishu, which carries official news and information and provides space for a variety of groups and individuals to voice their opinions. The joint UN-AU radio station Radio Bar Kulan began shifting its operations from Nairobi, Kenya, to Mogadishu in 2012, reflecting both the improved environment in Somalia and a planned transformation into a public-service broadcaster. Like Radio Mogadishu, the station has sought to offer a platform for voices that may be critical of the extremists and more sympathetic to the government and AU forces. Many Somalis also access news via foreign radio transmissions, including the Somali services of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America.

The advertising sector is weak, and advertising revenue is often not enough to sustain media houses. This leads some outlets to depend on financial support from wealthy owners or politicians, which compromises editorial independence. Journalists in all regions of Somalia receive low or even no pay and rely on trainings, corruption, or blackmail for additional income. Many media outlets also prefer to hire cheaper, less-skilled workers or even relatives over more experienced journalists. Because there is an abundance of journalists, those who complain about low wages usually face threats of dismissal and replacement.

The status of press freedom is somewhat better in Puntland, a self-declared semiautonomous region. Puntland's interim constitution provides for press freedom as long as journalists demonstrate "respect" for the law, but the region recognizes the Somali federal government. A 2010 Puntland counterterrorism law includes a provision that prohibits media outlets from reporting on the Shabaab. In 2012, journalists also faced threats, attacks, and harassment from security forces and militias, who usually enjoyed impunity for their actions. Despite Puntland president Abdirahman Mohamud Farole's stated commitment to greater openness, restrictions remained harsh, and coverage of political and security issues continued to be particularly dangerous for journalists. Two journalists in the city of Galkayo were killed in 2012: Farhan Jeemis Abdulle, who worked for Simba Radio and Radio Daljir and was shot by unidentified gunmen in May, and Ali Ahmed Abdi, a freelance journalist who was gunned down by Shabaab militants for supporting the Puntland government. The government also put pressure on the media, forcing the private radio station Horseed FM to close and allegedly blocking its website in some cities, according to Reporters Without Borders.

In 2012, the autonomous government of Somaliland – whose claims of independence have not been internationally recognized – continued to tolerate a relatively free media sector compared with the rest of Somalia, although the relationship between the government and the media was tense. The Somaliland constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press. Defamation is not a criminal offense, and libel cases are sometimes settled through the clan system of arbitration, although judges are inclined to use criminal law in media cases. There is no access to information law in Somaliland, and public officials often choose not to divulge information unless it is favorable to the government.

In a pattern that began in the run-up to the 2010 elections, many journalists and media outlets are aligned with or financially supported by political parties. The Somaliland government under President Ahmed Mohamed Mahamoud Silanyo has been accused of dealing harshly with the media, often summoning journalists for questioning at the Central Investigations Department, closing media outlets, or arresting journalists. The government has a history of suspending broadcasts by the satellite television stations Universal TV and Horn Cable TV. In early 2012, the president called Horn Cable TV a "nation destructor" and ordered it closed. Eight of the station's journalists were arrested while protesting the closure; when 13 of their colleagues from various outlets protested the detentions, they too were arrested. In December, editor Mohamud Abdi Jama of the newspaper *Waheen* was arrested after he quoted a report by a participant in a human rights conference that alleged corruption by the president's son-in-law. Also in December, the editor of the weekly newspaper *Yool* went into hiding due to fears of arrest after he reported his predictions regarding the outcome of local elections held the previous month. As in years past, several Somaliland journalists received threatening text messages and harassment from the Shabaab. In October, Ahmed Saakin Farah Ilyas, a journalist with Universal TV, was killed in the northern Sool region by unidentified gunmen. Fearing retaliation, some outlets have refrained from openly reporting and condemning the activities of the Shabaab.

There are about 10 newspapers in Somaliland, although this number fluctuates, as some publish intermittently. Most local outlets are not economically sustainable and are heavily subsidized by the diaspora as well as by political parties and businesses. While they tend to be aligned with particular political or individual interests, Somaliland media largely share a proindependence agenda. Newspaper reporting is often critical of the government but has limited reach due to the relatively high cost of papers and low levels of literacy.

Radio remains the most accessible and widespread medium for news in Somaliland. The establishment of independent radio stations is banned, and the region's government has been reluctant to liberalize the sector, citing the danger that stations could instigate clan violence; some Somalilanders support this argument. Government-owned Radio Hargeisa remains the only FM station, although the BBC is available in the capital. There has been a small but notable growth in internet-based radio stations operating both within Somaliland and from the diaspora. There is one government-owned television station, Somaliland National Television. A number of Somali-language satellite stations, such as Horn Cable TV and Universal TV, broadcast from the Middle East and London, and they are accessible and highly influential. The advertising sector is gradually growing but remains small.

The Somali diaspora in Europe, North America, and the Persian Gulf states has established a rich internet presence. Internet service is available in large cities in Somalia, and users enjoy a relatively fast and inexpensive connection, including through mobile devices. Around 7 percent of Somalis owned a mobile phone, and 1.4 percent accessed the internet in 2012. Although there were no reports of consistent government restrictions on the internet, some factions reportedly monitored internet activity.

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