Somalia

Federal Republic of Somalia

Key Facts

World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall) Ranked 164 (57.24)

Head of State / Head of Government: President Mohamed ABDULLAHI Mohamed "Farmaajo" (since 8 February 2017) & Prime Minister Hassan Ali KHAYRE (since 1 March 2017)

Capital city: Mogadishu
Population: 11,259,029 (July 2018 est.)
Official Language(s): Somali & Arabic
Ethnic Groups: Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (including 30,000 Arabs)
Currency: Somali shilling
Gross domestic product (PPP): 7.369 billion USD (2017)
Internet penetration: 7.9 %
Most trusted medium of information: Radio
Legal System: mixed legal system of civil law, Islamic (sharia) law, and customary law (referred to as Xeer)
Government System: federal parliamentary republic
Journalists Killed/Imprisoned: 3

Media Environment: 2 private TV stations rebroadcast Al-Jazeera and CNN; Somaliland has 1 government-operated TV station and Puntland has 1 private TV station; the transitional government operates Radio Mogadishu; 1 SW and roughly 10 private FM radio stations broadcast in Mogadishu; several radio stations operate in central and southern regions; Somaliland has 1 government-operated radio station; Puntland has roughly a half-dozen private radio stations; transmissions of at least 2 international broadcasters are available as of 2019. Somalia's media landscape is currently characterized by the dominant role played by radio, mainly because of the strength of the oral culture in the country, its high illiteracy rates and because

the medium is relatively inexpensive. The TV and print media-sectors are weak, and radio is by a long distance the dominant medium. There are at least 56 radio-stations, though there is no national or domestic broadcaster. Though Internet penetration remains paltry, the increase of Somali digital news outlets has massively grown in recent years. This growth has largely been driven outside Somalia's borders from its large and influential diaspora. Another important factor to consider is how conflict has shaped the media environment and created a fragmented political map. Somalia has suffered from political violence and weak central government. According to Transparency International, Somalia remains for the 10th year in a row the most corrupt country in the world. The media system has often reflected the major political divisions in society. According to the 2017 National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), journalists face, "endless violations" and impunity. In 2017, 5 journalists were killed in Somalia, 3 of them were killed in explosions in Mogadishu. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 64 journalists have been killed in Somalia since 1992. More than half of those, 44 altogether, were murdered, with al-Shabaab suspected of being responsible. But, in Somalia journalists face threats from all corners. Finally, one important factor is that the private sector is the prime player in the country's media landscape. This is what has distinguished Somali media since 1991: The significant role of the private media-sector, driven especially by members of the large Somali diaspora in Europe, the Middle East and North America.

Media Issues: Somalia continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for journalists. In 2018, three journalists eluded, or survived murder attempts and three others were killed in connection with their work. The first was gunned down by a police officer at a checkpoint, the second was stabbed to death after receiving death threats from the Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab and the third was killed by a car bomb for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility. The freedom to inform in Somalia is undermined by corruption, political violence, the central government's extreme weakness and the fact that non-state entities control much of the country. Both the government and Islamist militants persecute journalists. Those who refuse to censor themselves are the targets of bombings or shootings by Al-Shabaab militants or they are exposed to arbitrary detention, of which 2018 saw more than 10 cases. Journalists who raise their voice also risk torture or the closure of their media by the authorities. It is hard to play a critical role in such an environment, especially as many media outlets turn to political sources of funding often designed to obtain pro-government reporting, which undermines the media landscape and media independence.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Print: By the 2000s the print media was in tatters. War and conflict had made it difficult for newspapers to function in the country. The newspaper industry had suffered during these years with many printing organizations shutting down in South/Central Somalia and Puntland. Nowadays Somaliland is the only region with a thriving print media sector. There are over a dozen printing outlets that are operational. Most of the newspapers have a small circulation.

Radio: Somalia's oral culture lends itself to radio, and the importance of radio as the medium of choice for the transmission of information is an extension of the age-old tradition of oration and sharing information through poetry and spoken word. Radio consumption remains very high and radio-stations are spread across the country at a local level and have a greater reach to most of the population. Most radio-services transit on the FM band, because it's reliable and cheap. Furthermore, radio receivers are cheap and small to handle, so nomadic populations and city dwellers alike can use them with ease.

Television: Television news stations exist but in one of the poorest nations in the world TV sets are limited.

Digital Media: According to the International Telecommunication Union, which in 2009 presented a profile on Internet usage in Arab states (22 countries, including Somalia), Internet penetration is below 5 percent in Somalia. Nonetheless the explosion in digital media outlets has led to the creation of a rich transnational Somali online media environment. More broadly the digital media revolution has transformed the Somali society.

Social Networks: Somalia's use of social media has increased in recent years. Though there are low levels of Internet penetration and a lack of ownership of personal computers. Most Somalis access their social media platforms through mobile phones. And there has been an explosion in the private-led telecommunication industries in Somalia.