

# The Republic of Djibouti



## SUMMARY

Djibouti is a relatively poor, mostly urban country that is known by high rates of illiteracy, unemployment, and child malnutrition. Most of its population lives in cities or towns and the rural population consists of mostly nomadic herding. Djibouti has few natural resources and imports more than 80% of its food from Europe or neighboring countries. Its health care is limited due to poor infrastructure. Female genital cutting has become popular in the region. It is currently politically stable and many migrants use it as a transit point.

Chief of State: President Ismail Omar Guelleh (May 8, 1999)

Head of Government: Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed (April 1, 2013)

Capital: Djibouti

Other notable cities: Tadjoura, Obock, Khor Angar, Moussa Ali.

Gov Type: Presidential Republic

Population: 994, 974

Colonial History: In the late 19th century, Afar Sultans signed treaties with the French that allowed the establishment of the colony of French Somaliland in 1862. In 1967, the French changed the territory's name to the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas. In 1977, Djibouti was established as an independent nation.

## GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Djibouti is located in a strategic position at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden with its ports handling 95% of Ethiopian trade. It also services the transshipments between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Being located in Eastern Africa, Djibouti is between Eritrea (125km) and Somalia (61 km) with Ethiopia (342 km) along its entire southern border.

It is precisely 23,200 sq km in total area and has about 20 sq km of water with a hot, dry, desert climate. Much of its terrain can be described as 'coastal plain and/or plateau' which are separated by coastal mountains.

About 73.4% of its land is used in agriculture, with forest being 0.2% of the land. It suffers from earthquakes, droughts, and occasional cyclonic disturbances. It has a great position near the world's busiest shipping lanes and is also close to Arabian oilfields. It also holds Lac Assal, the saltiest lake in the world and lowest point in Africa.



# Economy and Politics

MAL FACT SHEET

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Noun: Djiboutian(s)

Adjective: Djiboutian

Ethnic Groups: Somalia (60%), Afar (35%), other (5% - mostly Yemeni Arab, also French, Ethiopian, and Italian)

Languages: French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar

Religions: Sunni Muslim (94%), other (6% - Shia Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Baha'i, and atheist.

Djibouti is a poor, mostly urban country. Much of its population is illiterate, unemployed, and children often suffer from malnutrition. Much of the population is focused along cities and towns (roughly 70%). Much of its imports come from neighboring countries due to its low source of natural resources. Djibouti has a lack of gender equality, which contributed to high rates of maternal and infant mortality.

## ECONOMY AND GDP

Djibouti is dependent on food imports with an economy driven by various national military bases and port-based trade. It is a major re-exporter and has recently been increasing its trade relations with China, as well as taking steps to invest in its infrastructure.

Real GDP: \$5.592 billion (2022)

Real GDP Growth Rate: 3.12% (2022)

Real GDP Per Capita: \$3.515 billion (2022)

GDP (Official Exchange Rate): \$476.748 billion (2022)

GDP Composition: Agriculture 2.4% (2017), Industry 17.3% (2017), and Services 80.2% (2017).

Inflation Rate: 5.18% (2022)

Industries: Construction, agricultural processing, and shipping.

Labor Force: 250,000 (2022).

Unemployment Rate: 26.67%, youth unemployment rate stands at 79.9% (2022).

Population Below Poverty Line: 21.1% (2019)

Public Debt: 31.8% of GDP (2017)

Exports: \$5.674 billion (partners include Ethiopia, China, India, Jordan, and Central African Republic) 2022 est.

Imports: \$5.096 billion (partners include China, the United Arab Emirates, India, Morocco, and Turkey) 2022 est.

## MAIN POLITICAL CONTENTIONS

Djibouti's relations with its neighbors is ever-evolving. The Arab Gulf Countries, Turkey, and China play a large role in the region. Djibouti has a strained relationship with the United Arab Emirates due to a dispute over the UAE state-owned port operator DP World, which has fought a legal battle with Djibouti over the 2018 termination of the firm's 30-year contract.

Djibouti holds good relations with East African governments, with the exception of Eritrea, which they had a border conflict with in 2008 over the peninsula of Ras Doumeira. They have begun to normalize relations as of 2018, but little progress has been made.

Djibouti holds good relations with the United States, with the United States characterizing Djibouti as a key partner on security, regional stability, and humanitarian efforts across the region. However, the United States estimates that Al Qaeda affiliates, such as Al Shabaab in Somalia and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) may pose a transnational threat in the future.

More than 35,000 refugees and asylum seekers reside in Djibouti who use it to transit to other countries. Yemen is one of those countries that has many refugees traveling through Djibouti. Djibouti has also deployed forces to join the AU Mission in Somalia in 2011.

# DJIBOUTI: A TIMELINE

Djibouti joins the League of Arab States. On June 27, 1977, the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas became independent, taking the name Djibouti. With this independence, fears that the Afar and Issa Somali would become pawns in a struggle between Ethiopia and Somalia began to emerge, although those fears never materialized into anything. Djibouti established a peaceful profile, keeping friendship treating with both Somalia and Ethiopia, refusing to support armed groups that opposed the neighboring regimes.

Due to a lack of Afar presence in the government, despite the Afar being the largest Ethnic group in Djibouti, a civil war broke out in 1991 that would later become known as the Djiboutian Civil War, or Afar Insurgency. The Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) began to attack government forces and continued to battle the government until French peace-keepers arrived in 1992 and instituted a cease-fire until the insurgency reemerged in February 1993.

Djibouti elects Ismael Omar Gelleh as President when the current President, Aptidon, announces he will not run. In 2000, the government and the radical faction of FRUD sign a peace agreement that officially ends the country's long civil war. Later that year, an coup is attempted led by police chief General Yacin Yabeh Galeb and fails, where Yacin is charged with conspiracy. In 2002, the 1992 law that allows only three political parties within the region expires and later, in 2003, the Coalition supporting President Ismael Omar Gelleh (the Union for Presidential Majority) wins the first free multi-party election since its independence.

Protests begin with demands for regime change and some are killed in a confrontation with the police. Despite this, Guelle wins a third term as President in an election boycotted by the opposition. In 2013, opposition groups contest parliamentary elections. The result is rejected, which gave the governing Union for the Presidential Majority 49 out of 65 seats. In 2016, President Ismail Omar Guella gains his fourth term of office after saying he would not run for the Presidency again.

Opposition parties are banned, except for the Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès (RPP). Ethnic conflict in the political sphere was mostly minimal, but Issa predominance in the civil service, armed forces, and the Popular Assembly for Progress (which was all a part of the RPP) was only slightly masked and slight social unrest began to run through Djibouti's mostly calm atmosphere.

Hassan Gouled Aptidon, the leader of the government in Djibouti, began to attempt to create a balance between the Issas and Afars. By 1994, FRUD entered a peace agreement with the government and by 1995 seven of the FRUD members were serving in the reorganized government. Despite this, some FRUD members being led by Ahmen Dini (a former Prime Minister) rejected the peace deal and continually engaged in military insurgency.

By 2003, the government begins to detain and expel illegal immigrants and in 2005 the Incumbent President Guelleh is the sole candidate in the elections and is subsequently reelected. In 2008, the ruling coalition wins all 65 seats in the parliamentary elections, which are boycotted by the three main opposition parties. Later in 2008, fighting breaks out between Djibouti and Eritrean troops in the Ras Doumeira border area due to a border dispute. The UN Security Council assists Djibouti by applying tough sanctions to Eritrea. In 2010, Eritrea and Djibouti resolve their border dispute peacefully.

President Guelleh secures his fifth term as President in 2021. Allegations of a coup emerge in 2022, leading to concerns about internal stability. The FRUD attack the same year in the Tadjourah region, as well as the Afar-Issa conflict beginning to spill in Djibouti leading to clashes. As of present day, Djibouti is currently struggling from the Houthis' Red Sea Campaign that has negatively impacted its port trade, which it relies on.

