

Djibouti

Ethnicity in Djibouti

Group selection

Djibouti, a former French colony, became independent on June 27, 1977. Within Djibouti, two main politically relevant ethnic groups may be discerned: the **Afars** and the **Somalis** (an overwhelming majority of whom belong to the Issa clan, while much of the remaining Somalis belong to the Gadaboursi clan from neighboring Somaliland). To assess respective group sizes, an average estimate is derived from Fearon (¹⁶⁰⁷) and the CIA's World Factbook (¹⁶⁰⁸): accordingly, the Somali constitute about 55% of the population, while the Afar number around 36%. The Afar settlements are predominantly located in the rural North and Western areas of country, but extending as far south to Lac Abbe, while the Somalis live in Djibouti's southern third and also form a majority in the capital, Djibouti-city (¹⁶⁰⁹, 269). Besides, within Djibouti-city, a small Arab population (mostly from Yemen) also exist (¹⁶¹⁰, 218), as well as a tiny ethnic Indian community. However, none of these latter ethnic groups articulate any political claims, and thus they are not coded as politically relevant in EPR. Due to continuous French military presence, a large expatriate French population also lives in the country, although its size has shrunk over time, as France has diminished its military assets over the years to about 2'000 in 2013 (¹⁶¹¹).

¹⁶⁰⁷ [Fearon, 2003]

¹⁶⁰⁸ [Central Intelligence Agency, 2010]

¹⁶⁰⁹ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶¹⁰ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹¹ [Armee Francaise, 2014]

Power relations

1977

In general, the "divide and rule" colonial policies practiced by France had tremendous influence on the salience of ethnic identities in Djibouti. Historically, the Somali population enjoyed an advanced position (in terms of access to education and positions in the administration) in the "Cete francais des Somalis" by virtue of their demographic majority in Djibouti-city, the French administrative headquarters for most of the colonial period. In addition, the need for Labor forced the French to encourage Somali immigration from neighboring Ethiopia and British Somaliland (¹⁶¹², 211,215; ¹⁶¹³, 271). However, the independence of Somalia and its goal of unification of the Somali people, led the French colonial government to alter its policies and favor the Afar people in 1963, in order to defend its interest and preserve the maintenance of a French outpost in the Horn of Africa. The Afars were perceived to be generally against

¹⁶¹² [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹³ [Abdallah, 2008]

independence, while the Somalis did support pan-Somalism (¹⁶¹⁴, 213). Apart from renaming the territory into “Territoire francais des Afars and Issas,” the chief policies implemented by the French were the redrawing of the electoral map in order to favor the Afar population and the denying of voting rights to newly emigrated Somalis (¹⁶¹⁵). Yet, the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia and cold war politics led the French to swap their support once again shortly before independence in favor of the Somali ethnic group, this time. As a result, they acceded to the demands for independence, but not before changing again the electoral rules and recognizing the political rights of Somali immigrants, which brought about a new legislative assembly this time dominated by the Somalis (¹⁶¹⁶, 216-9).

At independence, a power-sharing government between the Somali/Issa and the Afar ethnic groups took over the country (¹⁶¹⁷, 221). Key in the architecture was a provision for a dual executive, with the Somali, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, as President and the Afar, Ahmed Dini as Prime minister (¹⁶¹⁸, 220; ¹⁶¹⁹, 273). The Somalis are therefore coded as being Senior Partner and the Afar as Junior Partner for the year 1977.

1978-1994

Just a few months after independence, President Gouled proceeded to strengthen Somali/Issa control over the national executive by dismissing Afar officials from the security forces, nominating kin Somali from his Manmassan clan to key positions, as well as strengthening the office of the President at the expense of the office of the Prime Minister. These events led to the resignation of Prime Minister Ahmed Dini (¹⁶²⁰, 221, ¹⁶²¹, 273). Hassan Gouled further strengthened his position in 1981, by banning all opposition parties, a measure which was primarily intended to target the Afar parties. As a result of Afar exclusion, political violence was on the rise during the 1980s. Confronted with the government’s unwillingness to respond to Afar grievances, the “Front pour la restauration de l’unite et la democratie” was formed in August 1991 out of several Afar opposition groups and proceed to launch an armed insurrection later in the year (¹⁶²², 276). The civil war lasted until 1994 and saw the FRUD controlling large segments of the country, before gradually being pushed back by the government (¹⁶²³, 276). A peace agreement was finally signed by the Government of Djibouti and the rebels in 1994, which among others comprised provisions in favor of a power-sharing government with the Afar population, including cabinet positions for members of the FRUD, and a decentralization process (¹⁶²⁴, 277). The government had previously lifted the ban on opposition parties in 1992 (¹⁶²⁵). In light of continued exclusion of the Afar people during the period extending from 1978 until the peace agreement the 1994, the Afar are coded as Powerless and the Somali as Dominant. This coding is warranted as a few Afars remained in the Djiboutian executive during this period, such as the long-time

¹⁶¹⁴ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹⁵ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹⁶ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹⁷ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹⁸ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶¹⁹ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²⁰ [Shemim & Searing, 1980]

¹⁶²¹ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²² [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²³ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²⁴ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²⁵ [BBC, 2013]

prime minister, Barkat Gourad Hamadou, albeit without any effective decision-making power (for the ethnicity of the prime minister, see ¹⁶²⁶).

¹⁶²⁶ [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014]

1995-2021

As a result of the 1994 peace agreement, the share of Afars in the cabinet increased and the FRUD was legalized as a political party. In particular, two former FRUD leaders joined the government (¹⁶²⁷, 2000). Significantly, a radical faction within the FRUD, led by Ahmed Dini, rejected the peace agreement and vowed to fight on. Recurrent fighting lasted until 2000 and the signing of another peace deal with the radical fraction of FRUD, along the line of the previous 1994 agreement, which reiterated the call for power-sharing, decentralization and the integration of former rebels in the security sector (¹⁶²⁸, 277). Based on data from the US Department of State, the 1994 and 2000 peace agreements did indeed result in a power-sharing arrangement, although systematic data is not available for the main part of the period. The cabinet was composed of at least five Afar members in 2007 – including the prime minister, the minister of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of agriculture and the minister of labor –, the share of Afar in the cabinet was later increased to 8 in 2013 against 11 Somalis (¹⁶²⁹, 2014). Significantly, the moderate FRUD fraction joined the ruling party “Rassemblement populaire pour le progres” in a coalition called the “Union pour la majorité présidentielle” in the run-up to the 2003 legislative elections. The electoral alliance has been maintained ever since (¹⁶³⁰). As a result of the peace agreements, the Afars are coded with a Junior Partner power status for the period extending from 1995 to 2017, while the Somalis are coded as being Senior Partner. There remains nonetheless some uncertainty regarding the location of effective executive powers, i.e. in the cabinet or within a small group of close advisor to the Presidents Hassan Gouled and Ismael Omar Guelleh (at least when it comes to security issues). However given the extent of power-sharing between Somalis and Afar (as reflected by composition of the cabinet for the period), it is appropriate to code the Afars as Junior Partner rather than being excluded from executive power.

¹⁶²⁷ [US State Department, 1999-2016]

¹⁶²⁸ [Abdallah, 2008]

¹⁶²⁹ [US State Department, 1999-2016]

¹⁶³⁰ [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the integration of the Afar in the executive, they remain victim of significant socio-economic marginalization. Failing to implement meaningful decentralization and regional autonomy for the Afar as stipulated in the peace agreements, these grievances have led to occasional outburst of political violence, most recently in 2010 (¹⁶³¹).

¹⁶³¹ [Voice of America, 2010]

The general election of 2016 resulted in President Ismail Omar Gouled remaining power for a fourth term since 1999, winning with nearly 87% of the vote at 75% turnout (¹⁶³²). He is joined, as the post-conflict power-sharing constitution requires, by an Afar Prime Minister, who leads the cabinet, Mr Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed,

¹⁶³² [Global Security, 2016]

who has been in office since April 2013. As noted above, the extent and ingrained nature of the power-sharing agreement justifies a continuation of the Somalis as Senior Partner and Afar as Junior Partner. However, human rights reports from the US State department state that although minorities such as the Afar are represented in senior government positions (twelve ministerial positions from seventeen), they are often discriminated against in the workplace, and the Isaas dominate the civil service, the ruling party and the security services (USStateDepartment, 2016: 24). Yet, for lack of concrete evidence of political discrimination, the coding of Junior Partner remains justified.

President Ismail Omar Gouled remained in power until 2021 with Isaas and Afar holding central cabinet positions alike. Opposition parties were not organized along ethnic lines and included Afar but also Issa dominated parties. Thus, despite tendencies of the Isaas – particularly the president’s family – to monopolize political and economic power, the Afar keep their Junior Partner status (¹⁶³³; ¹⁶³⁴).

¹⁶³³ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

¹⁶³⁴ [Freedom House, 2020]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti

From 1977 until 1977

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Isaas (Somali)	0.55	SENIOR PARTNER
Afar	0.36	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1978 until 1994

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Isaas (Somali)	0.55	DOMINANT
Afar	0.36	POWERLESS

From 1995 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Isaas (Somali)	0.55	SENIOR PARTNER
Afar	0.36	JUNIOR PARTNER



Figure 308: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-1977.



Figure 309: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1978-1994.



Figure 310: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1995-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Djibouti

From 1977 until 1977

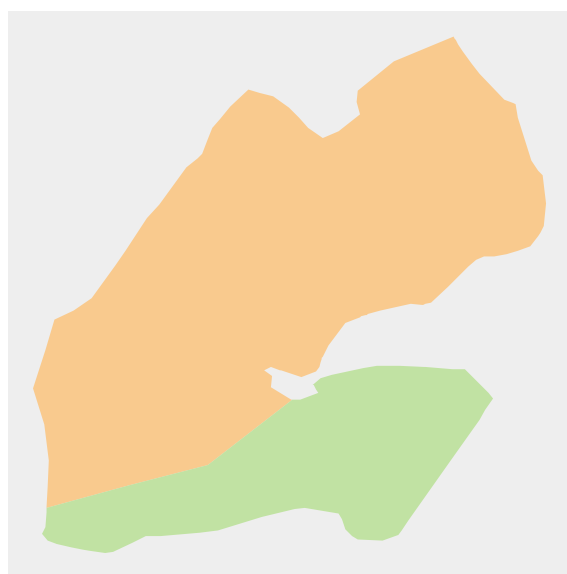


Figure 311: Map of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-1977.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Afar	15 884	Regional & urban
■ Isaas (Somali)	5 549	Regional & urban

Table 106: List of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-1977.

From 1978 until 2021

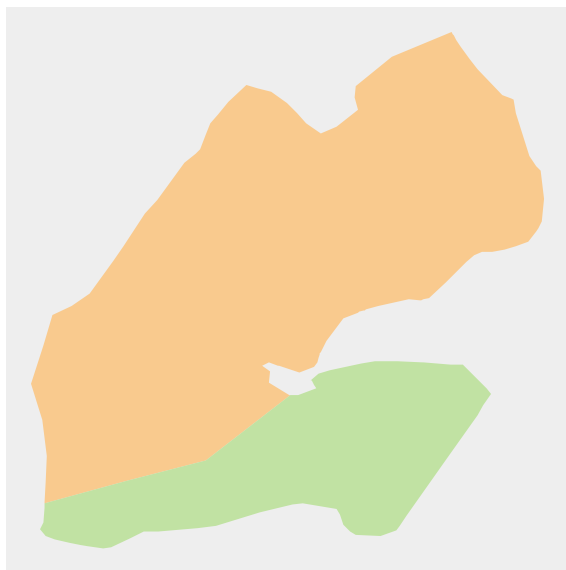


Figure 312: Map of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1978-2021.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Afar	15 884	Regional & urban
■ Isaas (Somali)	5549	Regional & urban

Table 107: List of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1978-2021.

Conflicts in Djibouti

Starting on 1991-11-11

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Djibouti	FRUD	Afar	1991-11-11	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Djibouti	FRUD-C	Afar	1997-08-31	Explicit	Yes	

Starting on 2008-06-09

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Djibouti	Government of Eritrea		2008-06-09			