

# 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 (<sup>1376</sup>) and the CIA's World Factbook (<sup>1377</sup>): accordingly the Somali population numbers about 55% of the population, while the Afar numbers 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 (<sup>1378</sup>, 269). Besides, within Djibouti-city, a small Arab population (mostly from Yemen) also exist (<sup>1379</sup>, 218), as well as a tiny ethnic Indian community (Based on the author own experience in Djibouti). However, none of these latter ethnic groups articulate any over political claims, and thus they are not coded as politically relevant for the period 1977-2013. Due to the continued French military presence, a large expatriate French population also live in the country, although it size has shrunk over time, as France has diminished its military assets over the years to about 2'000 in 2013 (<sup>1380</sup>).

<sup>1376</sup> [Fearon, 2003]

<sup>1377</sup> [CIA World Factbook]

<sup>1378</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

<sup>1379</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1380</sup> [Armee Francaise, 2014]

### *Power relations*

#### *Background*

In general, the "divide and rule" colonial policies practiced by France has had tremendous influences over the salience of ethnic identities in Djibouti. Historically, the Somali population had 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 seat 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. (<sup>1381</sup>, 211,215; <sup>1382</sup>, 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

<sup>1381</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1382</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

preserve the maintenance of a French outpost in the Horn of Africa. The Afars were perceived to be generally against independence, while the Somalis did support pan-Somalism (<sup>1383</sup>, 213.) Apart from renaming the territory into “Territoire français 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 (<sup>1384</sup>). 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 (<sup>1385</sup>, 216-9).

<sup>1383</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1384</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1385</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

### 1977

At independence, a power-sharing government between the Somali/Issa and the afar ethnic groups took over the country (<sup>1386</sup>, 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 (<sup>1387</sup>, 220; <sup>1388</sup>, 273). The Somalis are therefore coded as being Senior Partner and the Afar as Junior Partner for the year 1977.

<sup>1386</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1387</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1388</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

### 1978-1994

However, just a few months after independence, President Gouled proceeded to strengthen Somali/Issa control over the national executive by dismissing Afar officials in the security forces, nominating kin Somali from his Manmassan clan in key position, 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 (<sup>1389</sup>, 221, <sup>1390</sup>, 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 to the government unwillingness to respond to Afar grievances, the “Front pour la restauration de l’unité et la démocratie” was formed in August 1991 out of several Afar opposition groups and proceed to launch an armed insurrection later in the year (<sup>1391</sup>, 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 (<sup>1392</sup>, 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 (<sup>1393</sup>, 277). The government had previously lifted the ban on opposition parties in 1992 (<sup>1394</sup>). In light of continued exclusion

<sup>1389</sup> [Shemim Searing, 1980]

<sup>1390</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

<sup>1391</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

<sup>1392</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

<sup>1393</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

of the Afar people during the period extending from 1978 until the peace agreement the 1994, the Afar are coded as Powerless and the Somalia as Dominant. This coding is warranted as a few Afars remained in the Djiboutian executive during this period, such as the long-time prime minister, Barkat Gourad Hamadou, but without any effective decision-making power (for the ethnicity of the prime minister, see <sup>1395</sup>).

### *1995-2017*

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, from the outset two former FRUD leaders joined the government (<sup>1396</sup>, 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 (<sup>1397</sup>, 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 for the major part of the period is not available. 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 (<sup>1398</sup>, 2014). Significantly, the moderate FRUD fraction joined the ruling party “Rassemblement populaire pour le progres” in a coalition called the “Union pour la majorite présidentielle” in the run-up to the 2003 legislative elections. The electoral alliance has been maintained ever since (<sup>1399</sup>). As a result of the peace agreements, the Afars coded are being included in a Junior Partner power status for the period extending 1995 to 2017 periods, 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” and not as “excluded” from executive power.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the integration of the Afar in the executive, they remain victim of significant socio-economic marginalization. In addition to the failure to implement a meaningful decentralization and regional autonomy for the Afar as provided by the peace agreements, these grievances have led to occasional outburst of political violence, most recently in 2010 (<sup>1400</sup>).

The general election of 2016 resulted in President Ismail Omar

<sup>1396</sup> [US State Department, 1999-2016]

<sup>1397</sup> [Abdallah, 2008]

<sup>1398</sup> [US State Department, 1999-2016]

<sup>1399</sup> [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014]

<sup>1400</sup> [Voice of America, 2010]

Gouled returning to power for a fourth term since 1999, winning with nearly 87% of the vote at 75% turnout (<sup>1401</sup>). He is joined, as the post-conflict power-sharing constitution requires, by an Afar Prime Minister, who leads the cabinet, Mr Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed, who has been in office since April 2013. As noted above, the extent and engrained 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 in 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.

<sup>1401</sup> [Global Security, 2016]

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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 2017*

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



Figure 261: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-1977.

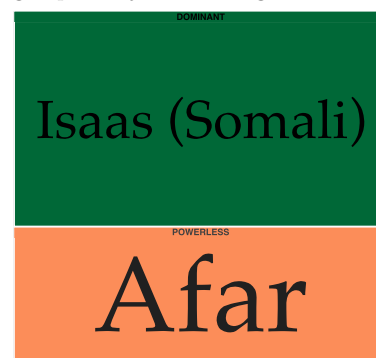


Figure 262: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1978-1994.



Figure 263: Political status of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1995-2017.



## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Djibouti*

*From 1977 until 2017*

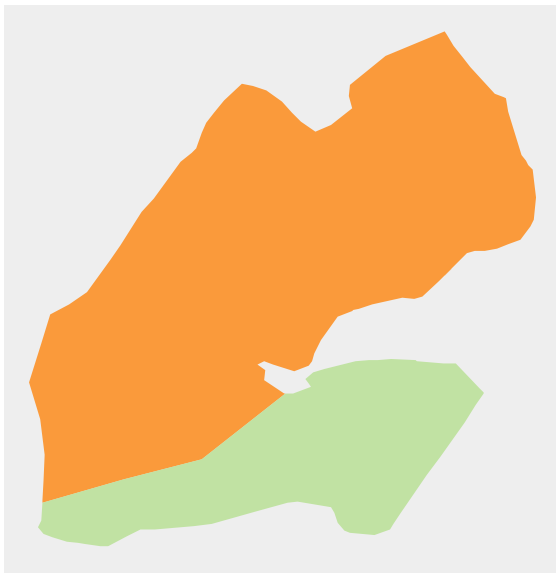


Figure 264: Map of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-2017.

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

Table 82: List of ethnic groups in Djibouti during 1977-2017.

## *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			