

# Somalia - Media Landscape

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## Overview

Since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, armed battles have resulted in uncontrolled violations of the laws of war, including indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, rape, torture and looting throughout Somalia. Committed by all sides, these atrocities have caused massive civilian suffering. To this day, the current government, backed by the African Union Mission to Somalia and the Ethiopian armed forces, remains at war with the Islamist armed group al-Shabaab, which controls areas of territory and important transportation routes. This collapse and the civil war resulted in Somalia becoming politically fragmented and being divided into several states, (Somaliland which declared self-independence in 1991, Puntland in 1998, Galmudug, Jubaland and South West State after 2014, Hirshabeele in 2017) each *with* their own laws regarding the media culture in their own territory; eg the State of Puntland currently has its own media laws and is going forward in creation of its own media council.

Unfortunately, these rules and regulations are implemented in their own way, which has caused a lack of overview. Next to this, these laws are still regulated underneath the umbrella of the federal overarching legislation which still acts according to the constitution of 1960 as the new federal constitution of 2012 is still a provisional constitution that has not been fully implemented yet. And although Somaliland is considered to be one of the federal member states by the government of Somalia, it has declared its independence in 1991 and has no association or ties to the government of Somalia.

Before the collapse, under Siad Barre's authoritarian rule, the state had a total monopoly on the media. There was no freedom of the press and no independent media were allowed to operate.

After the state collapse in 1991, Somalia fell into an orgy of violence, terrorism, piracy and a recent devastating drought. The country is politically fragmented. Press circulation is limited because of the conflict and the fact that the country has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Somali only became a written language in 1972, and because of the civil war very few books or newspapers are published in it. Televised news is also not widely available. Though Internet usage has increased in recent years it remains more of an urban phenomenon, and while it is popular with young people and diaspora returnees, it is not widely used by those who are illiterate or lack access to the necessary technology and Internet-services.

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.

The media reflect the deep schism that clannism has created in the society – which in part has fuelled the conflict in the country, which is a difficult country to govern. The state has always struggled to create a unified nation on a non-clan-defined basis. Clan affiliations become important where media outlets only report on their clan elders or report about attacks on their own clans – giving audiences an eschewed view of the news. Another problem is the perceived, or lack of, clan affiliations – journalists are routinely accused of either siding too much or too little with their own clans.

There is also a good deal of rumors and spread of unsubstantiated news stories that find their way onto the news. Journalists are offered money to cover certain stories, and because most lack reliable salaries, some will take advantage of this opportunity. In some other cases the issue is not that journalists take payments, but that they are not able to confirm the news that they hear, due to security concerns or lack of available corroborators, so they may release stories that turn out not to be true. Finally, there is also the problem that some journalists lack adequate training so some of what they broadcast may not have been researched and reported using proper journalistic methods.

Freedom House considers Somalia as one of the most dangerous places to be a journalist and a country with no freedom of press. In 2011 Freedom House issued a report entitled *Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies*, to complement its annual survey on the state of global political rights and civil liberties. They included nine countries designated as the Worst of the Worst, Somalia being one of them. On the other hand, in the same report Somaliland is considered as partially free.

According to the 2107 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

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### Print

Somalia's earliest newspapers were printed under Italian rule in the 1930s. One of the earliest newspapers was *Il Littoriale*, and after the Second World War the newspaper *Corriere della Somalia* came into circulation, published in Italian and English. Colonial possession of the print media did not change until independence. Though following Barre's coup in 1969, existing

newspapers continued to be published in the colonial languages of Italian and English.

Somali only became a written language in 1972 and not many books are published in Somalia because of the civil war. The Somali-language print media began operating after the introduction of the Somali Latin script at the behest of Barre – a system developed by the Somali linguist Shire Jama Ahmed. The first Somali newspaper was the government-owned *Xidgita*, its first issue was in January 1973. Later three other newspapers joined its ranks – including its sister government-owned paper *Najmatu Oktobar* printed in Arabic – and there was also *Heegan* – an English-language newspaper that was published twice a week. In the 1980s a presidential decree created the second Somali-language newspaper *Ogaal*, which was run directly by the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party headed by the president. The first privately run newspaper, *Aldaleeca*, an Arabic-language newspaper, was not published until much later in the 1980s.

In the same period the Ministry of Information heavily regulated the media. There was no freedom of the press and any criticisms of the government were severely punished. Though, as Mohammed Gaas, Stig Jarle Hansen and David Berry (2011) states, *Ogaal* was a little different as it did in some cases diverge from the official state propaganda. By 1988 the Barre regime had shutdown *Ogaal* as the civil war begun. The other newspapers were in operation until the state comprehensively fell apart in 1991.

In their research paper Gaas, Hansen and Barry argue that there are two important remnants from that period with regards to development of the print media. Most qualified journalists today have learnt their craft during the post 1972 period, but they were part of a “repressive press traditions” and were seen as being puppets of the regime of Barre. Second, this was the phase that defined the Somali language; the standard written Somali was established in this period and after the collapse of those early Somali-language newspapers, the Somali linguistic standard deteriorated.

After the civil war begun, in a quick period of time all the established newspapers along with TV networks and radio stations collapsed. Following the violence in 1991 many newspapers appeared. Estimates suggest in the period of 1991 to 2000 there were. Some of these newspapers were connected to warlords or clan groups, and were seen as biased, partisan and clan-mouth pieces. As the violence sped up in the 1990s most of these newspapers disappeared.

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 organisations 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. The most popular ones were *Haatuf*, the *Somaliland Times* and *Hubaal*, yet these ended their existence due to government interference. Others are, *Jamhuuriya* and *Geeska Afrika*. Some like *Jamhuuriya* are daily, while others are published two or three times per week.

It must be noted that the levels of circulation of newspapers are low because of the ongoing conflict. In recent years the country has witnessed an explosion of online newspapers that have filled the gap left in the market by the scarcity of print newspapers. Nowadays many popular online platforms exist and occupy the space that is traditionally occupied by the print press.

The current largest Somali newspaper is *Geeska Afrika* but this can't be confirmed as it is purely based on popularity and it is unknown how many copies are read due to lack of data resources.

But another significant reason for the low print penetration is that Somalia has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, in fact according to the UN it's 7<sup>th</sup> in the world. This explains, along with the conflict, why there are so few printed newspapers. Yet despite this, there is a growth of weekly magazines, and online news outlets written in Somali, Arabic and English such

as the *Somaliland Today*, the newly created *Somaliland Review* magazine (2018) and the website *Garoweonline.com*.

## 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 the majority 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.

The first radio broadcast initially started in Somaliland, in the northwest of the country, during the British colonial era. The country became a unified state in 1960 when British Somaliland merged with its much larger neighbor Italian Somaliland to form a new nation known as Somalia. After independence democracy briefly flourished, then former President Mohamed Siyad Barre took over in a military coup in 1969 and ruled Somalia with an iron fist until the state collapsed in 1991. *Radio Mogadishu* was then the first Somali-run radio-station. It was operated by Barre's regime and it became the chief radio-station in the country. *Radio Mogadishu* was a powerful tool, Barre's regime used to spread its revolutionary socialist ideology and propaganda. Beyond politics *Radio Mogadishu* broadcast music and entertainment, helping to foster a sense of nationhood and solidarity in post-colonial Somalia.

Even though radio is by far the most important medium in Somalia, news broadcasts are of varying quality. The two most widely respected sources are the BBC Somali Service, which in 2017 celebrated its 60th anniversary, and the Voice of America Somali service, which has grown in popularity in recent years. These sources are generally considered to be reliable, but many local radio stations and programmes may also be reliable, depending on which journalists are involved.

Radio is still the predominant media channel for Somalis, but access to radio in rural remote areas is limited. The emergence of social media and mobile telephony means that many people can now access radio broadcasts on their mobile phones, further spreading the reach of radio. This has influenced the new generations especially in towns, where youths are connected to social media. There are 56 radio stations across Somalia and although the number is quite high, there are a number of areas that are not covered due to Al Shabaab being in control and to the absence of FM transmitters. The majority of radio services in Somalia transmit on the FM band, because it's effective and cheap. But in many parts of Somalia people listen to radio through short waves, since FM radios are confined to big towns only. *Radio Mogadishu* is the federal, government-run public broadcaster. After closing down operations because of civil war, the station was officially reopened in the early 2000s by the Transitional National Government. *Radio Hargeisa* is the state-run broadcaster in Somaliland and is by far the most popular radio station in that region. The types of programmes offered by these stations generally do not differ from each other as they are commonly about political issues and lack topics about social issues and background information. This is true not only for radio but in fact a general issue for all media and across all regions of Somalia. Beyond these two major state-run stations and the international broadcasters, the vast majority of radio stations are private, some being community focused and some commercial. Among them the most popular include, *Kulmiye*, *Star*, many others, mostly based in Mogadishu and the southern-central parts of the country. Despite the conflict and violence, the country has seen, radio stations have grown in number since the state collapsed and radio still remains the main way that people get information and news in Somalia.

## Television

Television news stations exist but in one of the poorest nations in the world TV sets are limited. There are two main state-television news stations – but the private television news networks, many of which are found in the diaspora outside Somalia,

dwarf them. While television coverage is limited, in recent years television has expanded as a major source of news and entertainment and is now more popular and influential than print. Television audiences have increased in recent years because of the development of satellite and online TV services. But, only those with electricity services to supply satellite dishes or cable connections can have this privilege, which has to date made television a largely an urban phenomenon. Indeed, it's only in large cities such as Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Bossaso that citizens have regular television access.

In recent years many Somali-language satellite TV channels have been launched – many of them founded in the diaspora community. Many operate outside Somalia such as *Universal TV*, one of the oldest Somali TV stations, which is based in London and Hargeisa. Others like *Horn Cable TV*, which also operates from London, have changed the television market considerably. There are also two state-controlled TV stations, *Somali National TV* run by the internationally recognised government and *Somaliland National TV* operated from the breakaway region.

## Digital Media

The digital media landscape is characterised by the dominant role its diaspora plays. When it comes to online news media the diaspora dominates the environment.

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. Also, these Internet penetration levels put Somalia at the bottom of international league tables. Yet, this has not stopped the growth in digital media platforms. In 2017, Somalia experienced an Internet connection breakdown for three weeks, costing the country about US\$10m a day.

There are hundreds of Somali news websites but not all of them are constantly reliable. Existing exceptions are websites such as *Hiraan.com* and *Horseedmedia.net*. Many websites are linked to radio stations and news from international news agencies, which they translate in Somali or simply republish. Also, Somalia-based news websites often republish content that first appeared on international media outlets of the diaspora.

Nonetheless the explosion in digital media outlets has led to the creation of a rich transnational Somali online media environment, where all manners of subjects are debated and contested.

More broadly the digital media revolution has transformed the Somali society, perhaps even more than other factors, mostly because of the society's propensity for oral culture. Somalis have innovated digital media and mobile technology not just in the delivery of news but broadly as an important facet of the economy, for example with money transfer business.

## 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.

By their nature Somalis are an oral people and their ancient propensity for spoken word and poetry is a remarkably neat fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century social media platforms. In recent years Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube have emerged as powerful social networks that Somalis at home and abroad have harnessed to discuss politics, culture and identity.

The #Somalia hashtag is particularly popular on Instagram and Twitter. Another feature of Somali social media conversations has been the desire for Somalis to reclaim their narrative about their country. Many Somalis feel their country is framed through a problematizing lens by western media: Somalia is only depicted as place of wars, famines and terrorism. Somalia is often cited as the world's most dangerous country and this perception frames how the country has been reported.

The age of social media has allowed Somali social media users to counteract this historic framing of their country. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have allowed them the means to bypass mainstream media channels to tell their own stories.

Many online campaigns have been launched in recent years. Such as Somali Faces, an online project that shares everyday stories of ordinary Somali from around the world. The Anti-Tribalism Movement, a non-profit organisation aimed at educating and raising awareness about the effects of tribalism within communities has used YouTube and Facebook videos to show another side to Somalis at home and in the diaspora. Meanwhile, modelled on the Humans of New York, Humans of Somalia has also sought to present a different image of Somalia to the world: images of ordinary Somalis succeeding against the odds and images of the country that are not the aftermath of a terrorist attack or starving children.

Another aspect to Somalis on social networks has been young Somalis in the diaspora capturing their return journeys home.. Ugaaso Abukar Boocow an instagramer with 264,000 followers has in recent years gained international following for her portraits of everyday life in Somalia. She has become one the key Somali social media influencers, so much so that the BBC in 2015 dubbed her, a “global star on Instagram.”

## Opinion Makers

Somalia remains a polarised country, where public opinion varies greatly depending on which particular self-governed regional entity or non-state actor an individual may support.

In recent years there has been an explosion of blogs and online news sites – popular blogs such as *Warya Post* and *Sahan Journal*, an independent online news site that covers Somalia and the diaspora, which often mixes politics with light-hearted posts about what Somalis to follow on Instagram or the love lives of Somalis in America. Have all garnered huge attention and audience reach both at home and abroad.

There is also a new crop of opinion makers emerging in Somalia, including commentators like Abdi Aynte, journalist Fatuma Abdullahi founder of the online news blog *Warya Post* and Ilwas Elman, the noted human rights activist and youth, peace and security advisor to the UN in 2017.

## Sources

Newspapers

- [Foore](#)
- [Geeska Afrika](#)
- [Haatuf](#)
- [Hubaal](#)
- [Jamhuuriya](#)
- [Mogadishu Times](#)
- [Puntland Post](#)
-

## Somaliland Today

- Warsugan

### Publishers

- Asal Printing
- Ponte Invisible
- Sagal Jet printing
- Scansom Publishers
- Sign Jet Printing

### Radio

- Radio Andalus - franchise operated by al-Shabaab Islamist militants
- Radio Baidoa
- Radio Banaadir - private, Mogadishu
- Radio Daljir
- Radio Dhuuso Mareeb
- Radio Gaalkacyo - affiliated to Puntland authorities
- Radio Garoowe
- Radio Hargeisa - owned by Somaliland government
- Radio Kismaayo - state owned from Jubbaland
- Radio Koonfor Galbeed - state owned from the South West State
- Radio Kulmiye - private, Mogadishu
- Radio Mogadishu - operated by the government, coverage limited to Mogadishu
- Radio Mustaqbal
- Radio Risaala
- Radio Shabelle - leading private network; Mogadishu, Marka
- Radio Simba - private, Mogadishu
- Radio Warsan

### International radios

- BBC Somali Service
- Radio Ergo - humanitarian shortwave radio run by International Media Support - IMS in Kenya
- Voice of America Somali Service

### Television

- Bulsho TV
- Horn Cable TV – private channel
- Puntland state TV
- Somali Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) - private, Puntland
- Somali National Television - state-run, from Mogadishu
- Somaliland National TV (SLNTV) - owned by Somaliland government
- Somnews
- Somsat TV - private

- [Star TV](#) – private
- [TV Royal](#) – private
- [Universal TV](#) - London-based satellite station

#### Digital Media

- [Dayniile](#) - news website
- [Gabilay](#)
- [Garowe](#) - news website
- [Hiraan](#) – news website,
- [Horsheed Media](#) – news website
- [Jowhar](#) - news website
- [Mareeg](#) - news website
- [Qaran](#)
- [Raxanreeb](#) - news website
- [RTN Somali TV](#) - youtube channel

#### Opinion makers

- [Abdi Aynte](#)
- [AbdiMalik Cooldoon](#)
- [Abdirashid Hashi](#)
- [Anti-Tribalism Movement](#)
- [Illwad Elman Fatuma](#)
- [My252](#)
- [Somali Faces](#)
- [Ugaaso Abukar Boocow](#)
- [Warya Post](#)
- [Zahara Qoranne](#)

## Organisations

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### Trade Unions

Media Ink in Hargeisa is Somalia's only professional journalists trading center. It was founded by FPU in 2011 and gained Independence in 2016. Since then it implements capacity building activities towards journalists, media houses and associations.

### Journalist Associations

Somalia has several journalistic associations that operate as non-governmental organisations. These include: the National

Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA), the Media Association Puntland (MAP), the Somalia Media Association (SOMA) and others. There are also specific women's journalist associations such as the Somali Women Journalist Rights Association (SOWRJA) and the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) in South Central Somalia. To a certain extent these associations work together. Although the capacity of these associations is still in the development phase, they do provide basic support for journalists. Next to this, SOLJA en MAP recently established a registration mechanism for their members and they act as counterparts in developing media laws and improving the general operation environment for journalists in cooperation with the government. Furthermore, the leadership of each association is chosen, with a mandate that runs in general between 3 to 5 years.

NUSOJ is the first independently established association based in Mogadishu, which was created after the collapse of the state in 1991. It was founded in 2002 in response to an attempt by the Transitional National Government to re-establish regulations over the media. Journalist Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu, who was elected Secretary General of the Union in May 2016, leads the NUSOJ after conflict with the previous Secretary General Omar Farouk.

In 2016, during the 328th session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva the NUSOJ along with the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) took a case against the Somali government for infringing on the freedom of association, which they won. This shows how despite the challenges in growth and the various threats, there is an independent free trade union movement in Somalia.

In Somaliland, the Somaliland Journalist Association (SOLJA) is the largest umbrella association in the breakaway territory. The SOLJA was established in 2012 and is run by an elected committee of prominent Somaliland journalists. The SOLJA is a membership-based association which conducts advocacy, research and campaigns on issues of freedom of speech in Somaliland; it also runs a website and several social media platforms such as a Facebook group which has over 2,000 members.

The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) was established in 2006 to support women journalists. This association describes itself as a non-profit, non-political organisation dedicated to advocating for the rights of women journalists in the country. The SOMWA operates from Baidoa, a town north of Mogadishu. SOMWA operates in three regions, namely Bay, Bakol and Lower Shabelle. The association is membership-led and is managed by a general assembly, a board of directors and a management committee.

A recent addition to Somalia's growing list of journalist associations is the Somali Media Independent Houses Association (SIMHA). Established in 2013, SIMHA is centered on supporting Somali media companies to foster innovation across their output. There are also journalist networks that exist solely on Facebook. Such as the Somaliland Journalists Network, which is a group made up of prominent Somaliland journalists who share information and support each other.

Furthermore, in 2018 the Somalia Multi-stakeholder platform was launched. This dialogue forum for the safety of journalists in Somalia is a declaration which, among other issues, called for developing a national multi-stakeholder coordination system bringing on board the three arms of government (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary) and all other media stakeholders with a mandate to promote and defend freedom of expression, press freedom, access to information and safety of journalists, comprehensively addressing the safety of journalists in the respective countries and in line with the national, regional and global resolutions.

The mechanism will be led by an 11-person National Coordination Committee consisting of 4 representatives from media associations, 4 from the government and four from civil society, with at least three of them being women drawn from the three representative groups. This is an initiative of UNESCO together with Somali Media Support Group (MSG) and local journalist's associations and the Somali government.

Though there are a number of journalists associations in Somalia most of them do not cooperate, often they have smaller memberships and cannot always meet journalists' needs. Another issue is that associations can be perceived to be belonging to a certain clan group, which can harm their perceived legitimacy.

## News Agencies

The country does not have an official news agency. There are a number of online platforms in Somalia and Somaliland that self-describe as Somali news agencies. These include the Somali National News Agency (SONNA), which is based in Mogadishu but has plenty of content on its website and operates an active Twitter account tweeting in Somali, English and Arabic. Then there is the Somaliland News Agency (SOLNA), which describes itself as "a global news agency delivering fast, in-depth coverage of the events shaping our world".

## Audience measurement organisations

Audience figures are notoriously difficult to estimate. There is no reliable data available on audience figures for TV and radio consumption in Somalia. Though it is safe to say that radio remains by far the most popular media.

According to the BBC's Trust Media report (2011) information on Somali audiences is difficult to obtain, and the limited data that exists is usually from Mogadishu and focused on the listenership of international broadcasters such as the BBC and IRIN. Yet the report also states that Somali audiences are critical of media content and do engage with media outlets, with some people expressing distrust of various media organisations because of their ownership or content.

Somali audiences keenly engage with their media organisations via social media platforms and some radio stations have phone-in programmes where listeners get to air their opinions.

## Sources

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- [Media-ink](#)
- [National Union of Somali Journalists](#) (NUSOJ)
- [Somali Media Independent Houses Association](#) (SIMHA)
- [Somali Media Women Association](#) (SOMWA)
- [Somaliland Journalist Association](#) (SOLJA)
- [Somaliland Journalists Network](#) (SJN)
- [Somaliland Women's Journalists Rights Association](#) (SOWRJA)

# Policies

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## Media legislation

Somalia has had no effective media regulation since 1991, until a law was brought in 2012, which sparked huge protests from journalists. The 2012 provisional federal constitution allows for freedoms of speech and of the press. But, in reality the violence in the country restricts the capacity of the Somali government to enforce its own constitution.

The media have not been governed by a set of laws or regulations since 1991. Parliament signed off new media legislation, which came under heavy criticism because journalists felt it curtailed freedom of the press. The issue is that the law is not implemented and used. More often than not the penal code is used to charge journalists. The law itself is also not adequate.

In Somaliland the 2004 Press Law is the main regulation that governs the press. This law, which is based on an Ethiopian law, was proposed by the Somaliland government back in 1999, but not passed into law until 2004. A Media Law was not yet implemented. Currently SOLJA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and civil society organisations, is working to amend this law, which is expected to be passed by the end of 2018).

Although the Somaliland constitution allows freedom of expression in its widest form, there are no private radio stations allowed by the government of Somaliland and this has been so for the last 25 years. The media community has been lobbying the government to lift this ban, however this had no result yet. It is expected that this will remain in force in the foreseeable future. According to the government, the ban was implemented to avoid clan-based conflict.

On top of the media law approved by the federal parliament, the federal government also developed a federal media strategy in 2017, which includes the transformation of the government-owned media outlets to a public broadcasting system. However this still needs to be implemented and is not active yet.

## Accountability systems

For the past several decades Somali journalists have not been required to obtain licenses or abide to any regulations. Yet, this has been changing in recent years, especially in South Central Somalia. Currently, the state requires journalists in South Central Somalia not only to register but also to take on a one-year degree in journalism. And this provision is one of the specific provisions NUSOJ is working to change together with the parliament. It remains to be seen if this provision will be removed from the media bill. Furthermore, most media outlets do not have adequate editorial policies therefore it is difficult to implement the media law.

Though, as yet, there is no systematic regulation of broadcast or print media in Somalia. The government is weak and only controls small parts of the country. There are various self-governing regions with their own laws and agendas Therefore media accountability is weak and almost non-existent. There is often no recourse for news consumers to complain to individual radio stations or TV networks. There are no official ombudsmen or similar press complaints commissions you may have in other media environments.

## Regulatory authorities

The provisions within the current media law provide for the establishment of a media council. However, the media council still needs to be formed and formalized. In the state of Puntland, MAP together with the regional government did establish a

media council at the beginning of 2018, however the working mechanism for this media council still has to be developed.

The current government started discussions about bringing a legal and regulatory framework for the media. But the reality is that the government has no real capacity to create such regulatory frameworks or to enforce them.

In some ways the country is reminiscent of the historical Wild West when it comes to regulatory authorities. Until the security situation improves and the government can regain full control of the entire territory of Somalia, it seems highly unlikely this situation will change.

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## Education

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### Universities and schools

Before the war the University of Lafoole was known for its journalism faculty. 1991 Somalia has had no journalism schools between 1991 and 2013, when the University of Mogadishu began a faculty of journalism, which provided media training to journalists. The Somali government said in 2016 that it would require all journalists to enrol at this university to complete a one-year journalism degree. In exchange for greater freedom of speech, journalists must complete a journalism degree if they want to work as journalists in the country.

Furthermore, because of the decades of conflict the educational system was destroyed, with 75 percent of all schools either destroyed or closed. A generation of Somali journalists lost the opportunity for formal education. Today there are very few practicing journalists with formal education. Most journalists who had an education have already left the country and there has been no opportunity to educate younger journalists. This matters a great deal in Somalia, because the median age for men is 18.1 years and 17.9 years for women, and the majority of the population is under the age of 25.

In 2017 the Somali National University reopened its faculty of journalism and communication. The Prime Minister re-opened the faculty 26 years after it closed. In 2018, the University of Hargeisa opened a faculty of journalism in Somaliland.

### Professional development

There was no professional development training for Somali journalists after the state collapsed in 1991 until 2011 when FPY, IREX, BBC Media Action and other international agencies started providing media training throughout Somalia.

Journalism is a very dangerous profession in Somalia and journalists face daily threats of violence or arrest. Most journalists working in the country today do not have any formal education, and very few will have education to a degree level, and indeed many lack any experience of working in the media.

The situation is slowly changing. Through the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) and the Somaliland Journalist Association (SOLJA) various short-term training programs are available for journalists in the country. The SOLJA provides regular training and workshops for journalists in Somaliland.

## Media Development Organisations

There are many local, national, and international organisations active in the media development sector. The challenge over the past couple of decades has been consistency. Journalists have fled Somalia, others have been killed, and many simply pass through being 'journalists' for a short period of time. While media outlets have become progressively institutionalised over the last 10 years, there is a legacy of 'warlord' radio that has continued to influence the sector, where many media outlets are tied to particular conflict groups, businesspeople, or politicians, and the media itself has had a strong role as a conflict actor. While radios were the most prevalent in this sector, particularly in the 1990s, satellite television stations also grew, often beamed in from diaspora communities.

One of the challenges in this sector is the lack of institutional memory and weak donor coordination, possibly caused by the high turnover of staff in international agencies (although there have been some efforts to address this such as UNESCO's coordinating group in Nairobi). International organisations that are, or have been, particularly active in this sector in Somalia include the BBC Media Action, IREX, Press Now, Vikes, National Endowment for Democracy, and the UN. Additionally, for profit companies have also entered the media development space including Albany Associates, Integrity, Coffey International, and Bell Pottinger (until it was dissolved). Many initiatives are repeated, and it is not always clear who is being trained and for what purpose. Much of the media operates for political or economic objectives and has diverse agendas for participating in international training (Stremlau, Fantini, and Osman 2016).

Local organisations, or associations, providing media assistance or claiming to act on behalf of journalists, are often highly politicized leading to internal divisions and fragmentation. Some of the major journalists' associations include: the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), the Somali Women Journalist Association (SOWJA), Media Association of Puntland, and Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA). As with all activities in Somalia, some Associations attempt to work across the country while others are regionally based. While some international organisations run training programmes at media outlets, or through associations, there are degree or certificate programmes at private universities, although they are not always accredited.

## Sources

Universities/Schools of Journalism

- [Somali National University](#) (SNU)
- [University of Hargeisa, Somaliland](#)
- [University of Mogadishu](#)

Media development organisations

- [Albany Associates](#)
- [BBC Media Action](#)
- [Coffey International](#)
- [IREX](#)
- [Media Association of Puntland](#)

- [National Endowment for Democracy](#)
- [National Union of Somali Journalists](#)
- [Somaliland Journalists Association](#)

# Telecommunications

## Mobile network ecosystem

It is extremely difficult to get accurate data about the coverage and accessibility of mobile and Internet penetration. It is this author's belief that the official statistics tend to be far lower than actual rates of access. The ITU, for example, estimates that in 2016 just 1.9 percent of Somalis have access to the Internet. 3G coverage is thought to be higher at 38.7 percent of the population and 58.1 percent of Somalis are estimated to have mobile cellular subscriptions (ITU 2017). LTE, 3G and satellite connectivity services have been offered for several years. In late 2018 4G services were also introduced in Mogadishu and the surrounding areas to help boost the e-business sector (Nation 2018). Given the ongoing conflict, the competitive nature of the industry (including private and unlicensed mobile companies), and the lack of government regulation, accurate data is difficult to obtain. Families may share mobile phones, which increases access significantly.

Internet and mobile access are comparatively inexpensive due to the significant competition between companies. The mobile and Internet infrastructure has been developed by private companies. This has made government plans to enact more efficient tax collection, as outlined in the 2017 Communications Act, political and problematic as companies argue that they have invested significant resources in building an infrastructure that the state should have provided but has been unable to do so due to the continuing conflict.

## Company profiles

The telecoms environment is highly profitable and competitive. It is both a political and influential sector. A unique case in the whole continent, all companies are owned and run by Somalis (although often from the diaspora). The companies draw on international expertise from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and North America. Many of the telecoms companies have offices in the Gulf. This differs from other African countries that have telecoms markets dominated by international players such as MTN, Bharti, or Orange. Many of the main telecommunications companies operate across the Somali region, albeit under different names. The telecoms operators are closely intertwined with mobile money, remittances and the banking industry. One of the major challenges within this sector, partly as a result of the lack of government communication, has been ensuring interconnectivity between companies. Many Somalis that can afford to do so, carry multiple mobile phones and SIM cards.

Following is a list of the main companies:

- Hormuud Telecom is one of the largest companies. Based in Mogadishu, it was formed in 2002 and has a unique structure whereby more than 9000 Somalis hold shares in the company.
- Golis Mobile operates primarily in Puntland and Somaliland and was initially set up using Chinese equipment. It has been credited with offering some of the most inexpensive international calling rates in the world (Economist 2005). Golis is partnered with Salaam Bank.
- Somtel is headquartered in Somaliland and is primarily owned by Dahabshiil, the large Somali remittance company.
- Telesom is headquartered in Somaliland and has been pioneering mobile payments, through Zaad accounts, in the

region.

- Telcom is headquartered in Mogadishu and is one of the more established companies in Somalia.
- Nationlink, which was founded in 1997, is among the largest telecoms operators in the Somali territories. It is headquartered in Mogadishu with offices across the region and in Dubai.

## Main trends

The most notable trend in the sector has been the tremendous rise of mobile money. Somalia is often referred to as one of the world's first 'cashless' societies and mobile money has achieved significant depth and reach across the Somali territories with an estimated 73 percent of Somalis using it at least once a month (World Bank 2018). Mobile money transactions in Somalia have recently outpaced Kenya's popular and sector leading MPesa. Mobile money is primarily exchanged in US dollars, a factor that has resulted from the complete collapse of the banking system after the fall of the national government in 1991.

Mobile money has reached beyond capital cities and is popular among nomadic traders in rural communities as well. Mobile money products in Somalia do not require smartphones, so many Somalis have access and also use the accounts to receive remittances, save money and pay regular expenses such as school fees. The spread has partly resulted from the conscious efforts of leading companies such as Zaad to create a mobile money 'ecosystem' where some leading companies, including the Coca-Cola bottling plant and Amoud University, became cashless, paying employees and conducting trade solely with mobile money. This forced others to quickly adopt for fear of becoming economically marginalized (Stremlau and Osman 2015). The strategy has been successful in making mobile money an integral part of the remittance industry (the largest contributor to GDP in the Somali territories) and an everyday tool for business.

The humanitarian sector has also influenced the development of mobile money and the digitalisation of information, as well as the content of paid radio programs and access to phones and usage by beneficiary populations. Some aid agencies, such as WFP, have used mobile money in their relief/resilience programming and as such they influence not only the registration to mobile money services by subscribers, but also motivate people to buy/own phones to assist them in participation in aid programmes and receive cash. Some agencies have also donated telephones as part of their programs to facilitate communication with beneficiaries enrolled in long term development projects. The use of biometrics is a growing area, with a highly ambitious experiment in biometric voter registration having occurred in Somaliland for the 2017 elections. Debates around privacy data storage have largely been missing. The widespread acceptance of Somalis to give their biometric data to international organisations, including the humanitarian sector, is notable.

Social media and apps such as Whatsapp, Facebook messenger and Viber are particularly popular. While web and app statistics vary, according to companies such as Alexa and Similarweb, Youtube and Facebook are the most popular sites (apart from Google), with *Somalijobs.net* and *Caasimada.net* also receiving significant traffic. Uber-style taxi companies are also experimenting, with the launch in 2017 of Waryaa Taxi. There have been efforts to develop the startup sector, including through the Somali Accelerator, Innovate Ventures, which has provided some funding for new apps and companies.

## Mobile coverage

While there is a good network coverage in Somalia, there are locations that may be left out or have an erratic coverage, especially in remote locations. During military operations, not only the Internet but the whole network might be shut down in some cases, thus affecting all types of phone communication. The differences in access are significant with regions under government control (whether the self-declared but unrecognized government of Somaliland, the Government of Puntland, or the Federal Government in Mogadishu) and the significant territories that are controlled by the extremist group Al Shabaab.

While private companies have often found a way to work with local authorities in Al Shabaab-controlled territories, the group has, at times, enacted severe restrictions on communications. In south central Somalia, Al Shabaab has, for example, forced major telecoms providers such as Hormuud to close off access at times, arguing that international governments are tapping Internet and phone systems which has been putting their group at risk of attack. While periodic Internet shutdowns are part of the conflict (eg the African Union or Government of Somalia will order a local Internet shutdown when engaged in military operations), some regions (particularly the south), have experienced prolonged and widespread Internet shutdowns due to technical difficulties including a ship that cut the East African Submarine System (EASSy) undersea cable off the coast of Mogadishu. The economic costs to the local economy of this shutdown were estimated at 10 million USD per day (Reuters 2017).

## Mobile ownership

Given the lack of statistics from the national government, it is extremely difficult to offer reliable data about local mobile ownership and success (or the lack of it) in mediating the digital divide. Some have suggested that mobile ownership is around 58 percent (Statistica 2016) but the World Bank, which regularly tracks such data, does not provide this for Somalia. Part of the challenge of determining mobile ownership is that there are no reliable population censuses. Yet recent data, particularly in relation to mobile money, suggests that most adults have regular access to mobile phones and many enjoy low rates for calling and the Internet.

The most recent data relating to mobile phone use is on mobile money which gives some indication of use and of the digital divide. The World Bank notes that approximately 73 percent of the population uses mobile money with nearly 83 percent of urban dwellers using it, 72 percent of internally displaced and 55 percent of the rural population (World Bank, 2018). Like neighbouring Kenya, evidence seems to be suggesting that the digital divide is closing, partly driven by the integral role of mobile money to the economy.

Mobile phones are also becoming increasingly affordable with companies such as China's phone-maker Tecno taking a leading role in the market, selling relatively inexpensive handsets. Like many African countries, there is a digital gender divide in Somalia. Again, given the lack of government statistics it is challenging to generalize about how deep or significant this divide is. Some recent data related to participation on call-in radios (with women using mobile phones to participate) suggests that between 44-46 percent of participants on some programmes may be female. This is higher than many other countries on the continent (neighbouring Kenya, for example, has no gender gap in access but men are more than twice as likely to participate on call-in radio programmes) (Africa's Voices 2017).

## Sources

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- [Hormuud Telecom](#)
- [Innovate Ventures](#)
- [Nation Link Somalia](#)
- [Somtel](#)
- [Tecno](#)
- [Telcom Somalia](#)
- [Telesom Mobile Somalia](#)
- [Waryaa Taxi](#)
- [World Bank Indicators](#)

- [Zaad](#)

# Innovation

## Landscape analysis

The Somali region hosts some of the most ambitious experiments in technological innovation. This is surprising for a region that is often characterized as lawless. But it has been precisely this lack of regulation that has enabled tremendous adaptation and creativity. Private telecoms companies have been driving much of this, and the Somali region just surpassed Kenya (historically the market leader) for the pervasiveness and dominance of mobile money its economy (World Bank, 2018). The approach to technological innovation in Somalia has been one that is grounded in local efforts to find solutions to development and life challenges that are pervasive in a persistent conflict situation.

Concerns about security (and carrying money), the importance of remittances and a transnational diaspora community, and the lack of a formal banking sector, have all encouraged the development of new ways of using technology to address these challenges. In general, Somalis have been eager adopters of technology and communities have trusted the solutions and products offered by private companies (Stremlau and Osman, 2016). The recent biometric elections in Somaliland are an example of a willingness to tolerate, and to some degree embrace, technological intrusions into public and democratic life. Voter registration requiring iris scanning was accepted even by rural populations that have historically have less exposure to such technologies. This has been called 'technological leapfrogging' by some (Juma, 2017) but also raises questions of the willingness to experiment with enrolling and using citizens data to an unprecedented degree.

This degree of biometric registration is less likely to be tolerated in many European or North American countries, despite that this is where the technology companies are based and the funding for the biometric elections came from. Notably there have been few debates around privacy in Somaliland about the biometric data, including where it is stored, for how long, and who has access to it. There do, however, seem to be some rising concerns about this oversight in the humanitarian sector, particularly because it collects significant amounts of data (including cell phone numbers, names, locations, birthdays, etc) and western donors are increasingly raising concerns and encouraging greater protections in their grants.

## Profiles of main tech parks, accelerators, hackathons

For years what could be considered Somalia's 'innovation hubs' or 'tech parks' was limited to the rapid and ambitious developments within the private telecoms sector. Private companies have led global trends when it comes to mobile money, e-wallets and platforms for managing remittances. International organisations have also sought to encourage technological innovation. The World Food Programme has been experimenting with e-vouchers that enable recipients to purchase food from WFP-registered shops (WFP 2017). The 2017 elections in Somaliland also reflected both local and international innovation. As the first in the world to use iris biometrics as part of the voter registration process, this reflected both the Somaliland (and the people of Somaliland's) willingness to experiment with cutting-edge technology despite sensitive issues of identity and biometric identification. Questions of data protection and privacy had minimum public discussion.

News organisations, such as *Al Jazeera*, have also experimented of ways of using mobile phones to encourage participation and reach communities that are affected by conflict and whose voices are marginalized. The long term effects of initiatives such as "Somalia Speaks" are unclear beyond one-off events. There have also been some new initiatives by the civil society

community. In 2017 the first tech incubator opened in the capital, Mogadishu. iRise Innovation hub has sought to nurture a community of young entrepreneurs and innovators by fostering a co-working space and advising on start-ups. Similarly there have been other spaces emerging, particularly where young people have sought to create a platform for innovative ideas and expression, including TEDx Mogadishu (an independently organized TED event) and the Hargeisa Book Fair. While the latter does not focus on the use of new technology it has sought to blend old and new media, local Somalis and diaspora Somalis and create a unique space for innovation and collaboration. It has also been remarkably sustainable (compared with other initiatives) and has grown over the years.

## Sources

- [Hargeysa International Book Fair](#)
- [iRise Innovation Hub](#)
- [Somalia Speaks, Al Jazeera](#)
- [TEDx Mogadishu](#)

# Traditional forms of communication

## Summary

Somalia has an extremely rich culture and history of communication that has continued to inform and shape contemporary patterns of information exchange. The common greeting when meeting someone is 'what's the news?', reflecting the importance of accurate information required for survival by Somali nomads who continue to traverse their livestock across inhospitable and dry land. Somalia is often referred to as a 'nation of poets' or a region where poets are "more important than politicians" (Staff 2012). Poetry has a long legacy of being an integral part of conflict and peacemaking. Poets are regarded as trusted elder and arbiters of disputes. While their influence has waned, in some respects, after decades of conflict and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as promoted by al Shabaab, there have been efforts to counter this and revive their influence as a key part of Somali culture and identity essential for post-conflict reconstruction.

Somali did not have a written script until the 1970s and literacy has remained low (currently estimated at 37.8 percent with a significant discrepancy between men-49.7 percent and women- 25.8 percent) which affects modes of news consumption (Borgen Project 2018). Radio remains highly popular and accessible but radio also has a complicated history as it has long been involved in conflict. Warlord radios (where parties to the conflict would not only have militia but also a local radio) proliferated in the 1990s and were an active contributor to violence (Stremlau, Fantini and Osman 2016). Poets, religious leaders and elders would often be broadcast on radio, frequently advocating for a particular party in the conflict. Somalis are reported to be most interested in media reports covering religion (95.7 percent), according to a survey by the Broadcasting Board of Governors of 2013; this is closely followed by health (94.8 percent), arts and culture (83 percent), and education (81.6 percent). Different media outlets tend to have different credibility depending on the population. The BBC Somali Service, for example, has historically been heavily criticised in Somaliland for a perceived bias towards the South. Other outlets, including newspapers, that might be popular in Somaliland are regarded with scepticism in the South. And within regions media are often highly polarised and politicised, making it difficult to generalise about which media are trusted. Even UN-funded radios such as *Radio Bar Kulan* have been seen by some as very biased, or *Radio Mogadishu* which has had paid programming by the US State Dept on 'anti-extremism' and promoting moderate voices.

Communication by religious and community leaders (who often share roles- as 'elders' are frequently religious leaders, poets or other members of influential standing in communities) has also had a complex role in the conflict and as such, it is difficult to generalize about how trusted or accurate the information they provide might be. Al Shabaab, which at times has been aligned with al Qaeda and has roots in Wahhabi Islam, has often been at odds with Somalia's largely Sunni population and strong Islamic traditions including history of Sufism. There has also been a dramatic increase of funding and support for Islamic cultural institutions and schools by countries, such as Saudi Arabia, supporting Wahhabi Islam. This has challenged and transformed all aspects of traditional Somali society from dress (particularly for women) to education. The acceptance of what is often seen as a 'foreign' religious influence varies (Plaut 2017). Traditional religious leaders do remain very credible and are often called upon to resolve conflicts and mediate disputes. There have also been efforts to co-opt or engage such traditional leaders as part of national and international efforts of statebuilding and peacemaking and to support efforts to communicate these processes (see, for example, religious programming on state run stations such as *Radio Mogadishu* and *Radio Bar Kulan* sponsored by the African Union/United Nations).

## Sources

- [Somali poetry collection at Indiana University](#)
- [Radio Bar Kulan](#)
- [Radio Mogadishu](#)

## Conclusions

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### Conclusion

The Somali media landscape is energising and diverse, and will grow in the next few years. The importance of radio will not diminish in the years to come. However, there's an increasing growth in digital media, which if literacy rates increase in the country, may eventually challenge the dominance of radio as the favoured medium of choice for Somalis. For that to happen the political situation must improve. The country requires peace, unity and stability. Since 1991 there have been at least 14 international attempts to bring peace to Somalia, all have failed. But, a year since President Farmajo was sworn in as Somalia's ninth president there is still residual hope in the country, that he may be able to resolve the immediate political and security issues in the country and start to rebuild a shattered nation.

Until that happens Somalia will continue to be one of the most dangerous places to be a journalist. The NUSOJ's 2017 report highlighted the challenges Somali journalists face: killings, arrests and impunity. In Mogadishu, Somali journalists can be gunned down anywhere.

Despite the political challenges Somalia has suffered from, its media is characterised by vibrancy despite the conflict, a truly remarkable achievement for a country often cited as the world's most lawless place. Arguably, the Somali media remain one of the most lively and engaging media landscapes in the Horn of Africa.

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