



Djibouti

Djibouti: Introduction

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Chart 1: Political map of Djibouti

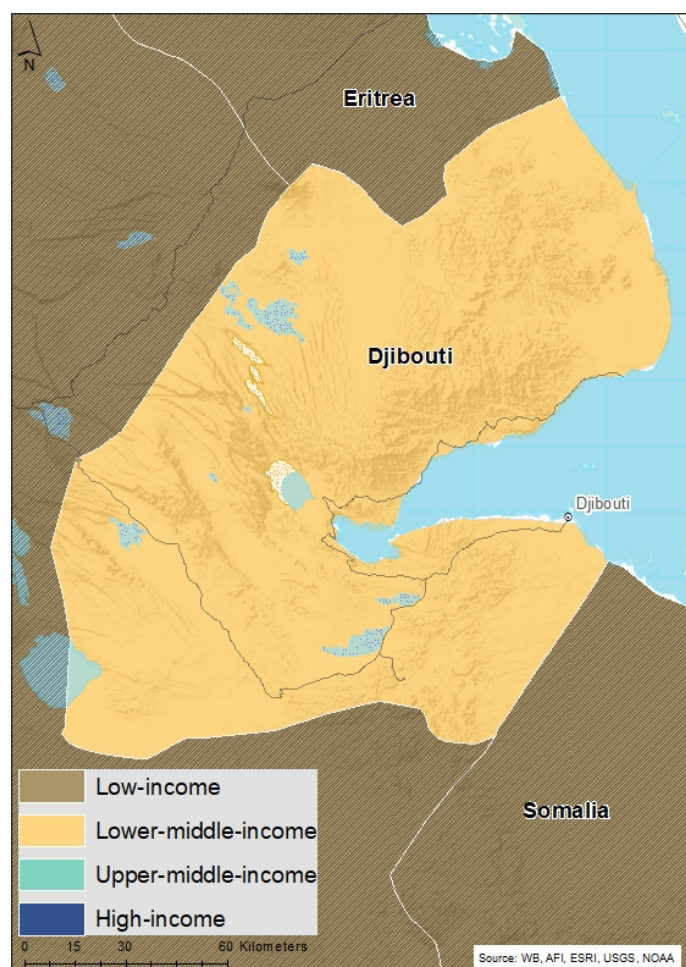


Chart 1 is a political map of Djibouti.

Djibouti is a small, lower-middle-income country at the Horn of Africa's maritime choke point, located along the Gulf of Aden at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, bordering Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Its land area is approximately **23 180 km²**, with a coastline of around **370 km**. This geography is the central driver of Djibouti's development model; it is the structural foundation of Djibouti's national development narrative. Vision Djibouti 2035 frames the country's aspiration as becoming a regional hub ("**Lighthouse of the Red Sea**") and a bridge across Africa and adjacent regions by leveraging port services, logistics and connectivity.

Djibouti is among the world's most climate- and water-stressed settings. The **2021 World Bank's Climate Risk Country Profile** characterises the country as highly arid, with nearly 90% classified as desert and limited arable capacity. The same profile reports a historical climatology baseline (1901–2019) of a mean annual temperature of approximately 27.8°C and mean annual precipitation of approximately 244.6 mm, with high intra-annual variability and generally low rainfall outside short wet periods.

Topography and geology reinforce both risks and opportunities. The World Bank profile describes terrain comprising plateaus, plains, volcanic formations and mountain ranges reaching up to 2 000 m, with altitudes varying from 155 m below sea level at Lake Assal to over 2 000 m at Mount Moussa Ali. These physical characteristics shape settlement,

transport costs, disaster risk exposure (including flash flooding in wadis and coastal hazards) and the feasibility of renewable energy development, particularly geothermal and wind.

Djibouti's constitutional framework ([Constitution of 4 September 1992](#)) defines the state as a sovereign democratic republic, establishes Arabic and French as the official languages and identifies Djibouti City as the national capital. The constitution specifies the structure of state authority, including that executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic, who is also Head of Government. The preamble also states that Islam is the religion of the State, which matters for social policy and institutional context.

Administratively, Djibouti's decentralisation architecture distinguishes between (i) five decentralised regional collectivities, Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Tadjourah, Obock and Arta, and (ii) Djibouti City, which has a distinct special status. The Presidency's official regional page states that these five regions have legal personality and financial autonomy and are administered through directly elected regional councillors, while Djibouti City has a special status under [Law No. 122/AN/05/5èmeL](#). This law establishes "Djibouti-ville" as a territorial authority and specifies that the city comprises three communes: Ras-Dika, Boulaos and Balbala. These institutional arrangements matter for the scenario analysis that follows because many interventions (education expansion, rural electrification, social transfers, governance reforms, tariff implementation under AfCFTA) depend on multi-level implementation capacity and local service delivery.

Djibouti gained independence on [27 June 1977](#) following its transition from French colonial administration, and its early post-independence political development required balancing ethnopolitical cohesion and state-building in a complex regional environment. Djibouti also experienced internal conflict in the early 1990s; a key milestone in stabilisation was the 1994 Peace and National Reconciliation Accord, captured in [peace agreement datasets](#) as dated 26 December 1994, which is commonly referenced as a turning point in the conflict trajectory. In the Vision 2035 framing, peace and national unity are emphasised as prerequisites for economic transformation, reflecting the view that sustained stability is essential for investment, corridor performance and tourism, as well as for protecting the country's role as a regional logistics hub.

The **social geography** of Djibouti is primarily centred around the capital region. Moreover, the country serves as a host for refugees and asylum seekers living in a fragile neighbourhood. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) operational overview, as of 31 January 2025, Djibouti was providing international protection to [32 920](#) refugees and asylum seekers, which accounts for over 3% of the total population.

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Dr Marvellous Ngundu is a Research Consultant at AFI. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. He is the recipient of the 2024 Megatrends Afrika Research Fellowship at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (ifw) in Germany, as well as the 2020/2021 fellowship program of the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in the United States. His research interests lie in the fields of international, political, and development economics, with a particular emphasis on Africa-China economic relations.

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