Libya

Ethnicity in Libya

Group selection

Throughout its history, Libya has been marked by its complex ethnic and tribal divisions. Only politically relevant ethnic groups are coded here, although these groups may be further divided by tribal distinctions and respective grievances. A recent consultancy estimates that Libya has up to 140 tribes, of which only around 30 have "particular significance" ([3020]). The following groups are considered politically relevant at the state-level in Libya: **Arabs**, **Berbers**, **Tuareg**, **Toubou**, and in selective years the **Jews**.

[3020] [Apps, 2011]

Power relations

1951 - 1969

The end of the Allied Occupation of Libya and the beginning of Libyan independence was achieved with the formation of the federal United Libyan Kingdom by December 1951 with Idris as King. Under the new federal government and constitution, the Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan states were declared to have autonomy (coded **Arabs**: dominant).

   Jews: An estimated 31,000 Libyan Jews migrated to Israel amid violent anti-Jewish discrimination between 1948 and 1951 (coded: discriminated), leaving an estimated 7,000 remaining in the country (<0.1%) ([3021]). With the establishment of Libya's 1951 independence, Jews were officially granted "guarantees of protection" under King Idris' inclusive policy (Arabs coded: dominant; Berbers, Tuareg, Toubou: irrelevant) ([3022]). However, Arab nationalist pressure following independence led to the gradual imposition of further legal restrictions on Jewish legal status, voting rights, public service, "commerce, licenses and holding of property", in addition to further anti-Jewish propaganda and violence which came to a peak around the time of the 1967 Six-Day War.

   In 1969, Idris' monarchy was overthrown under the leadership of Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi, and the Libyan Arab Republic was proclaimed. Under the rule of Colonel Qaddafi and his discriminatory state policies against non-Arab minorities, anti-Jewish sentiment was further propagated ([3023]). Libya's constitutional declaration of 1969 defines Libya as an Arab state, and the government denies the existence of minority groups (coded: Arab monopoly) ([3024]). By 1970, virtually all remaining Jews had emigrated from Libya (coded:

[3021] [Gruen, 1988]

[3022] [Gruen, 1988]

[3023] [Gruen, 1988]

[3024] [Minority Rights Group International, 2011]

irrelevance post-1970).

1970 - 2011

Toubou: The Toubou, also called Tebou, Tibu, etc. are an ethnic minority primarily located in the south of Libya. The Toubou are reportedly darker in appearance than the majority of Libyan Arabs and have experienced a history of social, economic and political discrimination, especially under the leadership of Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi. The Library of Congress Study on Libya ([3025]) reports: "In Libya as a whole, dark-skinned people are looked down upon, the degree of discrimination increasing with the darkness of the skin."

[3025] [Library of Congress, 1987]

One source stated the Toubou make up an estimated 0.2 of the population ([3026]), but the coding derives the group size of the Toubous from the Joshua Project homepage (38,000 or 0.6%) and from other similar sources (Wikipedia citing Encarta, LoC). The nomadic nature of the Toubou and the porous borders of the Saharan region make it difficult to accurately nationally identify them, and to identify the precise time period when their settlement in Libya began. Martin and Weber ([3027]) report that an estimated "several thousand" Toubou refugees fled from Chad and settled in southern Libya between 1974 and 1995, which is consistent with reports of intensifying persecution of this and other non-Arab minorities under the Qaddafi regime's 'Arabisation' policies. No further information on political discrimination before 2007 was found, but various sources report their long history of discrimination, particularly given their inability to obtain citizenship identification and assert respective rights under the Qaddafi regime. Therefore, the political relevance of this group is coded beginning with the year 1970.

[3026] [Martin & Weber, 2012]

[3027] [Martin & Weber, 2012]

While most US publications on Libya report that there are no major ethnic cleavages, and Libya's regime has even promoted a pan-African state, offering Chad an official union in 1971, multiple sources report that discrimination against the Toubou has worsened since 2007 (no new period is introduced in the coding). Measures taken by the regime included orders not to issue passports or IDs to newborn Toubous, not to treat Toubous at hospitals, and not to let Toubou children enter educational facilities. In 2008 Libyan officials and police started to demolish houses and settlements of the Toubou, arrest those who protested the destruction of their property, and in November of 2008 killed two Toubous and injured several others during a violent crackdown of protests against the discriminatory actions. Moreover, Libya has started to expel other black Africans from its territory. Citizens from Mali who had been expelled, reported massive abuse to the extent of torture by Libyan police forces. The development does not seem to be entirely new given past history of discrimination, although the scale and intensity of discrimination certainly seems to have reached a different quality.

Political representation: In 2007, a group defending the rights of the Toubou people in Libya, The Toubou Front for the Salvation of

Libya, was founded to call for more autonomy. The group disbanded in 2011 with the fall of Tripoli, but revitalized in 2012, reportedly in response to insecurity over Toubou ethnic cleansing and to seek political recognition.

Berbers: The Berber population of Libya is one of the three major ethnic minorities along with the Toubou and the Tuareg. They self-identify as Amazigh (plural: Imazighen). Making up an estimated 4 - 10% (coded: 10%) of the Libyan population, the Berbers speak their own language and "celebrate a cultural heritage that predates Arab expansion by thousands of years...(which is) distinct from the Arab identity" ([3028]). Along with the Toubou and other non-Arab minorities, the Berbers were culturally and politically repressed under the Qaddafi regime (coded: Discriminated). The group is politically represented by the Libyan Amazigh congress and Amazigh Supreme Council.

[3028] [Antoniskis, 2012]

Tuareg: The Tuareg population of Libya makes up an estimated 2 - 5% (coded 5%) of the Libyan population, and is among the three major ethnic groups which were similarly repressed under Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi's leadership (coded: Discriminated) ([3029]). They are traditionally nomadic and closely related to the Berber people. Little information was found on the Tuareg people besides reports that many were employed as fighters in the military by Qaddafi.

[3029] [IRIN News, 2012]

2012-2021:

Arabs: The Libyan Revolution of 2011 ended the Qaddafi era and his regime was replaced by the National Transitional Council. Although there is a major power shift in the tribal composition of political access, (Qaddafi's government favored the employment of members of his own tribe for public service), the ethnic composition of the government has not changed much. Arabs continue to dominate politics at the national level with token inclusion of other ethnic groups (coded: Dominant). In the absence of a legitimate central authority after the fall of Qaddafi's regime, ethnic tensions surfaced at varying intensities across the country about the future of the Libyan state. These tensions between the Arab majority and minority groups have prevailed.

It is unclear if conflicts between tribes and ethnic groups - during and as a consequence of the regime change - are politically motivated or more concerned with economic control over trade routes and oil reserves. For example, Toubou militias mobilized to provide security and to consolidate control over key economic resources in the region, particularly illicit smuggling routes across the south of Libya in contest with the Zwai group ([3030]).

[3030] [Martin & Weber, 2012]

Libya's disintegration, which began after the overthrow of Qaddafi's regime in 2011, continued in the subsequent decade. A power vacuum emerged after parliamentary elections in 2014 led to the formation of two political-ideological camps which both claimed legitimacy to govern the country ([3031]). In the eastern coastal town of Tobruk,

[3031] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

an internationally recognized government was established under the name of "Operation Dignity." It represented the anti-Islamist camp and is supported by the national army under the leadership of General Khalifa Haftar. Its House of Representatives (HoR) was the succeeding parliament of the General National Congress (GNC) that had been tasked to elaborate Libya's new constitution. The opposing bloc in the western town of Tripoli was the Islamist camp named "Libya Dawn." It elected a new GNC in August 2014 in Tripoli and likewise claimed to be the legitimate successor of the previous GNC ([3032]).

[3032] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

The warring factions continued to clash violently throughout the year 2015 ([3033]) until political dialogue facilitated an agreement, was signed in December 2015 and approved by the HoR in January 2016. It created the internationally recognized Government of National Accord Presidency Council (GNA PC), headed by Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj. The GNA PC took office in Tripoli in March 2016 ([3034]). However, the fighting did not stop and yet another player, the leader of the former National Salvation Government in Tripoli announced a comeback together with the General National Congress (GNC) (the legislature until 2014) and took over the Tripoli premises of the State Council, the advisory body attached to the GNA ([3035]). To sum up, at times three parties 2 in Tripoli, 1 in Tobruk claimed to be the country's legitimate government. The influence of Fayez al-Serraj, prime minister of the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), remained weak and widespread fighting continued. The clashing parties included myriad clans and tribes as well as foreign Islamist fighters such as the Islamic State trying to seize territory in North Africa ([3036]).

[3033] [U.S. Department of State, 2015]

[3034] [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

[3035] [Human Rights Watch, 2016]

[3036] [Eaton, 2017]

However, there is not enough evidence to redefine the ethnic composition of the warring parties. The fault lines seem to be ever-shifting and the loyalties of the people living under various regional leaderships are not evident. One report states that "in this majority Sunni Muslim country, however, the struggle is not between secular and religious norms, instead it is a fight between extremist ideologies of Islam and more mainstream ones. At a deeper level, the fight is over power, legitimacy and territory. Faith-related discourses are used to provide legitimacy" ([3037]). Thus, the Sunni Arabs keep their status as one ethnic group in Libya - yet power is contested by various players within this group (coded: dominant).

[3037] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

Toubou/Berber/Tuareg: The Toubous were united in their calls for autonomy with the Berber (represented by the Libyan Amazigh congress and Amazigh Supreme Council) and Tuareg (represented by the Supreme Tuareg Council). Several sources suggest that in the wake of the Libyan civil war, the three main ethnic minorities sought equal rights and fairer political and social representation. "The 2011 revolution instigated a shift in the balance of power between minority groups and the centre, creating incentives to employ more radical demands as Toubou elites seek to leverage political concessions and a favorable distribution of resources" ([3038]).

[3038] [Martin & Weber, 2012]

Most notably, the councils representing the three groups aimed to be recognized in the new constitution threatening otherwise to boycott the elections, or in the case of the Toubou, seek separation and autonomy. By 2013, political representatives of the Toubou, Berbers, and Tuareg quit parliament after no agreement could be reached on Libya's new constitution ([3039]).

[3039] [Stocker, 2013]

Both the Toubou and the Berbers played crucial roles in toppling the Qaddafi regime. However, the Berbers were not offered ministry positions in the National Transitional Council or other substantive rights, although token Berbers were elected to serve in the Libyan General National Congress ([3040]).

[3040] [Antoniskis, 2012]

Subsequent political marginalization and lack of access to full citizenship rights and public services contributed to Toubou grievances and their reluctance to disarm ([3041]).

[3041] [Martin & Weber, 2012]

Amidst the various players involved in the Libyan conflict, it is difficult to locate the relevant ethnic minorities. Reportedly, they continued to identify primarily with their respective cultural and linguistic heritage ([3042], [3043]). The constitution formally granted these groups full participation in elections and the political process, but "significant social and cultural barriers in addition to significant security challenges prevented their proportionate political participation" ([3044]). Furthermore, Toubou and Tuareg were divided between the eastern Tobruk camp and the western Tripoli camp. Clashes between the two groups were reported in 2015 and 2016 ([3045]). Human Rights Watch further reported that the government did not provide an inclusive environment for minorities ([3046]).

[3042] [U.S. Department of State, 2015]
[3043] [U.S. Department of State, 2019]

[3044] [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

[3045] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

[3046] [Whitson, 2017]

Yet, in comparison to the Gaddafi era, positive developments were reported for the country's minority groups, especially with regards to securing recognition of their distinct cultural identity and language rights ([3047]). While "the extent to which the government enforced official recognition of minority rights was unclear" ([3048]), the improvement of their situation is accounted for in the data (coded: powerless).

[3047] [Minority Rights Group International, 2019]
[3048] [U.S. Department of State, 2019]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Li[...]

Figure 612: Political status of ethnic groups in Libya during 1951-1969.

From 1951 until 1969

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.843	DOMINANT
Jews	0.001	DISCRIMINATED

From 1970 until 2011

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.844	MONOPOLY
Berbers	0.1	DISCRIMINATED
Tuareg	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Toubou	0.006	DISCRIMINATED
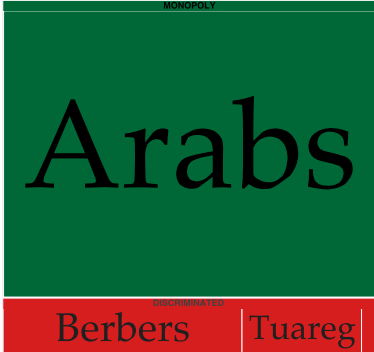
Figure 613: Political status of ethnic groups in Libya during 1970-2011.

From 2012 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.844	DOMINANT
Berbers	0.1	POWERLESS
Tuareg	0.05	POWERLESS
Toubou	0.006	POWERLESS

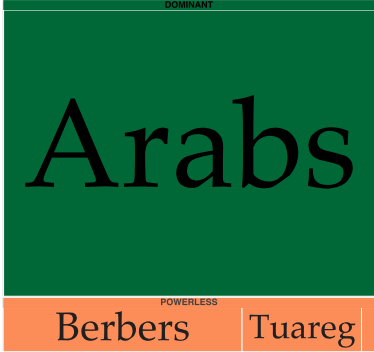Figure 614: Political status of ethnic groups in Libya during 2012-2021.

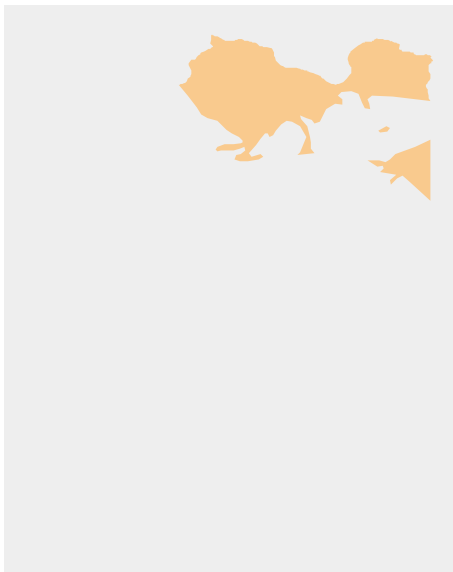# Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Libya

From 1951 until 1951

Figure 615: Map of ethnic groups in Libya during 1951-1951.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
■	Arabs	654 661	Regional & urban
■	Jews	0	Urban

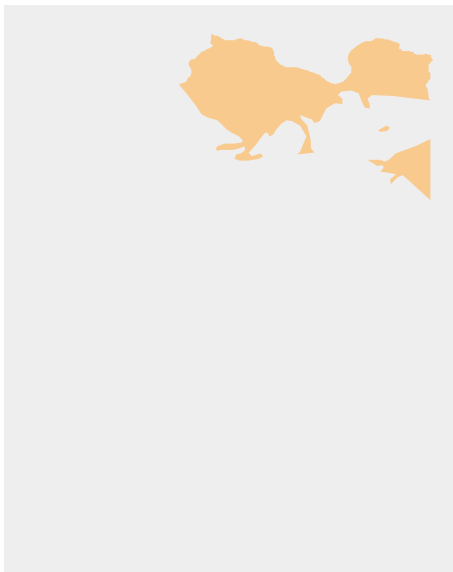Table 225: List of ethnic groups in Libya during 1951-1951.

From 1952 until 1969

Figure 616: Map of ethnic groups in Libya during 1952-1969.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
	Arabs	654 661	Regional & urban
	Jews	0	Urban

Table 226: List of ethnic groups in Libya during 1952-1969.

From 1970 until 2021

Figure 617: Map of ethnic groups in Libya during 1970-2021.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
■	Arabs	654 661	Regional & urban
■	Toubou	285 699	Regionally based
■	Tuareg	47 072	Regionally based
■	Berbers	8523	Regional & urban

Table 227: List of ethnic groups in Libya during 1970-2021.

Conflicts in Libya

Starting on 1987-08-07

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Chad	Government of Libya		1987-08-07			

Starting on 2011-02-27

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Libya	NTC	Arabs	2011-02-27	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Libya	Forces of Muammar Gaddafi	Arabs	2011-08-26	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Libya	ASL	Arabs	2012-09-18	Explicit	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Libya	Zintan Military Council	Arabs	2014-05-17	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Libya	Forces of the House of Representatives		2014-10-31			
Government of Libya	Forces of Khalifa al-Ghawil	Arabs	2016-10-13	No	Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Libya	PFLL	Arabs	2017-11-07	No	Yes, from EGIP	

Starting on 2015-03-13

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Libya	IS	Arabs	2015-03-13	No	Yes, from EGIP	