

**Morocco**

# *Ethnicity in Morocco*

## *Group selection*

The constituent ethnic groups are not clearly defined in Morocco. While the CIA World Factbook (<sup>3486</sup>) reports a population consisting of 99.1% Arab-Berbers, previous codings distinguished the **Berbers** from the **Arabs** as a powerless group. Moreover, various sources differ enormously in their population estimates for the Berbers and their subgroups. The Joshua Project notes 10 different Berber groups that make up about 20% of the total population. Wikipedia citing Encarta lists a number of 30% for the Berber-speaking population, which is consistent with the census results of 28% from 2004 (reported in <sup>3487</sup>) and Ethnologue numbers from the 1990s. However, representatives of the Berber claim that at the time of independence (in the 1950s) the amount of Berber-speakers in Morocco was 85% and that the official numbers are a gross underestimation of the real Berber population. Taking the 30% size of today as a vantage point and extrapolating 40% for the past decades seems to be reasonable, since apparently assimilation has taken place over time (Fearon (<sup>3488</sup>) notes a proportion of 0.37).

<sup>3486</sup> [CIA, 2011]

<sup>3487</sup> [Guilbaud, 2010]

<sup>3488</sup> [Fearon, 2002]

**Sahrawis** are of mixed Arab, Berber and Black African descent and inhabit the territory of Western Sahara. Their population numbers are disputed but several sources indicate a number around 500,000 today (<sup>3489</sup>). Their population share for Morocco was calculated based on present-day population numbers for both Morocco and the Western Sahara, assuming that both populations were growing at a similar rate. Moreover, it was assumed that the majority of Sahrawi people were living in the area claimed by Morocco (about 2/3 of the entire territory of the Western Sahara), arriving at a population share of 1.6% for Sahrawis in the period in question. Morocco occupied the Mauritanian-claimed territory of Western Sahara in 1979. Given the very low population density in this area and outmigration of about 100,000 Sahrawis to Algeria, the population share of Sahrawis is kept constant. All other population figures were adjusted accordingly.

<sup>3489</sup> [CIA, 2011]

## *Power relations*

### *1956-1975*

All sources consulted did not indicate neither exclusion nor discrimination on ethnic grounds. **Arabs** and **Berbers** are united in their

religious believes (Sunni Islam). The royal family, the Alawite dynasty, has ruled since the 17th century basing its claim to legitimacy on descent from the Prophet Muhammad and is therefore revered by Moroccan Muslims inclusively (<sup>3490</sup>). Parties are not allowed to form on ethnic grounds either. Some ethnic claims were made by Berbers seeking recognition of their cultural heritage and preservation of various Berber dialects.

<sup>3490</sup> [Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020]

Yet, the dominant narrative identifies Morocco as an Arab-Islamic state, reflecting the “long history of Arabization (that) has developed the institutional, political, and social spheres of Moroccan society” (<sup>3491</sup>). This prescriptive Arab-Islamic identity has been actively enforced by the ruling elite, which is predominantly of Arab ethnicity, and that such institutionalized Arabization has strongly perpetuated exclusion and oppression of other ethnic groups (ibid.).

<sup>3491</sup> [Fischer, 2010]

Overall, ethnicity plays little role in Moroccan politics - similar to Algeria. In both countries the constitution forbids political parties based on language, region, ethnicity (etc.), and both adopted Arabic as the official state language. Thus, Arabs are coded as dominant in Morocco.

### 1976-2021

Following Morocco’s occupation of Western Sahara in 1976, the **Sahrawis** become a politically relevant ethnic group. The International Court of Justice ruled in 1975 that the Spanish colony of Western Sahara had a right to self-determination. Morocco and Mauritania ignored the ruling and invaded Western Sahara in late 1975. Mauritania withdrew in 1979 and recognized POLISARIO as the official representative of the Western Sahara. The UN still considers Spain to be the administering country, despite the fact that 2/3 of Western Saharan territory have been under de facto control of Morocco since 1976 and almost the entire territory since 1979. The Moroccan government even constructed a wall throughout the entire country to keep Sahrawi rebels (POLISARIO) outside the economically more advanced coastal areas. Several peace initiatives were launched since the late 1980s, most of them envisioning a referendum for independence. The Moroccan government renounced the need for such a referendum and refused to hold it. Freedom House (<sup>3492</sup>, 2005) reports: “Sahrawis have never been able to elect their own government. The Moroccan government organizes and controls local elections in the Moroccan-held areas of the territory. Only Sahrawis whose views are consonant with the Moroccan government hold seats in the Moroccan parliament.” This is a clear basis for a discrimination coding.

<sup>3492</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

In 2011, following protests for democratic political reform by the February 20 Movement, the King presented a revised constitution (<sup>3493</sup>, 2010-2013), which, however, failed to effectively shift the distribution of power and to substantively curb the monarch’s political supremacy (<sup>3494</sup>): he still rules by decree, and he still has the au-

<sup>3493</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3494</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

thority to dissolve parliament (although now only in consultation with the PM), to appoint/dismiss cabinet members, heads of administrative provinces, and judges and magistrates, and to call for new elections (3495; 3496, 2010-2013; 3497). He also sets national and foreign policy, commands the armed forces and intelligence services, and presides over the judicial system (3498; 3499).

New is that the King is now required to elect the prime minister from the ruling party (before he had total discretion over whom to appoint) (3500, 2010-2013; 3501). There are also fewer government-imposed restrictions on political parties (3502). Nevertheless, executive, as well as legislative and judicial power undoubtedly remains with the king and his closest allies from the political elite (3503, 2010-2013). There are clearly no real checks and balances in the political system, and, given the concentration of power in the monarchy, elected officials do not have effective power to rule, even under the new constitution (3504).

Indeed, “the country’s fragmented political parties and even the cabinet are generally unable to assert themselves” (3505, 2010-2013). The fact that ministers are directly appointed by the King, and usually are individuals who have close ties to the palace, “creates a political atmosphere where the power of the ministers is challenged” (3506). Also, there are many royal commissions that are more powerful than the ministries. Parties, although they vary widely in their ideologies, have been unable to propose alternatives to those offered by the palace, and do not risk contesting the king’s political choices. In the provinces, although political decentralization was initiated in the early 2000s, power has not been effectively transferred, as policies and budgets of municipal governments require the approval of governors who are appointed by the King (3507).

The Justice and Development Party (JDP) remained the largest party in the election of October 2016. Abdelilah Benkirane remained prime minister and formed a government with the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the Popular Movement (MP), the Constitutional Union (UC), the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP). However, despite the 2011 reforms, effective power still rests with the monarchy and “elected officials in Morocco do not possess effective power to rule” (3508, 7; 3509, 2016). Prominent Amazigh elites may “enjoy access to the monarchy and also have their interests represented in Parliament”, but the “bulk of the ethnically indigenous population is marginalized” (3510, 2017). The Arabs keep their status as dominant.

Room for opposition more generally is equally limited: freedom of expression and assembly are severely constrained, especially when the monarchy, Islam as the state religion and the status of Western Sahara are questioned. Government critics often face severe punishment, harassment, arbitrary arrest and torture, while civil society actors and NGOs are subject to extensive administrative and financial regulation by the state, with, for example, pro-self-determination

3495 [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

3496 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3497 [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

3498 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3499 [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

3500 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3501 [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

3502 [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

3503 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3504 [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

3505 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3506 [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

3507 [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

3508 [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

3509 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

3510 [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

groups struggling to get legal status (<sup>3511</sup>; <sup>3512</sup>; <sup>3513</sup>, 2010-2013).

Relevant with regards to the status of the Berbers is that the 2011 constitution raised Tamazight from national to official language status, placing it on an equal footing with Arabic (<sup>3514</sup>, 2010-2013; <sup>3515</sup>). For example, it is now taught in schools along with Modern Standard Arabic (<sup>3516</sup>). While it may be an important battle won against cultural marginalization, in political terms the recognition of Tamazight is a mere “symbolic measure” that “will not help their disenfranchisement from what they believe is an Arab-dominated government” (<sup>3517</sup>).

Apparently, no real progress has been made to ensure Amazigh representation and participation in politics, with the International Business Times writing that “there are still those in government who have long worked against the integration of the [Berbers] politically” (<sup>3518</sup>). A political party, called ‘Parti Democratique Amazigh Marocain’ (PDAM), was initiated in 2005 to represent the Berber community, but was banned in 2007 and formally dissolved by a court ruling in 2008, on the grounds that parties based on ethnicity are against Moroccan law. The party was quickly re-formed under the title “Parti Ecologiste Marocain”, but has not been able to legally establish itself and thus remains inactive in the Moroccan government (<sup>3519</sup>; <sup>3520</sup>). The case of the Berbers in Morocco seems ambiguous. In recent years, “they have successfully claimed more cultural rights without questioning the legitimacy of the Moroccan nation-state” (<sup>3521</sup>). On the other hand, however, they have never been able to fully participate in Moroccan politics given the undisputed authority of the royal family and the prohibition of ethnically based parties and organizations. Lacking any significant developments with regards to their political status, their coding remains powerless until 2021.

Little has also changed in the political status of the Sahrawi ethnic group: “as the occupying force in Western Sahara, Morocco holds authority over local elections and works to ensure that independence-minded leaders are excluded from both local political processes and the Moroccan legislature” (<sup>3522</sup>, 2009-2013). Therefore, while there are 31 parliamentarians in the Chamber of Counselors and 21 in the Chamber of Representatives from districts that are all or partly in the Western Sahara territory, and both the regional governor and the members of the regional council self-identified as Sahrawi, they seem to be carefully selected in terms of their political orientation with regards to the Western Sahara issue (<sup>3523</sup>).

In addition, and as mentioned already above, the Sahrawis also continue to experience violations of their civil and political rights more generally (<sup>3524</sup>, 2009-2013): groups or individuals who question the legitimacy of Morocco’s claimed sovereignty over Western Sahara are not only excluded from the political debate but often also severely prosecuted (<sup>3525</sup>). Government restrictions on the civil liberties and political rights of pro-independence advocates include

<sup>3511</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

<sup>3512</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

<sup>3513</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3514</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3515</sup> [International Business Times, 2011]

<sup>3516</sup> [International Business Times, 2011]

<sup>3517</sup> [International Business Times, 2011]

<sup>3518</sup> [International Business Times, 2011]

<sup>3519</sup> [International Business Times, 2011]

<sup>3520</sup> [Wikipedia, 2013]

<sup>3521</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

<sup>3522</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3523</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2013b]

<sup>3524</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3525</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

in particular limitations on freedom of speech, press, assembly and association. As such, critical journalists face harassment and assault, dissent is repressed through the use of arbitrary and prolonged detention, protests and large gatherings of any kind are controlled through violence and excessive force, detainees are subjected to physical and verbal abuse, including torture, and Sahrawi-based associations/NGOs are often denied official recognition, preventing them from establishing office, recruiting members and collecting donations (<sup>3526</sup>, 2009-2013; <sup>3527</sup>). A poignant and recent example are the events around the Gdeim Izik protest camps established in 2010 close to the territory's capital, El Ayoun, whose residents were violently dispersed by Moroccan security forces. Two years later, 24 civilians remained incarcerated with no trial scheduled (<sup>3528</sup>, 2009-2013). In 2013, they were tried, although before a military court, and many received heavy jail sentences.

In 2014, King Mohammed IV stated that the "Sahara will remain part of Morocco until the end of time." Anyone questioning the legitimacy of the annexation is either marginalized from public debates or persecuted (<sup>3529</sup>; <sup>3530</sup>). Evidence of discrimination of the Sahrawis is further provided by Amnesty International (<sup>3531</sup>), which mentions arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Freedom House (<sup>3532</sup>, 2016) further mentions torturing of advocates of the independence of Western Sahara. There has not been any significant progress regarding the autonomy plan for Western Sahara nor have there been steps to realize the promise of a referendum on its independence (<sup>3533</sup>).

In the elections for the Chamber of Representatives (the lower house of parliament) of 2016, registered voters in Western Sahara elected representatives for regionally designated seats. A substantial number of candidates for the elected offices self-identified as Sahrawi (<sup>3534</sup>). On the other hand, Moroccan authorities continued to "systematically prevent gatherings in the Western Sahara supporting Sahrawi self-determination" (<sup>3535</sup>), indicating that the inclusion of the Sahrawis to the political process was only tokenistic. After renewed negotiations about the status of Western Sahara in 2018, the process was stalled again in 2019 after the resignation of the UN envoy. Morocco has proposed a measure of autonomy under its rule but continues to reject a referendum on independence for the territory (<sup>3536</sup>).

In December 2020 the US recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, which was condemned by POLISARIO on the same day as "blatant violation" of international law. Meanwhile, POLISARIO continued to shell Moroccan defensive positions along East-West sand berm that separates Moroccan-controlled Western Saharan territory from Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic-controlled territory (<sup>3537</sup>). In conclusion, the Sahrawi community remains discriminated in the political process through 2021.

<sup>3526</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3527</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2013a]

<sup>3528</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3529</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>3530</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

<sup>3531</sup> [Amnesty International, 2016]

<sup>3532</sup> [Freedom House, 2005-2016]

<sup>3533</sup> [Reuters, 2016]

<sup>3534</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2019]

<sup>3535</sup> [Human Rights Watch, 2020]

<sup>3536</sup> [Human Rights Watch, 2020]

<sup>3537</sup> [International Crisis Group, 2020]

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## *Political status of ethnic groups in M*

*From 1956 until 1975*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.6	DOMINANT
Berbers	0.4	POWERLESS

*From 1976 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.592	DOMINANT
Berbers	0.392	POWERLESS
Sahrawis	0.016	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 700: Political status of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1956-1975.



Figure 701: Political status of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1976-2021.

## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Morocco*

*From 1956 until 1956*

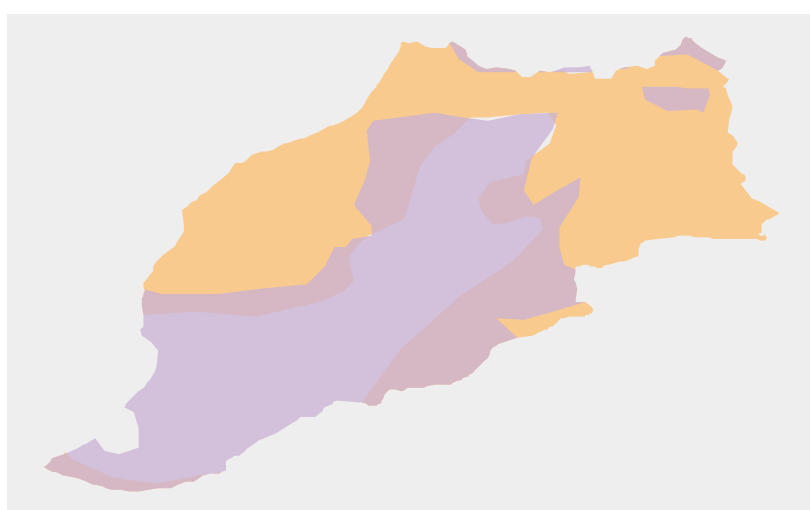


Figure 702: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1956-1956.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	218 876	Regional & urban
Berbers	199 775	Regionally based

Table 261: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1956-1956.

*From 1957 until 1957*

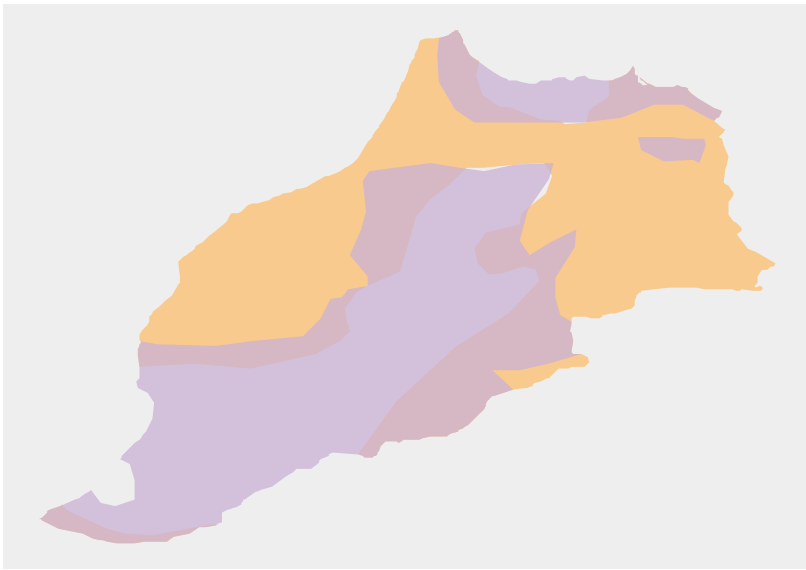


Figure 703: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1957-1957.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	234 135	Regional & urban
Berbers	219 659	Regionally based

Table 262: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1957-1957.

*From 1958 until 1958*

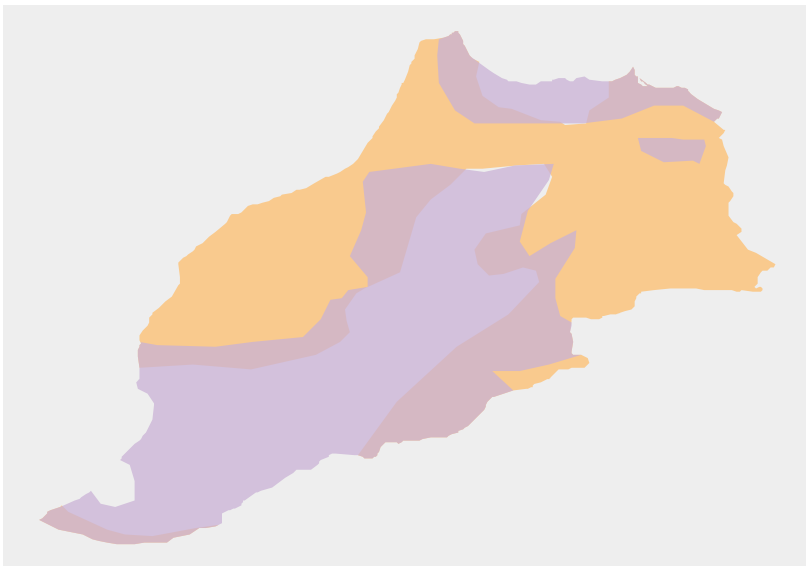


Figure 704: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1958-1958.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	234 135	Regional & urban
Berbers	219 659	Regionally based

Table 263: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1958-1958.

*From 1959 until 1974*

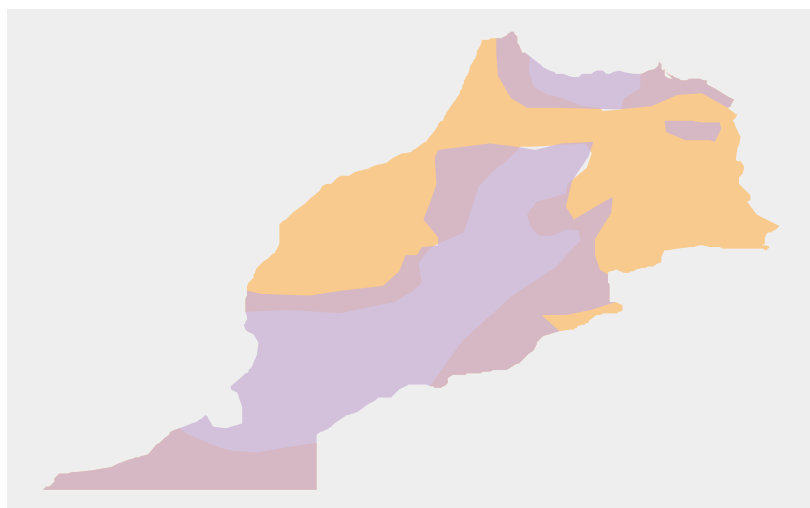


Figure 705: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1959-1974.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	262 819	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 348	Regionally based

Table 264: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1959-1974.

*From 1975 until 1975*

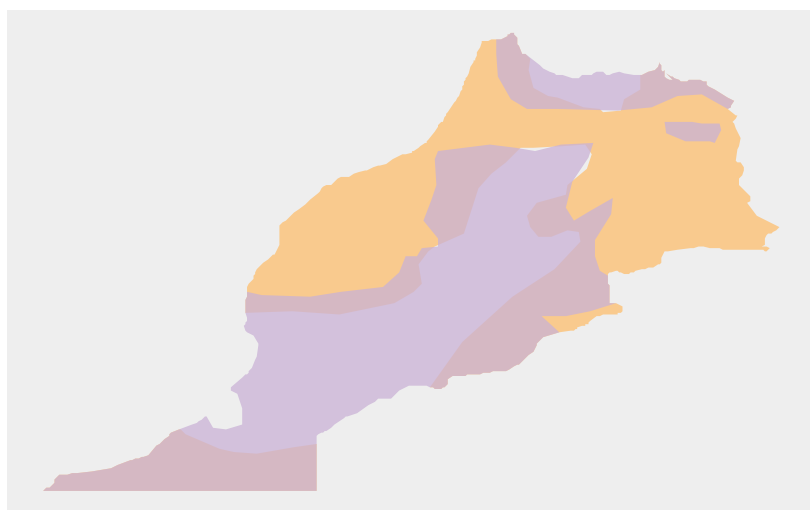


Figure 706: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1975-1975.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	262 819	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 348	Regionally based

Table 265: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1975-1975.

*From 1976 until 1976*

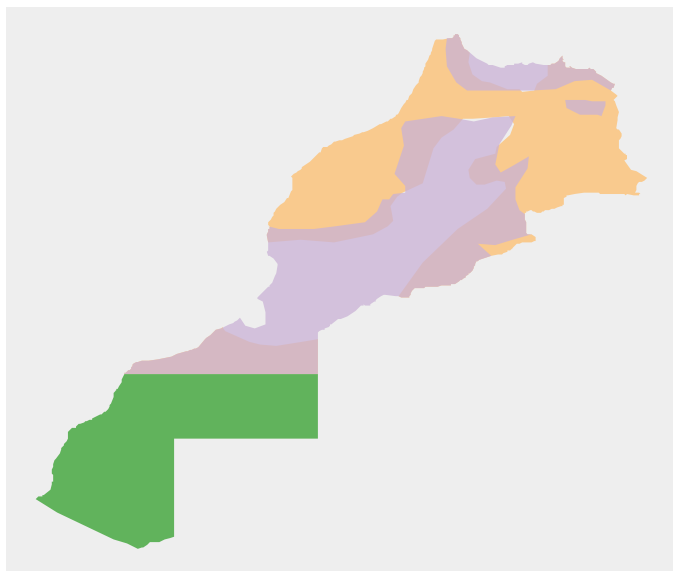


Figure 707: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1976-1976.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	262 823	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 351	Regionally based
Sahrawis	171 258	Regionally based

Table 266: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1976-1976.

*From 1977 until 1978*

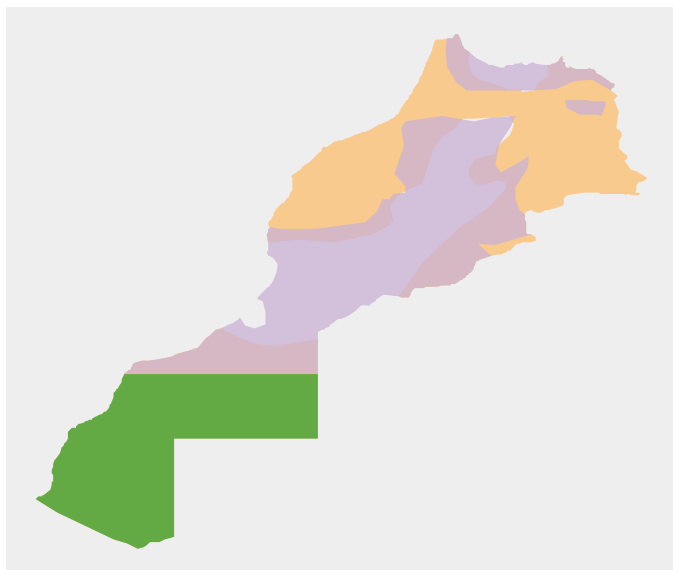


Figure 708: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1977-1978.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	434 081	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 351	Regionally based
Sahrawis	171 258	Regionally based

Table 267: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1977-1978.

*From 1979 until 1979*

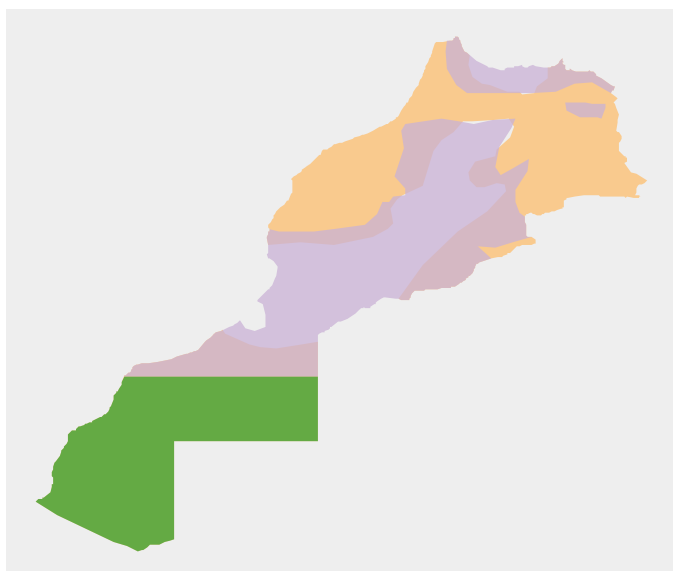


Figure 709: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1979-1979.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	434 081	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 351	Regionally based
Sahrawis	171 258	Regionally based

Table 268: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1979-1979.

*From 1980 until 1990*

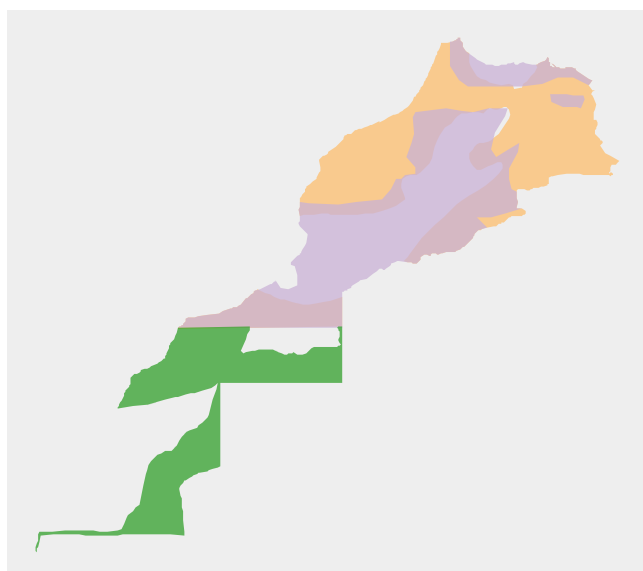


Figure 710: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1980-1990.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	262 716	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 351	Regionally based
Sahrawis	146 025	Regionally based

Table 269: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1980-1990.

*From 1991 until 2021*



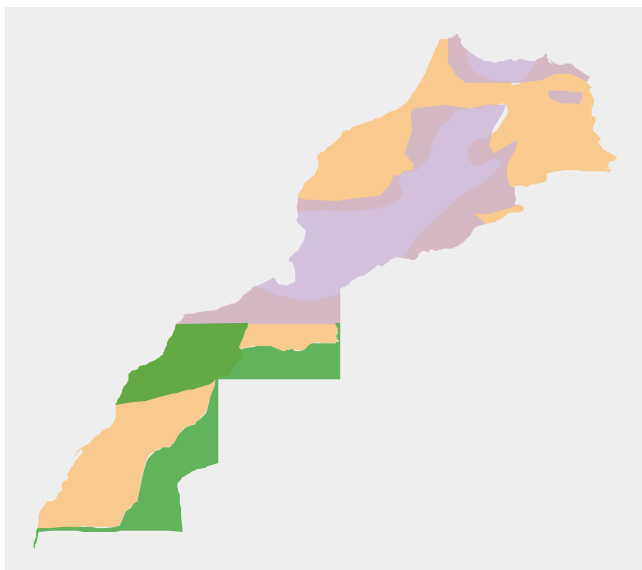


Figure 711: Map of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1991-2021.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Arabs	440 273	Regional & urban
Berbers	248 351	Regionally based
Sahrawis	146 025	Regionally based

Table 270: List of ethnic groups in Morocco during 1991-2021.

## *Conflicts in Morocco*

*Starting on 1953-11-06*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	Istiqlal		1953-11-06			

*Starting on 1957-01-11*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	NLA		1957-01-11			

*Starting on 1957-11-22*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Spain	NLA		1957-11-22			

*Starting on 1963-10-07*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Algeria	Government of Morocco		1963-10-07			

*Starting on 1971-07-09*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Morocco	Military faction (forces of Mohamed Madbouh)		1971-07-09			

*Starting on 1975-08-31*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Morocco	POLISARIO	Sahrawis	1975-08-31	Explicit	Yes	No