



## Libya's Ethnic Minorities and Upcoming Elections

Comprehensive Information on Complex Crises

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### Libya's Ethnic Minorities and Upcoming Elections

By Maya Moseley

Libya's first [National Assembly](#) elections since the fall of Moammar Gaddafi are scheduled to take place 19 June 2012, reports *Time*. According to political analyst Alison Pargeter, non-Arab ethnic minority groups will present [unique challenges](#) to the upcoming election as well as post-conflict national [reconciliation](#). Arab and non-Arab groups alike are divided into over 140 [tribes and clans](#) in the country. According to the *Time* article, while many minority groups were marginalised during Gaddafi's regime, others had fought in Gaddafi's security forces for decades and remained loyal to the regime throughout the uprising. Non-Arab minority groups in Libya that were involved in the recent conflict include: the Berber, Tuareg, Tawergha and Tubu. Under Gaddafi's "[Arabisation](#)" policies, many minority groups faced discrimination through the prohibition of languages other than Arabic, denial of access to citizenship records, and denial of housing, informs *Minority Rights Group*.

Demographic data for ethnic minorities is limited and varies according to sources, but it is estimated that there are [236,000-590,000](#) Berber in Libya, mostly residing in the [Nafusa Mountains](#), with some of the population scattered throughout the country. The Berber, who have inhabited Libya for millennia, were banned from using their language in schools, courts, and media and faced abuse and detention for publicly identifying themselves as Berber. Those residing in the southern region of the country were often denied citizenship. Estimates on the number of Tuareg in the country vary from [17,000](#) to [560,000](#). The Tuareg primarily live in the southern region. The Tuareg experienced a different relationship with Gaddafi's regime as some fought in his [Islamic Legion](#) during the 1970's, as reported by *BBC*. Following the disbandment of the Islamic Legion, Tuareg continued to be recruited into Gaddafi's armed forces. Despite the military [integration](#) of the Tuareg, they still faced much of the same marginalisation as other minorities within the country, leading many Tuareg to be [critical](#) of the regime. The [Tubu](#) are a non-Arab, dark skinned and traditionally nomadic ethnic group spread across Libya, Niger, and Chad. The Tubu inhabit the [south-eastern](#) region of the country but there are no reliable statistics on their population size. The Tubu [often clashed](#) with the ruling Arabs in the south. According to Amnesty International, under Gaddafi the Tubu faced [forced evictions](#), arbitrary detentions and refusal of identification documents. Similarly to Gaddafi's approach to the Tuareg, some Tubu were recruited into the [armed forces](#). Meanwhile, the non-Arab [Tawergha](#) ethnic group are descendants of former slaves living in a coastal town named Tawergha located 250 km east of Tripoli. The population size of the Tawergha is estimated to be 35,000.

During the 2011 uprising, both Gaddafi and opposition forces [sought support](#) from the various ethnic and tribal groups in the country, suggests the United States Institute for Peace (USIP). For the Berber who fought alongside Arab rebels, the [revolution](#) was their



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chance to rise up against decades of repression by Gaddafi's regime. While some Tuareg reportedly fought alongside Gaddafi's forces, others supported the revolution, seeking an end to their marginalisation and a greater [political voice](#). The Tubu were generally associated with supporting the anti-Gaddafi forces. However, the town of Tawergha was used by Gaddafi forces during the [siege of Misrata](#). Allegations of some Tawergha joining Gaddafi's forces and carrying out atrocities have led to massive [reprisal](#) attacks on the entire population of Tawergha.

In August 2011, militias from Misrata [forcibly displaced](#) the entire local population of the town of Tawergha. Since the fall of Gaddafi, the [Tawergha](#) have been subject to torture, beatings, detentions and executions. It is estimated that 35,000 Tawergha [remain displaced](#) and those in the Janzur camp, located 12 km west of Tripoli, remain vulnerable as militias have carried out raids on the camp. According to *Amnesty International*, the Libyan interim National Transitional Council (NTC) has [failed to control](#) militias that are detaining and torturing suspected Gaddafi loyalists. The transitional [Constitution](#) ensures protection of cultural, religious, and linguistic rights under Article one. The *United Nations Human Rights Council* reported the Tawergha have [faced execution](#), detention, and arrests as recently as February 2012. Tuareg have also faced violent reprisals, as they were forced out of the town of Ghadames in [retaliation](#) for reportedly supporting Gaddafi. The only Tuareg member of the NTC [resigned](#) following the lack of government support for Tuaregs in Ghadames, explains the *Integration Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*. According to Society for Threatened People (STP), many Tuareg fled into Algeria fearing [retaliatory attacks](#) after the fall of Gaddafi due to the assumption that all Tuareg had supported the regime.

Meanwhile, the Tubu and Berber initially supported the NTC. However, recent [clashes](#) between the Tubu and Arab tribes in Sabha and Kufra since the fall of Gaddafi have led to scrutiny of the NTC's commitment to Tubu rights. The clashes led to the [resignation](#) of Jomode Elie Getty, a Tubu official in the NTC as well as a secession threat due to the NTC's failures to adequately intervene. The Berber have also been [critical](#) of the NTC, since no Berber was given a ministerial position. In March 2012, Berbers protested the NTC electoral law No. 14, which designated the country's constituencies, demanding the government establish a [constituency](#) for Jebel Nafusa, a predominately Berber area that was split among the six western constituencies instead of receiving its own representation. According to the *Libya Herald*, a Jebel Nafusa constituency would create representation specifically for the Berber. Voter registration ahead of this month's elections was problematic for many non-Arab minorities in Libya, as many have no official documents proving their [citizenship](#). The primary citizenship document in Libya is the family book, which Tuareg who have been in Libya for the past century possess, but those who entered the country in the last 50 years are without any documentation, rendering them stateless. The NTC allowed individuals with a driver's license or national ID card, in addition to an alternative family document, to register to vote. Despite these relaxed regulations, thousands of [displaced Tawerghans](#) were reportedly unable to register to vote.

Reports of Gaddafi recruiting [African mercenaries](#) and the belief by Libyans that black tribes such as the Tuareg and Tawergha were fighting in his forces lead to indiscriminate attacks on Sub-Saharan Africans and black Libyans, reports *al Jazeera*. There were also reports of [Tuareg](#) and African migrants being [forced to fight](#) for Gaddafi it remains unclear how many voluntarily aligned themselves with his forces. The consequences of the perception of black Libyans and Africans being Gaddafi loyalists have been a severe backlash. Further, [insecurity](#) remains problematic for the electoral process as clashes in Kufra delayed electoral awareness campaigns as well as local council elections. While minority groups have continued to face hurdles in post-Gaddafi Libya, most minority groups believe the [upcoming elections](#) are key to ensuring their rights.

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