

LIBYA
(Edition 4, updated March 2020)

Country name	Libya
State title	State of Libya ¹
Name of citizen	Libyan
Official language(s)	Arabic (ara) ²
Country name in official language(s)	ليبيا [ara] Lībiyā
State title in official language(s)	دولة ليبيا [ara] Dawlat Lībiyā
Script	Arabic is written in Perso-Arabic script
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic 1956
ISO-3166 country code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	LY/LBY
Capital	Ṭarābulus (Tripoli); طرابلس [ara]

Introduction

Libya is in the Maghreb³ region of North Africa. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Egypt to the east, Sudan to the southeast, Chad and Niger to the south and Algeria and Tunisia to the west.

The first Libyan Civil War, also known as the Libyan Revolution, which began in 2011, led to the defeat of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. The second Libyan Civil War began in 2014 and is an ongoing conflict between various rival governments. The UN brokered a cease-fire in December 2015, and on December 17th 2015, the rival groups signed the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). Leaders of an interim UN-backed Presidency Council, headed by the prime minister preside over the Government of National Accord (GNA)⁴, in Tripoli⁵. As of March 2020, the conflict is still ongoing between the GNA and the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army (LNA). This Factfile aims to provide guidance on names for Libya in the absence of central government control of the whole country.

Geographical names policy

Geographical names are for the most part found in Arabic and should ideally be taken from official Arabic-script sources and romanized via the [BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic](#) since it is only by means of a scientific system that consistency can be obtained. All diacritical marks (see below for details) should be included where possible. Libyan Arabic (ayl) differs significantly from other dialects of Arabic in the spoken, and sometimes also the written, language. Dialectal and tribal influences may

¹ The Gaddafi-era state title of Libya (prior to 2011) was the “Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya”. On 22nd December 2017, the Protocol and Liaison Service of the United Nations received a letter from the Ambassador at the Permanent Mission of the State of Libya to the United Nations, New York. It confirmed the change of the official name of Libya to State of Libya.

² The ISO 639-3 three-letter language codes are included in brackets after language names in this document.

³ The name Maghreb (Romanized-Arabic: Al Maghrib), derived from the Arabic word *gharb* (meaning “West”), applies to the Arabic-speaking area of northwest Africa, generally including the countries of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

⁴ Sometimes seen as Unity Government.

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36072826>

be apparent in the country's geographical names. Place names may also be influenced by Amazigh (Berber) languages. Names found on English sources will not always match the standard Arabic romanized forms. In the absence of current official names sources for Libya, sources created prior to 2011 may be used, although some names and administrative generic terms will no longer be relevant. Please contact PCGN for further guidance. See administrative structure section on page 3.

Languages

The official language in Libya is Arabic. Arabic is written in a standard form throughout the Arab world. This form, known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), is used for official written purposes in Libya. However, the spoken Arabic varies considerably from the written form. Libyan Arabic is the most common spoken dialect, but other varieties such as Egyptian Arabic (arz) and Tunisian Arabic (aeb) are also spoken.

The two major dialects of Libyan Arabic correspond to the two main areas of settlement: the north-east (the area historically known as Cyrenaica) and the north-west (the area historically known as Tripolitania). The dialect of the south (the area historically known as Fezzan) is essentially a variant of the north-western form.

Various Amazigh (Berber) languages⁶ are also spoken in Libya including Tamasheq (taq), Ghadamès (gha), Nafusi (jbn), Sūknah (swn) and Awjilah (auj). All Amazigh languages were banned in Libya during the Gaddafi era, but have seen a revival since 2011⁷. In February 2017, the Libyan Amazigh High Council (LAHC) declared Tamazight an official language in the cities and districts inhabited by the Amazigh in Libya⁸, and there are calls for it to be included in a new Libyan constitution. Amazigh languages may be found written using Roman script, Arabic script or the Tifinagh script⁹. There is currently no standard way of writing Amazigh languages in Libya. Although some Libyan toponyms have their origins in Amazigh languages, the Arabic forms remain the recommended names, although Amazigh names may sometimes be useful for information or cross reference.

Inventory of characters used in Roman (and their Unicode encodings¹⁰):

The BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic (1956 system), contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode	Character	Unicode
‘	2018/02BB	’	2019/02BC
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ḍ	1E10	ḍ	1E11
Ḥ	1E28	ḥ	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ṭ	0162	ṭ	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Ẓ	005A+0327*	ẓ	007A+0327*

* There is no single Unicode encoding for these letter-diacritic combinations.

⁶ Sometimes collectively known as Tamazight.

⁷ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/amazigh-libya-revive-their-previously-banned-language-1206307999>

⁸ <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/life/tamazight-declared-official-language-amazigh-peopled-districts>

⁹ <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/tifinagh.htm>

¹⁰ See www.unicode.org

Administrative structure

Given the instability in Libya in recent years, and the absence of central government control of the whole country, there is no cohesive administrative structure recognised by all parties and in use throughout the country¹¹. Therefore, PCGN would recommend using the names of the 22 first-order administrative divisions that existed prior to the 2011 civil war.

Administrative unit (ADM1)	Administrative Centre (PPLA)
Al Buṭnān (30°14'N 24°10'E) البطنان	Ṭubruq (Tobruk) (32°05'01"N 23°58'35"E) طبرق
Al Jabal al Akḥḍar (32°12'N 21°45'E) الجبل الاخضر <i>Alternative name:</i> Green Mountain	Al Bayḡā' (32°45'46"N 21°45'18"E) البيضاء <i>Alternative names:</i> Bayda, Beida
Al Jabal al Gharbī (30°28'N 13°00'E) الجبل الغربي <i>Alternative name:</i> Western Mountain	Gharyān (32°10'20"N 13°01'13"E) غريان
Al Jafārah (32°39'N 13°00'E) الجفارة <i>Alternative names:</i> Al Jifarah; Al Jfara	Al 'Azīziyah (32°31'55"N 13°01'03"E) العزيزية
Al Jufrāh (28°00'N 17°25'E) الجفرة Gafrah; Al Jafrāh	Hūn (29°07'37"N 15°56'52"E) هون
Al Kufrāh (24°02'N 21°30'E) الكفرة <i>Alternative name:</i> Al Kafrāh	Al Kufrāh (24°10'N 23°15'E) الكفرة
Al Marj (31°56'N 21°19'E) المرج <i>Alternative names:</i> Al Maraj; Marj	Al Marj (32°29'17"N 20°49'54"E) المرج
Al Marqab (32°30'N 14°00'E) المرقب <i>Alternative name:</i> Al Murgub	Al Khums (32°39'N 14°16'E) الخمس
Al Wāḥāt (28°56'N 21°12'E) الواحات	Ajdābiyā (30°45'33"N 20°13'23"E) اجدابيا
An Nuqāṭ al Khams (32°43'N 11°49'E) النقاط الخمس <i>Alternative names:</i> Anakat Alkamis	Zuwārah (32°55'52"N 12°04'55"E) زواراة <i>Alternative names:</i> Zuwara, Zuara

¹¹ There has been a re-emergence of references to the three traditional regions that constitute Libya, each of which have maintained separate identities and cultures for thousands of years: Tripolitania, in the northwest, Cyrenaica in the east, and Fezzan in the remote centre and south of the country. While these names might be encountered in reports on Libya, PCGN would not usually recommend showing them on a map unless specifically required.

Administrative unit (ADM1)	Administrative Centre (PPLA)
Az Zāwiyah (32°40'N 12°35'E) الزاوية <i>Alternative names:</i> Al Zawiya; Azawei	Az Zāwiyah (32°45'26"N 12°43'40"E) الزاوية
Banghāzī (31°38'N 20°39'E) بنغازي	Banghāzī (Benghazi) (32°07'N 20°04'E) بنغازي
Damah (32°03'N 22°32'E) درنة <i>Alternative name:</i> Derna	Damah (32°46'01"N 22°38'12"E) درنة
Ghāt (26°06'N 10°20'E) غات	Ghāt (24°57'53"N 10°10'22"E) غات
Miṣrātah (31°25'N 14°25'E) مصراتة <i>Alternative names:</i> Masrata; Misrata	Miṣrātah (32°22'31"N 15°05'33"E) مصراتة
Murzuq (25°11'N 15°29'E) مرزق <i>Alternative names:</i> Murzaq; Mourzouk	Murzuq (25°54'16"N 13°53'50"E) مرزق
Nālūt (30°20'N 10°51'E) نالوت	Nālūt (31°52'07"N 10°58'52"E) نالوت
Sabhā (27°11'N 15°01'E) سبها <i>Alternative names:</i> Sibha; Sabhah	Sabhā (27°11'N 15°01'E) سبها
Surt (30°20'N 16°30'E) سرت <i>Alternative names:</i> Sirt; Sirte	Surt (Sirte) (31°12'32"N 16°35'19"E) سرت
Ṭarābulus (32°48'N 13°20'E) طرابلس	Ṭarābulus (Tripoli) (32°53'33"N 13°10'48"E) طرابلس
Wādī al Ḥayāt (26°33'N 12°51'E) وادي الحياة <i>Alternative name:</i> Wadi Al Hayaa	Awbārī (26°35'N 12°46'E) اوباري
Wādī ash Shāṭī' (27°53'N 12°45'E) وادي الشاطئ <i>Alternative name:</i> Wadi Al Shatii	Idrī (27°30'N 13°16'E) إدري <i>Alternative name:</i> Adīrī, Adri

Significant locations:

PCGN Recommended Name	Arabic Script	Alternative names/spellings	Feature Type	Location
Al Burayqah (Brega)	البريقة	Marsa el Brega	Populated place, port	30°24'22"N 19°34'26"E
Al Jaghbūb	الجغبوب		Populated place	29°45'N 24°31'E
Al Jawf	الجوف		Populated place	24°12'N 23°18'E
Al 'Uwaynāt	العوينات	Al Awaynat; Al Uwainat	Populated place	21°34'N 24°50'E
Aṣ Ṣaḥrā' al Lībīyah (Libyan Desert)	الصحراء الليبية	Sahara El Gharbiyah, Great Desert, Western Desert	Desert	24°N 25°E
Ash Shuwayrif	الشويرف		Populated place	29°59'N 14°16'E
As Sidrah	السدرة	Sidra	Populated place, port	30°39'N 18°22'E
Banī Walīd	بني وليد	Beni Walid; Beni Waleed	Populated place	31°45'24"N 13°59'39"E
Bin Jawād	بن جواد	Ben Jawad; Bin Jawwād; Bin Quwad; Ben Gauad	Populated place	30°47'46"N 18°5'32"E
Jabal Nafūsah	جبل نفوسة	Nafusa Mountains; Adrar n Infusen; Adrar n Yenfusen	Plateau	31°50' N 12°0' E
Khalīj Surt (Gulf of Sirte)	خليج سرت	Gulf of Sirte; Gulf of Sidra ¹² ; Khalīj at Taḥadī	Gulf	31°30'N 18°00'E
Maydān ash Shuhadā' (Martyrs Square)	ميدان الشهداء	Formerly known asساحة الخضراء Saḥat al Khaḍrā' (Green Square)	Square (in Tripoli)	32°53'42"N 13°10'52"E
Ra's Lānūf	رأس لانوف	Ras Lanouf	Populated place	30°31'N 18°34'E
Tarhūnah	ترهونة	Tarhuna; Tarhouna	Populated place	32°26'06"N 13°38'00"E
Waddān	ودان		Populated place	29°09'41"N 16°08'21"E
Yafran	يفرن	Yifran; Yefran	Populated place	32°03'48"N 12°31'43"E
Zlīṭan	زليطن	Zliten	Populated place	32°28'N 14°34'E

¹² The US conventional name is Gulf of Sidra, so this appears on US government sources. British usage favours Gulf of Sirte.

Border crossing points:

<i>Bordering country</i>	<i>Libyan side</i>	<i>Other side</i>	<i>Approximate location</i>
Tunisia	Ra's Ajdīr رأس اجدير	Ras al Jédīr رأس الجدير	33°09'N 11°34'E
	Wāzin وازن	Dhéhiba ذهيبة	31°59'N 10°41'E
Egypt	Umm Sā'd (Musaad) ام ساعد	As Sallūm السلوم	31°34'N 25°04'E
Algeria	Ghadāmis (Ghadames) غدامس	Debdeb دبدب	30°08'N 09°30'E
Niger	Bi'r al Wa'r بئر الوعر	Toummo	22°39'N 14°11'E

Useful references

US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/>

BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13754897>

FCO country profile: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/libya>

Ethnologue report on languages of Libya: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/LY>

CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>

Libya Wikipedia entries: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya>; Wikitravel <http://wikitravel.org/en/Libya>

Libya General Information Authority (population figures) archived at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110224023241/http://www.gai.gov.ly/shabiat>

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