Helpdesk Research Report

Key actors, dynamics and issues of Libyan political economy

Emilie Combaz

27.04.2014

Question

Identify the key actors, power dynamics and issues of Libyan political economy after the Qadhafi regime.

Contents

1. Overview

With the 2011 uprisings and the fall of the Qadhafi regime, Libya has experienced significant social and economic changes, with a shift from a centralised and personalised rule to a multitude of actors, both armed and non-armed. Identifying the major actors, dynamics and issues of the new Libyan political economy remains fraught with difficulty and uncertainty[1]. Who are the key players? What are they contesting? What is driving the contestation?

The **scene of actors** in Libya since 2011 is highly fragmented, localised and fluid, with connections and overlap between localities, regions, tribes, ethnicity, interests and ideology. Overall, the main division seems to have been between forces that support continued changes ('pro-revolution') and others that do not ('anti-revolution'), although this may be changing. Key actors have been as follows.

---

[1] The characterisation of events taking place in Libya since 2011 remains debated. In this report, 'uprisings' refers to the civilian and armed mobilisation in 2011 that protested and put an end to the Qadhafi regime. The changes produced by the uprisings and the developments since are described as 'the revolution'.

- **Community actors:**
  - Geographic communities. Beyond general differences between the three main regions (Cyrenaica, Tripolitana, Fezzan), local communities have been the fundamental actors since 2011. The most prominent 'pro-revolution' ones have had some national influence; they include **Misrata, Zintan and Al Zawiyah** in the north-west, and **Benghazi** in the north-east. **Tripoli** has comprised of a mix of 'pro-' and 'anti-revolution' communities. **Bani Walid and Sirte** in the north-west are major communities which have been deemed 'anti-revolution'.
  - **Tribal groupings** have remained important in Libyan political and social life, and have played out alternatively as conflict drivers and as resources for conflict management.
  - Ethnicity has at times been a part of conflict dynamics. Major ethnic groups include **Arabs, Amazigh, Tuareg and Tubu**.
  - Further actors have included: urban **notables**; networks based on **workplace or neighbourhood**; and **civil society** as a whole.
- **Armed actors:** local armed groups have played the central role, whereas national armed groups do not have significant capacity or legitimacy. The most powerful local armed groups are the **revolutionary brigades** in the east and west. Other armed groups include unregulated brigades, post-revolutionary brigades (located especially in areas deemed 'anti-revolution'), and militias (including criminal networks and violent extremists). The most powerful forces (non-state and state) are the ones based on the revolutionary brigades from **Misrata, Zintan and Benghazi**.
- **Formal national politics** has been a channel for elite struggles that stem from local interests and resources. Coalitions frequently shift, and political parties have a weak organisation. The Muslim Brotherhood and a few revolutionary groups are the current, precarious leaders.
- Many **women and girls** played major roles during and right after the uprisings. However, Libyan and international actors have marginalised them. Despite the adverse conditions, a number of them have remained active as women's rights and community activists, and as revolutionaries.

While some social factors support peace, conflict has been dominant. Disputes have been rooted in longstanding **competing claims** over territory, public and private resources, power, justice and fairness. They stem from the interplay of: people's different experiences, leading to divided views about the revolution; widespread insecurity and the mixed effects of security and conflict management through local actors; human rights abuses, impunity and weak justice institutions; inclusiveness and balance of power in formal politics; the distribution of licit and illicit economic and public resources (especially oil and gas wealth); national identity, citizenship (particularly towards the Tubu and Tuareg).

Based on a rapid literature review, there seems to be a limited body of rigorous, empirical **evidence** on the report topic. Libya expert Lacher notes the dearth of research on Libyan political forces since 2011, and emphasises that analyses can only offer a snapshot, as the political landscape remains in flux (2013: pp. 5-6). A significant number of studies are largely or entirely desk-based. Methodologies are overwhelmingly qualitative. Some social inequalities appear to receive limited consideration, including gender, age groups and generations, and (dis)ability. Meso- and micro-level findings about specific actors, dynamics and issues appear to vary somewhat, in part due to changing developments on the ground.

Section 2, which constitutes the bulk of this report, maps significant actors in the current situation, detailing their background, interests, goals, relations and positions. A brief section 3 brings together the cross-cutting dynamics and issues driving these players' actions.

2. Significant actors

Post-2011 Libyan society is defined by **fragmentation, localism and fluidity**, with connections and overlap between groupings based on localities, regions, tribes, ethnicity, interests and ideology (Combaz, 2014). A "confusing array of forces" and "institutional chaos" followed the downfall of Qadhafi (Lacher, 2013: p. 5). Historically, a plurality of competing power sources have shaped Libyans' conceptions of politics, power and legitimacy, including "tribal, regional, Islamic, civil and urban political organisation and state-like institutions" (Holm, 2013: pp. 26-27). With the revolution, local actors have enjoyed greater public trust, legitimacy and influence than central ones (Lacher, 2013; Holm, 2013). Most Libyans view foreign actors as a major influence over their country, although Lacher (2013: p. 35) states that external players are of secondary importance in the complex Libyan political dynamics.

Two opposing camps are emerging, each including diverse interests (Lacher, 2013):

- Forces that **define themselves as revolutionary**. They share the goal of a total renewal of political and business elites, and a monopoly of the gains from the uprisings to their advantage (Lacher, 2013: p. 5). In all revolutionary cities, a political and military elite that claims to defend local interests has emerged (*idem*: p. 19). Revolutionary elites owe their advancement "to their contribution to the struggle, their wealth, their traditional reputation, or a combination of these" (*ibidem*). Their influence is "closely tied to the military might of their cities and brigades" (*ibid.*).

- Forces that **stand to lose from continued revolution**. A heterogeneous camp of established, moderate, conservative and counter-revolutionary forces who want to re-establish stability and fear further loss of influence (Lacher, 2013: p. 5). This camp comprises "the actual or potential losers of a continuing revolution" (*idem*: p. 35). They are the localities and tribes that were broadly aligned with the Qadhafi regime (mostly through integration into its security apparatus) or who did not actively support the uprisings (*id.*: p. 19). This includes a number of political and tribal elites, and police and military officers (*id.*: p. 23). The sizable population that has that fled Libya during or after the uprisings is also virtually excluded from Libyan politics (*id.*: pp. 23-24).

This dominant rift runs through elites and the parliament (Lacher, 2013). It also divides different cities, tribes and elements in the security sector, threatening to separate them into winners and losers. Reading the situation as a struggle between Islamists and seculars/liberals is thus "misleading" (*idem*: p. 35).

However, the 2013 national law to exclude large numbers of former public officials from the Qadhafi era may have recently led to a **new scene with two sides**: Smits et al. (2013: p. 33) argue that, in the contest for state power, national divisions have begun to coalesce around the Muslim Brotherhood, supported by urban revolutionaries, on the one hand, and a tribal coalition with vested interests in the centre of the country that is "in a temporary marriage of convenience with the federalist movement in the East".

The most explicit identification of actors is provided by a literature review about the Libyan conflict commissioned by the EU-funded Civil Society Dialogue Network (Wood, 2012), whose categorisations form the basis of this section[2].

---

[2] Wood reviewed 2011 and 2012 English-language academic, practitioner and policy literature on the conflict.

2.1. Community actors

i. Geographic communities[3]

Map. Libya

Source: Crisis Group (2013: p. 41); map reproduced with the permission of Crisis Group

Based on UN map no. 3787 Rev. 7 (February 2012). The town of Tawergha has been added.

---

[3] The points made in this sub-section are from Wood (2012: pp. 4-10) unless otherwise indicated.

Libya comprises a series of geographic communities (Wood, 2012: p. 4). All authors emphasise the continued importance of **regional dimensions** with centuries-old social significance. There is a consensus that such regional differences have led to different social, political and military trajectories during and after the uprisings. Key points are (Lacher, 2013: pp. 17-18):

- **North west (Tripolitania):** strong local structures emerged in the revolutionary centres, "closely linking civilian councils, tribal leaders and military units" (Lacher, 2013: p. 17). The revolution has brought conflicts between revolutionary strongholds and tribes heavily present in Qadhafi's security apparatus. In cities that had largely supported the Qadhafi regime or abstained from the struggle, civilian and military structures formed as well, to defend against attacks by revolutionary brigades.

- **North east (Cyrenaica)**: NATO intervention in March 2011 protected the region from the military threat of the Qadhafi regime. In this context, no local structures with internal cohesion comparable to those in Tripolitana emerged, nor did conflicts flare between cities or tribes. Tensions have arisen mainly between the camp of revolutionaries and Islamists on the one hand, and members of the armed forces and security apparatus on the other hand. Local and regional interests still play an important role for political mobilisation, including demands for decentralisation and the movement for federalism and regional autonomy (see also: Holm, 2013: p. 36; Smits et al., 2013: p. 27).

- **South (Fezzan)**: the region "joined the revolution in its last month, largely without fighting" (Lacher, 2013: p. 17). Local groups have defined themselves above all through ethnic or tribal identities, and civilian and military councils have often been controlled by a single faction. There are a "multitude of armed groups and smuggling networks with transnational reach" (Lacher, 2014: p. 1). The major issues have been the rivalries over the control of borders, smuggling routes, oilfields and cities, as well as conflicts on entire communities' citizenship (*idem*). These issues are far more significant than the limited presence of religious extremists (*id.*).

Many **local communities** have *de facto* local autonomy based on local councils, and some control substantial armed groups or economic resources, which gives them a greater ability to influence national politics (Lacher, 2013: pp. 17-18; Wood, 2012: p. 4, 23). Each has its "particular context, interests and relationships with other communities", and often has limited understanding of other communities (Wood, 2012: p. 4).

North western Libya

- **Misrata** (Wood, 2012: p. 7; see also McQuinn, 2012; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 28, 31-32)

Misrata is the "military and political heavyweight" amongst revolutionary power centres (Lacher, 2013: p. 18). An important trade city, it was on the frontline of the armed conflict and suffered high human and material costs for it. The forces of the Qadhafi regime committed major human rights abuses there during the fighting. Misrata has been invested in supporting revolutionary objectives, including a transition to democracy, the purging of Qadhafi-era officials, and justice for human rights abuses suffered during the revolution. Misrata held its own municipal election in early 2012, "the first anywhere in Libya for four decades", with the revolutionary brigades helping to organise and secure the elections (Holm, 2013: p. 31). The city council has assumed some powers at the expense of central government (*ibidem*).

Its armed groups have engaged in punitive actions against persons accused of rights violations, including in other communities. Furthermore, they have played a substantial political and military role in other parts

of Libya. They have also attempted to develop greater national political influence by setting up a Union of Revolutionaries.

Misrata has become an important national actor in security and politics due to its role in the revolution and political manoeuvring (Smits et al., 2013: pp. 31-32; Wood, 2012: p. 7). It has especially strong relations with the communities of Al Zawiyah and Benghazi. At the same time, it has difficult relationships with other communities: Tawurgha, due to fighting during the uprisings; Bani Walid, due to longstanding historical tensions and to Bani Walid being perceived as anti-revolution[4]; Sirte, perceived as anti-revolution; some communities in Tripoli, due to the actions of armed groups from Misrata there; and Sabha, due to the negative perceptions of armed groups from Misrata deployed in Sabha in early 2012.

- ▪ **Zintan, Nalut, Jadu, Kiklah and Jafran**, western and central Nafusah Mountains (Wood, 2012: p. 5; see also Smits et al., 2013: p. 32)

Zintan is the second most important revolutionary power centre according to Lacher (2013: p. 18). This area, comprising Arab and Amazigh towns, has been less developed and more traditional than others in northern Libya. Zintan is both a city and a tribe, and has strong internal cohesion (*idem*: p. 19). The council of tribal leaders has been the highest decision-making body in Zintan, with the local civilian and military councils deferring to it (*ibidem*).

The area was pivotal during the revolution, as the main western front and "as a training / staging point for revolutionaries from other parts of Western Libya" (Wood, 2012: p. 5). Most of the community is interested in upholding revolutionary goals and in reversing its under-development. Zintani leaders wish to secure the city's predominance over parts of the south west (Lacher, 2013: p. 19). Zintani brigades had recruited some Tuareg and Tubu during the uprising and taken control of oil fields and border posts in the region, and they remain present in strategic positions in the south west (*ibidem*).

The area commands substantial political leverage nationally, due to its major revolutionary role and to the continued role of its armed groups (especially those from Zintan). However, the recent rise in power of Misratan actors has decreased Zintan's standing and caused tensions with Misrata (Smits et al., 2013: p. 32). Other areas in the country have also had some animosity towards armed groups from the area, for example due to Zintani brigades' actions in Tripoli (see Lacher, 2013: p. 19). Jadu is alone in its positive relations with areas considered anti-revolution. In the Nafusah Mountains, there has been significant, at times violent, conflict between the Zintan and El Mashasha tribes.

- ▪ **Al Zawiyah** (Wood, 2012: p. 5; see also El Kailani, 2012: p. 12)

This area mobilised early for the revolution and suffered substantial damages and casualties at the hands of old regime. A major pro-revolution area in western Libya, it has had some significant national influence. Locals generally support greater recognition of the community's revolutionary role and the punishment of human rights abuses that the Qadhafi regime committed during the uprisings. Al Zawiyah has had strong ties with Misrata, Benghazi and Zintan, due to a shared revolutionary experience. On the other hand it has had tense, at times violent, relationships with Al Aziziyah since the end of the uprisings.

---

[4] On tensions between Mistrata and Benghazi, see also: Lacher, 2013: p. 18.

- **Tripoli** (Wood, 2012: p. 6)

Tripoli comprises of a mix of groups from various areas, with some living in distinct city districts[5]. Some districts are closely associated with the revolution, such as Tajura, Fashlum and Suq al Juma. Others are associated with the Qadhafi regime, such as Abu Selim and Hadba. As a result, "there is no coherent voice within Tripoli" (Wood, 2012: p. 6). As of 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood dominated the unelected local council in Tripoli (Lacher, 2013: p. 16). The various districts can have difficult relations with each other based on their dominant positioning during the uprisings. The districts have also had different relationships with other communities. For example, Suq al Juma has been in conflict with Bani Walid, due to the death of its fighters in Bani Walid in 2011, while Abu Selim and Hadba have stronger relations with Bani Walid and Tarhuna due to family or tribal links.

- **Bani Walid** (Wood, 2012: p. 6-7; see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20)

It is the main town of the Warfalla tribe, one of the largest in Libya. While the tribe was closely associated with the Qadhafi regime, some of its members had opposed the regime. During the 2011 uprisings, fighting over Bani Walid was substantial, involving armed groups from a number of other cities. In 2012, there was an internal conflict over authority among civilian and armed groups, which had prevented local elections from being held. The community has been politically and physically isolated. 'Pro-revolution' decision-making has excluded Bani Walid representatives from the national parliament and its constitutional debates (Lacher, 2013: p. 13). Bani Walid has had extremely difficult relationships with a number of communities, including: Misrata; Al Zawiyah and Gharyan; Suq al Juma; and Zlitan. On the other hand, it has had positive relations with Jadu, Abu Selim and Hadba in Tripoli, Sirte and Sabha.

- **Sirte** (Wood, 2012: p. 7; see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20)

Sirte, along with Sabha, is the principal home of the Qadhafa tribe, which received substantial benefits from the Qadhafi regime. The rest of the population comprises a number of other tribes, including Firjan and Warfalla. Tribal loyalties are prominent. Sirte sustained severe damages during the uprisings. It is one of the most divided communities, between: pro- and anti-revolution, even within families; tribes (most maintain their own armed group); different orientations of Islam. These divisions have led to internal clashes. Sirte has been treated with suspicion by pro-revolution communities, and its tense relations with Misrata have at times escalated into armed confrontations. People in Sirte seem to have strong relationships with those in Bani Walid and Sabha, due to family and tribal connections.

- **Town of Tawurgha,** east of Misrata (Wood, 2012: pp. 7, 12; see also Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20)

The population was largely comprised of a "black African 'tribe' […] partly descended from slave workers", and labourers (Wood, 2012: p. 12). Under Qadhafi, it benefitted from increased rights and opportunities. Tawurgha fighters reportedly supported the forces of the Qadhafi regime during the siege of Misrata and committed significant abuses. Revolutionary armed groups then forcibly displaced the entire population of Tawurgha into camps in Benghazi and Tripoli. The population has not returned since, whether due to violent action by armed groups from Misrata or fear of revenge attacks.

---

[5] For example, many old Tripoli families live Suq al Juma and Fashlum; many members of the Tarhuna and Warfalla tribes live in Abu Selim and Hadba; and many families from the Nafusah Mountains live in Gurji and Dreibi.

Other geographic communities include:

- **Gharyan (including Al Asabi'ah)**, Nafusah Mountains (Wood, 2012: pp. 5-6; see also Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20).

- **Tarhuna** (Wood, 2012: p. 6; see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20).

- **Khoms, Zlitan and Al Karabali** (Wood, 2012: p. 6; see also Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20).

- **Al Aziziyah** (Wood, 2012: p. 5; see also Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20).

- **Zuwarah** (Wood, 2012: p. 4; see also Crisis Group, 2012).

- **Zaltan, Al Jamel and Raqdalin** (Wood, 2012: p. 4-5; see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20).

- **Ghadames** (Wood, 2012: p. 8; see also El Kailani, 2012: p. 11).

North eastern Libya

- **Benghazi** (Wood, 2012: p. 9)

Benghazi is an important political and cultural centre. It was the first city to rise up and was home to the National Transitional Council and the National Army during the revolution. It is the centre of the movements for devolution and federalism. It has significant Firjan, Zuwaya and Warfalla populations, as well as groups from other areas and tribes (e.g. from Misrata and Tajura). However, the population considers itself more cosmopolitan and is marked by an "anti-tribal bourgeois identity" (Hüsken, cited in Holm, 2013: p. 34). On the whole, it is united in support for the revolution. However, it is frustrated at perceived political marginalisation in favour of Tripoli, with different opinions on how to address this. Some support increased devolution or decentralisation of decision-making, others support federalism. Benghazi held its own municipal election in 2012, and the Muslim Brotherhood dominates the elected council (Holm, 2013: p. 31; Lacher, 2013: pp. 16-17). The city council has assumed some powers at the expense of central government (Holm, 2013: p. 31). Salafist fighters from Ansar al-Sharia have been active in the city (Lacher, 2013: pp. 16-17; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 49-51).

Benghazi has strong ties to Al Zawiyah, Zintan and Misrata due to a shared experience of the revolution. Benghazi is considered safe for communities persecuted because of their (perceived) support for the Qadhafi regime. As a result, Benghazi hosts a significant population of internally displaced persons (especially from Tawurgha). In 2012, it also had an improving relationship with Sirte, because one of its armed group ('the Martyrs of Zawiyah') prevented punitive detentions in the city.

- **Ajdabiya** (Wood, 2012: p. 8)

Ajdabiya is the closest urban centre to the main oil fields in North Eastern Libya. It has substantial Firjan and Zuwaya tribal populations, as well as workers from other parts of Libya who migrated there in relation to the oil fields. It was at times a frontline city during the uprisings. The community is deemed to be mostly pro-revolution, and people feel their revolutionary actions have not been duly recognised. Armed groups from Ajdabiya have played a significant role in protecting displaced persons in Libya.

Other geographic communities in the north-east include:

- **Al Bayda and its surroundings,** Green Mountains (Wood, 2012: p. 9).

- **Derna and surroundings,** Green Mountains (Wood, 2012: p. 9; see also Lacher, 2013: p. 17).

- **Tobruq** (Wood, 2012: p. 9; see also Hüsken, cited in Holm, 2013: p. 34).

<u>South western Libya</u>

- **Sabha, Murzuq, Aubari and Birak** (Wood, 2012: p. 8; see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20; Lacher, 2014)

Sabha has traditionally been a hub for migration from Niger and Chad and for control of trafficking routes. In Sabha, the major tribes are Awlad Sulayman / Abu Seid, Magarha, Warfalla and Hasawna. Sabha also comprises of members of the Qadhafa tribe, which received substantial economic benefits under Qadhafi. There are also a significant Tuareg population and a small Tubu population (the Tuareg are a majority in Aubari). The demographics of the community seem to be changing, with an influx of African migrants. Sabha is perceived as largely anti-revolution. Since the fall of Qadhafi, the Awlad Sulayman / Abu Seid and Tubu tribes have played the most prominent role.

Most armed groups in this area were formed after the revolution and are associated with particular tribes. Some seem interested controlling cross-border trade and trafficking. In 2012, fighting broke out in the community; probable reasons were local political control and access to economic resources, fuelled by ethnic tensions between Arab tribes and the Tubu / Tuareg. Civilian residents are reportedly worried for their security due to the lack of control over borders and the trafficking in arms, drugs and people. Some Arab residents are concerned about the increased numbers of black Africans, in particular the Tubu. The Tubu and Tuareg want an end to discrimination (e.g. in social housing or employment opportunities) and, in the case of the Tuareg, the promotion of Amazigh culture. Sabha has a difficult relationship with Misrata, due to the actions of armed groups from Misrata in Sabha in 2012.

<u>South eastern Libya</u>

- **Al Kufrah** (Wood, 2012: pp. 9-10; see also El Kailani, 2012: p. 11; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2014)

Its location is strategic as a point of control over trading routes with Sudan Egypt, Chad and Niger, and as the main access to the oil fields of Ajdabiya and the largest oil field of Libya, in Sarir. The Zuwaya tribe and the Tubu form the majority there. The Tubu population has markedly increased, as Tubu migrants (primarily from Chad) have settled into the area. Al Kufrah has seen competing interests over the control of cross-border transit and trafficking routes. Ethnic tensions have been substantial and at times violent (e.g. between the Tubu and the Zuwaya). The Tubu have protested their exclusion from political and economic opportunities and citizenship. Some Arab residents have opposed the increased presence of black Africans, in particular of Tubu, which they see as an attempt at domination.

ii. Tribal groupings

Of the 140 main Arab-Amazigh tribes generally identified in Libya, around 30-50 play an **important political and social role**. There is consensus in the literature that tribal networks have continued to be one major dimension of society, due to historical legacies and post-uprising conditions. Within all tribes, there has always been a diversity of political positions: where individuals and sub-groups (sub-tribes, lineages, extended families, and factions) have taken different stances. For example, some tribes were closely associated with the Qadhafi regime (e.g. the Qadhafa, Magraha, Warfalla, Worshefena and Tarhuna), but their members have always had different political positions, including towards the old regime[6].

---

[6] On this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: pp. 32, 34; Hüsken, 2012; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 19-20; Lacher, 2014; Wood, 2012: p. 10.

Tribal groupings can be a **conflict driver**, due to longer historical legacies, the allocation of opportunities under Qadhafi and the collective grievances between tribal groups stemming from the uprisings and revolution (Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2014; Wood, 2012: p. 10). In particular, grievances from the uprisings and revolution have developed into ongoing inter-community or tribal retribution in a number of cases (Wood, 2012: p. 10). This includes conflicts between Misrata and Tawurgha, Al Zawiyah and the Worshefena, Zintan and the El Mashasha, and Gharyan and Al Asabi'ah (*ibidem*). Some also argue that tension between Eastern Libya (Cyrenaica) and Western Libya (Tripolitania) can be mapped onto the two main Arab tribal identities in Libya, the Banu Hilal and the Banu Sulayman (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, tribal groupings can be a **resource for managing conflict**, especially in less developed and less mixed areas. Tribal groups are major social actors across different geographic areas – for example the Firjan are present in Benghazi, Ajdabiya and Sirte. Tribal committees of elders have managed conflicts. These committees have for instance played essential roles in conflicts between Zuwarah and Zaltan, Al Jamel and Raqdalin, between Arabs and Tuareg in Ghadames, and in negotiations over detainees (e.g. between Bani Walid and Misrata). At the same time, the accountability and ability of tribal councils to prevent violence in a sustainable manner have been questioned. Tribal leaders' main goals have been to enhance their political and economic participation and to benefit from their intermediary role between the central state and the regional and local levels[7].

At the same time, a **decrease in the importance of tribal allegiance** has occurred since the 1960s, with urbanisation into coastal cities and youth demographics (Holm, 2013: pp. 33-35; Wood, 2012: p. 10). Some towns (e.g. Ajdabiya and Benghazi) also took strong action to reduce tribal power (Wood, 2012: p. 10). Armed groups have also eroded tribal authority by providing an alternative for social and economic advancement for young men and diminishing tribal leaders' control (Smits et al., 2013: p. 29).

iii. Ethnic groupings

The major ethnic group in Libya is **Arabs**, although interrelations between the indigenous Amazigh and Arab tribes have been extensive since the 11th century (Wood, 2012: p. 10).

The **Amazigh** live in the Nafusah Mountains and in the area of Zuwarah, including a range of coastal villages between Sabratah and the border with Tunisia. The Qadhafi regime had marginalised the Amazigh culturally and politically, which has been a major reason for their significant pro-revolution role. Following the fall of the Qadhafi regime, some Amazigh were concerned that revolutionary Libya would prove equally unwilling to accept Amazigh culture. Indeed, discrimination of Amazigh or Arabs has happened in some local cases, leading to punitive actions and reprisals between each side – for example between Amazigh Zuwarah and the Arab towns of Al Jamel, Raqdalin and Zaltan. Conversely, some Arab Libyans have expressed fears of an Amazigh push for autonomy from the central government[8].

The **Tuareg** predominantly reside in the south west. Due to their transnational ties in Mali and Niger, they are important actors in regional security, with influence over political processes and trafficking and trade routes in a number of countries. Some Libyans view the Tuareg as close to the Qadhafi regime, and emphasise that Libyan and mercenary Tuareg fought in defence of the regime. Reasons reportedly include support by the Qadhafi regime for Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger in the 1970s, and settlement allowances to the Tuareg in southern Libya. However, different Tuareg tribes and factions have taken

---

[7] On this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: p. 34; Crisis Group, 2012; Wood, 2012: p. 10.
[8] On this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: p. 37; Lacher, 2013: pp. 21-22; McQuinn, 2012; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Wood, 2012: p. 11.

different courses of action during and after the uprisings. In addition, the Qadhafi regime marginalised the Tuareg culturally and politically, and the Tuareg now want to improve their political and cultural standing. In this context, there has been some conflict between Tuareg and Arab-Amazigh communities since 2011, notably in Ghadames and Sabha. 'Pro-revolution' decision-making has also excluded the Tuareg from representation in the national parliament – and thus constitutional debates[9].

The **Tubu** predominantly live in Sabha in the south west and Kufrah in the south east, with transnational ties in Chad and Niger. Under Qaddafi they were marginalised politically and culturally. The Tubu's full Libyan citizenship remains hotly contested. Complicating the issue, there is ongoing migration of Tubu from Niger and Chad to work in the oil industry between Kufrah and Ajdabiya. Past experience of marginalisation resulted in the Tubu's active support for the revolution. Yet, tensions between Tubu and Arab-Berber communities have remained high after the end of the uprisings, even involving armed clashes in Sabha and Kufrah. These clashes were driven by: the Tubu's concern about discrimination by Arab-Amazigh tribes; Arab-Amazigh tribes' fear of a change in local demographics and Tubu's political and cultural dominance; and control over cross-border transit and trafficking routes[10].

iv. Further community actors

The importance of **local urban notables** increased with the rise of local institutions during and after the uprisings (Lacher, 2013: p. 18). Across Libya, they have been effective conflict mediators (Crisis Group, 2012). **Workplace and neighbourhood** solidarity has been significant in coastal cities, especially among youth (Holm, 2013: pp. 34-35). Libyan **civil society** (considered as a whole) has helped to maintain positive social change, to encourage dialogue and civic participation, and to foster engagement with hard-to-reach groups such as religious extremists (Chatham House, 2013: p. 5; El Kailani, 2012: p. 9).

2.2. Armed actors

The literature consistently shows that, since the uprisings, informal and formal armed entities have proliferated at the local, regional and national levels. There is also a consensus that relations between these multiple and overlapping groups have ranged from cooperation to violent hostilities, and have remained very volatile, in a security environment that has remained decentralised and tense.

i. Local armed groups

There is at present an array of diverse community-specific armed groups (informal and formal, local and regional) – a point of consensus in the literature. Most local armed groups are associated with particular communities, especially in western Libya (Wood, 2012: p. 13). Three features of armed groups have proven to be **fundamental characteristics and factors** in group behaviour: the history of each group's formation, its community linkage, and its integration with local authorities (McQuinn, 2012: pp. 15-17). For example, in the east, there was coherence and coordination between armed groups and with the defectors of the

---

[9] The Tuareg are an Amazigh nomadic pastoralist group with a substantial presence in Libya, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso (Wood, 2012: p. 11). For this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: p. 38; Lacher, 2013: pp. 13, 21-22; Lacher, 2014; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Smits et al., 2013: p. 45; Wood, 2012: p. 11. On the Tuareg in south Libya, see also: Smith, 2013.

[10] The Tubu are a black African tribe indigenous to Southern Libya, Chad and Niger (Wood, 2012: p. 11). Different authors use different spellings for this group's name; this report uses the most frequent one. For this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: p. 37; Lacher, 2013: pp. 21-22, 25; Lacher, 2014; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 44-45; Wood, 2012: pp. 11-12. On the Tubu in south Libya, see also: Smith, 2013.

national army, and all were accountable to the National Transitional Council (NTC). In the west, however, armed groups developed independently of the NTC, were largely autonomous and self-reliant, and had closer ties to their communities[11].

The **purposes of armed groups** are diverse and fluid, with shifts back and forth between some categories: military; political; related to protection; ideological; militia-type, which means mostly criminal or interest-based. Military, political and protection armed groups generally enjoy greater local legitimacy. They usually fulfil one of two functions: the protection of the revolution, and the protection of the local community. Some armed groups are reportedly aligned with specific political factions. Local armed groups still perform many state functions. This is especially true in the South: ill-equipped and ill-trained local groups find themselves largely in charge of protecting the long borders of the country[12].

McQuinn (2012, pp. 11-12, 17-32) categorises armed groups based on **political and social functions**[13]:

- The **revolutionary brigades** in the east and west, notably in Misrata, Zintan, Benghazi and the western Nafusah Mountains. They are based on place (e.g. specific neighbourhood or workplace) or tribe. Revolutionary brigades are the most powerful category of armed: they control 75 to 85 per cent of the seasoned non-state fighters and non-state weapons. They are closely integrated into local authorities and associations, and are egalitarian and consensus-oriented internally.

- "**Unregulated brigades**". These revolutionary brigades broke away from the control of local councils in the later stages of the uprisings. The lack of oversight partly explains why they commit a disproportionate number of human rights abuses.

- **Post-revolutionary brigades**, which emerged as local protection forces in cities or neighbourhoods that had experienced sustained fighting during the uprisings and where the retreat of Qadhafi's forces left a security vacuum (see also Lacher, 2013: p. 17). They have limited internal cohesion and military capacity. Many are located in areas deemed 'anti-revolution' such as Bani Walid and Sirte (see also Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013).

- **Militias**, i.e. the small set of armed groups that do not fall into any previous category, representing perhaps less than two per cent of all armed groups. They range from criminal networks to violent extremists. They have very limited military weapons and fighting experience. Various militias have sought control over smuggling routes, adopted "Jihadist ideology", carried out terrorist attacks or shot at civilian protesters (Smits et al., 2013: p. 2; see also Lacher, 2014).

Analyses differ on the connections of militias. McQuinn (2012: p. 31) deems militias to be isolated, because they lack support by a substantial geographic community and integration with local community authorities. However, some extremist groups in coastal regions have received tacit support from official institutions, for example from some groups within the Supreme Security Committees and the Libyan Shield Force (Smits et al., 2013: pp. 47-53; Lacher, 2013: pp. 16-17). Some militias have also connected to transnational Islamist groups, mostly to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its offshoots (Smits et al., 2013: pp. 47-53). In addition, some political factions have used militias (*ibidem*).

The **profiles of individual fighters** may be: "genuine *thuwwar* [revolutionaries]"; "incentivised *thuwwar*"; "exploitative *thuwwar*"; "individuals with guns" – many fighters have also switched fluidly between these categories (Wood, 2012: pp. 13-14; see also: Crisis Group, 2013; Smits et al., 2013: p. 44). Few leaders and

---

[11] On this difference, see: Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 17-18; McQuinn, 2012; Wood, 2012: p. 12.
[12] On this paragraph, see: BBC, 2013; Holm, 2013: pp. 30-32; Crisis Group, 2012; Crisis Group, 2013 - including pp. 37-38; Lacher, 2014; Smits et al., 2013: p. 44; Wood, 2012: pp. 13-14.
[13] McQuinn's typology is frequently used, e.g. in Holm (2013: pp. 30-31) and Smits et al. (2013).

members of revolutionary brigades have switched to civilian politics, and their parliamentary representation is weak (Lacher, 2013: p. 22). Many have remained in security institutions, seeking future influence in the security sector or waiting to benefit from demobilisation or reintegration (*ibidem*).

The **legitimacy** of a given armed group is often challenged by other communities, depending on how the armed group behaves towards these communities (Wood, 2012: p. 14). For example, in the conflict between Zuwarah and Al Jamel, Raqdalin and Zaltan, each side considers its own armed groups to be legitimate because they protect the community, "but both challenge the revolutionary legitimacy of the other side's armed groups" (*ibidem*). Similarly, Misratans support their armed groups detaining crime suspects from other communities, but communities such as Sirte often view this as punitive (*ibid.*).

The following appear are frequently mentioned **non-state armed groups**:

- **Misrata brigades**. By late 2012, Misrata boasted "nearly half of the experienced fighters and weapons caches in Libya" (McQuinn, 2012: p. 11). 236 revolutionary brigades have registered with the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries, amounting to almost 40,000 fighters in a city of 300,000 residents (*idem*: p. 12). They control over 90 per cent of the city's weapons (*ibidem*). There are also between six and nine unregulated brigades in Misrata, under four per cent of the operational groups in Misrata (*idem*: p. 26). Misratan brigades control a significant number of tanks, heavy artillery pieces and vehicles mounted with machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons, in addition to small arms. As a result of all this, Misrata armed groups have "a disproportionate effect on the nation's security, demilitarization, and demobilization" (McQuinn, 2012: p. 11). Many of the brigades are deployed beyond Misrata, in the centre and west of Libya[14].

- **Military Council of Al-Zintan Revolutionaries** (BBC, 2013; Holm: 2013: p. 30; Lacher, 2013: p. 19). It is an umbrella for 23 armed groups in Zintan and the Nafusah Mountains. It has five brigades, the most prominent one with about 4,000 fighters. The level of its weaponry stockpiles is unclear. The Zintan revolutionary brigade detained members of the International Criminal Court (ICC) who were visiting Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, who was indicted by the ICC for crimes against humanity - the brigade refused to hand him over either to the Libyan government or to the ICC.

- **17 February Martyrs Brigade, based in Benghazi** (BBC, 2013; Lacher, 2013: p. 16). It is funded by the Ministry of Defence and is thought to be the biggest and best equipped armed group in eastern Libya, with about 12 battalions that have light and heavy weapons. The Brigade and the Union of Revolutionary Brigades that emerged from it are Islamist in outlook. The Brigade has carried out various security and law and order tasks in eastern Libya and Kufrah.

- **Ansar al-Sharia Brigade** (BBC, 2013; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: p. 17; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 49-51). It is a coalition of Islamist and Salafist armed groups in eastern Libya. It has committed human rights abuses and destroyed Sufi shrines in several places. In 2012, a popular revolt forced it to flee Benghazi. It has since returned and has begun providing some social services and security.

- **In the south**, a number of Tuareg, Tubu and tribal armed factions, and an emerging, limited presence of extremist armed groups (Lacher, 2014: pp. 2-6).

---

[14] On this paragraph, see: BBC, 2013; Holm, 2013: p. 31; Lacher, 2013: p. 18; McQuinn, 2012 - including pp. 11-12; Smits et al., 2013: p. 45.

ii. National armed groups

There is a consensus in the literature that national ministries and nascent national forces **lack capacities** (skills and equipment for security and border control), legitimacy and control over local armed groups. Revolutionary forces see the National Army and the Ministry of Defence, both "pre-revolutionary holdovers", as illegitimate (McQuinn, 2012: p. 11). According to Lacher (2013: p. 16), the Muslim Brotherhood is strongly represented in the new security organs set up after the fall of the regime.

Some **local armed groups** are deployed outside their community, often for long times, to "protect the revolution" (Wood, 2012: p. 14). In particular, armed groups from Misrata, Zintan, Ajdabiya and Benghazi have been deployed independently to protect borders or infrastructure, stop some fighting, or arrest and detain wanted persons (*ibidem*). They has often, but not always, coordinated with the authorities (*ibid.*).

The **Libyan Shield Force** (LSF) was set up in 2012 as a national army-in-waiting by revolutionary brigades from the north east, centre and west of Libya, as they were frustrated about the lack of reform in the National Army and the Ministry of Defence. It included groups from Khums (western Libya), Misrata, Zintan, Benghazi and smaller towns in the centre of the country. The LSF is thus an umbrella grouping comprising elite, experienced revolutionary groups. Numerous LSF leaders, particularly in the east and in Tripoli, are close to Islamist strands[15].

The LSF has been deployed to areas of inter-communal tensions or violence. As of 2012, they were in Kufrah, Sabha, near Bani Walid and between Zuwarah and Al Jamel, Raqdalin and Zaltan. The LSF was to be a temporary body integrating rebel fighters into a cohesive national force. As of late 2012, its four divisions – east, west, south and central – reported to the head of the National Army, Yousef al-Mangoush, but state control is nominal. However, the LSF has clashed with other government forces, such as the special forces unit of the Libyan army.

The **Libyan National Army**, still under formation, has very weak capacity due to a lack of institutionalised recruitment, of experienced soldiers and of adequate equipment. Its core members are the defectors who joined the National Liberation Army under the transitional authorities in the east. Some Zintani revolutionary brigades have also become army units entrusted with important tasks such as guarding detained Saif al-Islam Gadhafi in Zintan[16].

The **Supreme Security Committees** (SSCs) were developed as a police force by revolutionary leaders and nominally linked to the Ministry of Interior. The SSCs took in a number of fighters – mostly but not only revolutionaries – as part of official reintegration. SSCs have also sometimes been used to challenge the authority of military councils on the coordination of local armed groups, making them important political actors. Numerous SSCs leaders, particularly in the east and in Tripoli, are close to Islamist strands, and SSCs have been accused of letting Salafists vandalise buildings such as Sufi shrines[17].

The **National Security Directorate** (BBC, 2013; Lacher, 2013: p. 26) is the nationwide police force, under the Ministry of Interior. It was formed from several armed groups and provisional security bodies, such as Supreme Security Committees. It carries out conventional police duties (e.g. traffic, crime investigation and

---

[15] On this paragraph and the next, see: BBC, 2013; Holm, 2013: p. 31; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 16, 18, 26-27; McQuinn, 2012: p. 12; Smits et al., 2013: p. 42; Wood, 2012: pp. 14-15.
[16] On this paragraph, see: BBC 2013; Holm, 2013: p. 29; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: p. 19; McQuinn, 2012: p. 11; Wood, 2012: p. 15.
[17] On this paragraph, see: Holm, 2013: p. 31; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 18, 26; McQuinn, 2012: p. 56; Smits et al., 2013: p. 42; Wood, 2012: p. 15.

detection, protecting property). It has come under attacks in Benghazi, Derna and Sebha, which the BBC deems a manifestation of the current lawlessness in the country.

The **Petroleum Facilities Guard** (PFG) was set up in 2012 to protect Libyan oil installations by co-opting into the Ministry of Defence the armed groups present around oilfields, notably Zintani brigades and Cyrenaica federalists (BBC, 2013; Smits et al., 2013: p. 43). However, the PFG implemented a comprehensive blockade of oil terminals and affiliated itself with the eastern federalists (*ibidem*).

A number of armed groups in the east coordinated their actions as a '**Cyrenaica Army**' ahead of the 2012 elections, acting as a military wing of the Cyrenaica Transitional Council (El Kailani, 2012: pp. 11-12; Wood, 2012: p. 15). They closed off the road between Benghazi and Tripoli, to pressure the authorities to allocate an equal number of seats to the west and east (*ibidem*).

Other national military and police groups include: **Al-Saiqa Forces**, said to be the elite unit of the army, now numbering a few thousand persons (BBC, 2013); the **Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room**, a group created to tackle deteriorating security but that kidnapped the Prime Minister in 2013 (BBC, 2013); the **National Guard**, which was due to be an alternative to local armed groups in sensitive locations (Wood, 2012: p. 15); the **Anti-Crime Unit**, nominally under the Ministry of the Interior (BBC, 2013); the **Special Deterrence Force**, an anti-drug unit (BBC, 2013); and the **border guards** (Lacher, 2013: p. 27).

2.3. Formal national political actors

Politics in parliament and government

After the period of National Transitional Council (NTC), the General National Congress (GNC) was elected in mid-2012. The GNC has been the primary vehicle for **elite infighting, in a zero-sum conflict** for state power and its attached resources (Smits et al., 2013: pp. 19, 22). Unclear separation of powers between GNC and government, combined with the lack of dependable majorities for governments, has encouraged the GNC to act as a counterweight to the government and to take up more powers, including the right to decide appointments to key positions (Lacher, 2013: p. 14; Smits et al., 2013: p. 21).

National politics has been largely **determined by local and factional interests** (cities, tribes or elite families), rather than ideological differences. Any national leadership is vulnerable to local actors' demands and is faced with new cleavages and "recalcitrant spoilers" (Smits et al., 2013: p. 1). For example, many members of the NTC and the early 2011 and 2012 governments were forced out of the political arena by actors with a local power base, whether through public pressure, elections or armed force. This explains why alliances, parliamentary blocs and coalitions, reliant on small parties and non-party politicians, have continually emerged and collapsed. Since mid-2013, some "hardline revolutionaries", allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, have had "a fragile and contested command" of the state (Smits et al., 2013: p. 2). Their alliance has held together because both groups agree to exclude from the state anyone they deem to have been 'pro-Qadhafi'[18].
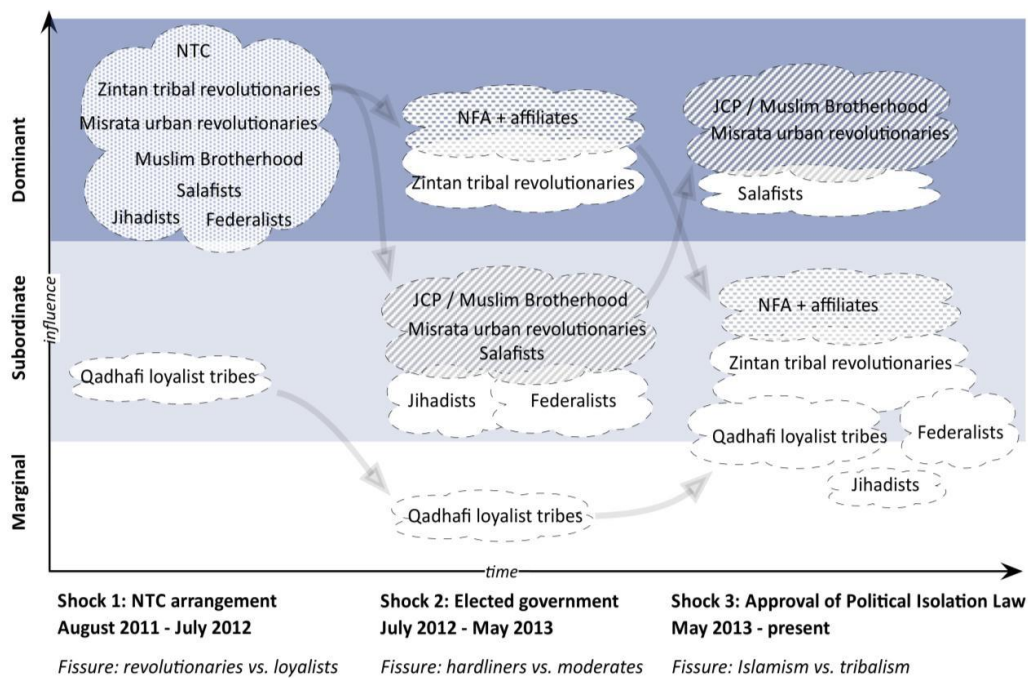
---

[18] On this paragraph, see: Lacher, 2013 - including pp. 6, 9, 22; Smits et al., 2013.

Figure. Coalition formation in response to shocks in Libya's transition
Source: Smits et al., 2013: p. 34;
figure reproduced with the permission of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael

Political parties

Political parties have weak organisational structures, resources, membership bases, and capacities (Kjaerum et al., 2013[19]). Major political parties include:

- The **National Forces Alliance** (NFA): a broad, loose national coalition of many smaller groups spanning the tribes and cities of the country and rallied behind Mahmud Jibril (Holm, 2013; Wood, 2012: p. 18). The NFA is an umbrella group for parts of the establishment that connects back to local networks, rather than an ideology-focused grouping (Lacher, 2013: p. 6; Smits et al., 2013: p. 20). NFA parliamentarians are prominent local figures from an economically privileged class and major families (Lacher, 2013: p. 11).

- The **Justice and Construction Party:** a part of the Muslim Brotherhood (Sawani & Pack, 2013; Wood, 2012: p. 18). Its internal cohesion is strong and it has been adept at alliances to advance its interests beyond its representatives' bloc (Lacher, 2013: p. 11; Smits et al., 2013: p. 20).

- Among **Salafists**, the al-Asala, closely allied with the Grand Mufti al-Ghariani, is especially influential (Lacher, 2013: p. 11-12). Other conservative parties include the Al-Watan Party and the Party of Reform and Development (Wood, 2012: p. 18).

- **Other smaller parties and independents:** for example the National Front Party (Wood, 2012: p. 18). Some deem these parties to be more liberal (Wood, 2012: p. 18). However, all parties in the GNC have declared Islam to be the state religion and Islamic jurisprudence the principal source of

---

[19] This study was commissioned by the National Democratic Institute, a policy-oriented organisation close to the US government, and was funded by the Danish government. It is normative and prescriptive.

legislation (Holm, 2013: pp. 39-41), and according to Libya expert Lacher, liberal, let alone secular, political forces play no role (2013: pp. 10-12, 35).

Islamists

Islamist organisations did not play a preponderant role in the uprisings (Benotman, Pack & Brandon, 2013). A diverse set of actors, they often compete and clash with each other[20]. They have had limited electoral success, but the Muslim Brotherhood has achieved a leadership position in national politics thanks to shrewd manoeuvring[21]. Their parliamentary and extra-parliamentary networks straddle national and local politics, the security sector and religious institutions, enabling them to exert a strong influence (Lacher, 2013: p. 14; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 29-33). Some Islamists, including Salafists and Muslim Brothers, have criticised or attacked people and places on religious grounds (Holm, 2013: pp. 38-39; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 16-17).

Eastern federalist movement

The eastern federalist movement mainly draws its support from: specific eastern tribes, such as the Obeidat and Awaqir (though not all tribe members); and intellectuals, many from the exiled opposition (Smits et al., 2013: p. 27). Federalists are driven by a belief that the east and south have been politically and economically sidelined, including through a lack of proper consultation after the uprisings (Holm, 2013: p. 36; Lacher, 2013: pp. 20-21; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Wood, 2012: p. 23). Most people in Cyrenaica have supported greater decentralisation or autonomy, not federalism (see section 3).

2.4. Women and girls

Many Libyan women and girls played a crucial role as leaders and participants in the uprisings, especially in the east, and in mediation and transition during the early post-uprising period. However, powerful local and national Libyan authorities, and international actors have since **marginalised, and at times excluded,** women and girls from decision-making (.e. on the security sector). Women and girls have thus struggled in a threatening and silencing environment of insecurity, violence, rising religious conservatism and detrimental electoral laws. Movements seeking to advance women' and girls' participation have also to contend with divisions among Libyan women and girls themselves about gender[22].

Despite these obstacles, a number of women and girls have continued to play important **community and political roles**. Libyan women inside and outside the country have self-organised to "tackle legal issues, promote political participation and address dire economic needs" (ICAN, 2013: p. 7). They have tried to simultaneously: secure political space for women; raise awareness about gender equality and rights; mobilise grassroots support through solidarity and reconciliation; obtain justice for victims of violence - including sexual violence – perpetrated during the Qadhafi regime, during the uprisings and in their aftermath (ICAN, 2013; Langhi, 2014).

---

[20] See: Benotman, Pack & Brandon, 2013: pp. 191-228; Holm, 2013: p. 38; Lacher, 2013: p. 14; Sawani & Pack, 2013.
[21] See: Benotman, Pack & Brandon, 2013: p. 191, 221; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 29-33.
[22] On this paragraph, see: ICAN, 2013; Langhi, 2014; McQuinn, 2012: p. 12; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Wood, 2012: p. 23.

3. Major dynamics and issues

This section focuses on dynamics and issues of conflict, which reflects the evidence base. However, it can be noted that some factors also foster the **reduction and prevention of violence, peaceful dynamics and cooperation**[23]. Parts of Libya have retained strong social cohesion, through: the role of tribes and other community organisations that interconnect many Libyans; collective identities; a high level of social control, particularly in more homogenous areas; traditional mechanisms and tribal male elders that deliver conflict management, justice and security; shared cultural and religious values (Chatham House, 2013: p. 5; EPLO, 2012: p. 3). In addition, all regions are dependent on each other for the oil system to function, from extraction to pipelines (Holm, 2013: p. 43). Actors have at times found common interests thanks to their very fragmentation, which entails multiple and fluid loyalties (Smits et al., 2013: p. 55).

General dynamics and issues in conflicts

There is a clear consensus in the literature on a number of general points, as follows[24]. Fundamentally, existing disputes are rooted in **competing claims** over territory, public and private resources (including land and jobs), and power, as well as competing claims about justice and fairness, all in the absence of an established and functioning state. These tensions pre-existed Qadhafi, but were exacerbated by clientelism and patronage under his regime, and then by communities' varying positions during the uprisings and acts of revenge in the aftermath.

This has translated into **unstable competition and cooperation** between actors. Dynamics of inclusion (through alliances, co-optation or patronage) and exclusion from power and formal politics have been accompanied by a regular use of violence for local, regional and national purposes. These dynamics have resulted from the interplay between: power struggles for the state, patronage and rent from oil and gas; localism and regionalism; and tribal and ethnic affiliations. Another crucial dynamic since 2011 has been the interplay between public **insecurity**, the lack of functioning police and justice, impunity for past and present abuses, and the ambiguous role of non-state armed groups in security and conflict management.

All these developments have fed into each other and precluded the rebuilding of state institutions, inclusive politics and justice, and a decrease in violence and insecurity.

Specific dynamics and issues in conflicts

An interplay of six key dynamics and issues has generated conflicts.

First, there have been stark **divisions stemming from different experiences** in relation to the Qadhafi regime, the uprisings and the revolution. Experiences, narratives, expectations and fears differ, leading to differences in debates and grievances about what the political and economic implications of the revolution should be and have been. Poor communication among actors, and some inflammatory media, have also worsened divisions and tensions. Some local armed groups have acted for the purpose of 'protecting the

---

[23] See: Chatham House, 2013: p. 5; EPLO, 2012: p. 3; Crisis Group, 2012; Smits et al., 2013.

[24] This sub-section reflects points made widely and consistently in the literature reviewed for this report, hence the lack of specific citations. For syntheses, see for example: Combaz, 2014; Holm, 2013; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013; McQuinn, 2012; Smits et al., 2013; Wood, 2012.

revolution', and 'pro-revolution' communities have been hostile to areas deemed anti-revolution and their 'volunteer forces'[25].

Second, **widespread insecurity** has had far-reaching repercussions on conflicts. Local actors, including armed groups, civilian councils, notables and tribes, have filled in for the weak central state and provided security and conflict management. This local success has had the mixed effect of both containing and fuelling insecurity and conflicts. It has constrained the role and capacities of state institutions, and interfered with the running of security and justice institutions (jobs, budgets, and policies of reform, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration). The use of violence has remained a regular means of action, enabled by the wide availability of firearms and light weapons[26].

Third, **human rights abuses** under Qadhafi, during the uprisings and since then have been a major source of contention. Widespread impunity for these abuses and the weakness of national justice institutions have made matters worse. Many local actors, acting outside official institutions, have enforced 'justice' selectively, punitively and often violently, especially against communities deemed 'anti-revolution'[27].

Fourth, **formal politics** has been both an arena and a stake in post-2011 conflicts. So far, there has been no effective, unified and inclusive state. Political inclusion and exclusion have been contested in relation to the state, public office (in government, parliament and administration) and the Constitution. In particular, the treatment of Qadhafi-era officials has been a key issue. The balance of power and accountability between government levels are also major issues. Libyans have a general desire for greater decentralisation and devolution to the local level, but beyond this have diverse opinions on these topics, including within Cyrenaica and the south[28].

Fifth, a major source of conflict has been the **use of economic and public resources**, against a backdrop of oil and gas wealth and limited development. Conflicts have taken place over the distribution and control of: economic gains; public resources (budgets, jobs); assets (e.g. oilfields, roads, airports, seaports, farms and major industries); and property rights over lands and building that the Qadhafi regime had nationalised and redistributed in the 1970s-1980s. There is a popular demand of national and local transparency and accountability in these matters, especially in relation to the extractive industries. Actors have also clashed over illicit flows and smuggling routes[29].

Sixth, **identity** has featured in a number of conflicts. Specifically, there have been tensions around national identity, nationality, citizenship and discrimination, particularly in relation to the Tubu, Tuareg, and black Libyans and migrants. While religion has not been central to conflicts and Islam has mostly featured as an

---

[25] On this paragraph, see: Chatham House, 2013: p. 3; EPLO, 2012: p. 2-3; Holm, 2013: p. 44; Crisis Group, 2012 - including pp. 24-27; Crisis Group, 2013; Lacher, 2013 - including p. 22; Wood, 2012: pp. 14, 19-23.

[26] On this paragraph, see: Chatham House, 2013: pp. 3-5; Combaz, 2014; El Kailani, 2012: p. 12; EPLO, 2012: pp. 1, 3; Holm, 2013: pp. 27, 30-32; Crisis Group, 2012 & 2013; Lacher, 2013 - including pp. 2, 18, 20-22, 25-30, 34; McQuinn, 2012: pp. 11, 56-57; Smits et al., 2013 - including pp. 41-42, 44-46; Strazzari & Tholens, n.d.; Wood, 2012: pp. 14-16.

[27] On this paragraph, see: EPLO, 2012: pp. 1, 4; El Kailani, 2012: p. 12; Holm, 2013: p. 29; Crisis Group, 2012 & 2013; Lacher, 2013: pp. 13, 19-20, 30-32; Smits et al., 2013: pp. 25-26; Wood, 2012: pp. 19-20.

[28] On this paragraph, see: Combaz, 2014; El Kailani, 2012: p. 12; EPLO, 2012: p. 2; Holm, 2013: pp. 36-37, 41; ICAN, 2013; Crisis Group, 2012 & 2013; Kjaerum et al., 2013: p. 5; Lacher, 2013: p. 6, 12-13, 20-22, 25-28, 30-32; Lacher, 2014: pp. 7-8; Langhi, 2014; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Smits et al., 2013 - including pp. 20-21, 25; Wood, 2012: pp. 21-23.

[29] On this paragraph, see: Chatham House, 2013: p. 3; El Kailani, 2012 - including pp. 7-13; EPLO, 2012: pp. 2-3; Holm, 2013: pp. 27, 42-44; Crisis Group, 2012 & 2013; Lacher, 2013: pp. 21, 25-26, 32-34; Lacher, 2014 - including p. 6; Smits et al., 2013 - including pp. 34-36, 38, 44-45; Wood, 2012: pp. 21-22.

identity nearly all Libyans share, Libyans have been divided about some social and religious changes, and their implications (e.g. for women). Libyans have been united in their rejection of foreign interference[30].

4. References

BBC (2013). *Guide to Key Libyan Militias and Other Armed Groups*. BBC News, Africa.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19744533

Benotman, N., Pack, J., Brandon, J. (2013). *Islamists*. In Pack, J. (Ed.). *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 191-228. Excerpts available at: http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=soKBM_lOk3cC

Chatham House (2013). *Local Conflicts, National Stability: Managing Conflict in Libya as a Platform for Successful Transition* (Middle East and North Africa Summary, Libya Working Group). London: Chatham House.
http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/0613libya_summary.pdf

Combaz, É. (2013). *Political economy of Libya after the Qadhafi regime* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report No. 1084). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/084.pdf

El Kailani, E., with Z. Saleh (2012). *Extractive Industry and Conflict Risk in Libya*. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office.
http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Civil%20Society%20Dialogue%20Network/Policy%20Meetings/Private%20Sector/EPLO_CSDN_PrivateSector_Libya.pdf

European Peacebuilding Liaison Office [EPLO] (2012). *Civil Society Dialogue Network: Crisis Response Meeting Organised by the EEAS, EC and EPLO. Libya Conflict Assessment: Gathering Civil Society Input*. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office.
http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Civil%20Society%20Dialogue%20Network/Crisis%20Response%20Meetings/Libya/EPLO_Report_CSDN_Meeting_Libya.pdf

Holm, U. (2013). *Libya in Transition: The Fragile and Insecure Relation between the Local, the National and the Regional*. In L. Riis Andersen (Ed.), How the Local Matters. Democratization in Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and Palestine. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 1, 26-45.
http://www.diis.dk/files/publications/Reports2013/RP2013-01-How-the-local-matters_web.jpg.pdf

Hüsken, T. T. (2012). *Tribes, Revolution, and Political Culture in the Cyrenaica Region of Libya*. In M. Bouziane, C. Harders, & A. Hoffmann (Eds.) (2013). *Local Politics and Contemporary Transformations in the Arab World*. Governance Beyond the Center. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 214-231. Excerpts available from http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=UezQAQAAQBAJ

---

[30] On this paragraph, see: Chatham House, 2013: p. 3; EPLO, 2012: p. 3; Holm, 2013: pp. 37-38, 40-41, 43-44; ICAN, 2013; Crisis Group, 2012; Lacher, 2013: pp. 21-22, 35; Lacher, 2014; Langhi, 2014; Sawani & Pack, 2013; Smits et al., 2013: p. 57; Wood, 2012: pp. 18, 24-25.

International Civil Society Action Network [ICAN] (2013). *From Subjects to Citizens: Women in Post-Revolutionary Libya* (What the Women Say, Brief No. 8). Washington DC: International Civil Society Action Network. http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/libya-dec3.pdf

International Crisis Group [Crisis Group] (2012). Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts (Middle East/North Africa Report No. 130). Tripoli/Brussels: International Crisis Group.http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/libya/130-divided-we-stand-libyas-enduring-conflicts.pdf

International Crisis Group [Crisis Group] (2013). Trial by Error: Justice in Post-Qadhafi Libya (Middle East/North Africa Report No. 140). Tripoli/Brussels: International Crisis Group.http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/libya/140-trial-by-error-justice-in-post-qadhafi-libya.pdf

Kjaerum, A., Lust, E., Fly Pedersen, L., & Wichmann, J. M. (2013). *Libyan Political Party Baseline Assessment*. JMW Consulting. http://jmw-consulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Party_Baseline_study_-Libya.pdf

Lacher, W. (2013). *Fault Lines of the Revolution: Political Actors, Camps and Conflicts in the New Libya*. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik / German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP Research Paper 2013/RP 04. http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2013_RP04_lac.pdf

Lacher, W. (2014). *Libya's Fractious South and Regional Instability* (Security Assessment in North Africa, Dispatch No. 3). Geneva: Small Arms Survey. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/R-SANA/SANA-Dispatch3-Libyas-Fractuous-South.pdf

Langhi, Z. (2014). Gender and State-Building in Libya: Towards a Politics of Inclusion. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(2), 200–210. http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/13629387.2014.881736

McQuinn, B. (2012). *After the Fall: Libya's Evolving Armed Groups* (Working Paper No. 12). Geneva: Small Arms Survey. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/F-Working-papers/SAS-WP12-After-the-Fall-Libya.pdf

Sawani, Y. M. (2012). Post-Qadhafi Libya: Interactive Dynamics and the Political Future. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 5(1), 1–26. http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/17550912.2012.650007

Sawani, Y. M. (2013). *Dynamics of Continuity and Change*. In Pack, J. (Ed.). *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 53-84. Excerpts available at: http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=soKBM_lOk3cC

Sawani, Y., & Pack, J. (2013). Libyan Constitutionality and Sovereignty post-Qadhafi: the Islamist, Regionalist, and Amazigh Challenges. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18(4), 523–543. http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/13629387.2013.838056

Smith, H. (2013). *The South*. In Pack, J. (Ed.). *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 175-190. Excerpts available at: http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=soKBM_lOk3cC

Smits, R., Janssen, F., Briscoe, I., & Beswick, T. (2013). *Revolution and Its Discontents: State, Factions and Violence in the New Libya*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Libya%20-%20Revolution%20and%20its%20discontents.pdf

Strazzari, F., & Tholens, S. (n.d.). "Tesco for Terrorists" Reconsidered: Arms and Conflict Dynamics in Libya and in the Sahara-Sahel Region. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 1–18. http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1007/s10610-014-9233-y

Wood, D. (2012). *Libya Conflict Assessment: Literature Review*. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office. http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Civil%20Society%20Dialogue%20Network/Crisis%20Response%20Meetings/Libya/EPLO_Literature_Review_CSDN_Meeting_Libya.pdf

Key websites

- International Crisis Group - Libya: http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya.aspx
- Small Arms Survey - Publications - Libya: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/by-region/africa-and-the-middle-east.html#c6175

Suggested citation

Combaz, E. (2014). *Key actors, dynamics and issues of Libyan political economy* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1106). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

About this report