

LIBYA

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. Since the first Libyan Civil War (also known as the Libyan Revolution) in 2011 and the subsequent overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, the country has experienced ongoing political instability and conflict, resulting in multiple rival governments and militias vying for control.

In March 2021, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was established in Tripoli with the aim of unifying the country⁴. However, political divisions persisted, and in March 2022, a rival Government of National Stability (GNS) was formed in Surt (Sirte), backed by the Libyan National Army (LNA)⁵.

Despite continued international efforts to resolve the political deadlock, including a United Nations initiative in late 2024, to address key issues and facilitate national elections⁶, Libya remains politically divided, with no single government exercising full control over the entire country.

This Factfile aims to provide guidance on geographical names for Libya in light of this ongoing division and absence of a cohesive, nationwide administrative framework.

¹ The Gaddafi-era state title of Libya (used prior to 2011) was the “Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya” (*Jamahiriya* being a Gaddafi neologism, based on the Arabic word *Jumhūrīyah*, meaning ‘republic’.) On 22nd December 2017, the United Nations Protocol and Liaison Service received a letter from the Ambassador at the Permanent Mission of the State of Libya to the United Nations, New York, confirming 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 understood to include Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Western Sahara.

⁴ <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/special-envoy-libya-j%C3%A1n-kubi%C5%A1-briefing-un-security-council-24-march-2021>

⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/23ba97ab-dd28-46b7-9952-549db90b174d>

⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/un-libya-election-deadlock-initiative-road-map-eca3b6af8c3525a769d0366db3afd46c>

Geographical names policy

Geographical names in Libya 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 be apparent in the country's geographical names. Place names may also be influenced by Amazigh (Berber) languages. Names found in English-language sources may not always match the standard Arabic romanized forms. In the absence of current official names sources for Libya, pre-2011 sources 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 4.

In addition to the official names, conventional names - widely recognised in international contexts - are commonly used for many regions and cities in Libya. Notable examples include Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata, and Sabha. PCGN recommends the use of these conventional names alongside official designations where appropriate, to improve clarity and consistency. For example: Banghāzī (Benghazi).

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 (ayl) is the most widely 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) languages⁷ 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 2011⁸. In February 2017, the Libyan Amazigh High Council (LAHC) declared Tamazight an official language in the cities and districts inhabited by the Amazigh in Libya⁹, 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 script¹⁰. 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.

⁷ Sometimes collectively known as Tamazight.

⁸ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/amazigh-libya-revive-their-previously-banned-language-1206307999>

⁹ <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/life/tamazight-declared-official-language-amazigh-peopled-districts>

¹⁰ <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/tifinagh.htm> ; 2022 BGN/PCGN Neo-Tifinagh Romanization system

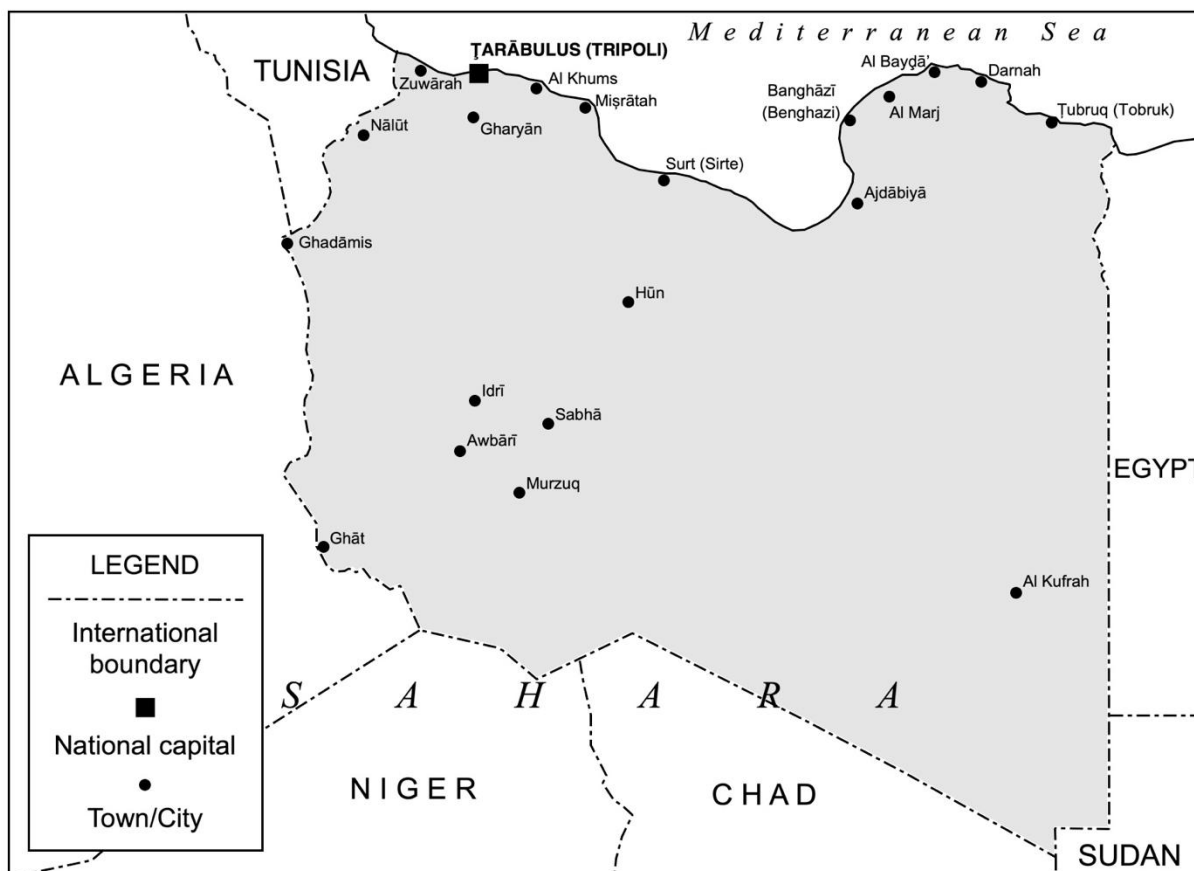
Inventory of characters used in Roman (and their Unicode encodings¹¹):

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
D _̣	1E10	d _̣	1E11
H _̣	1E28	h _̣	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
S _̣	015E	s _̣	015F
T _̣	0162	t _̣	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Z _̣	005A+0327*	z _̣	007A+0327*

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

Map of Libya



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

¹¹ See www.unicode.org
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Administrative structure

Given the ongoing instability in Libya, 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 country¹². Therefore, PCGN continues to recommend using the names of the 22 first-order administrative divisions that existed prior to the 2011 civil war, as these remain the most consistent and widely referenced framework in use by many international organisations, and within Libya. There have been proposals for alternative administrative structures such as those outlined in a draft constitution from 2014 (32 provinces) and a 2022 plan (18 provinces) by the Government of National Unity (GNU). Despite these proposals, neither structure has been fully implemented across the entire country.

The former subdivision category, sha'bīyah (popularate), has not been used since the fall of Gaddafi, with the word Muḥāfaz̧ah (governorate) occasionally being used instead.

Administrative unit (ADM1)	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre (PPLA)
Al Buṭnān (30°14'N 24°10'E) البطنان	LY-BU	Ṭubruq (Tobruk) (32°05'01"N 23°58'35"E) طبرق
Al Jabal al Akḥḍar (32°12'N 21°45'E) الجبل الاخضر Alternative name: Green Mountain (English translation)	LY-JA	Al Bayḍā' (32°45'46"N 21°45'18"E) البيضاء Alternative spellings: Bayda, Beida
Al Jabal al Gharbī (30°28'N 13°00'E) الجبل الغربي Alternative name: Western Mountain (English translation)	LY-JG	Gharyān (32°10'20"N 13°01'13"E) غريان
Al Jafārah (32°39'N 13°00'E) الجفارة Alternative spellings: Al Jifarah; Al Jfara	LY-JI	Al 'Azīziyah (32°31'55"N 13°01'03"E) العزيزية
Al Jufrah (28°00'N 17°25'E) الجفرة Alternative spellings: Gafrah; Al Jafrah	LY-JU	Hūn (29°07'37"N 15°56'52"E) هون
Al Kufrah (24°02'N 21°30'E) الكفرة Alternative spelling: Al Kafrah	LY-KF	Al Kufrah (24°10'N 23°15'E) الكفرة
Al Marj (31°56'N 21°19'E) المرج Alternative spellings: Al Maraj; Marj	LY-MJ	Al Marj (32°29'17"N 20°49'54"E) المرج
Al Marqab (32°30'N 14°00'E) المرقب Alternative spelling: Al Murgub	LY-MB	Al Khums (32°39'N 14°16'E) الخمس

¹² There has been a re-emergence of references to the three traditional regions that constitute Libya, each of which has 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)	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre (PPLA)
Al Wāḥāt (28°56'N 21°12'E) الواحات <i>English translation: Oases</i>	LY-WA	Ajdābiyā (30°45'33"N 20°13'23"E) اجدابيا
An Nuqāṭ al Khams (32°43'N 11°49'E) النقاط الخمس <i>Alternative spelling: Anakat Alkamis</i>	LY-NQ	Zuwārah (32°55'52"N 12°04'55"E) زواره <i>Alternative spellings: Zuwara, Zuara</i>
Az Zāwiyah (32°40'N 12°35'E) الزاوية <i>Alternative spellings: Al Zawiya; Azawei</i>	LY-ZA	Az Zāwiyah (32°45'26"N 12°43'40"E) الزاوية
Banghāzī (31°38'N 20°39'E) بنغازي	LY-BA	Banghāzī (Benghazi) (32°07'N 20°04'E) بنغازي
Darnah (32°03'N 22°32'E) درنة <i>Alternative spelling: Derna</i>	LY-DR	Darnah (32°46'01"N 22°38'12"E) درنة
Ghāt (26°06'N 10°20'E) غات	LY-GT	Ghāt (24°57'53"N 10°10'22"E) غات
Miṣrātah (31°25'N 14°25'E) مصراتة <i>Alternative spellings: Masrata; Misrata</i>	LY-MI	Miṣrātah (32°22'31"N 15°05'33"E) مصراتة
Murzuq (25°11'N 15°29'E) مرزق <i>Alternative spellings: Murzaq; Mourzouk</i>	LY-MQ	Murzuq (25°54'16"N 13°53'50"E) مرزق
Nālūt (30°20'N 10°51'E) نالوت	LY-NL	Nālūt (31°52'07"N 10°58'52"E) نالوت
Sabhā (27°11'N 15°01'E) سبها <i>Alternative spellings: Sibha; Sabhah</i>	LY-SB	Sabhā (27°11'N 15°01'E) سبها
Surt (30°20'N 16°30'E) سرت <i>Alternative spellings: Sirt; Sirte</i>	LY-SR	Surt (Sirte) (31°12'32"N 16°35'19"E) سرت
Ṭarābulus (32°48'N 13°20'E) طرابلس	LY-TB	Ṭarābulus (Tripoli) (32°53'33"N 13°10'48"E) طرابلس
Wādī al Ḥayāt (26°33'N 12°51'E) وادي الحياة <i>Alternative spelling: Wadi Al Hayaa</i>	LY-WD	Awbārī (26°35'N 12°46'E) اوباري

Administrative unit (ADM1)	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre (PPLA)
Wādī ash Shāṭī' (27°53'N 12°45'E) وادي الشاطئ <i>Alternative spelling: Wadi Al Shatii</i>	LY-WS	Idri (27°30'N 13°16'E) إدري <i>Alternative spellings: Adīrī, Adri</i>

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°44'33"N 24°31'04"E
Al Jawf	الجوف		Populated place	24°10'56"N 23°16'58"E
Al 'Uwaynāt	العوينات	Al Awaynat; Al Uwainat	Populated place	21°34'N 24°50'E
Aṣ Ṣaḥrā' al Lībiyah (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	السدره	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 Nafūṣah	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 ¹³ ; Khalīj at Tah, adī	Gulf	31°30'N 18°00'E
Maydān ash Shuhadā' (Martyrs Square)	ميدان الشهداء	Formerly known as ساحة الخضراء Sāḥat al Khudrā' (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

¹³ The US conventional name is Gulf of Sidra, so this appears on US government sources. British usage favours Gulf of Sirte.

Yafran	يفرن	Yifran; Yefran	Populated place	32°03'48"N 12°31'43"E
Zlīṭan	زليطن	Zliten	Populated place	32°28'02"N 14°34'09"E

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 دبذب	30°08'N 09°30'E
Niger	Bi'r al Wa'r بئر الوعر	Toummo	22°39'N 14°11'E

Useful references

- BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13754897>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/libya/>
- Ethnologue report on languages of Libya: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/LY>
- FCDO travel advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/libya>
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Libya General Information Authority (population figures) archived at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20110224023241/http://www.gai.gov.ly/shabiat>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/index.html>

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