planned to help him take over Tripoli,[10] as well as accusations that they were working with ex-Gaddafi fighters. Additionally, there was a pro- and anti-Islamist factor to the conflict, with some Zintani elements reportedly opposed to increased Islamist power while the Misratans were seen as linked to Islamist political groups.[11] These rival militias later reconciled and aligned in early 2018, but the split and conflict are illustrative of the overlapping and complex regional, political, religious, ethnic, and tribal loyalties that play a role in Libya.

Another issue that impacted the general security environment leading into 2011 and that persisted in the political challenges from 2014 to today is the overall weakness of formal political and security structures. Gaddafi's system of nepotism and the deliberate weakening of many government institutions, partially out of fears of a coup, resulted in the collapse of these institutions during the 2011 uprising.[12] This led to a post-Gaddafi security and governance vacuum that was an opportune environment for the rise of hundreds of armed groups overlapping with groups jockeying for political power. The high number of militias that grew within this context is also closely related to the patchwork of tribal and geographic loyalties outlined above. Competing allegiances without distinct, shared political goals outside of the elimination of Gaddafi created an environment that encouraged factionalization.

The Gaddafi regime also marginalized and banned Islamist elements to further protect its power. As a result, during the uprising, many of the anti-Gaddafi militias contained Islamist elements and Islamism took root in various forms in the political and security gaps post-Gaddafi. These political and militant elements ranged from moderates focused on democratic development to violent extremists, including an Islamic State (ISIL) branch that took hold of Sirte and several other areas in 2015.[13] The group had been expelled from Sirte and most other strongholds by the end of 2016, but it continues to carry out sporadic attacks on government and security force assets and personnel in the country. Other Islamist militias—some extremist and some moderate—established footprints in other parts of the country, including al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi (dissolved in 2017) and factions that broke off from the Libya Dawn coalition in Tripoli and surrounding areas. Some Islamist militias were main players in the escalation of clashes between rival groups that occurred in Tripoli in August and September 2018.

The largest Islamist political party to arise in the post-Gaddafi context was the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which had been banned and whose elements existed only in exile or underground during Gaddafi's rule.[14] As a result of this, the MB in Libya did not benefit from the broad societal support that MB bodies in other countries in the region did.[15] The group did form a political party, the JCP, which won 34 seats in the 2012 elections for the GNC, behind the largely secular National Forces Alliance (NFA) which won 64 seats.[16] The JCP and MB gained some wins within the GNC, such as the passage of the Political Isolation Law, banning anyone from the Gaddafi administration from political participation for 10 years. The MB has since suffered diminishing popularity and influence, experiencing poor results in the 2014 HoR elections, which many MB supporters boycotted. This led to the continuation of the GNC as a rival government by Islamist elements—including a strong MB faction. These actions contributed to criticisms of the MB regarding their role as spoilers in reconstruction and stabilization efforts as well as accusations of connections to extremist militant groups.[17] Eventually, representatives from the GNC and HoR signed the Libyan Political Agreement in late 2015, leading to the creation of the GNA,[18] though the GNC continued to fight for power until early 2017. The MB is now represented in some of the GNA's governing bodies,[19] though their continued political role and influence remains uncertain.