

Ethnic and Racial Discrimination

As mentioned above, tribal and ethnic discrimination was commonplace under Gaddafi's administration, with the Imazighen and Tebu minority groups experiencing abuses such as revocation of citizenship, denial of public services, forced displacement, repression of cultural practices, and banning of native languages.²⁰ The minority Tuaregs, despite being considered part of the wider Imazighen ethnic group, were actually given relatively preferential treatment by Gaddafi, but only under certain conditions. They were allowed to speak their dialect and some groups of Tuareg from neighboring countries were even welcomed into Libya. However, this preferential treatment disproportionately benefited the men in this population as Gaddafi aimed to incorporate male Tuareg into the army, offering them citizenship as an incentive. Segments of the Tuareg population were certainly aligned with Gaddafi as the rebellion broke out and some were members of the state-aligned security forces, but many other Tuareg were opposed to him and his overall treatment of minorities. Unfortunately, after Gaddafi's fall there was backlash against the wider Tuareg community by some parts of Libyan society who viewed them as Gaddafi loyalists.²¹ Each of these groups have been making efforts in the post-Gaddafi landscape to increase recognition and protection of their cultures and inclusion in governance.

Along with local minority groups, the group that bears the brunt of discriminatory and racist targeting is the large population of migrants, the majority of which come from sub-Saharan African countries. Estimates put the number of migrants in Libya at somewhere between 700,000 to two million people, depending on the source and time period. Some of these migrants have entered Libya for work while others use Libya as a transit point to cross the Mediterranean into Europe. During the fighting against the Gaddafi regime in 2011, many migrants, primarily from sub-Saharan Africa, were arrested or targeted by violence due to widespread, exaggerated rumors that the forces supporting Gaddafi had brought in scores of mercenaries from these countries who were then committing atrocities against Libyans.²² These rumors were compounded by existing xenophobia, prior exploitation of migrants under Gaddafi, and the training of foreign rebel fighters by the Gaddafi regime, notably insurgents from Chad, Niger, and Mali in the 1970s. Some foreign fighters had been incorporated into the Libyan military, but the accusations against foreigners during the rebellion were found to be widely overblown and proven false in many cases.²³ These accusations, and the arrests and violence against black members of the population, ignored the existence of dark-skinned Libyan nationals and vilified population groups based solely on the color of their skin.

Recent Events and Outlook

As mentioned in the introduction, General Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive aimed at taking control of Tripoli in early April 2019. This activity represents a significant escalation of conflict in the country and fighting is ongoing at the time of this writing. The military actions have been widely condemned by the international community, the UN, and, of course, the Tripoli-based GNA. Prior to the recent military developments, the GNA had been engaged in UN-led negotiations with Haftar aimed at forming a transitional government. Earlier in the year, the LNA successfully led operations to take the al-Sharara and al-Feel oil fields in Libya's southwest, giving the group control over the vast majority of the country's oil production. This also gave the LNA better strategic footing to move on Tripoli. Opponents to Haftar voice concerns that the general's success in gaining control of the country would be a return to the type of authoritarian rule experienced under Gaddafi.