



Libyan Elections

Product of the Research & Information Support Center (RISC)

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Introduction

On July 7, Libya held its first election in more than four decades, choosing a 200-seat General National Assembly to replace the Transitional National Council (TNC) that governed during and after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. The largely peaceful election marked the first step toward national unity and rebuilding a government by establishing a representative body; over the past several months, support for the interim government has been declining due to poor management of the transition and a lack of transparency. The General National Assembly will formulate Libya's government, with its two main objectives being to choose a prime minister and select a Constituent Assembly, who will draft a constitution, within 30 days of their first meeting. The success of the election is a promising sign for future state building efforts, despite many issues leftover from the Gaddafi era and civil war.

Largely Peaceful Election

While the National Electoral Commission was celebrated for its success in organizing the vote, with voter registration remarkably high, there were concerns over fringe groups inciting violence or disrupting polling. During the months leading up to the elections, violent incidents targeted foreign interests, including [a British diplomatic convoy, the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, and the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#). These incidents highlight the risk posed by extremist groups and possibly former Gaddafi regime officials seeking to disrupt stability in the country.

Since the end of the civil war, a federalist movement has emerged out of Eastern Libya which seeks regional autonomy and has been linked to violent protests and attacks. Angered that Eastern Libya did not receive an equal number of seats in the General National Assembly as Western Libya, pro-federalist groups forced several oil terminals and a port to close down prior to polling. Tensions between the east and west remain and will likely lead to additional outbreaks of violence. In the week prior to the polls, pro-federalist protesters stormed the office of the High Parliamentary Elections Commission in Benghazi. The protesters damaged vote records and other items while demanding that the interim government allocate seats of the eastern Libyan region equal to those granted to the western region. Meanwhile, the evening before the vote, a helicopter carrying voting boxes was hit by gunfire and made an emergency landing near Benghazi, killing an official with the election commission. Such events triggered concerns that federalist groups may incite significant violence during voting.

On the day of the election, however, limited violence was reported. One person was killed when unidentified gunmen opened fire close to a polling station in Ajdabiya, in the east. In Benghazi, Ajdabiya, and Brega, pro-federalist protesters stormed at least a dozen polling stations, where they burned ballot papers and tried to dissuade local residents from participating. Around the country, some 101 polling stations were unable to open due to alleged acts of sabotage, primarily in the east, but 98 percent of the stations were reported to be operating normally by the end of the first day of elections. The head of the election commission, Nuri al-Abbar, said that 1.2 million of the 2.8 million eligible voters had cast their vote. Overall, disruptions were very minor, particularly for a country that is only 10 months post-civil war and a 42-year dictatorship.

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General National Assembly

It was unclear in the weeks prior to the election whether any one party was in the lead. Many experts projected the possibility that Libya would follow the trend set by [Egypt](#) and Tunisia in recent elections and elect an Islamist conservative government. Based on the proliferation of campaign posters and leaflets by Islamist parties, and the country's reputation as one of the Maghreb's more socially conservative nations, it was widely suspected that Islamists had secured widespread support. Going into the election, the Justice and Construction Party (JCP), the political arm of Libya's Muslim Brotherhood, was expected to garner the most support. However, election results trickling in on July 8 indicated that the National Forces Alliance (NFA), one of the more moderate parties, had secured the lead. According to the most recent results on July 16, the coalition garnered 40 of the 80 party-seats. Meanwhile, the JCP came in second with 16.

However, as final results may take several weeks to be confirmed, the final makeup of the assembly remains unclear. Of the 200 seats, 80 were granted to parties and 120 to individuals. Although the individual candidacy winners have nearly all been reported, it remains unclear where their party affiliations lie and whether they will support the NFA or lead another party to a majority.

National Forces Alliance

As the National Forces Alliance celebrates their possible victory, new information regarding their believed agenda is emerging, providing some insight on the potential direction of the Libyan government and economy. The NFA is an alliance of "liberal forces" headed by Mahmoud Jibril, who played a prominent role as prime minister during the interim government. Jibril worked as Gaddafi's economics minister but defected to the TNC at the beginning of the revolution. He was ineligible to run as a candidate in elections due to his seven-month stint as interim prime minister during and after the rebellion. Jibril's name recognition likely played a role in the party's success, particularly due to the lack of information regarding many other candidates and parties.

While the NFA has been categorized as a liberal party in Libya, Jibril has made a point to say that Shari'a law is a principal of the party and that the NFA rejects the secularist label. It remains unclear exactly how closely the government will choose to base laws and govern around Shari'a, but it seems the notion that NFA is being labeled a liberal party is simply due to its relatively moderate stance when compared to other parties. The NFA claims to support privatization and rebuilding of Libyan infrastructure. Additionally, the party favors the creation of special economic zones to encourage trade and investment. Of primary concern will be the party's ability to reach a consensus, as the party is extremely diverse, and it is unclear whether the direction of the party is widely agreed upon. Jibril is expected to push for a grand coalition, assuming he can unify the alliance into an effective government.

Outlook

While the success of the National Forces Alliance is significant, as it indicates that the Libyan populace may be offsetting the trend toward supporting more conservative Islamist parties, it remains uncertain whether the NFA will prove to be fundamentally different from the Islamist options. The National Transitional Council is expected to be dissolved at the first session of the General National Assembly, at

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which point it will become more clear which direction the government will be heading as it chooses a prime minister and Constituent Assembly.

Besides building state institutions, the government also faces a number of challenges due to the aftermath of the civil war and the Gaddafi era, including: reconciliation of former Gaddafi loyalists and government officials, disarming militias, addressing extremist Islamists, the division of oil revenues, appeasing federalist groups, and addressing a long-running east-west divide. The limited violence and unrest during the vote is promising and confirms reporting that Islamic extremist and federalist groups remain on the fringe and are not part of the mainstream in Libya.

However, small, marginalized groups can still be problematic when rebuilding a state and an economy, and the government will need to reconcile these issues, in order to guarantee security and prosperity in the long-term. As foreign businesses seek to reenter Libya, building a police force and security apparatus while also disarming, demobilizing, and reconciling militias left over from the civil war will be necessary for economic growth and stability. OSAC will continue to monitor the situation in Libya and provide updated reporting on a regular basis.

For Further Information

Please direct any questions regarding this report or the general security situation in the region to [OSAC's Regional Analyst for the Middle East and North Africa](#).

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