

Reinterpreting the Results of the General National Congress Elections in Libya 2012: Did the Liberals Triumph Over The Islamists?

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Abstract: This paper challenges the media interpretations and political analysts' views of the July 2012 Libyan General National Congress (GNC) elections, which portrayed the results as a victory for the National Forces Alliance (NFA), described in the media as liberal, over the political Islam parties, represented by the Justice and Construction Party (Muslim Brotherhood), Salafists. However, our results show that these interpretations are inaccurate for three reasons: First, the loss of Islamists on party lists does not mean that the winners were liberal or secular. Second, the significance of independent candidates, who won most seats (120 out of 200), has been overlooked. Many of these independents were either associated with Islamists before the elections or later joined Islamist-affiliated parliamentary blocs. Consequently, the total number of seats held by Islamists and their allies equaled or surpassed those held by the NFA and its associated independents. Third, this paper argues that there was no convincing explanation of how Islamists and their allies passed laws, such as Resolution No. 7 and the Political Isolation Law, which excluded NFA leaders from the political process and undermined their numerical gains within the GNC. These laws were pivotal in the Libyan political transition. This paper suggests reevaluating additional factors, such as the political recruitment of armed militias and parties outside the GNC to sway voting within it, along with the competition for independent members, whose personal agendas often took precedence over national interests. By 2014, Islamists and their allies wielded nearly total control over the GNC.

1. Introduction:

The General National Congress (GNC) elections were part of the constitutional declaration announced by the National Transitional Council (NTC) ¹ in August 2011, later amended three times. ² The repeated amendments reflected the pre-election atmosphere in Libya post-Gaddafi, where the political landscape underwent radical reshaping, highlighted decentralized local forces like regional councils and armed militias, including jihadist groups and federal movements. Initially united against Gaddafi, these forces evolved into entities vying for power and resources, often disrupting the political scene to secure their interests.

The GNC elections produced a fragile political landscape. The National Forces Alliance (NFA), led by Mahmoud Jibril, ³ secured most of the political entities' seats (39 out of 80), trailed by the Justice and Construction Party (JCP), representing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (17 seats). A smaller cluster of parties with varied affiliations claimed 24 seats, while 120 members secured seats reserved for independents. ⁴

Polarization among political parties within the GNC peaked with the issuance of the Political Isolation Law in May 2013. This law aimed to ban political activity by individuals who held prominent civilian or military positions in the Gaddafi regime. The ban was later extended to anyone associated with organizations or institutions during that period. ⁵

In 2014, the Libyan political process collapsed when the GNC extended its term, which was supposed to end in February 2014, and refused to relinquish power to the House of Representatives (HOR), which was elected on June 25, 2014. The elections of HOR were seen as

¹The NTC was established in February 2011 through consensus among municipal councils from regions deemed "liberated" from official authority. It consisted of a political coalition comprising former officials who had defected from the Gaddafi regime, members of the Libyan opposition in exile, tribal and urban notables, academics, lawyers, and human rights activists, with notably limited representation of women. The council was led by former Minister of Justice, Mustafa Abdel Jalil. See: Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, the Libyan national transitional council: social bases, membership and political trends, al Jazeera center for studies, November 30, 2011. <https://bit.ly/4awsil5>, pp. 4-5.

² The First Amendment transferred the authority to certify the election results from the GNC to the High National Elections Commission. The second amendment, issued on June 10, 2012, postponed the elections to be held 270 days after the 'liberation' declaration on October 23, 2011, instead of the initially planned 240 days. The third amendment, dated July 5, 2012, saw the NTC revoke its previous decision regarding the GNC's right to appoint members of the Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting the constitution. Instead, direct suffrage by citizens was established, limiting the GNC's role in determining the standards and controls for the assembly's elections. See: The Interim National Transitional Council, The Constitutional Declaration of 2011- Consolidated, August 3, 2011, <https://bit.ly/45dnqlj> pp.7-10.

³ Mahmoud Jibril (May 28, 1952 – April 5, 2020) was a Libyan politician and technocrat. He joined the National Transitional Council on March 5, 2011. During Muammar Gaddafi's regime, he held the positions of Secretary of the National Planning Council and Director of the Economic Development Council. After Gaddafi's fall, he founded the National Forces Alliance. Jibril served as Prime Minister of Libya from March 5, 2011, to October 23, 2011, and held a doctorate in strategic planning and political science.

⁴Despite the National Forces Alliance's fluctuating characterization, ranging from liberal to nationalist, the ideological content of the Islamic parties, led by the Justice and Construction Party, alongside its allies among Salafists, religious figures, and other radical revolutionaries, appears more defined. see Karim Mezran, Fadel Lamem and Eric Knecht, "Post-revolutionary Politics in Libya: Inside the General National Congress," Atlantic Council, 2013, p.1.

⁵ أليسون بارغيتز، "الأصلاء والدخلاء في ليبيا الجديدة"، سياسات عربية، العدد 11 (نوفمبر 2014)، ص 32-33.

disappointing by the Islamists and their allies,⁶ who had nearly complete control over the GNC. This led to a legitimacy crisis that escalated into a comprehensive civil war,⁷ causing political and administrative divisions throughout Libya.

2. Paving the way for the elections

During the pre-election period, various political tensions emerged, which the NTC attempted to contain through a policy of appeasement.⁸ For instance, when faced with criticism from Islamists regarding the women's quota, the NTC retracted its proposal to allocate 10% of the seats to women and instead opted for party lists that included both male and female candidates in rotation.⁹

Furthermore, the allocation of seats to independents and party lists has caused confusion for the NTC. Jason Pack and Haley Cook observed that the Brotherhood preferred to increase party list seats, anticipating electoral success.¹⁰ Conversely, parties suspicious of Islamists feared that increasing the number of seats allocated to parties would lead to Islamist dominance.¹¹

In continuation of its appeasement policy, the NTC announced a new amendment to Article 30 on July 5, 2012,¹² amid fears of electoral disruption. Parties linked to federalists Cyrenaica¹³ had attempted to sabotage the elections by destroying electoral offices in Tobruk and Benghazi,¹⁴ burning ballot material warehouses in Ajdabiya,¹⁵ and closing five oil valves with gunmen from

⁶ Mohamed Eljarh, "Libya's Islamists Go for Broke", *Foreign policy magazine*, July 22, 2014. <https://bit.ly/3seaIu3>

⁷ Melissa Salyk-Virk, "Airstrikes, Proxy Warfare, and Civilian Casualties in Libya," *New America* (2020), p. 20.

⁸ Jason pack, Karim Mezran and Mohamed Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian Bargains: Breaking the Appeasement Cycle," *Atlantic Council* (2014), pp. 18-19.

⁹ "Libya's NTC adopts election law, drops women quota", *ALARABIYA NEWS*, January 28, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3tJ3KOB>

¹⁰ Jason pack and Haley Cook, "The July 2012 Libyan Election and the Origin of Post-Qadhafi Appeasement", *Middle East Journal* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015), p. 183. Understanding the majority support of Islamists for increasing party-list seats and their resistance to electoral policies that could favor other tribal, regional, or ethnic groups can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, ideological unity emphasizes the cohesion of the Islamic nation/ Ummah across various affiliations, transcending tribal, regional, and ethnic divisions. Secondly, a functional rationale wherein Islamists believed that their organizational capabilities and discourse could mobilize Libyan voters, given the significance of Islam in Libyan society. Ibid.

¹¹ Youssef Mohammed Sawani, "Dynamics of Continuity and Change" in Jason pack (eds.), *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post Qadhafi Future* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 65.

¹² The amendment divided seats equally among Libya's historically known regions (Tripoli, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan) within the Constituent Assembly for Drafting the Constitution, allocating 20 seats to each. It also mandated that the assembly be directly elected by the people, rather than appointed by the General national congress. See: Interim National Transitional Council, Constitutional Amendment No. (3) of 2012, July 5, 2012. <https://bit.ly/4bKyoYr>

¹³ Eastern Libya region, historically known as Cyrenaica, despite housing the country's most crucial oil export ports, suffered from marginalization and neglect under the Gaddafi regime, like many other Libyan regions. However, it was notable for sparking the 2011 uprising. On March 6, 2012, a group of social forces, including elderly rural tribal notables and some armed factions, declared autonomy and established the Cyrenaica Transitional Regional Council. This body had no formal ties to the National Transitional Council or local councils, though its leader, Ahmed Al-Zubair, was an NTC member. The movement sought legitimacy based on Cyrenaica's historical status as a largely autonomous province from 1951 to 1963, during Libya's federal monarchy.

¹⁴ George Grant, "Pro-federalist protesters storm election offices in Tobruk and Benghazi," *Libya Herald*, July 1, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3Scxkpc>

¹⁵ "Libya election materials destroyed in Ajdabiya fire," *BBC News*, July 5, 2012. <https://bbc.in/3MbIYNe>

the Cyrenaica Regional Council.¹⁶ Initially, the NTC ignored demands for an equal distribution of GNC seats among Libya's three regions.¹⁷ However, to protect the electoral process, NTC ultimately amended the Constitutional Declaration. This effort ensured that violations affecting polling stations did not exceed 6% in 1,500 different locations.¹⁸

Electoral seats were allocated based on Libya's 2006 population census of 5.3 million, with one seat for every 27,000 citizens. Seats were geographically distributed among four regions: the western region received 100 seats, the eastern region 60, the southern region 31, and the central region 9,¹⁹ resulting in a total of 13 electoral districts. The electoral system adopted a mixed approach, combining the majority system for individual lists and proportional representation for political entities with a single non-transferable vote system based on the first-past-the-post rule, not requiring a minimum number of votes to win a seat.²⁰

The relative majority system for individual voting highlighted two key issues: First, the significant disparity between winning candidates' vote counts. For example, the least-winning candidate received 276 votes in Tazerbu,²¹ while another won with 40,207 votes in Benghazi. Additionally, 13 candidates won with over 1,000 votes, while 50 others won with fewer than 3,000 votes. Second, most winning candidates received less than 20% of the total vote.²²

The electoral and voting systems contributed to giving a more local and personal character to the political process. This is evident in the allocation of most seats to independents (120 seats), as well as to small political entities. Most small entities were established in marginalized rural areas and won through promises to achieve development and improve living services. Apart from the independents allied with the major political entities before the elections, the rest of the members have become vulnerable to polarization between the major conflicting political entities within the GNC since the announcement of the election results on July 7, 2012.

¹⁶Jay Deshmukh, "Gunmen close five Libya oil terminals ahead of vote," *Modern Ghana*, July 5, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3S9TN6v>

¹⁷Libya consists of three historical regions: Tripolitania in the northwest, Cyrenaica in the east, and Fezzan in the southwest. The Ottomans recognized them as separate provinces (1551-1911). Under Italian rule (1911-1942), they were united into a single colony, leading to the formation of independent Libya after the Allies forces' victory and Italy's expulsion. Historically, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were more closely linked to neighboring lands than to each other.

¹⁸مصطفى عمر النير، الثورة الليبية مساهمة في تحليل جذور الصراع وتداعياته (الدوحة/ بيروت: المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات، 2020)، ص 386.

¹⁹انتخابات المؤتمر الوطني في ليبيا: بين تجاذبات النخب والدينامية المجتمعية"، تقدير موقف، المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات، (يونيو 2012)، ص 5-6. <https://bit.ly/46SpSUA>

Although the Western Region obtained more than half of the seats in the GNC, the value of this majority was mitigated through a constitutional amendment from the NTC requiring two-thirds approval of laws within GNC. Ibid, p.6.

²⁰ Interim National Transitional Council, Law No. (4) of 2012 On the Election of the General National Congress, January 28, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3RbvTpW>

²¹ A small city located in one of the oases in southeastern Libya.

²² See the announcement of the High National Electoral Commission - the results of the party lists. <https://bit.ly/3FtC8io> and the results of independents <https://bit.ly/3Mb4VMx>

3. Critical remarks on the interpretations of the GNC'S election results

The results of the GNC elections reflected the electoral system adopted by the NTC, which aimed to prevent major political entities from monopolizing power. In theory, these steps were intended to strengthen consensus on key issues such as the formation of a new government and the drafting of a new constitution. However, in practice, they strengthened the dominance of local, personal, and regional politics over national politics.²³

Table No. (1) (Entities Lists)²⁴

Entity	Number of seats
National forces alliance	39
Justice and Construction Party (Muslim Brotherhood)	17
National Front	3
Union for the homeland	2
The centrist national movement	2
Wadi al-Hayat Democracy and Development Rally	2
Entities with One Seat	15
Total	80

²³ It is important to note that the lack of historical party experience in Libyan politics was evident in the post-Gaddafi, with most newly formed parties primarily representing local and personal interests. Despite the proliferation of hundreds of political parties, many remained tied to their narrow social bases, some even bearing names reflecting their region or constituency, such as the **Wadi al-Hayat** Democracy and Development Rally and the **Wadi al-Shati** National Rally. These parties for instance were named on cities in southern Libya.

²⁴ Source: Compiled by the author from "Results of General National Congress Elections 2012 for Political Entities," High National Elections Commission - Central Election Administration. <https://bit.ly/3FtC8io>

Table No. (2) Independents²⁵

Independents Associated with the National Forces Alliance	25
Independents Associated with the Justice and Construction Party (Muslim Brotherhood)	17
Independents Linked to Salafists and Small National Lists	33
Independents Not Affiliated with Parties or Lists	55
Total	120

The results of the elections led some media outlets and political observers to misinterpret the NFA's victory in party lists as a victory for liberals and secularists over Islamists.²⁶ These claims gained traction when they were used to argue that Libya stood out as an exception among cases of the 'Arab Spring,' where Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia experienced electoral success.

These interpretations were misleading for three reasons: First, the real victory in terms of numerical majority was achieved by independents (120 seats), motivated primarily by local politics²⁷ or personal ambitions,²⁸ and it was not yet known whether they were linked to one of

²⁵ Wolfram Lacher, "Fault Lines of the Revolution Political Actors, Camps and Conflicts in the New Libya," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik SWP, Research Paper (2013), p.9. <https://bit.ly/3x5u5rz>

²⁶See for example: Mustafa Fetouri, "Why the Islamists Lost in Libya," *AL-MONITOR*, July 14, 2012. <https://rb.gy/pfgofg>; Omar Ashour, "Libya's defeated Islamists," *Brookings*, July 17, 2012. <https://shorturl.at/qux38> Hadeel Al Shalchi and Marie-Louise Gumuchian, "Libya's Jibril in election landslide over Islamists," *Reuters*, July 12, 2012. <https://shorturl.at/lzDLZ>. "Liberals claim lead in Libyan election" *France 24*, July 8, 2012. <https://bit.ly/4720Zph>.

For Arabic Media reports see:

أمين محمد، "قراءة في نتائج انتخابات ليبيا"، الجزيرة نت، 2012/7/10، <https://bit.ly/405PICH>؛ "الانتخابات الليبية: تصدر الليبراليين وانتكاسة للإسلاميين"، DW، <https://bit.ly/3tD99pG>؛ "الليبراليون يعلنون تقدمهم بانتخابات ليبيا"، sky news عربية، 2012/7/8، <https://bit.ly/3tMMwPR>

²⁷ Most independents won due to family and tribal support or their social prominence in their regions. Independent candidates received about 20% of the total votes, with more than half securing less than 10%. In Benghazi, for example, 6 out of 9 elected independents won with less than 2% of the votes. See: Results of individual candidates for the General National Congress elections, High National Elections Commission, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3Mb4VMx>

²⁸Several independents and party-list candidates won their elections by leveraging their families' aristocratic-bourgeois reputations, which had significant political and economic roles before Gaddafi's rule in 1969. Notable figures include Abdul Rahman Al-Suwaihli from Misrata; Ahmed Lenqi; Saleh Jaouda from Benghazi; and Abdul Jalil Saif Al-Nasr from Sabha. Beyond being electoral candidates, they are seen as representatives of commercial and economic networks led by their relatives in their respective cities. Lacher, "Fault Lines", p.10

the major political entities before the elections.²⁹ Second, the term 'liberal,' as understood in its Western context, applies to only a few members of the NFA or independents associated with it. NFA leader Mahmoud Jibril announced immediately after the elections that the NFA is not secular³⁰ or liberal but focuses on economic reform and development. This indicates that the appeal of the NFA was based on its development agenda³¹ and not on an ideological position against Islam or local conservative culture. Third, the seats obtained by the Islamists and their independent allies and small lists are equal to or greater than those obtained by the NFA and its allies.³²

The previous observations emphasize the importance of highlighting the local nature of the political conflict, which created new divisions within the GNC based on how the major entities dealt with regions, tribes, and individuals who supported the Gaddafi regime, intertwined with the media-fabricated Islamist liberal division, which Islamists exploited politically, especially at the level of political discourse.

4. Major political entities

National force alliance

The NFA emerged as an electoral coalition rather than a traditional political party. It comprised approximately 44 political organizations and 236 civil society organizations.³³ Although its former leader, Jibril, had maintained good relations with the Gaddafi regime in the last decade of its rule,³⁴ he defected during the 2011 uprising. Subsequently, he became a political leader in the NTC, serving as head of its executive office from March to October 2011.³⁵

²⁹ Mezran, Lamem and Knecht, "Post-revolutionary", p.1.

³⁰ "Don't call us secular, says Libyan poll favourite", *The independent*, July 10, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3S9aIWN>

³¹ In this context, Italian researcher Matteo Capasso offers an insightful analysis of the impact of the success of the neoliberal development model, particularly the Dubai model, on Libya's elite and society following the ideological decline of the Gaddafi regime in the mid-1980s and early 1990s due to international isolation and economic sanctions. Capasso discusses Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's efforts to implement economic and political liberalization projects in the early 2000s, inspired by the Dubai model, which aimed to blend traditional cultural features, such as Arab and Islamic identity, with Western capitalist modernity. This aligns with the core of the political and economic vision promised by Jibril to the Libyan people. Notably, Jibril had previously served as Secretary of the National Planning Council and Director of the Economic Development Council in Saif al-Islam's "Libya of Tomorrow" project. See: Matteo Capasso, *Everyday Politics in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023), pp. 118-145.

³² Compare with Table No. (1) and Table No. (2).

³³ Michel Cousins, "Mahmoud Jibril, elected head of Alliance of National Forces", *Libya Herald*, March 15, 2012. <https://rb.gy/5wmnmn>. The NFA was more of an electoral coalition than a political party with a clear ideology. While its strategies increased its popularity, its broad structure, designed mainly to win the GNC elections, negatively impacted its performance within the GNC. It appeared weak and lacked cohesion or long-term loyalty to its programs. This allowed Islamist opponents and their allies to undermine its political legitimacy, leveraging their ideological unity and militia support to influence the political conflict within the GNC.

³⁴ Jibril's previous connections to the Gaddafi regime made the NFA an easy target for criticism from Islamists and extremist revolutionaries, who refused to cooperate with him. To counter this and ensure electoral success, Jibril adopted a two-pronged approach: first, he ignored accusations about his ties to the previous regime, presenting himself as a technocrat and economic development expert with practical business and international experience. Second, he emphasized his role as the first Libyan prime minister post-uprising, highlighting his efforts to gain

The NFA also included several Libyan businessmen and technocrats who attempted to play reformist roles during Gaddafi's rule. The most prominent among them was Abdul Majeed Maligta, a businessman from Zintan³⁶ who, despite his ties to the former regime, formed an armed militia³⁷ during the uprising and played a key role in taking control of Tripoli in August 2011. Additionally, the NFA was joined by younger figures and more middle-class urban notables in major cities such as Tripoli and Benghazi.³⁸

As part of its electoral campaign strategy, the NFA presented its weaker candidates in cities where Jibril was popular, while focusing on Jibril's personality and development projects in rural interior areas where he was less known. Due to the absence of exiled opposition figures within the NFA,³⁹ socially popular figures without political backgrounds were attracted to the NFA, such as football player Ahmed bin Suwayd in Benghazi and Sufi cleric Abdul Latif al-Muhalhal in Tripoli.⁴⁰ Additionally, the moderate approach taken by the NFA towards social forces loyal to the former regime in cities such as Sirte, Bani Walid, Al-Azizia, Tarhuna, and southern Fezzan helped expand its popular base.⁴¹

Islamists

Justice and construction party (Muslim brotherhood):

The JCP was established on March 3, 2012, as a political party with an Islamic reference.⁴² It included figures who had engaged in reconciliation with the former regime, particularly through the program of de-radicalization led by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi.⁴³ The party emphasized its openness to all Libyans, not just Brotherhood members. To counter accusations of ties to

international recognition for the NTC through his relations with Arab and Western countries. Mezran, Lamem and Knecht, "Post-revolutionary Politics," p3.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ A city located 136 km southwest of the capital, Tripoli.

³⁷ The Qaqaa/القعاة militia, founded by Abdelmajid Maligta and later led by his brother Othman Maligta, was one of the most organized and best-equipped militias in western Libya. It benefited greatly from privileges granted by Osama Al-Juwaili Al-Zintani, the former Minister of Defense under Abdul Rahim Al-Keib (11/22/2011 to 12/27/2012). The militia is believed to have included many professional officers and soldiers from the 32nd Brigade, previously led by Khamis Gaddafi. Despite accusations of arbitrary arrests, confiscation of state property, and illegal trade, the militia was affiliated with the Ministry of Defense due to its control over border areas near Tunisia and some oil installations. For more about the Qaqaa militia. See: pack, Mezran and Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian Bargains," p.29.

³⁸ Lacher, "Fault Lines", p.10.

³⁹ Except for former exile oppositionist Ali Tarhouni, head of the centrist National party allied with the National Forces Alliance, who won two seats in the General National Congress elections.

⁴⁰ Lacher, "Fault Lines", p.11.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp.12-13.

⁴² Muslim Brotherhood forms party in Libya", *ALJAZEERA*, March 4, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3tXWKwS>

⁴³ For more details about the reconciliation program led by saif- al-Islam al-qaddafi and Libyan Islamists see: Noman Benotman, Jason Pack, and James Brandon, "Islamists," in *the 2011 Libyan s*, pp. 202-206. Also consider the lengthy report prepared by the most prominent leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group entitled:

دراسات تصحيحية في مفاهيم الجهاد والحسبة والحكم على الناس (د.م، د.ن، 2009).

international organizations, it stressed its independence from other regional Muslim Brotherhood groups,⁴⁴ especially in Egypt.

Before the uprising, the Brotherhood was banned in Libya. During the uprising against Gaddafi, they created relief and media organizations, most notably Nidaa al-Khair, to establish financial links between Libya and the wealthy Gulf states that supported the NTC. These institutions have become tools for the Brotherhood to strengthen its presence in society, alongside media platforms such as the Libya Youth Platform and Al-Manara Publications, which are used to convey their messages to Libyan society.⁴⁵

The Brotherhood enjoyed significant political influence within the NTC, estimated to have between 12 and 15 representatives, although none officially declared affiliation. Some members, like Abdullah Shamiya and Salem Al-Sheikhi, held ministerial positions in Jibril's government.⁴⁶ Their influence extended to subsequent governments, with Lamin Belhaj leading the Election Laws Committee and Nasser Al-Manaa serving as the official spokesperson for Abdel Rahim Al-Keib's transitional government.⁴⁷

Although, Brotherhood did not acknowledge the existence of military arms affiliated with it during the uprising, but some of its members organized fighting brigades, notably Fawzi Bukatf, an oil engineer and Brotherhood member, briefly served as Deputy Minister of Defense before leading two major militias in eastern Libya: the February 17 Brigade⁴⁸ and the Rafallah al-Sahati militia.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ronald Bruce St John, "Libyan Election Breaks Arab Spring Pattern," *The International Spectator* 47, no.3 (2012), p. 15.

⁴⁵ Susan Tarkowski Tempelhoff and Manal Omar, "Stakeholders of Libya's February 17 Revolution," United States Institutes of Peace, (January 2012), p.7.

⁴⁶ The first, Shamiya, served as Minister of Economy, while the second, Al-Sheikhi, took over the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

⁴⁷ Benotman, Pack, and Brandon, "Islamists," in pack (eds.), *The 2011 Libyan*, p.218.

⁴⁸ The February 17 Brigade, comprising 1,500 to 3,500 members, was among the largest and most formidable militias in eastern Libya. Initially funded by the Ministry of Defense, it was deployed across Kufra and eastern Libya as part of the Libya Shield Force. It notably provided security for the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi before the September 11, 2012, attacks. See: David Kirkpatrick, Suliman Ali Zway, and Kareem Fahim, "Attack by Fringe Group Highlights the Problem of Militias," *New York Times*, September 15, 2012. <https://rb.gy/ivqomb>.

⁴⁹ Originally part of the February 17 Brigade, the militia, boasting over 1,000 members, operated in eastern Libya and Kufra under the Ministry of Defense. Initially led by Ismail Al-Sallabi, it later came under the leadership of Muhammad Al-Gharrabi, a former Islamist detainee. Ismail Al-Salabi, brother of Ali Al-Salabi, a Qatari-based cleric accused of funding Islamic-oriented Libyan armed groups, was associated with the militia. Both the Rafallah al-Sahati and February 17 Martyrs Brigades were affiliated with the Benghazi Revolutionaries Operations Room and vied with the Benghazi Special Forces (Al-Saiqa) to control Benghazi's streets. Due to their Islamist ties, they were seen as allies of Ansar al-Sharia, a jihadist organization. Pack, Mezran and Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian," p.31.

Salafists

Lacking unified political leadership and being ideologically hostile to party democracy,⁵⁰ the Salafists have not established major political entities. However, they have pragmatically joined the elections through party lists or independently. Estimates indicate that their numbers ranged from 25 to 27 members within the GNC.⁵¹

Within the GNC, Salafists were not a unified bloc but were divided into various parliamentary blocs. One significant bloc, aligned with the Al-Asala rally and close to Grand Mufti Sheikh Al-Sadiq Al-Gharyani,⁵² secured 8 of Tripoli's 14 seats allocated for independents.⁵³ Another bloc, associated with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, included Salafists known for their armed activities during the uprising, like Abdel Wahab Al-Qayed.⁵⁴ Additionally, 5 independents were tied to the Al-Watan Party led by Abdul-Hakim Belhaj, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.⁵⁵ Other suspected Salafists, including militia leaders like MPs Muhammad al-Kilani⁵⁶ and Mustafa al-Triki, lacked clear affiliations.⁵⁷

Despite losing most party list seats to the NFA, the Islamists demonstrated strong cohesion within the GNC, particularly among independents associated with them, who exhibited greater loyalty compared to those aligned with the NFA. Islamists have leveraged their relationship with successive governments to build organizational capabilities and expand their political influence beyond their actual popularity in Libyan society. Economic resources and foreign support during the uprising also contributed to strengthening their influence. Furthermore, their success in recruiting military militias provided them with influence on the ground, enabling them to achieve military objectives when political means failed.

⁵⁰ Most of the Salafist movements that joined the political process called their entities rally instead of the party.

⁵¹ Mary Fitzgerald, "Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Policy*, November 2, 2012. <https://rb.gy/fpugo5>.

⁵² Al-Gharyani's involvement in political affairs blurs the lines between his role as a cleric and a politician. Notably, he issued a fatwa prohibiting voting for certain parties, seen as a direct attack on the National Forces Alliance for allegedly undermining Sharia law. Following the elections, he led a vigorous campaign for the establishment of an Islamic banking system, ultimately succeeding when the proposal was adopted and implemented by the GNC. Additionally, he staunchly defended the military action against Bani Walid in October 2012 and advocated strongly for the broad exclusion of former regime officials through the political isolation law.

⁵³ Lacher, "Fault Lines", p. 12.

⁵⁴ Abdel Wahab Al-Qayed, once a senior figure in the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, has familial ties to Abu Yahya al-Libi, a notable Al-Qaeda member who was killed in Pakistan in 2012. Post-regime change, Al-Qayed assumed command of southern Libya's border guards. He is associated with the Umma Al-Wasat rally, established by ex-members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and led by Sami Al-Saadi, the group's former religious figurehead. However, Al Qayed won as an independent candidate in the city of Murzuq.

⁵⁵ The Watan Party, led by Belhaj, did not secure any seats on party lists, despite efforts to project a more moderate image, including fielding unveiled female candidates.

⁵⁶ He was killed in military clashes in the Warshafana area, west of the capital, Tripoli, in 2014.

⁵⁷ Lacher, "Fault Lines", pp.11-12.

5. Exclusion and Post-Election Conflict (2012-2014): Revisiting Resolution No. 7 and Political Isolation

In accordance with the new conflict dynamics, the Islamists formed an expanded alliance with some former opposition figures in exile and other members from cities and regions considered strongholds of the armed rebellion against Gaddafi.⁵⁸ This coalition adopted a radical political stance against social groups associated with the previous regime. In contrast, the NFA took a more moderate stance toward groups associated with the Gaddafi regime as part of its electoral strategy to expand its popular base.

Resolution No. 7

In October 2012, Islamists and their allies pressed for a military operation against Bani-Walid,⁵⁹ claiming it hosted dangerous elements loyal to Gaddafi.⁶⁰ Tensions escalated when militants from Bani-Walid took hostages from Misrata, including a fighter who had captured Gaddafi and later died⁶¹ after being kidnapped.⁶² The incident prompted GNC members, led by Abdul Rahman Al-Suwaihi from Misrata and head of the Union for the Nation Party,⁶³ along with other members, to pressure the GNC to pass Resolution No. 7. This resolution authorized Libya Shield militias⁶⁴ from Misrata and Al-Zawiya to attack Bani-Walid, resulting in the displacement of thousands of civilians and the looting and destruction of many buildings in the city.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Such as Misrata, Al-Zawiya, the cities of Jabal Nafusa, and key neighborhoods in Tripoli, such as Tajoura and Souq al-Jumaa.

⁵⁹ 180 km southeast of Tripoli.

⁶⁰ Wolfram Lacher, *Libya's Fragmentation Structure and Process in Violent Conflict* (London: I.B. TAURIS, 2020), p.30.

⁶¹ وفاة المقاتل الليبي الذي شارك في إلقاء القبض على العقيد معمر القذافي في باريس، "France 24"، <https://bit.ly/3SogWC0>. 2012/9/27، "موتون للقذافي يقتلون 4 من الثوار ويسيطرون على بعض مناطق بني وليد"، **BBC NEWS عربي**، <https://rb.gy/vowehs>. 2012/1/23، "مقتل 10 ثوار في بني وليد"، الجزيرة، نشر في <https://bit.ly/3QHS8ha>. 2012/1/24.

⁶³ The Union for the Homeland Party, based in Misrata, presents itself as a national party with anti-centralist views but rejects the federal model proposed by eastern federal forces. It strongly opposes anyone who served in the Gaddafi regime, even those who defected and joined the National Transitional Council. Despite its nationalistic stance, the party won two seats in the General National Congress solely from votes in Misrata. Lacher, "Fault Lines", p.9.

⁶⁴ The Libya Shield Brigade, or Libya Shield Force, is a coalition of armed brigades formed from rebel groups that helped overthrow Gaddafi. It operates in various regions of Libya and is reputed to be affiliated with Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, despite ostensibly being part of the Libyan Ministry of Defense. Its leaders were mainly civilians rather than military specialists, such as Wissam bin Hmaid, who led a militia in Benghazi during the 2011 civil war. The brigade is divided regionally, with names like Al-Wusta Shield and Libya Shield 1. The name "Libya Shield" was designated by the Ministry of Defense on August 8, 2012, by then-interim Defense Minister Osama Al-Juwaili, forming a force in the central region. This force comprises revolutionary fighters from Misrata, Sirte, Al-Jufra, Beni Walid, Tarhuna, Al-Khoms, Masalata, and Zliten, with Colonel Muhammad Ibrahim Musa as commander. Most forces are stationed in Misrata, with additional units in smaller western Libyan areas. Officially, the militia is divided into three main battalions in eastern, central, and western Libya, tasked with law enforcement, maintaining order, and combat missions. Despite not being regular armed forces, they receive material and military support through decisions by the General National Congress. See: Wolfram Lacher and Peter Cole, "Politics by Other Means Conflicting Interests in Libya's Security Sector," Small Arms Survey Graduate Institute of International and Development (May 2014), pp.39-52.

⁶⁵ The operation's aftermath fueled discontent across Libyan society, particularly in Benghazi, the uprising's epicenter against Gaddafi. This underscores the complexity in political and public attitudes toward cities and regions associated with the former regime.

Resolution No. 7 passed with 65 votes in favor, 7 against, and 55 abstentions,⁶⁶ amid the absence of over a third of members who avoided voting. Despite the weak support within the GNC for the resolution, its passage would not have succeeded without the presence of a military force politically allied with the Islamists.⁶⁷

Resolution No. 7 marked the beginning of the use of armed militias in the political conflict within the GNC. It also led to the increased legitimization of armed militias,⁶⁸ formally linking them to the Ministries of Defense and Interior and granting them recruitment and conscription powers based on politicized patronage criteria.⁶⁹

Political isolation law⁷⁰

On 12/24/2012, the Islamists and their allies drafted an initial proposal for the political isolation law with the aim of expanding its scope outside the General National Congress to include former workers in various institutions, companies, and even the judiciary.⁷¹ Two days later, the GNC voted on a proposal to adopt the law and appoint a special committee of legal experts and members of the GNC to draft it. Despite receiving majority support with 125 votes within the GNC, the NFA strongly opposed the proposed law.⁷²

"اقتحام مجمع المؤتمر الوطني العام ومقر قناة خاصة ببغازي على خلفية قصف بني وليد"، *France 24*, 2022/10/22. <https://bit.ly/40pTRkr>

⁶⁶ Lacher, "Fault Lines", p.13.

⁶⁷ Accusations against Salah Badi and Muhammad al-Kilani, led by certain militias involved in the attack, paved the way for its passage. Spokesman Omar Hmaidan asserted that militias discovered Gaddafi's son Khamis dead in Bani Walid, providing legitimacy to the military operation.

⁶⁸ Most armed militias gained legitimacy from their fight against the Gaddafi regime, but political complicity allowed them to persist, despite promises to disarm and rebuild the national army. After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, a government body known as the Warriors Affairs Authority was established. Its aim was to rehabilitate fighters so that they could give up their weapons and return to civilian life. The Authority's programs were based on sending thousands of fighters wishing to study abroad at state expense. Some of them were granted financing loans to carry out commercial projects within the country. Ostensibly, the goal of this body was to contribute to the demobilization of the militias and rebuild the army, but it turned into a source of corruption and livelihood, like many institutions that were formed after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. The body was led by Engineer Mustafa Al-Saqzali, who is close to the Islamists. See:

<https://bit.ly/40k9Oc2>. 2013/5/27. الجزيرة نت، "برامج ليبية لدمج الثوار وتعليمهم"،

⁶⁹ Law No. 38, for example, exempted "rebels" from crimes during the February uprising, symbolizing a surrender to armed groups' influence and shielding them from accountability. This led to criticism from local and international activists for enabling criminal behavior. See:

<https://bit.ly/45S0UDz>. 2012/5/3. الجزيرة نت، "قانون لبيبي بالعفو عن أعمال الثوار"،

⁷⁰ The origins of the Political Isolation Law trace back to the Constitutional Declaration issued by the Transitional Council on April 4, 2012, which established the Integrity Commission to prevent former regime officials from engaging in political work. Despite the committee's efforts to exclude many figures affiliated with the former regime, including those who defected and sided with the uprising, it often clashed with the judiciary. This resulted in a legal battle between those aiming for complete political exclusion and those striving to remain on the political scene. See: Interim National Transitional Council, Law No. (26) of 2012 on the High Commission for the Application of Standards of Integrity and Patriotism, April 4, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3KAmleU>

⁷¹ "GNC members issue statement on "isolation law"", *Libya Herald*, December 24, 2012. <https://rb.gy/ix5xai>

⁷² objections were based not only on concerns about the drain on the country's expertise and skills, but also on the potential exclusion of many of its members, most notably their leader Jibril.

In January 2013, the Islamist Abdel-Wahab al-Qayed formed the parliamentary 'Loyalty to the Blood of the Martyrs' bloc, which consisted of about 60 members,⁷³ most of them from the Brotherhood and Salafists.⁷⁴ Conversely, in March 2013, the NFA established the 'Ya Biladi' bloc, in alliance with independents estimated to number approximately 20 to 40 members.⁷⁵ The formation of these parliamentary blocs indicates a new phase of polarization among Libyan political entities.

On April 29 and 30, 2013, military militias from Misrata, in collaboration with militias from Tripoli, Al-Zawiya, and other cities, surrounded the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs⁷⁶ to compel the GNC and the government to enact the political isolation law.⁷⁷ The siege on the ministries underscored the impression that the law's adoption would largely be enforced through coercion, raising questions about its final form and scope.

Table No. (3): Voters in favor of the political isolation law and their vote count⁷⁸

Voters	Vote count
Independents	100
National force alliance	27
Justice and construction	17
Other entities	19
Total	163

⁷³ خيرى عمر، "الأزمة الدستورية في ليبيا: أبعاد الصراع بين المكونات السياسية"، سياسات عربية، العدد 13 (مارس 2015)، ص 31-32.
⁷⁴ Lacher, *Libya's Fragmentation*, p. 30.

⁷⁵ "يا بلادي.. كتلة برلمانية جديدة في ليبيا"، بوابة أخبار اليوم، 2013/3/12. <https://rb.gy/rpuhqg>
⁷⁶ العزل السياسي في ليبيا: مسلحون يحاصرون وزارة العدل للمطالبة بإقصاء رموز القذافي"، BBC NEWS عربي، 2013/4/30. <https://rb.gy/yuyoti> ؛ "مسلحون يحاصرون مقر وزارة الخارجية في ليبيا"، BBC NEWS عربي، 2013/4/28. <https://bbc.in/3QoKFYW>

⁷⁷The intervention of the militias to impose the political isolation law was preceded by a strong political movement within the GNC, led by Abdul Rahman Al-Suwaihi of the Union for the Homeland Party, along with the Justice and Construction Party and the Loyalty to the Blood of the Martyrs bloc. The Islamist-led coalition not only pressured GNC members to pass the law but also mobilized popular support by establishing political isolation coordination committees in multiple cities, led by the former ideologue of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Sami Al-Saadi, in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Libyan Revolutionaries. See:

تنسيقية العزل السياسي تعلن تمسكها بإصدار قانون العزل السياسي"، وكالة الأنباء الليبية، 2013/3/7. <https://rb.gy/o2aipo>
 Additionally, the coalition received significant backing from the Grand Mufti of Libya, Sheikh Al-Sadiq Al-Gharyani, who enthusiastically supported the law, considering it a vital step toward achieving the goals of the revolution.see:

مفتي ليبيا: قانون العزل السياسي المطروح أكثر من ممتاز"، ليبيا المستقبل، 2013/2/20. <https://rb.gy/lj6doi>
⁷⁸ Source: Prepared by the author based on data available from the live broadcast of the isolation session on the Libyan National Channel. Available on YouTube at this link: <https://bit.ly/3s8UcLR>

Table No. (4): Voters against the political isolation law⁷⁹

Voters	Vote count
Independents	12
National force alliance	10
Other entities	3
Total ⁸⁰	25

Article 1⁸¹ of the Political Isolation Law was so extreme that it was impractical to implement. The final version did not differentiate between a person's position and their behavior. Most of those targeted were civil servants, with only some holding high positions during Gaddafi's 42-year regime. Given that the state was the primary source of income for most citizens, the voting results clearly showed a major contradiction.⁸²

⁷⁹ Source: Prepared by the author based on data available from the live broadcast of the isolation session on the Libyan National Channel. Available on YouTube at this link: <https://bit.ly/3s8UcLR>

⁸⁰ The whereabouts of the remaining twelve members out of the total 200 were unknown, with some potentially resigning or being removed by the Integrity Commission.

⁸¹ Article 1 of the Political Isolation Law prohibits anyone who worked in the previous regime (1969-2011) from holding public positions. The first category includes all of the following: Any person who participated in the 1969 coup, or held membership in the Revolutionary Command Council, the Free Unionist Officers, and the leader's companions; popular leadership coordinators; Secretary of the General People's Congress (Speaker of Parliament) and anyone who held the position of a member of the Congress, as well as those who held the position of Secretary of the People's Congress (mayors of municipalities); heads of institutions and departments affiliated with the Council of Ministers, the Revolutionary Command Council, and the General People's Congress; ambassadors, chargés d'affaires, consuls, and former Libyan delegates to international missions; university presidents, college deans and their deputies; leaders of the following security services (internal and external security, military intelligence, army security brigades, directors of security services departments, heads of political offices of the security and military services); presidents of student unions at home and abroad; whoever held a leadership position in institutions related to Gaddafi and his family, or was a partner with them in commercial businesses; members of the Revolutionary Committees, heads of the exceptional courts, members of the Revolutionary Guard and purification committees, and leaders of the People's Guard; general managers and researchers in Green Book study centers, Green Stage lecturers, and leaders in media institutions; chiefs of staff of the army, princes of defense regions, and leaders of military institutions and entities in their various forms; anyone who belongs to foreign parties that threaten the stability and unity of the country. The second category includes all those suspected of corrupting political and economic life in the country during the Gaddafi era: everyone who glorified the Gaddafi regime and his Green Book in the media and elsewhere; civilians accused of cooperating with the former regime's security services in human rights violations; whoever took a position hostile to the February 17 Revolution, either by action or by incitement; those who killed and tortured Libyans inside and outside the country for the benefit of the Gaddafi regime; those who seized people's public and private property during the period of Gaddafi's rule for political reasons; everyone involved in plundering the Libyan people's money; anyone who engages in artistic, intellectual, religious, cultural, or social activity that glorifies the Gaddafi regime or promoted his son's project (Libya of Tomorrow); everyone who used religious discourse to legitimize the Gaddafi regime, and considered disobeying it as a violation of obedience to the ruler. See: General National Congress, Law No. (13) of 2013 on administrative and political isolation, May 8, 2013. <https://bit.ly/3RidoA2>

⁸² Article 1 suggested that most members of the GNC could be expelled because they had served the former Libyan state. However, out of personal opportunism or fear, they voted against themselves, including Al-Magariaf, head of the GNC, who had served as an ambassador before defecting in the early 1980s to oppose Gaddafi, and Jumaa Ataiga, vice president of the GNC and former head of Gaddafi's Human Rights Organization.

The voting results revealed the consistency of the Islamists and their allies in serving their agendas and programs. The approval of the isolation law also reflected the Islamists' skill in recruiting military militias as a tool of strategic pressure. On the other hand, the voting results highlighted a significant contradiction in the voting behavior of the NFA, as 27 of its members voted in favor of approving the law despite its clear intention to exclude most of its leadership, including Jibril. The results confirm the assumption that the NFA, despite its high popularity and obtaining the largest number of seats on party lists in the GNC, showed significant weakness in directing the votes of its members due to its lack of party cohesion based on solid ideological or class foundations.

The enactment of the law marked a major shift in the Libyan political scene, significantly tipping the balance of power in favor of the Islamists and their allies. GNC President Al-Magarif resigned,⁸³ leading to the appointment of Nouri Abu-Sahmain, an Amazigh MP from the Loyalty to the Blood of Martyrs bloc, as President of the GNC.⁸⁴

Abu Sahmain, as 'Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,' financed the creation of the Libya Revolutionary Operations Chamber militia,⁸⁵ aligned with the Islamists. Additionally, he established the 'Integrity and Reform Commission in the Libyan Army'⁸⁶ to enforce political isolation among former officers, resulting in retirements by late 2013.⁸⁷

Amid increasing exclusionary politics, marginalized factions, including the NFA, Zintani militias, former regime loyalists, federalists, and army officers led by Haftar, intensified their criticism of the GNC. As Islamists and their allies imposed Resolution No. 7 and the Political Isolation Law through military coercion, other factions began resorting to violence to achieve their agendas.

On February 14, 2014, Military Commander Khalifa Haftar declared a freeze on the National Conference and the Constitutional Declaration, proposing a temporary presidential body led by the Supreme Counsel for the Judiciary.⁸⁸ Initially met with skepticism due to his lack of military

⁸³ استقالة رئيس المؤتمر العام الليبي محمد المقرئ بعد إقرار قانون "العزل السياسي"، عربي **BBC NEWS**، 2023/10/30،

<https://bbc.in/3FKxDAh>

⁸⁴ "انتخاب نوري أبو سهمين رئيساً للبرلمان الليبي"، عربي **BBC NEWS**، 2013/6/25، <https://bbc.in/3QJtaEI>.

⁸⁵ In June 2013, General National Congress head Abu Sahmain assembled former militias from the Ministry of Defense to form the Libyan Revolutionary Operations chamber, tasked with securing Tripoli by July. Sahmain assumed powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Libyan National Army and head of the operations chamber. Initially allocated 900 million Libyan dinars, the group faced accusations of kidnapping Prime Minister Zeidan on October 4, 2013. Following this incident, the General National Congress voted to oust Sahmain from his role as commander-in-chief. Though the motives behind the kidnapping remain unclear, it's evident that the Operations Room coordinated with several Islamist-leaning politicians for the act. Pack, Mezran and Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian," pp. 47-48.

⁸⁶ "هيئة النزاهة وإصلاح الجيش الليبي تصدر قراراً بعدم انطباق معايير النزاهة على عدد من ضباط الجيش"، وكالة الأنباء الليبية، <https://bit.ly/3Sptv02>. 2013/12/7

⁸⁷ Notably, these measures targeted military commander Khalifa Haftar, whose prominence predates the law's enactment. Although Haftar admitted in a televised interview that he respects the political isolation decision, acknowledging its flaws, he argued that it does not apply to him. He reasoned that none of those who drafted or approved the law appointed him to his current position as a general in the army <https://bit.ly/46cqqny>.

⁸⁸ "ليبيا: اللواء خليفة حفتر يعلن تجسيد عمل المؤتمر الوطني والحكومة الليبية والإعلان الدستوري" <https://rb.gy/vrnr8g>

power,⁸⁹ Haftar later amassed a significant military force comprising former army personnel, and tribal, federal, and Salafist forces. Concurrently, on February 18, 2014, the Al-Qaqaa and Al-Sawaiq⁹⁰ militias from Zintan, allied with the NFA, issued a statement giving the GNC 5 hours to cede power and warning of prosecution if ignored.⁹¹

Amid escalating military threats and the government's inability to resolve the oil port crisis,⁹² Libya descended into a full-scale civil war, sparked by Haftar's launch of the "Dignity" military operation on May 16, 2014.⁹³ Primarily targeting armed militias aligned with revolutionary and Islamic factions in Benghazi, including jihadist groups like Ansar al-Sharia,⁹⁴ these forces were politically allied with the entities controlling the GNC.

Haftar's military operation in the east and the Zintan militias' movements in the west sparked Operation Libya Dawn⁹⁵ as a preemptive measure against Operation Dignity spreading westward. Before the newly elected HOR could take its oath, Libya Dawn militias attacked Tripoli on July 13, 2014, targeting Tripoli International Airport and adjacent camps held by Zintan militias. By the end of August 2014, Libya Dawn had established control over Tripoli.⁹⁶

The HOR convened its inaugural session on August 5, 2014, in Tobruk.⁹⁷ This relocation was due to the refusal of the GNC to relinquish power to HOR. Simultaneously, on August 25, 2014,

⁸⁹ "انقلاب حفتر.. حقيقة أم استعراض إعلامي؟"، الجزيرة نت، 2014/2/15. <https://bit.ly/3QGh4LV>

⁹⁰ The Al-Sawaiq militia, formerly led by Imad Trabelsi, was among the most heavily armed militias in western Libya. It is nominally associated with the Ministry of Defense. Following the regime's downfall, the militia played a role in safeguarding officials and government facilities in Tripoli. Additionally, it was tasked with protecting Prime Minister Ali Zeidan after his abduction in Tripoli by Islamist-linked militias associated with the Libyan rebels' operations room, as claimed by Zeidan himself post-kidnapping. Pack, Mezran and Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian," p.29

⁹¹ "أرشيف وتاريخ في تغطية إخبارية حول البيان الذي صدر من كتيتي الصواعق والقذائف" <https://bit.ly/40nxM5X>

⁹² In mid-2013, the warlord and leader of the Petroleum Facilities Guard, Ibrahim Al-Jadhran, capitalized on protests in the oil-rich cities of eastern Libya, which demanded an increase in their share of oil revenues and improved services. He established what is known as the political office for the Cyrenaica region after he and his militants took control of three major oil export ports with a capacity of up to 600,000 barrels per day. For more, see:

<https://rb.gy/fdchqh>. 2016/1/11. بوابة الوسط، "إبراهيم الجضران.. قرصان أم حامي حمى النفط؟"

Despite the government's dismissal of him, he did not respect its decision and continued to control the fields, even attempting to export oil through unofficial channels. See: Libya's Cyrenaica hires Canada-based lobbyist to help sell oil", *Reuters*, January 7, 2014. <https://reut.rs/3FGtLA7>

⁹³ Aimen Majeed and Moutaz Ahmed, "Haftar launches Benghazi attack on Islamists", *Libya Herald*, May 16, 2014. <https://bit.ly/49mGBBs>

⁹⁴ Founded in Benghazi in April 2012, Ansar al-Sharia is a political Islamist militia advocating for Sharia law in Libya. Its members, many of whom were part of the Rafallah al-Sahati militia and Libya Shield, participated in the civil war, notably in the Second Battle of Benghazi in March 2011. The militia includes foreign members, particularly Tunisian citizens, and notably refuses to raise the Libyan national flag, opting instead for the flag associated with Al-Qaeda. Designated as a terrorist organization by the United States on January 10, 2014, both its Derna and Benghazi branches were also listed by the United Nations Security Council on November 20, 2014. Pack, Mezran and Eljarh, "Libya's Faustian," pp. 32-34.

⁹⁵ Libya Dawn comprised several Islamic-revolutionary militias, notably the Central Libya Shield, the Libya Revolutionaries operation chamber in Tripoli, and militias primarily from Misrata, alongside forces from Gharyan, Al-Zawiya, and Sabratha. Additionally, there's a militia named the National Guard, led by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense and a former member of the Libyan Fighting Group, Khaled Al-Sharif. Haftar's operation targeted the Benghazi Revolutionary Council, seen as an eastern extension of Operation Libya Dawn.

"عملية فجر ليبيا"، الجزيرة، 2014/8/23، 2023/11/2، في: <https://bit.ly/47gTgUE>

⁹⁶ "ميليشيات فجر ليبيا" الإسلامية تعلن سيطرتها على مطار طرابلس الدولي"، *France 24*، 2014/8/23. <https://bit.ly/3Qo5ofr>

⁹⁷ 1,300 km east of the capital, Tripoli.

some former GNC members reconvened and established a parallel administration, exacerbating the ongoing political and administrative divide. Subsequently, Libya has been engulfed in armed conflict between two factions, each with its own political, military, and foreign supporters, with the divide persisting to date.

6. Conclusion

Nearly twelve years after the GNC elections, this paper challenges media interpretations that portrayed the results as a victory for liberals and seculars over Islamists by highlighting the influence of local and personal interests in Libyan politics. The political scene was drawn along new fault lines that went beyond the media-fabricated Islamist/liberal dichotomy, forming two new camps. One camp sought to monopolize all the gains of the February 17 uprising for itself, while the other considered itself an actual or potential loser because of it. The imposition of laws such as Resolution No. 7 and political isolation under the threat of armed militias pushed anti-Islamist parties to resort to armed violence to avoid exclusion. This also contributed to the formation of temporary political alliances that have nothing in common except the interest of remaining on the political scene. All of that ultimately leads to the concentration of power outside official state institutions. Power dynamics in Libya are driven by armed militias and warlords, further complicating issues such as decentralization and national reconciliation. Questions regarding the role of Islam in legislation are less controversial, as conservative interpretations align with local values and traditions enjoy broad support across major political parties.

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