

Libya

Population: 5,600,000

GDP/capita: \$5,944

Life Expectancy: 76

Religious Groups: Sunni Muslim (97 percent), other (3 percent)

Ethnic Groups: Arab-Berber (97 percent), other [including Greek, Italian, Egyptian, Pakistani, Turkish, and Indian] (3 percent)

Capital: Tripoli

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Ratings Timeline (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

Overview:

Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi continued his bid in 2005 to change Libya's longstanding international image as a rogue state. Although he succeeded to a large degree in ending his country's diplomatic isolation, the changes have as yet meant little in terms of political rights or civil liberties for the population.

Formerly ruled by the Ottomans and colonized by Italy, Libya gained independence in 1951 and was ruled by a pro-Western monarch, King Idris, until he was ousted from power in 1969 in a military coup led by Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, then only 25.

Embittered by Western control of Libyan oil resources, Qadhafi adopted a political platform that was aggressively anti-Western. He has ruled Libya since, and although he holds no official title, he is the undisputed leader of the country, surrounded by a cult of personality. Qadhafi published a three-volume treatise, *The Green Book*, which explains his political ideology—a mix of socialism, pan-Arabism, and Islam.

Over the next two decades of Qadhafi's rule, Libya became a leading state sponsor of terrorism and provided financial assistance to various insurgent and terrorist groups around the world. The United States imposed sanctions against Libya in 1981 and bombed targets in the country in 1986, including Qadhafi's home. Three years after the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, the UN Security Council imposed an air embargo and banned Libya from importing arms and oil production equipment.

After the country went through several years of political isolation and economic decline, Qadhafi decided to move Libya in a different direction in 1999; he sought to make amends with the international community by accepting responsibility for, and compensating victims of, the acts of terror Libya had directed or financed. The United Nations suspended sanctions against Libya the same year. Members of the European Union (EU) slowly began reestablishing diplomatic and trade relations with Libya in subsequent years.

In early 2001, one of the two suspected perpetrators of the Pan Am bombing was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, while the other suspect was acquitted and freed. Over two years later, the Libyan government offered to pay about \$10 million to each of the families of the 270 victims of the attack, prompting the United Nations to permanently lift its sanctions against Libya. Qadhafi also agreed to compensate both the families of victims of the 1989 bombing of a French airliner over Niger and the victims of the 1986 Berlin nightclub bombing.

In 2004, Qadhafi made his first trip to Europe in more than 15 years, and several European leaders traveled to Libya as well. The EU also lifted its arms embargo against Libya, the final hurdle to building fully functioning diplomatic relations.

The past few years have seen a dramatic shift in Libya's relationship with the United States, with relations beginning to improve after Libya renounced weapons of mass destruction in late 2003. The United States established a liaison office in Tripoli in June 2004, and that year the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, William Burns, was the first U.S. government official to visit Libya in three decades. In 2005, U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Senator Richard Lugar visited Libya at President George Bush's request and referred to Libya as an important partner in the war on terrorism. No longer seeing Libya as a pariah, U.S. president George Bush announced his government's intention to establish full diplomatic relations with Libya. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reaffirmed this intention in August, saying that Libya could expect full diplomatic relations if it improved its human rights record and reformed democratically. Americans can now travel to Libya freely, and U.S. oil companies can do business in the oil-rich nation. At the same time, there have been media reports that Libya attempted to orchestrate the assassination of Saudi king Prince Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud in 2003 (when he was Crown Prince), which Libya denies.

Much of Libya's image reconstruction appears to be directed by Saif al-Islam, Qadhafi's son, who runs a charity foundation in Libya. According to press reports, the group has listed telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and fax numbers for people to report past and current human rights abuses. While his organization, the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charity Associations, is part of the revamping of Libya's image, it is thus far unclear what real impact the group can have on civil rights and political liberties for Libya's population. In July, the group called for the release of Islamist opposition individuals who had not been involved in violence.

Although Libya boasts a high literacy rate and vast oil wealth, years of sanctions, cronyism, and poor economic policies have resulted in a weak economy. Libya's reintegration into the international community and its economic reforms of the past three years should signal some improvement.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Citizens of Libya cannot change their government democratically. While in theory a state of the masses with direct popular rule, Libya in reality is a dictatorship governed by Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi and a few of his close associates. Qadhafi's *Green Book*, a political treatise published in three volumes beginning in the late 1970s, lays out his theories on government and politics, combining Islamic and socialist elements. In theory, the so-called people's committees and revolutionary committees are elements of direct popular rule. A unicameral General People's Congress is also a government tool employed to keep the population in check.

Legal opposition political parties do not exist in Libya, and authorities maintain tight control over any political activity through the security apparatus. The main Libyan opposition groups function in London but have established little presence inside the country.

Libya was rated 117 out of 159 countries in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index, due to widespread corruption in government and business.

Journalists in Libya function in an atmosphere of fear and censorship. Media outlets are state-controlled, and they reflect the opinions of the state. In early June 2005, Dayf al-Ghazal al-Shuhaibi, a former journalist for the government-owned daily *Azahf al-Akhdar* and contributor to critical Libya-focused websites based in London, was found dead in Benghazi after going missing a couple of weeks earlier. The journalist, who was shot in the head, had been critical of the authorities in articles published shortly before his death, accusing the government of repression and financial corruption. Another Libyan journalist, Abd al-Raziq al-Mansuri, who also wrote critical articles for a London-based website, has been in detention since January on charges of illegal possession of a weapon. However, al-Mansuri was apparently detained before the weapon was found in his home, and he was held incommunicado without access to a lawyer or his family for the first several months after his detention. The journalist was also apparently questioned during his initial detention about his critical writing. Libyan authorities are responding to the internet's proliferation by cracking down on dissent on the Web.

The government closely monitors mosque activity, as it fears militant Islamist influences. According to the U.S. State Department's 2004 International Religious Freedom Report, the small minority of non-Muslims in Libya, largely composed of foreigners, are able to practice their faith in public places of worship. Academic freedom remains restricted, with teachers and professors avoiding public debates or discussions of politically sensitive topics.

Authorities limit free assembly, public debates, and demonstrations, and independent civil society groups are weak. There are no independently functioning unions or professional associations besides the National Trade Unions federation, which has ties to the government.

The People's Court, which had for years been used to imprison political opponents, was closed last year, but the remainder of the judiciary is not independent. Arbitrary arrest and imprisonment are still practiced. In May 2004, five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor were sentenced to death after being found guilty of deliberately contaminating some 400 hospitalized children with HIV. The case was on appeal and awaiting judgment as of November 2005, while the defendants remained in detention, where they have been since 1999. The group claim they were tortured in order to extract a confession, and two of the nurses claim they were raped. This year, the Libyan government called on the Bulgarian government to negotiate with the families of the infected children to pay them financial reparations in order to secure the release of the nurses. In June 2005, a Libyan court found nine police officers not guilty of torturing the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor.

In May 2005, a team from the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted a three-week mission to Libya for the first time. It was the second major visit to Libya by an international human rights group in as many years, following Amnesty International's trip in 2004. HRW concluded that Libya was taking steps to improve its human rights record but said that Libya continued to repress and imprison political opponents. The group also highlighted the fact that detainee confessions are sometimes obtained through physical and psychological abuse. During the mission, the HRW group met with high-level government officials and several prisoners, and visited prisons, detention centers, and police stations. The group did speak to prisoners in private but were required to travel with government guides. They also raised the case

of Fathi al-Jahmi, a member of the General People's Congress, who is in prison after calling for democratic reform in Libya.

The Berber (Amazigh) population in Libya face discrimination, as they do in most North African states. The status of women in Libya is better than in many other Arab countries, but women still face legal and social hurdles. Libyan girls enjoy more access to education than girls in other neighboring countries, but traditional Islamic practices that favor males in areas such as divorce and inheritance are the norm. While Libya is a signatory to the 2003 Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, which protects women from harmful traditions like female genital mutilation, there are reports that it is still practiced on a small scale in some of the more rural areas of the country.