

Azerbaijan

Ethnicity in Azerbaijan

Group selection

The declaration of independence in Azerbaijan was accompanied by severe ethnic conflict in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was mostly populated with ethnic Armenians. As a result of this conflict, Azerbaijan lost its control over the region. The conflict also resulted in the fact that the group size of Armenians, who were one of the largest ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan before the conflict (5.6% in 1989), was reduced to 1.8% (¹⁹⁶). We identify the following politically relevant ethnic groups: **Azeri, Armenians, Lezgins, and Talysh**. The latest census took place in 2019. However, at the time of updating this report the results were not available online. The previous census took place in 2009. Numbers in the census of 2009 differ only slightly from those of 1999.

¹⁹⁶ [Population Statistics of Eastern Europe, 2009]

Renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 resulted in massive population displacement of ethnic Armenians. As of early 2021, approximately 60'000 refugees (60% of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh) remained in Armenia but the displacement situation was described as “dynamic and continues to evolve” (¹⁹⁷). Therefore, no changes in group sizes were made but remain to be evaluated in the next update.

¹⁹⁷ [REACH Armenia, 2021]

Power relations

1991-1993

Azeris are politically dominant, with president Aliyev dominating in practice the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government (¹⁹⁸; ¹⁹⁹). In the 2013 presidential elections, the National Council of Democratic Forces participated against the ruling party, aiming for stronger democratic value and giving the minorities hope of political and social reforms. However, president Aliyev won the election (²⁰⁰). In September 2016, the constitution was amended giving even more power to the President (²⁰¹).

¹⁹⁸ [US State Department]

¹⁹⁹ [CIA, 2017]

²⁰⁰ [UNPO, 2015]

²⁰¹ [Amnesty International, 2017]

The Armenians are mostly concentrated in secessionist Nagorno-Karabakh and control the area with support from Armenia. All Azeris have been expelled from Nagorno-Karabakh (²⁰²). The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh remains tense. Since the ceasefire in 1994, breaches have been reported regularly. April 2016 saw the most severe clashes since the ceasefire, resulting in more than 100 deaths, but no major changes in territorial control (²⁰³). Armenians are

²⁰² [Halbach, 1999]

²⁰³ [Amnesty International, 2017]

thus categorized as having separatist autonomy for the entire period (self-exclusion).

The Lezgins in northern Azerbaijan remain powerless. They are a Sunni Muslim group whose lands are divided by the international border between the Russian republic Dagestan and Azerbaijan. Political organizations like the national movement of Sadwal that wants to unify the Lezgin people and create an independent Lezgistan do not receive much support from the Lezgin people, because Lezgins are well integrated into the Azeri society (²⁰⁴; ²⁰⁵). While Sadwal dropped the call for independent Lezginistan in 1996, the potential for Azerbaijan to be destabilized by Lezgins still exists (²⁰⁶).

Sporadic incidents of discrimination against ethnic minority groups have been reported. These mostly include restrictions on the ability to teach in minority languages and harassment by local authorities (²⁰⁷).

²⁰⁴ [Halbach, 1999]

²⁰⁵ [UNPO, 2013]

²⁰⁶ [Coene, 2010]

²⁰⁷ [US State Department]

1994-2021

The Talysh ethnic group is settled in the south-eastern parts of Azerbaijan, close to the border to Iran. They constitute approximately 1.3% of the total population. They have always been socially discriminated and under strong pressure to assimilate. First attempts to gain national liberation were made in 1993, when they declared the formation of the Talysh-Mugansk Republic. This Republic was, however, destroyed immediately, through the arrest of their leader Hummatov. Hummatov was imprisoned until 2004. The Talysh National Movement continued its activities, pursuing the goals of decentralization of power and stronger minority rights (²⁰⁸; ²⁰⁹; ²¹⁰). Hence, we code the Talysh as politically relevant but powerless as of 1994.

Besides, the ethnic power relations on the national level have not changed substantially, the Azeri still are the dominant ethnic group (²¹¹; ²¹²; ²¹³).

In September 2020, a six-week war erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh and ended with military victory of Azerbaijan. The country regained most of the territory it lost to Armenian forces in the previous war that ended in 1994. However, the ensuing peace agreement has left the status of the de facto autonomous region unresolved, as various sources state. “Baku, which before the war talked of offering various sorts of autonomy to a Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control, now appears to reject anything save, perhaps, some local control over schools and the right to use the Armenian language. To Armenians, nothing short of self-determination, which is to say, independence from Baku, is acceptable” (²¹⁴). “The lack of political status for Nagorno-Karabakh is a blow to the self-governing institutions of the entity, creating uncertainties and insecurities for its Armenian population. The return of Azerbaijanis into Nagorno-Karabakh, as stipulated in the agreement, without recognition of the need for the political status for the entity to be addressed, will create impossible

²⁰⁸ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

²⁰⁹ [Novarank Foundation, 2005]

²¹⁰ [UNPO, 2015]

²¹¹ [CIA, 2017]

²¹² [Minority Rights Group International, 2018]

²¹³ [Freedom House, 2020]

²¹⁴ [International Crisis Group, 2020]

conditions for communal coexistence [between Azeris and Armenians] that the agreement seems to expect” (215).

Meanwhile, the tense situation of Nagorno-Karabakh has played an important role in shaping the attitude of the central government towards its Armenian minority over the past years. “Amidst fears of secession and state disintegration, the authorities primarily regard the situation of ethnic minorities from the perspective of national security, rather than human rights and inclusion. In particular, the Azerbaijani government actively discourages initiatives by Azerbaijani NGOs to engage Armenians, and information on the situation within Nagorno-Karabakh is tightly controlled. As a result, the situation for Armenians remaining in Azerbaijan outside Armenian-controlled territory remains difficult: hate speech against Armenians continues to feature heavily in state-controlled media, while peace-building efforts involving civil society actors are typically undermined” (216). From this perspective, the Armenians should be coded as discriminated. However, as the majority still resides in the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region, which for now continues to have its autonomous institutions, the Armenians keep their status as self-excluded. Their status might change if the region comes under full control of Azerbaijan’s central government.

²¹⁵ [Ohanyan, 2020]

²¹⁶ [Minority Rights Group International, 2018]

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Political status of ethnic groups in A.

From 1991 until 1993

| Group name | Proportional size | Political status |
|------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Azeri | 0.92 | DOMINANT |
| Lezgins | 0.02 | POWERLESS |
| Armenians | 0.013 | SELF-EXCLUSION |



Figure 37: Political status of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1991-1993.

From 1994 until 2021

| Group name | Proportional size | Political status |
|------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Azeri | 0.92 | DOMINANT |
| Lezgins | 0.02 | POWERLESS |
| Armenians | 0.013 | SELF-EXCLUSION |
| Talysh | 0.013 | POWERLESS |



Figure 38: Political status of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1994-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan

From 1991 until 1993

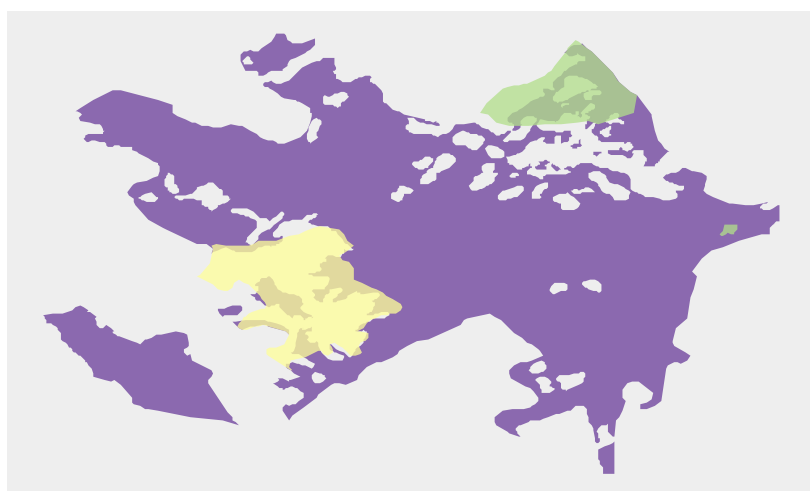


Figure 39: Map of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1991-1993.

| Group name | Area in km ² | Type |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| ■ Azeri | 66 028 | Regionally based |
| ■ Armenians | 7840 | Regionally based |
| ■ Lezgins | 3824 | Regionally based |

Table 16: List of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1991-1993.

From 1994 until 2020

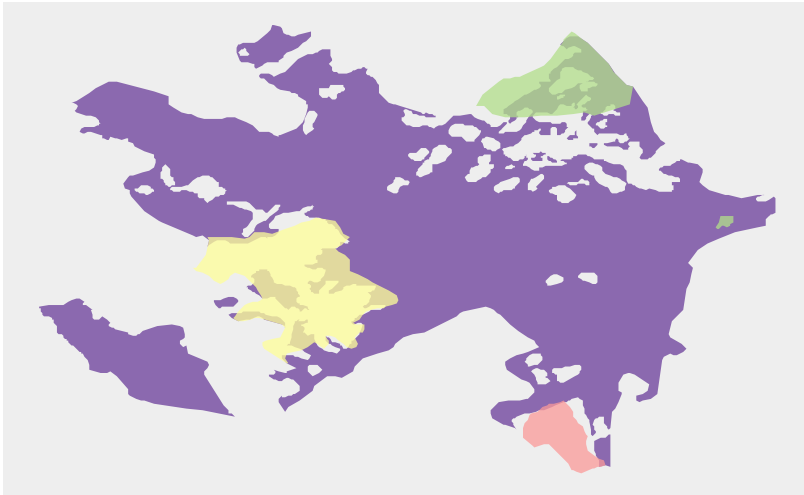


Figure 40: Map of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1994-2020.

| Group name | Area in km ² | Type |
|---|-------------------------|------------------|
| ■ Azeri | 66 028 | Regionally based |
| ■ Armenians | 7840 | Regionally based |
| ■ Lezgins | 3824 | Regionally based |
| ■ Talysh | 1620 | Regionally based |

Table 17: List of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 1994-2020.

From 2021 until 2021

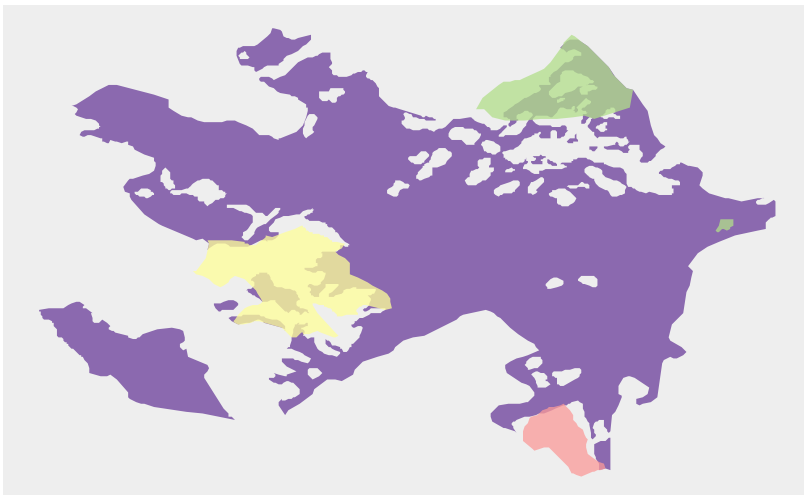


Figure 41: Map of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 2021-2021.

| Group name | Area in km ² | Type |
|---|-------------------------|------------------|
| ■ Azeri | 66 028 | Regionally based |
| ■ Armenians | 6161 | Regionally based |
| ■ Lezgins | 3824 | Regionally based |
| ■ Talysh | 1620 | Regionally based |

Table 18: List of ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during 2021-2021.

Conflicts in Azerbaijan

Starting on 1991-12-28

| Side A | Side B | Group name | Start | Claim | Recruitment | Support |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------|------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Government of Azerbaijan | Republic of Art-sakh | Armenians | 1991-12-28 | Explicit | Yes | Yes |

Starting on 1993-06-05

| Side A | Side B | Group name | Start | Claim | Recruitment | Support |
|--------------------------|--|------------|------------|-------|-------------|---------|
| Government of Azerbaijan | Military faction (forces of Suret Husseinov) | | 1993-06-05 | | | |
| Government of Azerbaijan | OPON Forces | | 1994-09-29 | | | |