

# Iran

## *Ethnicity in Iran*

### *Group selection*

We identify the following politically relevant ethnic groups in Iran:

- **Persians:** They represent the biggest ethnic group in Iran. All estimates give a population share of 51%.
- **Azeri:** Gurr, Fearon and the CIA estimate the group's size at 24%, while Fischer Weltallmanach gives a lower estimate of 20%. This is apparently due to the separation of a smaller population group from the Azerbaijani group by Weltallmanach. This group seems to be only negligibly different from the Azerbaijani, so the estimate of 24% is retained.
- **Kurds:** The CIA Factbook gives 7%, Fischer Weltallmanach gives 8% and Gurr gives 9%. We take the average of these three estimations, 8% for the Kurdish group.
- **Arabs:** All estimates range around 3%.
- **Baloch:** All estimates range around 2%.
- **Turkmens:** All estimates range around 2%.
- **Armenians:** Their group size in absolute numbers amounts to 0,0058% of the total population.
- **Bahais:** Their group size in absolute numbers amounts to 0,0045% of the total population.
- **Jews:** Their group size in absolute numbers amounts to 0,0039% of the total population.
- **Assyrians:** Their group size in absolute numbers amounts to 0,0034% of the total population.
- **Zoroastrians:** Their group size in absolute numbers amounts to 0,0015% of the total population.

Christians (Assyrians and Armenians), Zoroastrians and Jews are officially recognized minority groups with guaranteed representation in the parliament (<sup>2182</sup>).

<sup>2182</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

*Power relations*

*Persian and Azeri:* Because Iran is a theocratic republic, power rests chiefly with the clergy. The Supreme Leader is appointed for life (with the possibility of premature dismissal) by the Assembly of Experts, a body formed by scholars of Islamic law. Assembly candidates are in turn vetted by the Guardian Council, half of which is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader (the other half of course is indirectly appointed by the Leader). This circle assures the power of the leader in particular and of Shi'a clergy in general. Access to power is therefore theoretically open to all Shi'a. For this reason, the Persian majority of the population is coded as senior partner, and ethnic groups that also belong to Shi'a Islam and that are well integrated in Persian society - namely the Azeri from 1947 on - are coded as junior partner.

In recent years, Azeri Shias remain “well integrated into government and society”<sup>(2183)</sup>. However, some forms of discrimination against Azeris and violations of their cultural rights have been reported (ibid.). They also were limited in the use of their own language <sup>(2184)</sup>. In spite of this, Persians are continued to be coded as senior partner and Azeris as junior partner.

The new president Rohani, received a lot of electoral support from Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, and Azeri <sup>(2185)</sup>.

*Kurds and Arabs:* Both Kurds and Arabs have been targeted since 1980 due to ethnic differences and due to the fact that significant parts of the Kurdish population belong to Sunni Islam. Repression takes many forms: from the destruction of Sunni mosques, to the more recent closure of newspapers and political organizations. Both regions suffer regular periods of unrest, with the state reacting drastically. People suspected of political activism are arrested and brought before secret trials, where severe sentences including the death penalty are handed down. Human Rights Watch, the Minority Rights Group and Amnesty International all provide documentation for numerous cases in this regard. “With the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005 the situation of Kurdish Iranians, (along with other Sunni minorities) went from bad to worse” (Minorities at Risk Project, 2009). Both groups are therefore coded as discriminated after 1980 (the Iranian Revolution took place in 1979), which has also persisted in recent years <sup>(2186; 2187; 2188)</sup>.

<sup>2183</sup> [US Department of State, 2012]

<sup>2184</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

<sup>2185</sup> [Menashri, 2013]

<sup>2186</sup> [US Department of State, 2012]

<sup>2187</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

<sup>2188</sup> [Human Rights Watch, 2017]

*Balochs, Turkmens and Bahais:* “Like the Kurds, due to their adherence to the Sunni branch of Islam, the Balochs have become subjected to religious discrimination in the Islamic Republic. Again, this new found discrimination is added to the already existing class-, ethnic-, language-, and region-based discrimination” (2189, 17). Therefore, the Balochs are also coded as discriminated from 1980 on. “Like many other non-Persian communities, the Turkmen community has been subjected to forceful resettlement and assimilatory policies in modern Iran” (2190, 20). For this reason, Turkmens are coded as discriminated. The Bahais, being a non-Shia religious community, “became subject to the severest forms of discrimination. Their Bahai identity became criminalized; they became subject to open assault and persecution on all fronts; their assemblies even in the privacy of their homes were prohibited” (2191, 109). They are coded as discriminated, which has also persisted in recent years (2192; 2193; 2194).

<sup>2189</sup> [Asgharzadeh, 2007]

<sup>2190</sup> [Asgharzadeh, 2007]

<sup>2191</sup> [Asgharzadeh, 2007]

<sup>2192</sup> [US Department of State, 2012]

<sup>2193</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2016]

*Armenians, Assyrians, Zoroastrians and Jews:* The US State Department’s Religious Freedom Report (2195) states that Assyrian Christians and the Jewish community could relatively freely exercise their faith. However, there has been a lot of anti-Semitic rhetoric and the Iranian government also harassed evangelical Christians.

<sup>2195</sup> [US Department of State, 2012]

The Armenian and Assyrian minorities in Iran are the largest Christian communities in the country. Since no evidence of targeted discrimination or state violence against these groups was found both groups are coded as powerless. (Note: Conversion to Christianity results in intimidation and persecution by the Iranian authorities). Turning to the tiny minority of Zoroastrians, there appear to be some restrictions on their freedom of religion (2196). However, the regime’s treatment of the Christian (Armenian and Assyrian), Jewish and Zoroastrian communities appears less harsh than in the case of the Sunni and Bahai groups. Thus, these three religious minorities are coded as powerless. “The Zoroastrians, like the Christians and Jews, are recognized as an official religious minority under the 1979 constitution. The constitution permits the Zoroastrians to elect one representative to the Majlis, and, like the other [legal] minorities, they may seek employment in the government. They maintain houses of worship, known as fire temples, and their own cemeteries. They generally enjoy the same civil liberties as Muslims. As a group, Zoroastrians have not been singled out for discrimination or persecution because of their religious beliefs” (2197, 131). In the local elections in 2017, Bahais were not allowed to run for office because their ethnicity is not recognized in the country’s constitution (2198).

<sup>2196</sup> [Choksy, 2011]

<sup>2197</sup> [Curtis Hooglund, 2008]

<sup>2198</sup> [Sepehri Far, 2017]

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## Political status of ethnic groups in Iran

*From 1946 until 1946*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Persians	0.51	DOMINANT
Azeri	0.24	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kurds	0.08	SELF-EXCLUSION
Arabs	0.03	POWERLESS
Baloch	0.02	IRRELEVANT
Turkmen	0.02	POWERLESS
Armenians	0.0058	POWERLESS
Bahais	0.0045	IRRELEVANT
Jews	0.0039	POWERLESS
Assyrians	0.0034	POWERLESS
Zoroastrians	0.0015	POWERLESS



Figure 428: Political status of ethnic groups in Iran during 1946-1946.

*From 1947 until 1960*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Persians	0.51	SENIOR PARTNER
Azeri	0.24	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	POWERLESS
Arabs	0.03	POWERLESS
Baloch	0.02	IRRELEVANT
Turkmen	0.02	POWERLESS
Armenians	0.0058	POWERLESS
Bahais	0.0045	IRRELEVANT
Jews	0.0039	POWERLESS
Assyrians	0.0034	POWERLESS
Zoroastrians	0.0015	POWERLESS

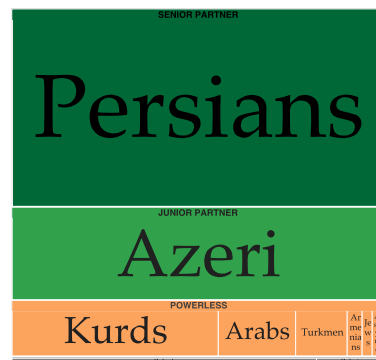


Figure 429: Political status of ethnic groups in Iran during 1947-1960.

*From 1961 until 1979*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Persians	0.51	SENIOR PARTNER
Azeri	0.24	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	POWERLESS
Arabs	0.03	POWERLESS
Baloch	0.02	POWERLESS
Turkmen	0.02	POWERLESS
Armenians	0.0058	POWERLESS
Bahais	0.0045	IRRELEVANT
Jews	0.0039	POWERLESS
Assyrians	0.0034	POWERLESS
Zoroastrians	0.0015	POWERLESS



Figure 430: Political status of ethnic groups in Iran during 1961-1979.

*From 1980 until 2017*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Persians	0.51	SENIOR PARTNER
Azeri	0.24	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	DISCRIMINATED
Arabs	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Baloch	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Turkmen	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Armenians	0.0058	POWERLESS
Bahais	0.0045	DISCRIMINATED
Jews	0.0039	POWERLESS
Assyrians	0.0034	POWERLESS
Zoroastrians	0.0015	POWERLESS



Figure 431: Political status of ethnic groups in Iran during 1980-2017.



## Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Iran

From 1946 until 1960

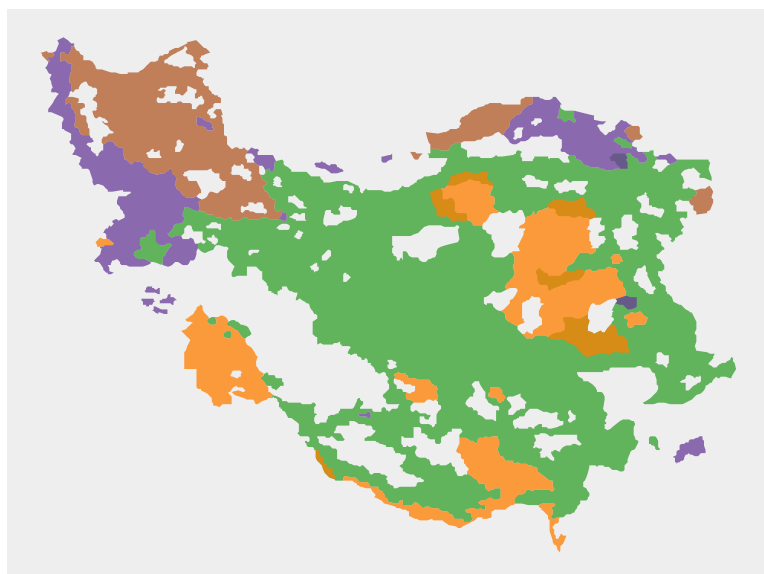


Figure 432: Map of ethnic groups in Iran during 1946-1960.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Persians	677 134	Regional & urban
<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Arabs	185 644	Regional & urban
<span style="color: purple;">■</span> Kurds	107 548	Regional & urban
<span style="color: brown;">■</span> Azeri	102 445	Regional & urban
<span style="color: darkbrown;">■</span> Turkmen	18 985	Regionally based
Zoroastrians		Urban
Armenians		Urban
Assyrians		Urban
Jews		Urban

Table 145: List of ethnic groups in Iran during 1946-1960.

*From 1961 until 1979*

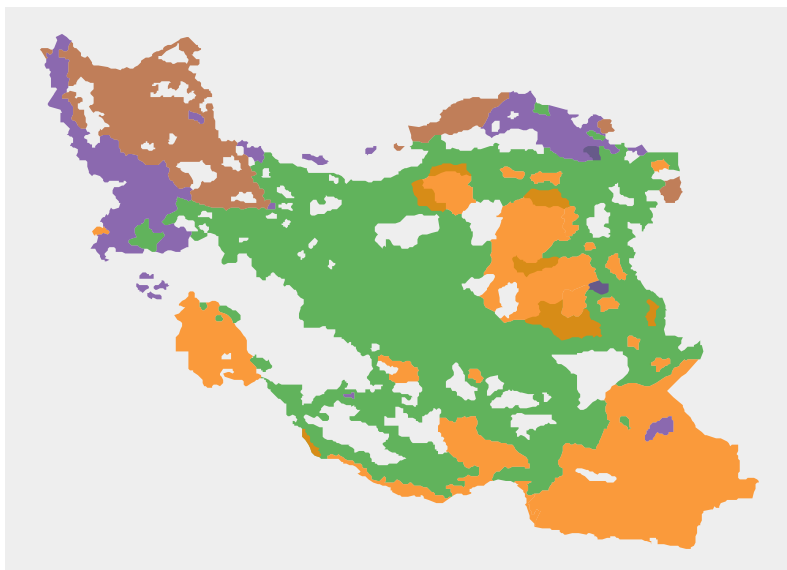


Figure 433: Map of ethnic groups in Iran during 1961-1979.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■ Persians	677 134	Regional & urban
■ Baloch	211 045	Regional & urban
■ Arabs	185 644	Regional & urban
■ Kurds	107 548	Regional & urban
■ Azeri	102 445	Regional & urban
■ Turkmen	18 985	Regionally based
Zoroastrians		Urban
Armenians		Urban
Assyrians		Urban
Jews		Urban

Table 146: List of ethnic groups in Iran during 1961-1979.

*From 1980 until 2017*

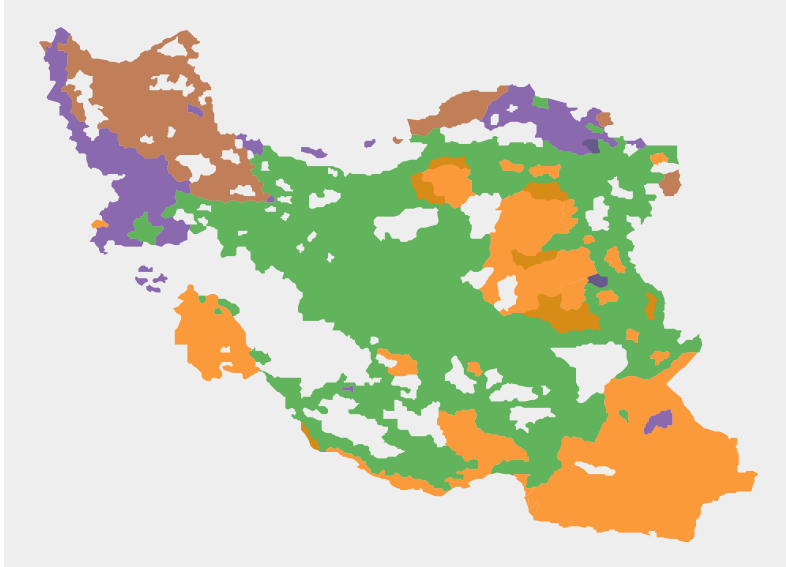


Figure 434: Map of ethnic groups in Iran during 1980-2017.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■ Persians	677 134	Regional & urban
■ Baloch	211 045	Regional & urban
■ Arabs	185 644	Regional & urban
■ Kurds	107 548	Regional & urban
■ Azeri	102 445	Regional & urban
■ Turkmen	18 985	Regionally based
Assyrians		Urban
Jews		Urban
Bahais		Urban
Armenians		Urban
Zoroastrians		Urban

Table 147: List of ethnic groups in Iran during 1980-2017.

## *Conflicts in Iran*

*Starting on 1945-11-18*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Iran	Republic of Azerbaijan	Azeri	1945-11-18	Explicit		No

*Starting on 1946-05-30*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Iran	KDPI	Kurds	1946-05-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes

*Starting on 1972-04-10*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Iran	Government of Iraq		1972-04-10			

*Starting on 1972-08-12*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Iran	MEK	Persians	1972-08-12	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Iran	Jondullah	Baloch	2003-12-30	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Iran	PJAK	Kurds	2005-07-25	Explicit	Yes	

*Starting on 1979-05-29*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Iran	APCO	Arabs	1979-05-29	Explicit	Yes	Yes