

ISSN 2532-845X



GEOPOLITICAL REPORT

VOLUME 4

YEAR 2023

Geopolitical Report

Publisher: **SpecialEurasia**

Website: www.specialeurasia.com

Email: info@specialeurasia.com

Online ISSN: **2532-845X**

Date: **December 2023**

Publisher: **SpecialEurasia**

Editors: **Silvia Boltuc, Giuliano Bifulchi**

Country: **Italy**

City: **Rome**

Address: **Via Torrenova, 407**

Language: **Italian, German, English**

SpecialEurasia

SpecialEurasia is a geopolitical Intelligence platform that transforms events into valuable outlooks, allowing public and private institutions, organisations, and individuals to confidently understand the increasingly complex international environment.

Our Mission

SpecialEurasia helps our members and partners to understand and navigate a complex and ever-changing global environment. Therefore, SpecialEurasia provides solid Intelligence for the decision-making process in international relations, security, and economics, supporting public companies and institutions with written and oral reports, risk assessments, infographics, tailored interactive maps, consulting and training courses.

Our Methodology

SpecialEurasia develops comprehensive, independent, and unbiased analysis by examining current events through our geopolitical methodology. This allows us to interpret the meaning of today's global events, block out the noise, inform decision-making and develop a more accurate view of the future.

Our Network

We have developed a solid network of international partners, contacts and sources which support our activities and projects. SpecialEurasia is not a media agency. Therefore, our goal is not to report daily news and events. By contrast, we want to read behind the lines of relevant events and inspect a single case from different points of view.

Geopolitical Report

SpecialEurasia's publication, *Geopolitical Report ISSN 2532-845X*, aims at investigating the current geopolitical and socio-cultural events and trends which are shaping the world of international relations, business and security creating a debate by allowing scholars and professional experts to share their views, perspectives, work results, reports and research findings. One can submit manuscripts, analytical reports, critical responses, short articles, commentaries, book reviews to info@special- Eurasia.com.

Information about the organization's goals, activities, projects and publications which can be freely downloaded can be found on the website www.specialeurasia.com.

Copyright © 2023 SpecialEurasia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at info@special- Eurasia.com

Table of Contents

TENSIONS AT THE BORDER BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN: AN ANALYSIS.....	4
INTRODUCTION	5
THE PASHTUNISTAN ISSUE.....	6
THE PAKISTANI SEARCH FOR STRATEGIC DEPTH	8
PAKISTAN’S HARMFUL SUPPORT OF THE TALIBAN	10
PAKISTAN-TALIBAN TIES AND THE FUTURE INSTABILITY OF PASHTUNISTAN	12
ANALYSING ETHNIC MINORITIES AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN	15
INTRODUCTION	16
DISCOVERING IRANIAN ETHNIC MINORITIES	17
<i>Azerbaijanis</i>	17
<i>Kurds</i>	19
<i>Arabs</i>	21
<i>Baluch</i>	23
<i>Turkmen</i>	23
<i>Qashqai</i>	24
<i>Lurs</i>	24
<i>Armenians</i>	25
<i>Mazandarani People (also called Mazani or Tabari)</i>	26
<i>Gilaks: (or Gils)</i>	27
<i>Talyshis</i>	27
<i>Tat</i>	27
<i>Assyrian/Chaldean</i>	28
<i>Dom</i>	29
RELIGIOUS MINORITIES	30
CONCLUSION	31
ANALISI DELLE RELAZIONI BILATERALI TRA AFGHANISTAN E TURKMENISTAN	33
INTRODUZIONE	33
STORIA DELLE RELAZIONI BILATERALI	34
I RAPPORTI ECONOMICI TRA AFGHANISTAN E TURKMENISTAN.....	38
<i>La cooperazione in ambito energetico</i>	38
TENSIONI LUNGO IL CONFINE, PROBLEMI DI SICUREZZA E LA SITUAZIONE DEI TURKMENI AFGHANI: L’ATTITUDINE DI AŞGABAT.....	40
CONCLUSIONI	42
GEOPOLITICS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL ETHNIC MINORITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	44
INTRODUCTION	45

THE FORUM OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE ROLE OF NORTH CAUCASIAN ETHNIC MINORITIES 48
CONCLUSION 51

Analysing Ethnic Minorities and Identity in Contemporary Iran

Silvia Boltuc*

Abstract in English

Iran is a richly diverse nation, woven from a multitude of ethnicities, each contributing to its vibrant cultural landscape. Although Persians form the majority, Iran's societal tapestry thrives on the invaluable contributions of diverse minorities and indigenous communities. Beyond ethnic diversity, the nation is further enriched by small religious minorities, collectively enhancing the depth and richness of Iranian traditions. To comprehend Iran's political landscape and the factors guiding its policies, a profound grasp of the intricate sociocultural fabric of Iranian society is essential. Despite historical interest from orientalists and modern researchers and academics, there remains a notable dearth of information concerning these communities and their distinctive characteristics. This paper endeavours to offer a concise overview of the principal ethnic groups existing in contemporary Iran, shedding light on their religious backgrounds and historical trajectories.

Keywords: Iran, ethnic groups, society, religion, geopolitics.

Abstract in Italiano

Il profilo antropologico dell'Iran presenta una moltitudine di etnie, ciascuna delle quali contribuisce al ricco panorama culturale del Paese. Sebbene i persiani costituiscano la maggioranza, il tessuto sociale dell'Iran prospera grazie al contributo inestimabile di diverse minoranze e comunità indigene. Al di là della diversità etnica, ad accrescere ulteriormente la complessità del suo tessuto sociale ci sono diverse minoranze religiose, che coesistono con la maggioranza sciita all'interno della Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran. Per comprendere il panorama politico del Paese e i fattori che influenzano le sue politiche, è essenziale una profonda conoscenza dell'intricato tessuto socioculturale della società iraniana. Nonostante l'interesse storico da parte degli orientalisti, e quello dei ricercatori e accademici moderni, rimane una notevole carenza di informazioni riguardanti queste comunità e i loro caratteri distintivi. Questo paper si propone di offrire una panoramica concisa dei principali gruppi etnici esistenti nell'Iran contemporaneo, facendo luce sulla loro configurazione storico-religiosa.

Parole chiave: Iran, minoranze etniche, società, religione, geopolitica

* **Silvia Boltuc** is the SpecialEurasia Managing Director. She is an international affairs specialist, business consultant and political analyst who has supported private and public institutions in decision-making by providing reports, risk assessments, and consultancy. Due to her work and reporting activities, she has travelled in Europe, the Middle East, South-East Asia and the post-Soviet space assessing the domestic dynamic and situations and creating a network of local contacts. She is also the Director of the Energy & Engineering Department of CeSEM – Centro Studi Eurasia Mediterraneo and an editor/analyst at the Italian media agencies *Notizie Geopolitiche*, *Opinio Juris*, and *European Affairs Magazine*. She is also in charge and the manager of the editorial project *Persian Files* ISSN 2975-0598. Previously, she worked as an Associate Director at ASRIE Analytica. She co-authored the book “*Conflitto in Ucraina: rischio geopolitico, propaganda jihadista e minaccia per l'Europa*” (Enigma Edizioni 2022).

Introduction

Iran is a tapestry of remarkable diversity, comprising a myriad of ethnic groups that enrich its cultural texture.

While Persians make up most of the population, the Iranian society thrives with the contributions of various minorities and indigenous peoples. Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, and smaller but significant groups like Baluch, Arabs, Gilaks, Mazanis, Turkmen, and other Turkic tribes, as well as nomadic communities, collectively add to the intricate mosaic of Iranian society.¹ Furthermore, minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, and the Afro-Iranian community bring unique cultural elements, augmenting the nation's multifaceted heritage.

This diversity isn't just evident in the demographics but also in the rich linguistic landscape, encompassing diverse Indo-Iranian, Semitic, Armenian, and Turkic languages, including Persian, Azeri, Kurdish, Gilaki, Talysh, Qashqai, Mazandarani, Luri, Baluchi, Arabic, and various other non-Turkic languages, underscoring the vibrant Iranian culture.

In addition, religious beliefs paint a mosaic of diversity within an Islamic Republic setting. While Islam is the predominant faith, with around 90% practicing Shia Islam primarily following the Twelver Jafari School, the country also embraces a multifaceted substrate of religious minorities. This includes Sunni Muslims, Ismaili Muslims, and Ahl-e Haqq (Yarsanism), offering a spectrum of Islamic beliefs. Beyond Islam, Iran is the house of significant religious communities like the Bahai, Christians from various denominations, Zoroastrians (Mazdayasnie), Jews, and Sabeen Mandaean, each adding their unique hue to the nation's spiritual landscape. The coexistence of diverse religious beliefs not only emphasises the integration of religious minorities within the Iranian context but also makes a significant contribution to the richness and allure of its cultural heritage.

An analyst typically utilises information reported by journalists, researchers, economists, and the academic community collectively to generate reports highlighting the dynamics of a country and attempting to forecast future trends. However, due to the extensive presence of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities in Iran, in addition to its incredible geographic diversity and equally rich history, simply collecting data isn't enough to gain a profound understanding of Iranian society needed to uncover its transformations.

¹ Alessandro Bausani, «The Persians, from the Earliest Days to the Twentieth Century», London, 1972.

This research, while not exhaustive in its research, serves as a compendium aiming to explore some of the most significant ethnic minorities within Iran.²

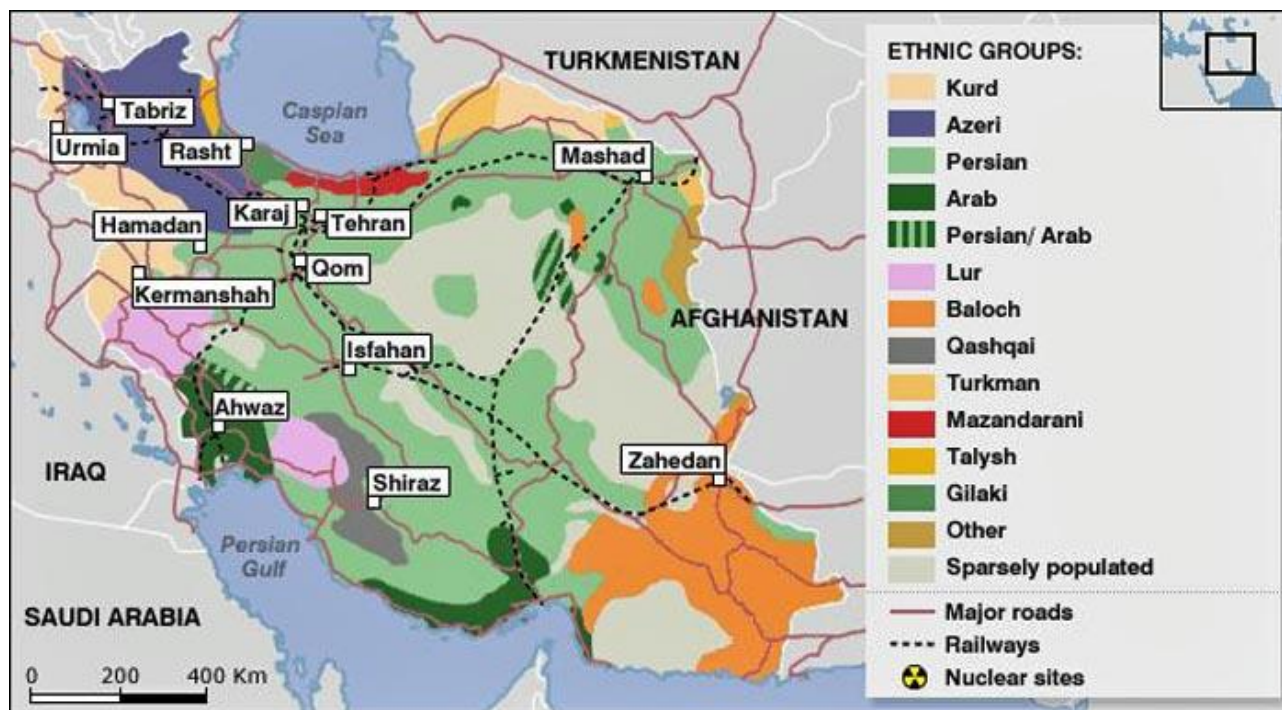


Figure 2 The map of the different ethnic groups in Iran. Source: Iranpoliticsclub, «Iran Ethnic, Population and Attractions Maps», <https://iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps15/index.htm>

Discovering Iranian ethnic minorities

Azerbaijanis

This paragraph refers to the Azerbaijanis who speak the language known as Azerbaijani Turkish or Azeri. With a population exceeding 18 million, the Azeri-speaking community constitutes Iran's largest ethnic minority. Almost all Turkish-speaking Azerbaijanis are Shi'ite Muslims, like the large majority of Iranians. Primarily Shi'ite and predominantly residing in the northwest regions bordering Azerbaijan, they differ from their more secular counterparts across the border.

² Within the scholarly discourse on ethnic groups and religious minorities in Iran, an array of perspectives has been meticulously examined by researchers and regional experts, yielding a rich and diverse literature in various languages. In alignment with the objective of this research to elucidate and disseminate information regarding this matter, the author judiciously curated sources that are poised to enhance the reader's comprehension. It is noteworthy, however, that the interested reader may find it beneficial to explore additional sources and contributions from the academic community to deepen their understanding of this complex and multifaceted topic. Cf. Kameel Ahmady, «From Border to Border. Research Study on Identity and Ethnicity in Iran», Avaye Buf Publisher, 2023; Brenda Shaffer, «Iran is More Than Persia. Ethnic Politics in Iran», Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2022; Rasmus Christian Elling, «Minorities in Iran. Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini», Ney York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013; Hussein D. Hassan, «Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities», Washington D.C., Congressional Research Service, 2008; Massoume Price, «Iran's Diverse Peoples. A Reference Sourcebook», Santa Barbara, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005.

A significant presence of this group also thrives in Tehran and are well-integrated into Iranian societal and political structures.

Azerbaijanis are commonly categorized into three groups based on their language: *Türk* for Turkish speakers, *Kürt* for Kurdish speakers, and *Fārs/Pārs* for Persian speakers. According to the Russian orientalist Vladimir Minorsky, the Turkification of Azerbaijan has been relatively superficial, citing as evidence both the persistence of Tati dialects and the “bastardisation” of the Turkish language, notably the loss of vowel harmony characteristic of Tabrizi speech.³

There are some sub-ethnic groups of the Azerbaijanis living in Iran, such as:

- 1. The Shahsevan:** the Shia Muslims who speak Azerbaijani Turkish and identify as Shahsevan possess a rich and intricate tribal structure rooted in their nomadic past. The term «Shahsevan», as noted by Minorsky, translates to ‘those who love the shah’ in Turkic, reflecting their historical association. Their tribal system encompasses various hierarchical institutions, with the ethnic group constituting the largest unit, followed by the tribe, clan, *gubak*, *ube*, and family. Despite uncertainties about their origins, the Shahsevans are believed to have formed from multiple tribes coming together, including Kurdish influences among them.⁴
- 2. The Qarapapaqs (Karapapakhs or Terekeme):** After the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay between Iran and Russia in 1828, they relocated to Qajar Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Initially belonging to a Turkoman group, the Karapapakhs are identified in the Encyclopaedia of Islam as “Turkicised Kazakhs.” They should not be confused with Karakalpaks, a Turkic ethnic group native to Karakalpakstan in North-western Uzbekistan.⁵
- 3. The Bayat:** The Bayat, an Oghuz tribe, initially embarked on migration from the Aral steppes. Their initial stop was the city of Nishapur in the southern region of Khorasan, situated in the northeastern part of Iran. Following assaults by Mongol forces in the 13th century, the Bayat clan dispersed, relocating to three different regions. This

³ Vladimir Fëdorovič Minorskij, «Turkish-Persian Demarcation», *Izvestiya of the Imp. Russian Geographical Society*. Vol. LII, iss. V, Petrograd, 1916.

⁴ Eckart Ehlers, Fred Scholz, Günther Schweizer, «Nordost-Azerbaidshan und Shah Sevan-Nomaden. Strukturwandel einer nordwestiranischen Landschaft und ihrer Bevölkerung», *Beihefte zur Geographischen Zeitschrift*, Vol.6 Heft 26, 1970.

⁵ Vasily Barthold & Ronald Wixman, «*Qarapapakh*». In van Donzel, E.; Lewis, B.; Pellat, Ch. & Bosworth, C. E. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Volume IV: Iran–Kha* (2nd ed.), Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1978.

Oghuz tribe is prevalent in various countries such as Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, where the surname Bayat holds significant prevalence, often appearing in diverse variations.

4. **The Qajars:** The Qajars, originally a Turkic tribe, initially resided in Armenia before their emergence and expansion in Asia Minor during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Within the Safavid state, many individuals from the Qajar tribe held influential positions, contributing to its authority. In 1794, Agha Mohammed, a chieftain of the Qajars, established the Qajar dynasty, displacing the Zand dynasty and assuming control in Iran.
5. **The Ayrums:** Historically, they have been linked to the vicinity near Gyumri, Armenia. In 1828, following the Treaty of Turkmenchay, Iran ceded the khanates of Erivan and Nakhchivan to the Russian Empire. To prevent Turkic tribes from falling under Russian rule, Iranian Crown Prince Abbas Mirza invited many of them to settle within Iran's newly defined boundaries. Notable among the Ayrums is Tadj ol-Molouk Ayromlou, who became the Queen Consort of Iran, the wife of Reza Pahlavi, and the mother of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.
6. **The Qaradaghis:** a Turkic sub-ethnic group of Azerbaijanis mainly living in the Southern Aras River. Qaradagh encompasses an expansive mountainous region situated in the northern part of Iran's East Azerbaijan Province. Within this area lived many Turkic tribes, including the Qaradaghis. Although these tribes have transitioned to a sedentary lifestyle, remnants of their culture, rooted in nomadic pastoralism, continue to endure through the ages.⁶

Kurds

The Kurdistan region serves as the primary home for Kurds, spanning across southeastern Turkey, northeastern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and parts of Syria and Armenia. Historically, the Kurds and their land were divided among Persia, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

Following a 1921 treaty between the Soviet Union and Turkey, the Kurdish-populated Caucasus region joined the Ottoman Empire, and later, parts of Kurdistan fell under Iraqi and Syrian authority with the annexation of the Mosul region.

⁶ Karl Foy, «Azerbajġanische Studien mit einer Charakteristik des Sdtdrkischen», Mitteilungen des Seminars fr Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, *Westasiatische Studien*, Vol.6, 1903.

In Iran, Kurdish settlements primarily exist in the Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam and southern part of the West Azerbaijan provinces. In addition, there are Kurds residing in the North Khorasan Province.

Kurds trace their roots to Iranian origins and speak a northwestern Iranian language, encompassing various dialects such as Gorani, Zaza, Laki, Sorani and Kormanji. Certain dialects, such as the Sorani dialect, have undergone further division into distinct variations.⁷

Kurds have different clans, the most significant of which are the Mokri, Bani-Ardalan, Jaaf, and Kalhor.

- 1. Mokri:** According to tribal lore, a Kurdish tribe from western Iranian Azerbaijan, the Mokri tribe traces its lineage back to the princes of Baban, and its name originates from one of its notable leaders, Mekkar. Tribal legends suggest that several Persian rulers, including Shah Abbas I, sought assistance from the Mokri tribe during wars, resulting in a victory against the Turks. However, historical records depict the Mokri as an exceptionally turbulent tribe, renowned more for their raids than for their military achievements. They are recognised for speaking a remarkably pure form of the Kurdish language. It is believed that Shah Abbas I resettled the ancestors of the Mokri in the region around 1600, coinciding with the relocation of most Kurdish tribes to Khorasan during the same period.
- 2. Bani-Ardalan:** a Kurdish tribe of northwestern Iran, now dispersed in Sanandaj and surrounding villages. Russian orientalist Minorsky believed that the name Ardalan was derived from a Turkish rank. The ruling family of this tribe claimed descent from Saladin. The Ardalan state was completely independent until it was incorporated into Safavid Iran as a semiautonomous frontier province by the name of Ardalan. Minorsky reported that during the Safavid period, the Ardalans were deeply involved in the struggles between the Persian and Ottoman empires and, whenever it suited them, they shifted their allegiance to the Ottoman government.⁸
- 3. Jaaf:** The Jaaf, a nomadic Kurdish confederation, resides in southern Iraqi Kurdistan within the Sulaymaniyah region and extends into the Sanandaj area of Iranian Kurdistan. As the largest Kurdish tribe in the Middle East, they share cultural ties

⁷ Nikitine Basile, «Les Kurdes: étude sociologique et historique», Paris, 1956.

⁸ M. Mardūk Kordestānī, «Tārīḵ-e Kord wa Kordestān (History of the Kurds and Kurdistan)», Tehran, 1358 Š./1979.

with other central Kurdish inhabitants, such as the Mokri, Baban, and Soran. Embracing Sunni Islam of the Shafiite *madhhab* (a school of thought within the Islamic jurisprudence), a significant number of Jaaf members follow the Qaderi and Naqshbandiyya Sufi orders. The earliest mention of this tribe dates back to the Perso-Ottoman peace treaty of May 1639. According to oral traditions within the Taayshai branch, its members originally hailed from Armenia and were Christians. The Jaaf dialect, part of the Sorani Kurdish dialects, has integrated various elements from Gurani and south Kurdish languages. Notable figures from this tribe include Dawood Fattah al-Jaff, renowned as 'The Lion of Kurdistan', appointed as the leader of the Jaff tribe and served as a Royal Minister in Iran. While most Kurds adhere to Sunni Islam following the Shafii school, others follow Yazidism, Yarsanism (or Ahl-e Haqq), Qadiriyyah Order and the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya brotherhood. The Kurdish population in Iran is estimated to be approximately 8.1 million.⁹

Arabs

Arabians have preserved their Arabic language and numerous traditional practices, though they have experienced a reduction in some of their distinctive ethnological traits. The most recent population census conducted in 1976 estimated the Arabian tribal population to be approximately 300,000. This scarcity of updated information stems partly from the considerable migration of people from Khuzestan to different regions of Iran after the Iraqi invasion in 1980. The initial Arabian tribes made their way to Iran from the Arabian Peninsula and primarily settled in the Khuzestan and Hormozgan provinces.¹⁰

- 1. Khuzestan Province:** Arab tribes' distribution in Khuzestan spans between the Arvand Roud (Shatt al-Arab) river, which separates the southern borders of Iraq and Iran, and the southern regions extending towards the Persian Gulf, reaching from Shush in the north. Their territory lies to the west of the Bakhtiyari territory, inhabited by the Lur tribe across Eastern Khuzestan, Lorestan, Bushehr, and Isfahan provinces. Among the significant Arabian tribes in Khuzestan, the Bani Kaab stands as the largest, originating from Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The Arabs living in Khuzestan are known as Ahwazi Arabs, as in Arabic the area is called 'al-Ahwaz'. Under the Safavids this area was referred to as 'Arabistan'. It was

⁹ Amir Šaraf-al-Din Bedlisi, «Šaraf-nāma: tāriḡ-e mofaššal-e kordestān (A detailed history of Kurdistan) », Tehran, 1988.

¹⁰ 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Zarrīnkūb, «The Arab Conquests in Iran», *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. IV, 1985.

renamed under the Pahlavis with a Persian name. The prevalent Arabic dialect in the province is known as Khuzestani Arabic, a Mesopotamian variant commonly used by Arabs residing across the borders of Iraq and Kuwait. This dialect holds similarities with the Basrah (Basrawi) accent and is easily comprehensible to other Arabic speakers. Notably, both the Ahwazi and Basrawi accents exhibit substantial influence from Farsi (Persian language). The majority of Ahwazi Arabs adhere to the Shia branch of Islam.

- 2. Bushehr and Hormozgan:** In the coastal areas of Iran, particularly in Bushehr and Hormozgan, there is a relatively small Arab population, numbering in the few hundred thousand. With the arrival of Islam, a significant influx of influential tribes from the Arabian Peninsula migrated to Iran's southern shores, with certain groups aspiring to establish their independent emirates.¹¹ The predominant Sunnis in the southern regions still are native Persian Sunnis (Achomi or Lari), predominantly following the Shafii school.

The Lari/Achomi represent an Iranian sub-ethnic community within the Persian demographic, primarily dwelling in the southern regions of Iran, historically recognised as *Irahistan*. This ethnic subgroup communicates through the Achomi language, an older linguistic variant predating modern Persian and bearing a closer resemblance to ancient Persian.

- 3. Khorassani Arabs:** The Arabs settled in Khorasan Province, Iran, during the era of the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1513). Significant populations of Khorasan Arabs live in cities such as Birjand, Mashhad, and Nishapur. This community comprises both Sunni and Shia Muslims. While identified as Khorasan Arabs, they predominantly speak Persian, with only a small fraction speaking Arabic as their native language.
- 4. Khamseh Arabs:** The Khamseh, located in Fars province in southwestern Iran, is a tribal confederation that was established between 1861 and 1862 during the reign of Shah Naser ed-Din. It comprises a mix of Turks, Lurs, and Arabs, who eventually came to be collectively recognised as Arabs, distinguishing themselves from the Turkic Qashqai community. Shah Naser ed-Din brought together five nomadic tribes (Arab, Nafar, Baharlu, Inalu, and Basseri) placing them under the authority of the Qavam ol-Molk family.¹² This act of forcibly uniting tribes was a recurring strategy

¹¹ Leone Caetani, «Annali dell'islam (Annals of Islam) », 1905, Milano.

¹² Fredrik Barth, «Nomads of South Persia: The Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy», Oslo, 1961.

used by various Persian dynasties to counter the increasing influence of other groups in the region.¹³

Baluch

The Baluch, the indigenous tribes of Baluchistan, reside across Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Despite debates over their origins, Baluchi legends suggest they migrated from Aleppo (modern Syria) during the Arab conquests of the ninth century in search of pastureland and water. They are a nomadic, pastoral ethnic group that speaks the Western Iranian Baluch language.

By the 9th century, Arab writers noted the Baluch living in the region between Kerman, Khorasan, Sistan, and Makran in present-day eastern Iran. However, their involvement in plundering travellers along desert routes led to conflicts with the Buyids, followed by clashes with the Ghaznavids and the Seljuqs. After their defeat, they were compelled to migrate eastward to what is presently the Baluchistan province in Pakistan. As of today, they constitute approximately 2% of the Iranian population.¹⁴

The majority of Baluch follow the Hanafi *madhhab* with smaller numbers adhering to Qarmatian, Zikri, and Shia beliefs. Consequently, Sharia law and Sunni Islamic institutions (as the Maki Religious School of Zahedan) hold significant sway in Baluchi society, with Molavis or Sunni religious leaders serving as key figures that Baluch turn to in case of disputes between families or tribes.¹⁵

In Baluchi society, both tribal and religious authorities regulate internal dynamics. Contrasting Pakistan, where violent competition among tribes and militant separatist movements, each loyal to its own tribal leader, pose threats to regional security and political stability, Iran's social structure unites Baluchis under the leadership of tribes and religious figures.¹⁶

Turkmen

The Turkmen represents a smaller group of Iranian Turks. Although some of them are located in Mazandaran and Khorasan, they mainly live in the Golestan Province, south of the Turkmenistan border. The land they live is referred to as *Turkmen-Sahra*, the Turkoman

¹³ G. F. Magee, «The Tribes of Fars», Simla, 1945.

¹⁴ Mansel Longworth Dames, «The Baloch Race», *Asiatic Society Monographs*, Vol.4, London, 1904.

¹⁵ Firuz Mirza Farmanfarma, «Safar-nama-ye Kerman o Baluchestan (Kerman and Baluchistan travel book) », ed. M. Nezam Mafi, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963.

¹⁶ Denis Bray, «The Jat of Baluchistan», *Indian Antiquary*, Vol.54, 1925.

Desert. Turkmens came first to the region at the time of their forefathers, the Seljuk Turks. Although in Iran they have given up a nomadic lifestyle, they have kept most of their tribal Turkmen customs.¹⁷

As a proof of the significant contribution that the rich ethnic mosaic of the Iranian society gave to the country, it is possible to cite the Iranian spiritual leader, philosophical poet, Sufi and traveller Magtymguly Pyragy. He was Turkmen and is considered to be the most famous figure in Turkmen literary history. The central Iranian authorities celebrated him erecting a mausoleum over his grave. A second example to cite is Agha Mohammed Khan, founder of the Qajar dynasty of Iran. Turkmens are Muslim, but still mysticism and other past religious traditions are present.

Qashqai

The Qashqai is not properly an ethnic group. Indeed, it is a conglomeration of clans of different ethnic origins: Lori, Kurdish, Arab and Turkic. But most of the Qashqai are of Turkic origin, and almost all of them speak a Western Ghuz Turkic dialect, which they call Turki.

Qashqai are known for their pastoral nomadic lifestyle, moving seasonally with their herds across the Zagros Mountains and surrounding regions. They are furthermore renowned for their intricately woven carpets and textiles, which are highly valued both within Iran and internationally. In terms of social structure, the Qashqai traditionally organised themselves into tribal units, led by chiefs or khans, and maintained a strong sense of community and identity. Their society traditionally had a patriarchal structure. In recent years, due to various factors, including modernisation, government policies, and socio-economic changes, some Qashqai groups have gradually transitioned away from nomadic life to settled or semi-settled lifestyles.¹⁸

Lurs

Historically, Lurs were originally Kurds who formed their distinct Lur ethnic identity about a millennium ago. There are four primary tribes among the Lurs: Bakhtiari, Mamasani, Kohgiluyeh, and the Lur proper. During the Seljuq dynasty, the region inhabited by the Lurs was

¹⁷ Gerhard Doerfer, «Das Chorasantürkische (The Khorasan Turkish)», *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten*, 1978.

¹⁸ Oliver Garrod, «The Qashqai Tribe of Fars», *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol.33, 1946.

divided into two parts: Big Lor (comprising Kohgiluyeh and Buyer-Ahmad) and Small Lor (encompassing Ilam and what is now Lorestan).¹⁹

Presently, Lurs are divided into two groups: one leading a settled life, and the Bakhtiari People who maintain a nomadic lifestyle. Their current territories span three provinces: Lorestan (the land of Lurs), Bakhtiari, and Kuhgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad. Moreover, Lurs make up a substantial portion of the population in various provinces such as Khuzestan, Fars, Ilam, Hamadan, and Bushehr. The majority of Lurs speak an Iranian dialect called Luri, which is the closest living language to Archaic and Middle Persian. Southern Lurs (Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Mamasani, Sepidan, Bandar Ganaveh, Bandar Deylam) speak Luri, while in the Chaharmahal-o-Bakhtiari region, Lurs speak the Bakhtiari dialect (Central Luri). Almost half of the Lurs in Lorestan province speak Laki, a dialect closer to Kurdish than Luri, which is more similar to Persian. Following the Islamisation of Iran, the majority of Lurs embraced Shia Islam, although some follow Yarsanism. Despite their conversion, remnants of their Zoroastrian past persist in their folklore.²⁰

Armenians

Armenians have a notable presence in almost all major cities across Iran. Traditionally, the Azerbaijan region and the Isfahan area were their main hubs dating back to the 11th century, but Tehran has now taken precedence as their central location. The Iranian Azerbaijan holds the oldest history of Armenian settlement in Iran, having been part of historical Armenia. Towns like Tabriz, Koy, Urmia, and Maraga historically had significant Armenian populations.

The Iranian Armenian community historically recognised the authority of the catholicos of Lebanon, previously the catholicos of Echmiadzin until the 1950s, with some Iranians still acknowledging this authority. Most Iranian Armenians follow the Gregorian church of Armenia, but there are also Catholics, Carmelites, Protestants, and Sabbatarians. In the Iranian Azerbaijan region, a small number follow the Eastern Orthodox church. The Armenian presence was so strong in the Azerbaijan region that Persians referred to two neighbourhoods, Gala and Lilava, as *Armenestan*. Additionally, there are Armenian sites linked to significant events in Iranian history, such as the St. Thaddeus church, known for the Armenians'

¹⁹ P. Anastase, «Luristan, or Land of the Luri», *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (JGLS)*, Vol.7, 1913-14.

²⁰ Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Aria, «Safar-nama-ye Lorestan wa Kuzestan (Lorestan and Kuzestan travel book) », Tehran, 1992.

resistance against the invading Ottoman army in 1917-18, resulting in a decimation of the Armenian population in the region.²¹

Julfa, an emblematic city, once a small township adjacent to Isfahan, now integrated into the city, is another significant centre. It traditionally served as the seat of the Armenian diocese of southern Iran and India. Despite once being entirely occupied by a Christian community in Iran, a substantial emigration to Russia occurred in the late 1940s after the catholicos of Soviet Armenia urged the faithful to repopulate the ancestral homeland, which had suffered devastation due to World War II, famine, and post-revolutionary atrocities in Russia. This led to a significant reduction in the Armenian population.

Despite the integration of Julfa into Isfahan and modernisation efforts that have destroyed many of its old buildings, efforts to preserve its historical and cultural significance were evident. The University of Isfahan began offering undergraduate courses in Armenian history, language, and literature in the early 1960s, while the University of Tehran established an Armenian section in its Graduate Faculty in 1970, recognising the ethnic group's importance within Iran. The Armenian community has made significant cultural and economic contributions to 20th-century Iranian society.²²

Mazandarani People (also called Mazani or Tabari)

They primarily inhabit the Mazandaran, Gilan, and Golestan provinces in Iran, although they can also be found in other regions of the country. Their major settlements lie in the northern areas along the Caspian Sea, and their traditional lifestyle is intricately linked to this region's geography.

Mazandarani language is closely related to the Gilaki (or Gilani) language (spoken in the Gilan province, west of Mazandaran), which falls under the northwestern Iranian language group within the larger Iranian language family. Many Mazandarani speakers (even in the heart of Mazandaran province) refer to their own language as Gilaki, a term used by Persian speakers and linguists worldwide solely to refer to the language spoken in Gilan province. Historically, the Mazandarani speaking people have primarily thrived in agriculture. Practically all of them adhere to Shia Islam. As of 2019, the Mazandarani population numbered around 4,480,000.

²¹ Iradž Afšar, «Aramena-ye Iran (Armenians of Iran) », *Ettela'at-e mahana III/9*, Iran, 1339 Š./1960.

²² Varhan A. Bayburdyan, «Nor-Julayi galut'ə kat'olik misionerleri kazmakerput'yunnerə (The colony of New Julfa and Catholic missionary organizations) », *Telekagir (Bulletin of the Acad. Sci. Arm. S.S.R.)*, Vol.9, 1964.

The Mazandarani people trace their origins back to the Tapuri and Amaldi tribes. Their territory was referred to as Tapria or Taplestan, meaning the Land of Taprith. They share close ties with neighbouring Gilaks and South Caucasian peoples. Throughout the Safavid, Afshar, and Qajar dynasties, Mazandaran was home to various other ethnic groups, such as Georgians, Circassians, Armenians, and other Caucasian communities. Descendants of these groups still inhabit different parts of Mazandaran today.²³

Gilaks: (or Gils)

Their primary settlements are along the southwestern shores of the Caspian Sea within the Gilan region, establishing them as one of the principal ethnic groups in Iran's northern territories. The Gilaks share close kinship with neighbouring Mazandarani people and other ethnic groups of Caucasian lineages. They communicate using the Gilaki language, which falls under the northwestern branch of Iranian languages.²⁴

Talyshis

Native to the Talish region, which spans across Azerbaijan and Iran, covering the South Caucasus and the southwestern coast of the Caspian Sea. Their language, Talysh, belongs to the northwestern Iranian languages and is spoken in the northern areas of the Iranian provinces Gilan and Ardabil. Belonging to the Tatic language family, the Talysh language, although lacking older texts, is believed to have evolved from Old Azeri, the indigenous Iranian language of Iranian Azerbaijan. In the Iranian section of Talish, the majority of Talyshis follow Sunni Islam and adhere to the Naqshbandi order.

Tat

The Tat people in Iran are an Iranian ethnic group living primarily in northern Iran, particularly in the Qazvin Province. The term 'Tat' originates from Turkish and was historically used by Turkic-speaking people to describe settled non-Turkic populations. Iranian Tats speak the Tati language, which comprises a cluster of northwestern Iranian dialects closely linked to the Talysh language, spoken in Iranian Azerbaijan and southward into the provinces of Qazvin and Zanjan. Within the Tati-speaking community, there are Muslims, Christians, and Judaists. In Iran, the majority of Tats adhere to Shia Islam.

²³ Jacques de Morgan, «Mission scientifique en Perse», Vol.V, Paris, 1904.

²⁴ Marcel Bazin, «Ethnies et groupes socio-professionnels dans le nord de l'Iran», *Le fait ethnique en Iran et en Afghanistan*, Paris, 1988.

Assyrian/Chaldean

The Assyrian/Chaldean community in Iran refers to an ethnic and religious minority primarily composed of Assyrians and Chaldeans, who are ethnically and culturally linked to ancient Mesopotamia. They belong to the larger Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac ethnic group, which also includes Syriac-speaking Christians. The Assyrians of Iran are divided into two main churches: the Ancient Church of the East (Nestorian) and the Catholic Chaldean Church, as well as a minor Protestant Church or Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobite Church). Although this research is not meant to delve into this specific topic, it is essential to mention that several ethnic groups divided into different confessions recognised the standard name “Assyrians” after this term had already been accepted, for practical reasons, by their neighbours in the Near East and in Russia, Europe, and America.²⁵

Still, the topic is way more complicated. Just to give a brief example, the Catholic part of these people prefers the appellation of Chaldean. Moreover, there are ethnically nameless Aramean population in these regions which had been satisfied to identify itself by religious denominations. In Iran, Assyrians and Chaldeans mainly live in specific regions, such as Urmia, Tehran, and other parts of western Iran.²⁶

From the 1830s to the end of World War I, Urmia was the spiritual capital of the Assyrians. In 1915-17 the missionary stations in Urmia were able to offer refuge to thousands of Assyrians from the Turkish territory escaping from the persecution of the Turkish government determined to exterminate all Christians. Assyrians and Chaldeans have kept their distinct language, culture, and traditions throughout their history in Iran. Historical event led to the urban Assyrian population diminishing in Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, and its increase in Tehran and, to some extent, in the larger cities of Khuzestan. Assyrian communities can be found also in Hamadan, Kermanshah, Ahvaz, Abadan, and other Iranian cities. The Assyrians of Iran speak Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, a neo-Aramaic language descended from Classical Syriac and elements of Akkadian.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, ratified in 1979, recognises Assyrians as a religious minority and ethnic minority and reserves for them one seat in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Iranian Parliament. Notably, there are five reserved seats in the Iranian

²⁵ Pierre Rondot, «Les chrétiens d’Orient», Paris, 1955.

²⁶ Robin E. Waterfield, «Christians in Persia: Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants», London, 1973.

Parliament for the religious minorities: two seats for Armenians and one for each other minority, Assyrians, Jews and Zoroastrians.

Dom

The Dom people, also known as the Romani or Gypsy community, trace their origins back to the Indian sub-continent and migrated as early as the sixth century. They speak various dialects of the Domari language. Within Iran, the Dom community maintains a unique cultural identity, language, and lifestyle. The Dom people consist of two distinct groups. Both groups speak a dialect of the language known as Romany, which has ties to the North Indo-Aryan language in India. Their specific dialect, Domari, incorporates many Arabic words. The Romani term themselves as *Rom*, derived from the Indian word *Dom*, signifying ‘a man of low caste who earns a living through singing and dancing’. Traditionally, the Dom people lead a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, moving frequently from place to place. They are recognised for their distinctive cultural practices, including traditional crafts, music, dance, and storytelling. Dom communities often maintain tight-knit social structures within their groups.²⁷

Despite their distinct cultural heritage, the Dom people in Iran encounter challenges related to social integration because of their nomadic lifestyle, which sometimes hinders their access to education and healthcare. In recent years, efforts have been initiated to address these challenges and preserve the cultural heritage of the Dom community. It’s important to note that the Middle East Romani are often followers of Islam, and within their group, the passing down of social status and technical expertise typically occurs through the male lineage. The Dom should not be confused with the Ghorbati (also known as Mugat or Hadurgar), originally nomadic, an ethnic group found in Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (in Central Asia they are part of the various communities termed Lyuli).²⁸

The Ghorbati derive their name from the Arabic word *gurbet*, meaning ‘stranger’. In the Arab world, the Romani are referred to as Nauar, hence the Nawari Romani. The Ghorbati have their own dialect often referred to as *Persian Romani*, or as *Mogadi* (in Shiraz), *Magadi* (in Herat), and *Qazulagi* (in Kabul). They are sometimes labelled as *Persian Gypsies* or *Central Asian Gypsies*. In general, gypsies in Iran can be divided into three branches: Roma, Dom and Lom, who speak European Romani, Asiatic or Middle Eastern Domari or

²⁷ F. C. Bailey, «Tribe and Caste in India», *Indian Sociology*, Vol.5, Paris and The Hague, 1961.

²⁸ A. von Gobineau, «Die Wanderstämme Persiens (The wandering tribes of Persia)», *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (ZDMG)*, Vol.11, 1857.

Armenian Lomavren, respectively. These migrants entered the Persian and Arabic territories no later than the 7th century.

Religious minorities

As noted in this research, various Iranian ethnic groups adhere to different religious beliefs. While this study does not delve deeply into this subject, it's important to consider Iranian laws concerning religious minorities to comprehend their potential impact on Iranian society.²⁹

Generally, the primary concern for authorities lies in the conversion of individuals to other faiths, as it contradicts Islamic principles. Non-Muslim religious communities are thus expected, in accordance with Islamic law, to refrain from proselytising Muslims to adopt different beliefs.

Additionally, religious faith should not be used to criticise or undermine the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in its 13th article states that:

*'Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognised religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.'*³⁰

Article 14 further affirms that:

'in accordance with the sacred verse, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights. This principle applies to all who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.'

Based on article 64 of the Constitution, religious minorities have 5 representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran (Parliament).

²⁹ Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Poland, «Minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran», Link: <https://poland.mfa.gov.ir/en/generalcategoryservices/11562/minorities-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran>.

³⁰ Jean Duchesne-Guillemin, «La religion de l'Iran ancien», Paris, 1962.

The only creed that encounters a dogmatic problem is the Bahai religion. Religiously, Bahais are considered *koffar* (unbelievers) in that they claim a book and prophet chronologically posterior to the Koran and Mohammad, regard the Islamic canonical law as abrogated and replaced by that of their own faith, and seek to convert Muslims to their beliefs.

According to open sources, more recently, it has become customary to condemn Bahaism precisely because it is “not a religion” but a political movement working in conjunction with royalist, Zionist, American, British, or other agencies for the subversion of Islam and the Iranian nation.

Conclusion

Geopolitics mainly focuses on how a nation’s geography shapes its politics. However, when examining Iran’s modern history and its prospective paths, it’s crucial not to disregard the significance of anthropology and ethnology in the country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, akin to other states inheriting legacies from great empires, faces the challenge of harmonising the needs of extremely diverse peoples and cultures, while still upholding the shared Iranian identity.

Many ethnic minority groups have ancient histories and unique cultural heritage. Consequently, their presence helps preserve and promote historical sites, rituals, folklore, and traditions that contribute to Iran’s overall historical narrative.

These ethnic minorities actively preserve their native languages, which hold a crucial place in their identities. Language serves as a vital tool for transmitting cultural heritage, literature, folklore, and historical knowledge.

However, it’s essential to note that all Iranian ethnic minorities also speak Farsi alongside their ethnic languages and have been firmly established in Iranian society and geography for centuries.

Indeed, while Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, and other minorities maintain their distinct identities, they also identify themselves as Iranian. Many of these groups or tribes have historically defended the empire and, in more recent times, contributed to the defence of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and took part in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. This underscores their significant contributions to Iranian history.

Apart from the laws safeguarding Iranian ethnic and religious minorities within the nation and ensuring their representation in the Parliament, it’s evident that many individuals of

descent from these ethnic groups have occupied significant positions in the government or positions of authority, although they might not officially represent their specific ethnic community.

These indigenous populations have produced Iranian/Persian poets, athletes, singers, academics, writers, politicians, and more. Institutions that take pride in celebrating Persian cultural heritage and the creative output in the Farsi language recognise their contributions.

Ultimately, embracing ethnic diversity promotes social cohesion and tolerance within Iran. It fosters an environment where different ethnic groups interact, share experiences, and learn from each other, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious society.