

Recently, pan-Turkist groups have been exaggerating the number of Turkic speakers and giving false statistics to different sites. They claim that in 2008, there are 20,25, 30, 35,40 45 million Turkic speakers in Iran (depending on which pan-Turkist site one looks at)! Note the total population of Iran was 70 million in 2008. This article is not interested in the political nature of these group and why such politically motivated exaggerations are made, rather than that, we provides a scientific response to their false claims.

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Actual Statistics from Iran

Unlike what the pan-Turkists claim, there have been statistics done in Iran. The pan-Turkist claim is based on an obscure site named Ethnologue.com (which has been corrected in the **16th** edition-2009). The pan-Turkists however use the **15th** edition of Ethnologue which has incorrect information. After contacting Ethnologue via E-mail in 2007, this is what the main editor Mr. Ray Gordon wrote to us: **“Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I am not able to locate the original source from 1997. In line with your calculations we agree that the figure is likely closest to 11,000,000. We will do further research and update our figures for the next edition Yours, Ray Gordon Ethnologue ,Research”** Indeed the inconsistent nature of ethnologue.com can be seen here from their 1996 to 2000 to 2006 editions.

<http://www.christusrex.org/www3/ethno/Iran.html> (1995 edition)

Another Iranian author (by the pen name Mazdak Bamdadani) has also written to ethnologue.com seeking their explanation on the big change from the 1996 to the 2000 and 2004 editions. They were not also able to provide a source:

Dear Mazdak,

Sorry we cannot help you further with this question. This information was posted by a previous editor, and it probably came from his personal communication with someone else, and was therefore not documented.

Regards, Conrad Hurd

<http://politic.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?politic/more/13089/>

Interestingly enough, Ethnologue which has not done any actual statistics been accused of political meddling and manipulations.

The following information found on the internet about SIL (Ethnologue's publication and endeavor of SIL international) is noteworthy:

SIL has been accused of being involved in moving indigenous populations in South America from their native lands to make way for exploitation schemes of North American and European oil corporations. The most well known example is the case of the Huaorani people in Ecuador, which resulted in many deaths and the moving of the people into reservations controlled by the missionaries.

In 1975, thirty anthropologists signed "The Denouncement of Pátzcuaro", alleging that SIL was a "tool of imperialism", linked to the CIA and "divisions within the communities that constitutes a hindrance to their organization and the defence of their communal rights". In 1979, SIL's agreement with the Mexican government was officially terminated, but it continued to be active in that country (Clarke, p. 182). The same happened in 1980 in Ecuador (Yashar 2005, p. 118), although a token presence remained. Remnants of SIL presence were protested in every subsequent Indian uprising. In the early 1990s, the newly-formed organisation of indigenous people of Ecuador CONAIE once more demanded the expulsion of SIL from the country. At a conference of the Inter-American Indian Institute in Merida, Yucatan, in November 1980, delegates denounced the Summer Institute of Linguistics for using a scientific name to conceal its religious agenda and capitalist worldview that was alien to indigenous traditions.

John Perkins provides an example of criticism of SIL activity:

I had heard that (Jaime Roldos, President of Ecuador, 1979-81) accused The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an evangelical missionary group from the United States, of sinister collusion with the oil companies. I was familiar with SIL missionaries from my Peace Corps days. The organization had entered Ecuador, as it had in so many other countries, with the professed goal of studying, recording, and translating indigenous languages. SIL had been working extensively with the Huaorani and Matsés tribes in the Amazon basin area, during the early years of oil exploration, when a disturbing pattern appeared to emerge. While it might have been a coincidence (and no link was ever proved), stories were told in many Amazonian communities that when seismologists reported to corporate headquarters that a certain region had characteristics indicating a high probability of oil beneath the surface, SIL went in and encouraged the indigenous people to move from that land, onto missionary reservations; there they would receive free food, shelter, clothes, medical treatment, and missionary-style education. The condition was that they had to deed their lands to the oil companies.

Rumors abounded that SIL missionaries used an assortment of underhanded techniques to persuade the tribes to abandon their homes and move to the missions. A frequently repeated story was that they had donated food heavily laced with laxatives - then offered medicines to cure the diarrhea epidemic. Throughout Huaorani territory, SIL airdropped false-bottomed food baskets containing tiny radio transmitters; The rumor was that receivers at highly sophisticated communications stations, manned by U.S. military personnel at the army base in Shell [a frontier outpost and military base hacked out of Ecuador's Amazon jungle to service the oil company whose name it bears], tuned into these transmitters. Whenever a member of the tribe was bitten by a poisonous snake or became seriously ill, an SIL representative arrived with antivenom or the proper medicines - often in oil company helicopters."

SIL was allegedly financed initially by expatriate coffee processors in Guatemala, and later by the Rockefellers, Standard Oil, the timber company Weyerhaeuser, and USAID. [...] By the 1980s, SIL was expelled from Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Panama, and restricted in Colombia and Peru. Today, according to SIL's annual report, funds are donations from individuals, churches, and other organizations, channelled to SIL by the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Whether the information above is correct (allegation of SIL's connection to various government agencies) is not clear or of concern. What I would like to point out here is that Ethnologue did not have a source for their statistics of the 14th and 15th edition, and they have never been to Iran. And their editors also responded that they do not know their source and their number is incorrect. It would not surprise the writer of this article that some pan-Turkists probably provided Ethnologue with false numbers which they cannot locate and justify.

Ethnologue has never done a census in Iran and as admitted by their main editor, they have no idea where the number was taken from and believe that the population of Azerbaijanis in Iran is closer to 11 million.

Indeed the numbers for Ethnologue(2004) do not add and are short by millions:

http://www.azargoshnasp.net/Pasokhbehairani/ethnologue_figuremissing.xls

In the 2009 edition of Ethnologue however, the information has been corrected. We read:

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=azb

11,200,000 in Iran (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001), increasing. 290,000 Afshar, 5,000 Aynallu, 7,500 Baharlu, 1,000 Moqaddam, 3,500 Nafar, 1,000 Pishagchi, 3,000 Qajar, 2,000 Qaragozlu, 130,000 Shahsavani (1993). Population total all countries: 12,612,660.

This 2009 correction is noteworthy considering that several pan-Turkist activists tried to pressure Ethnologue to keep their numbers. In the 2009 edition of Ethnologue however, the information has been corrected. We read:

Here is the letter of the pan-Turkist groups:

<http://www.oyrenci.com/NewsEn.aspx?newsId=2067> (accessed here in 2009) (note it should readily be accessible in google or internet archives if this site's link goes dead)

AN OPEN LETTER TO:

Mr Raymond G. Gordon, AN OPEN LETTER TO:

Mr Raymond G. Gordon,
Editor, Ethnologue
c/o International Linguistics Center
7500 West Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas, Texas 75236 USA

Dear Mr Gordon:

As a group of Iranian and Azerbaijani scholars and human rights activists, we the undersigned would like to express our deepest gratitude to you and all the individuals involved in publishing and maintaining Ethnologue, the most objective and scholarly body of knowledge on world languages.

In recent months we have learned of some dubious attempts to pressure the editors of Ethnologue into reducing the number of Iran's Azerbaijani-Turkic population (also known as Azeri, Azerbaijani, Turk, and Turkish) registered in Ethnologue's current edition. Needless to say, we are deeply concerned and saddened by such attempts. In our capacity as scholars, academics, and human rights activists, we would like to assure you that Ethnologue's current estimation (Web Edition, 2005) of Iran's Azerbaijani and Turkic speaking populations is a most objective estimation that closely corresponds to the facts on the ground. **We hope that the editors and researchers of Ethnologue will not cave in to various Persian ultranationalists' propaganda, and will not allow Ethnologue's scholarly reputation to be tarnished by ideologically motivated misinformation.** To this end, we would like to bring the following to your attention:

1) It is a well-known fact that in Iran's entire history, no kind of census has taken place that would account for the country's population makeup based on ethnicity, nationality, and more importantly, language. All existing figures and numbers in this area are estimations based on unsubstantiated sources and literature. As such, care must be taken that in estimating the number of each ethnic community, the views of local community leaders, scholars, and human rights activists are taken into full account. In particular, an objective researcher must be cognizant to the fact that, due to lack of respect for human rights and the rights of minorities in Iran, both ruling governments and many scholars of the dominant Farsi-speaking group have always presented a distorted view regarding the size and status of disenfranchised communities in the country. Unfortunately, they still continue to do so.

2) In current Iran, even though the significant portion of the Azeri-Turkic population is living in the provinces of Eastern Azerbaijan, Western Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Zanjan; the entire population is by no means limited to these four provinces. These provinces are recent creations based on dubious government measures and questionable administrative purposes. While constituting the core of Azerbaijan's geography, they neither correspond to historical Azeri lands nor do they reflect the Azeri inhabited areas in current Iran. In any kind of research on Iran's Azerbaijani population, it must be borne in mind that the Azeri-Turks reside all over the country, from the current Azerbaijani provinces in the north-west to eastern and central Iran to provinces of Tehran, Khorasan, Markazi, Hamadan, Qazvin, and so forth. Paying due attention to this

important issue is not only a matter of objectivity in social research; it is also a matter of consideration for morality and ethics, particularly in dealing with marginalized communities.

We are confident that Ethnologue's competent researchers will pay attention to the above-mentioned factors and, as always, will present a most objective estimation of Iran's Azerbaijani and Turkic populations in the upcoming edition of Ethnologue. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information or any kind of assistance. We will be more than happy to provide your researchers with relevant historical and contemporary literature on the subject.

Respectfully,

Fakhteh Zamani

Research Engineer; Director of Association for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (ADAPP)

Dr Alireza Asgharzadeh
Sociologist, York University

Dr Seyed Zia Sadr al Ashrafi
Sociologist; Azerbaijani member of Congress of Nationalities for Federal Iran

Ahmad Geybi
President, Association of Azerbaijanis in Sydney, Australia

Ismail Jamili
Poet and Artist

Dr Almas Shoar Ghaffari
Member of Societe Botanique Francais "citologiste"

Professor Reza Baraheni
Iranian novelist and poet, a former president of PEN Canada and retired professor of Comparative Literature, University of Toronto, Canada

Seyfeddin Hatamlooy
Writer and publisher

Shahrouz Torfakh
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Dr Shahriyar Rahnamayan
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Professor Younes P. Benab
Professor of Political Sciences at Strayer University, Washington, D.C.

We note that despite this strong pressure from pan-Turk oriented groups who put “Drs and Professors” in front of their title, they were not able to keep their false statistics going. Some of these like Asgharzadeh, Beraheni and Sadr al-Ashrafi have ignored all statistics and only concentrated on the flawed 15th edition of ethnologue in order to pursue their ethno-nationalistic interests. We will show that the Ethnologue 2009 version is fairly accurate based on provincial statistics in Iran.


Let us now look at some actual statistics done in Iran.

- 1) The first statistics is provincial statistics from Iran.

| Province | HA SC | ISO | Dom | FIPS | Pop-2006 | Pop-1996 | Area(km. ²) |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----|-----|------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Ardebil | IR.AR | 03 | ar | IR32 | 1,228,155 | 1,168,011 | 17,800 |
| Bushehr | IR.BS | 06 | bu | IR22 | 886,267 | 743,675 | 22,743 |
| Chahar Mahall and Bakhtiari | IR.CM | 08 | cb | IR03 | 857,910 | 761,168 | 16,332 |
| East Azarbaijan | IR.EA | 01 | as | IR33 | 3,603,456 | 3,325,540 | 45,650 |
| Esfahan | IR.ES | 04 | es | IR28 | 4,559,256 | 3,923,255 | 107,029 |
| Fars | IR.FA | 14 | fr | IR07 | 4,336,878 | 3,817,036 | 122,608 |
| Gilan | IR.GI | 19 | gl | IR08 | 2,404,861 | 2,241,896 | 14,042 |
| Golestan | IR.GO | 27 | gs | IR37 | 1,617,087 | 1,426,288 | 20,195 |
| Hamadan | IR.HD | 24 | hm | IR09 | 1,703,267 | 1,677,957 | 19,368 |
| Hormozgan | IR.HG | 23 | hr | IR11 | 1,403,674 | 1,062,155 | 70,669 |
| Ilam | IR.IL | 05 | il | IR10 | 545,787 | 487,886 | 20,133 |
| Kerman | IR.KE | 15 | kr | IR29 | 2,652,413 | 2,004,328 | 180,836 |
| Kermanshah | IR.BK | 17 | ks | IR13 | 1,879,385 | 1,778,596 | 24,998 |
| Khuzestan | IR.KZ | 10 | kz | IR15 | 4,274,979 | 3,746,772 | 64,055 |
| Kohgiluyeh and Buyer Ahmad | IR.KB | 18 | kb | IR05 | 634,299 | 544,356 | 15,504 |
| Kordestan | IR.KD | 16 | kd | IR16 | 1,440,156 | 1,346,383 | 29,137 |
| Lorestan | IR.LO | 20 | lr | IR23 | 1,716,527 | 1,584,434 | 28,294 |
| Markazi | IR.MK | 22 | mr | IR34 | 1,351,257 | 1,228,812 | 29,130 |
| Mazandaran | IR.MN | 21 | mz | IR35 | 2,922,432 | 2,602,008 | 23,701 |
| North Khorasan | IR.KS | 31 | kh | IR43 | 811,572 | 676,333 | 28,434 |
| Qazvin | IR.QZ | 28 | qz | IR38 | 1,143,200 | 968,257 | 15,549 |
| Qom | IR.QM | 26 | qm | IR39 | 1,046,737 | 853,044 | 11,526 |
| Razavi Khorasan | IR.KV | 30 | kh | IR42 | 5,593,079 | 4,991,818 | 144,681 |
| Semnan | IR.SM | 12 | sm | IR25 | 589,742 | 501,447 | 97,491 |
| Sistan and Baluchestan | IR.SB | 13 | sb | IR04 | 2,405,742 | 1,722,579 | 181,785 |
| South Khorasan | IR.KJ | 29 | kh | IR41 | 636,420 | 319,878 | 69,555 |
| Tehran | IR.TH | 07 | th | IR26 | 13,422,366 | 10,343,965 | 18,814 |
| West Azarbaijan | IR.WA | 02 | ag | IR01 | 2,873,459 | 2,496,320 | 37,437 |
| Yazd | IR.YA | 25 | yz | IR40 | 990,818 | 810,401 | 129,285 |
| Zanjan | IR.ZA | 11 | zn | IR36 | 964,601 | 900,890 | 21,773 |
| 30 provinces | | | | | 70,495,782 | 60,055,488 | 1,628,554 |

HA SC: [Hierarchical administrative subdivision codes](#).

ISO: Codes from ISO 3166-2.

Dom: Province domain codes from [IRNIC](#) .

FIPS: Codes from FIPS PUB 10-4, a U.S. government standard.

Pop-2006: 2006-10-28 census.

Pop-1996: 1996-10-21 census, corrected for changes in geography.

This is the most accurate and up to date census available. If we take the areas of predominantly Azerbaijani speaking population, that is East Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Ardabil and half of West Azerbaijan (although there are sources that mention majority Kurdish speakers), we obtain: 6.96 million. So this is rounded up to 7 million. If we assume 1.5 million in Qazvin, Hamadan (actual statistics done put Turcophone population at 28%), Gilan, Arak and everywhere else in Iran except Tehran, we can safely say it is 1.5 million. This is now 8.5 million. Now in Tehran, about 95% of people speak Persian as their first language according to Hamshahri and many Azerbaijanis there have adopted Persian, have mixed with other Iranians and have become "Tehrani". Despite this, if we assume 4 million Azerbaijani Turcophones in Tehran (which is an upperbound), we obtain 12.5 million. Thus this is also close to the ethnologue 2009 edition and this was an upperbound. In reality there are Tats, Talysh, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and standard Parsi-Dari speakers in East Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Zanjan as well.

2)

The next statistics is a recently done weighted survey by a US based organization.

<http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/TFT%20Iran%20Survey%20Report%200609.pdf>

Although the organization's name is political (Terror free Tomorrow), however the statistics were done in an independent fashion.

According to one site:

Ken Ballen is president of Terror Free Tomorrow: The Center for Public Opinion, a nonprofit institute that researches attitudes toward extremism. Patrick Doherty is deputy director of the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation. The groups' May 11-20 polling consisted of 1,001 interviews across Iran and had a 3.1 percentage point margin of error

According to the organization:

"Independent and uncensored nationwide surveys of Iran are rare. Typically, polls in Iran are either conducted or monitored by the Iranian government and other affiliated interest groups, and can be untrustworthy. By contrast, our poll—the third in a series over the past two years—was conducted by telephone inside Iran over May 11th to 20th, 2009, with 1,001 interviews proportionally distributed covering all 30 provinces of Iran, with a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent"

Thus the margin of error is +/- 3.1 percent. This poll was taken in May 2009. On the question of background, we note the number of Azeris

Is no where that claimed by pan-Turkists. Indeed our estimate of 12.5 million (2009) is within the margin of error.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Persian | 506 | 50.5 |
| Azeri | 216 | 21.6 |
| Gilaki & Mazanderani | 69 | 6.9 |
| Kurd | 76 | 7.6 |
| Arab | 27 | 2.7 |
| Lur | 59 | 5.9 |
| Baloch | 14 | 1.4 |
| Turkmen | 9 | .9 |
| Other | 12 | 1.2 |
| Refused | 4 | .4 |
| Don't Know | 2 | .2 |
| Bahtiyari | 2 | .2 |
| Khalaj | 1 | .1 |
| Janubi (Arab) | 1 | .1 |
| Turk Ghashghayi | 1 | .1 |
| Lac | 2 | .2 |
| Total | 1001 | 100.0 |

Terror Free Tomorrow: Iran, May 2009

On the number of people who understand Azerbaijani Turkic (note this could also include Qashqais, some Kurds, Talysh and others who live in Azerbaijani speaking provinces,

Including many Kurds in Western Azerbaijan), the number is:

Azeri

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------|-----------|---------|
| Yes | 203 | 20.3 |
| No | 793 | 79.2 |
| Refused | 1 | .1 |
| Don't Know | 4 | .4 |
| Total | 1001 | 100.0 |

Terror Free Tomorrow: Iran, May 2009

In contrast the number of people that understand Persian according to the same census is 100% (1001 out of 1001).

3)

The first statistics is about languages rather than ethnicity. In Iran, Persian is the official language and according to the CIA factbook literacy (which means knowledge of Persian) stands at 77%.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

Although it is not clear how many percent of those literate in Persian are literate also in other languages and how many percent of the native Persian speakers are literate.

The enclosed statistics is important because it was an actual census and shows how many people speak Persian as a first language.

The reference is:

(Farhād Nu'mānī, Farhad Nomani, Sohrab Behdad, *Class and Labor in Iran: Did the Revolution Matter?*, Published 2006, Syracuse University Press, 2006)

Which can be found in Amazon as well as Syracuse university peress.

<http://www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu/spring-2006/class-labor.html>

Relevant pages with regards to percentage of population that speaks Persian.

Population Growth and Supply of Labor | 71

would have been if there were no increase in its **rate** of emigration. That is, "growth shortfall," or G_i , measures the upper bound of number of emigrants for each population group:

$$G_i = [P_{i76} (1 + R)] - P_{i96}$$

where P_{i96} and P_{i76} are the population of the religious group i in the respective years, and R is the **rate** of growth of Iran's population between 1976 and 1996. Table 4.2 shows that the population of religious minorities (except Baha'is) in **Iran** in 1996 was 292,000 less than what it would have been if the **rate** of emigration of minorities had not increased under the Islamic regime.¹⁰ In effect, the Islamic Republic put into motion a process of "religious cleansing." Baha'is, Jews, Christians (mainly Armenians and Assyrians), and some "free-thinking" Muslims who had the means (financial or human capital), and felt they were severely persecuted, or could not tolerate a religious state, left the country.

The other dimension of diversity among Iranians is national ethnicity. After some flare-up of tensions in Turkman and Kurdish regions of **Iran** in the early postrevolutionary months, the Islamic Republic began to appease the ethnic minorities by recognizing some very limited rights for some non-Persian ethnic populations (Mojab and Hassanpour 1996). One of these moves, albeit preliminary, but essential, was the recognition of the existence of languages other than Persian. In 1986, for the first time, the Iranian census took count of non-Persian speakers by categorizing the population if they "Speak Persian," "Understand Persian," or "Do Not Understand Persian." Thus, the 1986 census reveals some measure of ethnic diversity, at least to the extent that knowing or understanding the dominant language is a criterion. Unfortunately, similar data are not available for the years previous to 1986, nor are they available in the 1996 census, to measure the extent of change in domination of the Persian language over the years.

Table 4.3 reveals the language divide among Iranians. In 1986, 7 percent of the urban population and 23 percent of the rural population did not understand Persian. If we add the category that could understand but could not speak Persian, the percentage of those individuals who were not fluent Persian

speakers approaches 9 percent in the urban areas and surpasses 26 percent in the rural areas. That is, in 1986, out of 49 million Iranians, 8.5 million, or 17 percent of the population, was not fluent in or did not speak Persian. In Iran the official language of the state and the language of business, except in the enclaves of minorities, is Persian.

Even in these enclaves, the written language of business (for contracts, invoices, deeds, and so on) is Persian. Thus, being active in the national labor market, taking a managerial or professional position, or being an entrepreneur or self-employed proprietor, even in ethnic enclaves, presupposes knowledge of Persian. Not being able to speak or understand the dominant language of the market limits one's opportunities in the labor market. Conversely, not being able to speak or understand Persian is an indication of limited experience in the labor market. This point is revealed by the significantly smaller proportion of urban and rural women who can speak or understand Persian in comparison to men. Moreover, because ethnic languages are not taught in the school system, in effect, not knowing Persian implies illiteracy.¹¹

Table 4.4 depicts the percentage of population that speaks Persian and the percentage that does not understand Persian in different provinces of Iran. In eight provinces less than 1 percent of the population did not understand Persian. In ten provinces between 1 and 25 percent of the population did not understand Persian. In the remaining six provinces more than a quarter of the population did not understand Persian. In East and West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, more than one-half of the population did not understand Persian. Together, more than seven million (84 percent) of those individuals who did not understand Persian resided in these three provinces. In these three provinces the literacy rate was among the lowest in the country (the only exception is Sistan va Baluchestan). The correlation between literacy and ability to speak Persian in these Azari- and Kurdish-speaking provinces is in two directions. The low literacy rates indicate that few people have received instruction on how to speak or understand Persian. On the other hand, however, everything

Table 4.3
Speaking and Understanding Persian in Urban and Rural Areas, 1986

| | <i>Speak Persian</i> | <i>Understand Persian</i> | <i>Do not understand Persian</i> | <i>Total*</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------|
| Urban | | | | |
| All (1,000s) | 24,405 | 408 | 1,956 | 26,845 |
| Percentage | 90.9 | 1.5 | 7.3 | 100.0 |
| Men (%) | 92.8 | 1.2 | 5.8 | 13,760 |
| Women (%) | 89.1 | 1.9 | 8.9 | 13,065 |
| Rural | | | | |
| All (1,000s) | 16,500 | 916 | 5,127 | 22,601 |
| Percentage | 73.0 | 4.1 | 22.7 | 100.0 |
| Men (%) | 77.9 | 3.6 | 18.3 | 11,511 |
| Women (%) | 68.0 | 4.5 | 27.2 | 11,078 |

Source: MAI 1988.

*Includes those undeclared, mute, or deaf.

else being equal, if the language of instruction is different from the native tongue, the **rate** of literacy declines.

Thus, the inability to understand and be fluent in the dominant language places the lowest categories of workers in a disadvantageous position, even in their own ethnic enclaves, for being illiterate and unskilled. When these workers migrate to the industrial centers, they are in an especially disadvantageous position. They constitute the most marginalized workers, many of whom are employed seasonally as construction workers. We are not aware of any studies examining the class position of ethnic minorities in **Iran**. Unfortunately, the absence of census data on minorities makes such studies rather impossible.

Table 4.4
Population, Understanding of Persian, and Literacy Rate
by Province, 1986

| <i>Province</i> | <i>Population (1,000s)</i> | <i>Speak Persian (%)</i> | <i>Do not understand Persian (%)</i> | <i>Literacy rate (%)</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Yazd | 574 | 99.1 | 0.17 | 69.6 |
| Semnan | 417 | 99.3 | 0.24 | 70.5 |
| Fars | 3,194 | 99.0 | 0.47 | 65.1 |
| Kerman | 1,623 | 99.1 | 0.49 | 58.0 |
| Esfahan | 3,295 | 99.1 | 0.58 | 70.9 |
| Chahar Mehal va Bakhtiyari | 631 | 98.4 | 0.79 | 56.9 |
| Boshehr | 612 | 98.4 | 0.82 | 60.9 |
| Tehran | 8,712 | 98.1 | 0.95 | 78.2 |
| Hormozgan | 762 | 97.0 | 1.44 | 51.6 |
| Khorasan | 5,281 | 96.5 | 2.76 | 56.4 |
| Markazi | 1,082 | 94.8 | 4.34 | 62.4 |
| Mazandaran | 3,419 | 87.4 | 8.54 | 63.4 |
| Gilan | 2,081 | 84.1 | 9.42 | 66.0 |
| Khuzestan | 2,682 | 81.7 | 12.64 | 59.0 |
| Kohkiluyeh va Boyerahmad | 412 | 57.3 | 15.78 | 53.0 |
| Hamedan | 1,506 | 80.7 | 16.53 | 56.8 |
| Lurestan | 1,367 | 71.8 | 16.83 | 52.6 |
| Bakhtaran | 1,463 | 68.4 | 24.40 | 55.6 |
| Sistan va Baluchestan | 1,197 | 66.7 | 28.32 | 35.9 |
| Zanjan | 1,589 | 64.2 | 31.28 | 57.8 |
| Ilam | 382 | 52.6 | 38.74 | 52.1 |
| East Azerbaijan | 4,114 | 40.7 | 54.57 | 52.2 |
| Kurdestan | 1,078 | 39.0 | 54.92 | 39.2 |
| West Azerbaijan | 1,972 | 39.0 | 57.35 | 47.0 |

Source: MAI 1988.

We note that (by the year 2008) Zanjan and Qazvin were one province, but later separated into two. Qazvin is predominantly Persian speaking but Zanjan is predominantly Azeri speaking. Khorasan is also now three provinces (Razavi, Shomali, Jonubi). Golestan (with a large Turkmen population) was also separated from Mazandaran.

4)

The second statistics is the recent Iranian government census on the provinces of Iran. There was one done in 1996 and another one in 2006. I will first note that the letter sent to you from nationalist Azerbaijani writes states:

“ In current Iran, even though the significant portion of the Azeri-Turkic population is living in the provinces of Eastern Azerbaijan, Western Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Zanjan; the entire population is by no means limited to these four provinces.”

I have put away the nationalistic rhetoric in the tone of that article. Let me first bring several maps that illustrate the majority Azerbaijani Turkish speaking areas of Iran.

I have taken this from the University of Texas ethnic maps:

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/iran_ethnoreligious_distribution_2004.jpg



You may look at other maps here:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html>

You may obtain the latest census of Iranian population here:

Anyone native to Iran knows which provinces have which languages as majority. The three provinces with Azerbaijani majority are East Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Zanjan. If we assume everyone in these provinces are Azerbaijani, we obtain: (3603456+964601+1225348)= 5793405. These three provinces are the areas that are 90% or above Azeri-Turkish speaking. Now although West Azerbaijan according to some sources is 2/3 Kurdish, we consider it half of West Azerbaijan. Then we obtain a total: 7230135. There are Azerbaijanis outside of these areas, but they are minority. That is in Arak, Qazvin, Gilan, Hamadan, there are minority Azeri populations, although these provinces are heavily population by people speaking Iranic languages (Gilaki, Talyshi in Gilan, Persian in Qazvin, Arak and Persian/Luri/Laki/Kurdish in Hamadan and the four major cities of Hamadan: Hamadan city, Maleyr, Nahavand, Towiskaran are Persian and Luri/Laki). Assuming 2 million Azeris in these provinces and three million in Tehran (note many of the Azeris in Tehran speak Persian as a first language and as shown by the first statistics, Tehran is one of the provinces where Persian is known by over 95% of the people), we obtain approximately 12 million Azerbaijanis. Note the statistics of 3 million in Tehran and 2 million in Hamadan, Qazvin, Gilak and Arak were upper-bounds. The Ethnologue figure does not make sense, since one is not sure where the other 11 million Azeris come from? Or for that matter when pan-Turkists groups claim 45 million, 30 million or even 20 million, where do they get their statistics from?

5)

The third source I would like to introduce from 1949-1954 and called the Manual on Iranian Geography, published by the Iranian army of the late Shah's government .

You can find this comprehensive 10 volume book in the university of Chicago (and probably other Universities):

<http://libcat.uchicago.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=12W276976255K.57375&profile=ucpublic&uri=full=3100001~!3410862~!2&ri=1&aspect=subtab13&menu=search&source=~!horizon>

Author:

[Iran. Artish. Sitād-i Artish. Dāyirah-i Jughrāfiyā'ī.](#)

Title:

Farhang-i jughrāfiyā'ī-i Irān : ābādīhā.

Imprint:

[Tīhrān] : Dāyirah-i Jughrafiyā`i-i Sitād-i Artish, 1328-1332 [1949-54]

Description:

10 v. : illus., maps (part fold. col.)

Notes:

Vols. 1-9 compiled under the general editorship of Hossein `Alī Razmārā.

The source has also been mentioned here:

(Shahzad Mojab and Amir Hassanpour, "The politics of Nationality and Ethnic Diversity", Saeed Rahnama and Sohrab Behdad, eds., *Iran after the Revolution: Crises of an Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 229-230.

And I will quote an excerpt from the article by Mojab and Hassanpour:

1. None of the Iranian governments has provided statistical information on the national and ethnic composition of the country. The only official data available are 'population according to language' figures released after the 1956 census (see Echo of Iran, *Iran Almanac and Book of Facts*, 5th edn (Tehran, 1976), p 357). The percentages cited here depend on data based on the 1956 census and the information from the ten-volume *Farhang-i Jughrafiya`i-ye Iran* (Geographical Dictionary of Iran), which was compiled and published by the Iranian Army in the early 1950s. The data from this dictionary were culled by a Soviet researcher, G.M. Petrov (cited in S.M. Aliyev, "The problem of nationalities in Iran", *Central Asian Review*, xiv/1 (1966), pp 62-70).

A summary of this book(Geographical Dictionary of Iran) with regards to language has been in this article here by the IranianKurdish scholar Ehsan Hooshmand:

(Ehsan Hooshmand, "Faslnameyeh Goftegoo", "A closer look at religious and ethnic statistics in modern Iran", 2005, Tehran)

The article can be found here:

<http://www.magiran.com/magtoc.asp?mgID=1929&Number=43&Appendix=0>

But the main summary table is given below:

جدول شماره ۱- توزیع زبانی جمعیت ایران در سال‌های ۱۳۳۱-۱۳۳۷

| جمعیت | زبان | جمعیت | زبان | جمعیت | زبان |
|--------|--------------|--------|---------------------|---------|--------------|
| ۱۶۱۱۹۲ | فارسی - تاتی | ۶۱۰۰۵۰ | فارسی - مازندرانی | ۴۱۹۹۱۸۵ | فارسی |
| ۹۷۴۹۱ | ترکمنی | ۶۰۴۴۳۵ | فارسی - گیلکی | ۲۴۵۱۰۶۱ | ترکی |
| ۹۲۱۳۱ | فارسی محلی | ۳۹۹۶۱۹ | فارسی - کردی | ۹۵۵۹۶۸ | نامشخص |
| ۶۴۵۱۴ | گیلکی | ۲۸۶۸۸۶ | فارسی - عربی | ۸۷۷۶۲۸ | فارسی - ترکی |
| | | ۲۰۲۰۰۰ | فارسی - بلوچی | ۸۳۶۳۷۸ | فارسی - لری |
| | | ۱۸۷۴۶۴ | فارسی - ترکی - کردی | ۶۹۲۴۴۳ | کردی |

Translation of the above table:

| Language | Population | Language | Population | Language | Population |
|----------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Persian | 4199185 | Persian/Mazandarani | 610050 | Persian/Tati | 161192 |
| Turkish(Azeri) | 2451061 | Persian/Gilaki | 604435 | Turkmeni | 97491 |
| Unknown | 955968 | Persian/Kurdish | 399619 | Local Persian | 92131 |
| Persian/Azeri | 877627 | Persian/Arabic | 286886 | Gilaki | 64514 |
| Persian/Luri | 836378 | Persian/Baluchi | 202000 | | |
| Kurdish | 692443 | Persian/Turkish/Kurdish | 187464 | | |

According to this book the population of Iran in 1335 was 14 million. From this 14 million, 2451061 people lived in a mono-lingual Turkish(Azeri) setting, 877627 lived in a bilingual Persian-Azeri setting and 187464 lived in a place where Persian/Turkish/Kurdish was spoken. Thus the range of Azeri speakers is from 17.5% to 25.1% according to this actual statistics that was done. This is agreed with statistics with part 3 where we quote some expert references. Note the importance of this census is that it was actually done and it is not based on guest work.

6)

Another source I would like to discuss and which also provides a sample is based on census taken in the Iranian month of Mordad (July 21 – August 21) in 1991. In this census, all 49,588 mothers who gave birth in the country, were issued birth certificates. They were asked about their mother-tongue.

"در مرداد 1370، هنگام صدور شناسنامه برای نوزادان، درباره زبان ۴۹ هزار و ۵۵۸ مادر در سطح کشور سوال مطرح شد که نتیجه حاکی از سهم حضور ۵۲،۸ درصدی زبان های غیرفارسی در ایران بود. بر اساس نمونه گیری مذکور، توزیع سهم هر يك از زبان ها (به درصد) به این شرح بود: ۴۶،۲ فارسی؛ ۲۰،۶ ترکی آذربایجانی؛ ۱۰ کردی؛ ۸،۹ لری؛ ۷،۲ درصد گیلکی و شمالی؛ ۳،۵ عربی؛ ۲،۷ بلوچی؛ ۰،۶ ترکمنی؛ ۰،۱ ارمنی؛ و ۰،۲ سایر زبان ها ". پس اگر گویش ها و زبان های هم خانواده با فارسی را با آمار فوق جمع شود، زبان هایی که "آریایی (ایرانی)" خوانده می شوند حدود ۷۶٪ ایران را دربرمی گیرند

The break down: 46.2% (Persian/Farsi), 20.6% (Azeri-Turkish), 10% Kurdish, 8.9% Luri, 7.2% Gilaki and Mazandarani, 3.5% Arabic, 2.7% Baluchi, 0.6% Turkmen, 0.1% Armenian, and 0.2% Others.

Source:

زنجانی، حبیب الله، محمد میرزایی، کامل شاپور و امیر هوشنگ مهریار، جمعیت، توسعه، بهداشت باروری، چاپ دوم، تهران، نشر و تبلیغ بشری، 1379.

Zanjani, H., Mirzai, M., Shapur, K., Mehriyar, A.H., "Population, Growth, Mortality Rate", Second Edition, Tehran, Tabligh-e-Bashari Publishers, 2000.

Note the sample size is very large.

5)

The fifth statistic which is old, but nevertheless truthful is from the English Noblemen Lord Curzon in 1890. The interesting thing about this statistics is that it shows the Turkic-speaking population of Iran was around 15-20% as it is today. Lord Curzon published it based on Russian Sources:

[Curzon of Kedleston, George Nathaniel Curzon, Marquess, 1859-1925.](#)

(Persia and the Persian question, by the Hon. George N. Curzon, 2 v. illus., plates, ports., maps (1 fold.) 23 cm., London, New York, Longmans, Green & co., 1892.). Based on the Russian scholar Zolatoraf who used official Iranian documents in 1888, the population of Iran was recorded as six million people, half of these were Persian, 1 million Turk/Tatar (the name Azeri was a recent designation and in the 19th century, the term Turk/Tatar was used for the speakers of this language), Lurs 780,000, Kurds 600,000, Arabs, 300,000, Turkmans 320,000. And the rest were Armenians, Assyrians and other groups. Large number of Assyrian Christians actually existed in Iran before they were massacred by the pan-Turkist young Turk government invasion of Western Iran during WWI.

Summary:

About 4 or 5 statistics that were actually taken in Iran. The most recent statistic (2006) gives provincial statistics of Iran and the number of Azeri-Turkic in Iran can be upperbounded by 12 million in these statistics. So one wonders where do the pan-Turkists get (in 2008) their 45 million? Or 30 million? Or even 20 million?

What some other sources state:

1)

CIA factbook:

Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2%

2)

Encyclopedia Britannica (2005):

Excerpt:

The people

Iran is a multilingual and diverse cultural society, and the majority of the population is extremely young. Nearly one-half of the people speak Farsi, and another one-fourth speak some other Indo-European language or dialect. These are descendants of the Aryan tribes, whose origins are lost in antiquity. The Kurds, whose language has seen scant modification over the centuries, are a fierce nomadic people dwelling in the western mountains of Iran and in Iraq and Turkey. They constitute a small percentage of Iran's population. They have resisted the Iranian government's efforts, both before and after the revolution of 1979, to assimilate them into the mainstream of national life. Also inhabiting the western mountains are seminomadic Lurs, thought to be the descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. Closely related are the Bakhtyari tribes, who live in the Zagros Mountains west of Esfahan. Both speak Luri, a language distinct from, but related to, Farsi. The Baluchi are a smaller minority who inhabit Iranian Baluchistan, which borders on Pakistan.

About one-fifth of Iranians speak a variety of Turkic languages. The largest Turkic-speaking group is the Azerbaijani, a farming and herding people who inhabit two border provinces in the northwestern corner of Iran. Two other Turkic ethnic groups are the Qashqa'is in the Shiraz area to the north of the Persian Gulf and the Turkmen of Khorasan in the northeast.

The Armenians, with a different ethnic heritage, have maintained their Indo-European linguistic identity. They are concentrated in Tehran, Esfahan, and Azerbaijan and are engaged primarily in commercial pursuits. A few isolated remnants of Dravidians are found in the Sistan region to the southeast.

3)

(Ervand Abrahamian, **Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudah and the Firqah-I Dimokrat**, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4. (Oct., 1970), pp. 291-316):

“The second largest group, Turkic, constitute another **26%** and are subdivided into the sedentary Azaris, the vast majority of Azarbaijan and a significant minority in the northern towns and tribal Turkmens, Qashqayis, Shabsavans, and Afshars, who form distinct entities in the north and southern province of Fars”.

4)

The following formerly posted on a Christian website is one of the most accurate in terms of distinguishing different Iranian dialects.

<http://www.acts.edu/oldmissions/Iranhist1.html>

Composition of Peoples

(OPW)

Peoples: Over 65 ethnic groups, many of which are small nomadic groups.

Indo-Iranian 75.6%. Persian 25,300,000; Kurds 4,670,000; Luri-Bakhtiari 4,280,000; Mazanderani 3,265,000; Gilaki 3,265,000; Dari Persian 1,600,000; Balochi 1,240,000; Tat 620,000; Pathan 113,000; Talysh 112,000.

Turkic 18.8%. Azerbaijani 8,130,000; Turkoman 905,000; Qashqai 860,000; Hazara 283,000; Teymur 170,000; Shahseven 130,000.

Arab 2.2%. Mainly in southwest.

Christian minorities 0.4%. Reduced from 1.5% in 1975 due to emigration. Armenian 170,000; Assyrian 40,000; Georgian 10,000.

Other 3%. Gypsy (Nawar and Ghorbati) 1,188,000; Brahui 149,000; Jews 68,000.

Refugees: Afghans 1.5 million, but decreasing; Iraqi Kurds 120,000 (at one stage in 1991 there were 1.2 million); Shi'a Arabs from Iraq.

5)

Colbert C. Held, John Cummings, Mildred McDonald Held, "Middle East Patterns: Places, Peoples, and Politics", Westview Press, 2005.

Pg 97: "Farsi is the language of Iran, although nearly half of the Iranians speak a mother tongue other than than Persian(Azeri, Kurdish, Gilaki, Luri, Baluchi, Arabic, and others)".

6)

Encyclopedia of Orient:

<http://looklex.com/e.o/iran.peoples.htm>

| Ethnic groups | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Figures in 1000. | | |
| Persians | 33,000 | 49% |
| Azerbaijanis | 12,000 | 18% |
| Kurds | 6,600 | 10% |
| Gilakis | 3,700 | 6% |
| *) Lors | 3,000 (2,000) | 4% (2.5%) |
| Mazandarani | 2,700 | 4% |
| Balochis | 1,600 | 2.4% |
| Arabs | 1,600 | 2.4% |
| Qashqais | 1,700 | 2.2% |
| Doms | 1,400 | 2.1% |
| Bakhtiari | 1,300 | 1.9% |
| Turkmens | 1,100 | 1.6% |
| *) Laks | 1,000 | 1.5% |
| Khorasani Turks | 800 | 1.2% |
| Afshars | 320 | 0.7% |
| Armenians | 200 | 0.7% |
| Talysh | 200 | 0.2% |
| Tats | 12 | <0.1% |
| TOTAL | | 71,500 |

7)

The (US) Library of Congress under the Country Studies/Area
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/irtoc.html>

PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

Iran has a heterogeneous population speaking a variety of Indo-Iranian, Semitic, and Turkic languages. The largest language group consists of the speakers of Indo-Iranian languages, who in 1986 comprised about 70 percent of the population. Approximately 28 percent of the population speaks various dialects of Turkish. Speakers of Semitic languages include Arabs and Assyrians

The Persian-speaking People

The Persians constitute the largest ethnic component in Iran. They predominate in the major urban areas of central and eastern Iran--in the cities of Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, Arak, Kashan, Kerman, Qom, and Yazd--and in the villages of the Central Plateau. An estimated 50 to 60 percent of the population speaks Persian as a first language.

Turkic-speaking Groups

Turkic speakers make up as much as 25 percent of Iran's total population. They are concentrated in northwestern Iran, where they form the overwhelming majority of the population of East Azarbaijan and a majority of West Azarbaijan.

Azarbaijanis

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ir0052\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ir0052))

By far the largest Turkic-speaking group are the Azarbaijanis, who account for over 85 percent of all Turkic speakers in Iran. About half of all Azarbaijanis are urban. Major Azarbaijani cities include Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Zanjan, Khoy, and Maragheh. In addition, an estimated one-third of the population of Tehran is Azarbaijani and there are sizable Azarbaijani minorities in other major cities, such as Hamadan, Karaj, and Qazvin.

8)

Encyclopedia Encarta (accessed 2006)

Ethnic Groups

Iran's population is made up of numerous ethnic groups. Persians migrated to the region from Central Asia beginning in the 7th century BC and established the first Persian empire in 550 BC. They are the largest ethnic group, and include such groups as the Gilaki, who live in Gilān Province, and the Mazandarani, who live in Māzandarān Province. Accounting for about 60 percent of the total population, Persians live in cities throughout the country, as well as in the villages of central and eastern Iran. Two groups closely related to the Persians both ethnically and linguistically are the [Kurds](#) and the Lurs. The Kurds, who make up about 7 percent of the population, reside primarily in the Zagros Mountains near the borders with Iraq and Turkey. The Lurs account for 2 percent of the population; they inhabit the central Zagros region. Turkic tribes began migrating into northwestern Iran in the 11th century, gradually changing the ethnic composition of the region so that by the late 20th century East Azerbaijan Province was more than 90 percent Turkish. Since the early 1900s, Azeris (a Turkic group) have been migrating to most large cities in Iran, especially Tehrān. Azeris and other Turkic peoples together account for about 25 percent of Iran's inhabitants. The remainder of the population comprises small communities of Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Baluchis, Georgians, Pashtuns, and others.

9)

The World Almanac and Book of Facts, Contributor Zoë Kashner, 2007.

Pg 783: Ethnic groups: **Persian** 51%, **Azeri** 24%, Gilaki/Mazandarani 8%, **Kurd** 7%

10)

Robin Morgan, "Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology", Published 1996.

Pg 324: Ethnic groups: Persian 66%, Azeri 25%.

11)

World Atlas which actually used the reliable source (number 2):

<http://www.atlapedia.com/online/countries/iran.htm>

LANGUAGES: The official language is Persian or Farsi which is spoken by 54% of the population. Other minority languages include Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, Turkmen, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Assyrian and Arabic.

12)

IRAN (65 million). The national language is **Persian**, with more than 40 million speakers. In the province of Azerbaijan in the northwest there are about 10 million speakers of Azerbaijani. In the southwest about 3 million people speak Luri. Along the shores of the Caspian Sea there are Gilaki (3 million speakers) and Mazanderani (2 million). **Kurdish**-speaking Kurds number about 5 million. Baluchi is spoken by about one million people in the extreme southeast, near the border with Pakistan. Other **languages** include Arabic (one million), Turkmen (one million), Armenian (250,000), and Assyrian (100,000).

(Kenneth Katzner, *The Languages of the World*, Routledge, Published 2002.)

Conclusion

The current Ethnologue figure of 2009 (unlike that of the 2005) despite pressure from pan-Turkist and politically oriented groups is correct. Also I have shown that the Azerbaijani population in Iran based on provincial statistics can be upperbounded by 12 million. I would like to add that Azeris are prominent members of Iran's society (the supreme leader of Iran is an Azeri) and thus due to their presence in the government and armed forces, some sources might have over-estimated their number. In 1890, the total Tatar (what Azeris were called then) was 1 million out of 6 million or approximately 16-17%. In the 1906 constitutional revolution, Persian was declared as the official language and schooling was done in this language. Before that, Persian was the main composition language of all of Iran and was the only language that was systematically taught alongside Arabic in the traditional schooling (Maktab) system. The current population of Iran according to the official census of 2006 is 70 million and assuming steady growth for all groups (actually large number of Azeris specially in Tehran have adopted Persian), the population of Azeris would be between 11-12.5 million. This agrees with the provincial statistics and some of the expert sources brought. It agreed with basically all actual census that was carried out in Iran even in the year 2009. Of course the pan-Turkist groups will claim 20, 25, 30,35,40,45 million (in 2009), but these claims are of political and not scientific nature. So why are these political claims made? I believe they are psychological, that is the pan-Turkists want to feel bigger than they are and want to influence foreign governments that they are a huge force. They should note that out of the 11-14 million Azeris, the overwhelming majority of Iranian Azeris are not with them and they should also note that situation of Iran might change one day, and it is not prudent to antagonize the Iranian population (not only patriotic Azeris but the majority Iranic speakers of the country who are indeed no friends of pan-Turkist concepts).