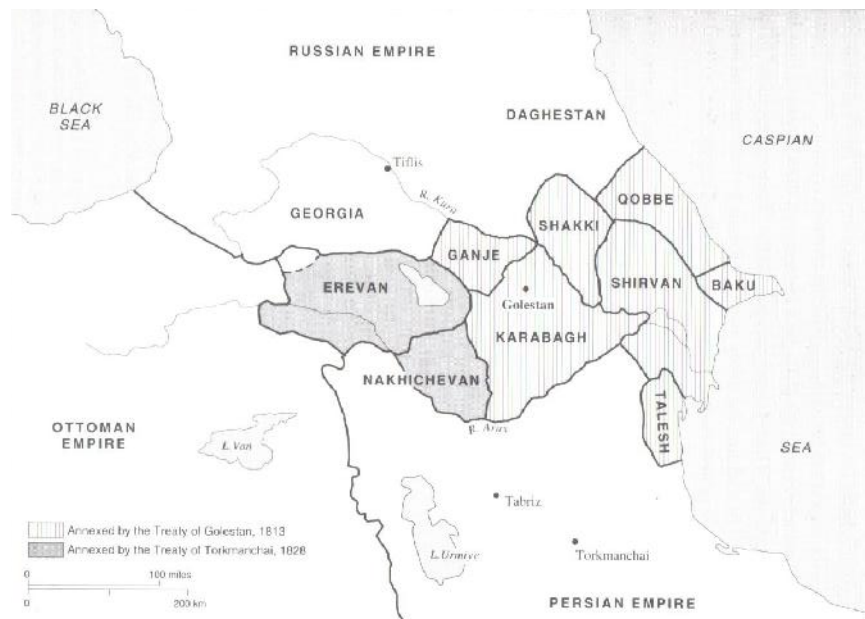


*Main Article*

## Demographic Changes in the Southwest Caucasus, 1604-1830: The Case of Historical Eastern Armenia

George Bournoutian

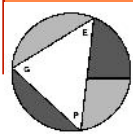


*The Russian Conquest of Transcaucasia, Map 3 in: G. Bournoutian, The Khanate of Erivan under Qajar Rule, 1795-1828 (New York, 1992).*

### Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is present, for the first time in English, reliable figures on the demographic changes in the Southwest Caucasus<sup>1</sup> from the height of Iranian hegemony to its conquest by the Russian Empire.

Until the fourteenth century AD, Armenians still formed the majority of the population of the historical territory of eastern Armenia.<sup>2</sup> It was only after the campaigns of Tamerlane (d. 1405) that the region began to lose its Armenian population and various Turkic and Kurdish tribes began to permanently settle there.<sup>3</sup> Despite the numerous battles between the Safavids and the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, the Armenians managed to hold their own in some of the districts of the khanates of Iravan (Erivan/Yerevan), Nakhjavan (Nakhichevan), Ganjeh (Ganja), and especially in the mountainous strongholds of Qarabagh (Karabagh).



### Population transfers and other demographic changes in Southwest Caucasus

Shah `Abbas I (1571-1629), the fifth king of the Safavid Empire, forced the migration of between 150,000 and 200,000 Armenians from the Yerevan-Nakhichevan regions to Iran in 1604. This event drastically altered the demography of these two khanates. The demographic picture of the khanates of Yerevan, Nakhichevan and Ganja continued to change during the twelve-year Ottoman occupation (1723-1735) of these three khanates, as well as the campaigns of Persia's post-Safavid ruler, Nader Shah Afshar (d. 1747) to restore them to Iranian rule.

The nineteenth century saw yet more changes. The first Russo-Iranian War (1804-1813) and the campaigns led by generals Paul Dmitrievich Tsitsianov (1754-1806) in 1804 and Ivan Vasilevich Gudovich (1741-1820) in 1808, against Ganja and Yerevan encouraged many Armenians to seek refuge in Georgia. A primary source mentions that some 5,000 Armenian refugees from Yerevan and Ganja had fled to Georgia.<sup>4</sup>

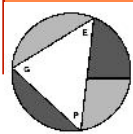
By the end of the first Russo-Iranian War (1813)<sup>5</sup>, therefore, the Armenian population of the khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan had dwindled considerably. The Armenians of the khanate of Ganja, however, maintained clusters in the suburbs<sup>6</sup>, while the Armenian population living in the five Armenian *mahals* (districts) of Mountainous Karabagh (present-day Nagorno-Karabakh) was the only part of historical eastern Armenia to maintain an absolute Armenian control over their territory. The official Russian survey conducted in 1823 shows that the Armenians in those five districts formed 96.67 percent of the population.<sup>7</sup>

The appointment of General Alexei Petrovich Yermolov as the Commander in Chief of the Caucasus, in 1816, ushered a new era in the region. Yermolov's anti-Muslim policy forced many of the Muslim governors, who had remained nominally in charge after the first Russo-Iranian War, to seek refuge in Iran. Yermolov wished to completely incorporate Transcaucasia into the Russian administrative system. He, therefore, ordered official surveys to be conducted in the former khanates of Sheki, Shirvan and Qarabagh (Karabagh).<sup>8</sup>

Yermolov's brutal actions of ruthless colonization forced Iran to invade Transcaucasia in 1826. The Iranians were welcomed by the Muslims and scored a number of victories. Most of the Armenians, however, hoped for a Russian victory. Some of their religious and lay leaders, especially those in Georgia and Russia, who had for some time been in touch with Russian sympathizers, envisioned the restoration of an Armenian state under Russian protection.

The appointment of General Ivan Fedorovich Paskevich as the new chief of the Caucasus turned the tide and began the Russian counteroffensive. An Armenian volunteer unit was formed in Tiflis and accompanied the Russian army in the capture of the Holy See of Echmiadzin outside Yerevan. By October 1827, the Russian army had taken the fortresses of Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Sardarabad and `Abbasabad, and had entered Tabriz.

Iran sued for peace and, in February 1828, signed the burdensome Treaty of Turkmanchay, by which it renounced all of the South Caucasus, gave up its naval rights on the Caspian Sea,



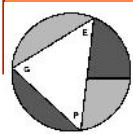
accepted capitulations and agreed to pay 20 million rubles in indemnity costs. Armenian leaders and their Russian allies also inserted Article XV in the said treaty, which gave a years' time for the transfer of populations across the Arax (Aras) River. Armenians from Iran were encouraged to emigrate from Iran into the former Yerevan and Nakhichevan khanates, while those Muslims who did not wish to be ruled by Orthodox Christian Russia decided to immigrate to Iran.

Taking advantage of Article XV and given financial aid, many of the descendants of those Armenians who had been forcibly moved into Iran by Shah `Abbas, crossed the Arax River and, after 200 years, repatriated to the newly-formed Armenian Province (*Armianskaia Oblast'*), created from the former khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, within the Russian Empire.

The population transfers once again altered the demography of the region, this time, in favor of the Armenians. A year later, following the end of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-1829, more Armenians emigrated from western Armenia into the newly formed Russian Armenian Province. The figures included herein, most presented for the first time in English, are from the official Russian census conducted in 1829-1830. Although not as accurate as a present-day census, these figures, nevertheless, give a good indication of the demography of the former khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan just prior to and immediately after the population transfers.<sup>9</sup>

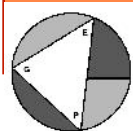
**Table I: The Russian Census of Population of the Yerevan Khanate in 1828-1830**

Muslims	Families	Male	Female	Total
City of Yerevan	1,807	3,749	3,582	7,331
Kirk-Bulagh Mahal	81	205	178	383
Zangi-Basar Mahal	910	2,979	2,434	5,413
Garni-Basar Mahal	753	2,231	1,945	4,176
Vedi-Basar Mahal	574	1,828	1,621	3,449
Sharur Mahal	1,305	3,397	3,113	6,510
Surmalu Mahal	709	2,555	2,277	4,832
Darakend-Pachenis Mahal	589	1,742	1,525	3,267
Sa' dlu Mahal	160	517	487	1,004
Talin Mahal	91	222	198	420
Seyyedli-Akhsakhli Mahal	311	953	801	1,754
Sardarabad Mahal	276	959	878	1,837
Karbi-Basar Mahal	400	1,406	1,186	2,592
Aparan Mahal	-	-	-	-
Darachichak Mahal	231	718	582	1,300
Gökchay Mahal	999	3,164	2,443	2,607
Total:	9,196	26,625	23,250	49,875



Armenians (native)	<i>Families</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
City of Yerevan	567	1,220	1,149	2,369
Kirk-Bulagh Mahal	262	743	653	1,396
Zangi-Basar Mahal	133	305	298	603
Garni-Basar Mahal	34	70	75	145
Vedi-Basar Mahal	2	9	6	15
Sharur Mahal	-	-	-	-
Surmalu Mahal	935	3,052	2,840	5,892
Darakend-Pachenis Mahal	1	3	2	5
Sa`dlu Mahal	-	-	-	-
Talin Mahal	74	225	191	416
Seyyedli-Akhsakhli Mahal	6	16	12	28
Sardarabad Mahal	469	1,640	1,574	3,214
Karbi-Basar Mahal	897	2,788	2,502	5,290
Aparan Mahal	11	29	29	58
Darachichak Mahal	92	298	254	552
Gökchay Mahal	15	52	38	90
Total:	3,498	10,450	9,623	20,073
Percentage of Muslims in 1828:		59.8%		
Percentage of Armenians in 1828:		40.2% <sup>10</sup>		

Armenians formed the majority of the population in only four districts. One of these, Karbi-Basar, included the Holy See of Echmiadzin. There were no Armenians in two *mahals* (Sharur and Sa`dlu) and no Muslims in one *mahal* (Aparan). This last was the scene of repeated raids by Russian troops. Armenians were also absent from those *mahals* (Darakend-Parchenis, Seyyedli-Akhsakhli, Sa`dlu, and Gökchay) with large nomadic tribes.



Armenian immigrants from Iran (1829/1830):

Families	Male	Female	Total
4,559	12,498	11,070	23,568

Armenian immigrants from the Ottoman Empire (1830):

3,674	11,400	10,239	21,639
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Total Armenian immigrants: 45,207

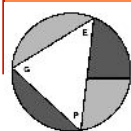
Total Armenian population in 1830: 65,280

Percentage of Muslims in 1830:	43.3%
Percentage of Armenians in 1830:	56.7%

**Table II: Russian Census of the Population of the Nakhichevan Khanate in 1828-1830**

Muslims:	<i>Families</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
City of Nakhichevan	909	1,892	1,749	3,641
Alinja-Chay Mahal	400	987	861	1,848
Nakhichevan Mahal	979	2,205	1,989	4,194
Mavazikhatun Mahal	282	811	686	1,497
Khok Mahal	292	727	648	1,375
Daralagoz Mahal	1,001	2,411	2,172	4,583
Total:	3,863	9,033	8,105	17,138
Ordubad District:				
City of Ordubad	767	1,687	1,575	3,262
Ordubad Mahal	146	280	272	552
Agulis Mahal	77	190	157	347
Dasta (Dastak) Mahal	317	810	723	1,533
Bilev (Bilav) <sup>11</sup> Mahal	289	605	605	1,210
Chinanap Mahal	79	179	164	343
Total:	1,675	3,751	3,496	7,247

Total Muslim population of the Nakhichevan khanate: 24,385



### Armenians (native):

	Families	Male	Female	Total
City of Nakhichevan	156	379	340	719
Alinja-Chay Mahal	123	360	323	683
Nakhichevan Mahal	150	409	367	776
Mavazikhatun Mahal	-	-	-	-
Khok Mahal	43	115	109	224
Daralagoz Mahal	58	141	147	288
Total:	530	1,404	1,286	2,690

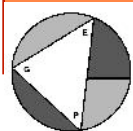
### Ordubad District:

City of Ordubad	-	-	-	-
Ordubad Mahal	36	102	113	215
Agulis Mahal	214	685	671	1,356
Dastak Mahal	62	181	165	346
Bilev Mahal	39	109	99	208
Chinanap Mahal	49	127	136	263
Total:	400	1,204	1,184	2,388

Total Armenian population of the Nakhichevan khanate in 1828: 5,078

Percentage of Muslims in 1828: 79.2%  
Percentage of Armenians in 1828: 20.8%<sup>12</sup>

The Agulis *mahal* was the only district where the Armenians formed a majority prior to the Russian conquest. It is within the historic Armenian district of Goght'n and had eight churches and a monastery.<sup>13</sup>



Armenians immigrants from Iran (1829/1830):

	Families	Male	Female	Total
Nakhichevan Region:	2,137	5,641	5,011	10,652
Ordubad District:	250	698	642	1,340

Armenian immigrants from the Ottoman Empire (1830):

Nakhichevan Region:	8	17	10	27
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Total Armenian immigrants: 12,019

Total Armenian population of the Nakhichevan khanate in 1829/1830: 17,097

Percentage of Muslims in 1830: 58.8%

Percentage of Armenians in 1830: 41.2%

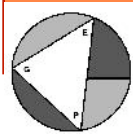
It is important to note that the Armenian Province, renamed Yerevan Province in 1845, continued to have a significant Muslim population until 1919. Official figures from the Armenian Republic, which was formed in May 1918 following the collapse of the Russian Empire, have the following numbers:

Armenians:	669,871
Tatars <sup>14</sup>	365,841
Turks	8,000
Kurds	36,508
Yezidis	12,624
Russians, Georgians, Greeks, Gypsies:	21,854 <sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

Thus, after nine decades, the Armenians formed only 66.4% of the population of the former territory of the Yerevan-Nakhichevan khanates. This was primarily due to the fact that Nakhichevan after the Armeno-Azeri clashes of 1905-1907 had lost a significant portion of its Armenian population.<sup>16</sup>

Most importantly, however, the majority of Armenian intellectuals and entrepreneurs preferred the cities of Tiflis and Baku, both being the political commercial and industrial centers of Russian Transcaucasia, to predominantly agricultural Russian Armenia, one of the many neglected and impoverished backwaters of the Russian Empire. It was only after Sovietization that Soviet Armenia (minus Nakhichevan, Sharur and Surmalu, the first two



ceded to Azerbaijan, and the third to Turkey)<sup>17</sup> achieved a predominantly Armenian character, with Armenians forming over 95% of its population in 1991.

Although the Armenian populations of Nakhichevan, Sharur and Surmalu, for all practical purposes, disappeared, Nagorno-Karabakh, with its Armenian majority, was designated in 1923 as an autonomous district within Azerbaijan. Azeri discriminatory policies angered the Armenians and they petitioned Moscow in the 1950s and 1970s to allow them to secede from Azerbaijan.

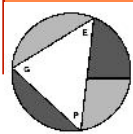
The fall of the Soviet Union resulted in large Armenian demonstrations, both in Yerevan and Nagorno-Karabakh demanding a change in the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Shortly after war ensued between the Armenians and Azeris. Armenians captured most of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as bordering regions. A shaky cease-fire has existed since 1994.

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### Endnotes—References

1. In order to desist from a Russian bias, the term South(west) Caucasus is used instead of Transcaucasia. In addition, geographical designations are listed first in their Persian version and after that in their Armenian/Russian versions.
2. Eastern or Iranian Armenia contained the later khanates of Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Karabagh and Ganja; see M. Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828* (Minneapolis, 1980), p.10.
3. G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (London, 1966), p.177.
4. Russia, Archives of the Viceroyalty of the Caucasus, *Akty sobrannye kavkazskoiu arkheograficheskoiu kommissiei*, II (Tiflis, 1868) [Collected Documents and Decrees of the Viceroyalty of the Caucasus], doc. 1228.
5. Iran signed the Treaty of Gulistan and gave up its claims to eastern Georgia, as well as the khanates of Qarabagh (Karabagh), Shirvan, Ganjeh (Ganja), Qobbeh (Kuba), Baku, Shakki (Sheki), and parts of Talesh, see T. Yuzefovich, *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom* (St. Petersburg, 1869) [Russian Treaties with the East], pp.208-214.
6. *Akty*, II, docs. 1190-1193 (see note 4).
7. G. Bournoutian, ed./trans., *The 1823 Russian Survey of the Karabagh Province: A Primary Source on the Demography and Economy of Karabagh in the Early 19th Century* (Costa Mesa, CA., 2012), p.439. Original Russian title: *Opisane Karabagskoi Provintsii sostavlennoe v' 1823 godu* (Tiflis, 1866).
8. *Opisanie Shekinskoi Provintsii sostavlennoe v' 1819 godu* (Tiflis, 1866) [Descriptive Survey of the Sheki Province compiled in 1819]; *Opisanie Shirvanskoi Provintsii sostavlennoe v' 1820 godu* (Tiflis, 1867) [Descriptive Survey of the Shirvan Province compiled in the year 1820]; and the survey for the Karabagh Province cited above (note 7), also printed in Tiflis in 1866.
9. The totals for the population listed in the Russian census are in I. Shopen, *Istoricheskii pamiatnik' sostoianiia Armianskoi Oblasti v' epokhu eia prisoedineniia k' Rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg, 1852) [A Historical Survey of the Armenian province at the Time of Its Unification to the Russian Empire], pp.637-647.
10. The table of figures (i.e. Table I) does not include the small number of Persians and especially the various tribes who left the khanate. The exact number is not available but it is estimated to have been over 15,000 people. The percentage of the Armenians, therefore, is reduced to between 33-30%





of the population. In my monograph on Yerevan, *The Khanate of Erevan Under Qajar Rule, 1795-1828* (New York, 1992), p.63, I overestimated the Persian population as being over 10,000 people. We now know for a fact that the number barely exceeded a 1000. The percentage of Armenians prior to the Russian conquest was, therefore, between 33-30% and not 20% as indicated in my monograph. In any case, prior to the Russian conquest and the emigration of Armenians from Iran, the Armenians formed a minority in the khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan.

11. This is the old Armenian Bghew district.
12. This table of figures (i.e. Table II) does not include the small number of Persians, who left the region after the Russian conquest. The Armenians probably formed less than 20% of the population.
13. See A. Ayvazian, *The Historical Monuments of Nakhichevan* (Detroit, 1990), pp.13-24.
14. Russian sources refer to all Turkish-speaking Muslims in the region as Tatars. Those living in the eastern parts of South Caucasus, after the creation of the Azerbaijan Republic in 1918, and especially after Sovietization, became identified as Azeris.
15. Prepared by the Armenian Delegation for the Paris Conference (1919), British Foreign Office, 371/4952.
16. See L. Villari, *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus* (London, 1907).
17. In exchange for these losses, Moscow agreed to include the district of Zangezur (which had an Armenian majority), as well as Lori and Borchalu (a bone of contention between Armenia and Georgia), which were not part of the original khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, within the territory of Soviet Armenia.

### Praise of the article 'Demographic Changes in the Southwest Caucasus'

(First Critical Response to George Bournoutian's "Demographic Changes in the Southwest Caucasus, 1604-1830: The Case of Historical Eastern Armenia")

The article reads well, and to me seems authoritative. Clearly, the author of the article knows this material very well—perhaps better than anyone. This is a very controversial subject, and it is valuable to have the material presented clearly and fairly, though many may dispute his or her findings.

- Ronald Grigor Suny is William H. Sewell, Jr. Distinguished University Professor of History at University of Michigan, United States; he is also Senior Researcher at the National Research University—Higher School of Economics, Saint Petersburg, Russia. [rgsuny@umich.edu](mailto:rgsuny@umich.edu)