

## Country Snapshot

**Country Name:**

Republic of Armenia

**Year Founded:**

1918

**Population:**

2,976,372 (July 2006 est.)

**Government Type:**

Republic

**Geography:**

- Armenia is a landlocked country located in western Asia.
- It is bordered by Georgia on the north, Azerbaijan on the east, Nakhichevan (and Azerbaijani enclave) on the southwest, Iran on the south, and Turkey on the west.
- Armenia's terrain is very mountainous; the average elevation is 5,900 feet above sea level.
- The climate varies greatly with elevation but, generally, is a dry continental climate.
- Armenia occasionally experiences severe earthquakes as well as drought. The last severe earthquake was in 1988 in northern Armenia.

**People groups:**

- Armenian—97.9%
- Yezidi (Kurd)—1.3%
- Russian—0.5%
- Other (Greek, Ukrainian, Georgians, Assyrians)—0.3%

**Picture of flag:**

## Religion Snapshot

**Major Religion:**

- Armenian Apostolic—95%

**Other religions:**

- Protestant/Evangelical—less than 2%
- Muslim—1.98%
- Other—1%

**Government interaction with religion:**

- Proselytizing is against the law
- All religious denominations and organizations must register with the government

# Mission Atlas Project

## Central and Eastern Europe

### Armenia

#### Demographics

The population of Armenia is 2,976,372 (July 2006 est.) It is one of the most densely populated of the former Soviet republics. The population density is currently 100 persons per square mile. Armenia's population growth is currently in negative territory due to high levels of emigration after the fall of Communism; it is currently -0.19%. It is not expected to stay negative for long, however, since emigration rates have declined in recent years. A positive population growth rate is expected by 2010.

Armenia was the USSR's most ethnically homogeneous country and it has maintained that homogeneity. Well over 90% of the population is ethnically Armenian; some estimates indicate that almost 98% of people living in Armenia are ethnically Armenian. There are sizeable Kurdish and Russian populations in the country, as well. There are small pockets of other ethnic groups represented in Armenia, as well (including Assyrians, Greeks, Georgians, Azeris, Belarusians, and Ukrainians). A full listing of Armenia's ethnic minorities is included at the end of this profile.

The majority of Armenians live in cities or towns (64%). Since Armenia is both highly mountainous and landlocked, its population is concentrated in river valleys, especially along the Hrazdan River where the capital city, Yerevan, is located.

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia>

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/am.html>

#### Language

The official state language of Armenia is Armenian. Armenian is an Indo-European language that is the lone survivor in its language family; there are no languages similar to Armenian spoken anywhere in the world. Its alphabet has 36 characters and dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. There are several Armenian dialects spoken in the country. The eastern/Yerevan dialect is the official language but many Armenians also speak a western/Turkish dialect. Ninety six percent (96%) of the population speaks some form of Armenian. Over 75% of Armenians also speak Russian at least intermediately because of Armenia's former membership in the USSR. More people are also learning English, especially in Yerevan. Kurdish is widely spoken by ethnic minorities, as well as the heart languages of Armenia's smaller ethnic populations.

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#### Society/Culture

Armenians are known for their close family ties and their warm hospitality. Family and close friends are the center of Armenian social life. Armenians do not move very often so it is the norm for friendships to carry over from childhood into adulthood. Adult children do not leave home until they are married and even after marriage many new couples will move in with the husband's family until they are ready to start a family. It is also common for aging parents to live with their children; grandparents play a very important role in childrearing in Armenia. There is an unspoken patriarchal structure to most Armenian families, meaning that the eldest man is head of the entire extended

family. Armenians usually have large families and interaction with members of the extended family is an integral part of everyday life.

Armenians expect visitors—be they family, friends, or acquaintances—to show up spontaneously; it is actually considered rude to always announce visits beforehand. Guests are almost always served food and drink. Planned social gatherings usually take place around the dinner table where multiple courses of food are served. If a guest's plate or glass is empty, the host will often refill it without even asking. After two helpings it is acceptable to decline or simply leave a small portion of food on your plate. Alcoholic beverages (cognac, vodka, or red wine) are served at most social gatherings and are accompanied by much toasting—toasting one another's families, health, success.

Handshakes and/or kisses on the cheek are traditional forms of greeting in Armenia. Men and women are physically affectionate with friends of the same gender; it is not uncommon to see two men or two women holding hands in public or walking down the street arm in arm.

Births, marriages, and deaths are important occasions in Armenia, regarded as rites of passage. The birth of a child is celebrated by friends and relatives, as is the baby's first tooth, which is normally the occasion for gift giving and a small party.

Weddings are very important occasions in Armenia. Sometimes they are still arranged by older relatives or close friends. Engagement and marriage begins with the man's immediate family. His parent's, grandparents, and sometimes aunts and uncles visit the woman's family and ask her father's blessing on the relationship. If her father gives his blessing then the man gives a woman a promise ring to make the engagement official. After the woman is officially promised to the man, her family plans a large engagement party. At the party a priest prays over the couple and gives them a blessing. At the conclusion of this ceremony the couple exchanges rings, placing them on each other's right hands. Then, the couple will usually wait a year before their official ceremony in the Armenian Church where the rings are moved to the left hand. The bride and groom plan the ceremony together. Divorce occurs much less frequently in Armenia than in the United States but it is not unheard of.

Funerals, usually occurring on the third day after death, begin at the home of the deceased where friends and family gather. The funeral procession then takes place, usually accompanied by traditional funeral music. Seven days after death, the deceased's family and friends gather at the cemetery for a ritualistic meal and toasting. The same thing occurs 40 days after death. After that, annual visits are made to the grave on the anniversary of death and on every New Year's Day.

During Soviet rule, Armenia had one of the highest standards of living of all the Soviet Republics. Under Soviet development, Armenia became highly industrialized. Cities, especially the capital, grew rapidly; Yerevan built an international airport and a subway system and more than 1/3 of Armenia's population migrated there. Yerevan remains home for 1/3 of Armenia's population. Another 1/3 lives in other cities such as Gumri, Spitak, Vanadzor, Alaverdi, and Stepanavan. The other 1/3 of the population lives in small towns or villages across the country.

The relatively high standard of living enjoyed by Armenia during Soviet rule has not carried over to post-Communist years. The fall of Communism, constant conflicts over land with Azerbaijan, and natural disasters have devastated Armenia's economy. In urban Armenia, most people live in old Communist block apartment buildings, many of which are overcrowded and dilapidated. Children and grandparents usually sleep in the same bed or on sofas in the living area or balcony; parents sleep in another room, many times along with a few children. Most rural-dwellers live in private homes, ranging from very small to quite large.

In terms of food, the Armenian diet is similar to other countries in the former USSR. Beet soup (*borscht*), roasted meats, potatoes, and stews are common. Fresh trout from Lake Sevan is a delicacy. *Dolma*, grapevine leaves stuffed with rice, meat, and seasonings, is also a special dish. Flat bread (*lavash*) and yogurt (*madzun*) are staples, evidence of Turkish and Arab influence on Armenian cuisine.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a large part of Armenian culture. Throughout centuries of unrest and invasion, the Church helped Armenia and its people maintain a sense of its identity, causing it to develop into a strong nationalist symbol and a maintainer and purveyor of Armenian culture.

Most holidays in Armenia are associated with the Armenian Church or a historical even in Armenia's past. In 2006, the Armenian holiday calendar looked like this:

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| January 1    | New Year's Day  |
| January 6    | Armenian Christmas Day (celebrated on the same day as Orthodox Christmas) |
| April 7      | Day of Beauty and Mother's  |
| April 23*    | Easter  |
| April 24     | Armenian Genocide Memorial Day  |
| May 9        | Victory and Peace Day   |
| May 28       | Restoration of Armenia's Statehood Day                                    |
| July 23      | Martyr's Day  |
| September 21 | Independence Day  |
| December 7   | Earthquake Victim's Memorial Day  |

\*Celebrated on a different date each year

Armenians celebrate Christmas on January 6; January 6 is also Epiphany, the day the coming of the Magi is commemorated. The Christmas celebration centers around Church and home. Most Armenians got to church on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning and then return home to a traditional meal of fish and rice cooked in butter.

May 28 marks the day in 1918 when Armenian nationalists declared Armenian independence from the Ottoman Empire, thus beginning Armenia's modern quest for independence.

Every year on April 24, Armenians all over the world remember the millions of Armenians that were slaughtered by the Ottomans in the Genocide of 1915. Tens of thousands of Armenians walk to Tsitsernakaberd every year to pay their respects.

Independence Day, celebrated on September 21, commemorates the restoration of the Republic of Armenia in 1990 after 70 years of Communist domination.

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia>

[http://www.earthcalendar.net/\\_php/lookup.php?mode=country](http://www.earthcalendar.net/_php/lookup.php?mode=country)

"Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life"

## **Government**

Armenia's first post-Communist constitution was approved in July 1995, replacing their 1978 constitution. The new constitution declared Armenia to be an independent democracy and guaranteed the basic human rights and freedoms of its citizens. It also granted universal suffrage to all citizens 18 years of age or older.

As most democracies, Armenia has three branches of government, executive, legislative, and judicial. The 1995 constitution set forth a strong executive branch, composed of the president and prime minister. The president is the head of state and has broad executive powers. He is elected to five year terms and can serve no more than two consecutive terms. The president has the power to appoint and remove the prime minister, judges, and other government officials. The president can also dismantle the legislature and declare martial law and states of emergency. The prime minister is head of the council of ministers.

A strong executive branch naturally entails a fairly weak legislative branch, as is the case in Armenia. Armenia has a unicameral legislature, the National Assembly. The National Assembly has 131 members who serve four-year terms. A revision to the constitution in 2005 granted the legislative branch more authority than it previously had but the executive branch still has far more authority than the legislative branch.

Armenia's judicial branch, according to the constitution, is technically independent. The Court of Appeal, the highest appellate court in the country, is there to watch over the application of the country's laws through its final review of cases. The justices on the Court of Appeals are appointed by the Council of Justice and finally appointed by the president. The Constitutional Court of Armenia oversees the constitutionality of legislative and executive decisions. Five of the Constitutional Court's justices are appointed by the president and four are appointed by the National Assembly.

Armenia is divided into ten administrative regions; Yerevan is one of them. These ten regions are then divided into smaller communities. Governors are appointed by the National Assembly to administer each region; each region also has its own legislative body. The governors and regional legislatures oversee the regional budget and economy. The communities have their own local governments with a community leader directly elected every three years. These local officials have limited authority and operate under the umbrella of the regional governor's authority.

Even as late as 2005 the Armenian government still scored low in the area of human rights. Treatment of prisoners/detainees was very bad; cases of detainee abuse were widespread as well as incidents lengthy pretrial detention. Armenian police frequently beat detainees in attempts to coerce confessions. Freedoms of assembly and press were limited. Abuse within the armed forces is also rampant with several mysterious deaths occurring yearly. In 1991 a law was passed that made proselytizing (by any religious group other than the Armenian Apostolic Church) illegal and required all religious groups to register with the government. Violence against women and the trafficking of women and children have been serious problems in the past and the government is attempting to address these issues; their efforts have met with only limited success.

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/12/09/azerba12177.htm>

“Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations”

## **Economy**

Before its break from the USSR in 1991, Armenia's economy was almost entirely based on industry. They produced large quantities of chemicals, electronics, machinery, food stuffs, textiles, etc. but were largely dependent on Moscow for resources (especially fuels) and trade. Because of its dependence on Soviet resources and trade, as well as the centralized economy it had lived with since 1921, Armenia was not economically prepared for independence. In fact, it was probably the least-prepared of all the Soviet Republics. Armenia's GDP, which measures the value of a country's goods and services, fell by 60% in the two years after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Two major events since the fall of Communism have greatly damaged Armenia's economy. The first is the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. During the years since this conflict began Azerbaijan has repeatedly set up blockades of Armenia's trade routes resulting in fuel shortages and near-famine. Also, the earthquake that hit northern Armenia in 1988 caused great damage to the Armenia's fledgling infrastructure.

Humanitarian needs are great in many areas of Armenia. Azeri blockades, slow progress in rebuilding after the earthquake of 1988, frequent droughts, and general economic instability create shortages and poverty for many Armenians. About 55% of the population lives below the poverty level and 12.8% of

the population lives on less than \$1 a day. Health care standards are poor. Maternal and infant mortality rates are very high compared to other European countries; each year there are 31 infant deaths per 1,000 live births and 35 maternal deaths per 1,000 live births.

Armenia's economy appears to have rallied in recent years. A tenuous cease-fire in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis in 1994 has helped matters significantly. Also, the government has passed sweeping economic reforms that have lowered inflation and caused steady economic growth. New industries, such as tourism and jewelry production, are popping up all over the country, supplementing the incomes of more traditional sectors. In 2005 Armenia's GDP was an estimated \$4.868 billion, showing a growth rate of 13.9%.

Unlike many former Soviet states, Armenia has limited problems with corruption. The 2005 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked Armenia 88 in a range of 1 to 158. Also, the 2006 Index of Economic Freedom ranked Armenia as the 27<sup>th</sup> most economically free country in the world, tying it with Japan. According to this index Armenia enjoys more economic freedom than Norway, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Finally, Armenia ranked highest among the Transcaucasian republics on the United Nations' 2005 Human Development Report.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia>

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/am.html>

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/DDAD-68ZLVE?OpenDocument>

## Literacy

Armenia's literacy rate is 98.6%, 99.4% for males and 98% for females. As part of the USSR, Armenian schools were controlled by Moscow and were required to teach Soviet history and agendas, all in Russian. The Soviet educational system was free and universal and this standard has carried over into post-Communist Armenia. However, instead of teaching Soviet curriculum, Armenian schools now emphasize Armenian history and culture and Armenian is the language of instruction. Unlike some countries, there is little variance in the percentage of urban and rural children that attend school; even in Armenian villages the large majority of children complete high school.

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/am.html>

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“Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life”

## Land/Geography

Armenia is a landlocked, mountainous plateau in western Asia. It is bordered by the Republic of Georgia on the north, Azerbaijan on the east, the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhichevan on the southwest, Iran on the south, and Turkey on the west. The landscape of Armenia is very mountainous with many rivers that create deep gorges and ravines between peaks. The average elevation of Armenia is over 5,000 feet above sea level.

Armenia's climate range is as varied as its elevations. Generally speaking the climate is temperate. In the higher altitudes winters tend to be long (up to seven months) and very cold and summers tend to be short but quite hot. In the lower altitudes the winters are shorter and milder and the summers are longer and hotter. All elevations tend to be very dry; Armenia is susceptible to frequent, sometimes severe, droughts.

Armenia also experiences earthquakes, usually mild or moderate but occasionally severe. In 1988 northern Armenia was rocked by a massive earthquake that left 25,000 dead and over 400,000 homeless.

“An Ethno Historical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires”  
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## History

Present-day Armenia only encompasses a portion of the land that was historically populated by Armenians. Historic Armenia encompassed not only the land of present-day Armenia but also large portions of eastern Turkey and northeastern Iran, and parts of Azerbaijan and Georgia. It is speculated that Armenia could have been populated even before the Great Flood but it is generally agreed that Armenia was populated by Noah and his descendents (Armenian legend points specifically to Noah's on Japheth) after the Flood since Armenia lies in the highlands near Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark came to rest after the flood. Mount Ararat is visible from the Armenian capital, Yerevan, and is a national symbol for the country even though it now lies in Turkey.

The kingdom of Armenia was established around 600 BC. Tigranes the Great ruled Armenia at the height of its power (95-66 BC); at that time the kingdom of Armenia stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and included portions of modern day Georgia and Syria. Before the first century ended however, Tigranes' empire fell into the hands of the Roman Empire and remained under Roman control until the collapse of Roman control in that region.

Armenia was the first officially Christian country in the world. King Tiridates III converted to Christianity in 301 and established a state church. His conversion predates Constantine's baptism by 36 years. Today, the Armenian Apostolic Church still exists independently of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Armenia was divided by the Byzantine and Persian empires in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century but eventually, in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, all of Armenia became part of the Byzantine Empire. In 653, however, the Byzantine Empire ceded Armenia to the Arabs and Armenia was granted some autonomy as an Arab protectorate. Various small Armenian kingdoms emerged during this time but Armenian independence ended with a resurgence of power by the Byzantine Empire in the late 10<sup>th</sup>/early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Byzantine Empire eventually fell to invading Seljuk Turks, placing Armenia under Turkish control by 1071.

Armenia was invaded and conquered by the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; the Mongols continued to rule there until the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottomans invaded Armenia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, gaining control of most of the country; Iran, however, still possessed some Armenian land. The Ottoman Empire and Iran played a centuries-long game of tug-of-war, vying for control of Armenia.

When Russian expansionism stretched into the Caucasus region in the 1820s they wrested all of present-day Armenia from Iranian control. The remainder of historic Armenia remained under Ottoman control but many Armenians migrated from Ottoman lands to the new Russian-controlled territory.

During the late 1800s Armenians, both in Ottoman and Russian lands began to organize themselves into political groups, lobbying for greater Armenian autonomy. Their protests were not always peaceful; many of their methods would not be considered terrorism. The Ottoman and Russian governments responded with a strong hand. Between 1894 and 1896 hundreds of thousands of Armenians were systematically murdered by Ottoman soldiers. The Russian government did not use such brutal measures; they closed all Armenian schools and churches prompting an armed Armenian revolt that lasted until 1905.

Until that time the Armenian minority had lived in relative peace with the Turkish majority in the Ottoman Empire. As the empire began to collapse, and with World War I on the horizon, the Ottomans began taking out their frustrations on Armenians living in Anatolia (present-day Asian Turkey). By accusing the Armenians of being pro-Russian, the Ottomans justified their actions against them, saying they merely wanted to avoid internal rebellion. In truth, it was not the pro-Russian bent of the

Armenians that bothered the Ottomans but their Christianity. The Armenian Genocide occurred between 1915 and 1918. Between 650,000 and 1,500,000 Armenians were massacred, the killings sanctioned by the Ottoman government. Hundreds of thousands more were exiled to the deserts of Syria; many died on the way due to starvation and disease. While Russia and the West officially protested this genocide they never took action. Hitler referenced the events of the Armenian Genocide while trying to convince his associates that the Jewish Holocaust would not be opposed by the West, saying “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” To this day Turkish authorities still refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for these events, claiming that the deaths of over a million Armenians were instead caused by a civil war incited by the Armenians, as well as disease and famine.

While the Armenian Genocide raged inside modern-day Turkey, World War I raged, as well. In 1916 Russia pushed the Ottomans out of most of Armenia but, when the Bolshevik Revolution inside Russia forced them to withdraw from the war in 1917, the Ottomans regained their lost territories. In 1918 the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the Albanian Nationalist Party) declared Albania’s independence. The Treaty of Sevres between the Ottoman Empire and World War I Allies, signed in August 1920, portioned off the Ottoman territories. Among other things, the treaty also recognized Armenian independence. In September, however, a newly organized Turkish government rejected the Treaty of Sevres and invaded Armenia. At the same time, Russian troops also invaded Armenia, preventing a full Turkish take-over. Armenia entered into a political arrangement with Russia in December of 1920, establishing Soviet rule in the country. In 1922 Armenia became part of the Soviet Union as part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFR); Georgia and Azerbaijan were also part of TSFR. TSFR was one of the USSR’s four original republics.

In the 1930s Armenia was also greatly affected by new Soviet economic policies. Armenia was soon the site of new chemical manufacturing plants and was also one of the USSR’s primary producers of copper. Private farms were taken away from individuals and consolidated into state-owned farms.

In 1936 the TSFR was divided into three separate entities, Armenian SSR, Georgian SSR, and Azerbaijan SSR. Despite an earlier agreement with Armenia, Soviet authorities gave the Armenian territories of Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Under Soviet control Armenia enjoyed a period of relative stability; the constancy of Soviet rule and the provision of a Communist government (medicine, food, etc.) was a welcome change from the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian Church faced some persecution; churches were closed and church property was confiscated. Some clergy members and members of the newly-banned Armenian Revolutionary Federation were sent to Soviet labor camps. After Lenin’s death, however, Stalin began to terrorize Armenia. Tens of thousands of Armenians were executed or deported during the Great Purge. Fears ebbed when Stalin died in 1953.

When Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev introduced *glasnost* (“openness”) in the mid-1980s Armenians took advantage of the opportunity. For the first time ever in the USSR, controversial issues could be discussed publicly with no fear of government retribution. Almost 1 million Armenians gathered in the streets of Yerevan in February 1988, calling for the return of the primarily Armenian-populated Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenian control.

In December 1988 Armenia’s attention was pulled from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict when a massive earthquake devastated northern Armenia, killing 25,000 people and leaving more than 400,000 homeless. Government relief efforts were minimal. Essential supplies coming from Russia were badly delayed by Azerbaijani blockades along the border. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh also dramatically slowed rebuilding efforts.

When the USSR dismantled in 1991, Armenians voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence. Levon Ter-Petrossian, head of the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PNM), became the first popularly elected president of an independent Armenia in October 1991. The establishment of Armenian independence and the progress of an autonomous Armenian government were disrupted by continuing conflict with Azerbaijan. Economic conditions were terrible. Azerbaijan continued their economic



blockade of Armenia, closing railways and fuel lines and causing severe shortages of food and energy throughout the country. Armenian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh were also streaming into Armenia causing further strain on the already faltering economy. A shaky cease-fire agreement has been in place between Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1994 but, despite continuing peace talks, there has not been complete resolution.

As conditions continued to worsen in Armenia, the people began to call for the resignation of Ter-Petrossian and his PNM government. However, in 1995 when Armenia's first parliamentary elections were held, the Republican bloc (led by the PNM) claimed the majority of seats. Many opposition parties criticized the fairness of the elections. In the same election voters approved Armenia's first post-Soviet constitution, granting the president wide-ranging powers. Ter-Petrossian was reelected in 1996 but there were wide-spread allegations of election fraud.

Ter-Petrossian appointed Robert Kocharian, the elected president of Nagorno-Karabakh, as prime minister of Armenia in 1997. Kocharian supported the secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan but Ter-Petrossian took a more moderate position, stating that he would agree to Nagorno-Karabakh remaining part of Azerbaijan but with Armenians taking over de facto control of the Armenians living there. Ter-Petrossian, as a result of this moderate position, was forced to resign in 1998 by hard-line supporters of Nagorno-Karabakh secession. A month later Kocharian was elected as his successor. He was reelected in 2003

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia>

[http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Armenian\\_Genocide\\_Quotes](http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Armenian_Genocide_Quotes)

“An Ethno Historical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires”

## Christian History

The Armenian Apostolic Church (sometimes called the Armenian Orthodox Church or the Gregorian Church) recognizes two of Jesus' disciples, Bartholomew and Thaddeus, as the first to bring the Gospel to historic Armenia. The Church traces its roots directly to these two apostles, hence the title “Apostolic”. The Armenian Church also honors many saints and martyrs who preached the Gospel in the region prior to its official conversion to Christianity.

Armenia was the first officially Christian nation in the world. The conversion of Armenia is attributed to Gregory the Illuminator, now a saint in the Armenian Church. Gregory, an ethnic Armenian, was converted to Christianity while visiting Cappadocia. Upon returning to his homeland, King Tiridates III threw him into prison. Years later Gregory was brought out of prison to pray for the king after he was stricken with a life-threatening illness. Following his miraculous healing, the king was baptized and declared Armenia to be a Christian nation in 301.

The Armenian Apostolic Church exists independently from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches although its practices have much in common with the Orthodox tradition. The primary point of contention between the Armenian Church and the Catholic and Orthodox Churches can be traced back to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The church fathers called the Council of Chalcedon to settle the issue of the nature of Christ. Up until this time there was much debate on this issue. Did Christ have two complete natures, complete God-ness and complete humanity? Or did Christ only have one nature? The Council of Chalcedon determined the dual nature of Christ, establishing that he was fully God and fully man, just as Scripture teaches. There were some, however, the Armenian Church included, who disagreed with this decision, rejecting the idea of Jesus' dual nature. Since that time the Armenian Apostolic Church has only held close ties with other “monophysite” (one-nature) congregations, like the Coptic Church of Egypt.

The Armenian Church managed to maintain its beliefs though it was influenced by many other cultures for centuries. It even managed to survive Ottoman rule and the growth of Islam. In 1933, however, the Church experienced a major split over the nature of its relationship with the Soviet state. The split became official in 1956. Some attempts at reunification have been made in recent years, mostly due to an increased sense of Armenian unity after the fall of the USSR, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, and the earthquake of 1988.

Almost 95% of Armenians consider themselves Armenian Orthodox. There are some Roman Catholic Churches in Armenia (more often called the Armenian Uniate Catholic Church). Catholicism first came to Armenia by the missionary efforts of Dominican and Franciscan monks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid 1990s there were 130,000 Catholics in Armenia; an estimated 100,000 of those were ethnic Armenians.

William Goodall, from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, arrived in Constantinople in 1831 and established the first Protestant mission among Armenians. His Armenian-Turkish New Testament was published in 1846; the first Armenian evangelical church began that same year. Originally, evangelical missionaries came to Armenia with the goal of reviving the historic Armenian Church. The clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church vigorously opposed them, however, even going so far as to excommunicate its members who associated with evangelicals. Overall, Protestants and evangelicals made little impact in Armenia. In 1991 there were only 1,500 Protestants in Armenia. In 1996 there were 900 Baptists and 7 Baptist churches; that number had increased from 400 Baptists in 1990.

“World Christian Encyclopedia”

## Religions

### Non Christian

#### *Islam*

Islam is not a prevalent religion in Armenia but it is practiced by many of Armenia's ethnic minorities, including Azeri, Kurd, Balkar, Chechen, Darginian, Kazakh, Ossetian, Tartar, and Uzbek. Muslims in each of these groups account for almost 2% of Armenia's population. These minority groups are primarily immigrants from Islamic countries and continue to practice their religion in their new homeland. Most (if not all) are Sunni Muslims, the largest branch of Islam.

#### *Yezidi*

Among the Kurds, there are many who practice the Yezidi religion; an estimated 1/3 of Kurds living in this area of the world are Yezidi. The world's largest concentration of Yezidi adherents is Mosul, Iraq. The Yezidi religion is highly syncretistic (a merging of the ideas and practices of multiple religions). Sufi Islamic influence is evident in Yezidi imagery and vocabulary but much of Yezidi mythology is linked to ancient Iranian religions (i.e. Persian Zoroastrianism). Other pagan religions are also represented, as well. It is difficult to ascertain specific details of the Yezidi religion because of their tradition of secretiveness when it comes to revealing certain aspects of their practices to outsiders.

The basic Yezidi belief is that God created the world at the beginning of time and then left it in the care of seven Holy Beings or Angels. They are referred to as the *heft sirr* (Seven Mysteries) in Kurdish. The highest of these seven beings is *Malak Ta'us*. *Malak Ta'us* is represented by a peacock. Some Muslims and Christians equate *Malak Ta'us* to Satan because *Malak Ta'us* has another name, *Shaytan*, which is the same as the name of Satan in the Qur'an. Yezidis do not view *Malak Ta'us* as an evil entity, however. He is the representative of God on the earth and the leader of these seven Holy Beings; he distributes responsibilities, blessings, and troubles as he deems appropriate. In fact, they do not believe that evil comes from an outside source; they view the human heart as the source of evil.

### *Jewish*

A small Jewish population remains in Armenia. At least 75% of them remain committed to Judaism and their orthodox practices. The other 25% now consider themselves nonreligious.

### *Non-religious*

A growing number of Armenia's population now considers itself nonreligious/atheist. While they may be officially registered with the government as adherents of the Armenian Orthodox Church this does not bear itself out in their ever day lives. Also, many of Armenia's nonreligious population are ethnic minorities from Belarus, Chechnya, the Republic of Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ossetia, etc.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yezidi>  
[www.joshuaproject.org](http://www.joshuaproject.org)

### **Christian cults and sects**

#### *Jehovah's Witness*

Jehovah's Witness missionaries first began working in Armenia in 1975 but, since 1991, have struggled to be registered by the government. In 2000 there were an estimated 6,300 Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia, 0.19% of the population.

[http://www.adherents.com/Na/Na\\_360.html#2102](http://www.adherents.com/Na/Na_360.html#2102)  
[http://www.watchtower.org/library/w/2003/4/1/article\\_01.htm](http://www.watchtower.org/library/w/2003/4/1/article_01.htm)

#### *Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints (Mormons)*

The Mormons began work around 1992 and now have two congregations with under 200 members.

### **Catholic/Orthodox**

From 1080 to 1375 the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia thrived along the Mediterranean coast and maintained positive relationships with Catholic crusaders. The Roman Catholic presence begun at that time was later strengthened by the arrival of Franciscan and Dominican missionaries in the late 1400s. The first official Armenian Catholic congregation formed in Constantinople in 1701. After a brief move to Italy the Armenian Uniate Catholic Church patriarchate moved to Bzommar, Lebanon later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were soon recognized by the Ottomans as a distinct group (1830). Before World War I there were an estimated 28,000 Armenian Catholics living in present-day Armenia. Due to immigration and mass martyrdom there were none remaining after the war. However, in 1995 there were 130,000 Catholics in Armenia. Almost 80% of those were ethnic Armenians.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has much in common with the Eastern Orthodox Church even though it is not officially associated with it. (See "Christian History" above for more information) Approximately 95% of Armenians are officially members of the Armenian Orthodox Church.

The *Armenian Church Loving Brotherhood* is the evangelical arm of the Apostolic Church which has its roots in the fifth century. The Brotherhood suffered much in past centuries and under Communism, but has been able to operate openly since the late '80s. The group emphasizes biblical preaching, personal witness, charitable works, and publishing and distributing evangelical literature and Bibles. By 1999 they had grown to 20,000 active members and had 500 preaching points all over Armenia.

*World Christian Encyclopedia; Operation World*

## **Protestant/Evangelicals/Pentecostals**

The first Protestant mission work among Armenians began in 1831. Over the years Protestant and evangelical missionaries seem to have made very little impact.

In 1991 there were only 1,500 Protestants in Armenia.

### *Baptists*

In 1996 there were 900 Baptists and 7 Baptist churches; that number had increased from 400 Baptists in 1990.

### *Seventh Day Adventists*

Seventh Day Adventists have been in Armenia since 1960. They report 10 congregations and almost 900 members.

### *Pentecostals*

In recent years the number of Pentecostals in Armenia has been increasing more quickly than other Protestant or evangelical groups. Still, the number of Protestant/evangelical believers in Armenia today accounts for less than 2% of the population. Pentecostals report over 500 congregations with more than 20,000 members

“World Christian Encyclopedia”

“Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions”

[www.peoplegroups.org](http://www.peoplegroups.org)

## **People Groups**

### **39314**

#### **Armenian (2,942,000)**

Most estimates indicate that well over 90% of Armenians are Christians, mostly members of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Joshua Project ([www.joshuaproject.org](http://www.joshuaproject.org)) estimates that as much as 8.26% of Armenia’s Christian population is evangelical. They classify the evangelical church in Armenia as “emerging” and indicate that over 5% of Albania’s population is evangelical. Peoplegroups.org is not as optimistic. They calculate that less than 2% of Albania’s population is evangelical but church planting efforts have been widespread in recent years.

### **24032**

#### **Azeri (20,000)**

Armenia and Azerbaijan share a border so it is not surprising that there is a small Azeri population in Armenia. Azeri are primarily Muslim (90%) and Azeri who live in Armenia are no different. There are few, if any, known Azeri believers in Armenia. No one is currently engaging this people group.

### **24035**

#### **Northern Kurd (Yezidi) (42,000)**

The Kurdish people are the largest people group without their own homeland. They are scattered all over the countries in this part of the world. They are among the Joshua Project’s least-reached people groups. Almost 95% of Kurds are Muslim. The majority of Armenian Kurds are Muslim, although a significant number of them subscribe to the Yezidi religion.

Northern Kurds are often referred to as Yezidi Kurds. A completed Bible translation is not available for the northern Kurds (the entire New Testament is translated). There have been some church planting

efforts among the northern Kurds in recent years and multiple missions agencies are committed to reaching this people group.

(NOTE: The information on Joshua project and [www.peoplegroups.org](http://www.peoplegroups.org) is very conflicted regarding this group. I used the Joshua project info.)

**00000**

**Assyrian (4,900)**

Almost 90% of Assyrians claim to be Christian but only 0.4% of those Christians are evangelical.

**00000**

**Balkar (800)**

The Balkars are a Turkish people from the Caucasus region. 100% of Balkars are Muslim. There are no known Balkar believers living in Armenia. There are no agencies committed to reaching this group.

**00000**

**Belarusian (1,100)**

Belarusians are mostly Eastern Orthodox but many, after years of Communism and government suppression of religion, claim to be non-religious. There are some Belarusian believers in Armenia but less than 2% of the population is evangelical.

**00000**

**Chechen (200)**

The Chechen people live in remote valleys in southern Russia (and other countries) between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Chechens are primarily Muslim (63%) but many also claim to be non-religious. There are few, if any, Chechen believers anywhere in this region and no missions agencies have committed to reaching them.

**00000**

**Darginian (300)**

The Darginian people are a Eurasian people from the Caucasus region. They are 99.99% Sunni Islam and live primarily in Russia. There are few, if any, Darginian believers in Armenia and there are no agencies currently committed to engaging them. A complete Bible translation is not available in the Darginian language (Dargwa) but portions have been translated. The Joshua Project ranks the Darginian people among its least-reached people groups.

**00000**

**Deaf (unknown)**

The status of evangelical Christianity among deaf Armenians is unknown.

**00000**

**Georgian (1,300)**

The majority of Georgians (55%) claim to be non-religious. This state can mostly be attributed to its long status as one of the republics of the USSR. Members of Georgia's national Orthodox Church make up 40% of the population while Muslims make up the other 5%. There are few, if any, Georgian evangelical believers even though multiple agencies are currently engaging Georgians around the world.

**00000**

**German (300)**

At least 25% of the Germans in the world are evangelical and, according to the Joshua Project, they are categorized as having a widespread, disciplined church. Still, over 20% of Germans consider themselves non-religious.

**00000**

**Greek (4,600)**

Greeks are largely members of the Greek Orthodox Church (90%+) but many consider themselves to be non-religious. Less than 2% of the Greek population of Armenia is evangelical but some church planting efforts have been successful in recent years.

**00000****Gypsy (Armenian Bosh) (50)**

There are few known Armenian Bosh believers in Armenia but it is believed that a small percentage of the population is evangelical.

**00000****Jew, Eastern Yiddish (800)**

Three-fourths of the Jewish population of Armenia still retains its Orthodox Jewish faith but 25% now describe themselves as non-religious. There are no known Jewish believers in Armenia but at least one agency is now committed to engaging this people group.

**00000****Kazakh (400)**

The majority of Kazakhs are Muslim (60%) but a large number consider themselves non-religious (40%). There are few, if any, Kazakh believers living in Armenia. A complete Bible translation is not available.

**00000****Lithuanian (200)**

A growing number of Lithuanians consider themselves to be non-religious but the majority of them are still members of the Lithuanian Catholic Church. About 0.5% of Lithuanians are evangelical.

**00000****Moldavian (600)**

The majority of Moldavians are members of the Orthodox Church but evangelicalism is growing among them. Currently almost 5% of Moldavians are members of evangelical fellowships. The Joshua Project considers the Moldavian evangelical church to be a widespread, disciplined church.

**00000****Ossete (400)**

Ossetians are one of the oldest known Caucasian peoples, descended from ancient Iranian tribes. The majority of them currently live in the Russian republics of Northern or Southern Ossetia. Many of them also live in Georgia. Forty percent (40%) of Ossetians are Muslim, 36% are Christian (mostly members of the Russian Orthodox Church), and 24% consider themselves to be non-religious. The Joshua Project reports that 0% of the Ossete population is evangelical. Even though they live in a Russian republic, the Ossetian heart language is Osetin, not Russian. A complete Bible translation has not been finished in Osetin.

**00000****Polish (300)**

The majority (91%) of Poles living in Armenia are Christian and 99% of Christians are Roman Catholic. Members of the other 1% are either Protestant or evangelical. Nine percent of Poles living in Armenia are non-religious.

**00000****Romanian (600)**

At least 7% of Romanians living in Armenia are evangelical with the number growing larger. The Joshua Project considers the Romanian evangelical church in Armenia to be widespread and disciplined.

**00000****Russian (8,800)**

Over 60% of Russians living in Armenia are still devoted to the Russian Orthodox Church. Another 38% consider themselves non-religious. About 0.8% of Russians in Armenia are evangelical. Even though less than 2% of the Russian population in Armenia is evangelical, there still appears to be a reproducing church movement beginning.

**00000**

**Tartar (500)**

The Tartars are a Turkic people who have sizeable populations in many of Russia's republics as well as many former Soviet/Central Asian republics. Over 80% of the Tartar population of Armenia is Sunni Muslim. There are few, if any, known Tartar believers living in Armenia. A complete Bible translation is still not available in the Tartar heart language, Kazan Tartar, and there are no agencies committed to reaching this group.

**00000**

**Ukrainian (6,900)**

Almost 80% of Ukrainians living in Armenia are Christian (mostly Orthodox); 5% of those Christians are evangelical. Another 21% consider themselves non-religious. There is a reproducing church movement present among the Ukrainians of Armenia.

**00000**

**Southern Uzbek (300)**

Sunni Muslims comprise 80% of the Uzbek population of Armenia. The other 20% are non-religious. There are few, if any, Uzbek believers living in Armenia. A complete Bible translation is not available in the heart language of Southern Uzbeks.

### **Missiological Implications**

1. Evangelical Christians and Churches should recognize that the Armenian Apostolic Church has been dead for many years as observed by the first evangelical missionaries to Armenia in the mid 1800s. Originally, the missionaries held out hopes of reviving the existing church and encouraging them in their ministries but they were unsuccessful.
2. Missionaries should be aware of the intense loyalty that most Armenians feel to the Armenian Church but realize that most of this loyalty is more closely related to nationalism than spirituality.
3. Evangelical Christians and churches should engage in efforts to introduce biblical Christianity into Armenia. This goal probably will be reached by finding dedicated believers who could go to Armenia, live, and witness by their lives of the gospel.
4. Evangelical Christians and church should recognize that while the number of Muslims living in Armenia appears small, the followers of Islam permeate almost every part of Armenia. Also, because of years of close association with Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and other Muslim nations, Armenia has (probably unknowingly) adopted some elements of Islamic culture.

Proselytizing is officially against the law in Armenia but it is unclear how closely the government watched missionaries or ministers. Also, every religious organization and congregation is required to register with the government. These restrictions, if they could even be called that, are minor and Armenia should be viewed as an open country for missionaries. Because of its strategic location—bordering Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey—Armenia could also be very useful to missionaries who, for whatever reason, cannot gain entrance into closed Muslim countries.

5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should commission a study group to prepare witnessing materials and train evangelists to present the gospel to the followers of Yezidi religion and

social life. If the Jesus Film is not available in Yezidi format, efforts should seek to make it available.

6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should engage in prayer and seek means of helping overcome the influence of 70 years of Marxism and a century of severe persecution of Armenians. These experiences have left deep moral and social wounds. The pain, anger, bitterness and vengefulness need to be cleansed in the blood of Jesus. The whole education system requires transformation and the restoration of Christian values. Pray for deep repentance and revival (See *Operation World*).
7. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to meet the pressing needs in the region, Nagorno-Karabakh. The region, nominally independent, is an open wound. Over 150,000 Armenians (many are refugees from Azerbaijan) live in the region. Some have come to faith in Christ. Refugees on both sides of the conflict (500,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan and one million Azeris from Armenia and the west of Azerbaijan) still suffer deprivation and marginalization. The international ramifications of the dispute for surrounding nations, NATO and Russia are significant.
8. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek ways to aid in leadership training in Armenia. Neither adequate residential training nor TEE courses are available. There is one small Pentecostal Bible School in Yerevan.



## Pictures

## Links

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/am.html>  
[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761569919/Armenia\\_\(country\).html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761569919/Armenia_(country).html)  
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia>  
[http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Armenian\\_Genocide\\_Quotes](http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Armenian_Genocide_Quotes)  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yezidi>  
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<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/DDAD-68ZLVE?OpenDocument>  
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/12/09/azerba12177.htm>  
[http://www.earthcalendar.net/\\_php/lookup.php?mode=country](http://www.earthcalendar.net/_php/lookup.php?mode=country)

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