Southwest Asia’s Ethnic Groups

Arabs, Kurds, & Persians
Ethnic Groups

• This is a group of people who share a common culture.
• These characteristics have been part of their community for generations.

• Ethnic groups can have many things in common:
• Shared history, common ancestry, language, religion, traditions, beliefs, holidays, food, etc.
• All of these things make up a common culture that is shared by the members of the ethnic group.
Religious Groups

- This is a group of people who share a belief system. They believe in the same god (or gods) and have common sacred text with a specific set of rules about how to live.

- Religious groups have many things in common:
  - God(s), prophets, prayers, history, sacred text, religious laws, holy days, etc.

- People from different ethnic groups may share the same religion; however, they may be from different cultures.
Arabs
Location

- Arabs comprise most of the population of Southwest Asia.

- Arabs also live in the United States, Canada, parts of northern Africa, and Europe.
Arabs of Southwest Asia believe themselves to be descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael.

Arabs make up the majority of the people who live throughout the Middle East.
Religion

• Most Arabs practice Islam.
  • Small numbers of Arabs practice other religions.
  • Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.

• Islam consists mostly of two different groups. The majority of Muslims practice Sunni Islam. Most others practice Shi'a Islam.
  • Sunnis and Shi'a disagree about who is in charge of the Muslim world.

• Small numbers of Arabs practice other religions. Some Arabs are Christians.
Religion

- Sunni Islam dominates in most Arab areas, especially in North Africa.

- Shi’a Islam is dominant among the Arab population in southern Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, northern Syria, & northern Yemen.
The Kaaba, located in Mecca, is the center of Islam.
Language

- Most Arabs, whether they are Muslim or Christian, speak Arabic.
Kurds
The Kurds are an ethnic group that live in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

- Kurds form almost 20% of the population of Turkey and Iraq.
- Many Kurds live in an area of northern Iraq called Kurdistan (not a separate country).

They are the largest ethnic group in the world without a country of their own.
- Many Kurds hope to have a nation of their own some day.
- This has caused conflict with the countries in which Kurdish people live.
Distribution of Kurdish people
In Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria

- Kurdish majority
- Kurdish minority

Map showing the distribution of Kurdish people in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, with major concentrations in the northern parts of Iraq, particularly in Mosul, Arbil/Hewler, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniya/Silemani, and Baghdad.
Ancestry

• Kurds of Southwest Asia believe themselves to be descendants of the Medes, an ancient Iranian people.
• In fact, Kurds share many aspects of their culture with Iranians.
Like the Arabs, the Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim, and the great majority are Sunni; only 5% are Shi’a.

Kurdish Muslims tend to be less strict about certain Islamic practices.
- For example, there are fewer laws for how Kurdish women should dress than there are for Iranian and Arab women.
Kurdish is an Indo-European language related to Farsi (Persian) and other Iranian languages.

There are many different dialects of Kurdish spoken throughout Southwest Asia.
Persians
Persians are those who live in the modern country of Iran.
- They make up about half of Iran’s current population.
- The country of Persia became known as Iran in 1935.
- There is written evidence (cuneiform) that was found in Iran that proves that “Persia” was the name of this area since its beginning.

Today, Persians can be found living in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and the Xinjiang province of China.
Iran's Demographics
Ancestry

• The Persians lived in Iran before the arrival of Islam in the 7th century.

• The Persians’ ancestors were Indo-Europeans who migrated from central Europe and Southern Russia and formed a great empire.
Most Persians in Iran practice Shi’a Islam, but some are Sunni and other religions.

Persian women have faced many challenges as a result of strict cultural and religious practices.
Ethnic groups of Iran, in 2008, in %

- Arab: 2%
- Baloch: 2%
- Lur: 6%
- Kurd: 10%
- Azeri: 16%
- 1 other: 1%

Religious groups in %

- Shiite: 89%
- Sunni: 9%
- Others*: 2%

*Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Bahai
Persians speak a language called Farsi (or Persian).

It is one of the oldest languages that is still spoken today!
thank you very much
chert
please (offering)
don't mention it
its nothing
excuse me

Hello
how are you?
I'm fine, thanks
how are you?
not baad, thanks

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