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# The Issue of Turkic Population in Iran in the Turkish Public Opinion

*İran'da Türk Nüfusu Meselesi Türkiye Kamuoyunda*

Öz

Zengin bir devlet geçmişine sahip İran, her zaman çok uluslu bir etnik yapıya sahip olmuştur. Arap işgalinden sonra Türk hanedanlarının, özellikle de Azerbaycan Türklerinin bugünkü İran'da iktidarda olduğu ve yüzyıllarca İran'ı yönettiği bilinmektedir. Tarihsel süreçlerin bir sonucu olarak, Türkler günümüz İran'ın hemen hemen tüm yerleşim yerlerine yayılmıştı. İran'ın etnik haritasına dikkat edersek, Türklerin Azerbaycan, Türkiye, Türkmenistan, Afganistan ve Irak'ı çevreleyen tüm illerde, Hazar Denizi ve Körfez kıyılarında ve ülkenin tüm merkez ayaletlerinde yerleştiğini görebiliriz. İran'daki Türk nüfusu meselesi, Türkoloji'de de önemli konularından birini oluşturmaktadır. Bununla birlikte İran'da yaşayan Türk halklarının tam sayısı konusunda bilimsel literatürde kesin bir görüş yoktur. Belirtmek gerekirken, farklı yıllarda Türkiye kamuoyu tarihinde İran'daki Türk nüfusu ile ilgili çok sayıda makale yayınlanmıştı. Bu yazıların dikkatlice incelenmesi, konunun bilimsel açıdan anlaşılmasında önemli bir rol oynayacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İran'ın etnik yapısı, İran'da türk nüfusu, Türkiye kamuoyu

**Abstract**

Iran has always been presented as a multi-ethnic structure with its rich history of statehood. It is known that after the Arab occupation, Turkic dynasties, especially Azerbaijani Turks were in power in today's Iran and ruled the country for centuries. As a result of historical processes, the Turks spread to almost all settlements of present-day Iran. If we examine the ethnic map of Iran, we can observe that Turks live in all the provinces bordering Azerbaijan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, on the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Gulf, and in the central parts of the country. Undoubtedly, "the number of Turkic people in Iran" is one of the most important issues in Turkology. However, there is no unequivocal opinion in the scientific literature about the exact number of Turkic peoples living in Iran. However, a large number of scientific articles on the "Turkic population in Iran" have been published in the Turkish public opinion in different years. A thorough study of these writings plays an important role in the study of the issue.

**Keywords:** ethnic composition of Iran, Iranian Turks, Turkish public opinion

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## Introduction

**R**aymond Furon, a former professor at Tehran University, mentioned the Iranian Plateau covers 1,645,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1</sup> Today, Iran with a large land area and a multi-ethnic structure is home to three major language families. Thus, the Arabs represent the Semitic-Hamitic language family, the Persians, Kurds, Gilaks, Mazanderanis and Balochs represent the Indo-European language family, and the Azerbaijanis, Qashqais, Turkmens and other similar Turkic peoples represent the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family. The Persians live in the central provinces of the country and on the shores of the Gulf, the Gilaks in Gilan province, the Mazanderanis in Mazandaran province in the south of the Caspian Sea, the Kurds in Kurdistan province, and partly in Western Azerbaijan and Khorasan provinces. The Balochs also belong to the Indo-European language family and settled in Sistan and Balochistan province on the border with Pakistan. The Arabs, who make up the Semitic-Hamitic language family, are few in number and live mainly on the shores of the Persian Gulf. The majority of Azerbaijanis live in the lands among the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the north, Turkey in the west, and many provinces in the east, from the Caspian Sea to Tehran. The Qashqais settled in a large area stretching from Isfahan to the shores of the Gulf. Turkmens are mainly spread in Khorasan and Gulistan provinces. In general, the Turks live in just about all settlements of the country.

Iran, one of the richest civilizations in the world, has historically had a federal structure. However, there was a long period of stagnation in the Iranian statehood tradition after the Arab conquest. The powerful liberation movement against the Arab occupation in the ninth century brought about the restoration of statehood in Azerbaijan and dealt a heavy blow to the Arabs in Iran. The influx of Turks from Turkestan had a significant impact on the strengthening of the position of the Turks in this region, and Iran was ruled by Turkic dynasties for centuries.<sup>2</sup> This process resulted in the settlement of Turks throughout Iran and especially at border checkpoints. Today, we can easily see the presence of Turks on the border with neighboring countries.

The study of Turkic peoples, their culture, countries and geographical regions features prominently in Turkology. If we take into account that there is a large Turkic presence in Iran, this country is a treasure for Turkologists. Unfortunately, the anti-Turkic policy pursued by Reza Shah Pahlavi has dealt a heavy blow to Azerbaijanis and other Turkic peoples living in Iran. From that time on, they tried to deliberately assimilate the Turks and humiliate them in all spheres of society. However, the Turkic peoples living in Iran, especially the Azerbaijanis, have always resisted this anti-Turkic policy and are still fighting for their national rights. The study of Turkic peoples, including Iranian Turks, is also necessary in the Turkish public opinion. Numerous books and scientific articles published in Turkey in recent years also stems from the attention paid to this issue. According to a study conducted by the Ankara-based Institute for Russian Studies on Iranian Turks, the places inhabited by Turks in Iran today can be divided into three major regions:

Northwestern Turkic lands - Iranian Turks live in an area of 170,000 km<sup>2</sup>, stretching 1,000 km from the south and east of Tehran to the Turkish border. Three-quarters of the Iranian Turks, or nearly 20 million, live in this region.

1 Raymond Furon, "İran", Hilmi Kitabevi, İstanbul 1943, s. 11

2 Ahmet Ağaoğlu, "İran ve İnkılabı", Zerbamat Basımevi, Ankara 1941, s. 11

Northeastern Turkic lands - Khorasan Turks and Turkmens live in this region. The number of Khorasan Turks is about 3 million, and Turkmens is around 2 million.

Southern and Central Turkic lands - Turks live dispersed in this region and the total number is about 3 million.<sup>3</sup>

Actually, no such geographical classification has been determined for the Turkic peoples in the administrative division of Iran. Nevertheless, the natives call the north-western Turkic lands as South Azerbaijan, the north-eastern Turkic lands as Khorasan and Turkmensahra, and the southern and central Turkic lands as Gashgai land. However, the Iranian government does not accept these names as a result of fear from the presence of Turks and always tries to underestimate the total number of Turks in Iran. However, all Iranian Turks, especially Azerbaijanis, have always fought for their national rights and still maintain their Turkic identity in Iran.

The general demographic situation of the population in Iran and the issue of the Turkic population is one of the most important issues in the field of Turkology and Iranian sciences. When Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power in 1925, the Turkic peoples faced serious discrimination in Iran. Even all Iranian Turks forced to forget their Turkic identity. The population of South Azerbaijan mostly suffered from this policy. Unquestionably, this policy was opposed by the Iranian Turks and never yielded positive results for the regime. Today, Iran is one of the countries with a majority of Turks. However, there is no unequivocal opinion about the exact number of Turkic peoples living in Iran. Thus, the Iranian ruling circles often underestimate the number of Turks, while South Azerbaijani national activists claim that this figure is twice as high as they show. In order to clarify these contradictions, it is necessary to look at the articles published in the history of Turkish public opinion on the general demographic situation of the population living in Iran and the number of Iranian Turks.

### **Turkic population in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the Pahlavi period**

The first comprehensive study of Iranian Turks and South Azerbaijan in Turkish public opinion belongs to the founder of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Muhammad Amin Rasulzadeh. In this regard, the author's article named "Iranian Turks" published in 1911 in the Journal of *Türk Yurdu* is praiseworthy. Rasulzadeh also brought to the readers' attention the contradictory figures on the total population of Iran in local and foreign sources. However, he noted that the total population of Iran is about 9 million, and the Turks with majority living in (South) Azerbaijan comprise 1/3 (3 million) of the total population of Iran.<sup>4</sup> The information provided by the author about the total population in Iran and the number of Iranian Turks at the beginning of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century is an important source to which we can refer.

Approaches about Turkic lands and the total number of Turkic people in Iran have played an important role in the research of Azerbaijani immigrants. Muhammad Sadiq Aran, one of the Azerbaijani immigrants who migrated to Turkey after the occupation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by Soviet Russia, touched upon the issue of the population census in Iran in his book "Iranian Turks" written in 1942 on behalf of 5 million Iranian Turks. The author mentioned that the

3 Cansu Tarakçı, "İran türkleri", Rusya Araştırmaları Enstitüsü (RUSEN), Avrasya, Güney Kafkasya Araştırmaları, İran türkleri, Ankara, Aralık 2017, <http://www.rusen.org/iran-turkleri/>

4 Mehmed Emin Resulzade, "İran Türkleri", Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, İstanbul 1993, s. 8

total population of Iran is about 10 million and half of them (5 million) are Turks.<sup>5</sup> This fact shows that Iran is not only a Persian land, but also Turkic. Murtuza Nizameddin Tabrizli, one of the South Azerbaijani emigrants, also gave a mention to the total population and the number of Turks in Iran. The author's book "Today's Azerbaijan Struggle and the Main Causes", published in Istanbul in 1946, states that it is difficult to give a definitive figure due to the lack of accurate census in Azerbaijan, however, the number of Azerbaijanis is estimated at 4 million.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of course, if we add other Turkic peoples living in Iran to the figure, we can assume that the Turkic population in Iran is high. It is obvious from these works written by Azerbaijani immigrants in the 1940s that half of the total population of Iran is Turks, and a significant part of them is the population of South Azerbaijan.

Prof., Dr. Ahmad Jafaroglu's (one of the Azerbaijani immigrants in Turkey) estimated the total number of South Azerbaijanis more than 4 million, citing European sources in his article "Iranian Turks" published in the Journal of *Türk Kültürü* in 1966. At the same time, for the first time, the book provides detailed information about other Turkic populations living in Iran, and the total number of Iranian Turks indicated around 5-6 million.<sup>7</sup> This can be seen more clearly in the chart below:

Ethnic groups in Iran	Number of the people
Azerbaijanis	More than 4 million
Qashqais	400.000-500.000
Afshars	470.000-500.000
Qajars	25.000-30.000
Shahsevens	180.000-200.000
Garadaghlis	75.000-80.000
Garagapags	15.000-20.000
Khamsa Turks	100.000
Kangarlis	30.000-35.000
Khorasani and Bochagchis	60.000-70.000
Kerayis	30.000-35.000
Bayat, Garachorlu and others	180.000
Turkmens	500.000

The question of the Turkic population in Iran was also included in the study of Nihal Atsız, a Turkish nationalist scholar. Thus, N. Atsız remarked on this issue in his article "Iranian Turks" published in 1970. The article notes that the total population of Iran was 25 million, and the number of Turks living in Iran was about 12 million in 1968-1970.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, this is half of the total population of Iran. Considering the fact that there are other ethnic groups in Iran, we can say that there are fewer Persians than Turks.

5 Sanan Azər, "İran türkləri", Cümhuriyyət Matbaası, İstanbul 1942, s. 11-12

6 Murtuza Nizametdin Tebrizli, "Bugünkü Azərbaycan Davası esas və səbəpləri", Gün Basımevi, İstanbul 1946, s.10

7 Ahmet Caferoğlu, "İran Türkleri", Türk Kültürü, Sayı 50, Yıl V, Aralık 1966, s. 125

8 Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, "Makaleler I", İrfan Yayınevi, İstanbul 1997, s. 55

In the 1970s, numerous articles about Iranian Turks and South Azerbaijan were published in various journals in the Turkish public opinion. These articles, published under the title of Iranian Turks, provide comprehensive information about the general Iranian population and the major Turkic communities living in Iran. The information also includes the number of Turks in Iran. In this regard, it is very important to look at these studies.

Mehmet Rasim's article "World Turkism I - Iranian Turks" published in the Journal of *Ocak* in 1972 provided information about the number of Iranian Turks and Azerbaijanis living in Iran. The article notes that it is impossible to give an exact figure for the Turkic population living in Iran due to insufficient available resources. In this regard, the author wrote that the total number of Turks living in Iran is not less than 8 million.<sup>9</sup> This article also notes that Azerbaijanis, Turkmens and Qashqais are the basis of Iranian Turks. As usual, the majority of Iranian Turks at that time belonged to Azerbaijanis. According to the latest figures, the total number of Azerbaijanis in the article is about 7 million.<sup>10</sup> The article also spoke more about Azerbaijanis and the Persianization policy pursued by the Iranian government in South Azerbaijan.

The research article entitled "Iranian Turks" published in the Journal of *Azerbaycan Türk Kültür* in 1977 by İsmail Kayabali and Samander Arslanoglu (co-authorship) gave the extensive information about the Iranian Turks, South Azerbaijan and the number of Turkic people in Iran. The introduction of the article discusses the division of Azerbaijan into two parts by the Treaty of Turkmenchay. The section on Turkic peoples contains information about the territories inhabited by Gajars, Qashqais, Afshars, Turkmens, Karakalpaks, Bayats, Shahsevens and other Turkic tribes living in Iran and their total number. The authors estimate that the total area of South Azerbaijan is 104,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and according to European sources, the total number of Azerbaijani Turks, along with other Turkic tribes, is about 18 million.<sup>11</sup> This figure is very high for the given period.

In the 70s of the last century, a journalistic investigation was carried out in the Turkish public opinion about the Turkic population living in Iran. Turkish journalist Yılmaz Çetiner recorded his memoirs during a visit to various cities in Iran and published them in the Journal of *Birlik* in 1977 under the headline "Iranian Turks and our bilateral relations". The article notes that Iranian Turks are deprived of their rights and that oil revenues are not used to improve welfare in the areas inhabited by Turks. The author also drew attention to the Azerbaijani Turks lived on both sides of the Araz. The article highlights the journalist's research on the Turkic population living in Iran under the headline "There are 12 million Turks in Iran." It is noted in the article that there are 12 million Turks in Iran, according to foreign historians, social anthropologists and diplomats. However, there are those who claim that this number is 15 or even 11 million.<sup>12</sup> These controversies are possible. Since the policy of administrative division and persuasion implemented during the Pahlavi period, the study of researchers also complicated and it did not allow them to

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- 9 Mehmet Rasim, "Dünya Türklüğü I – İran Türkleri", *Ocak Araştırma ve İnceleme Dergisi*, Yıl 5, Sayı 3, Mayıs 1972, s. 53
  - 10 Mehmet Rasim, "Dünya Türklüğü I – İran Türkleri", *Ocak Araştırma ve İnceleme Dergisi*, Yıl 5, Sayı 3, Mayıs 1972, s. 54
  - 11 İsmail Kayabalı, Cemender Arslanoğlu, "İran Türkleri", *Azerbaycan Türk Kültür Dergisi*, Yıl 26, Sayı 223, 1977, s. 69
  - 12 Yılmaz Çetiner, "İran Türkleri ve İkili Münasebetlerimiz", *Birlik Aylık Dışpolitika Dergisi*, Ankara, Eylül 1977, s. 597

express a common opinion on the issue.

Huseyn Baykara, an Azerbaijani immigrant, was one of those who spoke about the demographic situation and the Turkic population in Iran in Turkish public opinion in the 1970s. Baykara's book, "Iranian Revolution and the Liberation Movement", published in Istanbul in 1978, sheds light on the census conducted in Iran in the early 1970s. According to the latest census, the total population of Iran is 36 million and the Turkic population is 36%.<sup>13</sup> The author even noted that there is no significant difference between Turks and Persians. This can be clearly seen in the figure below.

Ethnic groups in Iran	Percentage
Azerbaijani Turks	36%
Persians	40-42%
Kurds	8%
Yoruks (Bakhtiaris and Qashqais)	3%
Balochs and Lurs	3%
Armenians and Jews	2%
<b>Total population of Iran</b>	<b>36.000.000</b>

Mehmet Metin Oren, one of the Turkish researchers studying Iranian Turks, in his book "Iranian Turks and Liberty Movements" published in 1980, gave a different figure about the general demographic situation in Iran and the number of Turkic-speaking population. The book also exposes the policy of national oppression against the Turks during the Pahlavi period, but states that 85% of Turks in Iran speak Turkish despite these pressures. M.M.Oren also noted that the total population of Iran in the late 1970s was about 36 million and the Turks were 19 million.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that the author, unlike H.Baykara, showed that there are few Persians in Iran compared to the Turks. The book shows the total population of Iran and the percentage of peoples of different origins as in the table below.

Ethnic groups in Iran	Percentage
Azerbaijani Turks	42%
Persians	34%
Turkmens and Yoruks	10%
Balochs	8%
Kurds	6%
Arabs, Armenians and Jews	2%
<b>Total population of Iran</b>	<b>36.000.000</b>

13 Huseyin Baykara, "İran İnkılabı ve Azatlık Hareketleri", Emek Matbaacılık Tesisleri, İstanbul 1978, s. 16

14 Mehmet Metin Ören, "İran Türkleri Hürriyet Hareketleri", Mars Matbaası, Girne 1980, s. 4

## Turkic population in Iran since the establishment of the Islamic regime

In 1979, the Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed. The Islamic regime changed its false identity policy during the Pahlavi period and relieved its attitude towards ethnic groups. However, the national issue remained unresolved for Iranian Turks and especially Azerbaijanis. At the same time, the national issue was forgotten as a result of the Iraq-Iran war. It should be noted that the principle of a “single Islamic nation” does not allow determine the exact number of ethnic groups living in Iran. The events in the world with the collapse of communism and the fall of the USSR at the end of the last century, especially the declaration of state independence of Northern Azerbaijan, revived the national issue in Iran. This issue also attracted the attention of researchers. Eventually, the Turkic population in Iran has become one of the most important issues. Unfortunately, not enough articles were published in Turkish public opinion in the 1980s. However, the declaration of state independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan also affected the Azerbaijanis living in Iran. This event raised the issue of South Azerbaijan, and a series of articles about the Turkic population began to be published in Iran.

Aygun Attar, a Turkish historian of Azerbaijani origin, touched upon this relevant issue in his book “Ethnic Structure of Iran” published in Ankara in 2006 and spoke about the Turks of South Azerbaijan. The book notes that the total number of Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran in 1979 and after Pahlavi was about 18-20 million.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it is possible to see the fluctuations in different sources. During the Pahlavi period, the inaccurate census and number of ethnic groups led to uncertainty. According to the 1991 statistics, the Turkic population in Iran is 0.4 percent and the number of Azerbaijani Turks varies between 20-25 million.<sup>16</sup>

Turkish researcher Prof. Dr. Mehmet Saray also referred to the issue of Iranian Turks, the number and the settlement of Turks. The author’s book, “Turk-Iran Relations”, published in 1999, states that the total population of Iran in the mid-1990s was 60 million. M.Saray wrote that Turks make up 25 million (Azerbaijanis-20 million), Persians 30 million and other ethnic groups 5 million.<sup>17</sup> The book also discusses the peoples and tribes of Turkic origin living dispersed in different parts of Iran.

Articles about the large number of Iranian Turks, mostly Azerbaijanis, were also published in Iran in the 1990s, and these views were widespread among South Azerbaijani national activists living in Iran. Thus, the “Hamshahri” newspaper published in Tehran in 1993 reported that there are about 80 ethnic groups (nations, etc.) in Iran, and the Turks are in the first place with the largest number (18.7 million).<sup>18</sup> As might be expected, this approach is not accepted by the Iranian ruling circles. An article published in the press in 1999 by the Analytical Information Center of the National Freedom Movement of South Azerbaijan stated that the total population of Iran was around 70 million and that the Turkic-speaking population was 48.57% (34 million).<sup>19</sup> These statistics are highlighted in a large book entitled “South Azerbaijan”, published in 2000 by S.Tagiyeva,

15 Aygün Attar, “İranın Etnik Yapısı”, Divan Yayıncılık, Ankara 2006, s. 233

16 Aygün Attar, “İranın Etnik Yapısı”, Divan Yayıncılık, Ankara 2006, s. 223

17 Mehmet Saray, “Türk-İran İlişkileri”, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2019, s. 263

18 Ş.Tagiyeva, Ə.Rəhimli, S.Bayramzadə, “Güney Azərbaycan”, Orxan, Bakı 2000, s. 58-59

19 Ş.Tagiyeva, Ə.Rəhimli, S.Bayramzadə, “Güney Azərbaycan”, Orxan, Bakı 2000, s. 63

A.Rahimli and S.Bayramzadeh, and the indicators are as follows.

No	Ethnic groups	The number of the people (million)	Percentage of these groups in total population
1	Azerbaijanis	29.0	41.42
2	Persians (including talysh, gilak, tat, bakhtiyari, lur, etc.)	22.0	31.42
3		7.5	10.71
4	Kurds	3.5	5.0
5	Arabs	3.0	4.28
6	Turkmens	2.4	3.42
7	Balochs	2.0	2.85
8	Qashqais	0.6	0.85
9	Jewish, Assyrian, Armenian	0.035	0.05
	Others		
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In Turkish public opinion, the issue of the Turkic population in Iran was on the agenda in the 2000s, and it is possible to find enough information about the settlement and number of Turks, especially Azerbaijanis in the articles published.

The studies on Iranian Turks by Ali Asgar Heydar with the origin of South Azerbaijan have been closely followed in Turkish public opinion, and his book “Identity Renaissance of Iranian Turks” has been translated into Turkish and published in 2017. The issue of the major number of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran also attracts attention in this book. Thus, referring to the statistics, conducted by the UN on a linguistic basis, the author estimated the total number of Iranian Turks in 2001 at around 28,600,000 including 23,500,000 Azerbaijani Turks.<sup>20</sup> A.A.Heydar, who was awarded the UN Helmen Prize for his research in the field of human rights, is one of the most widely accepted researchers in the world. From this point of view, it would be appropriate to consider his writings as one of the serious sources that can be cited.

The issue of the Turkic population in Iran is also reflected in Ali Bademci’s large-scale work “A Thousand Years of Turks in Iran” published in 2018. According to 2006 statistics in the book, the number of Azerbaijanis in Iran is 27 million.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, Azerbaijanis make up the majority of the Turkic population in Iran. However, in addition to Azerbaijanis, other Turkic communities can be found in Iran. In the section on population, the author also tried to draw readers’ attention to the repressions against Turks in Iran during the Pahlavi period and the misconception in the Western media that “there are no Turks in Iran except Azerbaijanis.” A.Bademci recently noted about the total number of Turkic population in Iran: “*It is completely wrong to talk about a Turkic population of less than 30 million in Iran. If we take into account the Turkic-speaking people who*

20 Ali Asghar Haghdar, “İran Türklerinin Kimlik Renösansı”, Türkçeye çeviren Macit Araz, Sonçağ yayınları, Ankara 2017, s. 214

21 Ali Bademci, “İranda Türklerin Bin Yılı”, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul 2018, s. 665

*spoke two languages and forgot their language under the pressure of the authorities, it is necessary to mention the Iranian Turkism over 40 million.”<sup>22</sup>*

Rajab Albayrak is among those who express an objective opinion about the Turkic population in Iran. In the first volume of the author’s book “Iran of the Turks”, published in 2013, provides readers with extensive information about the Turkic peoples living in Iran and the geographical regions where they live. The book shows the total area of Southern Azerbaijani lands as 203,624 km<sup>2</sup> and the number of Azerbaijani Turks around 21,460,560.<sup>23</sup> R. Albayrak also noted that it is difficult to give an exact figure for the Turkish population in Iran due to the lack of official census figures. Despite all this, the author cites 2006 statistics to point out that Iran, with a population of 70 million, has a population of at least 31 million Turks.<sup>24</sup> This comprises 44.28% of the total population.

Ali Kafkasiali is also a prominent researcher in the Turkish public opinion who spoke about the Turkic population in Iran. His book “Turks in the Geography of Iran” published in 2011 covered this issue in detail and reflected the views of the Turkic population living in Iran in 2008. The idea of dividing the Turkic lands in Iran into three parts, South Azerbaijan, Qashqai and Khorasan/Turkmen Sahara, is also mentioned in this book. Kafkasiali noted that South Azerbaijan had an area of 170,000 km<sup>2</sup> and three-fourth of Iranian Turks; it means that 20 million Turks, settled here.<sup>25</sup> Then the author gave information about the Qashqais, Turkmens, Kazakhs, Afshars, Karapapaks, Gajars, Shahsevens, Bayats and other Turkic tribes living in Iran today, the areas where they live and the total number of them. At the end of the section called “Iranian Turks”, it was noted that according to 2008 statistics, the total number of Iranian Turks is around 35 million.<sup>26</sup>

The issue of the Turkic population in Iran has also played an important role in Turkish public opinion in recent years, and every expert who studies Iranian Turks has commented on this issue. Among these researchers is Metin Erendor, a former Turkish army officer. The history of Iranian statehood, Turkic lands, ethnic groups and the Turkic population in Iran have been extensively mentioned in a great book under the title “Turkish identity in Iran” published in 2018 by M. Erendor. The book notes that the Turkic lands in Iran consist of 3 regions: north-west, north-east, south and center. The most studied of these was the territory of South Azerbaijan. Referring to A. Kafkasyali, M. Erendor noted that three-fourths of Iranian Turks settled in South Azerbaijan with a total area of 180,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>27</sup> The general information about the total population of Iran and the Turkic tribes living in different parts of Iran today is also reflected in this work. The author estimates the Turkic population in Iran, which has a population of 81 million in 2018, at around 40-42%.<sup>28</sup> According to the 2018 statistics, the population of Iran and the percentage of ethnic groups were determined by Erendor as in the table below.

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- 22 Ali Bademci, “İranda Türklerin Bin Yılı”, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul 2018, s. 665  
23 Recep Albayrak, “Türklerin İranı”, C. I, Berikan Yayınları, Ankara 2013, s. 203  
24 Recep Albayrak, “Türklerin İranı”, C. I, Berikan Yayınları, Ankara 2013, s. 257  
25 Ali Kafkasyalı, “İran Coğrafyasında Türkler”, Bilgeoğuz, İstanbul 2011, s. 70  
26 Ali Kafkasyalı, “İran Coğrafyasında Türkler”, Bilgeoğuz, İstanbul 2011, s. 70  
27 Metin Erendor, “İranda Türk Kimliği”, Kamer yayınları, İstanbul 2018, s. 211  
28 Metin Erendor, “İranda Türk Kimliği”, Kamer yayınları, İstanbul 2018, s. 307

Ethnic groups in Iran	Percentage
Persians	43-45%
Turks	40-42%
Kurds	6-6,5%
Arabs	2-2,5%
Other ethnic groups	9-10%
<b>Total population of Iran</b>	<b>81.000.000</b>

## Conclusion

Eventually, the figures for the Turkic population in Iran are different. In general, Turkish public opinion has never been unequivocal on this issue. From the above quotations, it became obvious once again that in some figures the Turkic population in Iran is three-fourth as a percentage of the total Iranian population, in some 40-45%, and in some higher. This difference can be easily seen when looking at articles published in Turkish public opinion in different years. Even today, this can be clearly seen in the Turkish media and in the approaches of researchers to the issue. However, in general, we can say that the Turkic population in Iran is 40% in the worst case, and three-fourth of this percentage is Azerbaijanis. Regardless of how much the Iranian authorities try to hide this fact, the truth is quite the opposite.

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