

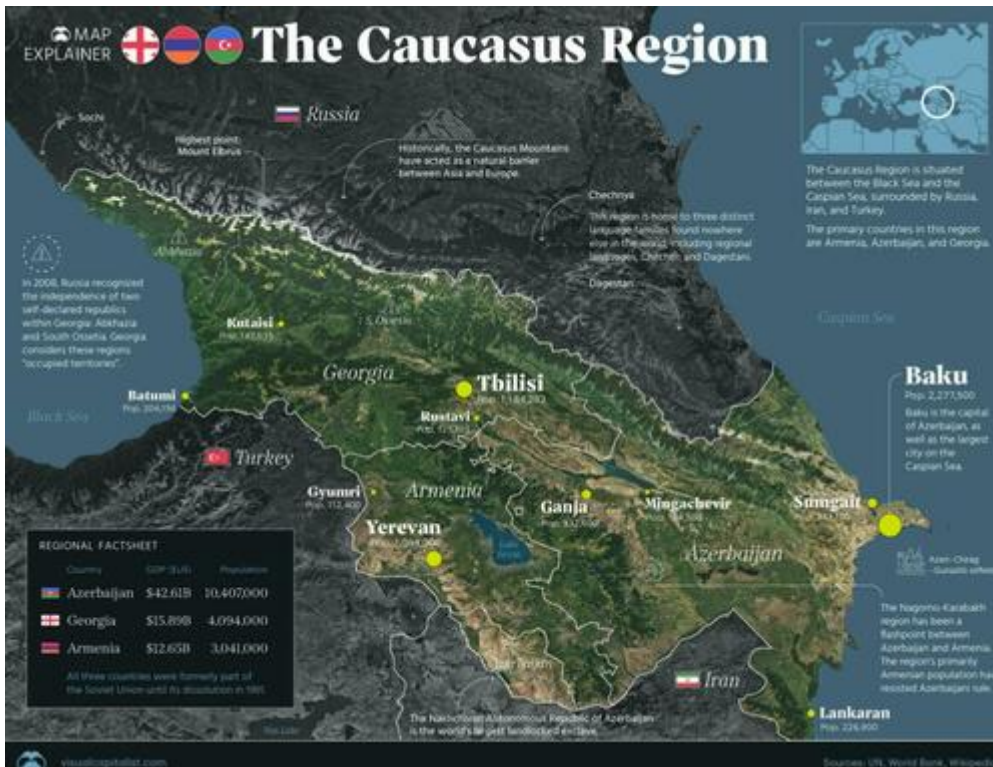
Understanding The Caucasus Region

Description

The Caucasus Region has been engulfed in a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region for decades now. Although flare-ups in the conflict have been recent, the root of the violence harkens back to the 1980s.

But, as Visual Capitalist's Avery Koop And Nick Routely explain below, this map allows us to step back and look at the region in its larger context.

While most media has focused on the tensions, this map breaks down the entire Caucasus region, providing key facts and information. What are the countries that comprise the region? What is the main economic activity in the area? How is the population distributed? Let's begin.



The Basics

The Caucasus region is characterized by far-reaching mountain ranges, that have long separated people and created distinct ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities over thousands of years. Today, the region spans over three main countries: **Armenia**, **Azerbaijan**, and **Georgia**, and is bordered by Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

Focusing on the main three, here's a look at some basic demographics:

- Azerbaijan Population: 10.4 million
- Armenia Population: 3.0 million
- Georgia Population: 4.1 million

Home to around **20 million**, the Caucasus region touches the Caspian Sea to the East and the Black Sea to the West. It is an area distinctly situated between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, but is defined by most categorizations as Central Asian.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is the biggest country in the region, both in terms of land mass and population. The **Nagorno-Karabakh** region is located within the official borders of Azerbaijan, and is inhabited almost entirely by ethnic Armenians.

The majority of Azeris are Muslim, however, the country is considered one of the most secular Muslim countries in the world. Azerbaijani or Azeri is the most widely spoken language with more than **92%** of

people speaking it. Just over 1% in the country speak Russian and another 1% speak Armenian. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, a similar percentage share defines the amount of ethnic Russians and Armenians in Azerbaijan, at 1.5% and 1.3% respectively.

Armenia

Like both its neighbors, Armenia was founded at the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Unlike its neighbors, however, it is entirely landlocked.

The country is a majority Christian nation, with an ethnic makeup of nearly **98%** Armenians and the most widely spoken language being Armenian, [according](#) to the government. The population count has fallen since the collapse of the USSR, and has been relatively flat in more recent years.

Georgia

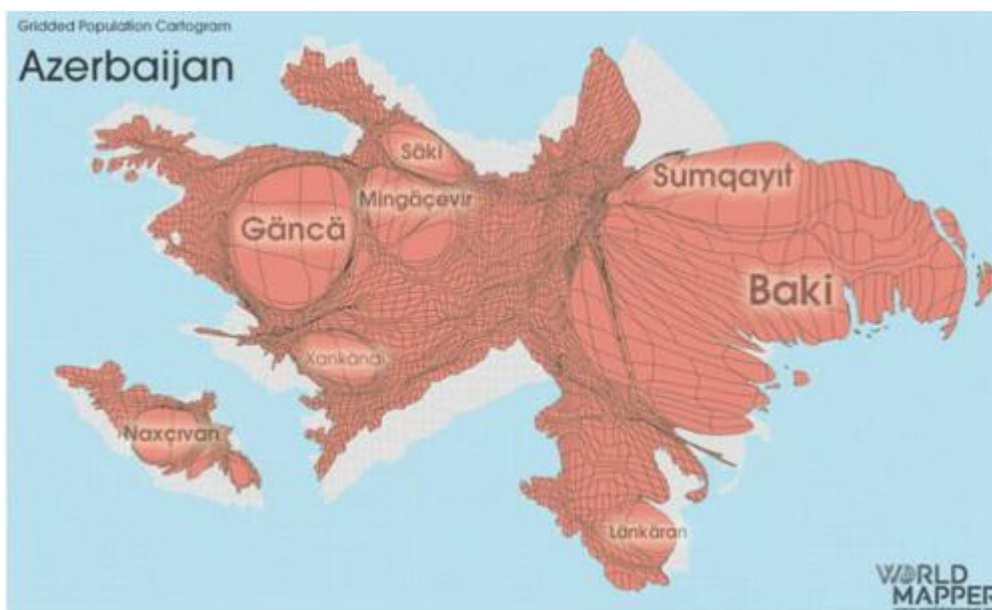
Georgia is slightly smaller than Azerbaijan in size; the country shares a long border with Russia to its north and features a long coastline on the Black Sea.

Georgia's population growth shares a similar story to many other former Soviet republics. While total population has decreased slightly over recent years, the growth in ethnic nationals (Georgians) has actually increased. The country is majority Christian and Georgian is the most popular language.

Where do People Live Across the Caucasus Region?

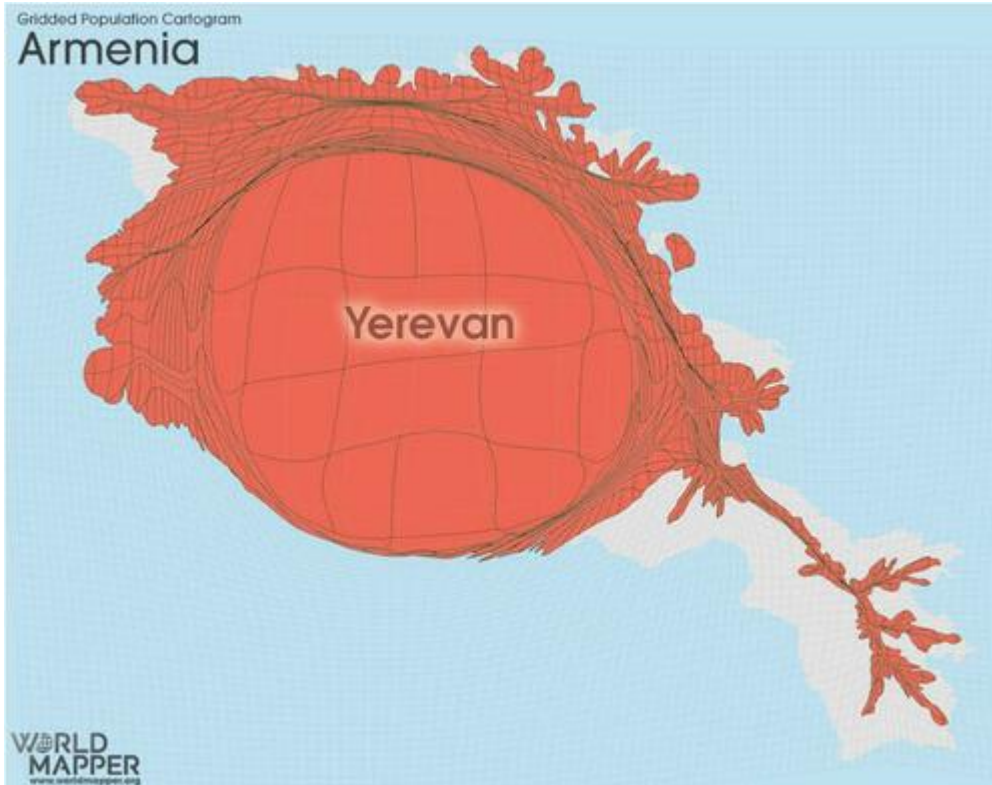
So how are these populations concentrated throughout the region? These [cartograms](#) from World Mapper, break it down by country:

Azerbaijan



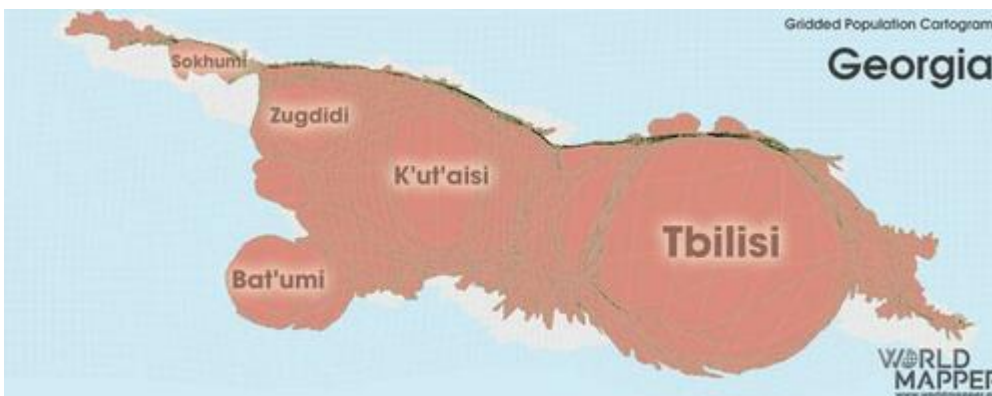
Most people live in and around the capital Baku, a port city on the Caspian Sea. However, a number of people also live inland closer to the Armenian and Georgian borders.

Armenia



In Armenia the population heavily skews towards its capital city of Yerevan, which has a population of **1.1 million**.

Georgia



Georgia's population distribution is slightly more even than its neighbors with a preference towards the capital Tbilisi.

The Economy of the Caucasus Region

Now let's dive into the economic activity in the Caucasus. In some parts, the region is oil-rich with access to resources like the vast oil fields in the Caspian Sea off Azerbaijan's coast. In fact, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline carries nearly **1 million barrels of oil** from the oilfields to Turkey every day.

Stepping back, here's a glance at regional GDPs:

Azerbaijan is the Caucasus region's biggest economy. It is the most economically developed country of the three, having seen rapid GDP growth since its transition from a Soviet republic. At its height in the early 2000s, the national GDP was growing at yearly rates of **25%-35%**. Today, its oil and gas exports are proving extremely lucrative given the European energy crisis due to the war in Ukraine. Fossil fuels make up about 95% of the country's export revenue.

Both Armenia and Georgia's economies are considered emerging/developing and are dependent on many different Russian imports. However, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development, both economies are expected to grow **8%** this year.

Georgia's economy has been recovering from the pandemic thanks to its burgeoning tourism industry, largely drawing Russian visitors. Additionally, in both Georgia and Armenia, the inflow of Russian businesses and tech professionals have boosted the economies.

A Brief Background

The three countries which encapsulate the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, were each [republics](#) under the Soviet Union until its fall in 1991. Additionally, the regions of Dagestan and Chechnya in Russia, also located in the geographic sphere of the Caucasus, each maintain a distinct identity from Russia. Both regions are majority ethnically non-Russian and still face regular violence over their power struggle with the regional heavyweight.

In fact, many of the tensions in the region can be linked to Russian oppression, according to experts.

"Russian suppression of national resistance in the Caucasus has encouraged fundamentalist movements."

– DR. JAMES V. WERTSCH (CAUCASUS SPECIALIST, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, ST. LOUIS)

In recent history, Russia even invaded Georgia during the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, sparking conflict in the Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. The Russo–Georgian War is considered the first European war of the 21st century.

While the history of the Caucasus goes way back?—for instance, the kingdom of Armenia dates back to the 331 BC?—more recent events have been shaped by Cold War and subsequent fallout from the dissolution of the USSR.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The tension over the Nagorno-Karabakh region began in the late 1980s and escalated into a full-scale war into the 1990s. In the early years of the conflict, approximately 30,000 people died. Since then, ceasefires and violence have arisen intermittently?—with the most recent end to the fighting in 2020. At least 243 people have been killed since then.

The conflict first began when newly independent Armenia demanded the region back from Azerbaijan, which was still a Soviet state at the time, as the population there was (and still is) mostly Armenian. Although not internationally recognized, a breakaway group has declared part of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state called the Republic of Artsakh.

Here's a very brief timeline:

- 1988-1994: First Nagorno-Karabakh War
- April 2016: Four days of violence at the separation line
- September-November 2020: War was reignited until Russia negotiated a ceasefire
- September 2022: New clashes erupted resulting in hundreds of deaths

The conflict has bled out into the region—Russia is on Armenia's side and Turkey on Azerbaijan's. But new allies may be taking the stage as evidenced by Nancy Pelosi's visit to Armenia in mid-September. Today, the region is divided between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russian peacekeepers, but is still officially Azerbaijani.

by Tyler Durden

Category

1. History-Archaeology-Past Mysteries
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

10/10/2022