

Have students look at the Ethnolinguistic map of the Caucasus and make suggestions about how they would draw the nations' borders, considering the distribution of people in the region. Is the diversity of languages spoken surprising?

- Keep in mind historical considerations – reading the historical summaries below, are there issues between the countries that make drawing borders difficult?
- Do you think that some ethnolinguistic enclaves are too small to be nations? What are the basic requirements to form a nation? Is a common language a good basis for a state?
- Why are Azerbaijan and Iran the same color? (Azeri population in Iran)
- What would be an alternative to creating separate nations, how could nations accommodate several ethnicities in one state? How is this done in the United States?

Background Information from the CIA World Factbook:

ARMENIA

Armenia prides itself on being the first nation to formally adopt Christianity (early 4th century). Despite periods of autonomy, over the centuries Armenia came under the sway of various empires including the Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Persian, and Ottoman. During World War I in the western portion of Armenia, Ottoman Turkey instituted a policy of forced resettlement coupled with other harsh practices that resulted in an estimated 1 million Armenian deaths. The eastern area of Armenia was ceded by the Ottomans to Russia in 1828; this portion declared its independence in 1918, but was conquered by the Soviet Red Army in 1920. Armenian leaders remain preoccupied by the long conflict with Muslim Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a primarily Armenian-populated region, assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s by Moscow. Armenia and Azerbaijan began fighting over the area in 1988; the struggle escalated after both countries attained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. By May 1994, when a cease-fire took hold, Armenian forces held not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also a significant portion of Azerbaijan proper. The economies of both sides have been hurt by their inability to make substantial progress toward a peaceful resolution. Turkey imposed an economic blockade on Armenia and closed the common border because of the Armenian separatists' control of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas.

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan - a nation with a majority-Turkic and majority-Muslim population - was briefly independent from 1918 to 1920; it regained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Despite a 1994 cease-fire, Azerbaijan has yet to resolve its conflict with Armenia over the Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh enclave (largely Armenian populated). Azerbaijan has lost 16% of its territory and must support some 600,000 internally displaced persons as a result of the conflict. Corruption is ubiquitous, and the government has been accused of authoritarianism. Although the poverty rate has been reduced in recent years, the promise of widespread wealth from development of Azerbaijan's energy sector remains largely unfulfilled.

GEORGIA

The region of present-day Georgia contained the ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Kartli-Iberia. The area came under Roman influence in the first centuries A.D. and Christianity became the state religion in the 330s. Domination by Persians, Arabs, and Turks was followed by a Georgian golden age (11th-13th centuries) that was cut short by the Mongol invasion of 1236. Subsequently, the Ottoman and Persian empires competed for influence in the region. Georgia was absorbed into the Russian Empire in the 19th century. Independent for three years (1918-1921) following the Russian revolution, it was forcibly incorporated into the USSR until the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. An attempt by the incumbent Georgian government to manipulate national legislative elections in November 2003 touched off widespread protests that led to the resignation of Eduard

Shevardnadze, president since 1995. New elections in early 2004 swept Mikheil Saakashvili into power along with his National Movement party. Progress on market reforms and democratization has been made in the years since independence, but this progress has been complicated by Russian assistance and support to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgian military action in South Ossetia in early August 2008 led to a Russian military response that not only occupied the breakaway areas, but large portions of Georgia proper as well. Russian troops pulled back from most occupied Georgian territory, but in late August 2008 Russia unilaterally recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This action was strongly condemned by most of the world's nations and international organizations.

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Links on the Internet:

CIA – The World Factbook

Armenia: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html>

Azerbaijan: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

Georgia: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

Russia: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

Economist – Country Reports

Armenia: http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=1000000900

Azerbaijan: http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=1640000964

Georgia: http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=1950000995

Russia: http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=2000001000

University of Texas at Austin – Maps

Armenia: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/armenia.html>

Azerbaijan: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/azerbaijan.html>

Georgia: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/georgia_republic.html

Russia: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth.html>

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region

