



A Fortress of Languages

A refuge since the last period of Eurasian glaciation, the Caucasus region has been a gateway for travel, trade, and conquest. Yet even as regional and imperial powers have for centuries contested for influence, the Caucasus has remained a redoubt of peoples whose identities are tied to the 50-some languages they speak, as grouped in major families (below). The persistence of the enduring identities of ethnic groups has been aided by the rugged terrain and by societies whose loyalties are to clan and family as much as to nation or region. Past attempts, especially by the former Soviet Union, to assimilate or dominate the Caucasians have been largely futile.

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| <p>ALTAIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Azerbaijani (8,273,000) 2 Balkar (71,000) 3 Karachay (276,000) 4 Kumyk (251,000) 5 Nogay (77,000) 6 Turkmen (18,000) | <p>NORTHWEST CAUCASIAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Abaza (98,000) 8 Abkhaz (36,000) 9 Circassian <p>9 Adygey (Cherkess, Kabardin) (668,000)</p> | <p>NORTHEAST CAUCASIAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Dagestani 11 Aghvakh (5,000) 12 Andi (8,000) 13 Archi (1,000) 14 Avar (501,000) 15 Bagvalal (4,000) 16 Bezhta (Kapuchi) (3,000) 17 Belkhih (3,000) 18 Budukh (1,000) 19 Chamalal (4,000) 20 Dargwa (282,000) 21 Ginukh (200) 22 Godoberi (2,500) 23 Hunzib (400) 24 Karata (5,000) | <p>SOUTH CAUCASIAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 Khaldiq (28,000) 26 Khinalug (2,000) 27 Khwarshi (1,000) 28 Kryz (6,000) 29 Kubachi (3,000) 30 Lak (92,000) 31 Lezgi (387,000) 32 Rutul (15,000) 33 Tabasaran (78,000) 34 Tindi (5,000) 35 Tsakhur (19,000) 36 Tser (Dido) (7,000) 37 Udi (5,000) 38 Batsbi (Tsova Tush) (3,000) 39 Chechen (792,000) 40 Ingush (197,000) | <p>INDO-EUROPEAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41 Kartvillian 42 Georgian (3,479,000) 43 Mingrelian/Laz (300,000) 44 Swan (35,000) 45 Armenian 46 Greek (3,205,000) 47 Greek (163,000) 48 Kurd (102,000) 49 Ossetian (509,000) 50 Talysh (21,000) 51 Tot (23,000) <p>Slavic (includes Krasnodar and Stavropol)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 Russian (8,845,000) 51 Ukrainian (408,000) |
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