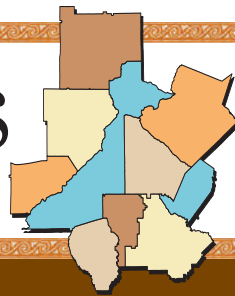


GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



I R A N I A N S

Global Atlanta Snapshots, a component of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Works program, help foster understanding among the rich ethnic and cultural diversity across the Atlanta region. Members of Atlanta's ethnic communities are recent arrivals or long-time residents and may have cultures and customs different from others in the region. But what they share with others who call the region home is that they all contribute to its success. Global Atlanta Snapshots introduce ethnic communities by exploring their backgrounds, customs and cultures, documenting their roles in the regional economy and highlighting available resources.



Who are the Iranian-Americans?

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as the nation has been known since the Iranian revolution of 1979, is the modern successor to the ancient Persian Empire. Situated in southwest Asia, it is bordered by Turkey and Iraq to the west, by Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east and by Turkmenistan, the Transcaucasus and the Caspian Sea to the north. Its southern boundaries are the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

A nation of nearly 64 million people in 2000, Iran has a history that stretches back more than 2,500 years. For a period of almost 1,200 years up until the 7th century, Persia was ruled by a succession of dynasties: the Achaemenian, the Selucid, the Parthian and the Sassanian. All of these ruling dynasties were Zoroastrian, followers of an ancient Persian religion founded by

the prophet Zoroaster. Islam was introduced in Persia in the 7th century when Arab armies invaded and the last Sassanian monarch lost a decisive battle in 642.

Islamic Persia was itself subject to invasion by a succession of outside forces, including the Seljuk Turks and the Mongols of central Asia. A native Iranian dynasty, the Safavids, came to power in 1501. The Safavid monarchs, or shahs, were replaced in the late 18th century by those of the Qajar dynasty. By World War I, Iran had become a battleground for the competing imperial colonialist interests of the British, Russians and Turks.

Developments in Iran early in the 20th century included the discovery of oil and new resources to modernize the nation. In 1921, an army officer seized power and, in 1925, was named the new shah, Reza Shah Pahlavi. As founder of the new Pahlavi dynasty, he ruled for almost 16 years before being forced to abdicate in 1941 in favor of his young son. His successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, ruled until 1979 when he was forced to leave the country as the result of a popular uprising inspired by the Islamic cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 also was marked by a crisis that lasted 444 days as U.S. citizens were taken hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by an armed student group. The U.S. and Iran have not had formal diplomatic relations since.

The Iranian population is a mixture of many different ethnic groups. About 15 percent of the population is ethnic Turks. The national language is Farsi, which is spoken by about 45 percent of the population; another 28 percent speak related tongues, including Kurdish, and 22 percent speak Turkic languages. As Iran has developed, its people have become increasingly urbanized. Tehran, the capital, is a large metropolis with 14 million people.

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A PERSONAL STORY

David Ramezani came to the U.S. in February 1978 at the age of 17 to study computer science at Indiana University. He spoke no English and had no friends or family in the U.S. Once he settled in Bloomington, Ind., he signed up for English classes while waiting for summer session to begin. When asked about the numbers of Iranian and Mediterranean students at Indiana University, Ramezani said there were about 35-40 Iranian students, as well as a number of students from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Jordan.



Ramezani said he went through an initial period of culture shock. In Tehran he attended a private high school where the school uniform was a suit. Since he was used to wearing his best clothes to school he spent the night before his first day ironing and polishing his shoes. On the first day of class, a young man came in with long hair, wearing shorts and a T-shirt, and introduced himself as the teacher. "It opened up my eyes," Ramezani said. "It was totally different than what I expected."

Ramezani was born and raised in Tehran, the oldest of seven in his family in a middle class family. His father, who worked for the Central Bank of Iran, wanted Ramezani to receive a college education in the U.S. His father supported him financially until the revolution, which led to restrictions on sending money overseas. Ramezani had to become independent and found a minimum wage position in the school cafeteria to meet the limitations of his visa.

Since leaving Iran in 1978, Ramezani hasn't returned. When he was younger, going back would have meant being drafted since

military service is compulsory. After the 1979 revolution, Ramezani was unsure how he would be treated if he returned because of his political activism in the U.S. promoting democracy. In 1987, he became a U.S. citizen.

He met his wife Jackie, an American, in Virginia on a blind date set up by friends. They were married in December 1983. The families did not meet at the wedding, as his family did not travel to the U.S. for the occasion. He said that his mother was initially unhappy about him marrying an American because she was afraid he would never come back to Iran.

In 1984, the couple moved to Bloomington so Ramezani could finish his college degree. After graduation the couple moved to Los Angeles, where they would be close to his wife's family. Los Angeles' large Iranian community was also attractive. Ramezani worked as a software engineer for a loan service company and his wife worked for California State University. He loved California and enjoyed the 20-minute trip to the beach. But some years after Jackie Ramezani's parents moved to Georgia, the couple decided to join them. The couple had always been close to Jackie's parents and when a job opportunity arose, the couple relocated to Atlanta in March 1996.

When asked about his impressions of Atlanta, Ramezani said that it was an adjustment to leave the beach and mountains behind, but they liked the green and lush beauty of Atlanta and the similar climate. They settled in Roswell because Jackie's parents thought that Roswell was a central location. Ramezani worked for Lockheed as a software engineer and his wife worked at Southern Polytechnic in Roswell. She later got a job at Georgia Tech's Language Institute, but eventually the commute from Roswell took its toll. In 1999, the couple moved to Midtown. David Ramezani has worked for a real estate investing company in Marietta for the last two years.

Iranians in the Atlanta Economy

The Iranian community has fared well economically, both in America and Atlanta. The median household income of an Iranian household in the Atlanta region in 1999 was \$62,658. That was 49 percent higher than the median for all households in the U.S. and 20.6 percent above the median for all metro Atlanta households.

Close to three of every five Iranian men in the region are in management or professional occupations. Within the professions, they are heavily represented among engineers and computer/mathematics professionals. Just over 20 percent hold management positions, including the one of every 20 who are counted as top executives. Another 20.3 percent are in sales and office occupations.

A high proportion of Iranian women are also found in professional fields. Over a third (34.3 percent), are in professional jobs, with the highest representation in health care and education. Another 37 percent of the women are in sales and office occupations.

If employment patterns are looked at in terms of industry sectors, Iranian men are heavily represented in construction, manufacturing, sales (in particular sales of motor vehicles and parts), professional and scientific services, lodging and food services. Women are well represented in the education, health care and retail sales sectors of the regional economy.





IRANIAN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000

By the Numbers: Iranians in the Atlanta Region

Cherokee - 43	Fayette - 0
Clayton - 84	Fulton - 1,175
Cobb - 1,341	Gwinnett - 819
DeKalb - 286	Henry - 27
Douglas - 21	Rockdale - 22

Total 10-county region - 3,818

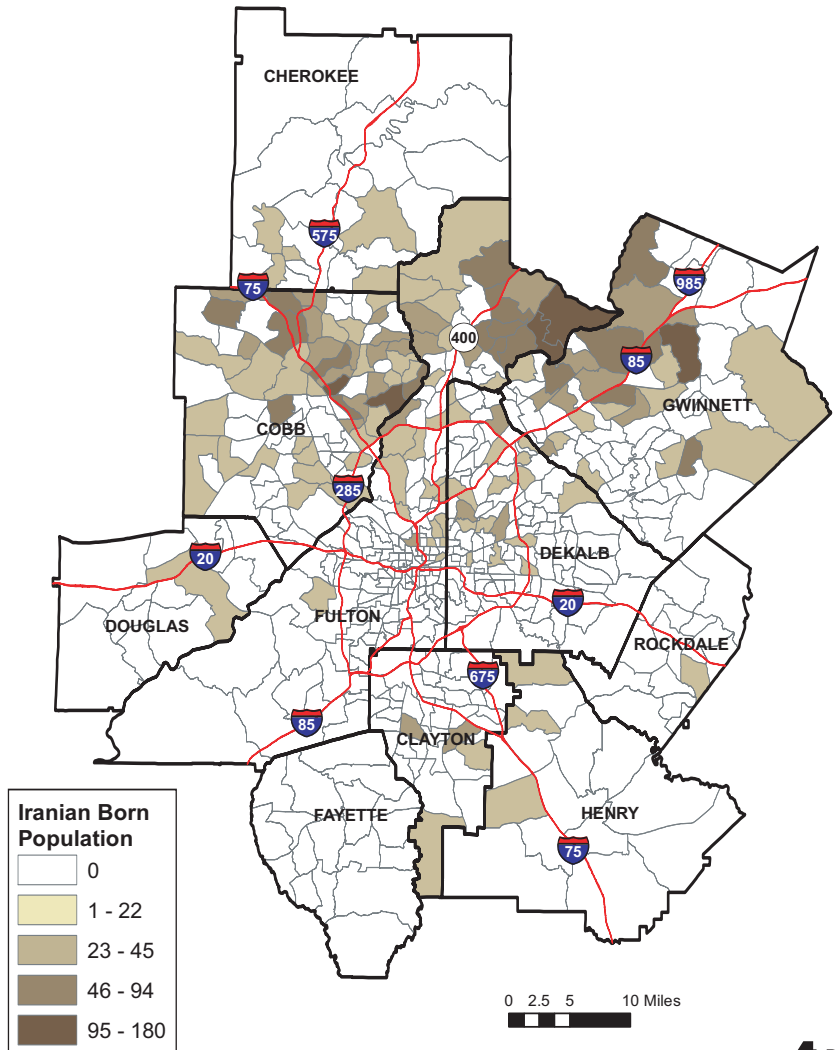
According to the 2000 Census:

Cobb County is home to the largest population of Iranians with 1,341. **Fulton County** is next with 1,175.

Together, **Cobb and Fulton counties** are home to **76 percent** of the Iranians in the Atlanta region and **57 percent** of the Iranians living in Georgia.

The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent** of Georgia's total population, but represents **85 percent** of the state's Iranian population.

The largest concentrations of Iranians are found in unincorporated north Fulton, just south of Alpharetta. There are also large concentrations along I-75 in Cobb County.



(Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth)

ARC

Celebrated Holidays

In addition to other Western holidays, Iranians may celebrate the following:

Chahar Shanbeh Soory (celebration of fire)	March 17, 2007
Sizdeh Bedar picnic at Lake Lanier	Early April
Mehregan (celebration of harvest or fall equinox)	Early October

Islamic Holidays, 2006-2007

Muharram (Islamic New Year)	Jan. 31, 2006, Jan. 20, 2007
Mawlid al-Nabi (Muhammad's Birthday)	April 11, 2006, March 31, 2007
Ramadan (month of fasting)	Sept. 24 - Oct. 24, 2006 Sept. 13 - Oct. 13, 2007
Eid-e Ghorban (Festival of Sacrifice)	Dec. 31, 2006, Dec. 20, 2007

Note: Islamic holidays vary according to the lunar calendar.

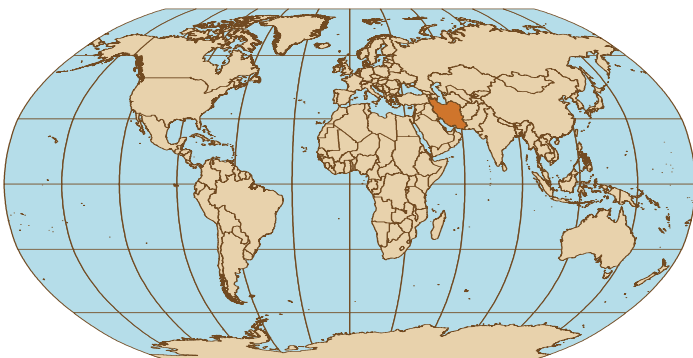


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Who are the Iranian-Americans? (continued)

Ninety percent of the Iranian population is Shiite Muslims. The remaining 10 percent are Sunni Muslims and members of several smaller minority religious groups, including Christians (primarily Orthodox Armenians), Zoroastrians, Jews and followers of Baha'i. A large number practice no religion.

Prior to the 1979 revolution, many of Iranians in America were college students. But the revolution was a turning point that sparked a large-scale migration of many highly trained and accomplished professionals. Many found their way to the west coast and Los Angeles. Some in the Iranian community living on the west coast compared living costs with those in Georgia and found that Georgia compared favorably. Metro Atlanta is home to 3,800 Iranian-Americans born in Iran. That number expands to 5,200 when we consider those with Iranian ancestry, including those born in America to Iranian parents.



Atlanta's Iranian Jews

While non-Muslims are a distinct minority in the population of Iran, non-Muslims are over represented among the Iranians who have migrated to America. Among those who have settled in the Atlanta region are Bahaies, Zoroastrians and Iranian Jews.

The Iranian Jewish community is one of the world's oldest, dating back some 2,500 years. Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, conquered Babylonia and invited the Jews, then exiled in Babylon, to live in Persia. Over two and one-half millennia the Jews continued to live in Persia, during alternating eras of religious tolerance and extreme oppression.

At the time of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, an estimated 100,000 Jews were still living in Iran. Under the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini they emigrated in great numbers, many to America. Today some 25,000 Jews are believed to still be living in Iran.

While local estimates vary, perhaps 750 to 1200 Iranian Jews live in the Atlanta area. One Jewish congregation, Netzach Israel – an Iranian Sephardic synagogue that follows Spanish or Mediterranean, rather than central European traditions – has a membership of 100 families. It is located on LaVista Road in DeKalb County.



What are Iranian Customs and Culture?

Drawing from both Persian and Islamic traditions, Iranians have achieved a high level of creative expression in a number of media. Many in the West are familiar with what is likely the best-known cultural export, the Persian rug. Handwoven out of wool, cotton or silk, the carpet designs typically incorporate themes from nature, floral patterns, geometric designs and religious symbols. A similar melding of natural and religious designs is found in fine Persian pottery.

Persian architecture, notably in its mosques, is characterized by simple structural forms (domes within domes, tall minarets) complimented by intricate and boldly colored ornamentation. These designs have influenced those in other Islamic lands, including Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent.

Poetry is another medium in which Persian culture has had an influence well beyond the borders of Iran. Omar Khayyam, an Iranian poet born in the 11th century, was popularized for the English-speaking world in the mid-19th century.

For Iranian-Americans living in Atlanta, the best opportunities for relating to their ancient heritage are through religious observances and holiday celebrations. One of the most important holidays on the calendar for an Iranian is *Norooz*, which translates as “new day.” This New Year celebration is not an Islamic observance, but has its roots in Persia’s earlier



Zoroastrian tradition. The holiday takes place in March at the start of spring and is a very festive occasion. Families gather and eat various symbolic foods, including colored eggs.

There are a few Islamic Centers in Atlanta serving those Iranians who are Muslims. These centers include Sahebe-a-zaman, which has a core group made up of about 10 people. During holidays there are 30 to 40 people who attend services. The Imam (spiritual leader) is a computer engineer who is more knowledgeable about Islamic law than the other ten regular members. Other community resources include the Zainabia Islamic Education Center and the Nour Center, which attracts members who are philosophically aligned with Iran’s Ayatollah Khatami and his reformist followers.

Iranian Life in Metro Atlanta

Of the 3,800 residents of the 10-county region that were born in Iran, two-thirds live in Cobb (1,341) and Fulton (1,175) counties. While the community is spread across many locations in those counties, there is some concentration of the Iranian community along Roswell Road in Sandy Springs.

When asked to describe the Iranian community in Atlanta, David Ramezani said, “It’s growing. There [is a large Iranian community] living in Atlanta but there is no leadership or focal point.”

Iranian-American college students have their own challenges and have formed local support groups. There is an Iranian Student Association at Georgia Tech that is composed mostly of graduate students. There are also student organizations at Georgia State and Emory universities. Young Iranian-American professionals



gather monthly to socialize and network in a number of major cities. In Atlanta, this networking, Shabeh Jomeh (Friday Night), takes place at the Divan Restaurant and Hooka Lounge.

When describing the political situation in Iran and its effects on the Iranian community in Atlanta, David Ramezani, an Iranian who became a U.S. citizen in 1987, said the current regime has taken Iran in the opposite direction of the reformists in power earlier in this decade. “It’s difficult when your country of origin has a showdown with your adoptive country,” he said.



Iranian Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Iranian communities. Additional resources are available at www.atlantaregional.com.

GENERAL

Atlanta Muslim Relief Task Force

1-888-295-7780, ext 704

Note: Assisting families with housing and transportation. Staff speak Farsi, Arabic, and French

Persian Community Center, Inc.

5920 Roswell Road Northeast
Atlanta, GA 30328-4913

REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT SERVING ORGANIZATION

Jewish Family and Career Services

Refugee Family Strengthening Program

4549 Chamblee Dunwoody Road

Atlanta, GA 30338-6210

770-677-9300

Email: info@jfcs-atlanta.org

www.jfcs-atlanta.org/

Note: For Russian, Iranian, Somali, Iraqi, French-speaking, Sudanese, Afghani, Bosnian, Kurdish communities

ASSOCIATION

Mahkameh "Kami" Sharifi

Executive Director

of Shabeh Jomeh Atlanta

1354 N. Morningside Dr, NE

Atlanta, GA 30306

404-295-5985

Email: atlanta@shabehjomeh.com

www.shabehjomeh.com

Note: Events held at "Divan Restaurant & Hookah Lounge" (3125 Piedmont Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30305 404-993-6847, www.divanatlanta.com) but subject to change. For up to date information, please visit the Atlanta page on www.shabehjomeh.com or email atlanta@shabehjomeh.com

BUSINESS

Persepolis Persian Cuisine

6435 Roswell Road

Atlanta, GA 30328

404-257-9090

www.persepoliscuisine.com

Shahrazad International

6435-A Roswell Road NE

Atlanta, GA 30328-3144

404-257-9045; 404-257-9045 fax

www.shahrazad.com

Note: fine food importer/distributor

EDUCATION

Iranian Student Association

Georgia Institute of Technology

331681 Georgia Tech Station

Atlanta, GA 30332

Email: iran@gatech.edu

www.cyberbuzz.gatech.edu/iran

MEDIA

Pardis Publications, Inc.

149 Powers Ferry Road, SE

Marietta, GA 30067-7557

770-973-0506

RELIGIOUS

International Church of God

3687 Briarcliff Road

Atlanta, GA 30345

Contact: Fred Marloni, Organizer

404-486-0252; 404-597-4322

www.farsinet.com/iccatlanta/

Iranian Church of Resurrection (Kelisa-ye Rastokheez-e Iranian)

3451 Johnson Ferry Road, NE

Roswell, GA 30075

Contact: Pastor Nasser Jallali

770-641-0274

Email: mojdaye_engil@juno.com

www.farsinet.com/jicr_atlanta

Netzach Israel – Iranian Congregation of Atlanta

1528 Sheffield Drive

Atlanta, GA 30329

404-320-1852; 404-325-8478 fax

Email: netzachisrael@gmail.com

Persian Community Church of Atlanta

(services held at

Northside Community Church)

5185 Peachtree Dunwoody Road.

Atlanta, GA 30342

Contact: Pastor Sarhad Mohajer

404-556-7000

www.farsinet.com/pccatlanta/

Zainabia Islamic Center

1100 Hope Road

Atlanta, GA 30350

Email: info@zainabia.com

www.zainabia.com

Contact:

E-mail: globalsnapshots@atlantaregional.com

Order printed copies from the ARC Information Center at 404-463-3102 or download free from the ARC website at www.atlantaregional.com

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Charles Krautler, Executive Director

Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the 10-county Atlanta region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 62 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of region wide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • www.atlcf.org

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