

# The plight of minorities in Iraq

The devastating attack against Iraq's Yazidi sect has highlighted the crisis faced by Iraq's minority groups. Caught between the warring factions – Shias, Sunnis and Kurds – communities which once made up as much as 14 percent of the country's population are increasingly under threat

**FAILI KURDS:**  
**Population: 800,000\***  
 Majority of Kurds are Sunnis, but Failis are Shia. Traditionally merchants, founded Baghdad Chamber of Commerce in 1960s. Stripped of citizenship by **Saddam Hussein**, continue to face human rights violations because of ethnicity and religion

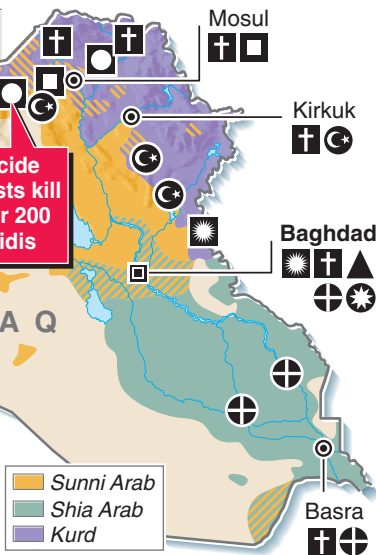
**TURKMANS:**  
**800,000**  
 Mainly Sunni who speak Turkish dialect, brought to northern Iraq by Ottomans to repel tribal raids. "Kurdification" policy prompting inter-ethnic violence

**CHRISTIANS: 800,000**  
 Includes **Chaldo-Assyrian** and **Syriac Christians** (Aramaic-speaking descendants of ancient Mesopotamia), as well as **Armenians**. Targeted due to perceived association with West and by kidnappers because of their wealth

**YAZIDIS: 550,000**  
 Kurdish followers of 4,000-year-old monotheistic religion thought to be offshoot of Zoroastrianism. Yazidis worship fallen angel synonymous with Devil in both Islam and Christianity. *Islamist groups dub their religion "impure" and call for their destruction*

**SHABAKS: 400,000**  
 Originally Aryan, culturally distinct from Kurds and Arabs. *Once pushed to "arabise" by Saddam, now under pressure to "kurdify" in ethnically divided north*

Suicide blasts kill over 200 Yazidis



**PALESTINIANS: 35,000**  
 Once given sanctuary by Saddam, now targeted due to perceived special treatment in past

**MANDAEANS: 30,000**  
 Believers of gnostic religion pre-dating both Islam and Christianity. *Targeted by criminals because they work as goldsmiths and jewellers*

**BAHAI: 700**  
 Followers of gnostic tradition who believe that **Bahau'llah**, not Muhammad, is last prophet. *No right to citizenship. Freedom of movement and to practise religion curtailed*

*\*Figures are pre-war numbers. UN estimates minorities make up around 30% of two million Iraqi refugees*