Minority Integration in Transition States: the Case of Post-Soviet Georgia

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Abstract

This thesis considers the impact of Georgia's post-Soviet transition on the integration of national minorities in the country. Since coming to power in 2003, one of the key objectives of the Saakashvili administration has been to consolidate the Georgian state through the integration of the country's largest national minorities, namely the Armenians of Javakheti and the Azeris of Kvemo Kartli. However, in spite of various policy changes to assist their integration in Georgia, the success of minority integration to date has been poor. Through qualitative interviews and in–depth research, this thesis examines the impact of transition on the Armenian and Azeri minorities, and identifies the chief obstacles facing the integration of each. In doing so, it locates the main features of transition that continue to shape Georgian society today. The thesis concludes that the integration of national minorities will continue to stall so long as key features carried over from the transition period, including a lack of effective local governance and low awareness of civic values, persist.

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List of Abbreviations

CCIIR – Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations

CIPDD – Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

CRRC – Caucasus Research Resources Centre

DEC – District Election Commission

ECMI – European Centre for Minority Issues

ECRML – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

FCNM – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

GOC – Georgian Orthodox Church

IPS – Institute of Policy Studies

OSCE HCNM – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe High Commissioner for National Minorities

OSCE/ODIHR – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PMMG – Public Movement "Multinational Georgia"

UAWG – Union of Azerbaijani Women of Georgia

INTRODUCTION

On Leselidze Street in the old town of Tbilisi, Georgia, a Georgian Orthodox church, a Jewish Synagogue, an Armenian Apostolic church and a Muslim mosque are all located a stone's throw away from one another, reflecting the historic religious and ethnic diversity of this small country. When questioned on the nature of interethnic relations in Georgia, local Georgians point to the close proximity of these religious buildings as proof of the uniquely harmonious relations enjoyed between the Georgian population and the country's many national minorities. Unfortunately, in spite of this comforting and oft-quoted analogy, such statements belie Georgia's recent history, fraught with ethnic nationalism, ethnic conflict and the resulting near failure of the state in the 1990s. However, the Rose Revolution of 2003 marked a new period in Georgia's recent history, characterized by intense reforms and attempts to consolidate the state. Above all, the current government has endeavoured to strengthen the integrity of the state through the integration of Georgia's national minorities and the promotion of a civic national identity in the country. In spite of the government's efforts, however, this process has been hampered by various obstacles, including the structural and societal features carried over from Georgia's transition period.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to assess the conditions inhibiting the integration of national minorities in the context of post-Soviet Georgia. In this regard, attention will be paid to the effect of transition on the integration of national minorities, since it is the transition period that is expected to define the characteristics and structure of society in the post-independence era. Thus, the questions guiding my research throughout are:

1. What effect has the experience of transition had on the integration of national minorities in Georgia?

2. What conditions are presently obstructing the integration of national minorities in Georgia?

In order to answer the first question, this thesis will take a detailed look at the Soviet and early post-independence periods to identify the prevailing features that effectively delayed Georgia's transition process and which continue to shape Georgian society today. The second question will be approached through case studies of two national minorities, so as to compare the respective situation of each minority and to identify features hindering their integration. It is anticipated that the transition period continues to inform minority integration, both in terms of how state policies approach integration, as well as in terms of the dominant features of transition affecting the integration of national minorities in the country. Thus, while the integration of national minorities is a necessary step towards consolidating the state and completing the transition from the Soviet era, the process of integration itself is also informed by features unique to Georgia's experience of transition in the 1990s. Meanwhile, the success of integration for different minorities in the country is expected to be influenced by the different experiences of minority regions of the transition period.

Case selection and Relevance of the Research

As compared with other former Soviet Republics, Georgia represents a particularly hard case in the integration of national minorities for a number of reasons. In particular, the past two decades have been especially turbulent for the country, including virulent dissident ethnic nationalism of the late 1980s that tore the republic from the Soviet Union, followed by

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the ethno-territorial conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and near state collapse in the early 1990s. As a result of these features, outlined in detail in Chapter two, Georgia's transition remained dormant until the Rose Revolution of 2003. While the government of Mikheil Saakashvili has in numerous ways failed to live up to its professed democratic credentials, it has made a concerted effort to integrate national minorities in the country and to consolidate the state by fostering national unity. Thus, the project of minority integration in Georgia is not only interesting to observe, but is also particularly challenging in light of Georgia's recent history. By assessing the impact of transition on the integration of national minorities, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute to understanding the hurdles facing multiethnic countries undergoing state- and nation-building. It also intends to counterbalance the academic focus on conditions of ethnic conflict and minority secession by instead exploring the problems of integration in multinational transition states. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that the problem of minority integration in Georgia is part of a larger issue concerning Georgia's continuing territorial disputes, and indeed the security of the region, as state efforts at integration are driven by the desire to resolve these issues and prevent their re-occurrence.

The minorities selected as case studies – the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Azeris of Kvemo Kartli – are most relevant to the integration process since they represent the largest minorities in Georgia, and are compactly settled on territories bordering their ethnic kin states (Armenia and Azerbaijan). Moreover, while they are similar in size and composition, the experience of transition of these minorities is sufficiently different to warrant comparison. Therefore, based on my case studies I will attempt to outline the impact of transition on the integration of these national minorities, as well as the major obstacles to integration in each case.

Methodology

In order to enrich my research and gather empirical evidence I made a short trip to Georgia in April 2012. For the duration of my time in Georgia I was based in the capital city Tbilisi, although I made a two-day excursion to the town of Akhalkalaki in the Armenian-inhabited region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. During this time I conducted nine interviews with a variety of people involved in minority issues in Georgia, including representatives of local NGOs, policy analysts, international organizations and personnel of the public defender's office. Using a purposive sampling strategy, I selected the interviewees based on their expertise and experience in the field of minority issues. The individual positions and relations with national minorities of the interviewees were sufficiently varied to allow me to gather a range of viewpoints on the issue. Those interviewed included representatives of Georgian, Armenian and Azeri nationalities.

The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions which were sometimes adjusted according to the area of expertise of the interviewee. In general, my questions touched on the effectiveness of government policies aimed at integrating national minorities in Georgia, as well as the main obstacles to integration, the purpose of integration and attitudes of both the Georgian public and national minorities to integration efforts. The interviews lasted between twenty-five minutes and one hour, and the language used was either English or Russian. While none of the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native languages, this did not seem to hinder the quality of the ideas expressed therein.

Conducting interviews with specialists in the field, some of whom are responsible for informing government policy, allowed me to access up-to-date information and informed opinions on the main issues relating to minority integration and the obstacles to integration. Interviews with national minority representatives also revealed personal experiences of the

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integration process, which served to enhance their awareness of the issues at hand. I have used these interviews primarily as a source of insight with which to inform the focus of this thesis, especially regarding attitudes towards national minorities in Georgia and the country's experience of transition.

Outline

This thesis consists of four main chapters. Chapter one looks at the theoretical background on transition, state-minority relations, and minority integration, in order to establish conditions impacting the integration of national minorities in the post-Soviet context and to outline potential factors affecting minority responses to integration. Chapter two provides an overview of Georgia's recent history, including the legacy of the Soviet era, the turmoil of the early 1990s and the subsequent period of state weakness that followed, with a focus on the structural and societal characteristics of this period. Chapter three will present the demographic, economic and political circumstances of the two minorities studied in order to determine the major characteristics that inform their integration, while Chapter four will consider state policies introduced in recent years designed to integrate minorities in the country. This final chapter will also consider the prevailing attitudes towards national minorities in Georgian society, as these are expected to shed light on the different experiences of transition of the two minorities in question.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1: States in Transition and Nation-building

Studies of transition have been a particular area of scholarly interest in recent years. However, while much focus has been on the democratization, marketization and state-building transitions of countries in the post-Soviet space, few scholars have contemplated issues of national identity made salient by transition. This absence is puzzling, as transition implies redefinition, and states emerging from colonial settings are often required to redefine not only their external borders but also the internal characteristics of the nation. Thus, this section will review the work of scholars focusing on the nation-building dimension of transition in the post-Soviet context, and consider the effect of nation-building on national minorities.

Taras Kuzio sees the quadruple transition paradigm as particularly relevant to the experience of post-colonial settings, applying it to his study of post-Soviet Ukraine. In doing so, he argues that states emerging from 'colonial' rule must revive national identity on the micro, macro and international levels, in order to promote national consciousness where it is lacking and consolidate state rule.[1] Bhavna Dave, on the other hand, takes an actor-driven approach by demonstrating how the elite in Kazakhstan has used nation-building to legitimize its rule, following their own transformation from loyal party cadres to leaders of an independent state.[2] As a result, nation-building is justified both by the need to consolidate a new state as well as to legitimize the leadership of a new state. In both the above cases,

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[1] Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri, 'Dilemmas of State-led Nation Building in Ukraine', Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002, 10-11.

[2] Bhavna Dave, 'Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power', New York: Routledge, 2007, 91-94.

nation-building occurs in spite of the already privileged position of the titular majority in the Soviet republics. Thus, nation-building is for some post-Soviet states a continuation of the Soviet nationalities policy, which through the policy of *korenizatsia* ('nativization') institutionalized national identity in the former Soviet republics by favouring the ethnic majority of a republic.[3] Meanwhile, Linz and Stepan consider the compatibility of nation-building and democracy in multinational states, as incongruence between the state and the nation poses serious problems for 'stateness'.[4] Thus, in order for democratization to be successful in a multinational state, "considerable political crafting of democratic norms, practices, and institutions must take place."[5] This necessitates policies that grant equal citizenship for all nationalities in a state.[6] Therefore, while nation-building is essential for consolidating states emerging from colonial rule, and in the post-Soviet context is used to reinforce the Soviet nationalities policy, multinational states cannot ignore the issue of national minorities during nation-building.

Eke and Kuzio remark how it was namely those Soviet republics with strong national liberation movements which were both the first to seek independence from the USSR, and were more likely to see a democratic overhaul of the system.[7] Thus, in states where national identity was weak (such as Belarus), transition was impeded by the absence of a strong mobilizing cause such as nationalism which helped to topple authoritarian leaders.[8] Consequently, both democratization and nation-building should be found in former Soviet republics where there was a strong national liberation movement, a history of independent statehood and a strong national identity. This holds true in the case of Georgia, although the

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[3] Ronald Suny, 'The Revenge of the Past', Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, 102-106.
[4] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, 'Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation', Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, Chapter 2.
[5] Linz and Stepan, 29.
[6] Linz and Stepan, 33.
[7] Steven Eke and Taras Kuzio, 'Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52(3), 2000, 528
[8] Kathleen Mihailisko, 'Belarus: retreat to authoritarianism', in *Democratic changes and authoritarian reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova,* Karen Dawisha et al. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 240.

failure of the national liberation movement to achieve stability and the state weakness of the 1990s served to delay Georgia's transition and prevent democratization.[9] Above all, although the above theories highlight the link between national independence and democratization, less attention is given to the position of ethnically 'disenfranchised' national minorities in nation-building states. As has been argued, unless there is "congruence between identity of the nation and the borders of the state", then democratization and consolidation are extremely difficult to achieve.[10] In this way, so long as nation-building is founded on exclusive ethnic identity, there is a high potential for conflict between majority and minority nationalities in a multinational state, making the integration of national minorities extremely difficult. This dilemma is especially acute in countries where national independence was accompanied by a virulent strain of exclusive ethno-nationalism, as was the case in Georgia. Conversely, in order to integrate national minorities in this context, an inclusive national identity must be fostered.

With regards post-Soviet Georgia, few scholars have examined Georgia's transition in terms of the nation-building experience of the country. While sharing some similarities with other post-Soviet states, such as a strong national liberation movement (the Baltic States, Armenian and Ukraine), Georgia is unique in terms of its high level of ethnic diversity coupled with its experience of ethnic conflict and state weakness. Writing on Georgia in the post-independence period, Laurence Broers and Jonathan Wheatley emphasize the structural barriers to minority integration, and demonstrate the difficulties posed by Georgia's weak statehood for managing minority issues.[11] In particular, Broers draws attention to the illiberal undercurrents in Georgian society provoked by seemingly irreconcilable ideological differences between the majority's fears of secession on the one hand, and the minority's fear

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[9] Jonathan Wheatley, 'Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union', Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005(a).

[10] Monica Duffy Toft, 'Multinationality, Regions and State-Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia', in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict,* James Hughes et al., London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, 124.

[11] Wheatley, 2005(a); Laurence Broers, 'Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-Conflict Georgia', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 36(2), 2008.

of assimilation on the other. [12] This underscores the dilemma of nation-building in multinational states, especially those with contested territories and the recent memory of ethnic conflict, making Georgia an especially 'hard' case for the integration of national minorities. However, the question of exactly how the experience of transition has informed different national minorities is not raised by these authors. Thus, this thesis will begin by tracing the experience of transition in post-Soviet Georgia, to consider transition's effect on the integration of national minorities in the country.

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[12] Broers, 299.

1.2: Transition and State-minority Relations

As established above, nation-building is an important component of transition, especially in the post-Soviet context. Thus, this section sets out to determine how nation-building affects state-minority relations, as this will help ascertain the nature of state policies towards national minorities in Georgia. A number of scholars explore the relationship between minority nationalism and state-building nationalism to assess when and why state-minority relations become conflictual and nationalism is made salient. According to Michael Hechter, nationalism emerges from the centre-periphery competition induced by a shift from indirect to direct rule by the centre of outlying regions. This is followed by the attempted cultural colonization by the centre, since "cultural uniformity helps to facilitate, and to legitimize, direct rule",[13] resulting in a backlash of nationalism from the periphery wishing to defend its ethnocultural interests. Therefore, a transition from indirect rule to direct rule by the centre is expected to strain relations between the centre and a minority region. This theory is particularly relevant to states which, having experienced state weakness, attempt to regain control of a peripheral minority region.

According to Henry Hale, ethnic identity is used to resolve the collective action problem affecting ethnic groups, allowing the group to mobilize and advance group interests.[14] However, advancing group interests does not necessarily entail secession; instead, Hale argues that minority-inhabited regions may prefer to cooperate with the host state. According to the classic commitment problem, however, the minority region is often unable to ensure that the Centre will not renege on the agreement.[15] Therefore, in order to avoid conflict, the onus is on the Centre to prefer cooperation with the region over exploitation, a

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[13] Michael Hechter, 'Containing Nationalism', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 62.
[14] Henry Hale, 'The Foundations of Ethnic Politics', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 25.
[15] Hale, 70-72.

decision driven by the Centre's 'time horizon' and the expected costs of exploitation.[16] Thus, this theory highlights how the policy of the state ultimately drives state-minority relations and affects the willingness of the minority to cooperate.

Another issue affecting a state's relations with its minorities is the type of national identity endorsed by the state. In this respect, while ethnic nationalism is exclusive, civic nationalism is ostensibly inclusive of minority cultures, as citizenship is founded not on ethnicity but on common principles of social justice and democracy.[17] However, some scholars argue that the neutrality of civic nationalism is questionable, since the implications of having an official state language make the "separation between state and ethnocultural groups" impossible.[18] Thus, in spite of civic nationalism's emphasis on minority inclusion, it nevertheless politicizes ethnocultural groups, forcing national minorities to accept the "societal culture" of the predominant ethnic group.[19] In this respect, public policies, and especially language policy, determine the fate of national minority culture in a multinational state. However, Will Kymlicka demonstrates how even in the context of a dominant societal culture, so long as the state adopts a liberal course, the position of national minorities is not threatened.[20] Therefore, a state engaged in civic nation-building may be more or less inclined to accommodate national minorities and preserve ethnocultural diversity, depending on whether the state is liberalizing.

While the concept of civic national identity has been promoted as a liberal paradigm, both nation-building states and national minorities may employ the language of civic nationalism as a rhetorical device to cloak potentially illiberal designs.[21] This underscores the need for caution when applying categories such as 'ethnic' and 'civic', as such terms are laden

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[16] Hale, 68.

[17] Will Kymlicka, 'States, Nations and Cultures', Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997, 23.

[18] Farimah Daftary and François Grin, 'Nation Building, Ethnicity, and Language Policy in Transition Countries', Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2003, 8.

[19] Kymlicka, 22-27.

[20] Kymlicka, 42.

[21] Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, 134-135.

with both analytical and normative ambiguities. [22] Thus, "it is often impossible...to characterize an entire state, or an entire national movement, as civic or national". [23] This is particularly true in transition states such as Georgia that are still in the process of formulating state identities and in devising policies that will fit the specificities of the ethnic composition of the state.

To summarize, the following points can be drawn from the above discussion: that conflicts of interest may emerge when states begin to rule peripheral regions directly; that ethnic groups do not necessarily view secession as the most preferable way of obtaining access to collective goods; that much depends on the state's willingness to cooperate with national minorities, which may depend on whether the state enjoys a legacy of liberalism; and that nation-building implies favouring the interests of the titular group. While none of the above-mentioned scholars consider why one minority might be less inclined to integrate than others, the literature nevertheless provides good foundations on which to consider the nature of nation-building and its impact on national minorities.

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[22] Brubaker, 2004, 136-144.
[23] Brubaker, 2004, 135.

1.3: Minority Responses to Integration

From the above discussion it can be deduced that cooperation between national minorities and nationalising states requires a strong degree of institutionalised recognition of minority rights by the state. Therefore, it is useful to examine under what conditions a minority is more or less likely to accept the integration efforts of a state engaged in nation building. This section will discuss studies undertaken by Ian Bremmer and Taras Kuzio pertaining to conditions of minority integration in the post-Soviet context, in order to attempt to apply these studies to the cases of minority integration presented in this thesis. It will also consider the application of Albert O. Hirschman's paradigm of exit, voice and loyalty in the context of national minorities.

Thus, Bremmer considers the implications of interethnic relations on the behaviour of ethnic Russians in post-Soviet Ukraine, and identifies three options available to minorities in transition, namely exit, voice and integration.[24] Exit is primarily an expression of nationalism, whereby the ethnic minority does not tolerate its position in the state, and so 'exits' either by emigrating, or by mobilising for greater autonomy or even independence. Voice may be manifested in various ways, including demands for language and political rights, as well as a more compliant attitude to the status quo.[25] Integration, meanwhile, is characterized by the willingness to learn the state language and accept the dominant culture of the majority, so that "ethnic identity...becomes a secondary affiliation".[26] According to Bremmer, what determines an ethnic minority's choice of behaviour, is the degree of 'ethnic attachment' and 'ethnic schism' of the minority. A high level of 'ethnic attachment', defined by the historical roots of the minority to its territory as well as proximity to a kin state, is bound to make an ethnic

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[24] Ian Bremmer, 'The Politics of Ethnicity: The Russians in the New Ukraine', *Europe-Asia Studies,* 46(2), 1994, 261-283.
[25] Bremmer, 263.
[26] Ibid.

minority unwilling to integrate. Meanwhile, a high degree of ethnic schism, defined as a measure of religious, linguistic and cultural differentiation between the majority and minority groups, also makes an ethnic minority less amenable to integration.[27] However, since Bremmer applies his model to ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, ethnic schism between the majority and minority ethnicity is almost negligible. By applying these two variables to the minorities considered in this study, I will be able to test the ethnic schism variable with more differentiated minorities. Also, besides cultural and religious features, it may be fruitful to analyse other sources of 'schism', such as the antagonism between majority and minority ethnicities produced by historical factors.

Thus, it can be expected that the function of exit, voice and integration behaviours may be manifested differently in the case of different minorities with different levels of ethnic attachment and schism. However, Bremmer fails to consider how the voice mechanism also functions differently when a minority has fewer opportunities to voice dissatisfaction, for example due to political marginalization and language barriers. Meanwhile, as Hirschman demonstrates, while the exit option often weakens the likelihood of dissatisfaction being voiced, the possibility of exit may provide one avenue through which the effectiveness of voice is in fact strengthened.[28] Therefore, if a minority is able to make a credible threat to secede then voice may be construed as a viable recourse for obtaining minority demands. Equally likely is that without recourse to voice concerns minority behaviour may resemble 'resignation', as opposed to an active attempt at integration.

Once again applying the examples of Russians in Ukraine, Kuzio and Meyer compare the integration of the Russians in the Donbass and Crimea to explain why one group attempted to secede while the other did not. They argue that Donbass Russians were not able to mobilize along ethnopolitical lines, as did the Crimean Russians, because they lacked the

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[27] Bremmer, 264.

[28] Albert Hirschman, 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States', Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, 83.

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institutional resources required to do so.[29] The absence of these resources compelled the Donbass Russians to cooperate with the centre and to mobilize instead along political and regional lines. This typology can also be applied to the cases analysed in this thesis to determine whether the institutional resources of the minorities in question differ, and if so, what the implications are for their integration. In this respect I am interested in how the structural features of transition have affected the resources of each minority, and hence their response to integration. Thus, one objective of this thesis will be to examine the responses to integration by national minorities in Georgia, and to consider if institutional and demographic resources, ethnic attachment and ethnic schism, as well as the mechanisms of 'exit' and 'voice' have played a role in determining the response of national minorities in Georgia to integration.

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[29] Taras Kuzio and David Meyer, 'The Donbass and Crimea: An Institutional and Demographic Approach to Ethnic Mobilization in two Ukrainian Regions', in *State and Institution Building in Ukraine,* Kuzio et al. (ed.), Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999, 299.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to assess the current issues affecting the integration of national minorities in Georgia today, it is necessary to examine the historical factors that contributed to the marginalization of national minorities in the country. Therefore, this chapter will demonstrate how the process of national minority integration is complicated not only by Georgia's recent history of ethnic nationalism and the wars of the early 1990s, but also by the administrative structure and culture of clientelism laid down during the Soviet period. Together, these factors served to marginalize national minorities while feeding the "great power chauvinism" of the titular nationality in the republic. In this way, the ethnic nationalism that seemed to emerge quite suddenly during *glasnost'* can in fact be traced to the large degree of political autonomy, and thus ethnic hegemony, of the Georgian SSR. Meanwhile, Georgia's continued state-weakness throughout the 1990s, by perpetuating some of the structural and social conditions of the late Soviet period, served to prolong its nation-building transition into the 2000s, delaying attempts to resolve the issue of national minority integration. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part includes a brief summary of Georgia's pre-Soviet period and a discussion of certain aspects of Georgia's Soviet experience. Part two turns to the post-1989 period to analyse the main influence of ethnic nationalism and state collapse on nation-building in this period. Finally, the third part outlines the main features of the post-independence era.

2.1: Roots of Corruption and Ethnic Favouritism in the Georgian SSR

The Georgian SSR was unique among the national republics of the SSR as it enjoyed a history of independent statehood and a distinct national culture and language.[30] Although the modern Georgian nation developed during the 19th and early 20th centuries when Georgia was still a protectorate of the Russian Empire, until the beginning of the twentieth century the ethnic Georgian population was largely rural, while the capital Tbilisi was home to a mostly Armenian merchant community.[31] The increasing wealth of the Armenian bourgeoisie in this period bred animosity towards the Armenians,[32] and made the task of 'national emancipation' by the 19th century Georgian intelligentsia all the more pressing.[33] Therefore, even before the Soviet policy of *korenizatsia* ('nativization'), Georgia had undergone a national revival that in part arose out of a perceived conflict of interests with other nationalities in the country. Meanwhile, Georgia's experience of independent statehood between 1918 and 1921 would serve to galvanize claims for independence on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The *korenizatsia* policy of the Soviet Union towards its national republics has been well-documented, and it is widely acknowledged to have furnished the institutions which fostered the growth of nationalism in the nationally-defined republics of the Soviet Union.[34] In the Georgian SSR, however, this policy was given a head-start as a result of the process documented above, and contributed to Georgia's development as one of the more "nationally-oriented republics" of the Soviet Union.[35] As the titular nationality of the republic, Georgians benefited from the privileged status afforded their language and culture, while the policy allowed for the 'Georganization' of local government and the favouritism of local elites in

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[30] Suny, 1993, 58.
[31] Ronald Suny, 'The Making of the Georgian Nation', Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 299. Indeed, before 1921, all but two of Tbilisi's mayors were Armenian, while ethnic Georgians only became a majority in the capital only in 1975.
[32] Suny, 1994, 115.
[33] Suny, 1993, 61-62.
[34] Suny, 1993, 102-106.
[35] Wheatley, 2005(a), 30.

filling government posts with their co-ethnics.[36] Therefore, while corruption and clientelism were endemic in the Soviet Union and an intrinsic part of the Soviet *nomenklatura* system, certain factors made these features more durable in the Georgian republic.[37]

In particular, the strength of patron-client networks in the Georgian SSR has been attributed to features specific to Georgian culture and society. Thus, the deeply embedded Georgian values of family honour and loyalty allowed clientelism to flourish through the extension of power and privilege to one's personal networks.[38] As a result, the rigid Soviet hierarchy was adapted to the Georgian tradition of favouring kinship and family ties. Due to the low level of intermarriage among ethnic Georgians, national minorities could not benefit from the necessary kinship and social connections that formed the basis of patron-client networks in local government. This would cause national minorities to perceive "Georgia as a realm of institutionalized Georgian ethnic privilege", a sentiment which would carry over into the post-independence period.[39]

Another feature of Georgian society that increased the likelihood of ethnic particularism was the weakness of cross-cutting social ties between ethnic Georgians and other ethnicities in the republic. This was characterised by a resistance to learning the Russian language among ethnic Georgians; by the concentration of ethnic Georgians in the republic; and by the relatively low level of intermarriage between Georgians and other ethnicities in the republic. Moreover, the Georgian SSR saw considerable outmigration of Russians, Armenians and Jews, while Georgians in the Soviet Union resided almost exclusively in the Georgian SSR, thereby intensifying the prerogatives of ethnic Georgians in the republic.[40] While David Laitin finds no correlation between the absence of cross-cutting social ties and the outbreak of

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[36] Suny, 1994, 298.
[37] John Kramer, 'Political Corruption in the U.S.S.R', in *Political Corruption: a Handbook,* Arnold Heidenheimer et al. (ed.), New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989, 449-466.
[38] Wheatley, 2005(a), 35.
[39] Toft, 132.
[40] Suny, 1994, 299-300.

ethnic conflict in the former republics of the USSR, their absence could explain the prevalence of ethnic particularism in local power structures in the Georgian SSR.[41]

This policy of ethnic favouritism intensified under Khrushchev as a result of the decentralization of power and a shift towards indirect rule by the centre, allowing for the nineteen-year tenure of Vasili Mzhavanadze as first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party. According to Ronald Suny, Mzhavanadze's rule

> "aided the establishment of entrenched local authorities who developed their own ethnic political base from which they could "negotiate" with central authorities."[42]

This situation would lead to the consolidation of power of local elites in the regions and paved the way for an especially virulent growth in clientelism and corruption in the republic.

By the time Mzhavanadze was removed from office and replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze in 1972, the system was already firmly in place. Efforts to curb corruption were closely linked to criticism of the national favouritism evident in the clientelistic power networks which came under fire from the new first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party.[43] Thus the fight against corruption was understood in nationalist terms as an affront to the national prerogatives of ethnic Georgians. Meanwhile, widespread corruption also spurred the onset of dissident nationalism in response to the venality of the local elite.[44]

To summarize, the *korenizatsia* policy of the early days of the Soviet Union, combined with the especially close kinship ties among the Georgian population, served to privilege the titular nationality to an even greater extent than in other republics of the Soviet Union. This would have long-term implications for the administrative structure of the republic, while providing food for the dissident nationalist movement that emerged in later years.

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[41] David Laitin, 'Secessionist Rebellion in the Soviet Union', *Comparative Political Studies*, October 2001, 34(8), 839-861.
[42] Suny, 1994, 301.
[43] Suny, 1994, 307.
[44] Suny, 1994, 309.

2.2: Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict

The 9th April 1989, when protests in Tbilisi were brutally repressed by the Soviet Army, marked a watershed in the history of the Georgian SSR and heralded both the collapse of Soviet power in the Georgian republic as well as the ethno-territorial conflicts that the collapse would facilitate. This event stoked the growing radicalization of the Georgian opposition movement and lent it widespread support, while crucially blighting the formation of a moderate Georgian Popular Front that might have facilitated a negotiated transition between the Communist authorities and the opposition. [45] This paved the way for the nationalist opposition movement formed by leading Georgian intellectuals seeking to safeguard Georgian cultural, linguistic and religious heritage and to achieve independence from the USSR. Moreover, since the April demonstrations in Tbilisi had been prompted by demands from the Abkhaz ASSR to raise the status of the region to that of republic, the violence that ensued helped to fuel fears of ethnic separatism.[46]

However, the radical nationalism that emerged towards the end of the 1980s cannot be explained by the by the events of April 1989 alone. The success of nationalism also reflected the weakness of the liberal intelligentsia whose moves to establish a Popular Front were outstripped by the creation of various nationalist opposition groups from 1987.[47] Moreover, an actor-driven explanation for the popularity of the dissident nationalists may be found in the "highly personalized" nature of nationalist politics as personified by the figures of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava.[48] Gamsakhurdia and Kostava were veteran nationalist dissidents made popular by their experience of time spent in Soviet prisons, their distinguished heritage,[49] and in the case of Gamsakhurdia, a certain ineffable charisma. Thus,

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[45] Wheatley, 2005(a), 45.
[46] Thomas de Waal, 'The Caucasus: An Introduction', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 131-132.
[47] Wheatley, 2005(a), 50.
[48] Suny, 1994, 324.
[49] Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the son of an acclaimed Georgian writer, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia.

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the ethnopolitical mobilization taking place in Abkhazia served to increase support for the hostile anti-minority rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia, who was renowned for describing all non-Georgians in the republic as "guests" and proclaiming "Georgia for the Georgians". It is important to note that while Gamsakhurdia's platform clearly advocated privileging ethnic Georgians in the republic to the disadvantage of national minorities, this was combined with the objective of national liberation from the Soviet Union. Thus, popular support for dissident nationalism did not necessarily indicate anti-minority sentiment alone, but also reflected declining support for the Soviet authorities following April 1989. However, many of Gamsakhurdia's policies, including the forced exodus of thousands of Azeris from the town of Bolnisi in late 1989,[50] clearly reflected the desire to banish the 'threat' posed by national minorities to the territorial integrity of the republic.

Because of such tactics, Gamsakhurdia's nationalist rhetoric repelled minorities in the country, causing him to lose control of South Ossetia. Meanwhile, in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, local movements were created to protect the national minorities inhabiting these regions. In the Armenian-populated region of Javakheti, the 'Javakh' movement defied Gamsakhurdia's choice of governor to the Akhalkalaki district, appointing one of the movement's leaders as district governor instead.[51] Meanwhile, the ethnic Azeri movement 'Geyrat' in Kvemo Kartli engaged in dialogue with the government to prevent the exodus of ethnic Azeris from the region.[52] However, unlike in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, no attempts were made to change the status of these regions.

Gamsakhurdia's popularity eventually led to his being popularly elected president of the country after Georgia declared its independence from the USSR in 1991. However, following the growth of rival opposition factions and his growing unpopularity,

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[50] 'Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities', International Crisis Group (ICG) report, 178, 2006, 16.

[51] Jonathan Wheatley, 'Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia', ECMI Working Paper, 22, 2004, 13.

[52] Jonathan Wheatley, 'Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia', ECMI Working Paper, 23, 2005(b), 13.

Gamsakhurdia's leadership became increasingly untenable. This led to the mobilization of paramilitary groups commanded by Gamsakhurdia's opponents who, taking advantage of state weakness, contested his leadership in the winter of 1991, forcing Gamsakhurdia to flee the country. Following this, Eduard Shevardnadze was invited back to lead a country on the verge of disintegration, as paramilitary groups and forces loyal to Gamsakhurdia still vied for control in certain regions of the country. As a result, on assuming power Shevardnadze was faced with more armed clashes in Tbilisi and the outbreak of war in Abkhazia. Thus, throughout the 1990s Shevardnadze's leadership would continue to be riddled by the state weakness and conflict that marked the inception of the independent Georgian state.

To conclude, the combination of dissident nationalism in a multi-ethnic country and the unwillingness of the nationalist opposition to achieve a comprise with the Soviet centre created the preconditions for state collapse and ethnic conflict in the country. Gamsakhurdia was able to garner popular support by presenting both the Communist authorities and national minorities as a threat to the survival of the nation, employing rhetoric that benefited from the permissiveness of dissent under *glasnost'*. Therefore, the experience of civil war would make for a particularly long drawn-out transition in post-independence Georgia, while continuing state weakness would lead to the resurfacing of structural traits inherited from the Soviet period, most notably corruption and clientelism.

2.3: Post-Independence Georgia under Shevardnadze

Given the fragmented political scene in the country, Shevardnadze sought to restore control by appointing many former communists to government posts, most of who were overwhelming loyal to the new president, thus helping to strengthen an already strong executive.[53] Meanwhile, local government in the regions was dominated by governors appointed by the president ("*gamgebeli*"), since the local assemblies ("*sakrebulos*") created by Gamsakhurdia were largely impotent.[54] While this provided a stable government, this stability was at the expense of co-opting the old Soviet *nomenklatura,* "whose continued influence would gradually sap the ability of the new state to reform itself."[55] This meant a return to the 'state capture' of the communist era and the exploitation of the state by the new elite, so that corruption once more became a mode of governance in Georgia. Again, while corruption featured in many post-Soviet societies, the level of corruption in Georgia was exacerbated by Georgia's particularly dire economic post-conflict situation, meaning that the government lacked a state budget with which to finance its administration.[56] As a result, Shevardnadze was forced to allow government ministers to line their own pockets through corruption. This led to what Wheatley terms the 'feudalization of power', as governors and other actors were able to advance their private interests and increase their influence over certain sectors and regions.[57] The systemic and decentralized corruption that this clientelism perpetuated undermined the government's authority both in the eyes of the *nomenklatura* that benefited from corruption and in the eyes of reform-minded politicians, eventually precipitating the Rose Revolution of 2003.[58] State capture also allowed local elites to control

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[53] Darrell Slider, 'Democratization in Georgia', in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus,* Karen Dawisha et al. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 189.
[54] Slider, 186.
[55] Wheatley, 2005(a), 103.
[56] Wheatley, 2005(a), 109.
[57] Wheatley, 2005(a), 109-110.
[58] Christopher Stefes, 'Understanding Post-Soviet Transitions: Corruption, Collusion and Clientelism', New York:

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economic resources in the regions, a feature which was particularly prevalent in the Javakheti region in the 1990s, where economic 'clans' loyal to the centre held a monopoly on both the political and economic resources of the region.[59]

Therefore, the effect of systemic corruption on post-Soviet society cannot be understated. As Stefes demonstrates, systemic corruption had a major impact on Georgia's transition by undermining the rule of law and sustaining state weakness.[60] Corruption also frustrated economic development by concentrating wealth in the hands of the political elite, repelling foreign investors, and imposing barriers to local entrepreneurs. In some respect minorities were particularly vulnerable to the consequences of corruption. For example, agricultural regions, including the minority-populated regions of Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti, were most susceptible to extortions by local officials from whom farmers were forced to rent land.[61] Moreover, the distance between minority-inhabited regions and the centre was in some senses greater, owing to the linguistic barriers in minority regions as well as their geographic isolation and especially poor infrastructure.[62] Such factors made oversight by the centre of local government in these regions especially difficult, thus increasing the likelihood of corruption and further impeding economic development.

To summarize, the post-independence period under Shevardnadze served to entrench state weakness by making systemic and decentralized corruption a mode of governance. This undermined the president's hold on power while thwarting economic development and impeding transition. Meanwhile, the 'feudalization of power' meant that regions were controlled by local elites sometimes defined along ethnic lines, as in the case of Javakheti. In spite of institutional reform in Georgia under the Saakashvili administration, many of the

Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 117.
[59] Wheatley, 2004, 16-17.
[60] Stefes, 119-120.
[61] Stefes, 142.
[62] Jonathan Wheatley, 'The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia', ECMI Working Paper, 44, 2009(b), 11.

local elites of the Shevardnadze era have remained in power, a crucial factor towards explaining the administrative structure in the regions today.

CHAPTER 3: THE ARMENIAN AND AZERI MINORITIES IN GEORGIA

The following chapter will focus on the situation of the Armenian and Azeri national minorities in Georgia, and present the greatest obstacles to integration facing each minority. These minorities have been selected as they are the two largest and most compactly-settled and are thus the main target of the government's integration efforts. They also pose the greatest challenges to integration because of their geographic and economic isolation from Georgian-populated areas. Thus, this chapter will consider the effect of the structural issues of transition outlined above on the integration of the two minorities in question, as well as other factors impeding the integration of these minorities. I will begin by examining the situation of each minority in turn, including their demographic, geographic and economic situation, political representation, the role of local, state and international actors, as well as the level of integration of each, followed by short a comparison of the two cases.

3.1: The Armenians of Javakheti

Demographic, Geographic and Economic Situation

According to the 2002 census, ethnic Armenians make up 5.69% of the population of Georgia, most of which inhabit the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, bordering Turkey and Armenia in the south of the country. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians make up an absolute majority of the population in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts (Javakheti), where they represent 94.3% and 95.8% of the population respectively. Ethnic Armenians also represent a majority in the Tsalka district in Kvemo Kartli, at 54.98% of the population.[63] In terms of their historical origins, most accounts observe that Armenians settled in the region following the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-29, while more arrived following the forced expulsion of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire in 1915. However, local Armenians claim to have a history in the region that far pre-dates this period, sparking arguments between the Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Churches as to the heritage of churches in the region (see Chapter 4).[64]

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Samtskhe-Javakheti has experienced changes in its ethnic make-up, including a small increase in repatriated Meskhetian Turks,[65] and a decrease in the number of Russian *Dukhobors.*[66] Moreover, in the earlier 1990s, ethnic Georgian eco-migrants were resettled in Samtskhe-Javakheti as part of a policy of "demographic balancing".[67] Finally, the Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti has also declined (from 128,204 in 1989 to 113,347 in 2002), mostly as a result of permanent

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[63] ECMI, *ECMI Caucasus,* accessed: 30.05.2012,
     <http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/stats/Census%202002.pdf >

[64] Hedvig Lohm, 'Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the Pursuit of National Unity in Georgia', ECMI Working Paper, 38, 2007, 36-37.

[65] The Meskhetian Turks of Samtskhe-Javakheti were exiled to Central Asia in 1944.

[66] The *Dukhobors* are ethnic Russians who settled in Georgia to escape religious persecution in the 19th century.

[67] Justin Lyle, 'Resettlement of Ecological Migrants in Georgia: Recent Developments and Trends in Policy, Implementation, and Perceptions', ECMI Working Paper, 53, 2012, 3.

migration to Russia and Armenia.[68]

Table 1: Population of Samtskhe-Javakheti by region and ethnicity, 1989 and 2002 [69]

Samtskhe-Javakheti	Armenians %		Georgians %		Russians %		Greeks %	
	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002
Adigeni	5.81	3.36	91.58	95.70	1.38	0.49	0.11	0.03
Aspindza	19.1	17.47	80.06	82.02	0.34	0.26	0.11	0.06
Akhalkalaki	91.29	94.33	4.35	5.27	2.51	0.26	0.1	0.08
Akhaltsikhe	42.81	36.59	46.78	61.72	6.25	0.89	0.44	0.28
Borjomi	9.95	9.64	71.99	84.21	4.54	1.80	3.37	1.67
Ninotsminda	89.63	95.78	1.2	1.39	8.34	2.75	0.09	0.01

The highland region of Javakheti represents a historically distinct region of Georgia, but was incorporated into the region of Samtskhe in the 1990s, arguably to prevent the secession of Armenian-populated Javakheti.[70] The main economic activity in Javakheti is subsistence-level agriculture, while another major source of local income comes in the form of remittances from relatives who have emigrated abroad, as approximately 73% of ethnic Armenians have a family member living abroad.[71]

In spite of infrastructural improvements in recent years, Javakheti's distinguishing feature is its isolation from the rest of Georgia, as transport and communications are hampered by poor roads and an unreliable supply of electricity. Moreover, during the Soviet period travel to Javakheti was restricted, as the region bordered a NATO country and was subject to a special passport regime.[72] Together, these factors have served to isolate the local Armenian population of Javakheti and prohibit their contact with Georgian society, while a

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[68] ECMI, *ECMI Caucasus,* accessed: 30.05.2012, < http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/info_stats.html#>
[69] Ibid.
[70] Wheatley, 2004, 14.
[71] See Appendix 1.
[72] ICG report, 21.

policy of "benign neglect" under Shevardnadze served to prolong the region's isolation until long after the collapse of the USSR.[73]

Until 2008 the Armenian town of Akhalkalaki was home to a Russian military base, the closure of which has had a negative impact on the local economy, depriving it of vital trade and employment opportunities. It has been estimated that between 7,000-8,000 people (of a population of around 60,000) depended directly on the base in the post-Soviet period,[74] while the added economic value of the base to the region was between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Georgian Lari per month.[75] Consequently, the closure of the base became a major bone of contention between the local population and the centre throughout the 2000s, causing mass demonstrations in Akhalkalaki in 2005.[76] However, dependency on the base added to the region's economic isolation, especially as it meant that the Russian Rouble and not the Georgian Lari was the currency used in the region.[77] Meanwhile, military personnel at the base were required to adopt Russian citizenship, resulting in a proliferation of black market passports and an alarming proportion of local citizens with Russian citizenship, especially in light of Russia's moves to protect its 'citizens' in South Ossetia.[78]

As is the case in much of rural Georgia, economic growth in Samtskhe-Javakheti has lagged behind that of the capital Tbilisi. However, the region's isolation and poor infrastructure has meant that Samtskhe-Javakheti's economic output is particularly modest compared to the rest of the country, with annual turnover per capita at just 35.5% the national average in 2007.[79] In fact, these figures give a false indication of the economic output in the Armenian-populated districts of Javakheti, as output is dominated by the Georgia Glass and

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[73] Wheatley, 2004, 31.
[74] Oksana Antonenko, 'Assessment of the Potential Implications of Akhalkalaki Base Closure for the Stability in Southern Georgia', a Conflict Prevention Network Briefing Study, Brussels, 2001, 31.
[75] Lohm, 10.
[76] Lohm, 40.
[77] Wheatley, 2009(b), 11.
[78] Wheatley, 2009(b), 39-40.
[79] Wheatley, 2009(b), 8.

Mineral Water Company located in the ethnic Georgian town of Borjomi.[80] Meanwhile, although unemployment in Samtskhe-Javakheti is lower than the Georgian average (7.5% as compared to 16.5%), this is misleading as 90% of the region's inhabitants work in subsistence-level agriculture.[81] Thus, in a country-wide survey carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRC) in 2010, 27% of ethnic Armenian respondents said their household does not have sufficient money for food, while 52% have enough for food but not for clothes and durables.[82] Economically, therefore, the region is particularly weak, with the region's economic and geographic isolation a major factor impeding the integration of Javakheti.

Political Representation and Local Government

The power of local elites in the Shevardnadze period has meant that the posts of district governor, locally-elected assemblies, as well as the major executive posts in Javakheti are filled by ethnic Armenians.[83] Moreover, ethnic Armenians are well represented in the locally-elected *sakrebulos,* making up 87.5% and 90% of *sakrebulos* members in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts respectively.[84] However, in spite of the strong Armenian presence in local administrative structures, these bodies have been ill-equipped to represent the local population for a number of reasons. Firstly, the positions of *gamgebeli* and major executive posts are appointed by the centre, so that appointees are highly dependent on Tbilisi and less

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[80] Wheatley, 2009(b), 10.
[81] 'Regional Labour Survey in Samtskhe-Javakheti: Report', conducted by the International Organization for Migration, Tbilisi, 2010, 8.
[82] See Appendix 2.
[83] Antonenko, 31.
[84] Wheatley, 2009(b), 18.

so on the local population.[85] Also, even though major posts are occupied by ethnic Armenians, they are often not locals but Tbilisi Armenians co-opted by the centre, and therefore lack a profound knowledge of the regions which they govern and the trust of the local population.[86] Secondly, the ratio of *sakrebulos* to head of population is many times greater in the minority-inhabited regions than in ethnic Georgian regions, making the local authorities in these regions less accessible.[87] A similar problem relates to the electoral districts in minority regions, so that in Akhalkalaki there is one elected representative for 670 Georgian inhabitants in contrast to one representative for 3,382 Armenians.[88] Finally, as compared to the centrally-elected *gamgebeli*, the local *sakrebulos* have limited powers, playing a "supervisory" role in local affairs.[89] While a new Organic Law on Local Self-Government introduced in 2005 increased the power of the *sakrebulos* to elect the local *gamgebeli*, in actual fact the appointment of district governors is strongly influenced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.[90] The new law may even have done more to harm local self-government by abolishing village-level representative bodies. In sum, elected local representatives have little power to represent or govern the region, while ethnic Armenian governors, due to the undemocratic appointment procedure, are insufficiently representative of the local Armenian population.

Thus, the system of co-optation employed in the Shevardnadze era to ensure the loyalty of local government has persisted following the Rose Revolution. However, while the focus of the Shevardnadze government was on co-opting influential economic elites in the region, the past decade has also witnessed the co-opting of local political movements.[91] This includes members of the Javakh movement, some of the leaders of which have been appointed to important administrative posts, including the post of police chief in

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[85] Wheatley, 2009(b), 17.
[86] Seda Melkumyan, Personal Interview, Akhalkalaki, ECMI, 27.04.2012.
[87] Wheatley, 2004, 19.
[88] ICG report, 11.
[89] Wheatley, 2004, 11
[90] Wheatley, 2009(b), 19.
[91] Wheatley, 2009(b), 17.

Akhalkalaki.[92] Meanwhile, a key associate of the splinter group "United Javakh" and a vocal critic of the government was co-opted when made *gamgebeli* of Akhalkalaki.[93] The effect in both cases has been to undermine the legitimacy and local support for these organizations, while weakening the ability of local actors to influence the centre. Thus, the clientelism of the 1990s is still discernible in the current distribution of power in Javakheti, where many of the same economic elites who held power in the 1990s continue to do so today. This has fundamentally affected the system of self-government in Javakheti, creating a "lock on power" and preventing newcomers to enter local government.[94] As one observer has commented, "the structure of co-optation from central levels is one of the main impediments to change in the region."[95] Meanwhile, Javakheti has consistently shown overriding loyalty to the ruling party in elections, loyalty which is at least in part accounted for by the influence of co-opted or centrally appointed actors. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that improved integration of the minority regions would be unfavourable for the ruling party, which could lose up to 20% of its votes.[96] Therefore, the power structure in Javakheti is highly influenced by the structure and mode of governance of the Shevardnadze period, although co-optation by the centre has rendered the representation of Armenians on the *rayon* level superficial.

Actors and Agency

A brief discussion on the role of local, state, and international actors in the region is useful to understanding the dynamics of power in Javakheti. As noted above, the centre has successfully managed to co-opt leaders of local organizations which previously provoked

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[92] Lohm, 12
[93] Wheatley, 2009(b), 28.
[94] Wheatley, 2009(b), 23.
[95] Lohm, 13.
[96] Shalva Tabatadze, Personal Interview, CCIIR, Tbilisi, 25.04.2012.

resistance to the centre. However, this tactic has only increased discontent allowing more extremist views to rise to the surface, as the decimation of the Javakh movement led to the formation of the more radical United Javakh.[97] While the support base of this organization typically amounted to only a couple of hundred active followers,[98] its ability to quickly mobilize the local population to demonstrate around issues of popular concern gave the appearance of widespread popularity. In fact, this propensity for demonstrations is facilitated by inadequate self-governance and channels for representation on the local level. Thus, while local actors in Javakheti may have helped local Armenians find their 'voice' by mobilizing street protests, this is a very weak form of representation which has only served to further alienate the region from the rest of the country. Indeed, in this case, the threat of secession (as perceived by the Georgian public) has stifled voice by leading the authorities to co-opt and influence the leadership. Interestingly, this case does not conform to Hirschman's argument that voice is strengthened by the threat of exit.[99] Instead it suggests that the (presumed) threat of exit leads to the suppression of voice, leaving the minority with only the option of 'loyalty', as demonstrated by the co-optation of local elites.

In terms of international actors, the Armenian government has provided some support to its co-ethnics in Javakheti, in particular in supplying electricity and funds for school renovation.[100] Consequently, it has been argued that the involvement of the Armenian state in Javakheti "keeps Georgian Armenians alienated from their state and attached to Armenia."[101] In reality, the Armenian government is dependent on maintaining good relations with Georgia and categorically does not support independence or autonomy for the region.[102] Thus the political role of the Armenian state in the region is insignificant. There are also non-state

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[97] Wheatley, 2009(b), 26.
[98] Lohm, 16.
[99] Hirschman, 83.
[100] ICG report, 19.
[101] Ibid.
[102] ICG report, 18.

actors in Armenia and Russia which claim to represent the interests of Javakheti Armenians, although these lack widespread support in the region. While these organizations tend to voice more radical demands for regional autonomy than have ever emanated from the region itself, their attempts to garner international attention for Javakheti from Armenia and Russia have fallen on deaf ears.[103]

Thus, it can be said that the most powerful actor in the region remains the Georgian government, in particular in light of the overwhelming success of the ruling party in elections. However, control of the region is mediated through the ethnic Armenian district governors who, together with the ethnic Georgian regional governor, enjoy economic and administrative power.

Integration into Georgian Society

As is the case with other national minorities, the biggest obstacle to the integration of Javakheti Armenians is the poor knowledge of the state language. In general, variations in the knowledge of Georgian reflect the degree of ethnic diversity in a district, so that in the ethnically homogeneous districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, 47.2% and 28.2% (respectively) have no knowledge of Georgian whatsoever, while 30.3% and 52.6% understand only a few basic words.[104] Thus, although by law state employees must use Georgian at work, the working languages of local administration are Armenian or Russian, while documents are translated by the handful of employees who speak Georgian.[105] However, of those interviewed for this thesis, most remarked on a positive change in attitudes among the Armenian population of Javakheti towards learning the state language. As compared to

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[103] Marina Elbakidze, Personal Interview, CIPDD, Tbilisi, 24.04.2012.
[104] Wheatley, 2009(b), 7.
[105] Lohm, 31.

2005 and earlier, when Georgian-language programmes were viewed as attempted assimilation by ethnic Armenians, most Armenians in Javakheti now accept the necessity to learn the state language and appreciate the benefits to be derived thereof.

In spite of this, the language barrier still prevents ethnic Armenians from obtaining higher education and employment. Following the introduction of state-wide university entrance exams in 2004, far fewer Armenian students were able to enrol in university due to an inadequate grasp of Georgian, with just 3 students from Javakheti passing the entrance exam in 2005.[106] Since then, policies have been introduced to increase the number of national minority students in university, but nevertheless minority students are only filling around 10% of the places assigned to them.[107] In spite of this, for national minority students enrolment in Georgian universities is still preferable to going to study in Yerevan or Baku, due to the higher tuition fees in these countries. Consequently, the number of national minorities applying for higher education is increasing.[108]

An additional aspect of integration is use of and access to media. In general, poor knowledge of the state language, together with socio-economic issues, makes access to state media for national minorities problematic. As a consequence, channels broadcast by the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation enjoy overwhelming popularity in Javakheti.[109] This meant that, during the 2008 war with South-Ossetia, Georgian Armenians were receiving the Russian version of events through their satellite dishes.[110] Meanwhile, local TV channels are broadcast in Armenian, but these are often dependent on funding from NGOs and international donors, making their financial sustainability uncertain, while a lack

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[106] Salome Mekhuzla et al., 'National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia', ECMI Working Paper 46, 2009, 37.
[107] Tabatadze.
[108] "Number of Armenian and Azeri entrants registered for the National Unified Exams has increased", *Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia,* 29.03.2012, accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?t=srch&search=quota&id=3909&lang=eng >
[109] Tobias Akerlund, 'National Minorities and the Media Situation in Georgia', ECMI Working Paper 52, 2012, 18.
[110] Akerlund, 17.

of funds results in poorly trained journalists and a sub-par quality of reporting.[111] Moreover, while the state broadcasting company does broadcast the national news on local channels, these programmes are aired at inconvenient times when the population is unlikely to view them.[112] Thus, the low-penetration of state media in Javakheti exacerbates the knowledge vacuum in the region, affecting awareness of state affairs and public life in Georgia and thus hindering integration.

To summarize, as a result of its geographic remoteness and its recent economic dependence on the Russian military base, the ethnic Armenian population of Javakheti is particularly isolated from the rest of Georgia. However, due to the ethnic Armenian presence in administrative posts, the minority can be said to enjoy a high degree of institutional resources. Meanwhile, the minority's demographic homogeneity in the region, together with its long-standing presence and proximity to an ethnic kin state, arguably makes for the strong ethnic attachment of the minority to the region. Meanwhile, ethnic schism with the native Georgian population should be weak on account of their sharing similar religions, although linguistic differences could serve to heighten schism between ethnic Armenians and ethnic Georgians.

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[111] Akerlund, 19.
[112] Armen Farmanyan, Personal Interview, Akhalkalaki, 27.04.2012.

3.2: The Azeris of Kvemo Kartli

Demographic, Geographic and Economic Situation

The Azeri population of Georgia is predominantly settled in the region of Kvemo Kartli, in the districts of Marneuli, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, and Gardabani.[113] While the towns of Marneuli and Gardabani are located not far from the state capital (at 39km and 42km respectively), the district of Dmanisi is both further from the centre and more mountainous. Since the collapse of the USSR, Dmanisi region has seen considerable out-migration as the population has almost halved (from 51,844 to 28,034).[114] Azeris in Kvemo Kartli have a history in the region dating back to the 11th century. While most Azeris in Georgia belong to the Shi'ite branch of Islam, in general religious practice in the region is weak.[115] Another similarity with Samtskhe-Javakheti is that the regional capital, Rustavi, has only a small proportion of ethnic Azeris.[116] Finally, in each district of Kvemo Kartli the proportion of ethnic Azeris increased between 1989 and 2002.

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[113] The respective percentages of ethnic Azeris in these districts are: 83.10%, 66.76%, 65.98% and 43.72%. ECMI, *ECMI Caucasus,* accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/stats/Census%202002.pdf>
[114] Wheatley, 2005(b), 7.
[115] Wheatley, 2005(b), 5.
[116] ICG report, 9.

Table 2: Population of Kvemo Kartli by region and ethnicity, 1989 and 2002[117]

Kvemo Kartli	Azeris %		Georgians %		Armenians %		Greeks %	
	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002
Rustavi City	7.28	4.29	65.10	87.77	4.32	2.41	2.52	0.22
Bolnisi	65.98	65.98	21.69	26.82	6.80	5.81	2.88	0.59
Gardabani	42.51	43.72	45.66	53.20	1.41	0.93	1.33	0.21
Dmanisi	63.86	66.76	28.14	31.24	0.36	0.52	6.12	0.78
Marneuli	78.72	83.10	6.13	8.04	11.93	7.89	1.35	0.33
Tertritsqaro	6.85	6.47	45.85	74.03	12.39	10.38	23.06	5.05
Tsalka	5.13	9.54	3.63	12.02	28.51	54.98	61.04	21.97

As with Samtskhe-Javakheti, the economic disparity between Kvemo Kartli and the capital city is great. In fact, Kvemo Kartli's annual turnover per capita dropped between 2003 and 2007 from 67.6% to 59.7%.[118] Nevertheless, these figures are an improvement on those of Samtskhe-Javakheti, owing to the proximity of the region to the capital as well as the fact that major industrial enterprises are located in Kvemo Kartli.[119] However, as in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the majority of these enterprises are located in the ethnic Georgian city of Rustavi, and thus the economic output of the minority-populated districts is not reflected in the above data.

Like Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli is an agricultural region, while 70% of Azeri households have a family member living abroad, making remittances a significant contribution to the income of the local population.[120] Furthermore, due to the proximity of the

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[117] ECMI, *ECMI Caucasus*, accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/info_stats.html#>
[118] Wheatley, 2009(b), 8.
[119] Wheatley, 2009(b), 9.
[120] See Appendix 1.

capital city, the rural population of Kvemo Kartli has access to large markets in which to sell produce, helping to increase contact with the Georgian-speaking population and enhancing the integration of ethnic Azeris into society.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Kvemo Kartli has also experienced changes in its demographic make-up. One significant episode was the forced removal of around 800 ethnic Azeri families from the city of Bolnisi in late 1989, making this an ethnically homogeneous Georgian city.[121] These events led to the creation of an Azeri popular movement, Geyrat, that was tasked with preventing the wide-scale emigration of Azeris from Georgia, and which later protected local Azeris from intimidation by the notorious *Mkhedrioni* paramilitaries that controlled the region in the early nineties.[122] Meanwhile, most of the Greek population of Kvemo Kartli has left the country, while the region of Tsalka has seen an influx of ethnic Georgians, mostly eco-migrants and those who arrived in anticipation of work provided by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.[123]

Thus, in terms of geography and economy, the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli enjoys closer ties with Georgian society than the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti, and is less isolated from the centre. However, Kvemo Kartli has also suffered from the same infrastructure issues as Samtskhe-Javakheti, with poor roads making travel to and from rural regions particularly difficult. As one interviewee remarked, while integration in Kvemo Kartli is facilitated by greater levels of ethnic diversity in towns such as Gardabani, Bolnisi and Dmanisi as well as proximity to Tbilisi, the more physically removed communities in the region remain just as isolated.[124]

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[121] ICG report, 16.
[122] Wheatley, 2005(b), 13-14.
[123] Jonathan Wheatley, 'Defusing Conflict in Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State', ECMI Working Paper, 36, 2006, 9-10.
[124] Leila Suleimanova, Personal Interview, UAWG, Tbilisi, 01.05.2012.

Political Representation and Local Government

Perhaps the most striking difference between the circumstances of the Armenian and Azeri minorities is the complete absence of Azeris in administrative structures. Thus, the regional and district governors of Kvemo Kartli has consistently been ethnic Georgians, while all top posts, including the police chief, procurator, and tax inspectorate, are also held by ethnic Georgians. Moreover, these posts are closely tied to the ruling party, as they are either held by ruling party activists or are occupied by those with experience working for government agencies. [125] Ethnic Azeris are also under-represented in the elected local-assemblies*:* Thus, in Dmanisi and Bolnisi where ethnic Azeris make up two-thirds of the population, Azeris occupy closer to one-third of the positions in local councils, while in Marneuli, at more than 80% the local population, Azeris account for just over a half of council members.[126] This under-representation is especially acute in rural areas, where access to the authorities is hampered by both poor infrastructure and the language barrier, while the same issue concerning the abolition of the village-level councils also affects the rural Azeri minority (see above). This situation limits state penetration of society, and ultimately undermines the authority of the state.

As in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the appointment of *gamgebeli* in Kvemo Kartli is largely influenced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs*,* thus weakening the power of the *sakrebulos.* Meanwhile, electoral irregularities also appear to have been especially prominent in Kvemo Kartli in recent years. For instance, during local elections of 2006 the District Election Commission (DEC) in Kvemo Kartli was composed exclusively of ethnic Georgians, while the vote count and tabulation of results were carried out only by ethnic Georgians. [127] According to an OSCE/ODIHR report on the May 2010 local elections, while the number of

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[125] Wheatley, 2009(b), 32.
[126] Wheatley, 2009(b), 17.
[127] ICG report, 13.

minority members in the DEC had increased in Samtskhe-Javakheti, once again there was not a single ethnic Azeri in the DEC in Kvemo Kartli.[128] Meanwhile, the low awareness of political candidates and opposition parties among both the ethnic Azeri population and ethnic Armenians means that these national minorities almost invariably vote for the ruling party.[129] It has also been suggested that loyalty to the ruling party among national minorities stems from a fear of reprisal if their voting habits changed.[130] Thus, representation of the Azeri minority is particularly weak in Kvemo Kartli, where ethnic Azeris are entirely absent in local administration.

Actors and Agency

In terms of actors and agency, the distribution of power in Kvemo Kartli is a much less controversial issue than in Javakheti because of the absence of Azeris in administrative structures. Throughout the 1990s, Geyrat was the main Azeri civil society organization in the region, but as with movements in Javakheti its legitimacy was weakened by the practice of divide and rule, causing it to split in the late 1990s.[131] Moreover, while United Javakh managed to influence local elections in 2006, Geyrat's leaders were pressurized to withdraw their candidates by the local authorities.[132] This suggests that local actors in Kvemo Kartli are more pliable to the local authorities than in Javakheti. As with Javakheti, the most radical Azeri organization, the National Assembly of Azeris in Georgia (NAAG), which lobbies for greater political autonomy and language rights for the Azeris of Kvemo Kartli, is based

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[128] 'International Election Observation Mission; Georgia, 30 May 2010', OSCE/ODIHR, 10, accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/68206>
[129] Wheatley, 2009(b), 24-25.
[130] Wheatley, 2005(b), 15.
[131] Wheatley, 2005(b), 14-15.
[132] Wheatley, 2009(b), 33.

outside of Georgia in Baku. However, this organization does not enjoy the support of the Azeri authorities, who arrested and jailed its leader in 2009.[133] Moreover, unlike movements in Javakheti, organizations in Kvemo Kartli have not been successful in mobilizing the local population, and protests by the Azeri community have been spontaneous affairs over local issues.[134] One explanation for this weak capacity for mobilization might be the increased ethnic diversity of urban centres in Kvemo Kartli (except Marneuli), as compared with the towns of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda in Javakheti which are almost entirely ethnic Armenian.[135]

In general, there are few NGOs representing the Azeri minority, while the outreach of these organizations is limited. As one interviewee explained, there exists a traditional reticence to engage in public discussions among ethnic Azeris, who are used to delegating important decisions to the head of the family and tend not to get involved in issues which do not directly involve them.[136] Consequently, on top of institutional obstacles to representation, the minority's activism and means of representation appears to be suppressed by traditional views and customs.

Meanwhile, the role of the Azeri government in Kvemo Kartli is confined to the cultural and humanitarian sphere. When it is politicised, it tends to act in favour of the Georgian government, such as when a delegation was sent to the region in 2003 to encourage local Azeris to vote for the incumbent.[137] Such actions reflect the traditionally close ties between the two governments. However, Georgia's dependence on Azerbaijani oil and gas pipelines suggests that there exists a potential for the manipulation of Georgia's Azeri population by the government of Azerbaijan.

In spite of this, the region remains firmly in the grasp of the Georgian government, and

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[133] Wheatley, 2009(b), 34.
[134] Wheatley, 2005(b), 40.
[135] Wheatley, 2005(b), 43-49.
[136] Suleimanova.
[137] ICG report, 14.

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economic and administrative control rests in the hands of centrally-appointed, ethnic Georgian governors. Consequently, it is the Georgian government who is most able to determine the speed and nature of the integration of the Azeri minority of Kvemo Kartli, and with relatively little resistance from local or international actors.

Integration into Georgian Society

As with the Armenian minority, the biggest obstacle to the integration of ethnic Azeris is poor knowledge of the state language. Thus, among the national minorities of Kvemo Kartli, proficiency in Georgian poses a particular problem in Marneuli and Gardabani districts, where 42.2% and 24.5% (respectively) of national minorities have no knowledge of Georgian, while 35.1% and 47.0% can understand just a few basic words. In no district of Kvemo Kartli does the percentage of the national minorities with a fluent grasp of the state language exceed 8%.[138] Thus, knowledge of the state language in areas inhabited by ethnic Azeris is just as poor as it is in areas inhabited by ethnic Armenians. However, due to the proximity of Kvemo Kartli to the centre, the desire to learn Georgian has been stronger among the Azeri minority, while fears of assimilation have been much less prevalent than among ethnic Armenians.[139]

As a result of the language barrier, ethnic Azeris face many of the same problems as ethnic Armenians, including in obtaining employment, in accessing higher education, in having recourse to the law and in accessing state media. Moreover, owing to the overwhelming absence of ethnic Azeris in administrative structures, the Azeri minority stands at an even greater disadvantaged when it comes to addressing the local authorities. When the Unified National Examinations were introduced in 2005, making knowledge of Georgian for

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[138] Wheatley, 2009(b), 8.
[139] Wheatley, 2009(b), 54.

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entrance into higher education obligatory, only 17 out of 1,012 Azeri candidates passed the exam that year.[140] Although policies to improve the chances of national minorities in higher education have been introduced, the number of ethnic Azeris entering education is still less than the assigned quota. Moreover, one interviewee suggested that this results not only from poor teaching, but also as a result of substandard education in minority regions in general, where there is an estimated 40% failure rate for school leaving exams.[141]

In terms of media usage, the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli makes limited use of state television channels, with Azerbaijani state channels dominating the television sets of Azeris in Kvemo Kartli.[142] As in Javakheti, here is also the issue of media quality, as local media outlets in particular lack resources and are often financially dependent on the state, a factor that reportedly diminishes trust in local TV channels.[143] Local minority-run TV and radio stations also have difficulty obtaining licenses to broadcast, as proof is required that the station will be able to transmit programmes for a 10 year period, an unrealistic expectation for small, local broadcasters.[144] However, a couple of local and national stations do broadcast short programmes in Azeri, including Marneuli TV and 'Moambe'.[145] Thus, although some efforts are being made to offer more media in the Azeri language, access to and use of state media is limited among the Azeri minority, once again resulting in insufficient awareness of events in Georgia.

To sum up, while the Azeri minority might benefit from the proximity of the region to the centre and the improved economic integration of some Azeri-populated towns, the lack of representation in local administrative structures puts Azeris at a distinct disadvantage.

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[140] Mekhuzla, 37.
[141] Tabatadze.
[142] Akerlund, 23.
[143] Akerlund, 23.
[144] 'Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Opinion on Georgia', a Council of Europe publication, October 2009, Article 107, 30.
[145] Akerlund, 21.

Moreover, as noted above, as a result of traditional cultural features, the Azeri community is less willing to voice its concerns, and thus less open to attempts to resolve their problems and represent their interests, making problems and conflicts more intangible.[146] Thus, the Azeri minority does not conform to Hale's hypothesis that ethnic identity will be used to obtain collective goods; indeed, the more culturally distinctive Muslim Azeris are less likely to mobilize and collectively represent their interests then the Christian Armenians. In this respect, a putatively greater degree of ethnic schism with the host nation does not inhibit integration by generating conflict, but rather prevents the minority from actively integrating into Georgian society due to features intrinsic to the minority culture. Consequently, the reluctance of the Azeri minority to utilize its voice has led to the perception of Azeris as less antagonistic towards the Georgian state than ethnic Armenians, making the relationship with the ethnic Azeri minority less conflictual.

3.3: Comparative Summary

In brief, while there are many similarities between the conditions of the Armenian and Azeri minorities in the country, including a widespread lack of Georgian language skills, poor rural infrastructure and limited access to education and employment, there are also some key differences. Chief among these is the gaping absence of ethnic Azeris in administrative structures, which deprives the Azeri community of the opportunity to communicate its needs to the local government. On the other hand, the presence of Armenians in local administration in Samtskhe-Javakheti is a product of the localism on which ethnic Armenian elites thrived under Shevardnadze; however, this does not reflect a better functioning and more

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[146] Wheatley, 2009(b), 40.

representative local government due to the system of centrally-appointed elites. In terms of the geographic isolation of each region, Kvemo Kartli is at a slight advantage being closer to the capital and less mountainous, but in places where the infrastructure is poor this advantage becomes insignificant. Finally, while Kvemo Kartli has the upper hand over Samtskhe-Javakheti in terms of economic integration this does not benefit all inhabitants of the region equally but only deepens the rural/urban divide.

Meanwhile, both national minorities are poorly represented in central government, with only three ethnic Azeris and three ethnic Armenians MPs in parliament.[147] Moreover, parliamentary deputies rarely speak out on minority issues, which are often considered taboo issues.[148] A recent example of this was when a Georgian MP brought up the issue of Georgia's non-recognition of the Armenian Genocide in April 2012. Besides the fact that the minister was 'accused' of being ethnic Armenian by a fellow MP, it is noteworthy that an ethnic Armenian did not stand on this issue.

Moreover, among both minorities there is the perception that knowledge of Georgian does not prevent exclusion from administrative positions.[149] As one interviewee noted, language is not the only obstacle to employment for minorities, but very often, members of national minorities also lack the essential requirements for a post, usually as a result of poor education and training.[150] However, failure to be employed or dismissal from work on grounds of corruption or incompetence is often construed as ethnically-driven discrimination.[151] Therefore, the language barrier and the isolation of minority regions are responsible not only for limiting the access of education and employment, but in driving the perception of exclusion among national minorities. These features can thus be identified as a

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[147] "Members of Parliament", *Parliament of Georgia,* accessed: 30.05.2012,
<http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=2>
[148] Suleimanova.
[149] ICG report, 22.
[150] Giorgi Sordia, Personal Interview, ECMI, Tbilisi, 01.05.2012.
[151] Lohm, 32.

relevant feature of ethnic schism.

In a similar vein, changes to the law undertaken as part of the transition to democracy are also often construed as discriminatory. For instance, a local of Samtskhe-Javakheti was surprised to have to pay a hefty fine for bride-knapping[152], a traditional yet illegal practice to which the authorities previously turned a blind eye.[153] Similarly, the extraction of fines for failing to pay taxes or for accepting bribes has also been understood as being ethnically-driven. Thus, attempts to govern according to state laws are sometimes perceived as an encroachment on the local culture. This supports Hechter's theory on how the transition to direct rule of minority regions can cause tension between the centre and a minority region, even if the supposed cultural homogeneity imposed by the centre is in fact an attempt to apply the rule of law.[154]

Overall, the transition period has led to the greater isolation of Javakheti as compared to Kvemo Kartli, posing greater obstacles to its integration. This is in part a result of the increased economic and geographic isolation of Javakheti, caused by its special status in Soviet times and its economic dependence on the Russian military base. It is also a result of the substantial freedoms of local elites in the Shevardnadze era, which in some respects afforded the region greater independence. This has also meant that the shift from direct to indirect rule in Javakheti has been more marked, as Javakheti has experienced the co-optation of its economic and political elite as well as of the Javakh movement, provoking greater unrest over local issues. Moreover, the greater prominence of the Javakh movement compared to the Geyrat movement in Kvemo Kartli accounts for its success in mobilizing the local population, while its hold on administrative power in the early 1990s made it harder to subdue. However, the greater social cohesion and independence of the region does not equate to a desire to secede. Indeed, when tensions between the region and the central government were

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[152] Bride-knapping, when a girl or woman is kidnapped for the purpose of marriage.
[153] Lohm, 33-34.
[154] Hechter, 62.

highest in 1991, the Javakh-led Provisional Council that controlled Javakheti at the time actually rejected a motion for Javakheti's independence.[155] Thus while the Javakheti Armenians have enjoyed greater institutional resources as a result of the ethnic Armenian presence in local administration, this has not led to an attempt to secede. Thus, Kuzio and Meyer's assertion that institutional resources encourage secession does not hold.[156] It has, however, increased the 'voice' of the minority by facilitating the mobilization of the local population. Meanwhile, other factors have also led to the perception among ethnic Georgians that Javakheti is particularly resistant to integration. Since these features are believed to contribute to the level of 'ethnic schism' between the Armenian and Georgian communities, they will be discussed in the following chapter together with an overview of government policies aimed at integrating national minorities in the country.

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[155] Wheatley, 2009(b), 14.
[156] Kuzio and Meyer, 299.

CHAPTER 4: THE INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES IN GEORGIA: POLICIES AND PERCEPTIONS

4.1: Government Policies towards the Integration of National Minorities

From a policy of "benign neglect" under Shevardnadze, the administration of Saakashvili has attempted to reign in Georgia's distant and potentially destabilizing national minorities by assisting their integration into Georgian society. In order to cope with Georgia's multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-faith society, the state has also encouraged the development of a civic national identity, focused on the inclusion of different ethnic groups and on citizenship rights as opposed to an exclusive, ethnic identity. This chapter will outline some of the key legislative and institutional changes undertaken by the current government, as well as the government's language policy towards national minorities. Following this, the prevailing perceptions and stereotypes of national minorities among the Georgian public will be, presented, to consider whether attitudes towards national minorities cohere with the promotion of a civic national identity in the country.

Legislative and Institutional Provisions

Since coming to power in 2004, the Saakashvili administration has implemented numerous structural reforms in the country. One such reform was the inclusion of minority issues under the remit of the State Minister for Reintegration Issues in 2008.[157] However, the

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[157] Giorgi Sordia, 'Institutions of Georgia for Governance on National Minorities', ECMI Working Paper 43, 2009, 4.

chief competence of this institution is to manage issues relating to Georgia's breakaway regions, a fact which might be expected to overshadow its efforts to assist the integration of other national minorities in Georgia. It also reflects the importance of minority integration to the state, and the implicit parallels drawn between minority and separatist regions. Moreover, while the reforms have given more attention to 'civic integration', there is considerable overlap between the different institutions involved in minority issues. This results in a lack of coordination between ministries, making for the ineffective implementation of minority projects.[158] Other institution-level problems include the poor capacity of ministries dealing with minority issues, frequent changes in the mandates of these institutions, and a shortage of funds.[159] Thus, while the current government has devoted much more institutional space to minority issues then the previous government, this has not always been effective in practice.

The most significant legislative provision concerning national minorities introduced by the current government is the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration.[160] This document claims to have a legal basis in various international and EU conventions, including the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML).[161] The Concept's goals range from the creation of an 'environment of tolerance and respect' for minorities to the provision of equal opportunities, including the right to be educated in their native languages, while mention is also made of promoting 'civic consciousness'.[162] Thus, the overall aim of the concept is to foster values associated with democracy, including the creation of a civic national identity amenable to minority inclusion.

While the objectives of the documents are commendable, the Advisory Committee to

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[158] Sordia, Personal Interview.
[159] Sordia, 5.
[160] Sordia, 4.
[161] 'National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration', Government of Georgia, May 2009, 3-4, accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc203.pdf>
[162] 'National Concept…', 4.

the FCNM has noted some apparent flaws in the Concept, including its definition of national minorities, defined as Georgia *citizens* with distinct ethno-linguistic features.[163] Thus the status of national minority may not be extended to, for example, Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti who have obtained Russian or Armenian citizenship in order to facilitate seasonal migration to Russia.[164] Moreover, while ethnic and religious minorities are protected from discrimination on the basis of race or religion by law, the Committee notes that very few cases of discrimination are brought to court in Georgia, often because members of national minorities are unaware of their rights.[165] Also mentioned are the failure to prosecute hate-speech in the media and the lack of enforcement of the Code of Conduct by the state broadcasting company.[166] In addition, attention is drawn to the continuing obstacles to the practice of minority religions in Georgia, as minorities often face opposition from local authorities when trying to establish places of worship.[167] Thus, while legislative provisions have improved the position of national minorities on paper, these provisions are beset by practical hurdles, including the inability of national minorities to exercise their rights as well as the ineffective realization of minority provisions laid down in the Concept.

One significant development was the introduction of a legislative amendment giving minority religions legal status in July 2011.[168] However, the passing of this amendment provoked telling resistance from the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), which organized a protest rally in Tbilisi,[169] sparking a wave of anti-minority (and especially anti-Armenian) hate-speech in the media and on the streets of the capital.[170] This episode demonstrated the

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[163] 'Advisory Committee...', Article 9, 6.

[164] Dual citizenship is prohibited by law in Georgia, while travel to Russia has become extremely difficult for Georgian passport-holders since the 2008 war. Isabella Osipova, Personal Interview, Public Defender's Office, Tbilisi, 25.04.2012.

[165] 'Advisory Committee...', Article 38, 13.

[166] 'Advisory Committee...', Article 82, 23-24.

[167] 'Advisory Committee...', Article 93, 26-27.

[168] Previously, minority religions were forced to register as NGOs.

[169] "Thousands Protest Law on Religious Minorities Legal Status," Civil Georgia, 10.06.2011, accessed: 30.05.2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23728>

[170] "Threat of outburst of inter-religious and interethnic hatred in Georgia: where silence leaded (sic.) us",

influence of the GOC in Georgian society, as well as the government's relative weakness in the face of the church's popularity since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that loyalty to the GOC in Georgia overshadows national-identity, thus complicating the promotion of an inclusive civic national identity in the country.[171]

Therefore, while state policies towards national minorities are clearly framed in terms of a liberal, inclusive civic nationalism, the widespread acceptance of such policies is inhibited by the "informal codes and expression of intolerance" latent in Georgian society.[172] This highlights the need to move beyond legislative provisions and to facilitate increased interethnic dialogue in order to properly institutionalize a civic national identity and civic consciousness in society.

Language policy

The main focus of the government's policy of integration is to improve knowledge of the state language among national minorities. To this end, various programmes have been introduced to train Georgian language teachers in minority regions. These programmes usually consist of sending Georgian teachers or university graduates to the region to simultaneously assist teaching in the Georgian language while training local teachers. However, the first such project, implemented from 2004-2006, involved just 40 Georgian teacher-trainers in both Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.[173] Recent programmes have consisted of sending a larger number of graduate students to the regions to assist in language classes for a one-year period. However, the lack of specialised training and high turnover of

Analytical Brief, PMMG, accessed: 30.05.2012,
<http://www.pmmg.org.ge/home.php?option=publish&lang=en>
[171] Nana Sumbadze, Personal Interview, IPS, Tbilisi, 24.04.2012.
[172] Broers, 299.
[173] Mekhuzla, 12-13.

these graduates make this is a regression from previous programmes.[174] Consequently, the results have been slight, and approximately 60% of Georgian-language teachers in the regions lack an adequate grasp of Georgian.[175] However, more positive steps have been made to increase enrolment of minority students in university by relaxing the Unified National Examination rules, resulting in a steady increase of the number of minority students entering university in recent years.[176] Another positive step in this direction has been the introduction of quotas for minority students, although minority university applicants still do not manage to fulfil their quota due to linguistic constraints.[177] Also, a recent pilot project funded by the OSCE HCNM introduced the multilingual teaching method, which has proved successful in retaining linguistic diversity while fostering knowledge of the state language in multi-ethnic states.[178] Encouragingly, the Ministry of Education has taken up the multilingual method, although currently it is only implemented in a handful of non-Georgian schools in the country.[179]

As regards the protection of minority languages in Georgia, although the Georgian government pledged to ratify the ECRML on becoming a member of the Council of Europe in 1999, it has yet to do so.[180] Indeed, it has been argued that Georgia's failure to ratify the ECRML reflects the highly-politicized nature of the language issue in Georgia, as public opinion rejects the presence of languages other than Georgian in the country, while "the continuing use of minority languages in Georgia is somehow seen...as an aberration that needs

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[174] Tabatadze.
[175] Tabatadze.
[176] Mekhuzla, 38.
[177] "Ethnic Minority Entrants at the Unified National Exams", *Ministry of Science and Education of* Georgia, 17.02.2012, accessed: 30.05.2012,
   <http://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?t=srch&search=quota&id=3786&lang=eng >
[178] Mekhuzla, 17.
[179] Civil Integration Programs, *Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia,* accessed: 30.05.2012,
   <http://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?t=srch&search=Multilingual%20Instruction&id=547&lang=eng>
[180] Jonathan Wheatley, 'Georgia and the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages', ECMI Working Paper 42, 2009(a), 4.

to be corrected."[181] Considering the popular response to legislative amendments introduced to empower minority religious institutions in the country, changes to the status of minority languages following ratification of the ECMRL could be expected to draw a similar reaction.

Indeed, the promotion of minority languages stands in contradiction to the understanding of linguistic integration in Georgia, where emphasis is placed on learning the state language and where it is expected that the promotion of minority languages will be to the detriment of Georgian. This contradiction goes some way in explaining the as yet tentative steps towards introducing the bilingual language approach in Georgia, especially in administrative affairs. Thus, resistance to minority-language learning is still voiced in official circles, including the *Parliamentary Committee for Education,* which has declared that teaching languages other than Georgian is non-constitutional.[182] However, it has been argued that ratification of the ECRML poses no threat to the state language and will only benefit the integration of national minorities.[183] In this way, it is clear that the civic national identity endorsed by the government continues to privilege the titular majority of the states, while an ideological remnant of the 1990s in Georgian society, that still sees minorities as a threat to the state, continues to prohibit the introduction of institutional arrangements beneficial to minority integration.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated above, the Georgian government is increasing efforts to find new ways to improve the integration of national minorities in the country. In spite of this, increased institutional arrangements and better application of already existing institutional provisions for national minorities are required to improve their integration into society. Moreover, in terms of local representation, the lack of self-governance mechanisms represents a particular problem for national minorities, and especially the Azeri minority. Therefore,

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[181] Wheatley, 2009(a), 5.

[182] Britta Korth et al., 'Language Policy in Georgia: With a Focus on the Education System', published by CIMERA, Geneva, 2005, 45.

[183] Wheatley, 2009(a), 25.

more emphasis must be placed on changing the administrative structure that has been in place since the 1990s in order to improve minority representation in the regions. In terms of the promotion of civic national identity, the government is also faced with opposition from Georgian society, which struggles to come to terms with the essence of civic national identity, and which still perceives national minorities as a latent threat to national survival.

4.2: Perceptions of Minorities in Georgia

Most of those interviewed for this thesis agreed that, in general, attitudes towards minority groups have been rather negative in Georgia in recent years. In particular, events such as the response to the legislation on minority religions, in the words of one interviewee, "demonstrated that the Georgian public is far from ready to talk seriously of tolerance."[184] However, the prevalent perceptions among the Georgian public of the Azeri minority appear to be less negative than those of the Armenian minority. In general, Georgians tend to think of ethnic Azeris as being less confrontational than ethnic Armenians. It is the opinion of the author that the negative perception of ethnic Armenians has to do with the propensity for mobilization demonstrated by the minority in recent years, which has consistently kept the minority 'in the limelight' since the early 1990s. This, together with the ongoing issue of Georgia's sovereignty in its breakaway regions, the specific administrative structure of the Javakheti region, as well as the tense history between the ethnic Georgian and ethnic Armenian population of the country, has sustained the fear among ethnic Georgians that Javakheti might be the 'next Abkhazia'.

In particular, the ability of local organizations such as United Javakh to mobilize the

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[184] Arnold Stepanyan, Personal Interview, PMMG, Tbilisi, 26.04.2012.

local population has meant that visible and vocal demonstrations are more frequent in Samtskhe-Javakheti than in Kvemo Kartli. Thus, demonstrations have become a frequent means of voicing discontent over issues including the closure of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, tax collection, or the poor supply of electricity to the region.[185] While these demonstrations are rarely driven by ethnocultural concerns, they are often perceived as such by the public, in part due to the representation of events in the Georgian media. Thus, according to one observer,

> "The only news that ever reaches Tbilisi (from Javakheti) is when another mass meeting has been arranged, and often the shows are edited in such a way that the entire population is portrayed as dangerous separatists, rather than discontented Georgian citizens from the region demanding socio-economic improvements."[186]

Therefore, it is important to note that disputed issues in Javakheti to date have been overwhelming economic, while the fear of assimilation and demands for increased political autonomy are expressed only by a small minority of Javakheti's Armenians. In this vein, all ethnic Armenians interviewed for this thesis, and in particular those from Akhalkalaki, were uncomfortable using the terms 'autonomy' and even 'self-governance', being quick to add that such demands are voiced only by a handful of radicals. This can be attributed to the taboo nature of ethnopolitical issues in the region. Thus, the mobilization of ethnic Armenians should not be construed as ethnopolitical, but as a product of the economic hardship of the region heightened by the marginalization felt by the local population due to its overwhelming isolation from the rest of Georgia. Thus, two consequences of the transition period – the especially high level of isolation of the Javakheti region and the deep-seated insecurity of Georgian society regarding minority claims – are responsible for producing a particularly negative perception of the ethnic Armenian minority.

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[185] Lohm, 40.
[186] Lohm, 42.

Another feature that appears to drive perceptions of the Armenian minority are the connected disputes regarding the religious identification of churches in the region, which has often put the Church in Armenia in direct confrontation with the GOC.[187] Owing to such disputes, ethnic Armenians are perceived as attempting to usurp Georgian national heritage and lay claim to Georgian territory.[188] Such arguments run especially deep in the region as a result of the ongoing territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus. Thus, while both the Armenian and Azeri minorities ought to identify highly with the regions they inhabit, the effect of ethnic attachment is arguably only made relevant when it creates competing claims over land and religious monuments, as has been the case with the Armenian minority.

In this way, frequent disputes involving the Armenian minority have focused attention on this minority among the Georgian public, affording them the reputation of trouble-makers. By contrast, the Azeri population has been driven to protest only on rare occasions, including over land distribution disputes.[189] Unlike the demonstrations in Akhalkalaki, these protests have been largely spontaneous and were not led by a specific movement, thus avoiding the politicization of the disputed issues in the eyes of the Georgian public. However, the propensity to demonstrate and the negative perception of the Armenian minority does not dampen its prospects for integration; likewise the fact that the Azeri minority is less demonstrative does not reflect a more successful integration process for this minority. In fact, as suggested by this research, the reticence of the Azeri minority to voice concerns in fact further adds to their marginalization, already institutionalized by their low levels of representation in administrative structures and relatively weak civil society.

To conclude, the main effect of Georgia's transition period, marked by state weakness and ethnic conflict, has been to isolate both regions to varying extents. However, the isolation of Javakheti has been especially marked as a result of its economic and geographic insularity,

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[187] Lohm, 36-37.
[188] 'Where silence...'.
[189] Wheatley, 2009(b), 53.

while the predominance of ethnic Armenians in administrative structures lent the region increased independence from the rest of the country. This has impelled the Armenian minority to find its 'voice' through demonstrations, even if this has proven an ineffective mechanism for representation in this case. Meanwhile, the negative perception of the Armenian minority that this has produced has inhibited both minorities' integration by making increased institutional provisions appear inimical to the security of Georgian society. Meanwhile, the absence of Azeri representatives on the local level has meant that this community is entirely deprived of representation, and thus remains even more on the margins of society than the Armenian minority.

Thus, according to Kuzio and Meyer's typology, increased institutional resources do inhibit integration, but not directly as a result of the availability of such resources. Rather, it is the antagonism towards ethnic Armenians as a result of their higher level of institutional resources, reflected in their propensity to voice their dissent that complicates their integration. In this regard, ethnic schism based on cultural and religious differences does not conform to these case studies. However, ethnic schism produced by historic antagonism and the threat perception of the majority does give the appearance that the minority is unwilling to integrate. Thus, these perceptions, in the context of Georgia's unresolved territorial disputes, serve to make the Georgian public wary of institutional provisions for minority rights that are likely to facilitate the integration of all national minorities.

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CONCLUSIONS

Georgia's post-Soviet transition, characterized by ethnic nationalism and state weakness, has influenced the attempted integration of its national minorities in various ways. For both the Armenians of Javakheti and Azeris of Kvemo Kartli, state weakness has added to the isolation of these communities; however, isolation is especially marked in Javakheti, where the region's special status in the Soviet era and the overwhelming presence of ethnic Armenians in the administrative structures has lent the region an identity removed from the rest of Georgia. This accounts for the minority's propensity to voice its discontent, as well as the especially negative attitudes towards ethnic Armenians prevalent in Georgian society. Meanwhile, government policies to integrate national minorities, including legislative arrangements that respect minority cultural and religious rights, have improved the position of national minorities on paper, but are ineffective in practice. This is because, without the facility to communicate their needs constructively, minorities are unable to make use of the institutional structures available to them. Thus, a highly centralized system and lack of self-governance is another feature carried over from the transition period which continues to obstruct minority integration.

Moreover, popular opposition in Georgian society to institutional provisions which would facilitate minority integration, such as ratification of the ECRML, arises from the deep-seated insecurity of Georgian society resulting from the experience of state weakness and ethnic conflict of the nineties. This suggests that the successful integration of national minorities residing in Georgia proper largely depends on some form of resolution of Georgia's territorial conflicts, which continue to prolong transition by preventing state consolidation. Therefore, the impact of the transition period and the obstacles to integration are highly
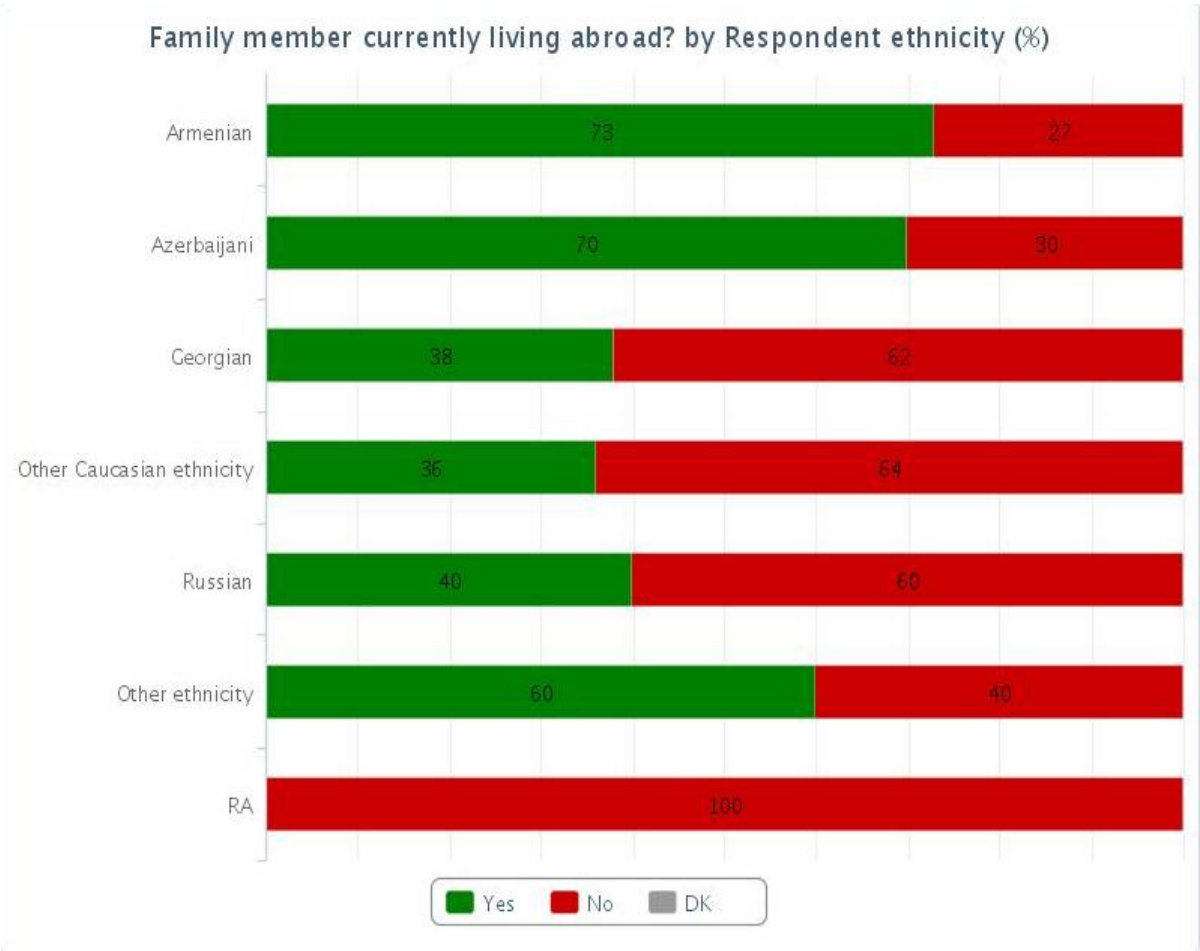
interrelated.

Thus, the main obstacles to integration of national minorities in Georgia are defined as follows: the lack of representative local government in minority regions, which prevents minorities from constructively voicing their concerns; the linguistic barrier caused by poor knowledge of the state language; and finally, the overriding negative attitudes towards national minorities, which partly accounts for the lack of institutional provisions to assist minority integration and inadequate realization of the current policies on integration. Meanwhile, the variables identified as obstacles to minority integration, including ethnic schism, ethnic attachment and institutional resources, have not been found to directly apply in the case of the Armenian and Azeri minorities in Georgia. Rather, it is the structural and societal consequences of Georgia's prolonged transition, and not features intrinsic to minorities, that appear to be inhibiting the integration of national minorities in Georgia. In addition, this thesis has revealed a discrepancy between the objective of minority integration as outlined in the National Concept and the absence of widespread acceptance of civic values in Georgian society.

Combining an in-depth analysis of Georgia's transition period with qualitative research interviews on minority integration has allowed me to link up features of transition with the existing obstacles to integration. In this way, this thesis has provided a novel perspective on the issue of minority integration by focusing on the nation-building aspect of transition in relation to national minorities. Moreover, conducting interviews with specialists in the field in Georgia afforded me a unique insight into the embeddedness of these issues within the context of Georgia's difficult and arguably as yet unresolved transition. This has led to the realization that the integration of national minorities in Georgia is dependent on wider issues of national security and state consolidation made pertinent by transition. Thus, the dilemma of multinational states undergoing nation-building is particularly relevant to
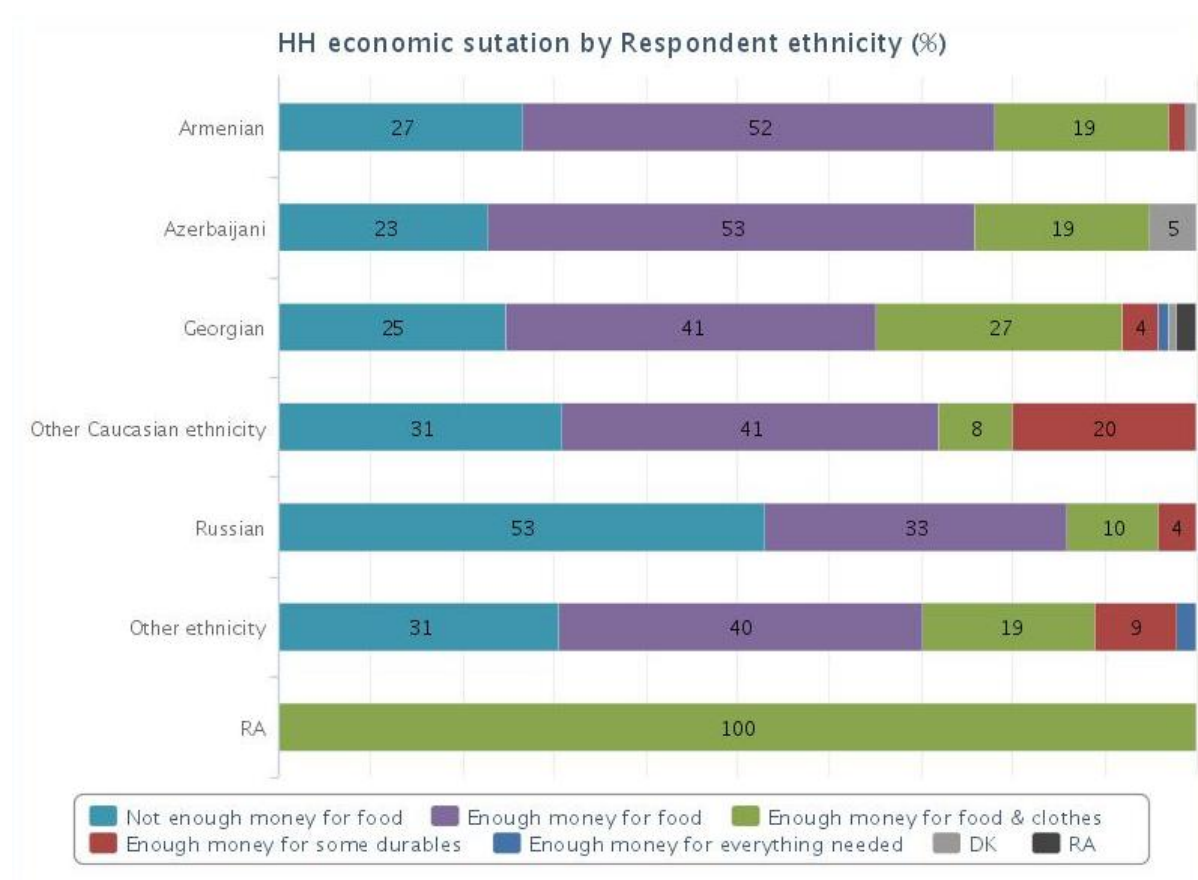
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Georgia's transition experience, so that national minority integration requires a comprehensive approach which addresses structural, societal and institutional issues simultaneously.

Appendix 1: Family Member Living Abroad by Respondent Ethnicity, Georgia[190]

Family member currently living abroad? by Respondent ethnicity (%)

Ethnicity	Yes	No
Armenian	73	27
Azerbaijani	70	30
Georgian	38	62
Other Caucasian ethnicity	36	64
Russian	40	60
Other ethnicity	60	40
RA		100

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No ■ DK

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[190] Caucasus Barometer 2010, CRRC, accessed: 30.05.2012,
<http://www.crrc.ge/oda/?dataset=4&row=11&column=127>

Appendix 2: Household Economic Situation by Respondent Ethnicity[191]

HH economic sutation by Respondent ethnicity (%)

Ethnicity	Values
Armenian	27, 52, 19
Azerbaijani	23, 53, 19, 5
Georgian	25, 41, 27, 4
Other Caucasian ethnicity	31, 41, 8, 20
Russian	53, 33, 10, 4
Other ethnicity	31, 40, 19, 9
RA	100

Legend: Not enough money for food · Enough money for food · Enough money for food & clothes · Enough money for some durables · Enough money for everything needed · DK · RA

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191 Caucasus Barometer 2010, CRRC, accessed: 30.05.2012
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