

Georgia as an Ethnic Democracy: a Study on the Azerbaijani and Armenian Minorities under Mikheil Saakashvili

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that the relationship between the core Georgian majority and the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities can be conceptualised through Sammy Smooha's model of ethnic democracy. Scholars have largely ignored instances where a state has not established a power-sharing agreement with the minority, yet conflict has not occurred. This dissertation will show that despite formal and informal restrictions from participating in the state apparatus, the granting of collective rights to minorities reduced tensions and ensured stability. Mikheil Saakashvili transformed Georgia into a tolerant state, but mostly failed at incorporating the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities into a broad 'civic' identity. The Georgian national identity was significantly influenced by the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, linking ethnicity with nationality and thus marginalising ethnic minorities.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter I: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, & Methodology	6
Literature Review	6
Theoretical Framework	8
Chapter II: Georgia's Relations with the Azerbaijani & Armenian Minorities – A Historical Background	12
Nation- & State-Building in Georgia	12
Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti	14
Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli	18
Majority-Minority Relations under Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, & Mikheil Saakashvili	20
Chapter III: Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and the State Apparatus	25
State Approaches to Minority Rights	25
Legal Framework	26
Local Governance Structures	28
Political Representation & Participation	30
Chapter IV: Georgia as an Ethnic Democracy	32
Applicability of the Eight Features of Ethnic Democracy in Georgia	32
Conclusion	37
Appendix	39
Bibliography	42

Introduction

In one of the most well known papers on the Soviet Union's ethno-territorial structure, Slezkine (1994) asserted that the USSR resembled a communal apartment. Each sub-unit represented a separate room, watched over closely by the apartment's communist landlords. Jones (2006, p. 248) elaborates, remarking that the internal design of these rooms varied, as "some tenants proved better at managing their newly independent "rooms" than others." Georgia is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous former Soviet republics, while also having experienced the most ethno-political conflict. According to the most recent census of 2002, of Georgia's 4,371,535 population, 3,661,173 (or 84%) were ethnically Georgian, while 16% were of non-Georgian descent. Using Slezkine's metaphor to understand the post-Soviet reality, scholars have posed the question: are Georgians bad roommates? Georgia, as other former Soviet republics, was swept up by a fervent ethno-nationalist movement in the early nineties. Inter-ethnic relations deteriorated as minorities feared discrimination, forced assimilation, and even expulsion. While the separatist provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia proclaimed their independence, Georgia was still left with a large minority population. Due to the legacy of the Soviet Union nationalities policy, the experience with ethno-political conflict, and the need to project the government as democratic to the West, a very unique structure for majority-minority relations emerged.

This dissertation will seek to analyze the structure, mechanisms, and dynamic between the Georgian majority and the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in their respective provinces of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Sammy Smooha's model of ethnic democracy is the most applicable, and will thus be used to understand this unique relationship. Through the application of Smooha's model, this dissertation will also show why and how majority-minority relations remained relatively peaceful. It will also show how the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia affected policies towards minorities. Because the majority-minority dynamic changed significantly under President Mikheil Saakashvili, this dissertation will apply ethnic democracy to Georgia under his rule. Very little research has been done to analyse societies where a

considerable minority population exists, yet a power-sharing agreement has not been ratified. Consequently, this dissertation will attempt to narrow this gap. Furthermore, the status of the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia has been largely ignored by Western academia, despite the fact that scholars in Georgia see the minorities as a potential source of conflict. This dissertation will consist of four chapters. The first will analyse the literature available on the topic of majority-minority relations, selecting the model of ethnic democracy to test on the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia. The second chapter will review relevant historical developments regarding Georgian state- and nation-building, the status of the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia, and an overview of the three presidencies and how they affected the majority-minority dynamic. The third chapter will analyse state policies and how they have affected the participation and representation of the Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Finally, the fourth chapter will determine the extent to which ethnic democracy can be applied to Georgia.

Chapter I: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, & Methodology

Literature Review

When analyzing ethnic relations, many approaches have been used. Georgian academia has tended to take a primordialist approach, focusing on ancient origins and ethnogenesis. As such, an ethnic group is seen as either indigenous to a certain territory or viewed as immigrants, citing the latter's homeland as existing elsewhere. A nation's history is thus given colossal importance, and as a result, some have politicised this history to justify or legitimise a course of action. There is however a growing discrepancy in Georgia between scholars from the Soviet period and those of the post-Soviet generation. The latter, while not entirely embracing Western ideas, pay less attention to primordialism and see ethnicity more as a product of recent times (Broers 2008). Western academia, by contrast, neglected the field of ethnic relations only until recently. Very little importance was given to ethnicity as many believed its influence would gradually diminish with globalisation and modernisation. However, with the collapse of communism and the prevalence of ethno-political conflict thereafter, political scientists began to study nationalism to understand the tensions that arose in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics (Kymlicka 2000). Generally, Western academia has focused its attention on the two extremes of the spectrum of majority-minority relations. They have either looked at multiethnic societies that have established a power-sharing agreement and avoided conflict, or societies that did not establish a power-sharing agreement and have experienced conflict. Scholars have largely ignored the instances in the middle of the spectrum, where society is divided along ethnic lines but has not undergone violent conflict and is relatively stable. Within the major works on Georgia in Western academia (Sunny 1994; Wheatley 2005a), very few scholars examined minority-majority relations and how these societies, although ethnically fragmented with clear 'winners' and 'losers,' manage to stay together. This chapter will provide a summary of the literature regarding this topic and select a model to apply to Georgia.

Academia has struggled to reconcile with the fact that some multiethnic societies, while fulfilling the basic conditions of a democratic state, use non-

democratic mechanisms to guide majority-minority relations. Scholars have moved away from the mutually exclusivist identification of states as either democracies or not, now recognising the usefulness of 'diminished subtypes' of democracies (Collier & Levitsky 1996). Inherent within this notion is that a state, as a quasi-democracy, satisfies most of the main features of democracy, but may have one element that is either missing or weakened (Collier & Levitsky 1996). The notion of a diminished democracy is useful because it rejects that fact that states are either democracies or not, looking at those in the middle that maintain democratic elements within them. The growing consensus around the concept has allowed the resolution of two objectives: (i) characterizing semi-democratic states with certain peculiarities, while (ii) not engaging in conceptual 'stretching;' acknowledging that their characteristics set them apart from the 'pure' model of democracy but close enough that the conceptualization is still useful (Collier & Levitsky 1996).

Political scientists have thus constructed several models to describe democratic and quasi- or non-democratic regimes within the literature on majority-minority relations. The democratic models consist of civic and ethnic democracy, while quasi- or non-democratic models consist of control, Herrenvolk democracy, and ethnocracy. In civic democracies (such as the United States, Mexico, or Brazil), the emphasis is on the citizen and nationality, while in ethnic democracies (such as Israel or Turkey), ethnicity remains the most important feature of the state. In the civic democracy category, scholars have further constructed subtypes to distinguish between different forms, such as individual liberal democracy, republic liberal democracy, consociational democracy, and multicultural democracy (Smootha 2001). The civic-ethnic dichotomy has been criticised by academics for neglecting the fact that nations can contain elements of both to different extents¹. This has become especially problematic when those in the West idealise and promote their nation's '*civic-ness*.' It is evident that many nations who are typically exemplified for their civic qualities maintain a cultural and societal chauvinism where heterogeneity is suppressed and the identity of

¹ See Kymlicka (2000) and Brubaker (in Hall 1998) for more on the civic-ethnic debate

the majority dominates the state (Brubaker 1998). Despite this weakness, some states do clearly promote an identity based on an ethnic identity, culture, language, religion, and kinship, while others emphasize citizenship and nationhood. For the purposes of this dissertation, it remains a constructive differentiation and will be used to elaborate on majority-minority relations.

Theoretical Framework

Since this dissertation will be analyzing a society where ethnicity is the primary means of identification, the civic democracy subtypes can be discarded. The closest model is thus ethnic democracy. Despite the fact that Georgia is far away from a 'pure' democracy, it is still better analyzed within the framework of a diminished democracy than one outside of the democratic framework, such as control. Georgia is one state that has clearly identified democratization as a priority, and despite mixed results and lagging behind the Baltics, it is still one of the most democratically advanced former Soviet republics. The basic features of a democracy are mostly present, making Georgia a plausible case study for the model of ethnic democracy. Thus, the model will be tested in order to understand the dynamic between Georgians and the two main minorities in the country. In applying the ethnic democracy model, this dissertation does not seek to promote Georgia's democratic qualities; it merely attempts to investigate the role of ethnicity in a diminished democracy. Smooha's (2001) model of ethnic democracy is a diminished subtype, originally applied to Israel, but also to other states as well, such as Estonia, Slovakia, Northern Ireland (1921-72), Poland (1918-35), and Malaysia. His model specifies several features to analyze the extent to which a state can be coined an ethnic democracy. By determining if these features are characteristic to the society in question, one can have a better understanding of majority-minority dynamics. Smooha defines an ethnic democracy as a:

“...democracy that contains the non-democratic institutionalization of dominance of one ethnic group. The founding rule of this regime is an inherent contradiction between two principles – civil and political rights for all and structural subordination of the minority to the majority... The organization of the state on the basis of this structural incompatibility

constantly generates ambiguities, contradictions, tensions and conflicts, but not necessarily ethnic and political instability... Yet the democratic framework is real, not a façade. The conferral of citizenship on the minority enables it to conduct an intense struggle for fulfilling its rights and for improving its situation without fearing repression on the part of the state and majority” (Smootha 2001, p. 24-5).

It is the contradiction between the principles of civil and political rights for all and structural subordination that creates a unique dynamic between a majority and minority. Yet, Smootha admits that contradictions can be prevalent in some matters and in others, not at all. The prevalence of these contradictions is based on perceptions, interpretations, and attitudes of both groups towards each other, which in turn can be influenced by state policy. In ethnic democracy, minorities are granted individual and collective rights, but collective rights may not be given in instances where they “reinforce the threat it presents to the majority” (Smootha 2001, p. 26). For this reason, one can describe the minority in an ethnic democracy as “separate but not so equal” (Smootha 2001, p. 26). Smootha further elaborated on his model with eight main features, of which he states all are not equally essential, and the absence of one or more does not necessarily negate its application:

Table 1: Eight Features of Ethnic Democracy (Smootha 2001)

1. The dominant ethnic nationalism determines that there is only one ethnic nation that has an exclusive right to the country
2. The state separates membership in the single core ethnic nation from citizenship
3. The state is owned and ruled by the core ethnic nation
4. The state mobilizes the core ethnic nation to obtain its members’ consent, legitimacy, support, and participation
5. The state grants non-core groups incomplete individual and collective rights
6. The state allows non-core groups to conduct parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle for change
7. The state perceives the non-core groups as a threat
8. The state imposes some control on non-core groups

It is apparent that in an ethnic democracy, a minority's collective rights are only restricted when it poses a threat to state stability. Thus, in some sectors they may enjoy full equality vis-à-vis the majority with minimal state interference, while in other areas restrictions may be established. A minority in an ethnic democracy has the same legal right to seek change within the domestic political space. An ethnic democracy is likely to emerge if ethnic dominance and ethnic nationalism precede the emergence of democracy, there is a real threat that requires mobilisation of the majority, and a commitment to democracy exists. Moreover, an ethnic democracy is likely to be a stable system if the core nation comprises of a numerical majority, the minority population constitutes a significant minority (from ten to twenty-five percent), the core nation is committed to democracy, the core nation is indigenous to the territory, the minority is not indigenous, the minority comprises of more than one ethnic group, the majority possess a supportive diaspora, and the minority's external homeland and the international community do not intervene (Smootha 2001).

This dissertation will thus test ethnic democracy's applicability to Georgia under President Mikheil Saakashvili in order to analyse relations with the country's two largest and compactly settled minorities, the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli. Within Georgia, the Azerbaijani and especially the Armenian minorities are regarded as a source of potential conflict. Among Western academia however, very few have even mentioned their presence, focusing their work on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Despite the numerical superiority of the Azerbaijanis and Armenians when compared to the other minorities, little has been written regarding their status in Georgia. By looking at more than one minority, the analysis will be able to decipher whether some features of majority-minority relations are peculiar to a certain region or can be attributed to the overall situation in the country. The dissertation will include a textual analysis, drawing from a variety of governmental and independent sources, including speeches made by political leaders, legislation and policies, official documents, expert interviews, and reports compiled by both governmental and nongovernmental organisations. One challenge in analysing official statements will be deciphering to whom the

statement was directed and whether it resulted in the adoption and implementation of concrete initiatives. Other challenges will be quantifying relations between Georgians and the minorities, examining their perceptions of each other, and understanding the role and influence of ethnic elites in their respective regions.

Chapter II: Georgia's Relations with the Azerbaijani & Armenian Minorities – A Historical Background

Nation- & State-Building in Georgia

With a long history of shifting borders and conquests by many great powers, Georgia was and still is the most ethnically heterogeneous state in the South Caucasus. Even within the Georgian ethnic group exist several sub-groups, such as the Mingrelians, Svans, Ajars, and Laz, all speaking languages different but related to the Georgian language, *kartuli* or Kartvelian. Facing difficulty remaining independent in a geostrategic region with growing Persian and Ottoman influence, Christian Orthodox Russia was a natural ally for Georgian Orthodox rulers. Between 1801 and 1878, modern-day Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire, beginning a long period of Russian rule (Cornell 2001). According to Suny (1994), by the end of the 19th century, the Georgian national identity had consolidated, becoming an individual's main form of identification. Fused into the Georgian national identity however was Georgian Orthodoxy, creating the concept of *sjuli*, or an ethnoreligious identity. This concept was so strong in the early 19th century that Muslim Georgians were known as 'Tatars' and Catholic Georgians, oddly, as 'French' (Sabanadze 2010). Ultimately, religion still plays a crucial role in modern-day Georgia and is thus seen to be one of the main features of Georgian national identity. One factor that helped to strengthen national identity was contact with other ethnic groups and the domination of the Armenians and Russians in Georgia's urban centres, resulting in a need to defend and assert one's identity more prominently². Despite some resentment of Georgians towards their marginal status in urban centres, the nationalists of the day favoured a relatively inclusive attitude (Sabanadze 2010). Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, the short-lived Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) came into being as a hybrid nationalist-socialist state. Facing many difficulties, it ultimately succumbed to Bolshevik rule, but its existence served as a useful model for the modern-day Republic of Georgia to emulate (Jones 2006).

² Throughout the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, Georgians were a minority in Tbilisi until the 1920s (Jones 2006).

Soviet rule and its nationalities policy, heavily influenced by Ioseb Jughashvili (also known as Joseph Stalin and native of Gori, Georgia), left an indelible mark on present-day Georgian national identity. The Soviet Union was based upon ethno-territorial administrative units, linking each officially recognised ethnic group, known as a titular group, to a specific territory. These administrative units were, in order of decreasing standing, Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), Autonomous Regions (*oblasti*), and Autonomous Areas (*okruga*). Despite the fact that below the SSR level, very little local autonomy was given, the system did establish local elites and institutions at other levels. In turn, this local infrastructure was utilised by the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast and the Abkhaz ASSR to declare independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Abkhaz and the Ossetians, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis were not given an ethno-territorial administrative unit in the Georgian SSR. As a result of this, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis could not enjoy the benefits of special access to education³ and political office that were granted to the titular minorities in Georgia like the Abkhaz and South Ossetians (Cornell 2002). Many scholars such as Zürcher (2005), MacFarlane (1997), and Cornell (2002) have thus linked these political structures with the occurrence of conflict. Conversely, the lack of these political structures among the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities in Georgia could be one explanation for the absence of conflict in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.

The major consequence of the ethno-territorial system for present-day Georgia is that: “post-Soviet citizens do not expect the state to be ethnically neutral; on the contrary, titular majorities expect the state to promote the symbols and interests of the titular nation...” (Broers 2008, pp 281). However, the Soviet authorities promoted a primordialist version of Georgian ethnicity, focusing on ancient roots and ethnogenesis, while even imposing ethnic and folk themes on the artists of

³ Higher education in the Georgian SSR usually took place in Georgian, limiting its availability to the minorities, who were either taught in their native language or in Russian. Due to the proximity of the minorities’ respective kin-states, the majority would choose to go to university in their native lands rather than within Georgia³.

the day. Ultimately, the experience under communism led to the development of an ethnically exclusivist identity. This way of defining ethnicity was not limited to Georgians, but was present among minorities as well. As Nodia (in Coppieters & Legvold 2005, p. 48) states, “exclusivist attitudes are no less, if not more, characteristic of minorities than of the Georgian majority.” Sabanadze (2010, p. 88) believes that the strength of Georgian nationalism can be measured by the nation’s attitude towards ethnic minorities:

“An official national discourse cultivated the image of multi-confessional and multiethnic Georgia, putting it in the context of Georgian hospitality and openness. As a result the concept of tolerance became confused with hospitality and resulted in a highly intolerant society in which the majority believed that minorities were their perennial guests and thus should be treated as such, in the best traditions of Georgian hospitality. This theme of “minorities as guests” would be dangerously exploited by radical nationalists after the Soviet collapse and inflict significant damage to the integrity and social cohesion of the newly independent Georgian state.”

Such a conceptualisation is visible regarding the Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia; the former are regarded by Georgians as indigenous to the area while the latter are not. Since the Ossetians crossed over the Caucasus mountain range in the 17th century from North Ossetia, they are perceived as ‘newcomers.’ Similarly, because the Armenians and Azerbaijanis have a homeland of their own, they are also sometimes perceived of as ‘newcomers’ or ‘guests.’

Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti

The origins of the Armenians in the historic Georgian province of Javakheti⁴ are debated, with some historians claiming that they are indigenous to the area, while others believe that they migrated to the area from the province of Erzurum in the Ottoman Empire (Margaryan 2008; Cornell 2001). According to Georgian scholars, compact settlement of Armenians in Javakheti began primarily in the

⁴ Javakheti by itself is not an administrative district but an unofficial region, consisting of the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts. It is located within the administrative province of Samtskhe-Javakheti

nineteenth century, and their migration occurred in three waves. Following the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, the Russian Empire ethnically cleansed the South-West Caucasus of Muslims, including Georgian Muslims, sending them to Turkey (UNHCR & UNAG 2003). After the depopulation of these lands, about 30,000 Armenians came in the first wave, either voluntarily or by invitation, to repopulate the region of Javakheti, which the imperial government allotted to them. The second and third waves occurred during 1897-1902 and WWI, when Armenians began fleeing from Anatolia⁵. Upon the founding of the Democratic Georgian Republic, a brief territorial dispute occurred with the Dashnaks⁶ in Armenia over the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki regions. Fighting began in December 1918 and only ceased after British intervention⁷ (Cornell 2002; Suny 1994). Modern-day suspicions between the Georgians and Armenians may have their roots in this small conflict.

Javakheti is located on an elevated mountain plateau, has a harsh climate, and is one of the poorest regions of Georgia. Javakheti includes the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts, and its economy is primarily based on agriculture, such as dairy products and potatoes. In 1994, Javakheti was merged with Meskheta, creating the province of Samtskhe-Javakheti. In the first several years of the post-Soviet period, Javakheti existed as an administrative region, and its capital was located in Akhalkalaki. While Armenians made up 95% of the population in Javakheti, when it was merged with the Georgian-dominated region of Meskheta, their overall standing in Samtskhe-Javakheti decreased to about half (see Appendix 2). The administrative capital was moved to Akhaltsikhe, where Armenians did not make up a majority of the population⁸. Armenians negatively perceived this structural change as way for Georgians to maintain numerical superiority over them (Guretski 1998). Until recently, Javakheti has lacked

⁵ Besides settlements in Javakheti, Armenians also inhabit parts of Abkhazia and Tbilisi (Gachechiladze 1995)

⁶ Dashnaktsutyun, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, is an Armenian nationalist party whose members are known as 'Dashnaks'

⁷ For more on the Armeno-Georgian conflict, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1951, pp. 174-183.

⁸ Gigla Baramidze, an ethnic Georgian, was appointed as head of the new province.

proper roads and railways connecting with the rest of the country. Because of infrastructural problems and its distance from Tbilisi, Javakheti existed in cultural, social, and economic isolation from Georgia, instead being better integrated with nearby Armenia (Cornell 2002). Some Armenians perceived the Georgian government to be intentionally ignoring and isolating the province (Guretski 1998). A main issue amongst the Armenian population today in Javakheti is low fluency in the Georgian language. While Georgian is taught in schools, the required advanced level to study at university is not achieved. As a result, Armenians seeking to go obtain a higher education have primarily done so in Armenia rather than within Georgia (Wheatley 2009a). Also significant within Samtskhe-Javakheti has been the 62nd Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. The Armenians saw the Russian base as a security shield from both Turkish influence and Georgian nationalism (Wheatley 2009a). The base also formed an integral part of the local economy; as it was cheaper to hire locals than Russians, several thousand Armenians worked there⁹.

During the early nineties, several organisations were established to promote Armenian interests in Javakheti. Local activists like Samvel Petrosyan created the Armenian nationalist organisation *Javakhk*¹⁰, both in reaction to tense ethno-cultural relations in Georgia in the early nineties and to the ongoing war in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. *Javakhk* became the region's de facto authority, establishing a 'Provisional Council of Representatives' and pushing for Javakheti to be given autonomous status within Georgia. As *Javakhk* lost influence, another group *Virk*¹¹ emerged that also campaigned for autonomous status and its leader, David Rstakyan, unsuccessfully attempted to register it as a political party (Lohm 2007). *Miatsyal Javakhk* (United Javakhk), led by Vahagn Chakhalyan, was established after the government called for the removal of the Russian military base, staging two demonstrations in 2005 against the move. More recently, it has lobbied for

⁹ As a result, the Russian rouble became one of the primary currencies in Javakheti, with even some local shops reluctant to accept the Georgian Lari (Guretski 1998).

¹⁰ *Javakhk* is Armenian for Javakheti

¹¹ 'Virk' is an old Armenian word for 'Georgia.'

Armenian to become a regional administrative language (Nilsson & Popjanevski 2009).

Political activism amongst Armenians has primarily taken place in Akhalkalaki rather than in Ninotsminda, where some Georgians believe the relationship between a local 'clan' and the former Georgian parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania has kept tensions low (Cornell 2002). The 'clans,' or extended families that acquired large amounts of wealth during and after the Soviet era, maintain significant control over the economy. Some capitalised on the Nagorno-Karabakh war by trading oil and gas between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Some of these individuals have been co-opted by the state and serve in the local administration. Despite their Armenian ethnicity, the local population has mixed feelings towards them, perceiving the politicians to be more interested about their own financial gain than local issues (Wheatley 2009a). Therefore, feelings of marginalisation from the political and economic development of the country are widespread (Tonoyan 2010).

The Armenian government has not supported autonomy for Javakheti and has been quiet on the issue. Part of the reason for this has been strategic: already involved in a war over Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia's land border with Azerbaijan and Turkey¹² was closed, leaving the only way out of the country through Iran and Georgia. Armenia's deep partnership with Russia meant that the road to Russia via Samtskhe-Javakheti was critical for the Armenian economy. Thus, starting another territorial with Georgia would be catastrophic¹³. President Kocharian and President Sargsyan have both recommended Armenians to learn Georgian, but the latter went further, citing the need for integration but condemning assimilation¹⁴ (Tonoyan 2010). Within

¹² Turkey, a strategic partner of Azerbaijan, has linked the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the normalisation of Turkish-Armenian relations and the opening of the land border.

¹³ Armenia intervened to calm tensions when Javakheti planned to hold a unilateral referendum on independence (Cornell 2001).

¹⁴ President Sargsyan (2009): "The logic of our policy toward Javakheti [Javakheti] should rest on the principle of "integration without assimilation." In this case, integration should presume the strengthening of the Armenians in Georgia as

Armenia, the political party Dashnaktsutyun has made the restoration of Javakheti with Armenia a clear goal and has been closely linked with Armenian organisations in the region (Cornell 2002).

One peculiarity that must be mentioned is an underlying negative perception that some Georgians hold of Armenians at the individual level. By contrast, this does not exist within Georgian-Azerbaijani relations. Possible explanations for these negative perceptions could stem from the fact that some Armenians in Abkhazia fought against the Georgian government during the territory's struggle to secede from Georgia; Armenian irredentism in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fear the same could occur in Javakheti; or the military alliance between Russia and Armenia, while Georgia seeks to exit Russia's sphere of influence and join the European community. On several occasions, Georgian politicians have been 'accused' of having 'hidden' Armenian heritage, implying that this is an undesirable trait for an individual in the government¹⁵ (Nodia 2005).

Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli

Azerbaijani presence in Kvemo Kartli can be traced back to the eleventh century, when their Turkic ancestors settled in the region (Wheatley 2005b). The Azerbaijanis were primarily based in and around the city of Marneuli (Gachechiladze 1995). Kvemo Kartli's administrative capital is Rustavi, and the province contains six districts: Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Tsalka, and Tetrtsqaro. Azerbaijanis comprise of over fifty percent of the population in Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi, while in Gardabani they comprise of over forty percent (see Appendix 3). Kvemo Kartli's main economic activity is agricultural production; in contrast with the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the

dignified and respected citizens of that country. I believe that recognition of Armenian as a regional language [in Javakheti], registration of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and steps to protect Armenian monuments in Georgia will only strengthen Armenian-Georgian friendship and enhance the atmosphere of mutual trust. We should take a delicate approach to all of these issue but also be persistent and principled" (ICG 2011, p. 12).

¹⁵ The most prominent example of this was when a spokesperson for Shevardnadze's party discussed Armenian ancestry of Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili. In an effort to eradicate this stigma, Zhvania publicly acknowledged his Armenian roots.

Azerbaijanis are economically integrated with the rest of Georgia, especially in terms of agriculture¹⁶. Most Azerbaijanis in Georgia are Shi'ite Muslim, but their level of religious activity is fairly low. In the late Soviet period, Azerbaijanis were present in local government, but due to the growing nationalist mood, they were removed from power and replaced by ethnic Georgians (Wheatley 2009a). Due to the fast-growing Azerbaijani population, Georgians feared the 'Islamisation' and 'Tatarisation¹⁷' of southern Georgia, leading to the expulsion of 800 Azerbaijani families from the town of Bolnisi (Cornell 2002). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, some Azerbaijanis did advocate for autonomous status, such as through the *Geyrat* movement, but since then they refrained from seeking such a goal (Popjanevski 2006). *Geyrat* primarily advocated for Azerbaijanis to be represented in the government and the Azerbaijani language to be taught in local schools. Towards the late nineties the organisation eventually lost influence as its members were co-opted into the government (Nilsson & Popjanevski 2009; Wheatley 2005b). Generally speaking, the Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli have been less politically active and vocal compared to the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Issues related to land distribution have been the primary grievance for the local population. Following the Soviet era, *sovkhozy* (state-owned farms) and *kolkhozy* (collective-owned farms) were distributed in an obscure fashion, often to Georgians with links to the local administration (Wheatley 2009a). Furthermore, a law was passed restricting land privatisation along the border regions for security reasons. The fear was that putting land for sale near the border would pose a threat to territorial integrity of the state, and so it came under the control of the Ministry of Defense. The law was later abolished under the administration of Mikheil Saakashvili, but the local population still perceives that land is distributed in a discriminatory manner and the best plots are given to ethnic Georgians (CIPDD 2006). Another issue, as in Samtskhe-Javakheti, is low fluency in the Georgian language. In Georgia there exist Azerbaijani and

¹⁶ This may have to do with its proximity to Tbilisi

¹⁷ 'Tatar' is an old word that was used to refer to the Muslims in the Caucasus (Cornell 2002)

Russian language schools, and Azerbaijanis can send their children to either if they choose. The Georgian language is taught in these schools, but not to the extent that fluency is achieved. Those seeking to go to university have preferred to go to Baku to study in Azeri rather than to Tbilisi (Wheatley 2009a). Furthermore, the language issue has meant that locals have struggled to interact with government agencies (Nodia 2002). When compared with Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti, there are fewer Azerbaijanis in the local government in Kvemo Kartli (Popjanevski 2006). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, political participation among the Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli has been low, yet one can see a continued trend of unanimously supporting the incumbent candidate in elections (Nodia 2002). One reason for this has been the need of the local population to prove their loyalty to the state and the regional governor, Levan Mamaladze¹⁸. In return for this loyalty, Wheatley (2009a) reports that locals would then be allowed to engage in corruption. Another reason for this voting pattern is the close relations between the Georgian and Azerbaijani governments, as well as between Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev. Baku has generally been quite on the issue, and as Nodia (2002, p. 11) states: “Azeri residents claim that they are advised by Baku to support the Georgian government, learn the Georgian language, and abstain from raising problems that may irritate Georgian society.”

Majority-Minority Relations under Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, & Mikheil Saakashvili

Following the events of April 9, 1989 in Tbilisi, when the Soviet military disrupted a demonstration resulting in the deaths of 19 civilians, the Georgian national movement gained momentum and radicalised¹⁹. This brought Zviad Gamsakhurdia to power as the leader of the national movement, while later becoming the chairman of the Georgian SSR. His aggressive ethno-nationalist rhetoric and policies, such as the annulment of South Ossetia’s autonomous

¹⁸ Levan Mamaladze was governor of Kvemo Kartli from 1994 to 2003.

Mamaladze kept the region under control using his patron-client networks and advocating for ethnic Azerbaijanis to be represented in government structures.

¹⁹ The demonstrators were rallying against Abkhaz demands to secede from Georgia and discrimination against ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia (Cheterian 2008)

status and the banning of ethnic and regional parties, alarmed the minorities and damaged majority-minority relations. The existence of minorities constituted a threat in the eyes of Georgian politicians to the national integrity of the state. This nationalist attitude led to small skirmishes with the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities (Sabanadze 2010). Just as Gamsakhurdia's 'Round Table-Free Georgia' bloc won elections in the Georgian Supreme Soviet in October of 1990, the country was plunged into war as South Ossetia declared itself an independent republic of the Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia declared independence from the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991, and a month later, was elected President. He appointed 'prefects' to Georgia's regions, but because of the government's weak power, the Armenians refused and Javakhk became the *de facto* authority in Akhalkalaki from 1992-1994, completely outside of Tbilisi's control (Nilsson 2009).

Following the December 1991 coup d'état that overthrew Gamsakhurdia, former First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and the last Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrived from Moscow to oversee the transitional government, eventually becoming the country's second president. During the beginning of Shevardnadze's tenure in office, rhetoric became significantly less exclusivist and Shevardnadze officially condemned Gamsakhurdia's policies. However, Georgia was yet again plunged into war as another ethno-political conflict erupted in Abkhazia. Despite declaring himself the 'protector of national minority groups,' Shevardnadze made no concrete efforts to integrate the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities or increase political participation (Popjanevski 2006). A draft decree was prepared by the State Council of Georgia on the integration of national minorities but never signed (Sordia 2009). Due to the government's weak capacity, it was unable to promote programs to teach the Georgian language to the minorities, creating a strong language barrier. This language barrier, along with decreasing knowledge of Russian, prevented the minorities from engaging in many sectors of public life. The status of Georgia's territorial organisation was postponed until the resolution of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while any laws regarding minority issues proved too controversial to pass (Jones 2006). Broers (2008 p. 282) characterised

Shevardnadze's rule as "politics of omission: omission of any concerted attempt to promote policies for either integration or minority rights."

One significant achievement was the passing of the 1993 "Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Georgia," giving full citizenship to all current residents in Georgia, regardless of ethnicity or language (Gachechiladze 1995). However, the inability to provide basic goods and services throughout the country became perceived in minority regions as direct discrimination by the state²⁰ (Nilsson & Popjanevski 2009). Furthermore, the state faced difficulties in consolidating its power in the remote regions of Georgia, especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Shevardnadze's main strategy in combating this issue in the Armenian-dominated areas was by aligning with and co-opting the local clans, and making deals with patronage networks²¹ (Nodia 2005). The clans would be balanced against each other, and if one espoused particularly radical beliefs, the individual would be subdued by being offered lucrative positions in the government or economic incentives (Lohm 2007). This strategy did help the government increase its leverage in the regions, and in Javakheti, Javakhi's role as the de facto authority ended. After Georgia's first decade of independence, the 2002 census showed a decline in the number of ethnic minorities since the previous census in 1989 (see Appendix 4). The minority population went from 28% in 1989 to 16% in 2002 (Sordia 2009).

Contrasting with his predecessors, Mikheil Saakashvili took a much more proactive approach to the minority issue. Saakashvili came to power in a mass movement known as the Rose Revolution, following blatant fraud in the 2003 parliamentary elections and the increasing unpopularity of the Shevardnadze regime. The new administration's main priorities were building state capacity, democratisation, and anti-corruption reform. The province of Adjara, run by Aslan Abashidze, was brought under control after being virtually independent since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The lack of a Georgian civic identity was

²⁰ Because of their marginalisation, rural regions did not experience the same amount of economic development that took place in urban areas. This was true for all rural regions, not only those with ethnic minorities.

²¹ See Koehler & Zürcher (2003), *Potentials of Disorder: Explaining Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and in the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 250 for more on patronage networks in the former communist states.

recognized as a problem, and Saakashvili made clear his intent to better integrate minority regions in order to build a strong state. In order to do this, Saakashvili proposed the decentralisation of power. Politicians thought that since the minorities were compactly located, giving more power to local government would facilitate greater access and integration into the political structures (George 2006). Despite these new appeals to civic values, the government exhibited strong ethno-religious undertones. Following his election, Saakashvili changed the country's official flag to one with five crosses, a reference to the country's Christian Orthodox heritage. Non-Christian minorities complained that portraying Georgia as Christian state was symbolic discrimination (Tonoyan 2010; FIDH 2010). The body of Gamsakhurdia, whose reputation remained controversial since his death, was returned from Chechnya to Georgia and his legacy was rehabilitated without any discussion of his treatment of minorities. The Georgian language, closely linked with conceptions of the nation, became the main characteristic of the Georgian civic identity. These moves alarmed minority groups, who perceived them as forced assimilation. Minorities criticised the short time frame in which they were expected to learn the Georgian language, and they feared their children would be taught Georgian culture at the expense of their own.

The Saakashvili administration's main goal in Samtskhe-Javakheti was the closure of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. The base was eventually closed in 2007 despite disapproval among the Armenian population, over 6,000 of which protested against the move (Lohm 2007; George 2009). It must be said however that under Saakashvili, concrete policies were put through to improve education, transport infrastructure, and the provision of energy in minority areas. In the 2007-2008 school year, the ministry of education began providing textbooks translated into local languages (Wheatley 2009a). The Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration was established to train the minorities to work in the civil service. The American 'Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund' allotted money for renovating the Akhalkalaki-Ninotsminda-Tsalka-Tbilisi road, lessening travel time to the country's capital by several hours (Lohm 2007). In terms of governance, most individuals loyal to Shevardnadze in the ethnic

Georgian parts of the country did not keep their jobs after the Rose Revolution. But in Javakheti, influential individuals such as Samvel Petrosyan, David Rstakyan, and Enzel Mkoyan²² were able to switch their political affiliation to Saakashvili's UNM and remain in power (Lohm 2007). In Kvemo Kartli, the influential governor Levan Mamaladze fled the country after nine years in office (Wheatley 2005b). One noticeable trend in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli under the Saakashvili administration has been increased surveillance and security presence. The government shut down the Sadakhlo and Red Bridge markets to curb smuggling and corruption. Both were a crucial part of the local economy and locals have campaigned to reopen them (Wheatley 2009a). Moreover, security officials have been targeting leaders of NGOs and civic activists, sending them in for questioning and monitoring their activities²³. Some analysts link the enlarged security presence to the influential Ivane Merabishvili²⁴, former Minister of Internal Affairs. The 2008 war in South Ossetia increased fears that Russia would use the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities to further dismember Georgian territory. Local law enforcement agencies have increased surveillance over political activists and even detained some individuals, such as Vahagn Chakhalyan²⁵ (Wheatley 2009a).

²² Became a member of parliament under Shevardnadze's Citizen's Union Party, and after the Rose Revolution, Mkoyan joined Saakashvili's United National Movement and has kept his seat in parliament.

²³ ICG (2011 p. 5) reports that "large shipments of books and newspapers from Armenia by charity or advocacy groups that portray Armenian versions of history, news events related to Javakheti or are considered as intended to stoke ethnic discord are prohibited entry without prior arrangement."

²⁴ Ivane Merabishvili is originally from Akhaltsikhe and was known to have been closely involved with state policies in Javakheti. Merabishvili was appointed Prime Minister of Georgia by President Saakashvili in the summer of 2012 and is one of the leader's possible successors.

²⁵ Chakhalyan, former leader of United Javakhk, was arrested after an explosion occurred near the house of Samvel Petrosyan. Petrosyan blamed the incident on a member of United Javakhk, whose other members were consequently targeted. Strangely, Chakhalyan was not charged in connection with the explosion, but for alleged provocations committed during demonstrations following the 2006 local elections. He was sentenced to ten years in prison (de Varennes 2012).

Chapter III: Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and the State Apparatus

...in this era of democracy, in contrast to the medieval period, it is not enough just to tolerate “the other”; a state must find a way to integrate “the other”—to make him a willing participant in the national project. As long as minorities are not integrated in this sense, their very existence may be seen as a challenge to the state. (Ghia Nodia)²⁶

State Approaches to Minority Rights

Policymakers have approached the issue of minorities in Georgia with extreme caution due to the experience of conflict in the first decade of independence. The secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has meant that any minority nationalism or ethno-political activism is linked with separatism and threatening to the territorial integrity of the state (Nilsson & Popjanevski 2009 pp 29). Georgian policymakers perceive of minority organisations as “radical groups’, supported and sponsored by external, unfriendly forces with an interest in destabilising and weakening Georgia through mobilising the local population against the Georgian state” (Nilsson 2009, p. 140-141). There is a widespread fear that Russia, if it so desired, could stir up conflict in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti in order to weaken the Georgian government. Some politicians point to the regional alignments of the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities’ kin-states to justify this fear, as both states have maintained positive relations with Russia. Furthermore, the root problem is perceived by Georgians as related to poverty and the minorities’ socio-economic status, rather than ethnicity or ethnic discrimination.

The presence of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki further exacerbated concerns of external involvement. This has meant that in Georgia, minority issues are linked with national security. Ethnic Georgians, Sabanadze (2005 p. 127) argues, are plagued by the feeling of insecurity, “arguably stimulated by the history of foreign invasion, attempted Russification, and a weak demographic representation in the country’s borderline periphery.” The government was

²⁶ Nodia (2005, p. 46)

painfully reminded of this reality during the 2008 South Ossetian war, after which Russia recognised the independence of the separatist territory. For these reasons, both policymakers and the general public in Georgia are not in favour of a federalist system of governance, believing that regional autonomy will lead to the state's disintegration. When drafting the constitution, politicians decided on postponing the formation of Georgia's administrative-territorial division until Abkhazia and South Ossetia were reincorporated with the rest of the country²⁷. Thus, Tbilisi has had to react to pressure from multiple audiences in formulating a coherent policy: the international audience, calling for the adoption of civic values; the secessionist governments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the other minority groups in Georgia who demand local rights and autonomy; and the ethnic Georgian majority, who expects the state to promote their interests (Broers 2008).

Legal Framework

While existing legislation on minorities in Georgia is not explicitly discriminatory, the main issue is ambiguity and the fact that laws and responsibilities are spread across various institutions and frameworks. According to the Constitution, "citizens of Georgia shall be equal in social, economic, cultural and political life irrespective of their national, ethnic, religious or linguistic belonging," and "shall have the right to develop freely, without any discrimination and interference, their culture, to use their mother tongue in private and in public" (Art. 38). As Broers (2008) notes, the constitution at first refers to citizens of Georgia (*sakartvelos mokalakeni*), but then it cites the "centuries-old traditions of the statehood of the Georgian nation" (*kartveli eris*), demonstrating the significance of the past. Members of both minorities have criticised the constitution and existing legislation regarding minority rights in Georgia as being too vague and have lobbied for a specific law on minorities, albeit without success (Broers 2008, p. 284). Georgian was made the state language, while in Abkhazia, Abkhaz was given official status. The Education

²⁷ "Georgia's territorial structure will be determined by constitutional law according to the principle of the division of powers after Georgia's jurisdiction has been restored across the entire territory of the country" (Constitution, Article 2.3)

Law allows citizens to obtain an education in their native language while the Public Association Law grants minorities the right to establish ethnic or cultural organisations. By contrast, according to the Law on Political Associations of Citizens (Art. 6), groups that maintain a territorial or regional platform are not allowed to become political parties, effectively banning ethnic organisations.

The language issue is a serious setback for the participation and representation of minorities in the state apparatus. During Soviet times, Russian was the administrative language in minority regions, and even after independence, Russian remained the working language, albeit unofficially despite the constitution's requirement that Georgian be used in state structures. Further legislation was passed to enforce Georgian as the state language: the 1999 Administrative Code of Georgia calls for all administrative proceedings to be held in Georgian and the 1998 Law on Public Service requires that civil servants speak Georgian, noting that the government reserves the right to terminate their employment due to low fluency (Metreveli & Yakobashvili 2009). Despite the fact that previous administrations did not enforce these laws, the Saakashvili began to put it into practice, requiring civil servants to pass language exams. Some minority members who did not pass were subsequently terminated, but the government has since relaxed the law's enforcement due to the large amount of civil servants in minority regions that are not fluent Georgian (ICG 2011).

When Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe in 1999, it was required to adopt the Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), in compliance with international standards for minority rights. Due to the government's desire to distance itself from Russia and integrate into European institutions, there was significant domestic pressure for Georgia to adhere to its international obligations. However, several issues inhibited or delayed the passage of the FCNM and ECRML. The FCNM was signed in 2000 but only came into force in 2006, with members of parliament stating that its full implementation would not be possible until the Georgia's territorial integrity was restored. By contrast, the ECRML has not been ratified, with politicians believing that Georgia is still in the process of state building and does not yet have the

capability to enforce it. Politicians also fear that giving minority languages a higher status would be detrimental to integration (Popjanevski 2006). A resolution²⁸, linked to the FCNM, was passed delineating a 'national minority' as a group whose members are "Georgian citizens; stand out from the prevailing population in terms of their own language, culture, and ethnic identity; have inhabited the territory of Georgia for an extended period of time and; densely populate a region of Georgia." However, the resolution did not elucidate how long a group had to live on the territory of Georgia or how compactly to be considered a national minority, leaving considerable vagueness its application (Popjanevski 2006).

Local Governance Structures

Under the Shevardnadze administration, Georgia acquired three hierarchical levels of governance: nine provinces (*mkhareebi*), 65 districts (*rayoni*), and over 1000 villages (*temi*). The province level was unofficially introduced by Shevardnadze in 1994 and existed solely by presidential decree. The legal status of the provinces in Georgia was not established until 1997 when a law on the administrative territorial arrangement was passed (Wheatley 2005b). Each province had its own governor (*rtsmunebuli*) and each district had its own mayor (*gamgebeli*), both of whom were appointed by the president²⁹. The district and village levels each had their own local council (*sakrebulo*) and executive administration (*gamgeoba*). In the villages, locals elected members of the councils, who were responsible for choosing the members of the executive administration. In the districts, the president of Georgia appointed the mayor (George 2009). The Saakashvili administration proposed a new plan to restructure local governance in order to make it more efficient, decentralise power, and diminish nepotism (George 2009). In 2005, the plan was passed by the parliament as the Law on Local Self-Governance in 2005, significantly altering the system. The lowest level of governance was eliminated and incorporated into enlarged districts, while seven cities were given special

²⁸ Article 2a of Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia #1938-I

²⁹ These were usually individuals with close links to the president.

status³⁰ (Popjanevski 2006). Instead of having its own council, each village would elect one individual to represent them in the district council, while the mayor would appoint one individual to represent the executive administration in each village (Wheatley 2009a). Districts were given more control over the budget, infrastructure, environmental protection, healthcare, culture, law enforcement, and the rule of law (Lohm 2007). The practice of the president appointing the mayor ceased, and district councils were given this privilege. In the district councils, one member would be elected using a majority-based system while the other ten members would be elected using a proportional system. The mayor is required to collaborate with the governor to compose the budget, which district councils can only accept or reject (Swianiewicz & Mielczarek 2010).

Despite the stated aims of decentralising power, the new law on local governance was undermined by influential individuals and the dominance of Saakashvili's ruling party. The UNM has capitalised upon its domination in Georgia's district councils by ensuring that its favoured candidate is chosen as mayor³¹. This has been documented in Kvemo Kartli's Marneuli district and Samtskhe-Javakheti's Akhaltsikhe district, as well as others across Georgia. Regarding the parallel system of representation in the villages, locals in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti have reported that the mayor's representative is the most influential of the two (Wheatley 2009a). The elimination of village councils has meant that local governance is less accessible to people in rural communities, who now must travel to their district's administrative centres to deal with state services. According to (Swianiewicz & Mielczarek 2010, p. 298), the result of this was that "the price for the reform was paid (in terms of creating new territorial units more distant from local citizens) but the prize (more capable governments) was not won." Districts still face limited financial resources and members of the councils are unaware of what they are entitled to

³⁰ Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi, Poti, Kutaisi, Tskhinvali, Sokhumi

³¹ The UNM won a majority in every district in the 2006 local elections, the first to be held under the new system. Of the 1,731 council positions across the country, the UNM won 89% of them (George 2009). In the 2010 local elections, the UNM won 80% (ICG 2011).

under this new system. This lack of knowledge also has to do with poor fluency in the Georgian language and the inability of minority council members to understand legal documents (Lohm 2007). Essentially, the administrative structure widened the gap between the average citizen in a rural community and the state apparatus, implying centralisation. In minority regions, citizens now have fewer opportunities to participate in local government and have their concerns represented at the community level. The governor has always been the most powerful individual in a given province, followed by mayors, council chairmen, and chiefs of police. The boundaries of these offices were poorly defined at their conception, and the new administrative structure failed to minimise their considerable formal and informal power (Metreveli & Kulick 2009). This is especially true of the governor, a position that no minority has ever been able to assume.

Political Representation & Participation

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians have been represented at the district level much more than Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli (see Appendix 5). While Armenians dominate the districts of Akhalkalaki (94.33%) and Ninotsminda (95.78%), they make up 87.50% and 90.00% of the local councils, respectively. In the more mixed region of Akhaltsikhe (36.59%), Armenians make up 30.77% of the local council. In Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, the top positions such as mayor, chief of police, and chief of justice are all held by Armenians. As stated previously, Armenians in power in Javakheti are typically influential individuals, often members of regional clans, co-opted by the centre. As these individuals are the primary providers of jobs and resources, the local population is loyal to them. However, locals perceive those in power as self-interested, pursuing personal profit, and accountable only to Tbilisi (Wheatley 2009a). Due to their domination over these roles, it is difficult for outsiders without significant economic status to break into Javakheti's political arena. Furthermore, it is in the interest of co-opted individuals to maintain the status quo and convince the government that they are the only ones who can ensure stability in the region (Lohm 2007). Conversely, Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli are significantly underrepresented in local government (see Appendix 5), as the government has been able to consolidate its rule in the region and rely on ethnic Georgians run

local affairs. While Azerbaijanis are a majority in Marneuli (83.10%), Bolnisi (65.98%), and Dmanisi (66.76%), they make up 55.17%, 38.46%, and 38.46% of the local councils, respectively. In the more mixed district of Gardabani (43.72%), they make up 41.62%. In Marneuli, Dmanisi, and Bolnisi, the deputy mayor is Azerbaijani, while all other positions are held by ethnic Georgians. At the national level, minorities are both underrepresented. In the 2008-2012 parliament³², which consists of 150 members, three are Armenian (Harutiun Hovhanesyan, Enzel Mkoyan, and Armenak Baianduryan) and three are Azerbaijani (Isvakhan Shamilov, Azer Suleimanov, and Ramin Bayramov). However, these six members of parliament do not participate in debates or discussions often, mostly due to low fluency in Georgian, causing constituents to question their usefulness (ICG 2011; Metreveli & Kulick 2009). The highest office achieved by an Azerbaijani in the central government is that of the Deputy Minister of Energy (Sabanadze 2005).

Due to the ban on parties based on ethnicity or a certain territory, the only way for members of the ethnic minorities to enter the Georgian political arena is through building alliances with political parties. In both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, it has been common practice for minorities to vote for the ruling party. This is primarily a sign of loyalty, but one must note that other parties do not bother to campaign in the two regions, as this tradition is widely known. As a result, Armenians and Azerbaijanis have a very low knowledge of political campaigns during an election season other than that of the ruling party, and other parties do not try to make appeals to the minorities (BTKK 2008; Metreveli & Kulick 2009). In the 2006 local elections, United Javakheti (UJ) aligned itself with the Industry Will Save Georgia (IWSG) party, putting UJ members on its party list. Consequentially, in Akhalkalaki the ISWG got 32% of the vote, the most that the party received throughout the country (Lohm 2007). Besides this example however, there are no instances of political parties including minority members on party lists other than the UNM.

³² In 2012, parliament moved from Tbilisi to Kutaisi as part of President Saakashvili's initiative to decentralise government power.

Chapter IV: Georgia as an Ethnic Democracy

Applicability of the Eight Features of Ethnic Democracy in Georgia

1. *The dominant ethnic nationalism determines that there is only one ethnic nation that has an exclusive right to the country* (Smootha 2001 p. 29). The legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy has played a large role in this feature. The Georgian SSR identified the Georgian nation as its titular group, and as such, Georgian was made the official language, a national bureaucracy and institutions were established, certain elements of Georgian culture were permitted to be practiced, and a Georgian political elite developed. In the late 1980s, the Georgian nationalist movement, led by Gamsakhurdia, sought to establish an independent Georgia to protect the core Georgian nation from injustices brought on after seventy years of communism. As a result of these historical events, a Georgian ethno-nationalist identity has developed in which the core nation expects the state to serve its interests and protect its territory as the homeland of the Georgian people.

2. *The state separates membership in the single core ethnic nation from citizenship* (Smootha 2001 p. 29). Some ethnic democracies have sought to limit citizenship to those of its core nation. Breaking this tendency, Georgia established a liberal citizenship law following independence, offering citizenship to all permanent residents at the time of the USSR's collapse, regardless of ethnicity. However, obtaining Georgian citizenship does not mean an individual is included in the core Georgian nation. Some members of the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities have tried, with mixed success, to assimilate into the core Georgian nation by learning the state language and changing their names to Georgian ones. Despite assimilation attempts and efforts to display civic elements of Georgian citizenship, minorities cannot join the core ethnic nation without Georgian ancestry.

3. *The state is owned and ruled by the core ethnic nation* (Smootha 2001 p. 31). The core Georgian nation owns the state, and as such, the official language, flag, and symbols of country reflect and are biased in favour of the Georgian ethnicity. Despite the fact that all citizens are able to run for public office, very few minorities have achieved the higher echelons of the central government. Ethnic

Georgians have even accused their political elite of not having 'pure' Georgian ancestry, implying that it would inhibit an individual from serving the state. Georgians have tended to only trust other Georgians to run national affairs. At the district level, minority representation in the government has been restricted. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians do serve in the local administration but these are often individuals co-opted by the ruling party. In Kvemo Kartli, Azerbaijanis are underrepresented in the local administration. Across the country, positive discrimination policies do not exist to ensure that minorities are proportionally represented in the government.

4. *The state mobilizes the core ethnic nation* (Smootha 2001 p. 32). If an element of the core Georgian nation is at stake or under threat, the state can easily mobilise its members to protect it. This is characteristic of societies with a weak civic identity, like Georgia, where mass mobilisation is frequent. Prior to the outbreak of Georgia's two ethno-political conflicts, the populace mobilised to support the state's territorial integrity and against the territories' desire to secede. One recent example was a dispute between Georgia and Azerbaijan in the border region over a monastery that both claimed as their own. Thousands of Georgians quickly mobilised in the streets to denounce Azerbaijan's attempts to possess the complex and support the Georgian Orthodox Church.

5. *The state grants non-core groups incomplete individual and collective rights* (Smootha 2001 p. 32). Georgia has granted collective rights to the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities, allowing them to practice their own culture and language, maintain separate schools, and develop their own cultural organisations. However, minorities are not entitled to a proportional representation in public office and are denied power-sharing mechanisms or the ability to veto political decisions. Such a prerogative would have been valuable during negotiations to close the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, which the Armenians vehemently opposed. Minority organisations are restricted from registering as political parties. Moreover, political parties are not required to put minority representatives on party lists. Outside of public education, the use of languages other than Georgian is rare. Although in some instances minorities are offered translators, interactions with the state are by law required to be conducted in

Georgian. The Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities have also been restricted from buying land in their respective districts because of security threats along Georgia's border regions.

6. *The state allows non-core groups to conduct parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle for change* (Smootha 2001 p. 33). Despite the restrictions listed in the previous feature of ethnic democracy, minorities are nonetheless legally entitled to engage in the same method for change as the core Georgian nation. Minorities are permitted to vote, participate in demonstrations, and form lobby groups. However, because political parties do not campaign in minority regions and minorities do not have adequate media coverage in their native languages, knowledge of political developments remains limited. The neutral status taken by their kin-states has limited these groups' prospects for local autonomy. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, newcomers face difficulties in running for local public office due to the monopoly on power held by clans and influential individuals. Consequently, Armenians and Azerbaijanis face many informal challenges in altering the status quo.

7. *The state perceives non-core groups as a threat* (Smootha 2001 pp. 34). The experience with two ethno-political conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has led politicians to perceive minority political activism with suspicion and threatening to state security. The state fears that Russia will interfere in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli and convince minorities to secede or engage in public disorder. Given the two separatist territories, the state is unwilling to offer minority local autonomy or establish a federalist structure. Thus, minorities have been perceived as a national security risk, and in turn, minority members are required to continuously profess their loyalty to the state and dispel this perception.

8. *The state imposes some control on non-core groups* (Smootha 2001 p. 34). Minority representatives have been restricted from political activism at times, especially following the 2008 war. The state has increase surveillance over minority activities and placed restrictions over materials brought in from abroad if considered to harmful to ethnic relations. As Armenians have been more

politically active than Azerbaijanis, instances of control are prevalent in Javakheti, with the most famous case being the detainment of Vahagn Chakhalyan.

The eight features of ethnic democracy fit well in explaining how the state has been engineered around the core Georgian nation, but has prevented conflict by granting ethnic minorities basic individual and collective rights and some ability to advocate for change. Unlike other states in the former Soviet Union, Georgia granted full citizenship to its minorities. However, political activities have been restricted, and policymakers have not established a power-sharing arrangement with the Azerbaijanis or Armenians. Georgian politicians do not compromise with Azerbaijani or Armenian representatives over key decisions; policies are made either in Tbilisi by the central government or in the governor's office in administrative centres. The perceived security threat has been used to justify these restrictions, and the neutral stance taken by the minorities' kin-states has allowed politicians in Georgia to govern as they see fit. As a diminished democracy, Georgia faces significant stumbling blocks in moving towards a democratic system. In many areas, these stumbling blocks affect both the minorities and the core Georgian majority equally. In the local and central government however, Azerbaijanis and Armenians face many difficulties participating in the state that ethnic Georgians do not experience. Furthermore, in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, a lower degree of democracy is perceived as state-directed discrimination.

Smootha's conditions for the emergence of ethnic democracy in a state are applicable to Georgia. Georgians dominated the area prior to becoming an independent state. Ethnic nationalism developed under the USSR, continuing during the Soviet era in different forms. The perceived threat emanating from the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities served as a justification to restrict the activities of minorities in certain ways and maintain the system of ethnic democracy. Despite several stumbling blocks to democracy in Georgia, the commitment to a democratic system exists and over time, its quality has improved. Georgia mostly fulfils Smootha's conditions for stability in an ethnic democracy. Georgians have maintained their numerical majority, the minority constitutes a significant proportion of the population, the core Georgian nation is

committed to democracy, the core Georgian nation is indigenous to the area, the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities are not indigenous and have external homelands, and the minorities' external homelands or the international community has not intervened. The condition that does not fit is the lack of a significant Georgian diaspora to support the state.

Sabanadze (2005) rose concern regarding the stipulation that ethnic democracies are often stable countries. When her paper was published in 2005, only one year had passed since the Rose Revolution and Saakashvili's rise to power. Since then, Georgia has to some extent succeeding in establishing a strong state, albeit at the expense of civil liberties. The central government was able to establish control over the province of Adjara, law enforcement agencies were nationalised and reformed, all of the Russian military bases were closed, and Georgia survived a war with Russia relatively intact. Infrastructural projects in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, along with increased economic growth, have lessened the regions isolation. While Georgia may not be a strong state, it is certainly no longer the weak state it once was. Therefore, now that political control has consolidated, the model of ethnic democracy has entrenched itself into governance and ensured that majority-minority relations remain stable.

Conclusion

Some scholars have criticised ethnic democracy as misleading the international community that the state in question is a democracy. Yet, it is a useful analytical tool that has clearly shown the role of ethnicity in Georgia, better analysed within a diminished democratic framework than not at all. As Järve (2000) has demonstrated, the ethnic democracy model could be improved if quantitative indicators were provided. This would allow for a more effective comparison across states. Nonetheless, the ethnic democracy model serves as a preliminary framework for analysing majority-minority relations at the state level. This dissertation has not used ethnic democracy to account for the existence of a diminished democracy. However, it has elucidated how the level of democracy is diminished when a core ethnicity is present. In Georgia, ethnic democracy is more a product of ethno-nationalism manifesting itself informally, where the state has not explicitly clarified how the majority-minority relationship should proceed. This is in contrast to other states where ethnic democracy is reflected officially through state legislation.

As the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the Georgian SSR were not granted an ethno-territorial structure, they did not possess the infrastructure that Abkhazia and South Ossetia used to move toward independence. Thus, separatism and ethno-political conflict in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli were avoided. However, the legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy and an exclusive ethno-nationalism has prevented a Georgian civic identity from developing. Consequently, Azerbaijanis and Armenians do not feel a strong attachment to the state. President Saakashvili correctly cited the lack of a Georgian civic identity as a problem and attempted to reconstruct it. Yet, this new civicness is closely tied to the Georgian language, the Georgian Orthodox Church, and other cultural markers. The Saakashvili administration has been successful in ensuring that Georgia remains a tolerant state, but attempts to decentralise power and integrate minorities into the state apparatus have been hampered by the system of appointment, a strong ruling party and executive branch, as well as influential local figures. Low fluency in the Georgian language has maintained the two provinces' isolation from political and social development across the country.

Minorities perceive that what the state really has in mind is assimilation. Yet, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians seek to retain and promote their traditions while also having access to the state apparatus. In any case, assimilation is not entirely possible for ethnic minorities because an individual can only enter the core Georgian nation through ancestry.

Discrepancies are visible regarding the inclusive identity that Saakashvili administration portrays and what actually occurs. Georgia's commitment to integrate into EU and Western institutions play a large role in this; the need to portray the state as a European style democracy is crucial to the state's development outside Russia's sphere of influence. Saakashvili's commitment to building a strong state undermined efforts at decentralisation. Despite that fact that the 2005 law on local governance was aimed at decentralising government power, in reality the result was further centralisation. While this affected all communities in Georgia equally, in minority-dominated areas, this was perceived as ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, the failure of the Saakashvili administration to increase Tbilisi's authority throughout the country can be seen through the co-optation policy in Javakheti. This speaks to the government's fears that Armenians would readily rebel if Georgians were placed in power.

By surveying the status of Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia over time, it is evident that overall, their status has improved, as described by the model of ethnic democracy. Important reforms were passed to lessen the isolation and segregation of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities. An inclusive citizenship policy, access to public education in minority languages, and freedom to develop cultural organisations has enabled a fairly stable majority-minority dynamic to arise. Georgia may have succeeded in creating a tolerant state, but not at integrating the minorities into the state. One can see that the contradictions between democratic principles and ethnic principles do not always result in clashes or tensions; it varies per situation. While the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia both face many difficulties, the few individual and collective rights granted by the state have been critical to ensuring that the minorities see their future within Georgia, and not as a separate entity.

Appendix 2: Distribution of Georgians & Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti (2002 Census)

PROVINCE/DISTRICT	Georgians (%)	Armenians (%)
Samtskhe-Javakheti	43.35	54.60
Borjomi	84.21	9.64
Akhaltzikhe	61.72	36.59
Adigeni	95.70	3.36
Aspindza	82.02	17.47
Akhalkalaki	5.27	94.33
Ninotsminda	1.39	95.78

Appendix 3: Distribution of Georgians & Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli (2002 Census)

PROVINCE/DISTRICT	Georgians (%)	Azerbaijanis (%)
Kvemo Kartli	44.71	45.14
Rustavi	87.77	4.29
Gardabani	53.20	43.72
Marneuli	8.04	83.10
Bolnisi	26.82	65.98
Dmanisi	31.24	66.76
Tetritsqaro	74.03	6.47
Tsalka	12.02	9.54

Appendix 4: Ethnic Composition of Georgia (1989 & 2002 censuses)³³

ETHNICITY	1989 (%)	2002³⁴ (%)
Georgians	70.1	83.7
Armenians	8.1	5.7
Russians	6.3	0.75
Azerbaijanis	5.7	6.5
Ossetians	3.0	0.87
Greeks	1.9	0.35
Abkhaz	1.8	0.001
Ukrainians	0.9	0.002

Appendix 5: Representation of minorities in the local councils of Kvemo-Kartli & Samtskhe-Javakheti³⁵

³³ Metreveli & Yakobashvili 2009, pp. 47

³⁴ Figures for 2002 do not include the population of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

³⁵ Wheatley (2009a). The author has omitted minorities other than the Armenians and Azerbaijanis from this table for ease of reading.

PROVINCE/DISTRICT	Georgians (%)	Azerbaijanis (%)	Armenians (%)
Kvemo Kartli	59.41	28.22	9.90
Rustavi	100	-	-
Gardabani	59.38	41.62	-
Marneuli	31.03	55.17	10.34
Bolnisi	57.69	38.46	3.85
Dmanisi	57.69	38.46	-
Tetritsqaro	82.35	8.82	10.38
Tsalka	47.50	12.50	37.50
Samtskhe-Javakheti	59.59	-	39.73
Borjomi	95.24	-	4.76
Akhaltsikhe	69.23	-	30.77
Adigeni	92.00	-	8.00
Aspindza	95.45	-	4.55
Akhalkalaki	12.50	-	87.50
Ninotsminda	5.00	-	90.00

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