



Title VIII Research Scholar Program
Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Program

Samantha Guthrie
Independent Researcher

*The Social and Economic Consequences of
Non-Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia*

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Research Abstract:

Approximately half a million Georgian citizens – 13 percent of the population – are not ethnically Georgian. The members of this group often face systematic economic, educational, and social disadvantages, propagating a cycle of continuous alienation and exclusion. Minority groups have extremely low regional and national political participation, even in regions of the country where they are the majority, and there are currently only seven ethnic-minority members in the 150-member Parliament. The largest minority ethnic groups in the country are Armenians and Azerbaijanis, together comprising over 10 percent of Georgia’s population. Among other challenges, low knowledge of Georgian language bars them from government jobs and limits their access to national news media. There are deep divisions in Georgian society. In 2017, 25 percent of Armenian-Georgians and 14 percent of Azeri-Georgians reported that they did not approve of people of their ethnicity doing business with ethnic Georgians. Amongst ethnic Georgians, 32 percent said they did not approve of people of their ethnicity doing business with Armenian-Georgians, and 25 percent disapproved of doing business with Azeri-Georgians (Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2018). Minority disapproval of working with Georgians has decreased since 2015, but Georgian disapproval of working with minorities has increased. In nine months of active field research in Georgia, I studied the question: **what are the social and economic consequences of the marginalization of minorities on both minority communities themselves and Georgian society as a whole?** I hypothesized that the current lack of integration creates sub-optimal conditions for every stratum of Georgian society economically, socially, and politically. Using a mixed method approach comprised of a quantitative survey and personal interviews, I evaluated levels of inter-ethnic integration, several quality of life measures, language skills, and desires regarding integration to Azeri-Georgians and Armenian-Georgians. I administered surveys and conducted interviews in Tbilisi as well as minority-majority settlements in Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti. I have identified barriers to full social participation on the part of minorities, used quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate ways Georgia will benefit from greater integration of ethnic minorities, and made several policy recommendations.

Research Goals:

My research looks at the consequences of the marginalization of minorities on both minority communities themselves and Georgian society as a whole. The status of minorities affects not only the lives of those community members, but the entire country, as Georgia attempts to fulfill its potential for sustainable economic growth and development and its goals of Euro-Atlantic integration. My primary research goal was to show that the current lack of integration creates sub-

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optimal conditions for every stratum of Georgian society economically, socially, and politically. This enabled me to recommend policies that fairly and equitably improve the lives of ethnic minorities in Georgia.

Several non-governmental organizations and international institutions have projects focused on minority groups in Georgia, including the Council of Europe (2016), the World Bank, and the International Republican Institute (2012). I aimed to identify the sectors that will benefit the most from greater integration of ethnic minorities, laying the groundwork for future cooperation with civil society leaders and policy makers to incorporate my research findings into concrete policy prescriptions. I wanted to join the existing conversation on minority rights and sustainable development for rural minority communities and inform my positions with data from the field.

I aimed to better understand the interests, needs, and circumstances of Georgian citizens. I also observed existing minority-integration projects, applying my public policy training to evaluate what is working, what is not, and why. Another major goal of mine was to build relationships with Georgian development experts and policymakers, with members of ethnic minority communities including young people, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations, and with other scholars and researchers in my subject field.

In terms of the Title VIII Program, I wanted to address critical issues in the Georgia-United States relationship, including national security, economic development, and Euro-Atlantic integration. I hope that my recommendations will provide a way for Georgia to incorporate all its citizens into its growth and encourage social equity. When everyone benefits from growth, people are more likely to be active participants in the process, as well as safeguard their gains through social and political support for pro-development policies. U.S. foreign aid is a major source of income for the Georgian government and ensuring that ethnic minorities are also allowed to benefit from that is vitally important to Georgia's security and growth, and to America's core values.

Research Activities:

I used a mixed-methods approach to test my hypotheses. A quantitative analysis provided a picture of minority integration and self-perceptions and allowed me to observe the influence of language, location, and, economic development on social integration, as well as compare ethnic Armenian and ethnic Azerbaijani communities. The ability of survey data to present full pictures of minority marginalization is limited, however, due largely to the imprecise sampling techniques necessitated by a lack of resources. Participants were not randomly selected and there is pairing not always reflected in the analysis. However, I am able to provide a speculative interpretation of the survey

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results informed by extensive ethnographic observation reflected in the personal interviews. I incorporated qualitative measures, namely personal interviews and one focus group session, to act as a check on the conclusions drawn from my survey results. The personal interviews allowed me to see implications of marginalization that I did not predict or address in the survey.

In my first month, I conducted informational interviews with experts on Georgia's ethnic minorities from NGOs, universities, and government. I used these interviews to verify that my proposed methodology was appropriate in the specific context and to help me better understand some of the subject's nuances. These interviews were extremely helpful in allowing me to tailor my project to the on-the-ground conditions, and most of the changes I made to the project proposal occurred during this period. I also learned about other data sources I was not previously aware of.

Through the end of November, I researched historical sources and statistical trends to ask why the position of minorities in Georgia has eroded so greatly over the past 150 years. I focused on institutions, practices, and historical factors that have led to and maintain the current marginalization of minorities. I also looked at recent scholarship relating to ethnic minorities in Georgia, finding particularly interesting work relating to education, language, and economic policy. I primarily used data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia and academic papers.

Quantitative Data Collection

I first designed a survey, drawing from several sources including the World Bank, the UN, and local Georgian surveys. I also had several people review the survey including minority university students living in Tbilisi and Georgian academics. I attempted to work directly with a researcher at the University of Georgia and with Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) but neither was able to commit to working with me due to time constraints. I did get strong support from the Georgian language preparatory program (1+4) administrators at Tbilisi State University (TSU).

To administer the survey, I used a modified snowball method. I connected with students from minority-majority settlements, through the TSU and Georgian Technical University (GTU) 1+4 programs and other networks, who served as my guides in the field. These guides acted as translators and led me to parts of their hometowns or villages where we could find people of various ages, genders, and social classes. I sampled populations three regions – Samtskhe-Javakheti (55 percent Armenian), Kvemo Kartli (45 percent Azerbaijani), and Azeri-majority villages in Kakheti (National Statistics Office, 2014). The surveys were administered primarily in person on paper, but approximately 20% of Azerbaijani responses were collected electronically. Paper surveys were available in Armenian or Azerbaijani and electronic surveys were additionally

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available in Russian and Georgian. Due to limited resources, I was unable to compare populations in the regions with populations in Tbilisi, as I had originally planned.

I used a variety of outside data sources to contribute to the research, including, primarily, the recently released 2017 Caucasus Barometer from CRRRC and data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat). Obtaining data from GeoStat that was not already published online was challenging. The agency failed to respond to me despite numerous written requests in both English and Georgian. I used the Caucasus Barometer and obtainable GeoStat data to examine perceptions between different ethnic groups, socioeconomic conditions, and well-being in nationally representative samples.

By late November my survey instrument was finalized. I also spent a significant amount of time recruiting the guides who helped me administer surveys and find interview subjects in the field. Most volunteered their time.

Qualitative Data Collection

I gathered qualitative data from a series of personal interviews and one focus group. The focus group was comprised of 10 ethnic Azerbaijani university students, male and female, 8 of whom were in the 1+4 program. We discussed their experiences at university in Tbilisi, the experience of being a Georgian ethnic minority group member, and their understandings of the consequences of non-integration for them and their community members. We also discussed how they envision their role in an ideal Georgian society, and their opinions on existing policies and institutions.

To ground my work in the human reality of personal narratives, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 people from February – May. Of those, 12 were students, 9 were ethnic Armenians, 16 were ethnic Azerbaijanis, and 5 were ethnic Georgians. The interviewees came from both the regions and Tbilisi, and from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews were conducted in English and Russian or in Armenian/Azerbaijani through a translator. The material from these interviews helped me process my survey data support my conclusions. Among the interview participants were a member of the Bolnisi municipal government, the Head of the Strategic Planning and European Integration Department of the Ministry of Education and Science, and several university students.

In late March through April, I administered my survey to ethnic Azerbaijani populations in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli at the sites of: Iormughanlo, Marneuli, Gardabani, and Kesalo. Due to weather conditions, I was unable to visit Samtskhe-Javakheti until early May. I spent 10 days in the field

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there administering my survey among the ethnic Armenian population in the following sites: Ashkala, Kizilkilisa, Avranlo, Kushi, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Vale, and Ninotsminda.

I collected survey data from a total of 217 people – 105 ethnic Armenians (17% male, 73% female) and 112 ethnic Azeris (53% men, 38% women).

I completed the survey data collection on May 17, 2018. I spent the following two weeks entering and cleaning the data collected using the online platform KoBo Toolbox, which I also used to administer the survey electronically. I spent the next week conducting data analytics using STATA software. I am continuing to run different regressions on the data collected and continue to discover new and interesting patterns which I hope to explore in further research and publications.

Important Research Findings:

Solving a problem begins with understanding its root causes. It is abundantly clear that the number one barrier to integration, as perceived by policymakers, ethnic Georgians, and the majority of ethnic minority members in the regions, is language. The question as to why language is such a significant barrier, however, is complex. Is learning a language really such a struggle? The contributing factors are poor quality education, neglect of rural areas (particularly minority-majority settlements) and interethnic tensions. There is a common perception among ethnic Georgians that people living in minority-majority settlements are uninterested in integration and, in fact, have intentionally created settlements that, due to limited Georgian, are often perceived as no-go zones for ethnic Georgians. Ethnic Georgians sometimes feel hostile towards these areas, based on a feeling of rejection which furthers the ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative.

According to 2014 Census data, in all regions of the country, at least 90% of households are fully Georgian-speaking (nationally 91%), apart from Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, which report 57% and 58% respectively. Households in these two regions, account for 81% of non-Georgian speaking households nationally, and 47% of households where at least one, but not all household members fluently speak Georgian (27% of this households in this category reside in Tbilisi). Of the 263,706 non-Georgian speaking Census respondents who do not speak Georgian (7% of the population), 93% are native Armenian or Azeri speakers. Of the 376,248 Armenian and Azeri speakers in Georgia, 73% are counted as not speaking fluent Georgian and native Azerbaijani speakers have much lower levels of Georgian fluency (19%) than native Armenian speakers (40%) (National Statistics Office, 2014).

Researching the consequences of non-integration begs the question – what are the consequences of being born into an ethnic minority family? Ethnic minorities are more likely to live in rural

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areas, where there is less access to high quality education (including Georgian language, and particularly in minority-language schools), public services, and social activities and conveniences (movie theaters, shopping malls, large grocery stores, cafes). Ethnic minorities also see a narrower world of opportunities before them – less access to higher education due to language barriers and poorer primary and secondary education, fewer positive role models in media and society, and less access to Internet and other information sources, such as public or university libraries, which is, again, largely a consequence of rural living. In fact, the intersection with rurality is critically important to examine.

The economic challenges faced by ethnic minorities appeared acutely in my research, but a large portion of those issues could not be disentangled from the economic challenges of living in a rural area. 74.1% of Armenian-Georgians and 93.7% of Azerbaijani-Georgians live in the regions, outside Tbilisi (National Statistics Office, 2014). In the regions, there is a lack of economic infrastructure to support industry. Rural Georgia does not offer competitive conditions for manufacturing enterprises due to transportation costs and the difficulties of achieving economies of scale– rent is low but cost of transportation is high due to isolation, poor quality roads, and limited railway networks. One possibility for economic growth in the regions is tourism, but currently the path of tourism infrastructure development is narrow. Outside the most popular, established sites, there are few options for accommodation, few easily understandable, comfortable transportation links, and little informational support available in foreign languages.

I discussed the challenges of rural schools in a conversation with Kakha Khandolishvili, Head of the Strategic Planning and European Integration Department at the Ministry of Education and Science. In rural schools, the average age of teachers is increasing by one year each year, indicating that there are little to no new teachers coming into the schools. Echoing many other Georgian voices, Khandolishvili noted that local traditions are a barrier for some to receiving education, particularly women in ethnically Azerbaijani areas who have a higher rate of early marriage (Khandolishvili, 2017). Interestingly, when asked in the 2017 Caucasus Barometer how important it is for a good citizen to protect traditions, 90% of respondents in Georgia answered 4 or 5 (5 being extremely important, 1 being not important at all), compared to 89% of those answering in Azeri and just 44% of those answering in Armenian (Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2018). Khandolishvili also expressed concern for population decreases in rural Georgia, saying that young people who attend university tend to not want to go back to their villages, and instead settle in Tbilisi or Baku, Yerevan, or Moscow.

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“Religion and language [are the] two most important factors in [how] people identify their selves. People’s attachment to the language is a symbol of their identity and a desire for independence. Everywhere and [in] every case the importance of the language...is very difficult to overestimate” (Weber, 2017). Minority group members do not want to lose their cultures and are often afraid that if schools focus more on teaching Georgian, their children will not be able to speak good Armenian or Azeri. On the other hand, most members of ethnic minority groups say that Georgian is a key that unlocks many opportunities that otherwise wouldn’t be available. There are few jobs in rural villages, and many of the jobs that are there (school teacher, bank employee, local government) require Georgian. Without Georgian, the main options are agricultural work or running a business such as a small store – neither of which offer significant income. In larger villages there are more opportunities for non-Georgian speakers, such as working in cafes, restaurants or tea houses, gas stations, print shops, or sometimes even construction work. A small number of towns and villages are fortunate to have industrial employment opportunities where language is generally not a barrier – dairy or meat processing factories, energy plants, or manufacturing facilities.

The lack of employment opportunities and low salaries in the regions spur many people to move to Tbilisi, which can be more difficult for ethnic minorities. For non-ethnic Georgians, language remains the key factor, but is not the only barrier. Simply knowing Georgian is often not enough to land a lucrative or stable job. Many people of all ethnic backgrounds in rural areas have poor education, no soft skills, and no opportunities for job training. There are no technical and vocational education training (TVET) programs offered in Armenian, Azerbaijani, or Russian languages in the country. Khandolishvili agrees that making TVET programs more accessible for minority members should be a major component of an integration strategy. According to Khandolishvili, many preschools in the regions were closed or their educational capacities limited during the previous administration, creating something more akin to daycare centers than schools. In 2015, a new law on preschool facilities was adopted with the goal of reintroducing educational components, renovating facilities in disrepair, and enforcing standards for preschool teachers. UNICEF is assisting with the implementation of the new law nationwide, writing new standards for teachers – many of whom currently do not have higher education. The capacity of preschool facilities in the regions is still severely limited, however, and transportation between isolated villages along barely paved roads is a serious problem. Another difficulty is figuring out how to introduce Georgian language at the preschool level.

Khandolishvili is proud of the progress that has been made over the last 10 years in improving levels of Georgian. The major challenge is how to balance the right of children to study in their native language with the need to learn the state language as a functional tool. The Ministry of

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Education is testing different models of multilingual education but has not yet found an ideal solution. Khandolishvili is in favor of starting all children in their native languages, and then slowly introducing Georgian as the language of instruction. Currently, regional schooling options are not unified – Russian and minority language schools are the norm, where Georgian is taught as a foreign language, often by teachers who are not native Georgian speakers. There is a fear that pushing Georgian too hard could backfire and incite Ukraine-like tensions. Many ethnic Georgian interviewees commented that they are constantly aware of Russia to the north, ready to take advantage of any ethnic division. Georgians are also sensitive to language policies in occupied Abkhazia, where native Georgian speakers are oppressed.

Many point to Tsalka Municipality as an example of successful interethnic integration. I visited the region to conduct interviews and administer surveys to the residents. For many generations, the municipality was 50% Armenian and 50% Greek. After the Soviet Union collapsed, most of the Greek families emigrated and left empty homes that were later filled by ecological migrants from the Adjara and Svaneti regions. The common refrain is that the region was “Georgianized” by the new migrants, proving that integration is the key to harmonious social development. However, the reality in Tsalka Municipality is that the Armenian and Georgian populations are still relatively isolated from each other. Schools are not integrated and there are few spaces to allow young people to interact with each other, especially in the villages. The remaining Greek population is relatively integrated, likely out of necessity due to such small numbers, and there are no schools with Greek as the language of instruction. This example shows that integration is a more complex process than simply living nearby.

Although speaking Georgian makes it far easier to integrate, there is evidence that speaking with an identifiable minority accent lowers people’s perceptions of the speaker on several measures. A 2016 paper found that “There are virtually no social rewards to moving between language families – at least when the speaker retains a foreign accent characteristic of her ethnic group” (Driscoll et. al., p. 7). There are “benefits and punishments associated with assimilation” which the authors call social rewards – strangers’ judgement in terms of respect, friendship, affection, perceived job prestige, etc. (Driscoll et.al., 2016, p. 6). The research also found that “Georgians are not rewarded for attempts to speak in the minorities’ languages. Both minorities and Georgians are given higher professions ratings when speaking in Russian than when speaking ‘into’ each other’s languages” (Driscoll et.al., 2016, p. 13). While Russian currently is a sufficient bridge, it is unclear whether people recognize or even care that Russian is still needed for interethnic communication without Georgia. English is quickly gaining dominance as the foreign language at the school level, and as long as crossing ‘into’ each other’s’ worlds is not a priority recognized by many Georgian parents,

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Russian will rarely be taught as a way to speak with ethnic minorities in their country, and English will be seen as providing better opportunities overall. The burden falls strongly on minority communities. Evidence still seems to show that members of minority groups gain more social rewards speaking Russian than Georgian – but Russian is becoming increasingly less functional in Georgia, and minority youth are probably not learning any second language to gain social rewards, but to gain financial rewards. Interestingly, the effect is not seen for non-accented Georgian speakers with identifiably ethnic minority names (Driscoll et.al., 2016). This further supports the need to introduce robust Georgian education from a young age. But is flawless Georgian alone enough?

We can inform our speculations of the potential consequences of ethnic minority groups speaking more fluent Georgian by observing another ethnic group – the Kists. Kists are ethnic Chechens who settled in Georgia’s Pankisi Valley in the mid-19th century. They are a much smaller group than either Armenians or Azeris, are concentrated in one geographic location, and can often pass for Georgian through physical features and Georgianized surnames. The Kists have also been associated with terrorism and Islamic extremism (Wahabbism), adding an additional element that feeds non-integrative tendencies on the part of both Georgians and Kists. There are also similarities – both Armenian/Azeri-Georgians and Kists have historical, linguistic, and cultural ties to an external nation, practice a collective religion different from the Georgian Orthodox Church, actively speak a non-Georgian native language, and live largely in more rural areas surrounded by co-ethnics. Kists generally speak excellent Georgian (schools are taught in Georgian) yet they maintain the Chechen language in the home and social realms – this is a model for successful language education within Georgia, but shows that language is not enough. Despite their Georgian fluency, their Georgian surnames, and the length of time their community has called Georgia home, the Kists are still marginalized. Religion is certainly an important component of the non-integration. Despite the fact that there are nearly 400,000 ethnic Georgian Muslims, Georgian Orthodoxy still acts as a proxy for Georgianness (National Statistics Office, 2014).

Another major barrier to integration, in some respects more important than language, is the lack of role models. The importance of role models has been well studied. Decision making is strongly influenced by a person’s mental models of the world, and the social norms he sees as appropriate for himself (Hoff & Stiglitz, 2015). Exposure to role models, even fictional ones, “can be particularly powerful in getting people to think differently and raising aspirations” (World Bank Group, 2015, p. 46). There are few, if any, real role models for young members of ethnic minority groups to look up to, people who are attractive and successful, and have both retained their ethnic identity and integrated into wider Georgian culture and society. Without role models, young

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minorities will not know that it is possible to do both. There are no well-known politicians or celebrities who are ethnic minorities. Without role models, young minorities struggle to envision themselves integrated.

There are also social and political consequences to non-integration. Members of ethnic minority groups have lower levels of political engagement and tend to vote mainly as a block for the ruling party, giving politicians less of an incentive to tailor their policy platforms to the needs of ethnic minorities. When asked if their local government is more, less, or equally concerned with governing and creating policy that benefits people of their ethnic group as compared to others, 49% of Azeri survey respondents said they believe the government is less concerned and 33% said equally concerned. Of Armenians respondents, 34% said they believe the government is less concerned and 42% said they see their government as equally concerned with their minority constituents. Non-Georgian speakers also have less access to fair, balanced information in their native language to inform their voting choices.

Georgia's flagship minority integration program is the college preparatory 1+4 Program. 1+4, initiated in 2010, offers non-native Georgian speaking students one free year of Georgian language classes before full time enrollment in a bachelor's degree program. For admission, students need only to pass one general education test, offered in their native language, rather than four national exams in Georgian. The program is designed to prepare minority students, mainly from outside Tbilisi, both for the rigors of a university education and academic level Georgian, in just one academic year. Unfortunately, the program often fails at both goals. While there are plenty of examples of successful 1+4 students, I interviewed many who said the program is an additional tool for already high achievers, but hangs struggling students out to dry, with no support systems when they fall behind. Several universities participate in the program, and the quality is not equal across the board. The program at Ilia State University is widely considered to be the strongest, but also has the most competitive acceptance requirements. Most students end up in lower quality universities with weaker 1+4 programs. The program curriculum is standard, focusing on reading and writing rather than speaking, implementation, or real-world communication. Ilia State's 1+4 director, Merab Basilia, and TSU's 1+4 director, Kakha Gabunia, both recognize flaws in the program and advocate reforms. At TSU, students are divided according to ability, as Gabunia estimates that 30% of students cannot even say "hello" in Georgian when they begin the program and recommends a minimum language requirement for applicants to incentivize students to learn some Georgian while in secondary school (Gorgodzde, 2015). However, I anticipate that such a requirement would reduce the program's effectiveness for its target audience – the students most in need, most disadvantaged by their background. Before considering a minimum language

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requirement, school curriculum changes must be made to include more Georgian for all students and all 1+4 programs should divide its students by level. Basilia believes that one year of preparation is sufficient for 80% of students to study well at the bachelor level, but Ilia State has high standards and demand its students meet them. For the 20% of students who struggle, Ilia hopes its innovative teaching methods like a focus on practical usage and combining Armenian-Georgian and Azeri-Georgian students will help, but other universities have what Basilia calls a “more human” approach, which in effect means that failing students are still graduated from the program, and sometimes at the bachelor’s level as well; he calls upon the Ministry of Education to strengthen its monitoring mechanisms for preventing such cases (Gorgodze, 2015).

In a 2015 article, DFWatch wrote that the students claimed the program’s quota system was “easy to abuse” and that there was “a lack of transparency in finances” (Popovaite, 2015). The program’s quota system allots 12% of all bachelor or academic certificate level academic placements in Georgian public universities to students with an ethnic minority background. Each year, 100 Armenian and 100 Azeri students are awarded state funding for their complete undergraduate studies. There are anecdotal reports from students that the system is being abused by some minority students who could already study at university in Georgian, but instead apply through the 1+4 program in order to circumvent the normal entrance exam requirements and increase their chances of receiving state scholarships. On average, students taking the United National Exams in Armenian or Azeri score lower than those taking it in Russian or Georgian. This can most likely be attributed to variations in the quality of education in different regions of the country.

For Azerbaijani students, there is an additional opportunity for funding – since 2009, the Georgian Representation of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic, SOCAR, has granted scholarships to “97 talented Azerbaijani students studying at higher education institutes of Georgia” (SOCAR, n.d.). The Ministry of Education shared some information with me on the 1+4 Program, writing “Receiving a higher education in Georgian language proves to be an effective tool for building a career for ethnic minority population in Georgia and contributes to their integration in the Georgian society.” (Lukava, 2017). While enrollment numbers are rising, the program is significantly more popular among Azerbaijani students than Armenian, perhaps because the Kvemo Kartli region, home to most of the country’s Azeri population, is significantly closer to Tbilisi’s universities than the Samtskhe-Javakheti region where the majority of Georgia’s Armenian population lives.¹

¹ According to the data shared with me by the Ministry of Education, there has never been an Abkhaz student enrolled in the program, and 2017 saw the first Ossetian student enroll.

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Table 1: 1+4 Enrollment Numbers by Year and Ethnic Group, Ministry of Education

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<i>Armenian</i>	124	179	198	183	217	219	300	373
<i>Azerbaijani</i>	175	250	386	708	456	522	660	673

Non-Georgian speaking citizens are much more vulnerable to Russian propaganda and soft power programs. Turkish state media is also quite popular among Azeri-speakers, and the government of Azerbaijan regularly builds schools and mosques in Azeri regions of Georgia. Among Armenian respondents in my survey, 62.9% said they get information from Armenian state media, 39% from Russian state media, 36.2% from Georgian state media, and 7.6% from independent media sources (multiple answers were accepted). Among Azeri respondents, 39.3% said they get information from Azeri state media, 9.8% from Russian state media, 34.8% from Georgian state media, 29.5% from Turkish state media, and 7.1% from independent media sources. According to data from the 2017 Caucasus Barometer, however, non-ethnic Georgians have higher levels of trust for Georgian media. When interviews were conducted in Georgians, 23% of respondents say they “rather trust” or “fully trust” Georgian media, compared to 31% and 35% when interviews were conducted in Armenian and Azerbaijani, respectively (Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2018).

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

Strong institutions and an inclusive economic system are the foundations of a stable liberal democracy. As Georgia continues to pursue policies that bring the country closer to the European Union and NATO, integration of national minorities will become increasingly relevant. Current policies and institutions have failed to encourage minority integration and leave many ethnic minority communities marginalized on the edges of the economic, political, and social systems that simultaneously influence and benefit from development.

Minority-majority regions face higher levels of poverty, less economic and business development, lower wages, and higher unemployment (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2014). The exclusion of minorities from national-level economic and political systems risks the loss of potentially transformative voices and powerful changemakers. The State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality considers language the biggest problem facing ethnic minorities,

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and in the last few years the government has introduced several Georgian language programs into regions with significant minority populations, but results have been mixed.

Especially, but not only, in the NGO sector, the drive to integrate national minorities lacks cohesiveness; there are too many organizations with overlapping and conflicting projects and missions. From the government side, the framework for minority issues is the Civic Equality and Integration State Strategy and respective Action Plan 2015-2020. In May 2018, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution on the implementation by Georgia of the CoE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 2018). Based on data from January, 2016, the Resolution praises progress made in protecting ethnic minority groups since 2011, including the Action Plan 2015-2020, new legislation and policies to ensure equality and integration and to combat discrimination, continued support for media and cultural activities in minority languages, and promotion of the participation of minorities in public life. The Resolution notes, however, that there is still a long way to go. Ethnic minorities remain marginalized, there are significant language barriers, the quality of teaching at minority language schools is low, and the report identified rising hate speech and inter-faith tensions. The Resolution recommended several steps to continue the progress of minority rights and protection in Georgia which largely confirm the observations from my research, including enhancing support for ethnic minority cultural activities, promoting an attractive and diverse media environment with ample opportunities for persons belonging to ethnic minorities (role models), and improving the standards of minority language learning by implementing modern language learning methodologies.

My primary recommendation is simple and well supported – integration. Integration is critical for many reasons, including evidence that close personal relationships can inoculate people against bias, hatred, and prejudice, particularly for majority group members (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005). Although intergroup interactions help participants see the similarities between themselves and members of other groups, “the development of a more inclusive common identity does not necessarily require members of each group to completely forsake their less inclusive ethnic or racial group identities” (American Psychological Association, 2012, p. 11). In fact, people can establish an overarching shared identity (e.g., nationally Georgian), while simultaneously remaining connected to subgroup identities (e.g., ethnically Armenian, Azeri, or Georgian).

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Table 2: Interest in Integration – quantitative survey, 2018

Question	<i>Do you feel, in general, that people of ethnic minorities are interested in integrating with ethnic Georgians? (1)</i>		<i>In general, are you personally interested in integrating more with ethnic Georgians? (2)</i>	
Response Group	Armenian	Azeri	Armenian	Azeri
Yes	32.30%	53.50%	45.30%	70.90%
No	10.40%	20.80%	21.10%	14.60%
(1) Depends on the individual / (2) Already well integrated	58.30%	25.70%	31.60%	14.60%

Table 2 shows that the majority of both Armenian-Georgians and Azerbaijani-Georgians who I surveyed want to integrate more with ethnic Georgians. My research indicates that people underestimate the amount of desire for integration there is in their communities.

Ultimately, a fragmented society performs worse, insists economist Karine Torosyan of ISET Policy Institute (K. Torosyan, personal communication, March 7, 2018). Specifically, the integration of public schools could have a significant effect on the development of social relations among different ethnic groups. One suggestion is for all schools in minority-majority settlements to teach in both Georgian and the minority language – ensuring all students are fluent in both languages, putting neither in first place. The base that could support this policy change is a consolidation of regional public schools – rather than having a small school in every village, one large school should be built in a central location and transportation should be provided for students from around the area. There are approximately 2,800 public schools in Georgia, and according to Khandolishvili, two-thirds are ‘underpopulated’ – meaning they serve less than 100 students. Consolidation will also require improving the infrastructure of school buildings, including heating systems and energy efficient construction, and road infrastructure, which could have other positive network effects. While politically unpopular, as a school is often the main source of employment in a village, consolidation is the only way to ensure quality education that actually benefits students, and a lower number of higher paid teachers will increase the quality of teachers.

Khandolishvili says the integration of ethnic minorities is a priority for the Ministry of Education. The ministry has been brainstorming ways to better use school facilities, particularly for underpopulated schools: lifelong learning, integrate kindergartens, English classes, public libraries. The conditions of many village school buildings, however, are extremely poor and offer

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neither a good learning environment for students nor a promising second life as a multiuse community space. By the end of 2018, the ministry plans to have high speed Internet access in every public school. There are also ongoing discussions about introducing online classes, which would allow for better matching between teachers and their subjects.

The reform of the 1+4 Program is another critical step. The largest problem with the program is the lack of monitoring and evaluation. In more than eight years the structure has barely changed. While individual universities work to improve the program in some regards, there must be systematic improvements in order to reach the most in-need students. Students in the 1+4 Program at GTU told me that the curriculum is focused mostly on language, not culture, although there are a few field trips to historical sites and cities. They also wanted to have Armenian-Georgian and Azeri-Georgian students integrated – as it is at Ilia State. Students said that combining the groups would force them to speak Georgian as a bridge language, while now the friends they make in their first year in Tbilisi are only co-ethnics, whom they spend their time outside class with speaking their native language. Another suggestion would be to give the program participants Georgian ‘buddies’ to help them make more Georgian friends, connect with local Tbilisi culture, and adjust to university life. Two Azeri-Georgian second year 1+4 students at GTU told me they understand approximately 35% of what they read for class and what the professor says in Georgian. Their professors try to help, looking for materials in Azeri or even Russian, but generally they teach themselves the material after class from Internet sources, just enough to pass their exams. Both live in Tbilisi with other Azeri 1+4 students during the week and go home to their Azeri-speaking villages most weekends. According to the students I interviewed, about half of their 17-person class finished the 1+4 prep year strongly, while the others, including them, continue to struggle.

Another major opportunity for improvement is the TVET system. It is critical that more opportunities for higher education be made available in the regions, and for courses to be offered in non-Georgian languages – preferably Armenian and Azerbaijani, and perhaps Russian as well.

Co-Curricular Activity:

I met with many people to discuss my work, both for the purpose of soliciting advice and a variety of perspectives on my topic, and to share my preliminary findings with them, stirring up more interest on issues of minority non-integration. Most of the people I met with were more than happy to speak with me and were interested in my work and project. A partial list of meetings: Kakha Khandolishvili, Head of Strategic Planning and European Integration Department at the Ministry of Education and Science; Eric Livny, Director of the International School of Economics of Tbilisi (ISET), and three ISET researchers – Salome Gelashvili, Maka Chitanava, and Katrine Torosyan;

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Koba Turmanidze, Director of Caucasus Research Resources Center; Zviad Devdariani, Director of the Civil Development Agency; Shoka Akopian of the Youth Development Center of Marneuli; David Jijelava, a researcher at GeoWel; Margalita Japaridze, the Executive Director of Iris Group; Dr. Zurab Davitashvili of TSU; Dr. Giorgi Sordia of the University of Georgia – among others.

I also presented topics related to my research at two conferences – at St. Andrew the First-Called Georgian University of the Patriarchate of Georgia, I presented at the IX Scientific Conference at the Kartvelology Center on the topic “Teaching Georgian Language and Literature at Schools” with a paper titled “Language Among Ethnic Minorities in Georgia” and at TSU I presented a paper titled “Uncovering Contemporary Lived Identity in the Chechen Republic” at the International Symposium for Young Scholars in the Humanities. Additionally, I gave a lecture at Caucasus University on academic writing and policy writing to first and second year students, and a lecture at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs on the Economics of Inequality.

Conclusions:

Policymakers attempt to do one of two things – solve a problem or realize a vision. There are plenty of problems to be solved regarding Georgia’s ethnic minority populations, many of which my survey identifies. What is the vision, though? What is the ideal Georgia? Many advocate for, consciously or subconsciously, a vision of Georgia as a nation unified under a single culture, where everyone has the same work and social opportunities because everyone speaks Georgian. While this may seem positive, compared to the vision I promote it seems bleak...I promote that we work towards a vision of a multiethnic Georgia, where, yes, everyone is comfortable using the state language, but also where all ethnic groups celebrate all others as part of Georgian identity. We must distinguish Georgian ethnicity from Georgian nationality,² otherwise, even in our speech, we cannot distinguish between being Georgian as an ethnic marker (only by birth), and being a member of the multiethnic, multi-linguistic Georgian nation. We should not only try to coat the country with a layer of ‘Georgianness,’ but if we can see each group as a collection of colored marbles, held in separate containers, then the goal is to break the walls of the containers, allowing the marbles to flow freely together, colliding, yet retaining their unique characteristics.

² In the Russian language, there are two words for “Russian” – *russkiy* (русский), meaning of the Russian ethnicity, and *rossiskiy* (российский), meaning of the Russian state or nation. This allows politicians, media personalities, and everyday people to be explicitly inclusive of the variety of ethnic groups living in Russia.



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Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

I plan to continue writing on topics of social policy in Georgia. I will continue research on minority groups in the Caucasus. I see potential extensions of the research model into communities of internally displaced persons, and perhaps even with Abkhaz and South Ossetian people. Through this research, I have also become more interested in issues of gender inequality in Georgia, particularly in the labor market.

I will share copies of my findings report with each person and organization who assisted me in the process, including: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, TSU, the University of Georgia, the International School of Economics of Tbilisi, Caucasus Research Resources Center, and several small non-governmental organizations in the regions. The next step for the research is to parse the findings into smaller papers of policy recommendations supported by my research and look for outlets to publish them.

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