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Javakheti Armenians: An Intersection of Securitization and Informality

CEERES Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis aims to uncover elements of the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state related to the issue of security. Essential context for this relationship and the concept applied come from Armenians and Georgians being two ethnic groups with an extensive history if interaction between each other and modern Georgia's ethnic heterogeneity and history of ethnic conflict since independence from the Soviet Union. The research explores whether and how securitization characterizes the relationship between minority and state, as well as between minority and majority. The concept of securitization employed by the study is what Thierry Balzacq labels sociological securitization, that is a securitization which does not rely on speech acts, setting it apart from the models of securitization originally put forth by the Copenhagen School authors. To collect empirical evidence, in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts on minority and security policy in Georgia as well as one Armenian media representative were conducted alongside desk research. The interview data yield insights into security practices employed by the state in Javakheti, perceptions held by security actors in Georgia, as well as wider Georgian society, and brings to light an interplay between informality and securitization which has likely shaped the governance of the region for decades.

Abbreviations used:

SJ: Samtskhe-Javakheti, administrative region of Georgia (Mkhare)

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

GD: Georgian Dream

UNM: United National Movement

SMR: State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality

SSS: State Security Service of Georgia

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1. Introduction

Javakheti is a region in the south of the republic of Georgia bordering Armenia and Turkey, dominated by ethnic Armenians. Javakheti was historically, and until 1994 its own regional entity within Georgia[1]. Despite being combined with its northern neighbor region of Samtskhe into the Administrative region or *Mkhare* of Samtskhe-Javakheti, it still retains unique characteristics which have ensured that the term Javakheti still has relevance without the rest of its administrative region. These characteristics are its geographical isolation from the rest of Georgia, and its demographic composition which is over 90% Armenian[2]. While Armenians live in other parts of Georgia as well, namely Tbilisi, the minority-dominated isolated nature of the region means that Javakheti Armenians are far less integrated with the rest of the country compared to their Tbilisi co-ethnics and have generally different lives and different relationships with the state and majority[3].

The focus of this study is on the relationship between the Armenians of Javakheti, and the Georgian state, as well as Georgian society, meaning ethnic Georgians living in Georgia. Accordingly, the research questions underlying the thesis are: Are Javakheti Armenians securitized, and if so, how? This open-ended research question lends itself to qualitative research methods, which were used in the collection of data for this thesis.

Besides the regional characteristics of Javakheti, it is important to understand the context which has, and continues to influence the formation of this relationship, that being the history of interethnic relations in the territory of Georgia from the period of control by the Russian empire, to the Soviet era, to modern independent Georgia. From the origins of Georgian nationalism to the interethnic, separatist conflicts which engulfed Georgia in the 1990s and 2000s, this context informs the relationship between the minority on one side and the state and majority on the other.

The conceptual framework applied to study this relationship is that of security and securitization, drawing on both the constructivist Copenhagen school of security studies as well as the PARIS or *Political Anthropology Research in International Sociology* approach to security. Each school puts forth different models of securitization, or the process through which security threats are constructed, but the Copenhagen approach uses a rigid form which relies on the existence and use of speech acts[4], while the

[1] Lohm, "Javakheti", 21
[2] Wheatley, "Managing", 125
[3] Blauvelt, "Sticking Together", 114-116
[4] Buzan, Waever and deWilde, "Security", 26

PARIS approach takes a much wider interpretation of security and securitization[5]. Somewhere in the middle ground between the two schools is Thierry Balzacq's concept of securitization which sees securitization as a mechanism by which threats are constructed but is not reliant on speech acts or intensions of a security actor[6]. This Balzacqian conceptualization was employed in this thesis as it best fits with the picture which emerged from the data, which was collected through seven semi-structured open-ended interviews. The thesis employs an interpretivist research paradigm, and so the theoretical framework and methodology evolved through the data collection process. The desk research conducted to complement the interview data focused on Javakheti, the security dimension as it evolved since Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union, and the role of informality in Javakheti, which turned out to be a key element to answering the 'how' part of the research question, as well as to understanding the relationship between minority and state.

The results of the thesis yield insights into the experiences of ethnic Armenians and activists as they have experienced security practices employed directly or indirectly by the state. Their accounts and perceptions point to the presence of a securitizing mindset among security actors in Georgia, which coupled with the security practices would support the existence of a Balzacqian securitization. Furthermore, in answering the 'how' of securitization, the interview data pointed to the existence of a system where informality is leveraged to benefit the ruling elite in Tbilisi and a handful of Javakheti locals at the expense of the rest of the region's population.

This thesis fills a gap in research on the interplay of informality and securitization in regard to minorities in Georgia, while also applying the concept of security in a new way to Javakheti. While others such as Metreveli[7], and Bardin[8] have written about Javakheti from a security perspective as recently as 2016, and Bardin employs a similar theoretical framework, neither focus on the role of the State Security Service as a securitizing actor, or the role of informality in the security equation. Exploration of the mechanics of securitization in a specific single case study such as this one on Javakheti can uncover patters of illiberal practices in other countries applied to other minorities, as well as practices of the Georgian state toward its other minorities. Furthermore, understanding such practices, their causes, and mechanisms can inform transformations to more liberal regimes in the future.

[5] Bigo and McCluskey, "What is a PARIS approach"
[6] Balzacq, "A Theory of Securitization", 2
[7] Metreveli, "Conflicting"
[8] Bardin, "Security"

2. Review of Empirical Literature on Javakheti

While Javakheti is today no longer an independent administrative entity, but rather part of the *mkhare* or administrative region of Samtskhe-Javakheti[9], it still retains meaning as a term because of its distinctions from the rest of the Samtskhe-Javakheti *mkhare*. These distinctions are its geographical isolation from the rest of Georgia, and to an extent, from the rest of SJ, as well as its demographic composition of over 90% ethnic Armenians.[10] Javakheti is commonly referred to in scholarly and journalistic literature as the Armenian dominated part of SJ, centered around its two largest towns, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda.[11] Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda are also each the center of their respective municipality, and so for precision's sake, when using the term "Javakheti", this research is referring to the Akhalakalki and Ninotsminda municipalities. Aspindza municipality, neighboring Akhalakalki municipality to the north-west, is partially dominated by Armenians especially near the border with Akhalkalaki municipality, but as a whole is less than 20% Armenian[12], and therefore its governance and overall trajectory is influenced by mostly different factors than its more homogeneous neighbors.

Geography and Infrastructure

Javakheti is located on the southern border of the Republic of Georgia where it neighbors both Turkey and Armenia. Despite its two main towns being only about 100 kilometers from Tbilisi in a straight line, Javakheti is geographically isolated from the rest of Georgia thanks to mountains, and sub-par road and rail connections to the region.[13] This has been an important factor in the regions relations with the rest of Georgia and in the economic realities of the people living there.[14] The problem was most severe in the 1990s and somewhat as well in the 2000s, after the departure of soviet-era industry and jobs from the region, and before the improvement of the main road connecting Tbilisi to Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki.[15] During this period Javakheti experienced harsh economic conditions of high unemployment and in combination with the highland climate led to a reliance on two sources of livelihood: the Russian military base, and labor migration to Russia; more about which will be discussed later.[16] The relative geographical

[9] Lohm, "Javakheti", 21
[10] Wheatley, "Managing", 125
[11] Lohm, "Javakheti"; Wheatley, "Managing"; Kopecek "Trapped in Informality"; Metreveli "Conflicting"
[12] Wheatley, "The Integration", 5
[13] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 7-8
[14] Ibid, 7-10
[15] Ibid, 7-10
[16] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 7-8

isolation has characterized the development of Javakheti over centuries, and thereby despite improvements in infrastructure in the last decade, is still significantly affected by its geography today.[17]

In the present, the infrastructure has improved, with the more direct road to Tbilisi trough Tsalka having been significantly improved in the 2010s, and travel time is now less than half of what a Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi trip took in the 2000s.[18] The Javakheti economy has also strengthened compared to previous decades, with a modest service sector present in Akhalakalki and Ninotsminda. However, the economic situation of most Javakheti Armenians, especially those living in rural settlements has not seen as much change in the past two decades.[19] A mix of subsistence farming and remittances from the male labor migration to Russia are what keeps households afloat.[20]

Language and Education

A second key factor which contributes to Javakheti's isolated situation within Georgia is the language barrier.[21] Javakheti Armenians have historically spoken Armenian amongst each other and have used Russian as a lingua franca to communicate with the state authorities and with Georgians.[22] This is a status-quo that pre-dates the Soviet Union, as Armenians lived in Javakheti during the era in which most of what is today the three south Caucasian states were under control of the Russian empire. As a result of this long-held configuration, few Javakheti Armenians speak Georgian.[23] In comparison with the soviet era communication with the rest of Georgia became much harder after independence once Georgian was designated as the official language, and as Russian has become far less commonly spoken today than it was before independence.[24]

Today, the language barrier is not only an ongoing element preventing deeper integration of Javakheti Armenians into Georgian society[25] but is, according to the experts and activists interviewed for this thesis, also a source of discord and contention between Georgians and Armenians (as well as other ethnolinguistic minorities) who do not speak Georgian.[26] A study conducted by Berglund et al. has also shown that Armenians living in Georgia do not hold very positive views of their peers who learn the

[17] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 2
[18] Wheatley, "The Integration", 12
[19] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 5
[20] Ibid, 5
[21] Lohm, "Javakheti", 34
[22] Metreveli and Kulick, "Social Relations", 12
[23] Lohm, "Javakheti", 34
[24] Blauvelt, "Armenians in the Making", 8
[25] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 23
[26] Respondents #4, #5, #7

language.[27] The state has undertaken initiatives to provide Georgian language education to all of its citizens, including minorities witch simultaneously hold the right to educate their communities in their own language.[28] Schools in Javakheti conduct classes in Armenian as the majority of communities in Javakheti are Armenian speaking, but the schools are also required to provide adequate schooling in Georgian language, so that school graduates are equipped with knowledge of the state language in order to become fully integrated citizens.[29]

Nonetheless, the Georgian state has fallen short of providing adequate teaching resources to the Javakheti region. While learning outcomes have been improving and one can speak today about a section of Armenian students who are graduating from Javakheti schools with a functional knowledge of the Georgian language, this is a relatively recent improvement, and is only the case for a minority of pupils.[30] A successful development has been the implementation of the so-called 1+4 program, introduced in 2010, where competitive students from ethnic minority backgrounds are accepted to Georgian-speaking universities, and then attend a one-year course of Georgian language to prepare them for their bachelor's studies.[31] However, low learning outcomes in the minority-dominated regions of Georgia are a prevailing structural problem, and knowledge of the Georgian language has remained a weak point in schooling in minority dominated regions.[32]

The main obstacle in achieving better learning outcomes has been the lack of quality Georgian teachers in the region.[33] There are very few locals who know Georgian well enough to qualify as teachers, and there are very few Georgian teachers who are willing to come and work in the minority-dominated and geographically isolated region.[34] There have been programs to incentivize Georgian teachers to come work in Javakheti, including some which offered double the standard pay and free accommodation, but uptake has still been low on the teachers' side.[35] So, while the situation regarding minority integration through language education has seen real progress since the early 2000s, there is a lot left to be desired and improved.[36]

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[27] Berglund et al. "Sticking Together"
[28] Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 16-20
[29] Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 16-20
[30] Ibid, 20
[31] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 9
[32] Lohm, "Javakheti", 34
[33] Ibid, 34
[34] Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 14
[35] Respondent #7
[36] Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 13-18

Economy and Dependency on Russia

The fall of the Soviet Union brought economic difficulties to every newly independent country born of the Union Republics, but Georgia was especially hard hit with two parallel civil wars and a general implosion of statehood in the immediate post-independence period.[37] The situation was not easier in the isolated and mountainous Javakheti. The region also experienced Soviet industries ceasing operation and falling into disrepair, with the difference that alternative sources of livelihood such as subsistence farming or small-scale agricultural business were even harder to rely on.[38] Javakheti is located on a high plateau with much of its land lying over 1800 meters above sea level, so growing crops is more difficult and less profitable than in much of the lower-lying areas of Georgia.[39] Nonetheless, the region main economic activity is farming and agriculture, with livestock rearing and potato growing the largest domains.[40] In the 1990s and 2000s the profitability of any agricultural business was further complicated by the low quality of roads connecting Javakheti to larger population centers which could serve as markets for goods, as well as bribe-taking police officers before the Saakashvili reforms, so much product was traded internally or used for domestic consumption.[41]

One source of employment and income which remained in Javakheti after the fall of the Soviet Union, and which became a key source of livelihood in the region was the 62nd Divisional Russian Military Base in Akhalkalaki. The base employed around 2000 locals as both military and civilian service personnel, most of whom lived in Akhalkalaki or neighboring villages. The base provided relatively high wages and employed a significant portion of the town's population, such that at least half of the families in Akhalkalaki were supported by an employee of the military base.[42] For those who were employed as military personnel, the Russian military required taking Russian citizenship, so a meaningful number of men from the Akhalkalaki region are Russian citizens.[43]

Besides the economic importance, the Russian base was also a psychological reassurance for Javakheti Armenians as a protector from their very close neighbor, Turkey. The history of the Armenian genocide, its primacy in Armenian culture and identity, and the fact that many Javakheti Armenians were expelled from

[37] Nodia, "The Story of Georgia's State Building", 77
[38] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 8-9
[39] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 7
[40] Hertoft, "Javakheti: the Temperature", 11
[41] Wheatley, "Obstacles"
[42] Ibid, 29
[43] Metreveli and Kulick, "Social Relations", 25

eastern Anatolia in that very event, makes many Javakheti Armenians see Turkey as a hostile power.[44] Unsurprisingly, when Georgia decided to close the Russian base in a wider de-coupling from its former capital, Moscow, the move was highly unpopular in Javakheti. The region has moved on from its economic dependence on the base, but while it was present it had a significant effect on the relationship between the region and the Georgian state, namely as a source of security concerns for Tbilisi due to Russia's history of supporting separatist entities in Georgia.

With formal employment being so scarce in the region, it is not hard to understate the importance of the Russian base for the local economy. After the closure of the military base many former employees turned to a source of income which was common in Javakheti before,[45] but became even more prevalent, referred to by Armenians as "Khopan". Khopan is the Armenian word for seasonal labor migration to Russia, which is also widespread in poorer regions of Armenia, but has become very common in Javakheti due to the long-term lack of formal employment opportunities.[46] Men from especially rural families travel to Russia to work most often in the construction sector for several months to more than half of the year and bring or send back remittances to their families in Javakheti.[47] Travel to Russia has become more difficult for Georgian citizens as a consequence of the closing of the land border for Georgian citizens in the aftermath of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and so Javakheti Armenians now take up Armenian citizenship in order to gain visa-free travel to Russia, including through the land border at Verkhny Lars.[48]

The lack of economic opportunity has constrained Javakheti since the independence of Georgia consistently, and the locals have generally turned towards Russia, whether through the military base or through labor migration for formal employment and to support their families. A third important element which links Javakheti to Russia is media. As Javakheti Armenians largely do not speak Georgian, they find themselves in a different information space from that of the ethnically Georgian population. There are a handful of local Javakheti news outlets, radio stations and tv channels, but their content and quality is limited, and their coverage is mostly of local issues.[49] For Javakheti Armenians the way they get information about the world outside of Javakheti is most often through Russian and Armenian language television channels, including Russian state propaganda channels. This shapes the worldview and the opinions of people in Javakheti, and opinion poll studies have shown that people in minority-dominated

[44] Ibid, 29
[45] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 33
[46] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 5; Respondent #1, #7
[47] Metreveli and Kulick, "Social Relations", 25
[48] Metreveli, "Overview", 10
[49] Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 22

regions of Georgia are less likely to hold positive views about the European Union and NATO and have more favorable views towards Russia than those living in the rest of Georgia.[50]

Politics of Javakheti

Besides the more favorable attitudes towards Russia and more negative perceptions of the West,[51] polls have shown another trend which sets Javakheti (as well as other minority-dominated regions) apart from the rest of Georgia. This is the portion of votes which are cast in support of the party in power in elections on both local and national level. Election records show that since at least the Shevardnadze administration minority dominated regions have voted in support of the ruling party by larger margins than most or all other regions of Georgia.[52] The same was true in the most recent parliamentary elections in 2020 Javakheti residents voted for Georgian Dream more than the residents of any other region.[53] The Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki regional governments are also notable, both having over 88% of seats allocated to the ruling Georgian Dream party. Besides these voting patterns, Javakheti is notable for a relative lack of any grassroots political activism, especially of an oppositional nature.[54] In the 1990s and 2000s various Armenian nationalist political parties were active and even controlled some positions in the local government or seats in municipal councils. These included Virk, Dashnaksutyun, Javakhk, and later on United Javakhk.[55] While they were Armenian nationalists and generally advocated for an autonomous status for Javakheti, separatist ideas never gathered major support from the public and was not in the core agenda of most of these parties.[56]

Informality

There is not a definitive consensus on the causes of these wider political behaviors which characterize Javakheti but causes for these patterns may lie in the widespread prevalence of informality in the region. Informal networks and informal politics are an important feature of the social and political landscape of Javakheti, and there are informal leaders of the region and of towns, usually local businesspeople, whose financial and social resources allow them to make some political decisions without holding a formal office.[57] The system of informality is closely connected with the formal institutions of

[50] FES, "Attitudes and perceptions", 35
[51] Ibid, 39
[52] "Georgian Election Data", https://electionsdata.ge/elections
[53] "Georgian Election Data", https://electionsdata.ge/election?eventId=74&rootShapeId=105361&parentShapeId=105382
[54] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 10
[55] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 30-32
[56] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 12
[57] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 71

government in Javakheti from the members of national parliament down to the district and community councils (Sakrebulo).[58] Informality and its interplay with formal institutions in Javakheti was described in detail by Vincenc Kopecek in his 2019 study titled "Trapped in informality? A study of informal politics in Georgia's Javakheti". Kopecek assembles a recent history of informal practices in the region and how these practices interacted with the center (the national government in Tbilisi) through key exogenous shocks which have evolved the system. Importantly, as Kopecek's article is published in 2019, it gives current relevance to his findings which echo many other authors findings about clientelism in Javakheti but were often written before the power transition from United National Movement to Georgian Dream in 2013.[59]

The first phase of governance in Javakheti after Georgia's independence was a period of de-facto autonomy where the Akhalkalaki district was illegally taken over by a council dominated by members of Javakhk, an Armenian nationalist movement with some separatist elements.[60] This lasted only as long as Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency, and Javakhk's control began to crumble because of internal disputes within the party, allowing the new president Eduard Shevardnadze to re-assert a degree of government control over the region.[61] This began with the fusing of Javakheti with neighboring Samtskhe to form the administrative region or *mkhare* of Samtskhe-Javakheti, and the creation of the post of presidential representative to the region (*sakhelmtsipo rtsmunebuli*) commonly called the Governor.[62] These Governors were extensions of the president's power in the regions overseeing the prefects of individual districts (*gamgebeli*) within their regions.[63]

The first such governor of Javakheti was Gigla Baramidze, who established a patron-client relationship with the prefects of the constituent regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti, including the Armenian dominated districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda by co-opting part of the dominant Javakhk party's leaders, causing the party to break up.[64] The elites who were coopted by the center filled the positions of prefect, police chief, prosecutor, and members of parliament from the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts, and given these formal positions were able to establish clientelist networks, making them the chief power brokers in the region.[65] The informal networks which came to control Javakheti under

[58] ibid
[59] Wheatley, "The Integration", 22
[60] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 64
[61] Ibid, 64
[62] Wheatley, "Obstacles", 14
[63] Wheatley, "Georgia" p88
[64] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 65
[65] Lohm, "Javakheti", 12

Shevardnadze are commonly referred to as "clans" in Georgia, although they are not based on a common ancestry, but are rather economic networks headed by powerful and affluent individuals or families.[66] Important to note, is that the system of governance through informal networks of local business elites was not an organic product of local informal practices but was brought in by the Shevardnadze administration in order to make the formal institutions loyal to the center.[67]

After the Rose revolution the administration of Mikheil Saakashvili implemented extensive reforms with the goal to eradicate corruption in Georgia, cracking down on clientelist networks throughout the country through which Shevardnadze had exercised control.[68] Despite the broad success of these anti-corruption efforts, as well as an ambitious integration policy,[69] clientelism was not eradicated entirely in Georgia, and the Javakheti "clans" shifted loyalties to Saakashvili from Shevardnadze[70] and continued to operate under the same dynamic with a few personnel changes among the upper ranks in Javakheti administrative positions. [71] After the power transition from United National Movement to Georgian Dream in 2013, a similar shift in loyalties took place, where most Javakheti political elites supported UNM even in the 2012 parliamentary elections, but then switched allegiance to GD once UNM was voted out. Kopecek sums it up as follows: "the informal institution of co-optation of Javakheti's elite survived even Saakashvili's reform policies and two changes of the government in 2004 and 2012/2013 – and has been used by Saakashvili as well as by the Georgian Dream government."[72]

The mechanism by which this cooptation relationship was established was by playing off different elites and their networks against each other based on their economic interests.[73] This was facilitated by the relative lack of economic opportunities in the region and the control of those few opportunities by a handful of families[74]. Once coopted and with the blessing of the center (initially the Shevardnadze administration) these elites were able to leverage their public offices as well as the positions of their allies which they placed into other positions of power to strengthen their business interests and generally extract wealth from the region.[75] In return, the Javakheti elites had to ensure that Armenian nationalism

[66] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 65
[67] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 66
[68] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 67
[69] Wheatley, "The Integration", 55
[70] Wheatley, "The Integration", 22
[71] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 67
[72] Ibid, 68
[73] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 8; Wheatley, "The Integration", 23
[74] Metreveli and Kulick, "Social Relations", 21; Wheatley, "The Integration", 22-23
[75] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 66

and separatism was suppressed in Javakheti, show personal political loyalty to the ruling party, and ensure that the ruling party won elections in the two Javakheti districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. This was done with the help of the elite's informal networks, including placing loyal supporters on the electoral commission of the district, pressuring voters, and blackmailing opposition candidates.[76]

The informal institution of elite cooptation through a patron-client relationship was created and able to endure because it has suited the needs of both sides regardless of which party is in power in Tbilisi. Shevardnadze instituted this policy because his administration viewed the minority question in Georgia from a perspective of national security rather than human rights.[77] The central elites are motivated by the fact that this cooptation of Javakheti elites and leveraging and enabling of their informal networks has been effective in curtailing nationalist and separatist voices from Javakheti, while also being a reliable source of votes in elections, as the ruling party has so far always triumphed in elections in Javakheti since the introduction of this informal institution during the Shevardnadze administration.[78] The dominant economic informal networks of Javakheti also benefit in two ways from this arrangement and therefore work to maintain the status quo. Supporting the incumbent government in Tbilisi ensures that they will retain their positions of power and privilege which they exploit for financial gain of themselves and their network, and also gives them security that Georgian politics will not shift towards a more radical nationalism like that of Gamsakhurdia right after Independence.[79] Underlying the benefits each side gets from this arrangement, as presented by Kopecek, is a mutual fear: Javakheti elites are afraid of overly nationalist politics taking hold nationally, and the Tbilisi ruling elites fear excessive nationalism or even separatism from Javakheti Armenians. These fears were undoubtedly present at the establishment of this informal institution,[80] but the motivations for continuing in this arrangement to this day could be simply a reliable electoral stronghold for the ruling party and the material benefits which the Javakheti elites can extract by leveraging their public office. Nonetheless, Kopecek writing in 2019 speaks of these motivations in the present.

The security situation in Javakheti

Javakheti was considered a significant vulnerability of the nascent independent Georgian state in the 1990s and early 2000s, as evidenced by a number of academic publications by not only their quantity

[76] Ibid, 68
[77] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 8
[78] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68
[79] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68
[80] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 65

but also their statements on the issue. Over time, there has been a decrease in academic literature looking at Javakheti through a security perspective, with an exception being a brief period after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbass[81] with many academics and experts pointing to the suitability of Javakheti for a similar Russian incursion. One of the most recent pieces dealing with the topic directly, was Eka Metreveli's 2016 article "Conflicting Threat Perceptions and Securitization of Minority Issue: The Case of Javakheti, Georgia". Metreveli highlights the role that Russian influence in Javakheti played in creating tensions with Tbilisi and a fear over separatist conflict arising in the region in the 1990s and 2000s.[82] This is also viewed by the Georgian state in the context of Russia's historic and ongoing aggressive foreign and security policy in the post-Soviet space.[83] These concerns stemmed from Russia's role in the separatist conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and were exasperated by the presence of the aforementioned 62nd Divisional Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. Other contributing factors to Tbilisi's concern over Russian influence, which have not been resolved as with the 2007 closure of the base, are the labor migration to Russia and the prevalence of Russian propaganda spread through Russian language TV channels. In conjunction with Russian influence, Armenian nationalist and separatist movements were viewed as a threat by Tbilisi, especially in the early 1990s when there was little control of the region by the Georgian state.[84] This also contributed to the creation and endurance of the informal institution of elite cooptation described in the previous section on informal practices in Javakheti.

The dimension of security in Javakheti has evolved since the 1990s but echoes of the period are still clearly felt. Writing in 2016, Metreveli asserts that the state looks at the minority question in the country, as in Javakheti specifically through the perspective of national security rather than human rights and justice.[85] While the threat of Russia instigating interethnic conflict and leveraging minorities against countries it considers to be in its "sphere of influence" is lesser than in the 1990s and 2000s, this still hangs over Javakheti and its relationship with the Georgian state.[86] The current key dimensions of this perceived threat are the ongoing extensive proliferation of Russian propaganda through Russian state TV channels, and the fact that a meaningful portion of Javakheti Armenians hold either Russian or Armenian passports. Dual citizenship was not legal in Georgia until 2018[87] without a special exception from the president, so

[81] Bardin, "Security", 48-49
[82] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 6
[83] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 17
[84] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 5
[85] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 13
[86] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 12
[87] Georgia Today, "Parliament Adopts New Law on 'Georgian Citizenship'"

when individuals were discovered to have a second passport, they were stripped of their Georgian citizenship.[88] The existence and implementation of this law on citizenship was itself evidence of the state favoring a perspective of state security rather than human rights in their approach to the minority, but the amending of citizenship law in 2018 was a step towards liberalization.

A final element to the security dimension is the conflicting nature of the threat perceptions held by Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state. Whilst the Georgian state sees Russia as its main geopolitical threat,[89] Armenians, given the history of the Armenian Genocide and its central place in Armenian identity, consider Turkey their greatest threat and Russia as their historic protector.[90] While this is a perspective anchored in historic perceptions, there is also a material, financial reliance on Russia due to the economic conditions in Javakheti which force locals to rely on labor migration to Russia for their incomes. This reliance also results in the widespread preferences among Armenians for Georgia to maintain good relations with Russia, rather than aspiring to join NATO which Turkey is a member of.[91] The combination of Armenians seeing Russia as their protector from Turkey as well as their source of income, coupled with the Georgia's perceptions of Russia as a threat means that the minority and majority have opposing threat perceptions, and contributes to the Georgian state treating Javakheti Armenians as a security threat.

Evolution of Nationalism in Georgia

Nationalism in Georgia is an important piece of the background on which relations between Javakheti Armenians and the rest of Georgia is set. Relevant are both the nature of Georgian nationalism, or the markers by which Georgians have come to identify themselves with and distinguish themselves from others, as well as the forms of nationalism employed by the modern Georgian state. Regarding Georgian nationalism, Ronald Suny writes that in the second half of the 19th century when the idea of a Georgian nation was being formed, Tbilisi was dominated by Russian bureaucracy and Armenian entrepreneurs, as well as being demographically mostly Armenian.[92] Despite the humanistic and inclusive vision of the leading thinkers and writers behind the Georgian national idea, such as Ilia Chavchavadze,[93] Armenians and Russians were the main groups against whom Georgian-ness was defined.[94] This is not to

[88] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 14
[89] Metreveli, "Conflicting"
[90] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 11
[91] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 12
[92] Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", 116-117
[93] Sabanadze, "Globalization and Nationalism", Chapter 4, 6-15
[94] Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", 116-120

suggest that Georgian nationalism is inherently Armenophobic or Russophobic, but that there is a long history of interaction between the ethnic groups, and Armenians and Russians have often been the out-group who Georgians see themselves as different from. Already in the late 19th century, there were widespread stereotypes about Armenian's savviness and being cheats and swindlers,[95] which as interview data from this study suggested, are still commonly held today. This dynamic has implications for the perceptions of Armenians held by Georgians, as well as wider implications for the integration of the Armenian minority of Georgia into society within the state.

This brings us to the second aspect of nationalism in Georgia relevant to this research, that being the concept of nationalism employed by the Georgian state since independence. While ethnic nationalism defines members of a nation based on their ethnicity and often excludes or demotes to a second-class status subjects of the state who are not members of the majority nation, civic nationalism is understood to include all subjects of a state equally.[96] While the Georgian state has formally espoused civic nationalism since the 1990's the initial nationalism after independence was decidedly not civic, and civic nationalism policy has fell short in some implementations. During the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia's nine months in office highly nationalist discourse dominated, as he labeled most of the minority groups of Georgia as "guests" who would be tolerated in the country on condition of good behavior.[97] Armenians, along with Azerbaijanis were portrayed as settlers who threatened the identity of the Georgian nation in their state not just through their presence but also through their higher than average birthrates.[98]

From the times of his Successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, the official public discourse in Georgia has been more in the direction of civic nationalism, and official government policy has taken first a more neglecting and later integrating (from Saakashvili onwards) stances towards Javakheti Armenians, rather than exclusionary rhetoric of "Georgia for Georgians"[99]. But While officially, ethnic and religious minorities are equal citizens of Georgia and the state has passed laws and ratified treaties guaranteeing their rights, the state promotes narratives glorifying the Georgian (ethnic) nation through educational and cultural policy and privileges the Georgian orthodox church through its special status in the country, exemptions

[95] Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", 118-119
[96] Ipperciel, "Constitutional", 2-3
[97] Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 16
[98] Ibid, 17
[99] Slogan used by the Georgian nationalist leader and first President after independence, Zviad Gamsakhurdia; see also Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 16

from paying taxes, and even contributions from the state budget.[100] So while the state presents a civic concept of nationality in rhetoric and to some extent policy, a closer look shows that there are a lot of elements of ethnic nationalism in the state's conception of nationality.

This has implications for interethnic perceptions as ethnic Georgians are the implicit norm of the Georgian nation and ethnic Armenians are the explicit 'other', and thanks to the elements of ethnic nationalism in state policy Georgians feel greater ownership of the country while minorities likely still feel partially as the "guests" which Gamsakhurdia labeled them. When a group such as a minority is seen as "other" or an out-group it is more easily perceived or constructed as a threat, and its collective and individual rights are more easily pushed aside in order to deal with the threat they may or may not pose.

3. Theoretical Framework

The central concept of this thesis, and therefore the focus of the theoretical section of the literature review is securitization, and the conceptual foundation on which it stands, security. Since the 1990s security studies has expanded from its original state and military-centered focus, which originated and was especially strong in the academic institution of the United States. This expansion of security studies and of the concept of security was spearheaded by scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Waever and came to be known as the Copenhagen School of Security.[101] The key innovation brought by the Copenhagen school was the expansion of the concept of security to include other objects of security than the state and the military, and the recognition that threats to security need not be of a military nature. This opened the door to the consideration of different sectors of security, but more importantly for this thesis, the concept of securitization.[102]

Copenhagen-style Securitization

Securitization is a concept born out of a non-functional approach to security, one which does not take for granted what is and is not a security issue, as was typically done earlier in traditional IR-based security studies.[103] The functionalist, or traditional approach to security considers mainly military and strategic matters, with the state as the object of security.[104] This approach was eschewed by the schools

[100] Ibid, 35-37
[101] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security"
[102] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach" 117
[103] Ibid, 117
[104] Ibid, 117

of critical security studies, considered to be composed of the Copenhagen, Aberystwyth, and Paris schools for approaches to security based more in constructivism, critical theory, and political sociology, respectively. Because these schools reject the functional approach to security and see security actors as having agency over practices of security and insecurity, as well as constructing and de-constructing security threats, the need emerged for the concept of securitization, or the construction of security threats. Securitization is a central concept of the Copenhagen school of security, so this chapter will first discuss the Copenhagen model of securitization as first outlined in the foundational book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, and then move on to alternative models of securitization introduced by other scholars and schools of security thought.

Securitization, in its original Copenhagen form, refers to the process by which issues or objects are characterized as existential threats, or threats to the security of a referent object which is portrayed as vulnerable and worthy of defending.[105] The solution to this problem of a threat to something of essential importance is solved by taking extraordinary measures, outside of the normal system of rules-based order and politics.[106] This is the power that the concept of security holds- it is the threat to something essential (most often, but not exclusively, the state) which gives justification for the breaking of established rules in dealing with this perceived threat and elevating an issue from normal politics to "panic politics" and taking exceptional measures.[107]

The concept evolved in large part thanks to the Copenhagen's school realization that the then-established ideas on security which saw military conflict as the key to security and the state as the principal referent object needed widening. The Copenhagen school presents security not as something absolute, but rather takes a constructivist perspective: security threats are "real" to differing degrees, but more important than how real a security threat may be, they are more interested in the consequences of labeling an issue or an object a security threat. This is where securitization comes into play. Security is not exclusively the domain of militaries and states, rather many different things can be construed as threats, and the possible objects of security are vast. Securitization is the process by which these threats are constructed.

[105] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security"
[106] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security"
[107] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security", 34

One possible referent object, in the expanded Copenhagen understanding of security is national identity.[108] According to Buzan et al, this falls the societal security sector, one of a number through which security is expanded beyond simply military security.[109] In this case a threat to national identity could come from the contestation of who does and doesn't belong to a nation, meaning that an ethnic minority is not only a non-traditional threat because it is not a state with a military, but because it can threaten not the state but the composition and nature of a society. As outlined in the empirical literature chapter,[110] Javakheti Armenians as an ethnolinguistic minority dominant within one region of the country could easily constitute a non-traditional threat to the (partially) ethnic understating of the Georgian nation as employed by the state. Through their mere existence they are an implicit threat to the hegemony of Georgianess in Georgia.

An instance of securitization has a few constituent parts, the first of which is a referent object. Referent objects are those objects whose security is threatened or has been portrayed as threatened by a securitizing actor.[111] A referent object must be something that the audience (to whom exceptional measures are being justified) sees as necessary to preserve. The perceived worthiness of preservation can be based on various factors, including the importance of the referent object for societal well-being, the maintenance of stability and order, or the preservation of certain values or norms.[112] The diversity of possible referent objects is an important contribution of the Copenhagen school, as traditional security approaches focused almost exclusively on the state as the referent object.[113]

The next key component is the existential threat to a referent object. Within securitization the threat is not assessed on normative or positivist grounds, but is rather taken as a construct, and in the Copenhagen school conceptualization the existential threat is constructed through speech acts. A speech act is when a securitizing actor labels an issue or object a security threat to a referent object. Speech acts can or cannot succeed in securitizing an issue or object, and their success is dependent on the authority of the speaker and how receptive their audience is.

In the typical hypothetical case which Buzan, Waever and de Wilde present, the existential threat is instrumentalized to justify emergency action or exceptional measures taken to protect the referent

[108] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security", 7
[109] Ibid, 7
[110] See Chapter 2, Evolution of nationalism in Georgia 20-22
[111] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security", 36
[112] Ibid, 21
[113] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach", 117

object. In the understanding of the Copenhagen school, the exceptional measures are the reason behind the securitizing actor's construction of a threat. Exceptional measures are actions which break the rules that usually apply, and often violate the rights of the group or entity which has been constructed as a threat.

Finally, there are the effects on interunit relations brought about by the exceptional measures and breaking of rules which were justified by the securitization of an issue.[114] Securitization can profoundly affect interunit relations between the constructed threat, the referent object, the securitizing actor, and the society around them, which is essentially why the securitization phenomenon is worth studying.

While the expansion of the concept of security to include non-military threats to other referent objects than just states was an essential contribution by the Copenhagen school, the reliance on speech acts as the main mechanism of securitization was deemed excessively rigid by many in the field of security studies. The desire to expand the applications of the concept of security further, in combination with the application of alternative theoretical frameworks led to the creation of a different approach to security, associated with the city of Paris. The Paris school of security widens the scope of security and securitization and generally shifts from the highly constructivist approach to security of Copenhagen to an approach based in political sociology.

The Paris or PARIS approach to security

The Paris school of security studies puts forth an approach to security which is based more in sociology and anthropology than traditional international relations and has therefore alternatively become known as the Political Anthropology Research for International Sociology (PARIS) approach. The PARIS approach to security is deeply transdisciplinary, and distances itself not only from the traditional approaches of international relations to security focused on military and state issues, but also from the rigidly constructivist securitization theory which was initially put forth by the Copenhagen school.[115] PARIS therefore incorporates elements of Copenhagen constructivism and Aberystwyth critical theory but prioritizes sociology and anthropology in its approach to security, while also keeping an element of political science.[116] PARIS scholars object to the culturalized approach of dividing European security thought into three distinct boxes with deterministic labels and fixed epicenters, however, the author believes that the three schools' categorization is a useful aid for understanding the landscape of modern security

[114] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security"
[115] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach"
[116] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach"

scholarship, as long as it is understood as a simplification, the shortcomings of which are well expressed by the above objections.[117] The PARIS approach to security consists of a number of key characteristics which are outlined in the following paragraphs and set it apart from the Copenhagen approach to security.

Studying security and securitization according to PARIS does not require a referent around which to construct a threat as is needed in the original Copenhagen approach, as the meaning of security is not as much the focus as the way in which the labels of security or insecurity relate to other terminologies, in their closeness or opposition.[118] Consequently, the PARIS approach does not divide security into different types or categories as is advocated by the Copenhagen school,[119] but rather recognizes the diverse ways in which the term 'security' has been used, in an effort to avoid a hierarchization of security types.

The PARIS approach also prioritizes attention to the lived experiences of people and how they are affected by the actions and practices of those who set the security agenda, or decide what security and insecurity is. Using political anthropology, it analyzes symbolic power and its trajectories to explore how individuals experience (in)security.[120] This is evidence of the anthropological lens used by the PARIS approach, as the personal angle is considered to a far lesser extent in traditional IR security studies, or in the strict Copenhagen constructivist approach.

As a result of the aforementioned flexibility in what can be considered security and the primacy of the lived experiences of people in the PARIS understanding of security, it aims to analyze "the social forces that have the capacity to impose a meaning at a certain period, and the dynamics that construct change in the long run"[121]. This means that it examines the power structures which influence the meaning of security and insecurity within a context, and how these meanings shift over time, as meanings are not constant but rather subject to constant transaction and conversion.[122] This makes the PARIS approach flexible and unconstrained by boundaries of academic disciplines and also shows the importance of an anthropological lens in the school of thought.

The fourth key to the PARIS approach is an examination of the disputes and controversies which actors involved around a situation of security, and the track their trajectories or settlements. This requires also looking into or beyond the controversies to the power struggles and dynamics affecting these actors;

[117] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach", 117
[118] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach", 120
[119] Buzan, Waever, and deWilde, "Security"
[120] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach"
[121] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach",121
[122] Bigo, Didier, "Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations"

both those which they fight with and those which they are a part of.[123] This element encompasses a critical aspect to the PARIS approach, and makes symbolic power one of the main categories of analysis, in stark contrast to the traditionalist IR approaches centered on military and state power.[124] This is also a point of contrast with the Copenhagen securitization theory, which despite its efforts to expand the concept of security beyond simply matters of state and military, still retains a state-centric and thereby Westphalian, Eurocentric point of view, which shows its limitations when applied outside of contexts where strong nation-states are dominate the political and security landscape.[125]

These four keys add up to an approach to security which is permanently contested, cannot be encapsulated in a single unifying principle or dominant theory, and inherently implies a struggle for legitimacy of practices which involve violence or control of an actor's behavior. Finally, an essential characteristic of the PARIS approach is that security and insecurity are not opposites in the traditional sense of the word, but rather exist as a mobius strip where there can be clear difference between them but there is never a clear border between security and insecurity.[126] A person, group, object, or institution can always become less or more secure, and a state of security can never be completely insulated from insecurity. They are the inverse of each other, and yet it is impossible to distinguish where one begins and the other ends, just as when trying to find the opposing sides on a mobius strip. For this reason, the PARIS approach rarely speaks of security and insecurity, or of securitization or insecuritization processes, preferring (in)security and (in)securitization.[127]

A middle ground: Thierry Balzacq's Security Practices

The PARIS approach takes the concept of security to another level of broadness and is employed by a lot of the recent research and discourse around human (in)security, concepts which have been successfully applied to the South Caucasus region by scholars such as Huseyn Aliyev.[128] However, the conceptualization of securitization which I find most compelling is one which draws on both the Copenhagen and PARIS approaches, which is put forth by Thierry Balzacq in his 2010 article: Security Practices. Balzacq is sometimes grouped into the PARIS school of security, but in "Security Practices" he describes a version of securitization which is based on the Copenhagen blueprint, but accounts for the performative manifestation of securitization narratives and most importantly does not rely solely on the

[123] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach", 123
[124] Ibid
[125] Bigo, Didier, "International Political Sociology"; Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan"
[126] Bigo and McClusky, "What is a PARIS Approach", 126
[127] Ibid, 127
[128] Aliyev "Informal Networks as Sources of Human (In)security"

discursive practices of elites or security professionals.[129] Balzacq presents this as a sociological approach to securitization, not excluding speech acts, or the discursive aspect, but widening it to include non-discursive practices.[130] Furthermore, Balzacq insists that a process of (in)securitization "is not necessarily the result of a rational design where goals are set beforehand, following a predetermined agenda"[131]. As such, securitization can happen unintentionally, and can be the product of non-discursive security practices, which include but are not limited to laws and policies which shape the interaction between state and an (in)securitized group.[132]

Balzacq contends that security is not the realm of the exceptional or emergency, but rather that it is a constant part of politics and is constantly contested, keeping in line with his PARIS colleagues.[133] (In)securitization takes place through the application of security practices which do not necessarily have to be justified by speech acts appealing to an audience that a threat warrants exceptional measures. Rather, (in)securitization can take the form of security actors' practices which treat a subject as a threat.[134] The set of security practices employed by a securitizing actor or actors, can (in)securitize its subject unintentionally, especially if the actor(s) are informed by a *habitus* or internal culture of sorts, which either views the subject group as a threat.[135] The habitus can be understood as "the system of enduring behaviors and discourses of the agents that populate a given field"[136], and in the field of security, it has the tendency to lead security actors to view everything through the lens of security.[137] Viewing the world through the lens of security, security actors can unintentionally and without necessarily employing a securitizing discourse or appeal to an audience (in)securitize a subject through security practices. In the following section I will argue why the Balzacqian securitization concept fits best for the focus of this study, while other thoughts of securitization remain relevant as a background against which the Balzacqian version is understood.

[129] Balzacq, "Security Practices", 2
[130] Ibid, 3
[131] Ibid, 3
[132] Ibid, 9
[133] Ibid, 4
[134] Ibid, 3
[135] Balzacq, "Securitization Theory"; Balzacq, "Securitization Revisited"
[136] Balzacq, "Securitization Revisited", 505
[137] Balzacq, "Securitization Revisited", 505

4. Methodology

Operationalization of concepts

The sociological approach of Balzacqian securitization is more useful in studying the context of Javakheti Armenians, because of the ideological and rhetorical shift around minorities in Georgia since the Shevardnadze administration. While Gamsakhurdia's politics employed a strong element of ethnic Georgian nationalism, known as "Georgia for Georgians", from Shevardnadze onwards the rhetoric of "guest" ethnic groups was abandoned for a more reconciliatory stance, followed by a (formally) integrative agenda in the UNM and GD administrations.[138] Therefore, I did not expect to find a significant amount of discourse resembling speech acts, and was also constrained by the language barrier from properly analyzing official public discourse on a large scale. If we equate Gamsakhurdia's aggressively nationalist rhetoric with securitizing speech acts, the referent object of which would be national identity, this brings up an interesting conceptual challenge. That is, are we dealing with traditional securitization a la the Buzan et al. Securitization Theory, which has just dissipated over the years in the absence of more securitizing speech acts, or can we understand the extent to which Javakheti Armenians are currently securitized to be the product of an ongoing process of securitization in the mold of Balzacq's sociological interpretation of the theory?

The answer I argue lies best in Balzacq's sociological perspective on Securitization Theory because his is a more expansive interpretation, which does not contest the existence of securitization processes which happen through speech acts, but rather broadens the concept to include non-explicit social securitization. This allows us to consider that there is a past discourse of securitization which is likely influencing the current degree of securitization experienced by Javakheti Armenians, but does not exclude that there is an ongoing securitization through social mechanisms such as interethnic perceptions between Georgians and Armenians, as well as a significant power imbalance between the governmental bodies who have the power to treat the minority as a security threat and the minority itself, and a securitizing habitus which may exist among security actors in Georgia.

The securitization which this research project set out to look for initially positions the state (or the territorial integrity of the state) as the referent object. However, the identity of Georgian society, or at least the majority ethnic-Georgian society is another possible referent object, because Georgia has a relatively ethnic conceptualization of nationalism, which an ethnic minority group living within the country

[138] Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 16-25; See Chapter 2, Evolution of Nationalism in Georgia, 20-22

is naturally positioned to challenge.[139] The securitized object is hypothetically the Armenian minority living in Javakheti, and the securitizing actor is the state security service, as indicated by a majority of respondents interviewed in the primary research for this thesis.[140] If one takes a sociological perspective on Securitization Theory, securitization may be ongoing even if the securitizing actors may not be very explicitly identifiable, and there may not be any securitizing discourse. Instead, the securitization may be generated by an established habitus shared among stakeholders and decision makers within the Georgian state, specifically among members of the State Security Service, as was suggested by Modebadze's research on the dual vulnerability of ethnic minority women in Georgia.[141]

This thesis does not see the existence of securitizing discourse, or even the non-discursive securitization of Javakheti Armenians to be the only indicator that they are a securitized group. Also considered is the perspective of the minority itself. If representatives of the community and minority rights activists experience interaction with the Georgian state in which they are treated as security threats, that their group rights are abused or individual rights are abused because of their belonging to the Armenian minority of Javakheti or advocating on their behalf, this would also support the position that the minority is being securitized.

In this research Balzacqian, non-discursive, sociological securitization was investigated through interviews with independent experts on minority rights and integration, minority rights activists based in Tbilisi and abroad, as well as a journalist from Javakheti. In the first phase I interviewed one Tbilisi-based expert on minority issues in Georgia, and two Tbilisi-based security experts who also had experience with minority issues. In the second phase I interviewed two Tbilisi-based minority rights activists, one EU-based expert on minority issues from Akhaltsikhe, and one ethnic Armenian journalist from Akhalkalaki. The latter of the two groups of interview subjects were also used as an indicator, whether or not members of the minority and minority activists feel that they are being treated as a threat by the state, and if they feel their rights are being violated through security practices.

Research Design

This thesis employs an interpretivist research paradigm, meaning that it assumes that social reality is not singular or objective. This stems from the epistemological stance that social reality is best studied within its social context and must reconcile the subjective interpretations of all constituent participants.

[139] Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 16-25; See Chapter 2, Evolution of Nationalism in Georgia 20-22
[140] Respondents #4, #5, #6, #7
[141] Mobedadze, "Dual Vulnerability", 14-15

The research questions of "Are Javakheti Armenians securitized, and if so, how?" follows the characteristics of interpretivist research as they aim to generate thick description of a phenomenon rather than investigate a causal relationship. In order to generate this thick description and account for the subjective interpretations of participants' social reality, open-ended individual interviews were chosen as the data collection method.

Proceeding from the interpretivist research paradigm, this thesis employed a cyclical research chain, with two phases of data collection. The initial phase which consisted of three interviews explored experts' perspectives on the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state and was followed by an initial analysis of data which informed the shift in the research focus from pro-Russian influence to securitization more broadly, and also informed the theoretical framework employed. This included a change in the research question, from its original version of "How do pro-Russian attitudes among Javakheti Armenians affect their relationship with the Georgian state?" The theory of securitization employed in this thesis also aligns with the epistemological lens because a Balzacqian conceptualization of securitization emphasizes the importance of social context and social phenomena such as the habitus to broaden securitization beyond the strict requirements of speech acts in the original Copenhagen school version.

Another characteristic of this research stemming from its interpretivist underpinning is the centrality of me and my interpretations of the data. Because I have interpreted and distilled meaning from the interview data, and also affected the interviews in the way I conducted them, my personal experiences, perspective and biases have affected this research deeply. This is in part a limitation of this study, but I as all researchers employing an interpretivist research paradigm believe that it can still make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge as long as these biases and perspectives are accounted for in both the creation and the reading of this research.

The interpretivist paradigm has been useful in accommodating diverse perspectives on the relationship between state and minority, and while it has not led to definitive answers regarding securitization, it has shown how the concepts of securitization and informality likely interact in the governance of Javakheti.

Methods Used in Research

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews with activists and experts from the field of ethnic minority policy in Georgia were chosen as the method of data collection for this research. The interviews

were conducted in two consecutive phases whereas the interview guide and the selection of the respondents in the second phase were adapted based on the findings of the initial interviews (see details below). This decision was made in accordance with the interpretivist paradigm applied in this research. There is little research in the English-speaking academic literature focusing on the perceptions side of securitization of minorities in Georgia, and so the present research is an exploratory study aiming to probe the complex nature of minority-state relations in Georgia. Open-ended semi-structured interviews are favorable for inductive studies and this method has also been shown to be best suited to "exploring understandings, perceptions, and constructions of things that participants have some kind of personal stake in"[142]. The interviews focused on the respondents' experiences of state interaction with Javakheti Armenians as well as their own perceptions and the attitudes of the public, the ruling elite and of other experts towards the minority. Furthermore, the interview guide was designed in a way that formal and informal aspect of the state's policies towards Javakheti Armenians could be discussed as well as the discrepancy between the two. The participants were given the chance to lead the direction of the discussion and to bring up topics that were not anticipated by the researcher. Such an inductive approach has proven to be fruitful when dealing with different perceptions and understandings in a complex setting and facilitates exploration of uncharted waters.

Respondents were selected based on either their expertise on minority issues and policies in Georgia or on their involvement in minority rights activism in the region of Javakheti. A snowball method was used to receive contacts of potential respondents from the field. This method also helped to build up trust between the researcher and the interview participants if the contacts were set up by members of their network. Interviews took place online through ZOOM, lasted about 60 to 75 minutes, and were conducted in English with some Russian being used in one interview. Responses in Russian were translated by the researcher in order to be quoted in this thesis.

The interview data was transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke[143]. First, initial codes were generated through a thorough reading of interview transcripts and were indexed according to topic.[144] From these initial codes and topics, themes representing important and recurring points made by the respondents during interviews.[145] Recurring themes were counted to determine how many respondents had made the same point, with the most

[142] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis", 81
[143] Ibid, 87
[144] ibid
[145] ibid

commonly recurring themes given extra consideration in the formation of an understanding of the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state, and what role securitization plays in this relationship.

Extensive desk research on minority policy, both generally and in Georgia, as well as on Javakheti itself was conducted before data collection began to generate a foundation of background knowledge. This informed the flexible questionnaires used during the interviews, which gave freedom to the interviewees to influence the direction and topics discussed in the interviews. This was important in order to stay true to the inductive approach which this thesis employed in line with its interpretivist research design.[146]

The data collection phase of this research was concluded once I felt that I had enough data to answer my research questions and once I did not foresee new significant information coming from conducting more interviews given the constraints of language and lack of access to representatives of state institutions, including the State Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Evolution of Research Methods Through Initial Stage of Interviews

The existence of a meaningful discrepancy between official policy such as what is found in policy concepts and documents outlining policy strategies for government bodies and that which is implemented or executed in reality was anticipated by the researcher based on desk research before data collection began. However, in the initial phase of interviews it became clear that this was a key element of the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state and led to a change in the planned research methods. It is not unusual for an interpretivist research design to leave room for the data to shape the interview guide or even the direction of the study more broadly.[147] Originally, the plan was to analyze official policy documents from three different state institutions which are concerned with ethnic minorities in Georgia: The State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (SMR), the Parliamentary Committee on Diaspora and Caucasus Issues, and the Human Rights Defender of Georgia (Ombudsperson), as well as interviewing representatives or members from each of these government bodies. After the initial phase of data collection, analysis of interview data suggested that the discrepancies between official policy as written in the policy concepts of the various state institutions and the situation on the ground in the region were so significant that an approach more centered on the voices of people with firsthand experience would better serve the thesis. For this reason, I chose to interview two minority rights activists and one

[146] Della Porta and Keating, "Approaches and Methodologies"
[147] ibid

Journalist who is a Javakheti Armenian, as well as one expert on minority issues from the partially Armenian-populated city of Akhaltsikhe in the second phase of interviews and moved away from the focus on official policy of the three aforementioned state institutions.

Another important shift in the scope of this research was regarding the initial focus on pro-Russian attitudes among Javakheti Armenians, and how this affects the minority's relationship with the Georgian state, or any securitization that may be happening. During the initial three interviews, but also in phase 2 interviews, there was a consensus that pro-Russian attitudes are not a major factor in the relationship between state and ethnic minority. Following an analysis of the first phase of interviews, the conceptual focus of the research shifted to securitization generally, not in conjunction with pro-Russian attitudes, although the issue was discussed in phase 2 interviews to confirm the conclusions from phase 1 which led to this pivot.

A second key element of data collection which was changed from the initial research plan was interviews with representatives of the three aforementioned state institutions. Through respondents' suggestions on who else to interview, I received the contact information of a person working in the SMR, but upon contacting them they were not willing to give an interview to be used in this research, and said that I had made false assumptions about the pro-Russian orientation of Javakheti Armenians despite this being a fact supported by numerous opinion polls as well as a consensus of the respondents interviewed for this thesis. This suggested that getting access to people working in state institutions would be more difficult than arranging interviews with experts and activists not connected to the government, and that representatives of state institutions did not feel the liberty to discuss Georgia's ethnic minority policy openly and honestly. Based on this, the interview with this particular person was abandoned, and I decided to continue asking for recommendations for representatives of state institutions to interview but realized that I could not expect to succeed finding willing participants for this category of respondent.

The second phase of research then continued with interviews from respondents selected using the snowball sampling method and grew to include not only experts on ethnic minority policy in Georgia but also ethnic minority rights activists. The inclusion of activists added a new category of perspective on Georgian ethnic minority policy because the activists had generally a different set of experiences and professional goals than the experts. The respondent sample was also importantly diversified with the inclusion of an ethnic Armenian from Javakheti who was able to give a perspective from within the region and from someone who identifies as Armenian. This was in contrast to the other respondents who were with the exception of one all ethnic Georgians based either abroad or in Tbilisi. The inclusion of the

perspective of Javakheti Armenians was essential to fulfilling the epistemological lens of this research, and the research would ideally have included more Armenian respondents from Javakheti, but the language barrier turned out to be a serious obstacle to this goal. The pool of English-speaking Javakheti Armenians who are experts or activists dealing with ethnic minority rights was seemingly much smaller than that of English-speaking experts and activists from Tbilisi, which resulted in only finding one Armenian respondent.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation of this research is that the respondents cannot be taken as a representative sample. The small number of seven interviews is the first obstacle to any claim to representativeness, but also important to consider is the sampling method. The snowball method of sampling through asking for each respondent for recommendations on who to interview leads to people suggesting peers who are likely to hold similar beliefs to them. Most respondents made an effort to recommend peers who could offer a different perspective or set of experiences than their own, which did lead to a more diverse pool of respondents, but still not in any way representative. However, as this exploratory study aims to probe into the understudied field of minority policy implementation and security perceptions by considering their experiences and various understandings of the situation and providing a thick description, it can provide valuable insights and point to new aspects in need of further research.

Possibly the biggest limitation related to respondent sampling was the lack of an interview with a member of the State Security Service, or at least a representative of the Ministry of Internal affairs, as these organizations (mainly the SSS) were mentioned by every respondent and their activities in Javakheti were discussed in depth by a majority of respondents. One respondent promised to provide contact details of someone from the interior ministry who would have ostensibly been open to an interview, but they never followed through. No other respondents had the contact information for anyone from the SSS or MIA, and most said they did not believe anyone from these institutions willing to speak openly in a research interview. This is a significant limitation of this thesis because in a Balzacqian understanding of security, perceptions, beliefs, and institutional culture practiced by security actors are key to determining if a process of securitization is happening.[148]

The findings of this thesis are also limited by the barrier of language, specifically that I do not speak Georgian. For this reason, the interviews were conducted in English (plus one partially in Russian),

[148] Balzacq, "Securitization Theory", 2

therefore the pool of respondents was limited to experts and activists who speak at least some English. One interview, with the Armenian respondent from Javakheti, was conducted partially in Russian, as the respondent was comfortable with English comprehension, but preferred to express themselves in Russian (their native language was Armenian). The use of languages other than each speakers own native language slightly lowers the degree of confidence which can be placed in the respondent's statements and in my interpretation of them, as it introduces the chance for someone to mis-represent something because of lack of language ability. The respondents most likely would have been able to express themselves more comfortably and fully had I been able to speak with them in their native language.

The interviews were also constrained by my own personal biases in both conducting and interpreting the discussions. Many of these biases would be subtle and subconscious, but as imaginably any researcher, I was biased towards finding data and results which would answer my research question positively, in this care affirming that securitization of Javakheti Armenians is happening. Even if this research question does not have to be answered as a binary, and the second question of 'If so, how?' even less, there still is a clear opportunity for such a bias to creep into research with these research questions.

Finally, one limitation which stems partially from the ethical guidelines and requirements of this research is the transparency of the research questions and focus of the thesis towards the respondents. When analyzing the interviews, I felt that some respondents had a pre-existing, categorical belief either that Javakheti Armenians are securitized or that they are not, which then shaped their responses throughout the interview. If the term securitization had not been disclosed in the plain language statement given to each respondent before the interview, and I had not mentioned the term until at least the very end of the interview, perhaps people would have spoken about their understanding and experiences of the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the state with more openness and honesty. While research ethnics stipulate that respondents must be given some details of the research in the plain language statement, perhaps I could have given away less, or made sure that my questions and plain language statement did not suggest that I see securitization as sort of a dirty word, thereby making an accusation just by investigating the topic.

Research Ethics

The ethical implications of this research were considered through submission of an application for research ethics approval to the ethics forum of the University of Glasgow School of Social Sciences. Among the key issues discussed in the ethnics approval was the potentially sensitive nature of the topic to be discussed with respondents, that being interethnic relations and policy on ethnic minorities in Georgia. In

order to mitigate any negative impact on respondents, only respondents who deal with minority policy and interethnic relations regularly in a professional capacity were selected. Cultural context of Georgia and the Caucasus region generally were taken into account, and I used my three years of experience of living in the region to ensure cultural norms and sensitivities were respected.

In order to minimize the risk of contributing to the spread of COVID-19 respondents were given the option of conducting interviews in person or online through ZOOM, and in the case of in-person interviews respondents were offered safety measures such as meeting outside, wearing masks, and ventilating the space. In order to protect the privacy of respondents interview data was anonymized and while some details about the professional background of each respondent were disclosed in the thesis for context, detail which could reveal the identity of respondents were withheld. For further protection of respondent privacy, respondents were encouraged to conduct ZOOM interviews in private settings, and interview data was stored solely in password-encrypted files in a password-locked laptop computer which in turn was always stored in a locked space when unattended.

In order to ensure that participants could all give informed consent to be interviewed and their responses used in research, a plain language statement describing the research project and a privacy notice about the use of response data and protection of identity and personal details was distributed to participants in advance of arranging interviews. To document their informed consent, each participant signed a research consent form which also stated that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Are Javakheti Armenians Securitized?

After conducting seven interviews with experts on security and policy on ethnic minorities in Georgia, as well ethnic minority rights activists, and one Armenian journalist, an understanding of the security situation around Javakheti Armenians started to emerge. The research questions of this study were: Are Javakheti Armenians securitized, and if so, how? The concept of securitization employed was closest to that of Thierry Balzacq,[149] who contends that securitization can take place non-discursively and can instead be caused by a set of beliefs, perceptions, and repeated practices (habitus) held and executed

[149] See Chapter 3, A middle ground: Thierry Balzacq's Security Practices, 27-28

by security actors. The first element of securitization examined to determine whether or not securitization is happening is the degree and nature of security practices executed by security actors (in this case the State Security Service of Georgia) as experienced or witnessed by the respondents.

Security Practices in Javakheti

The interview data suggests that there is an ongoing non-discursive securitization of Javakheti Armenians, with data from 5 out of 7 interviews supporting this claim. The two interviews with the strongest evidence of securitization were from ethnic minority rights activists, one of which described how they and their colleague's phones had been bugged:

"*My coworker's* [phone] *definitely was* [bugged] *because things were leaked"*[150] adding that *"If you are* [politically] *active then you'll be closely watched. You never know where they are or when they are listening to you."*[151] This activist, being ethnic Georgian herself, explained she believed the State Security Service's motive in bugging her phone was *"Because I work in places which have been marked as potential threats"*[152] referring to the minority dominated regions of Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and the Pankisi Gorge. This instance can thereby not prove that Javakheti Armenians and the activists working in the region are being monitored by the SSS but does suggest that activism in minority regions is something the SSS sees though the lens of security and as worthwhile to bug activists' phones for.

To contextualize the respondent's suspicion of their phone being bugged, surveillance of opposition figures had been a growing issue in Georgia in the last few years and was also commonplace especially in the later years of the UNM administration. On September 13th, 2021, documents were leaked to the public containing evidence of widespread surveillance of Journalists, clergymen, foreign diplomats, NGO activists and opposition figures.[153] The SSS was the government agency, which was mainly implicated in the surveillance scandal, and while an investigation into these surveillance practices was opened[154] it brought few consequences. The Georgian Dream government instead moved to expand the state's powers of surveillance the following year.[155] These events suggest that state surveillance of the politically active public is commonplace.

[150] Respondent #4
[151] Respondent #4
[152] Respondent #4
[153] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "A Massive Purported State Surveillance Leak"
[154] Amnesty international, "Human Rights in Georgia"
[155] Nikoladze, "Georgia Changes Rules for Covert Surveillance"

Another activist respondent described intimidation by SSS which opposition candidates from Javakheti electoral districts faced in the 2021 municipal elections.

"*There were 4 or 5 [districts] where the only candidate was from Georgian Dream, and the oppositional candidate refused to participate in the party list after several events, and these events were like: their cousins were visited by the SSS saying that your cousin should not participate in that [the election], or in one case it was the wife of an opposition candidate who worked in a school and she was told you'll lose your job if you husband stays in the race. So the SSS control the system and the elections*"[156]

Candidate intimidation is a clear example of a security practice implemented by the SSS against the Armenian minority, in this case against political opposition in the region. This statement does not exclude the possibility that there is a trend of opposition securitization, which could manifest as opposition intimidation throughout all regions of Georgia but mentions of opposition intimidation in other interviews suggest that there is an element of minority securitization at play. This is supported by the interview data as four other respondents mentioned that the SSS suppresses or intimidates opposition candidates in Javakheti, and five out of seven respondents stated that the SSS is especially active in Javakheti alongside other minority regions, with three respondents mentioning that the SSS is the state institution with which Javakheti Armenians have the most interaction. This still does not exclude the possibility of opposition, rather than Javakheti Armenians being the subject of security practices, but considering that Javakheti, like other ethnic minority dominated regions of Georgia, has been an electoral stronghold of the Ruling Party since the Shevardnadze administration[157] suggests that the security practices are not a blanket targeting of opposition, and that ethnicity plays a role. The securitization hypothesis is also supported by academic literature on the topic, with the most recent article on Javakheti security coming from Metreveli in 2016[158] (discussed in the Empirical literature Chapter). Metreveli contends that the state does view Javakheti Armenians as a security threat, but the publication date in 2016 means that the situation may have changed in that time period. Nonetheless there are further data from interviews which also suggest securitization id happening.

A third respondent who worked as an election observer said that while they didn't know anything concrete regarding opposition intimidation in Javakheti, they noticed a big difference during interviews with opposition candidates from Akhalkalaki compared to regions dominated by ethnic Georgians.

[156] Respondent #5
[157] See Chapter 2, Politics of Javakheti 15
[158] Metreveli, "Conflicting"

"*In Eastern Georgia in interviews we heard a lot about intimidation, but there was a difference in how careful opposition candidates were… Minority candidates, especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti, I don't know why, but oppositional candidates are more careful to talk about these intimidations*." [159]

Adding: "*They don't feel enough support, and you know if the opposition don't win there is always this fear of some kind of revenge, and that can also be because of this, the state demonstrating its power more… we were so surprised how carefully oppositional candidates were talking*."[160]

This respondent's account of interviews with opposition candidates shows that they perceive the opposition intimidation faced by candidates in Javakheti as more serious than that which happens in ethnic Georgian dominated regions.

Perceptions Among Security Actors

Besides security practices, a key element of securitization is perceptions, that is the perception of threats (as discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis).[161] While there is likely not a public discourse of securitization which would try to persuade an audience that something is a threat to justify extraordinary measures,[162] a perception of a threat among security actors, in this case the SSS, would indicate that there is a case of Balzacq style (sociological, non-discursive)[163] securitization taking place. Regarding perceptions of the Armenian minority of Javakheti posing a threat to the Georgian state, the respondents once again did not all agree, but three believed that the SSS perceive Javakheti Armenians to be a security threat. Or put simply: "*The Security Service are always waiting for something to happen and see all the minorities as against Georgia*" and "*They see them as potential spies or allies for these other countries*"[164] referring to minorities living in the minority-dominated regions of Georgia.

One respondent, an expert on ethnic minority issues in Georgia spoke about their interactions with members of the SSS during a police training program on minority issues, contrasting the perception of Georgia's ethnic minorities among the interior ministry's security forces and that of the SMR or the ministry of education.

[159] Respondent #6
[160] Respondent #6
[161] See Chapter 3, A middle ground: Thierry Balzacq's Security Practices, 27-28
[162] See Chapter 4, Operationalization of Concepts, 29-30
[163] See Chapter 4, A middle ground: Thierry Balzacq's Security Practices, 27-28
[164] Respondent #4

"*When we started discussions about minority issues, they started defending Georgian statehood. From their perspective these are problem regions and Georgia should be very strong and make sure there's no problems there*"[165]

Later adding:

"*There are very liberal branches of the government like the Ministry of Education, the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, but there's also another branch of the government, the strong forces actually. They think that these minorities, they live here, they should live here, but comply with all the rules and not make any problems, they look at the through a security perspective*."[166]

Another respondent, an activist, described how a securitized approach to ethnic minorities in the Interior Ministry began in with the UNM governments of the 2000s, but continued with the Georgian Dream governments after 2013 because of something like a bureaucratic inertia within the Interior Ministry and the SSS.

"*I think it's paved with the wrong perceptions of certain politicians. I had interviews with several people from the previous government like Giga Bokeria[167], who were the people dealing with security issues, and their position was that 'we had troubles keeping Armenians in' so what we did we brought in certain people from the Armenian community to control the situation and we gave them all the powers they needed, like Enzel Mkoyan[168]. Their definition was that after Saakashvili left the Georgian Dream followed the same path. And they followed the same path not because it was better or worse but because it was controlled by the SSS and they said this is the way of dealing with this problem and we have more expertise than politicians. So not only state agencies or government bodies, ministries are working this way but even politicians. Very different political parties are following the positions of SSS when it comes to minorities. So UNM and GD are complete contrasts to each other, two very different political parties, but still having the same policies."*[169]

The respondent cites their own interview with Giga Bokeria, Secretary of the National Security Council from 2010 to 2013 in supporting their perspective on the perceptions of Javakheti Armenians by security actors in Georgia. These observations of the continuity in security practices towards ethnic

[165] Respondent #1
[166] Respondent #1
[167] Secretary of the National Security Council from 2010 to 2013
[168] Member of National Parliament representing Javakheti (Ninotsminda District) from 1994 to 2020
[169] Respondent #5

minorities through different governments suggests that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and SSS perceived and continue to perceive ethnic minorities as a threat to the state and continue to employ the same security practices regardless of changes in government. If this were the case, it would closely resemble the securitizing habitus which Balzacq describes as a common component of nondiscursive securitizations.[170] It is of course difficult to assert this is happening on the evidence of one interview, but a similar securitizing habitus was also identified by Modebadze after interviews with members of the Georgian SSS on the topic of ethnic minorities in the study titled "Dual Vulnerability of Ethnic Minority Women".[171]

The same minority rights activist respondent gave their insight on why Javakheti is still treated as a security threat today by the SSS, despite a minimum of oppositional or separatist activism in the region for a long time.

"*Whatever happens today is the echo of certain moments in history, so what kind of prejudice GEs have about Armenians or Azerbaijanis today is the product of the past 30 years, in certain points in history Armenians were very vocal, a lot of people remember for example Vahagn Chakhalyan[172], small clashes in Javakheti over the Russian base staying or leaving. In some cases, there were discussions about Javakheti having autonomous status, so this is somewhere in the heads of Georgian people which would say look at Armenians they are a problem.*"[173]

The respondent believes that the current perceptions of Javakheti Armenians are not informed by the immediate status quo in Javakheti alone, and that the events of the recent past have a big role in shaping the perceptions of the minority and its region.

Perceptions Among the Ethnic Georgian Public

Knowledge of the perceptions of Javakheti Armenians among members of the SSS is highly informative in determining whether or not there is an ongoing Balzacqian securitization of the minority, but despite several attempts to get in touch with people working for the SSS, the researcher was not able to find a willing respondent. While this is a significant limitation of the study, respondents' thoughts on the perceptions of Javakheti Armenians held by ethnic Georgians in general further supports the above claims.

[170] Balzacq, "Security Practices", 3
[171] Modebadze, "Dual Vulnerability", 14-15
[172] Leader of United Javakhk, Armenian nationalist party in Javakheti
[173] Respondent #5

Negative Stereotypes, Common Points of Contention

Beyond the respondents' statements on the perceptions which they believe are held by the SSS, all but one respondent spoke about perceptions of Armenians among the general public of ethnic Georgians in the country. Respondents saw this as highly relevant to the overall state of integration of the minority in Georgia, but also spoke about it because they knew more about perceptions of Armenians by Georgians in general than about the perceptions of the SSS. All who spoke about public perceptions of Armenians believed that there are many widely held negative stereotypes about Armenians, and some described the minority as being marginalized, untrusted, or that they are often faced with Armenophobia when dealing with their ethnic Georgian co-citizens.

"*So these are the two big attitudes, they [Armenians] are savvy, they might cheat you, they might lie to you, and on the other hand they claim parts of our culture as their own.*"[174]

Two respondents also mentioned that Javakheti Armenians not knowing the Georgian language was a point of contention and something that irritated Georgians, which they observed on social media.

"*Government Services are in Georgian[175] but other services are not… and Georgians do not really like this situation in Javakheti. 'Why can't I talk to a doctor in Georgian in my own country?' and so the situation is such that the organizations and parts of government that work in this direction of integration and ethnic minorities it's all good, but once it goes to the level of just people, the emotions of the masses are more effected by topics like 'there are signs in Javakheti in Armenian'*"[176]

Later adding:

"*Now on social media its very popular and the main commenters who are very active are the part who are most interested in the fact that there are signs in Armenian in Javakheti*."[177]

Another common point of contention was arguments over historic religious sites in the region and whom they belong to, with both ethnic Georgians and ethnic Armenians claiming many churches, and holy places.

"*One topic is religious sites, like holy places, rocks, churches, and when the issue comes up of who does it belong to, this object which is deteriorating and it's not so important whose it is but to save it, then it*

[174] Respondent #4
[175] See chapter 2, Language and Education, 11-12
[176] Respondent #7
[177] Respondent #7

mobilizes these groups which for example among Armenians say 'look this is Armenian and they want to take it from us' or among Georgians say 'look, they showed up here in our country and now they're claiming this as their own'"[178]

The respondent believes these two points of contention observed on social media suggest that there is an uneasiness among Georgians around sharing their country with a national minority, and that the perception of Armenians among the public is not a very positive one. All but one respondent mentioned these tensions, so not only does the interview data as a whole strongly suggest this is true, but it also shows that respondents generally saw this as an important factor in the relationship between Armenians and Georgian society.

Cultural Narratives

Whilst digging deeper into these public perceptions, and asking about their origins, two respondents said that there was a tendency among Georgians to have an attitude of superiority, or look down on their neighboring ethnic groups, and that in some popularized civilizational narratives people see Armenians (among others) as less developed.

"In the civilizationist narrative Georgia is on the way to Europe and historically was part of something more developed"[179]

This respondent also added that the relationship between Armenians and Georgians in recent history is shaped by Georgian nationalism and which group's Georgian identity was defined against from its initial conceptions.

"*Georgian identity was from the beginning from the first national movements in the 19th century were formed and everything was very much from the beginning based on this 'I'm Georgian that means I'm not Armenian' and you have this situation where in Tbilisi there were so many Armenians richer than Georgians and they have stronger positions so it's that kind of Armenophobia has some kind of history in Georgia… Georgians define themselves very much against Russia as well."*[180]

National identities in Georgia today are influenced by the nationality policies of the Soviet Union, which took a primordialist approach to nationality and every person had an assigned nationality written

[178] Respondent #7
[179] Respondent #6
[180] Respondent #6

in their passport and was afforded privileges in the territory assigned to their nationality.[181] The echoes of these policies in people's understanding of nationality are in conflict with civic conceptualizations of the Georgian nation. Besides this, in order to construct national identities, national movements often define both positive and negative identifiers around which they try to coalesce an ethnic group into a nation, the positive typically being shared language and culture. But the negative identifiers are sometimes even more important: in the case of Georgian nationalism, the nation was defined as distinct from Armenians and Russians, two ethnic groups to which Georgians were extensively exposed, especially in Tbilisi, which was shared mainly by those three ethnic groups, in the late 19th century when the idea of a Georgian nation was being constructed.[182] So, Armenians (among others, notably Russians) were some of the defining out-groups against which Georgian nationalism was defined at its outset, and this has brought with it a sort of informal national perception of Armenians, as the some of the negative stereotypes mentioned by respondents were written about already in the 19th century.[183] This is what we see in the widely believed stereotypes which all but one respondent mentioned as shaping the relationship between Armenians and Georgians today.

Doubts about loyalty and tensions over ties to Russia

The respondents presented these narratives and negative stereotypes as very common among ethnic Georgians and saw them as important in shaping the relationship between Armenians and Georgians living in Georgia. As was summed up by one respondent, they are "untrusted people". This, in combination with the Georgian state's incomplete transition from the ethnic nationalism[184] of Gamsakhurdia to civic nationalism[185] despite the efforts and rhetoric of parts of the state apparatus (such as the SMR) seems to lead to Javakheti Armenians' loyalty to the Georgian state being doubted among the Georgian public. This is not only what the respondents' statements on public perception of Armenians suggest but was also directly mentioned in multiple interviews. One activist spoke extensively about this perception among the public and politicians in Georgia:

"*A lot of Georgians think that Georgian Armenians are not integral part of Georgia, and they still think that these minorities do not belong to Georgia they are just like basically satellites of their homelands here*"[186]

[181] Suny, "Provisional Stabilities", 154-155
[182] Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", 116-119
[183]Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", 116-119
[184] Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 16-17
[185] Berglund and Blauvelt, "Redefining", 35-36, 42-43
[186] Respondent #4

"*Theres this argument that minorities will always have loyalty to other countries first. It's also completely flawed and kind of rooted in the idea that Georgia is only for ethnic Georgians who are Christian. This is highly problematic and was popularized in the 1990s, although it's true that in the Soviet Union there were titular nations, so it's kind of rooted there, but in the 1990s is when it took this ethno-religious form with Gamsakhurdia and others… Even today because if you closely listen to politicians, sometimes they don't want to say it and they want to embrace this civic nationalism, but sometimes they say this is your historic motherland, or they say Georgia is not your motherland, they still want to connect these minorities to other countries.*"[187]

Another Respondent, an ethnic Georgian expert who had lived in Samtskhe-Javakheti for many years, spoke of the doubt about Armenians' allegiance to Georgia in connection with their ties to Russia, and described this dynamic as such:

"*Being pro-Russian is not the main thing I would say but this plays also some role or at least on the discursive level I've heard this many times… There is this feeling kind of that if something happens, there will be no support at least from Armenia because people see it like that it's because of history of Armenia somehow, it's in that geopolitical situation where you cannot trust because it doesn't have any other way away from Russia. That is not main reason why it goes to securitization but one of them.*"[188]

Later adding

"*There is always this kind of feeling that if at one point Armenia or Azerbaijan would have some kind of political aspirations if they decide to say that this is historically part of Armenia there is a feeling they [ethnic minorities] would back those states. I know this because in the 90s this feeling was especially strong, and you had also really some [separatist] movements in Javakheti and also in Kvemo Kartli*."[189]

The respondent references Armenia's and by extension Armenians' Geopolitical reliance on Russia as its security guarantor in the face of its conflict with Azerbaijan in which Turkey supports Azerbaijan creating a situation where most of Armenia's borders are with countries it considered its enemies. With most Georgians seeing Russia as their main geopolitical foe, this creates a lack of trust between Georgians and Armenians according to the respondent. In the second quote, the respondent references separatist movements which were active in Javakheti during the 90s, and early 2000s, but have not been very visible

[187] Respondent #4
[188] Respondent #6
[189] Respondent #6

or relevant for many years now. This reference echoes the ideas of the activist respondent who pointed out that current perceptions of Armenians in Javakheti are influenced by the events in the region since independence, and history generally, not just by what the status quo is currently in the region.

Public Perceptions Conclusion

The interview data suggests that the perception of Armenians living in Georgia is generally not very positive among their ethnic Georgian co-citizens, and that as perceived by the respondents, doubts about the minority's allegiance to Georgia are commonplace among ethnic Georgians generally, and among politicians as well. This context supports the accounts of the respondents who spoke of a securitizing mindset among the SSS, as the perceptions of the SSS in this case simply match those of much of the ethnic Georgian population. Furthermore, if, as the interview data suggests, the idea that Armenians are not loyal to the state is already commonplace among the ethnic Georgian public, it could explain why the securitization is a non-discursive one, that is without speech acts labeling the minority a threat, because the majority 's perception of the minority is already not far from this.

Is securitization taking place? – Conclusion

The two respondents who did not believe that securitization was taking place work at a Tbilisi think tank which focuses on "strategic studies" – a field related to security studies, and certainly one which concerns itself with state security. I had the impression that these respondents saw securitization as either something like a dirty word or an extreme situation, a light in which they did not want to show the relationship between Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state. Nonetheless, both of these experts and their strategic studies focused think see minority regions as an important topic to be studied. When asked why their organization studies and reports on Javakheti, they responded because it is a vulnerable region and integrating minorities makes the state stronger.

"*We pay more attention to these [vulnerable] regions because we would like to integrate national minorities into the state better. We also work with ethnic Georgian religious minorities, because they also have integration challenges, and we work with IDPs mostly from Ossetia because they have different problems, they are vulnerable groups we work with, not because they are a threat but because they are more vulnerable than the majority and we as a state will be stronger if they have better integration policies. If they do more in politics, economics, in policy making and do not feel isolated and vulnerable, because from these problems, from vulnerabilities you get other problems as well."*[190]

[190] Respondent #3

This could be interpreted as a completely non-securitized approach, or also as perception of a security threat and simply dealing with the threat in constructive ways. Both respondents also stated that they see Russian influence as a threat to Georgia, and one said that those Armenians under Russian influence are seen by their organization as a threat.

Both experts also agreed that securitization had taken place in the past, specifically during the years of the UNM governments under president Mikheil Saakashvili. They at times admitted that a "*security approach*"[191] may exist among some parts of the government, but disagreed with the statement that the government or even the State Security Service sees Javakheti Armenians as a threat to the state. Considering these experts agreed that security practices happened under the previous government, and that two activist respondents provided concrete examples and mechanisms by which securitization was taking place currently, one of which spoke with a former secretary of the National Security Council who said the security practices continued under the Georgian Dream government, the evidence from the interviews conducted weighs on the side that there is an ongoing securitization of Javakheti Armenians. A study of such limited dimensions as this one cannot assert this claim as an absolute truth, but the evidence collected suggests that the SSS perceives Javakheti Armenians as a threat, and employs security practices against them.

5.2. The How of Securitization – Mechanisms, Actors, Effects

The following section will focus on the details and mechanics of the security practices employed by security actors against Javakheti Armenians, the constituent parts of the ongoing securitization, and the effects it has on the minority and interethnic relations. This is an important part of the findings of this research because the relatively small number of respondents means that the research cannot assert with much certainty that a securitization is ongoing. However, thanks to the in-depth nature and freedom for expression of their own ideas which the respondents had in the open-ended interviews, the data collected gives detailed descriptions of the interaction between the Georgian state and Javakheti Armenians, as well as the experiences of the respondent activists and experts. The further details on what many respondents believe to be an ongoing securitization also strengthens the argument that the minority is securitized.

The "Clan System"

The most interesting insight about the mechanics of the security practices exercised by the SSS in Javakheti came from a minority rights activist who described how local business elites and their informal

[191] Respondent #3

power networks are coopted by the center and given power and legitimacy through formal institutions to keep the opposition and separatist activism to a minimum in the region. This was already alluded to in first section on findings, where this activist spoke about the habitus present among the SSS. The ongoing existence of the "clan system" in Javakheti as the principal means of governance in the region is in line with Kopecek's findings in his 2019 "Trapped in Informality"[192] study on informality in Javakheti.[193] Kopecek[194], as well as Metreveli[195], both state that fear of Armenian nationalism and separatism in the region was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the informal institution of coopting Javakheti business elites and their informal networks to govern the region. Kopecek further contends that fear of Armenian separatism in Javakheti is one of the reasons why the system stayed in place under government of three different parties, from Shevardnadze's UCG to Saakashvili's UNM to today's GD.[196] This, coupled with the perspective of one activist respondent who believed that the SSS and the "clans" work together to suppress political opposition in the region creates a link between the securitization and governance through elite cooptation in Javakheti.

"I had interviews with several people from the previous government like Giga Bokeria[197], who were the people dealing with security issues, and their position was that 'we had troubles keeping Armenians in' so what we did we brought in certain people from the Armenian community to control the situation and we gave them all the powers they needed, like Enzel Mkoyan[198]. Their definition was that after Saakashvili left the Georgian Dream followed the same path."[199]

To this they added: "*So UNM and GD are very different two political parties but still having the same policies and even the same people in power in Parliament. Now GD changed that guy but for the previous two elections GD had Enzel Mkoyan in power. Until 2020. And he was controlling the situation from the inside, from the community*."[200]

The respondent names Enzel Mkoyan, an ex-member of parliament as an example of the local elites who were/are coopted by the center to keep order in Javakheti. He points out that after the power

[192] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality"
[193] See Chapter 2, Informality, 15-18
[194] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68
[195] Metreveli, "Conflicting", 8
[196] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68
[197] Secretary of the National Security Council from 2010 to 2013
[198] Member of National Parliament representing Javakheti (Ninotsminda District) from 1994 to 2020
[199] Respondent #5
[200] Respondent #5

transition from UNM to Georgian Dream, Mkoyan also transitioned between the two parties, always representing the party in power. In the case of Enzel Mkoyan this is also true for the previous power transition through the Rose revolution, as Mkoyan was an MP for the ruling Union of Citizens of Georgia party in the Shevardnadze years before switching alliance to UNM once they became the ruling party. Mkoyan is also considered by multiple authors writing on Javakheti informality as, for a long period, the head of the most powerful clan in Javakheti.[201]

The other part of the equation which allowed Mkoyan to stay in power for more than two decades through three different ruling parties is the fact that minority regions of Georgia consistently vote for the ruling party.[202] This is a feature of the clan system, as informal networks (for example the one headed by Mkoyan) are leveraged by their leaders to extract votes in support of their candidates for public office.[203] So to be elected so many times it is not surprising that this coincides with Mkoyan's changing allegiances to always be a candidate for the ruling party. According to the respondent Mkoyan is a Javakheti elite who was coopted by the center and given (or perhaps in this case allowed to stay in) power through his formal position as member of Parliament. This corresponds with the Kopecek's findings, as states "Today the dominant economic network in Javakheti seems to be that of Enzel Mkoyan"[204]. The respondent suggests that Mkoyan was supported by the MIA and the SSS, giving more details about the system of elite cooptation and each sides motivations to participate in it, all which broadly agree with the academic literature on the Javakheti "clan system"[205]:

"*Here's the problem about Javakheti, along with securitization I think you should look at the clan system. I think its interconnected, when it's so much securitized, the region, usually it brings some clans to rule the securitized region, because Tbilisi says I don't trust these people, so what should I do? I should bring powerful people who are loyal to me personally. So that was the guy Enzel Mkoyan*."[206]

"*And when its clans from the local minority community it's really hard for the local activists to fight for equality because it's not ethnic Georgians or the system of SSS who interrogates you, but it's the clan member from your group, ruling party member comes to you and says it's a shame you're a smart guy or*

[201] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 66; Wheatley, "The Integration", 22
[202] Ibid, 22-24; Veloy Mateu, "The Armenian Minority", 34
[203] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68
[204] Ibid, 69
[205] See Chapter 2, Informality, 15-18
[206] Respondent #5

girl you should jump in our boat or they're gonna beat you up or create a problem for your family at a very local level."[207]

The respondent explained their understanding of the personal clientelistic relationship between local elites and those in Tbilisi, where local elites and their informal power networks (referred to by the respondent and locals as "clans")[208] are legitimized by the center through their formal offices and are in turn expected to keep opposition and separatist activity in the minority region to a minimum. If so, this would likely be both a product and a cause of the low level of political engagement and dominance of the ruling party in the region which many respondents mentioned. Also notable here, is the respondent's point that opposition intimidation is usually done not by the SSS itself, but rather by members of the clans or informal power networks who are better connected in the minority community. Clans and specifically the clan of Enzel Mkoyan were mentioned by two other respondents, who alluded to Javakheti being in many ways controlled by informal power networks.

The respondent's perceptions of how Javakheti is governed through cooptation of elite informal networks closely aligns with the observations made by Kopecek in his 2019 analysis of informal practices in Javakheti. While this activist respondent perceived this system to be operating in Javakheti in the present, other respondents portrayed this as the situation in the past, and no longer the status quo. Nonetheless, the scope of this research, and what can be understood in a wider sense as the political present in Georgia is the period starting with the power transition from UNM to GD in 2013, and notably Mkoyan was only voted out of office in 2020. Importantly, this was not because an opposition candidate won, but because Mkoyan was no longer the ruling party candidate, having seemingly fallen out of favor with central elites.

The respondent gave further insight into the relationship between Tbilisi and Javakheti elites:

"*Basically, when its securitized it stands on the personal relations from the center to the leader of local community so you should look at how clans are controlling the situation in the securitized reality. Maybe how it helps the system to keep security in place because this leader sometimes says if not me, you're gonna have a problem. You're gonna have person like Vahagn Chakhalyan*[209] *or I'm gonna create a problem for you if you don't give me this and that."*[210]

[207] Respondent #5
[208] Wheatley, "The integration", 21
[209] Leader of United Javakhk, Armenian nationalist party in Javakheti
[210] Respondent #5

Here the respondent explained how the local elites can bargain with the Tbilisi elites by using the threat of separatism. Vahagn Chakhalyan was the leader of the separatist movement United Javakhk, which has in recent times lost political relevance, but was active in Javakheti especially in the 2000s. How recently Javakheti elites still bargained with Tbilisi for more power benefits with the threat of allowing more separatist organizing the respondent could not say, but such a dynamic would further attest to the securitized nature of the relationship between state and minority, or the perceived threat from Javakheti.

These statements from the activist respondent suggest that governance in Javakheti has little to do with democracy but rather that local business elites use their informal power networks to stay in power and suppress dissent while being legitimized and empowered by the central government. This matches the findings of Kopecek[211] and Wheatley[212] on Javakheti governance[213]. The government legitimizes the (originally informal) elites by giving them official government positions in return for assurances that separatist voices and activity will be suppressed and that that Javakheti will remain an electoral stronghold of the ruling party. The Javakheti elites ensure this by using their informal power networks to intimidate separatist and opposition activists through threats to their family.

Minority Securitization, or Opposition Securitization?

The security practices which this respondent and others spoke about were all connected to political opposition which again brings the question of whether it may be more accurate to speak of a securitization of political opposition than a securitization of the minority. Relevant to this debate is the fact that Georgia has experienced democratic backsliding[214] and a deterioration in the human rights conditions[215] over the past few years, with the government abusing and expanding its powers in order to suppress political opposition throughout the country. This has accompanied a significant upswing in polarization in the country, which has seen the ruling party, GD, accuse the opposition of attempting to stage a coup, and then use this conspiracy theory to justify the deterioration of democracy in the country.[216]. While interview data suggests that security practices have been employed against Armenians in Javakheti, the government has been using some similar security practices against political opposition and opposition media[217] over the last several years. Central to this deterioration of human rights in Georgia

[211] Kopecek, “Trapped in Informality”
[212] Wheatley “The integration” 20-30
[213] See Chapter 2, Informality, 15-18
[214] Caliskan, “Democratic Backsliding in Georgia”
[215] De Waal, “How Georgia Stumbled”
[216] Nodia, “The influence of the Russian Invasion”
[217] U.S. Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia."

has been the State Security Service,[218] who's powers have been expanded through a 2022 bill loosening restrictions on state surveillance and who were also implicated in the 2021 leaks of recorded conversations of opposition politicians.[219] This can be understood as an abuse of state institutions by the government to promote the interests of the ruling party, chiefly its interest in staying in power, which is also a theme raised by multiple respondents. One expert, a Javakheti Armenian, spoke of an evolution in the security practices that the community has experienced:

"In Javakheti there's no longer a need to fight for the integrity of the state, so that's why these structures now fight for the security of the ruling party… Actually, I just realized that they went from protecting the state to protecting the ruling party, just now in our conversation."[220]

This echoes what other respondents said about the degree of securitization of Javakheti improving over time, contrasting the situation today and generally under the Georgian Dream governments compared to the 2000's when UNM was in power and before, with two respondents stating that the minority is no longer securitized. A shift from securitization of the minority to a securitization of opposition would suggest that the region is perceived as less of a threat than in the past, as interview data suggests that opposition is securitized and suppressed throughout Georgia. Nonetheless, as discussed in the first section of the results chapter, the interview data suggests that opposition in Javakheti and other minority-dominated regions is subjected to greater intimidation and suppression than what happens in the rest of Georgia.

When asked how this suppression experienced by opposition in Javakheti compared with how opposition was treated in other ethnic Georgian dominated regions, the respondent said:

"I'm not sure I can judge it objectively, but I think the tendency of the SSS and Ministry of Internal Affairs to support the ruling party is everywhere. But in Javakheti the SSS has a wider influence and they do more here because they have more influence over the daily lives of normal people. Because here they have more privileges and power, but the dynamic is going to be present elsewhere as well."[221]

The respondent saw this as a wider trend in the Georgian state institutions and public, which more than half of respondents also mentioned: the government and the ruling party are often considered to be

[218] Ibid
[219] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "A Massive Purported State Surveillance Leak"
[220] Respondent #7
[221] Respondent #7

one and the same. The interests of the ruling party are understood as the interests of the state, and the powers and resources of state institutions are devoted to supporting the ruling party:

"These services [SSS] have switched to those who are against the ruling party because the ruling party and the government are the same for many people. People say, 'My wife works in the municipal government, how can I go for a meeting with the opposition party?' and the person says so not because someone told him he shouldn't go, but from his own initiative. The ruling party and the government and its budget are of course not the same! But the ruling party does everything to keep this mentality around, so they use the SSS to uphold this idea."[222]

The respondent sees this dynamic of state and ruling party fusion as something promoted by the security services, and instrumentalized to keep the party in power. State institutions being used to support the ruling party is what most respondents spoke about, and none contradicted, but the widespread belief that this is normal among people in Javakheti (as the respondent suggests) facilitates the abuse of state institutions by the ruling party. Respondents generally stated that the conflation of ruling party with the state is not unique to Javakheti, but is especially strong in Javakheti, suggesting that the higher levels of opposition intimidation and low levels of education, integration, and political participation[223] all contribute to this situation. Importantly for the argument of securitization, the respondent from Javakheti said that the SSS are aware of this public misconception and do all they can to promote this idea.

Political Disengagement

The same respondent also expressed that the conflation of ruling party and state coupled with a general political disengagement leads to votes being cast on the basis of allegiance to the state as their employer, the state as an employer of a relative, or personal connection to a party campaigner. This suggests that in minority-dominated regions of Georgia people who are employed by the state (such as teachers and workers in the municipal government) feel compelled to vote for the ruling party with the scarcity of formal employment contributing to the close allegiance which those employed by the state feel a need to demonstrate. Political disengagement seems to be an important part of the puzzle in how securitization works in the region, as it is both a product and a result of the security practices.

"When representatives of the ruling party come to some village in Javakheti (every village has a few campaigners), and they come to their neighbor or relative and say: 'please go vote for this number in the

[222] Respondent #7
[223] See Chapter 2, Politics of Javakheti, 15

next election.' And they respond 'Why, do you need me to?' and he says, 'Well yeah I need it, I'm a campaigner so I get paid for this, so I need you to do it.' So imagine how passive a person must be not to care who he votes for and just does it because someone says he needs him to vote this way."[224]

Later adding: "*People don't consider themselves part of the electorate, part of a democratic country.*"[225] This is in line with how a Tbilisi expert saw political engagement in the region, saying that because locals watch more Russian news than Georgian news and a lack of civic education, they are better informed about the Russian political system than the Georgian one[226]. The Javakheti respondent further explained this as such:

"*All of this stems from economic dependence because a person thinks if he doesn't leave [Georgia] then he won't be able to feed his family. And so then he no longer economically participates in the state, and doesn't tie himself economically to the government. They care more about a good exchange rate from the Ruble to Lari*."[227]

This suggests that informal networks and clientelism not only shape elite politics in Javakheti, but that also on an individual level, people are more likely to vote based on someone in their own network having a connection to a political party. The political disengagement is both (partially) a result of the security practices against opposition and political activism, and in turn reinforces the existing system of informal "clan" rule in Javakheti. While further research into this theory would be needed to bring more certainty about the role of political disengagement, the interview data points to a system based on clientelism and loyalty both on the elite level, and among voters, rather than a system driven by ideological or policy preferences, competence, and merit. The system is supported and perpetuated not only from the Javakheti elites, but also by the central government which sees it as a reliable way to suppress separatism and opposition in the region[228]. This is supported by respondents' accounts of informal networks of business elites dominating formal politics, cooptation of these elites by the center, suppression of opposition through informal networks with the support of the SSS, and a disengaged electorate which votes based on allegiances to employer or personal network, thereby supporting the elites who are backed by the ruling party.

[224] Respondent #7
[225] Respondent #7
[226] Respondent #1
[227] Respondent #7
[228] Kopecek, "Trapped in Informality", 68

6. Conclusion

The key findings of this thesis can be distilled into two points, the first of which is on the existence of securitization. Three respondents experienced or perceived what can be labeled security practices (either recently or under the UNM administration), which were implemented largely through the State Security Service. These security practices are the bugging of activist's phones and the intimidation of opposition candidates in the runup to elections. Even more respondents believed that the SSS perceives Javakheti Armenians as a threat to state security, based on either conversations with government officials associated with the SSS, or on what respondents perceived to be an extensive involvement of the SSS in Javakheti. Furthermore, multiple respondents believed that doubts about Javakheti Armenians' loyalty to the Georgian state were commonplace among Georgians. These elements aggregated suggest that there is a securitizing habitus towards Javakheti Armenians among the SSS, which in combination with the perceived security practices employed by the SSS constitutes a case of Balzacqian securitization.

The second point is the interplay of securitization and informality in Javakheti. Shevardnadze established the informal institution of coopting informal business elites from Javakheti and giving them the top political offices in the region. This was motivated by his concerns over Armenian nationalism and separatism, and the continued existence (as perceived by respondents) of this institution suggests that Javakheti is still seen as a separatist threat by the elites in power in Tbilisi. The informal networks of these elites, (such as Enzel Mkoyan's until 2020), are used alongside the SSS to execute the security practice of candidate intimidation, in order to fulfil their half of the arrangement with Tbilisi: ensure electoral victories in Javakheti for the ruling party. In return the Javakheti elites are allowed to use their positions in the government to benefit their business interests, thereby enriching themselves and the members of their informal networks. The motivations of Tbilisi elites in sustaining this informal institution, and the involvement of the "clans" in security practices is what ties informality and securitization together.

As mentioned in the section on limitations, the interview data for this thesis was gathered from a small unrepresentative sample, therefore the findings produced cannot be taken as conclusive. More research and data collection should be conducted before the suggestions from this thesis could be solidified into an academic consensus. Nonetheless, the findings regarding the securitizing habitus of the State Security Service and the link between perceptions of threat in the form of separatist sentiments and governance through cooptation of informal elites fits well into the existing web of knowledge about

Javakheti, and could fill existing gaps in the collective academic understating of the region. The findings of this thesis could also point to solutions for Georgia's minorities policy which could improve in both integration of minorities and in respecting their individual and collective rights.

While this research has largely presented securitization in a negative light, it is worth acknowledging the legitimacy and value in honestly assessing the security risks which a country, or any entity worth maintaining, faces. The process of evaluating and naming threats should not be construed as inherently oppressive to the identified threats, but rather what policy follows the identification of a threat can be where the problems arise. In the example of Javakheti, a more ideal state would perhaps devote more resources and intensify integration efforts which do not encroach on the individual or collective rights of the minority and its individual members.

An opportunity for further research which arises from this thesis is an update on the status of the "clan system". Kopecek's thorough and comprehensive account of informality in Javakheti was published in 2019 (and based on interviews conducted only as recently as 2017), a year before Enzel Mkoyan and the Georgian Dream parted ways and a new Armenian candidate took Mkoyan's seat in the national parliament. Mkoyan was a mainstay of Javakheti politics since the Shevardnadze era, and Kopecek as well as other scholars identified him as the head of the most powerful network in Javakheti. Therefore, his departure from the Ninotsminda parliamentary seat could mean that politics in Javakheti have taken a meaningful step towards relative normalization, and away from the system of informal elite cooptation. However, it is also possible that the central elites simply decided to put an end to his informal networks period of dominance in favor of a different one, under the same basic agreement and roles.

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Annex: Index of respondents

Respondent Alias	Description	Based in	Interview date
Respondent #1	Expert on Minority Policy in Georgia	Tbilisi	08/06/2022
Respondent #2	Security Expert with experience in Minority issues	Tbilisi	13/07/2022
Respondent #3	Security Expert with experience in Minority issues	Tbilisi	26/07/2022
Respondent #4	Minority Rights Activist	Tbilisi	31/05/2023
Respondent #5	Minority Rights Activist	Tbilisi	07/06/2023
Respondent #6	Expert on Minority Policy in Georgia	Vienna	15/06/2023
Respondent #7	Ethnic Armenian Journalist in Javakheti	Akhalkalaki	15/06/2023