

# FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES OF ARMENIANS AZERIS LIVING IN GEORGIA

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## Abstract

This research presents an in-depth study on the acculturation strategies of ethnic minorities in Georgia, with a specific focus on Armenians and Azeris. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to identify the factors significantly influencing the choice of acculturation strategies. Societal factors such as age, education, knowledge of the state language, perception of ethnic equality, and religious practices, and personal characteristics like locus of control, self-esteem, and optimism were found to be significant predictors. Armenians predominantly adopt an integration strategy, while Azeris favor separation. The research also discovered a complex interplay between societal attitudes, the process of integration, and the formation of social bonds like marriage, especially in the context of the critical role of religion in Georgian society. The findings provide valuable insights for policy development aimed at facilitating better integration and social cohesion in Georgia's multicultural context

**Keywords:** *Acculturation, ethnic minorities, integration, Georgia, societal factors.*

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## 1. Introduction

Georgia is a multicultural nation, home to a variety of ethnic groups, as reported by numerous researchers. It is estimated that one in six residents is a minority, most of whom live in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. According to the 2014 census conducted by GeoStat, the majority ethnic group is Georgians, comprising 86.8% of the population. Following them are Azeris at 6.3%, Armenians at 4.5%, with other ethnicities accounting for the remaining 2%. Despite this diversity, the integration of ethnic minorities remains a challenging issue. Various strategies are being used to facilitate acculturation.

The research at hand aims to investigate the factors that influence the selection of integration as an acculturation strategy. It hypothesizes that the attitudes of the dominant ethnic Georgians towards the Armenian and Azeri minorities, and the acculturation strategies chosen by these groups, significantly impact the success of their integration. It seeks to identify the elements that either hinder or facilitate the acculturation process among minorities, providing valuable insights that could inform policy development. The following hypothesis were tested:

H1: Armenians and Azeris living in Georgia prefer the integration strategy out of the four acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization).

H2: The high level of religiosity of Armenians and Azeris living in Georgia will be negatively related to the strategy of assimilation and integration and will be positively related to the strategy of separation and marginalization

H3: Self-esteem has a positive relationship with the strategy of integration and a negative relationship with the strategy of marginalization; Integration strategy is positively related to internal locus of control and negatively related to external locus of control; The integration strategy is negatively related to the loneliness rate.

H4: Ethnic Georgians have a negative stereotypical attitude towards ethnic minorities and they express assimilationist attitudes towards ethnic minorities living in Georgia

## 2. Acculturation

Acculturation was initially seen as a linear process, where individuals shift from retaining their original culture to assimilating into the host culture (Graves, 1967). This one-dimensional model was

further expanded by sociologist Milton Gordon (1964), who considered acculturation a sub-process of assimilation where biculturalism is only a transitional phase leading to complete assimilation.

However, this thesis examines acculturation as a bidirectional process, as proposed by Berry (2005) and Bourhis (1997). Berry's theory, modified over the years, identified four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The host group can also choose four different responses to the minority group: multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion.

Studies have shown that integration is the most successful strategy for minority groups, followed by assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry et al., 1989). Bourhis et al. (1997) expanded Berry's model and introduced the Interactional Model of Acculturation (IAM), which states that the expectations of the dominant group impact the acculturation strategy chosen by the minority group.

Acculturation research has evolved from viewing it as a one-sided phenomenon to considering it from a two-sided perspective. There are three approaches to measuring acculturation: bipolar, two-dimensional, and four-dimensional. This dissertation uses Declan Barry's (2001) East Asian Immigrant Acculturation Assessment Scale (EAAM), based on John Berry's acculturation strategies, to measure acculturation as it considers acculturation a multidimensional phenomenon.

In summary, acculturation research has evolved from a one-dimensional to a two-dimensional model, considering both the acceptance and attitudes of the minority and majority groups. The chosen acculturation strategy by the minority group is influenced by the attitudes of the host culture.

### 3. Methodology

This research relied on the East Asian Immigrants' Acculturation Assessment Scale (EAAM), which was modified for the Georgian context by Shekrladze in 2017. This scale measures the four dimensions of acculturation as defined by Berry: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Unlike other measures, the EAAM approaches acculturation as a multidimensional phenomenon that appears at different stages, evaluates attitudes and behavior in different situations, and each statement of the scale measures a different area. The scale is not ambiguous or triad, and statements do not overlap each other (Barry, 2001).

The research methodology consisted of several stages. During the first stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts. The second and fourth stages employed quantitative methods and involved a total of 452 participants from Azeri and Armenian communities, as well as 1,200 ethnic Georgians. In the third stage, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with ethnic minorities to supplement the quantitative data collected.

The research employed purposive sampling methods. Initially, available sampling, a non-probability method, was used for conducting 15 expert interviews. The second and third stages used convenient and snowball sampling for quantitative and qualitative research involving ethnic minorities, with 452 participants for the former and 42 for the latter.

Purposive sampling facilitated participant selection based on specific criteria, ensuring representativeness and yielding insights into the experiences and perspectives of ethnic minorities and Georgians in Georgia.

Quotas were allocated according to regional population distributions, settlement types, gender, and age. Interviewers used a 3-step free incidence method to find suitable respondents, applying the last birthday rule for free quotas.

A self-administered questionnaire was used for the survey, delivered via a door-to-door approach with interviewers assisting as needed. The final stage implemented quota sampling to ensure proportional representation, resulting in 1200 face-to-face interviews across Georgia, excluding occupied territories.

### 4. Results and discussion

The research provides an in-depth examination of the acculturation strategies of two ethnic groups in Georgia, Armenians and Azeris. Acculturation is a process in which an individual adopts, acquires and adjusts to a new cultural environment. In this context, Armenians (mean score: 4.15, standard deviation: 2.02) predominantly adopt an integration strategy, assimilating some features of the host culture, which involves a balance of maintaining their own cultural identity while also adopting the cultural practices of the Georgian society.

Contrastingly, Azeris (mean score: 3.50, standard deviation: 1.24) were found to favor the separation strategy. This strategy involves maintaining their native culture and minimally adopting the practices of the host culture. They focus more on their native culture, indicating a strong sense of ethnic preservation and less assimilation of Georgian culture.

Table 1.

Ethnicity		Assimilation	Separation	Integration	Marginalization
Armenian	Mean	2,18	3,66	4,15	2,13
	St. Deviation	1,16	1,61	2,02	0,88
Azeri	Mean	2,43	3,50	3,40	2,85
	St. Deviation	1,14	0,95	1,24	0,83
Total	Mean	2,31	3,58	3,75	2,51
	St. Deviation	1,15	1,30	1,69	0,92

In the process of this research, the perceptions within Georgian society towards these ethnic minorities were analyzed. The data revealed a tendency towards negative perceptions of ethnic minorities, especially Armenians living in Georgia. They were negatively characterized in a significant majority of cases, approximately 86.8%.

Table 2.

Georgian		Azeri		Armenian	
Patriot	32.1%	Hardworker	43.1%	Hardworker	18.3%
Hospitable	27.6%	Friendly	18.8%	Stingy	17.6%
Traditional	18.7%	Kind	10.9%	Friendly	12.9%
Manly	15.2%	Traditional	10.2%	Devil	12.1%
Hardworker	14.6%	Believer	7.7%	Scammer	8.9%
Faithful	13.3%	Faithful	5.9%	Traitor	5.4%
Proud	13.3%	A historic neighbor	3.4%	Kind	5.3%
Believer	12.6%	Assertive	3.1%	Greedy	5.3%

On the other hand, Azeris were generally viewed more positively within Georgian society. However, despite these attitudes, ethnic Georgians themselves were negatively characterized in only 25.1% of cases. This contrast in perceptions towards different ethnic groups presents an intriguing aspect of Georgian societal attitudes.

Interestingly, despite the negative characterization of Armenians, it was found that Georgians displayed a higher willingness to start a family with Armenians than with Azeris. This finding, despite Azeris being more positively characterized overall, was statistically significant ( $t(1199)=3.2$ ;  $p=0.001$ ), indicating a complex interplay of factors influencing such personal decisions regarding family formation. Further, when respondents were asked about the most important factors when starting a family, over half (58%) indicated that religion is essential. Language was the next significant factor at 21.2%, with ethnicity close behind at 20.8%. These responses highlight the integral role of religion in Georgian society and its influence on personal and social decisions.

These findings suggest a complex relationship between positive societal attitudes, the process of integration, and the formation of social bonds such as marriage. While positive attitudes towards a minority group can encourage those individuals to opt for an integration strategy, it is evident that positive attitudes alone do not necessarily lead to deeper social bonds like marriage.

This relationship is particularly relevant in Georgia, where religion plays a critical role in cultural identity. The research thus concludes that while positive societal attitudes towards a minority group can encourage integration, other significant factors like religion greatly influence important social decisions like choosing a marriage partner. This, in turn, affects the choice of acculturation strategy adopted by ethnic minorities in Georgia.

In a detailed research study using multiple linear regression analysis, various factors were identified that significantly influenced the choice of acculturation strategies. The strategy of integration was mainly influenced by factors such as age, education, knowledge of the state language, perception of

ethnic equality, and religious practices. In statistical terms, these factors accounted for 65.6% of the variance in integration ( $R^2=.656$ ,  $F(11)=76.235$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

The study also analyzed the role of personal characteristics in choosing the integration strategy. It was found that locus of control, self-esteem, and optimism significantly predicted integration, but they accounted for only 25% of the relationship ( $R^2=.25$ ,  $F(3)=49.799$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). When data was analysed for ethnic Armenians, personal factors such as locus of control, optimism, trust, and self-esteem were found to be significant, predicting 41% of the integration rate ( $R^2=.41$ ,  $F(4)=35.583$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

The study further explored the predictors of the assimilation strategy. Here, factors like age, knowledge of the state language, perception of ethnic equality, religious practices, job opportunities, and trust in government significantly influenced the tendency towards assimilation. They explained 52.8% of the variance ( $R^2=.528$ ,  $F(9)=55.043$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, personal characteristics could predict only 21.2% of the choice of the assimilation strategy ( $R^2=.212$ ,  $F(4)=29.986$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). For ethnic Armenians, personal characteristics predicted 46.7% of the variance for assimilation ( $R^2=.467$ ,  $F(3)=60.088$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

The separation strategy was determined by factors such as age, education, knowledge of the state language, religious beliefs, trust in institutions, and financial status. These accounted for 48.4% of the variation ( $R^2=.484$ ,  $F(7)=59.461$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). When it came to personal characteristics, they predicted the choice of separation strategy by 17.3% ( $R^2=.173$ ,  $F(4)=23.364$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). For ethnic Armenians, personal characteristics predicted the choice of separation strategy by 44.3% ( $R^2=.443$ ,  $F(4)=40.838$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Lastly, the strategy of marginalization showed significant relationships only with the personal characteristics of ethnic minorities. Specifically, loneliness, locus of control, and self-esteem were the predictors, accounting for 46% of the variance ( $R^2=.46$ ,  $F(3)=127.357$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). For ethnic Armenians, the predictors of marginalization were loneliness index and locus of control, which accounted for a significant 69.4% of the variance ( $R^2=.694$ ,  $F(2)=235.246$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this extensive research has provided valuable insights into the acculturation strategies of ethnic minorities in Georgia. It is clear that both societal factors and personal characteristics play significant roles in determining the chosen acculturation strategy. The adoption of integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization strategies depends on various factors, including age, education, language proficiency, religious practices, financial status, locus of control, self-esteem, and optimism.

The research also highlights the complex interplay of societal attitudes, personal characteristics, and the process of integration. Despite the generally negative societal attitudes towards Armenians, they are more likely to choose integration, influenced by their personal characteristics and societal factors. On the other hand, Azeris tend to choose separation, maintaining more of their native culture.

Moreover, the critical role of religion in Georgian society, manifested in choices related to marriage and family formation, significantly influences the choice of acculturation strategy. This research underscores the need for policy development to facilitate better integration and social cohesion in Georgia's multicultural context.

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