



Georgian

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Profile	6
Introduction	6
Geography	7
Area	7
Geographic Divisions	7
Climate	8
Major Cities	9
Tbilisi	9
Batumi	9
Kutaisi	9
Mtskheta	10
History	10
Competing Powers	10
Soviet Georgia	11
Independence	11
Recent Events	11
Government	12
Media	13
Economy	13
Ethnic Groups and Languages	14
Chapter 1 Profile, Assessment	16
Chapter 1 Profile, Assessment Answers	17
Chapter 2 Religion	18
Overview	18
Major Religions	19
Georgian Orthodox Church	19
Russian Orthodox Church	19
Armenian Apostolic Church	20
Islam	20

<i>Other religions</i>	20
Role of Religion in Government	21
Religion in Daily Life	22
Religious Holidays	23
Buildings of Worship	24
Behavior in Places of Worship	24
Chapter 2 Religion, Assessment	25
Chapter 2 Religion, Assessment Answers	26
Chapter 3 Traditions	27
Introduction	27
Formulaic Codes of Politeness	28
Hospitality and Gift Giving	29
Eating Customs	29
<i>Supra</i>	31
Dress Codes	31
Non-religious Celebrations	32
Dos and Don'ts	33
<i>Do</i>	33
<i>Don't</i>	33
Chapter 3 Traditions, Assessment	34
Chapter 3 Traditions, Assessment Answers	35
Chapter 4 Urban Life	36
Introduction	36
Urban Challenges	37
<i>Urban Economy</i>	37
<i>Pollution</i>	37
<i>Urban Housing</i>	39
<i>Internally Displaced Persons</i>	39
Urban Health Care	40
Education	41
Restaurants	42

Marketplaces	44
Urban Traffic and Transportation	45
Street Crime	47
Chapter 4 Urban Life, Assessment	48
Chapter 4 Urban Life, Assessment Answers	49
Chapter 5 Rural Life	50
Introduction	50
Land Tenure and Distribution	51
Rural Economy	52
Rural Transportation	53
Rural Healthcare	54
Rural Education	55
Who's in Charge?	56
Border Crossings and Checkpoints	58
<i>Border Crossings</i>	58
<i>Checkpoints</i>	59
Landmines	59
Chapter 5 Rural Life, Assessment	60
Chapter 5 Rural Life, Assessment Answers	61
Chapter 6 Family Life	62
Introduction	62
Typical Household and Family Structure	63
Status of Women in the Family	64
Status of Elders, Adolescents, and Children	65
<i>Elders</i>	65
<i>Adolescents</i>	66
<i>Children</i>	66
Marriage, Divorce, and Birth	66
<i>Marriage</i>	66
<i>Divorce</i>	67
<i>Birth</i>	67

Family Events	68
<i>Weddings</i>	68
<i>Funerals</i>	68
<i>Rites of Passage</i>	69
Naming Conventions	69
Chapter 6 Family Life, Assessment	70
Chapter 6 Family Life, Assessment Answers	71
Further Readings and Resources.	72
Articles and Websites	72
Final Assessment	74
Final Assessment	74
Final Assessment Answers	77

Chapter 1 | Profile



The fields, hills, and mountains of the Svaneti region.
Public Domain

Introduction

Georgia is a country of contradictions. Its identity is neither wholly European nor Asian. It has been influenced by both Greek mythology and orthodox Christianity. The country is home to many ethnic and linguistic groups ; some trace their roots to the region’s prehistoric tribes while others reflect foreign influence. Today, Georgian society is deeply fractured, both politically and culturally.¹

Georgia lies between Europe and Asia. The Caucasus Mountains, traditionally the dividing line between the two continents, rise on Georgia’s northern and southern borders, creating an enclave on the shores of the Black Sea. Lying in the boundary between East and West, Georgia has found itself continually on the periphery of competing world powers. Over the centuries, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Russians have made their ways into Georgia, leaving distinct cultural influences.² Even the country’s name is evidence of foreign occupation. Georgia is called Sakartvelo in its native language, but the name “Georgia” (used by the outside world) came either from the term Gurj, used by Persians and Arabs, or from the earlier Greek geos.³

1 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 16.

2 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.

3 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 14.

Geography

Area

At 69,700 sq km (26,911 sq mi), Georgia is roughly the same size as the state of South Carolina. The country shares a border of 894 km (556 mi) with Russia to the north. A coastline of 310 km (193 mi) along the Black Sea forms its western border. Georgia's southern border runs alongside Turkey in the west for 273 km (170 mi), Armenia in the middle for 219 km (136 mi), and Azerbaijan in the east. The border with Azerbaijan runs 428 km (266 mi) and curves northward to form Georgia's eastern boundary.⁴

Geographic Divisions

The Greater Caucasus Mountains of the north, the Lesser Caucasus of the south, and the coastal lowlands of the west compose the country's main geographic divisions.⁵ The Greater Caucasus, which spans the northern part of the country and forms a natural border with Russia, is a series of high peaks and gorges. The chain's peaks reach more than 5,000 m (16,404 ft) and are covered in snow even in the summer.⁶ These mountains contain Georgia's highest point, Mount Shkhara, which rises to 5,193 m (17,037 ft).^{7, 8}

Dense swampland once dominated the coastal lowlands but a series of improvement projects in the early 20th century, including drainage canals and river embankments, have made the area a vital agricultural asset. Rivers originating in the Caucasus crisscross the lowlands and empty into the Black Sea. The lowlands are warm, but the cool waters of the Black Sea ease the summer heat. In winter the Caucasus Mountains shield the lowlands from the arctic cold. The Lesser Caucasus, as its name implies, is not as steep as its northern sibling. It forms a natural border with Georgia's southern neighbors.^{9, 10, 11, 12}

The Kartli Plain lies between the two mountain ranges in the center of the country. The Likhi Mountain range, an extension of the Caucasus that connects the Greater with the Lesser, forms a natural divide between the western and eastern regions of the country. In the eastern part of the country, largely uninhabited, the mountains taper off into an area of river basins and plateaus.^{13, 14, 15}

4 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

5 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 8.

6 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 16.

7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

8 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

9 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

10 Stratfor, "The Geography of the Caucasus," 25 June 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geography-caucasus>

11 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

12 G. Melvyn Howe et al., "Transcaucasia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Transcaucasia>

13 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.

14 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

15 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

Climate

Georgia's climate is considered subtropical but varies by region. A major contributor to the mild climate is the Greater Caucasus, which blocks cold air from the north. In the west of the country, the Black Sea provides an inflow of moist, warm air. The west sees about 1,000–2,500 mm (40–100 in) of rainfall per year, with fall and winter being the wettest seasons. The west experiences warm and mild winters with temperatures no lower than 0°C (32°F); temperatures are even warmer on the Black Sea coast. In the summer, temperatures average around 22°C (71°F). Regions at higher elevation experience a cooler climate.^{16, 17, 18}

East of the Likhi Mountains, the climate tends to be more continental.¹⁹ This part of the country is drier, with 406–1,422 mm (16–56 in) of rainfall per year. Winters here are the driest time of year and most rainfall occurs in late spring. The lowest temperatures occur in January, at 0–3°C (32–37°F), while the highest temperatures, about 25°C (77°F), are seen in July.^{20, 21}

Rivers and Lakes

Georgia has some 25,000 rivers. The Mtkvari River, also known as the Kura, is the longest river in Transcaucasia. It originates in Turkey, runs through Georgia and Azerbaijan, and empties into the Caspian Sea. Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, was founded on the banks of the Mtkvari.^{22, 23, 24, 25, 26}

The Rioni River, in Georgia's central lowlands, is the country's second-longest. In Greek mythology, it was the waterway navigated by Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. The Inguri River, in the northwest of the country, forms a natural border for the autonomous region of Abkhazia. Georgia has more than 850 lakes.^{27, 28, 29, 30}

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- 16 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 20.
- 17 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 18 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 19 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 20.
- 20 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 21 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 22 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.
- 23 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.
- 24 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 25 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kura River," 16 March 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kura-River>
- 26 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 27 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.
- 28 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.
- 29 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 30 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Inguri Dam," 22 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Inguri-Dam>

Major Cities

Reflecting Georgia's long history, several of its cities have served as capitals of former Georgian kingdoms. Kutaisi was the capital of Georgia from the late 10th to the early 12th century.³¹ Mtskheta was the capital of the kingdom of Kartli from 500 BCE to 500 CE. Telavi, though a small city today, was once the capital of the kingdom of Kakhetia.³² Furthermore, national identities are rooted in the capital cities of Georgia's self-declared independent provinces: Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, and Sokhumi, the capital of Abkhazia.^{33, 34}

Tbilisi

Tbilisi is Georgia's capital and economic and cultural hub. Founded on the shores of the Mtkvari River more than 1,500 years ago, Tbilisi has outlasted foreign rulers from both Europe and Asia. The city reflects this diverse history and is, in many ways, a microcosm of the multiethnic nature of the country. Today some 1.1 million people live in the city, which straddles both sides of the Mtkvari River. Tbilisi produces more than 35% of the country's industrial output and is a major engineering center for the building of locomotives, agricultural machinery, and electrical equipment. It is also home to Georgia's major educational and scientific institutions.^{35, 36, 37, 38}

Batumi

Georgia's second-largest city is Batumi, the capital of the autonomous region of Ajaria. Batumi's roots go back as far as the first millennium BCE. After coming under Ottoman control in the 16th century, the city was given to Russia in 1878. Today, Batumi is a vibrant and important port on the Black sea with a population of 166,000. Some of the city's economic activities are oil refining, shipbuilding, zinc plating, and citrus and tea growing. The city is also a seaside resort known for its beautiful gardens.^{39, 40, 41, 42}

Kutaisi

Situated in the heart of the central lowlands, Kutaisi is Georgia's third-largest city, with a population of roughly 138,000. In addition to being a center for coal mining and automotive industries, Kutaisi is also the country's western center for agriculture. Kutaisi dates back to a Greek colony in the seventh century BCE. According to legend, it was the ancient home of the Golden Fleece and the adjacent Rioni River allowed Jason and his Argonauts to sail in from the Black Sea.^{43, 44, 45, 46}

31 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 14.

32 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 90.

33 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

34 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

35 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 13.

36 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 90.

37 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

38 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Tbilisi," 23 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tbilisi>

39 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 14

40 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Batumi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Batumi>

41 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

42 In Your Pocket, "Batumi History Overview," 2014, https://www.inyourpocket.com/Batumi/History-Overview_73148f

43 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 91.

44 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

45 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 14.

46 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kutaisi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kutaisi>

Mtskheta

The small city of Mtskheta is in many ways the home of the Georgian identity. Christianity was first brought to Georgia in Mtskheta, and the first document using the alphabet of the Georgian language was written here. The city was Georgia's capital from the second to the fifth centuries, and its Cathedral of Sveti-Tskhoveli serves as the burial place of Georgia's kings. The Georgian Orthodox Church is headquartered in Mtskheta, and UNESCO lists the city as a World Heritage Site.^{47, 48}

History

Competing Powers

Modern Georgian culture has been shaped by foreign powers vying for the country's territory over the centuries. The protection of the Caucasus Mountains and the fertile lowlands appealed to settlers for millennia. By the second century BCE, Georgia was inhabited by cattle-raising tribes proficient in metallurgy. The Karli kingdom arose as peoples in the Mtkvari valley intermingled and accepted Christianity in 330 CE. Competition for the region from Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, and Mongol powers occurred in the centuries that followed.^{49, 50}

After the Ottomans captured Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) in 1453, Georgia was isolated from the western Christian world. The Ottoman Turks and Safavid Persians of present-day Iran vied for power in Georgia for several centuries, and each group left its mark. Descendants of Georgians deported to Persia may still be found in Iran, and Ottoman influence may be seen in the Muslim populations of Georgia's Abkhazia and Ajaria regions. When the power of the Persians began to wane in the early 18th century, the Russian Empire expanded. For much of the 18th century, Georgia was caught between competing foreign powers, but by 1801 Russia successfully incorporated Georgia into its empire.^{51, 52, 53}

Tsarist Russia supplanted Georgia's feudal system. By the end of the 19th century, radicals influenced by Karl Marx—among them Georgian-born Joseph Stalin—gained traction both in Georgia and throughout Russia. In 1917, after bitter fighting in World War I and economic collapse in Russia, Bolshevik revolutionaries successfully overthrew the Russian tsar. Georgia claimed its independence in the anarchy of the revolution, but Soviet forces took control of the country by 1921; in 1936 Georgia officially became a Soviet republic.^{54, 55, 56}

47 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 90–91.

48 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mtskheta," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mtskheta>

49 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

50 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

51 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 26–27.

52 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

53 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

54 Glenn L. Roberts, *Commissar and Mullah: Soviet-Muslim Policy from 1917 to 1924* (Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.com, 2007), 146–47.

55 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

56 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

Soviet Georgia

The Soviets brutally suppressed a Georgian rebellion in 1924. After Stalin came to power, he showed no favoritism toward his birthplace—expressions of nationalism were quashed, and Moscow kept a close eye on the republic. Georgia’s economy began to industrialize and improve until the German army invaded in 1941. Although Germany was never successful in its occupation of Georgia, it is estimated that 10% of Georgia’s population died during the war.^{57, 58, 59, 60}

After Stalin died in 1953, the USSR’s repressive grip on Georgia began to loosen. Symbols of the Georgian identity, such as language and literature, were once again promoted openly. By the time Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev began reforms in the mid-1980s, Georgian nationalism, long fomented through centuries of foreign rule, drove a referendum for independence.^{61, 62, 63, 64}

Independence

Georgia declared its independence in April of 1991, an act that became legal when the Soviet Union officially disbanded later that year. Independence precipitated immediate internal opposition and civil conflict. Ethnic minorities, nonparticipants in Georgia’s newly realized nationalism, began pushing for secession in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and tens of thousands of Georgians were forcibly relocated. The self-declared autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia became Georgia’s primary domestic concerns.^{65, 66, 67, 68, 69}

Recent Events

In 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in the wake of a “Rose Revolution” that ousted the previous leadership over corruption and election fraud. Saakashvili established trustworthy state institutions and gave Georgia a pro-European orientation. He was also quick to affirm the country’s territorial unity, prompting further hostilities in the autonomous regions. Tensions came to a head in August 2008 when Russian forces entered South Ossetia and supported separatist fighters in response to increased Georgian military action. The five-day war ended in a ceasefire but conflict continued because Russia formally recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent nations. Georgia responded by withdrawing its membership from the Commonwealth of Independent States, a regional organization of former Soviet nations, and strengthening its campaign for membership in NATO.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

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- 57 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 222–225.
 58 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 43.
 59 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
 60 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
 61 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 43.
 62 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
 63 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
 64 History.com, “Perestroika,” 14 November 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/perestroika-and-glasnost>
 65 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 44.
 66 Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*, Post-Soviet Politics Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 53–56.
 67 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
 68 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
 69 BBC News, “Georgia Profile—Timeline,” 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17303471>
 70 Human Rights Watch, “Russia/Georgia: All Parties in August/South Ossetia Conflict Violated Laws of War,” 23 January 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/22/russiageorgia-all-parties-augustsouth-ossetia-conflict-violated-laws-war>
 71 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
 72 BBC News, “Georgia Profile—Timeline,” 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17303471>
 73 *Economist*, “An Exiled Ex-president Plans a Comeback in Georgia,” 22 October 2020, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/10/22/an-exiled-ex-president-plans-a-comeback-in-georgia>

Saakashvili's government became unpopular over the slow pace of reform and allegations of corruption and human rights abuses. In the 2012 elections, Saakashvili's party lost power to the opposition Georgian Dream (GD) party, headed by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. After serving as prime minister, Ivanishvili retained behind-the-scenes political control and oversaw a series of GD prime ministers who slowly instituted electoral and economic reforms. The summer of 2019 saw brutal dispersions of anti-GD protests in Tbilisi calling for further reforms.^{74, 75}

Government

Georgia is a semipresidential republic. Overall, Georgia's political system is democratic and well-functioning, with competitive and free elections. In recent years, however, observers have noted a deterioration in the political process, with oligarchs wielding outsized influence and political interests displacing the rule of law.^{76, 77} A 2020 poll found that 59% of Georgians did not view the country as a democracy and that 64% disapproved of the government's performance.⁷⁸

In the executive branch, the president has the role of head of state and the prime minister is head of government. The current constitution, adopted in 1995, was amended in 2013 to reduce the powers of the president in favor of the prime minister and cabinet. Currently, the president is popularly elected to a maximum of two five-year terms. When constitutional reforms go into effect in 2024, the president will be chosen by an electoral college of 300 legislators and representatives. As of 2020, the president was Salome Zourabichvili and the prime minister Giorgi Gakharia, both affiliated with the GD party.^{79, 80, 81}

Georgia's legislative branch consists of the unicameral body, the Sakartvelos Parlamenti. The legislature's 150 members are popularly elected to four-year terms. Thirty of the seats are contested by individual candidates while the other 120 are chosen based on party lists. To claim a governing majority, a party must secure at least 40% of the total votes.^{82, 83}

The judicial branch consists of a Supreme Court made up of 28 judges. The judges are nominated by a judicial council and appointed by the legislature to life terms. A second high court, the Constitutional Court, has nine judges appointed to 10-year terms by either the president, the legislature, or Supreme Court judges.⁸⁴

74 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

75 BBC News, "Georgia Profile—Timeline," 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17303471>

76 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

77 Freedom House, "Georgia," 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia>

78 National Democratic Institute, "NDI Poll: Declining Trust in Country's Democratic Institutions; Georgians Negatively Assess Parliament's Failure to Ensure Fully Proportional 2020 Elections," 16 January 2020, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-poll-declining-trust-country-s-democratic-institutions-georgians-negatively-assess>

79 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

80 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

81 BBC News, "Georgia Country Profile," 3 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17301647>

82 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

83 Margarita Antidze, "Georgia Cast Ballots in Election Seen as Way for More Diverse Parliament," Reuters, 31 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-election/georgia-cast-ballots-in-election-seen-as-way-for-more-diverse-parliament-idUSKBN27G0CY>

84 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

Media

Georgia's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and government policies tend to uphold this right. Journalists commonly criticize government officials in various news outlets. The country's media broadcast a wide variety of political viewpoints but are considered very polarized. The political leanings of media outlet owners often dictate the editorial stance of their journalistic outlets. While print media have little readership, television viewership is high.^{85, 86, 87, 88, 89}

In 2019, a European Court of Human Rights decision awarded control of Rustavi 2, a pro-opposition TV channel, to a former owner who was aligned with the ruling GD party. After the change of ownership, most of the channel's staff resigned and it adopted a wholly different editorial policy. The years-long legal battle raised concerns about journalistic freedom in Georgia and generated accusations that the government is attempting to silence outlets that are critical of its policies. In the aftermath of the court decision, two new pro-opposition channels were formed.^{90, 91, 92}

Economy

The services sector dominates Georgia's economy, with a 67.9% share of gross domestic product (GDP), followed by industry at 23.7% and agriculture at 8.2%. The primary industries are steel, machine tools, electrical appliances, mining (manganese, copper, gold), chemicals, wood products, and wine. The primary agricultural products are citrus, grapes, tea, hazelnuts, vegetables, and livestock.⁹³ The agriculture sector employs the largest share of the workforce, at 50.9%, followed by services at 39.1%.⁹⁴

In August 2020, Georgia had a negative trade balance of USD 350.8 million.⁹⁵ Georgia's top export partners are Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Armenia, China, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and the United States; its top import partners are Turkey, Russia, China, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Germany. The top exports are vehicles, ferro-alloys, fertilizers, nuts, scrap metal, gold, and copper ores. The top imports are fuels, vehicles, machinery and parts, grain and other foods, and pharmaceuticals.⁹⁶

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- 85 BBC News, "Georgia Country Profile," 3 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17301647>
- 86 Virginia Davis Nordin, "Georgia Press, Media, TV, Radio, Newspapers," Press Reference, 2011, <http://www.pressreference.com/Fa-Gu/Georgia.html>
- 87 Margarita Antidze, "Europe's Human Rights Court Rules against Owners of Georgian Pro-Opposition TV Channel in Ownership Row," Reuters, 18 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-politics-tv-court/europes-human-rights-court-rules-against-owners-of-georgian-pro-opposition-tv-channel-in-ownership-row-idUSKCN1UD1YY>
- 88 Reporters without Borders, "Georgia," 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/georgia>
- 89 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: Media Freedom at Risk," 7 March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/07/georgia-media-freedom-risk>
- 90 Margarita Antidze, "Europe's Human Rights Court Rules against Owners of Georgian Pro-Opposition TV Channel in Ownership Row," Reuters, 18 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-politics-tv-court/europes-human-rights-court-rules-against-owners-of-georgian-pro-opposition-tv-channel-in-ownership-row-idUSKCN1UD1YY>
- 91 Reporters without Borders, "Georgia," 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/georgia>
- 92 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: Media Freedom at Risk," 7 March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/07/georgia-media-freedom-risk>
- 93 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 94 European Training Foundation, "Georgia Education, Training and Employment Developments 2016," 2017, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/233AD94A2CEBED50C12580E60051DF39_Georgia%202016.pdf
- 95 Trading Economics, "Georgia Balance of Trade," 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/balance-of-trade>
- 96 European Training Foundation, "Georgia Education, Training and Employment Developments 2016," 2017, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/233AD94A2CEBED50C12580E60051DF39_Georgia%202016.pdf

Between 2005 and 2019, Georgia’s economy registered a healthy average annual growth of 5.3%. The COVID-19 pandemic had a strong negative effect on tourism, exports, and overseas remittances, causing the economy to contract by 12.3% from April to June 2020. The strength of the mining and manufacturing sectors lessened the decline after June. The recession is expected to be accompanied by job and income losses and an increase in poverty. Post-pandemic, Georgia hopes to resume economic growth fueled by ongoing economic reforms, sound macroeconomics, and a welcoming business environment.^{97, 98, 99}

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Georgia’s mountainous terrain has allowed for the preservation of multiple ethnic identities. Roughly 86% of the population is ethnically Georgian, while the remainder includes more than 80 other ethnicities.^{100, 101}

Georgia’s ethnic minorities include Azeri, Armenians, Russians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Yazidis, Ukrainians, Kists, and Greeks. Georgia’s Russian, Azeri, and Armenian populations are largely transplanted from neighboring countries. Abkhazians inhabit the autonomous region of Abkhazia in the country’s northwest, where they make up about half of the population. The Ossetians are the majority population in the breakaway region of South Ossetia. The Ajarians of Georgia’s southwest autonomous region (Ajaria) are largely Muslim, as are the Abkhazians and Ossetians; however, the Ajarians are ethnically Georgian.^{102, 103, 104, 105, 106}

Georgia is not only ethnically but also linguistically diverse. The Georgian language belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian language group.¹⁰⁷ Its lack of relationship to any neighboring languages suggests that it grew as an indigenous language in the Caucasus.¹⁰⁸ Regional dialects are plentiful, as are minority languages such as Russian, Armenian, Ossetian (part of the Indo-European language family), Azeri (a Turkic language), and Abkhaz (another Caucasian language).^{109, 110, 111, 112}

Several ethnic subgroups are prominent in some of the country’s rural areas. Russians and early Soviets classified Georgia’s Mingrelian population as distinct from Georgians, but since the 1930s Mingrelians have been recognized as ethnically Georgian.¹¹³ Mingrelians, noted for their blond hair and blue eyes, speak a Caucasian language related to Georgian. But because there are substantial differences in languages, speakers of one

97 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

98 Focus Economics, “Georgia Economic Outlook,” 6 October 2020, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/georgia>

99 World Bank, “Georgia: Overview,” 12 October 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

100 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999), 30.

101 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

102 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999), 31.

103 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 56–58.

104 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

105 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

106 Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization, “Abkhazia,” 16 February 2015, <https://unpo.org/members/7854>

107 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999), 73.

108 Roger D. Woodard, *The Ancient Languages of Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4 http://books.google.com/books?id=J-f_jwCgmeUC&pg=PA4#

109 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

110 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 43.

111 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

112 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., “Georgia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

113 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 54.

language cannot understand speakers of the other.^{114, 115} The majority of Mingrelians still live in rural settlements, unlike most Georgians.¹¹⁶ Mingrelians today occupy much of the coastal lowlands in western Georgia, and many were displaced because of conflict in Abkhazia.¹¹⁷

The Svans are another Georgian ethnic subgroup who, like the Mingrelians, have been recognized as Georgian since the 1930s.¹¹⁸ The Svan language, related to Georgian and Mingrelian, is oral and not written.¹¹⁹ Svans now self-identify as Georgian. They live almost entirely in the territory of Svaneti, which borders Abkhazia to the west and Russia to the north. This region is mountainous and rugged.¹²⁰ Their villages tend to be commune-like, made up of a group of dwellings within a larger clan structure.¹²¹ Svans are a proud people, and vendettas between feuding families remain today.¹²²

114 Everyculture, “Mingrelians—Orientation,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Orientation.html>

115 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 240.

116 Everyculture, “Mingrelians—Settlements,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Settlements.html>

117 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 240.

118 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 54.

119 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus*, (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 185.

120 Everyculture, “Svans—Orientation,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Svans-Orientation.html>

121 Everyculture, “Svans—Settlements,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Svans-Settlements.html>

122 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 188.

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Caspian Sea makes up Georgia's western boundary. True False
2. According to Greek mythology, the city of Kutaisi was the ancient home of the Golden Fleece, sought by the hero Jason and his Argonauts. True False
3. After Georgia's independence in 1991, the country's ethnic groups joined forces to build a stable and equitable society. True False
4. Georgia's democratic political system is showing signs of strain. True False
5. The Georgian language is closely related to the language of neighboring Russia. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The Black Sea makes up Georgia's western boundary.
2. True:
Kutaisi dates back to a Greek colony in the seventh century BCE.
3. False:
At independence, Georgia's newfound nationalism was not shared by its ethnic minorities, who began pushing for secession in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
4. True:
Georgia's political process has shown signs of deterioration in recent years, with oligarchs wielding outsize influence and political interests displacing the rule of law.
5. False:
The Georgian language is not related to native languages used by neighboring countries, suggesting that it grew as an indigenous language in the Caucasus.

Chapter 2 | Religion



Gelati Monastery built in the 12th century by King David I.
Wikipedia / ilan molcho

Overview

Georgia's religious landscape is notably diverse, shaped by Persian, Turkish, and Russian influences. In the capital city of Tbilisi, one may find a Georgian Orthodox basilica, an Armenian church, a Muslim mosque, a Jewish synagogue, and a Zoroastrian temple within close proximity to each other. Although Georgian society is not uniform in its religious observances, its identity is in many ways tied specifically to its Christian heritage.¹ When Christianity became the official religion of the Georgian kingdom centuries ago, this early conversion had a permanent effect on Georgia and its people.²

Georgia retains a distinct religious identity that is vibrant despite centuries of foreign rule. Additionally, Georgia's Christian roots prompted it to retain a westward orientation even when foreign empires sought to isolate the country.³ During Soviet rule in the 20th century, Georgian nationalism strengthened its bonds with Georgian Orthodoxy. The importance of Christianity in Georgian identity is succinctly captured in a statement by the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church: "What would Georgia be without Christianity? ...our soul is by nature a Christian one." While Georgia is home to prominent secular and minority religious elements, Christianity has played a strong and significant role in its history and culture.⁴

1 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 13.

2 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

3 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 28.

4 Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 187.

Major Religions

Georgian Orthodox Church

The Georgian Orthodox Church is an independent (autocephalous) branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church has more than a dozen independent arms, the most well-known being the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches. Like other Eastern churches that split from western Christianity in the 11th century, the Georgian church does not recognize the authority of the Catholic pope. Its religious practice includes rituals such as burning incense and praying before important icons. Georgian is typically the language of church services.^{5, 6, 7}

According to tradition, Christianity was brought to Georgia by a woman known as Saint Nino, who gained the queen of Kartli's confidence by curing her of an unknown illness. The queen's husband converted after he was enshrouded with darkness while hunting and prayed to the Christian God for deliverance.⁸ As the religion spread, it replaced Greek paganism in the west of the country and Persian Zoroastrianism in the east.⁹ The local church quickly became autonomous and remains one of the oldest Christian denominations in the world.¹⁰

The Georgian Cross, identified by its downward-angled arms, is a prominent national icon. Legend has it that this unusual shape comes from Saint Nino who, when entering Georgia for the first time, fashioned a cross using vine branches and strands of her hair. Icons of Georgia's patron saint, St. George, are also common. Saint George, who was a third-century CE martyred Roman soldier, is typically depicted clad in armor, slaying a dragon.^{11, 12}

Russian Orthodox Church

Christianity came to Russia much later than in Georgia, but the Russian branch grew substantially as the might of the Russian empire increased.¹³ After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, many began to see Russia as the "Third Rome" and its leaders as defenders of the faith. The Russian Orthodox Church remains the largest of all the Eastern churches, with adherents throughout the former Russian Empire. About 10% of Georgians are Russian Orthodox.^{14, 15, 16}

5 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

6 John Meyendorff, "Eastern Orthodoxy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 23 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy>

7 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 72–73.

8 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 71–72.

9 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 28.

10 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

11 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 73, 75.

12 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

13 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Russian Orthodox Church," 26 February 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-Church>

14 Encyclopedia.com, "Third Rome," 8 November 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/third-rome>

15 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 75.

16 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Russian Orthodox Church," 26 February 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-Church>

Armenian Apostolic Church

The Armenian Apostolic Church was founded at the beginning of the fourth century. Although in its home region the church neighbors churches of the Eastern Orthodox family, the Armenian Church split from them in the sixth century.¹⁷ Georgia's Apostolic Armenians make up about 2.9% of Georgia's population and are the largest such group outside of Armenia. Their churches are decorated simply and often have ostrich eggs suspended from the ceiling to signify hope and resurrection.^{18, 19}

Islam

Many of Georgia's neighbors—including Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus region of Russia—are predominantly Muslim. Georgia, too, has its Muslim communities, making up about 10.7% of the population. The minority populations of Georgia's self-declared autonomous republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria are largely Muslim, as is Georgia's Azeri population. While most of the country's Muslims follow the dominant Sunni sect, the Azeris are primarily Shiite.^{20, 21}

Other religions

Georgia has small populations of Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics. Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional congregations in the country have been the target of persecution and attacks. Additionally, the country has for centuries had a small Jewish community, although much of that population migrated to Israel in recent decades.^{22, 23, 24, 25}

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- 17 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Armenian Apostolic Church," 17 June 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Armenian-Apostolic-Church>
- 18 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 76.
- 19 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 20 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 41.
- 21 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 22 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 45.
- 23 Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Georgia," 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/georgia/>
- 24 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 77.
- 25 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

Role of Religion in Government

During the Soviet years, the government condemned religion and religious organizations. Soviet officials accused churches of exploitation and feared the influence of institutions outside of government control.²⁶ Although the Georgian Orthodox Church received less government repression than other Orthodox churches in the Soviet sphere, many Georgian churches were destroyed or turned into concert halls or museums.^{27, 28}

After Georgia gained independence in 1991, it enshrined religious freedom in its constitution while also noting the unique role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the country's history. The Orthodox Church receives special tax exemptions and a constitutional agreement known as a concordat further strengthened the bond between the state and the church. This agreement allows the church to be granted permits for the use of official state symbols and the production and distribution of worship articles. Since the early 2000s, the government has handed over some 1 million hectares (2.5 million acres) of land and USD 76 million to the church as part of a reparation program for damage suffered by the church during the Soviet era.²⁹ The line between church and state appears blurred at times. The education ministry, for example, has reportedly prevented the distribution of textbooks that did not pay significant homage to the Georgian Orthodox Church.^{30, 31, 32}

After 2004, the church was increasingly at odds with the pro-Western, reformist policies of the Saakashvili administration. When the new government attempted to remove religious teachings from public schools, the church mobilized its grassroots Orthodox activists as part of a conservative backlash. The church strongly supported the Georgian Dream party, which came to power in 2012. Since then, Orthodoxy has assumed a prominent place in Georgia's public schools, leading to allegations of discrimination against groups like Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and atheists.^{33, 34, 35}

The church's prominence in the Georgian national consciousness has not shielded it from scandal and controversy. Its significant wealth, including large real estate holdings, is readily apparent, and critics have accused it of opaque business dealings and gross corruption. The church's leadership appears fractured over the impending succession of Patriarch Ilia II, its long-serving leader and perhaps the most respected public figure in the country. In 2017 a senior priest was sentenced to nine years in prison over a murky plot, allegedly involving high-ranking

26 Robert Conquest et al., "Soviet Union," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union>

27 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 121.

28 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 29.

29 OC Media, "City Council Transfers Land to Orthodox Church in Tbilisi," 9 November 2017, <https://oc-media.org/city-council-transfers-land-to-orthodox-church-in-tbilisi/>

30 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State Department, "2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia," 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

31 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>

32 Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Georgia," 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/georgia/>

33 Natalia Antelava, "Georgia: Orthodoxy in the Classroom," BBC News, 7 May 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32595514>

34 BBC News, "Georgia Profile—Timeline," 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17303471>

35 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>

political and church figures, to assassinate the patriarch's secretary. In 2019, an archbishop lost his position in the wake of a pedophilia scandal.^{36, 37, 38, 39, 40}

Yet the church retains its prestige and influence. Throughout Georgia's tumultuous post-independence history, warring political factions have repeatedly turned to Patriarch Ilia for mediation and sought the church's blessing. In April 2020, the church defied a national state of emergency and held nationwide Easter church services despite government directives for citizens to remain at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The church will likely remain a force that future governments will have to contend with.^{41, 42, 43}

Religion in Daily Life

Since achieving independence from the Soviets in 1991, the role of religion in daily life has grown considerably. Membership and activity in the Georgian Orthodox Church have increased. About half of adult Georgians identify as highly religious, placing Georgia among Europe's most religious countries. The church ranks as the country's second-most trusted institution after the army. In a 2019 poll, 85% of respondents held a favorable opinion toward the church. The church's stances against issues like LGBT rights and legal abortion reflect the conservative views of a vast majority of Georgia's population. In 2013, Georgian Orthodox priests were at the forefront of a mob that violently suppressed peaceful antihomophobia protests in Tbilisi. In recent years the church has been involved in incidents of hostility and harassment of religious minorities like Muslims and Catholics.^{44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49}

Despite Georgia's political troubles with the self-declared autonomous regions that are predominantly Muslim, the conflicts have not been framed as religious. Georgia's Muslim population does not actively promote a religious identity. The Ajarians of the southwest emerged from Soviet rule far less observant in their religion than they had

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- 36 Mike Eckel et al., "Attempted Murder, Alleged Sodomy, Poison Pills: A Plague of Scandals Consumes Georgia's Orthodox Church," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 November 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgian-orthodox-church-scandal-sodomy-poison/30254591.html>
- 37 RFE/RL's Georgian Service, "Georgian Archpriest Convicted of Planning to Poison Patriarch's Aide," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 September 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-priest-convicted-planning-kill-patriarch-secretary/28717886.html>
- 38 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>
- 39 OC Media, "New Allegations against Georgian Orthodox Church as Archbishop Accused of Sexual Assault," 6 November 2019, <https://oc-media.org/new-allegations-against-georgian-orthodox-church-as-archbishop-accused-of-sexual-assault/>
- 40 Dustin Gilbreath and CRRC, "Analysis: Church Scandals Have Hurt Trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church," OC Media, 3 August 2020, <https://oc-media.org/features/analysis-church-scandals-have-hurt-trust-in-the-georgian-orthodox-church/>
- 41 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>
- 42 Giorgi Lomsadze, "Georgia's Nightmare before Easter," Eurasianet, 16 April 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgias-nightmare-before-easter>
- 43 Neil Hunter, "Georgia's Defiant Orthodox Church Will Host Easter Worshipers despite Lockdown," CNN, 17 April 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/17/europe/georgia-orthodox-easter-intl/index.html>
- 44 National Democratic Institute, "Results of December 2019 Public Opinion Polls in Georgia," 16 January 2020, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/results-december-2019-public-opinion-polls-georgia-0>
- 45 Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Georgia," 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/georgia/>
- 46 Natalia Antelava, "What Was behind Georgia's Anti-gay Rally?" *New Yorker*, 23 May 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/what-was-behind-georgias-anti-gay-rally>
- 47 Richard Plunkett and Tom Masters, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004)*, 28.
- 48 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>
- 49 Adam Hung, ed., "Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova," Foreign Policy Centre, 2015, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1707.pdf>

been decades before. Today few attend mosques and fasting during the month of Ramadan is rare.⁵⁰ The Azeri population of the south is Shia Muslim, but unlike Azerbaijan’s Shia neighbor Iran, the Azeris are not known for their devotion to faith.⁵¹

Religious Holidays

All major feasts of the Orthodox calendar are observed. Easter is the most important of all holy days. Other feasts include the Feast of Saint Basil the Great, celebrated on 1 January; Christmas, celebrated on 7 January; and Ascension Day, which occurs 40 days after Easter.⁵²

May I enter the church?		
Visitor:	May I enter the church?	meh eklesiyashi shesvla shemidzleeyaa?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 1

Some celebrations are Georgia-specific and go beyond the Orthodox calendar used by many Eastern churches. Saint Nino is honored in May for her role in bringing Christianity to Georgia. Later in the year, on 14 October, Georgians celebrate the historic role of the city of Mtskheta in Georgian Orthodoxy. The city continues to be the home of the Georgian Orthodox Church and is regarded as one of the most sacred places in the country. Georgians from all over the country fill the small city during the festival. Entertainment in town accompanies a procession led by the church’s patriarch around the cathedral. Finally, a holiday on 23 November honors Saint George as both a religious and national figure.⁵³

Do I need to cover my head?		
Visitor:	Do I need to cover my head?	tavzey Ramey unda daaveepaaRo?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 2

Georgia’s Muslim population celebrates the two major feasts of Islam. Eid al-Fitr, the lesser of the two, commemorates the end of Ramadan, Islam’s month of daytime fasting. Eid al-Adha, the feast of the sacrifice, commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God and coincides with the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. Because Islam’s calendar is lunar, the dates of these festivals shift every year.^{54, 55}

50 Everyculture, “Adjarians,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Adjarians.html>

51 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 41.

52 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 110.

53 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 111.

54 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Eid al-Fitr,” 23 April 2020.

55 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Eid al-Adha,” 9 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eid-al-Adha>

Buildings of Worship

Christian churches dot Georgia's landscape. Some of its older basilicas have a distinctive triple church style found only in Georgia. In this style, the two side naves are separated from the central hall by walls and the only access to each side is through doors. Later churches reflect various styles including the central-domed churches common to Greece, brick churches with geometric patterns inspired by Persian influence, and churches in the 19th-century Russian neoclassical style.⁵⁶ Churches are often decorated inside with candles, pictures depicting religious events, and other icons.^{57, 58}

When do you go to church?

Visitor:	When do you go to church?	eklesiyashi Rodis mideeKhaaR?
Local:	On Sunday.	kveeRaas

Exchange 3

Behavior in Places of Worship

The Georgian Orthodox Church shares the practices common to other Orthodox Christian churches and expects behavior in its buildings similar to other conservative Christian traditions. Visitors should not step on the altar as it is considered sacred and should not sit in the chair at the center of the church as it is symbolically reserved for the patriarch. Phones should be silenced, and no photographs should be taken without permission.^{59, 60}

May I take photographs inside the church?

Visitor:	May I take photographs inside the church?	eklesiyashi suRaatebis gadagheba shaydzlebaa?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 4

Modesty is important as a symbol of respect while in a Georgian church. Women and men should avoid wearing tight or revealing clothing. Women should wear modest skirts or dresses and men should wear long trousers. Men should remove hats or other head coverings, but women should cover their heads when entering a church.^{61, 62}

⁵⁶ Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 35–37.

⁵⁷ Robert Presutti, "A Glimpse inside the Secluded World of a Georgian Convent," *New York Times*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/travel/a-glimpse-inside-the-secluded-world-of-a-georgian-convent.html>

⁵⁸ Armin W. Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, "Icons and Agency in the Georgian Orthodox Church," Taylor & Francis Group, 20 October 2014, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315729299/chapters/10.4324%2F9781315729299-18>

⁵⁹ Kartveli Tours, "Georgian Church Dress Code," 1 November 2018, <https://kartvelitours.com/georgia-church-dress-code/>

⁶⁰ Chris Owen, "Churches & Monasteries in Georgia," Responsible Travel, n.d., <https://www.responsiblevacation.com/vacations/georgia/travel-guide/georgias-churches-and-monasteries>

⁶¹ Kartveli Tours, "Georgian Church Dress Code," 1 November 2018, <https://kartvelitours.com/georgia-church-dress-code/>

⁶² Chris Owen, "Churches & Monasteries in Georgia," Responsible Travel, n.d., <https://www.responsiblevacation.com/vacations/georgia/travel-guide/georgias-churches-and-monasteries>

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Georgian Orthodox Church is a lesser-known branch of the Catholic Church. True False
2. Armenian churches in Georgia and elsewhere are often decorated with ostrich eggs suspended from the ceiling. True False
3. Since 2012, the Georgian Orthodox Church has assumed a prominent place in Georgia's public schools. True False
4. The Georgian Orthodox Church has emerged as a moderate supporter of LGBT rights in Georgia. True False
5. The city of Mtskheta is home to the Georgian Orthodox Church and is considered sacred. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The Georgian Orthodox Church is one of more than a dozen independent branches of the Eastern Orthodox Church.
2. True:
For Armenian Christians, ostrich eggs signify hope and resurrection.
3. True:
The church's influence on religious teaching in public schools has led to allegations of discrimination against groups like Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and atheists.
4. False:
A strong majority of Georgia's population shares the church's conservative LGBT and abortion stances.
5. True:
Every October, many Georgians visit the small city for a religious festival that includes a procession led by the church's patriarch.

Chapter 3 | Traditions



Georgian folk dance.
Wikipedia / George Kvizhinadze

Introduction

Traditional Georgian honor and values are embodied in two of the country's national symbols: a centuries-old epic poem and a monumental statue that embodies its national identity. While most countries have a national anthem, fewer have a national epic poem. Shota Rustaveli's 18th century epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is not only regarded as Georgia's greatest poem but also a source for lessons of virtue and chivalry reflected in the culture to this day.^{1,2} The poem's admonition that "everything you give away remains yours and everything you keep is lost forever" permeates through Georgia's national character and is expressed through its trademark hospitality and kindness. The poem declares that a person's worth is found not in their possessions but by their number of friends.³ The value of friendship is evident in the Georgian word for friend, *megobari*, which refers to one with whom you have eaten from the same bowl.⁴

Georgian hospitality is also embodied in a relatively newer national symbol: the statue of Mother Georgia. She overlooks the capital Tbilisi, welcoming guests with a bowl of wine in one hand and a drawn sword in the other, serving as a warning against enemies. She stands as a reminder that although Georgia is welcoming, its hospitality does not extend to those seeking to conquer them.⁵

1 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 57.

2 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 19.

3 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 31–32.

4 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), xviii.

5 Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 55.

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

A common “hello” greeting in Georgia is *gamarjoba* (literally “victory”). *Gagimarjos* is a more formal way to say “hello.” “How are you?” is asked informally as *Rogor khar?* and more formally as *Rogor brdzandebit?* Goodbye is *kargad ikavit*, while *mshvidobit* (literally “peace be with you”) is comparable to “farewell.”⁶

Good morning!		
Visitor:	Good morning!	deelaa mshveedobeesaa!
Local:	Good morning to you!	deelaa mshveedobeesaa!

Exchange 5

Shaking hands is a commonly accepted form of greeting, especially when meeting someone for the first time. Closer friends, women, and young people are more likely to greet each other with an embrace or a kiss on the cheek. In groups, elderly people should be greeted first as a sign of respect. *Batono* (sir) or *kalbatono* (madam) are common ways to address adults.^{7, 8, 9}

Hi, Giorgi! (Informal)		
Visitor:	Hi, Giorgi!	gaamaaRjoba, baatono geeyoRgee
Local:	Hello!	gaamaaRjoba!
Visitor:	Are you doing well?	Khom kaaRgad KhaRt?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 6

Greetings in business settings generally follow Western norms. The person with the highest status or rank initiates handshakes in order of seniority. When greeting women, it is polite to wait for them to initiate handshakes. Business partners should be addressed by their last names with any accompanying professional or academic titles.¹⁰

6 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

7 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

8 Reach to Teach, “Etiquette in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>

9 Lonely Planet, “Georgia in Detail: Etiquette,” 28 August 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/narratives/practical-information/directory/etiquette>

10 Reach to Teach, “Etiquette in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>

Hospitality and Gift Giving

Hospitality is a hallmark of Georgian culture; as Georgians commonly remark, “any guest is God’s messenger.” This hospitality is a direct result of the Georgian concept of friendship, which is considered a great virtue. Guests are likely to be invited for a meal, where they will be given a place of honor and respect at the table.^{11, 12}

Thank you for your hospitality.		
Guest:	Thank you for your hospitality.	deedee maadloba gaamaspindzlebistvis
Host:	You are welcome.	aaRaapRis

Exchange 7

Visitors to a Georgian home may bring flowers, sweets, or a bottle of wine as a gift for their hosts. Presents for children are also common. Gifts are given to Georgians on birthdays and Christmas, and on “name days,” which are holidays celebrated in honor of saints on their birthdays. Gifts need not be expensive or wrapped elaborately.^{13, 14}

Eating Customs

Georgians take either a light breakfast early in the day or a more substantial breakfast around 8 a.m., both consisting of a combination of vegetables, salad, bread and butter, eggs, ham or sausage, cheese, and tea or coffee. A mid-day meal is eaten around 1–2 p.m., and an evening meal after 6 p.m. Both commonly consist of soup and a meat dish with beans, potatoes, bread, and/or fruit. Georgians follow the continental style of eating, with the fork held in the left hand and the knife in the right hand.¹⁵

Feasts are the ultimate expression of Georgian culture. The male head of the household acts as host while the wife or daughters prepare and serve the food.¹⁶ The women may not even have time to join everyone at the dinner table. Guests need not ask for seconds but are expected to eat the food on their plates.^{17, 18} A line from *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* expresses the cultural importance of feasting: “Spending on feasting and wine is better than hoarding our substance.”¹⁹

Wine has a prominent place at the Georgian table.²⁰ Viticulture in the region is thousands of years old, and Georgia grows hundreds of varieties of grapes.²¹ Some scholars think that winemaking originated in Georgia and later spread to other parts of the world.²² While wine is common at lunches and dinners, drunkenness is seen as a social stigma and an insult to one’s host or guests. Manliness in Georgia is traditionally equated with the ability to drink large amounts of wine without becoming intoxicated. Women are not expected to keep pace with men.²³

- 11 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 31.
 12 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 13 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 14 Reach to Teach, “Etiquette in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>
 15 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 16 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 116.
 17 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 77.
 18 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 19 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 26.
 20 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 59.
 21 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 121.
 22 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 81.
 23 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 85.

The food tastes so good.

Guest:	The food tastes so good.	kvelafeRi gemReeleeyaa
Host:	I'm glad you like it.	meeKhaaReeyaa, Rom mogtsont

Exchange 8

The Georgian diet relies heavily on vegetables and a wide variety of herbs. Beef, lamb, chicken, and pork—luxuries once reserved for feast days—are now commonly eaten. The main vegetables are beans, cucumbers, cabbage, and eggplant. Favorite fruits include melons, apples, grapes, figs, pears, cherries, tomatoes, and peaches. Walnuts are used extensively, and a yogurt called *matsoni* often accompanies meals.^{24, 25}

What type of meat is this?

Guest:	What type of meat is this?	es Risee KhoRtseeya?
Host:	Pork.	ghoRee

Exchange 9

Georgian shish kebab, known as *mtsvadi*, is the most common grilled food in the country. Lamb, beef, or pork is skewered and grilled with vegetables; the meat may be grilled fresh or after marinating overnight. *Satsivi* is a dish of fried turkey or chicken in a walnut sauce. Other favorite foods include *khachapuri*, cheese enveloped in wheat dough, and *churchkhela*, chestnuts, walnuts, or almonds with a grape syrup coating.^{26, 27}

What is the name of this dish?

Guest:	What is the name of this dish?	aam keRdzs Raa kveeyaa?
Host:	This is mtsvadi.	es chabastuRmebuli mtsvadeeya

Exchange 10

Khinkali dumplings are popular throughout Georgia. The dumplings are made with seasoned meat or cheese encased in tender dough. The filling is wrapped together into a topknot. When eaten, the dumpling is held by the topknot, although the knot itself is not consumed. The quality of the dumpling is based not only on its flavor but on the number of pleats in the dough.²⁸

What ingredients are used to make Georgian dumplings?

Guest:	What ingredients are used to make Georgian dumplings [khinkali]?	Ritee ketdeba Khinkaalee?
Host:	Spiced meat, onions, and garlic.	sunelebit, KhoRtsit, KhaaKhvit daa neevRit

Exchange 11

24 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 36.
 25 CultureGrams World Edition, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 26 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 84.
 27 CultureGrams World Edition, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
 28 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 114.

Many aspects of Georgian cuisine bear a striking resemblance to that of Northern India, an interesting foreign influence not yet fully understood in origin. Clay ovens, cast-iron skillet, curry spice blends, and some culinary terms are similar between the two regions.²⁹

Supra

The *supra* is an evening-long culturally significant meal characterized by continuous servings of food and long, elaborate toasts. A *supra* may commemorate a holiday such as Easter or a significant life event such as a wedding or funeral. It may also be convened for no reason other than to eat good food with friends and guests.^{30, 31, 32}

The offering of toasts is an important part of the evening meal.³³ Entire glasses of wine are consumed after an individual toast; sipping or drinking out-of-turn is considered inappropriate. Toasts are made to family, friends, and visitors.³⁴ A toastmaster, known as a *tamada*, is not only responsible for directing the toasts of the evening but also for ensuring that the entire meal runs smoothly.³⁵ The *tamada* is especially valued for demonstrating wit and eloquence in addition to their ability to improvise as the evening progresses; the *tamada* is expected to be a ringmaster, comedian, storyteller, and referee.^{36, 37} Visitors should only add their toasts under the direction of the *tamada*.³⁸ As one observer noted, “at least at the feast table, every Georgian is a poet and competition can turn the meal into a celebration not only of the occasion but of the oratory art.”³⁹

Dress Codes

Everyday clothing is highly westernized and similar to the clothing worn in Russia and other former Soviet republics. Trousers and button-down shirts are common, as are business suits. In rural areas and among older people, colors tend to be more muted and conservative than in urban areas. High-quality clothes that look sharp are prized. Jeans are commonly worn.^{40, 41, 42}

Is this acceptable to wear?		
Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	es Rom chaavitsvaa misaaghebee ikneybaa?
Local:	Yes.	Kay

Exchange 12

- 29 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 36.
- 30 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 127.
- 31 Cuttino Alexander, “The Rules of the Supra,” *Cuttino’s Georgian Life: A Journal of my Peace Corps Service in the Republic of Georgia, 2006–2008*, 11 April 2007, http://cuttinoalexander.blogspot.com/2007/04/rules-of-supra_11.html
- 32 Reach to Teach, “Etiquette in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>
- 33 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 59.
- 34 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 26–27.
- 35 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 31.
- 36 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 26–27.
- 37 Cuttino Alexander, “The Rules of the Supra,” *Cuttino’s Georgian Life: A Journal of my Peace Corps Service in the Republic of Georgia, 2006–2008*, 11 April 2007, http://cuttinoalexander.blogspot.com/2007/04/rules-of-supra_11.html
- 38 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 31.
- 39 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 27.
- 40 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999).
- 41 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004).
- 42 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Georgians wear traditional clothing on holidays, weddings, and other special or cultural occasions. The *cherkeska* is a traditional men’s tunic that reaches the knees and is paired with high, soft leather boots. Cylindrical cases for ammunition cartridges are sewn into both sides of the tunic’s chest, and a short, narrow knife is worn around the waist. Woolen hats complete the ensemble. Traditional dress for women comes in a variety of colors and is often ornately decorated with silver chains and accompanied by a headscarf.^{43, 44}

Non-religious Celebrations

Several civil holidays are recognized in Georgia. Georgians celebrate their independence every year on 26 May. This commemorates the day in 1918 when Georgia declared its independence from the Russian Empire after the previous year’s Bolshevik Revolution. This is not related to the 1991 referendum declaring independence from the Soviet Union. Independence Day is celebrated with parades and displays of military strength, a speech by the president, and various cultural events.^{45, 46}

A major folk festival known as Tbilisoba is held every year in Tbilisi at the end of October. It is a celebration not only of the country’s capital city but of Georgian life as a whole.⁴⁷ Celebrations include street carnivals, traditional dances and songs, artistic performances, and craft fairs, all accompanied by copious amounts of street food.^{48, 49}

St. George’s Day, a commemoration of the country’s patron saint, occurs every year on 23 November.⁵⁰ The day is known as Giorgoba in Georgia and is a national holiday during which schools are closed. Many commemorate the bravery of Saint George by attending a church service and having a large feast in his honor.⁵¹

Happy St. George’s Day!		
Visitor:	Happy St. George’s Day!	geeyoRgobas geelotsavt!
Local:	May St. George bless you!	tsminda geeyoRgis maadlee aaR mogeeshaalot ghmeRtmaa!

Exchange 13

43 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 59.

44 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

45 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 113.

46 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

47 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 87.

48 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 112.

49 Advantour, “Tbilisoba,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/georgia/festivals/tbilisoba-festival.htm>

50 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 90.

51 CultureGrams World Edition, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Dos and Don'ts

Do^{52, 53}

- Do maintain eye contact during greetings.
- Do wait for a woman to initiate a handshake.
- Do address others by their surname until invited to use their first name.
- Do hold the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left hand when eating.
- Do finish the food on your plate and accept additional helpings when offered.

Don't^{54, 55}

- Don't disregard the role of the toastmaster at a meal.
- Don't hide your hands when eating or rest your elbows on the table.
- Don't toast with beer; beer is only used to toast enemies.
- Don't enter a church dressed immodestly.
- Don't take pictures at a church without asking for permission.

52 Reach to Teach, "Etiquette in Georgia," n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>
53 CultureGrams World Edition, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
54 Reach to Teach, "Etiquette in Georgia," n.d., <https://www.reachtoteachrecruiting.com/guide-to-georgia-etiquette.html>
55 CultureGrams World Edition, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is an internationally successful 2010 movie that introduced a distinctively Georgian superhero to a global audience. True False
2. The consumption of wine is traditionally forbidden in Georgian culture. True False
3. *Khinkali* dumplings are popular throughout Georgia. True False
4. *Supra* is the name given to Tbilisi's underground car racing culture. True False
5. Traditional dress for Georgian men includes cylindrical ammunition cases. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The Knight in the Panther's Skin is an 18th-century epic poem regarded as Georgia's greatest literary work and a source for lessons of virtue and chivalry reflected in the country's culture to this day.
2. False:
Wine has a prominent place at the Georgian table. Viticulture in the region is thousands of years old and Georgia grows hundreds of varieties of grapes.
3. True:
When eaten, the dumplings are held by a topknot of dough, although the knot itself is not consumed.
4. False:
The *supra* is a culturally significant, evening-long meal characterized by continuous servings of food and long, elaborate toasts.
5. True:
The ammunition cases are sewn into the sides of the *cherkeska*, a traditional men's tunic.

Chapter 4 | Urban Life



The landscapes of Batumi and Tbilisi.
Wikipedia / KREOH

Introduction

Fifty-nine percent of the Georgian population lives in a city; the country's estimated urbanization rate is 0.42% per year.¹ Tbilisi, the country's capital, is by far the largest city, and at more than a million residents, accounts for roughly a quarter of the country's total population.² Many city dwellers live in Soviet-era apartment buildings. Since independence, haphazard urban development and high levels of air pollution have harmed the quality of urban life. In the absence of government action, activists have mobilized to oppose illegal building projects or the further clogging of city streets with cars. In recent years, Tbilisi and other cities have introduced reforms and ambitious infrastructure modernization initiatives, but progress has been uneven.^{3, 4, 5}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 2 Everyculture, "Georgia—Urbanism, Architecture, and the Use of Space," n. d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>
- 3 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 4 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>
- 5 Railway Pro, "EBRD Loan Approved for Tbilisi Metro Modernization," 1 May 2020, <https://www.railwaypro.com/wp/erbd-loan-approved-for-tbilisi-metro-modernisation/>

Urban Challenges

Urban Economy

Urban development has focused almost exclusively in the greater Tbilisi metropolitan area—a region that also includes the nearby cities of Rustavi, Mtskheta, and Gardabani—and in the larger cities of Kutaisi and Batumi. These urban centers contain a majority of the country’s population and benefit from a disproportionate share of services, commodities, and labor markets over the rest of the country’s urban settlements. The uneven and hierarchical urban development is reflected by the fact that unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural ones.^{6, 7}

The Georgian word *blat*, which comes from the Russian word meaning “pull” or “connections,” is used to denote bending the rules. The term grew out of the restrictive communist system and connotes anything from patronage to fraud. Its continued usage since independence signifies the corruption and black-market trading found in Georgia’s cities.⁸ To get around arbitrarily enforced laws, a great deal of business occurs “off-the-books.” According to a 2018 study, this “gray” economy accounts for 64% of the country’s total output, the highest such rate in the world.^{9, 10}

Pollution

Tbilisi is affected by high rates of air pollution. In a 2018 study measuring mortality rates from air pollution, Georgia was among the top three worst-performing European countries, with a rate of 101.8 deaths per 100,000 people. The air in Tbilisi is laden with toxic substances such as nitrogen dioxide, a chemical compound that causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. In 2016, an alarming 20% of the city’s population suffered from a respiratory disease.^{11, 12, 13, 14}

A significant cause of air pollution is vehicle exhaust. Underdeveloped public transport has led to a preference for private vehicles and taxis. Many of the cars on Georgia’s roads are low-quality diesel imports or highly polluting older models; nearly three-fifths of Tbilisi’s cars are more than 20 years old. A lack of fuel standards encourages the use of low-quality fuels, which can cause damage to cars’ components such as the catalytic converter. Many owners opt to remove the catalytic converters instead of replacing them, leading to worse emissions. The situation has been exacerbated by a history of lax or nonexistent government enforcement of vehicle emission

6 Asian Development Bank, “Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary,” 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>

7 Agenda, “Unemployment Rate Reaches 15 Year Low in Georgia,” 19 February 2019, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/484>

8 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 69.

9 David L. Phillips, “Stability, Security, and Sovereignty in the Republic of Georgia,” Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action, 15 January 2004, 11, <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Georgia.pdf>

10 *Financial*, “Does Georgia Have One of the Largest Shadow Economies in the World?” 12 March 2018, <https://www.finchannel.com/opinion/72052-does-georgia-have-one-of-the-largest-shadow-economies-in-the-world>

11 Georgian Journal, “Georgia No. 1 among the Countries that Have Deadliest Air Pollution,” 28 June 2016, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/32635-georgia-no-1-among-the-countries-that-have-deadliest-air-pollution.html>

12 Georgian Journal, “Tbilisi among Dangerous Cities in Europe Where Air Pollution Is High,” 8 May 2018, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/34468-tbilisi-among-dangerous-cities-in-europe-where-air-pollution-is-high.html>

13 Prathap Nair, “Tbilisi Comes Up for Air,” Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>

14 Thea Morrison, “WHO 2018 Survey: Georgia Takes 70th Place in Terms of Air Pollution Deaths,” Georgia Today, 11 July 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11226/WHO-2018-Survey%3A-Georgia-Takes-70th-Place-in-Terms-of-Air-Pollution-Deaths>

standards. After emission tests were reinstated in 2018, a quarter of the vehicles tested did not meet the standard.^{15, 16, 17, 18}

Another significant cause of urban air pollution is smoking, which remains ingrained in Georgian culture. Smoking has only recently been banned in restaurants and other indoor spaces. Urban heating and the uncontrolled burning of trash on city streets also contribute to pollution.^{19, 20}

Noise pollution, defined as disruptive sounds that are unpleasant or excessive, is another harmful presence in Tbilisi. High levels of noise from factories, vehicles, construction sites, and inconsiderate neighbors cause psychological and physical harm to nearly half of the city's inhabitants. In 2017, the national legislature passed a noise pollution law under which repeat offenders faced fines.^{21, 22, 23}

In recent years, urban environmental activists have begun to challenge government authorities' inaction on the issue of air pollution. In 2018, protesters opposed plans to build vehicle overpasses that would increase Tbilisi's already congested traffic. That same year, the city government announced plans to purchase 100 buses with reduced emissions.²⁴ Tbilisi is currently implementing a modernization plan to improve energy efficiency and boost public transportation to reduce private vehicle traffic in the city center.²⁵

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- 15 Georgian Journal, "Georgia No. 1 among the Countries that Have Deadliest Air Pollution," 28 June 2016, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/32635-georgia-no-1-among-the-countries-that-have-deadliest-air-pollution.html>
- 16 Georgian Journal, "Tbilisi among Dangerous Cities in Europe Where Air Pollution Is High," 8 May 2018, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/34468-tbilisi-among-dangerous-cities-in-europe-where-air-pollution-is-high.html>
- 17 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>
- 18 Agenda, "Tbilisi Takes Giant Steps to Tackle Noise Pollution," 12 August 2015, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2015/1773>
- 19 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>
- 20 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 21 Agenda, "Tbilisi Takes Giant Steps to Tackle Noise Pollution," 12 August 2015, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2015/1773>
- 22 Agenda, "New Law Imposing Noise Restrictions Comes into Force in Georgia," 15 August 2017, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/1761>
- 23 Analysis and Consulting Team, "Noise Pollution in Tbilisi," 28 June 2020, <https://act-global.com/en/news/noise/>
- 24 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>
- 25 Railway Pro, "EBRD Loan Approved for Tbilisi Metro Modernization," 1 May 2020, <https://www.railwaypro.com/wp/erbd-loan-approved-for-tbilisi-metro-modernisation/>

Urban Housing

Most housing in Tbilisi is expensive and consists of small apartments. When extended families are not living under the same roof, they tend to live nearby, usually in the same ethnically and religiously homogenous neighborhood. Basic services such as heating are not consistently available and water and energy shortages are common. The management of solid waste is a considerable problem. In 2019, Georgia began implementing residential recycling programs, a small step toward reducing the rate of solid waste that ends up in landfills, currently at 75%.^{26, 27, 28, 29}

A lack of regulation and sustainable urban planning has led to chaotic urban development in Tbilisi and other cities in the post-Soviet era. Many buildings were constructed illegally by opportunistic investors, leading to overpopulated areas, low quality of life, the erasure of green spaces, and an unattractive urban landscape. In recent years Georgia has begun reforming and improving its urban planning processes. In 2016, after a long legal struggle, courts in Tbilisi revoked the construction permit for a hotel that was planned to be illegally built in the city's Vake Park. The effort to oppose the project was led by environmental activists.^{30, 31, 32}

Internally Displaced Persons

There are approximately 301,000 internally displaced persons (IDP) in Georgia, most as a result of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts in the early 1990s and the war with Russia in 2008. Most IDPs live in nonresidential public buildings on the outskirts of cities; about 38% live in Tbilisi. The buildings that house the IDPs are often dilapidated and unsafe, making for harsh and dangerous living conditions. The arrangement has also contributed to the isolation and segregation of IDPs from the greater surrounding communities. Some IDPs have staged protests or gone on hunger strikes to highlight their plight. The government provides some assistance to IDPs, such as small pensions, but its focus on IDPs' eventual return to their homes in disputed areas has made it reluctant to pursue efforts for the permanent housing and full integration of IDPs.^{33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38}

26 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 128–129.

27 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>

28 Vladislav Vorotnikov, "Tbilisi or not Tbilisi, That Is the Question," *Recycling & Waste World*, 19 October 2016, <https://www.recyclingwasteworld.co.uk/in-depth-article/tbilisi-or-not-tbilisi-that-is-the-question/147034/>

29 Dato Parulava, "How Georgia Is Changing Its Approach to Waste Disposal with EU Support," *EU Neighbours*, 4 June 2018, <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action/stories/how-georgia-changing-its-approach-waste-disposal-eu-support>

30 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," *Bloomberg City Lab*, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>

31 Ann-Christin Schubert, "A Discourse on Urban Informality in Georgia's Capital and Why Buildings Are Not Enough," *Friends of Friends*, 28 October 2018, <https://www.freundevonfreunden.com/features/tbilisi-architecture-biennale/>

32 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>

33 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>

34 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Georgia," n.d., <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/georgia>

35 Carolin Funke and Tamar Bolkvadze, "Work in Progress: The Guiding Principles in Georgia," *Forced Migration Review*, October 2018, <https://www.fmreview.org/GuidingPrinciples20/funke-bolkvadze>

36 David Gogishvili and Suzanne Harris-Brandts, "The Social and Spatial Insularity of Internally Displaced Persons: 'Neighbourhood Effects' in Georgia's Collective Centres," *Taylor & Francis Online*, 3 June 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23761199.2019.1617652?journalCode=rcau20>

37 Annie Raglow, "The Problem of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia," *Borgen Project*, 21 July 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/the-problem-of-internally-displaced-persons-in-georgia/>

38 Stephanie Joyce, "Uprooted by Conflict, Stuck in Limbo, Yearning for a Place to Call Home," *NPR*, 29 May 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/05/29/529164167/uprooted-by-conflict-stuck-in-limbo-yearning-for-a-place-to-call-home>

Urban Health Care

Following independence in the early 1990s, the healthcare system in Georgia was in crisis. The per capita expenditure on healthcare dropped dramatically, healthcare infrastructure crumbled, and medical indicators such as life expectancy worsened. Starting in 2006, the government began implementing a series of healthcare reforms meant to expand coverage, especially for the poor, and improve the quality of care. The reforms faltered at times, including due to an ill-conceived private insurance scheme and the toll of the 2008 conflict with Russia. Some Georgians would spend as much as one-third of their income on medical care, while others went without treatment. In 2013, the newly elected Georgian Dream government introduced a system of universal healthcare coverage.^{39, 40, 41, 42, 43}

Is there a hospital nearby?		
Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	aak aaKhlos saavadmkofo aaRees?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	kay, kaalaakees tsentRshee

Exchange 14

Georgia's universal healthcare system is a public-private partnership in which funding is provided by the government and some 85% of the care comes from private providers. The system has created benefits such as the renovation and modernization of hospitals, improved service quality and patient safety, and continuing education for medical professionals.⁴⁴ Despite improvements, the system retains shortcomings, such as a shortage of nurses.⁴⁵ Out-of-pocket health expenses persist and place a notable burden on households.⁴⁶ According to a 2018 survey, over 40% of the population was dissatisfied with the state of healthcare.⁴⁷ In 2017, Georgia's healthcare expenditure amounted to 7.6% of GDP, below the 2018 average of 8.8% among industrialized countries.^{48, 49}

Is Dr. Mchedishvili in, sir?		
Visitor:	Is Dr. Mchedishvili in, sir?	ekeemi mtchedlishveelee aak aaRaees?
Local:	No.	aaRa

Exchange 15

- 39 Xiaohui Hou and Shiyao Chao, "An Evaluation of the Initial Impact of the Medical Assistance Program for the Poor in Georgia," The World Bank, Europe and Central Asia Region, Human Development Department and South Caucasus Country Department, April 2008, 1, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/333901468031559070/pdf/wps4588.pdf>
- 40 Monica Ellena, "Georgia: Healthcare Costs Making Health Ministry Wheeze," EurasiaNet, 7 October 2015, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-healthcare-costs-making-health-ministry-wheeze>
- 41 David Ninikelashvili, "Georgia's Healthcare Reform," Georgia Today, 28 March 2016, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3402/Georgia%E2%80%99s-Healthcare-Reform>
- 42 World Health Organization, "Quality of Primary Health Care in Georgia," 2018, https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/373737/geo-qocphc-eng.pdf
- 43 International Finance Corporation, "Georgia's Health-care System Overcomes Growing Pains," November 2018, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/impact-stories/georgia-health-care-system-overcomes-growing-pains
- 44 International Finance Corporation, "Georgia's Health-care System Overcomes Growing Pains," November 2018, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/impact-stories/georgia-health-care-system-overcomes-growing-pains
- 45 Nino Tarkhishvili, "How Prepared Is Georgian Healthcare System for COVID-19 Pandemic?" Civil.ge, 13 March 2020, <https://civil.ge/archives/342281>
- 46 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 47 JAMnews, "Survey: Most Georgians Believe Officials Are Corrupt," 5 April 2019, <https://jam-news.net/survey-most-georgians-believe-officials-are-corrupt/>
- 48 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 49 OECD, "OECD Health Statistics 2020," 2020, <http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/health-data.htm>

Pharmacies are easy to find in Tbilisi and provide prescription and over-the-counter drugs.⁵⁰ Pharmacies are called aptiaqi in Georgian, but often also bear the sign “Apotheka.” Aversi is a popular pharmacy chain in Tbilisi, and many of its branches are open 24 hours.⁵¹

In early 2020, Georgia’s proactive response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed it to contain the spread of the virus within its borders and avert a heavy toll on healthcare resources. The government moved swiftly to close the borders, quarantine travelers, and impose lockdowns and curfews. Top public health experts were enlisted to head the containment strategy. As the stringent measures were relaxed during the summer, the country began to see larger-scale outbreaks.^{52, 53, 54}

Education

The basic structure of Georgia’s education system resembles western models. The school year begins in September and ends in June, with locally determined fall and winter breaks. Early childhood education is not compulsory, and most children are not enrolled in it. Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14. Primary school consists of nine years, the first six in elementary school and the next three in what is known as basic school. Secondary school follows and is usually three years. The secondary school system is divided between traditional secondary schools and vocational and technical secondary schools, some of which last only two years.^{55, 56, 57}

According to 2017 estimates, 99.4% of the Georgian population is literate.⁵⁸ Literacy is not necessarily limited to Georgian, the official language, because much of the population speaks more than one language.⁵⁹ Despite the high literacy rate, approximately one-third of students lack basic skills in science, reading, and mathematics. A significant number of students drop out of school after the ninth grade, typically the last year of compulsory education. Government spending on education—13% of the budget in 2017—is increasing but still low by international standards.⁶⁰

Georgia is actively adjusting its education system to align with contemporary approaches such as student-oriented teaching and implementing the development of students’ social and emotional skills in the school curriculum. Management of the education system has been decentralized to give local schools autonomy in addressing student needs. The national student to teacher ratio is 8:1, but in urban areas, it is as high as 15:1.⁶¹

50 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 63.

51 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 63.

52 Giorgi Lomsadze, “Georgia Gets Rare Plaudits for Coronavirus Response,” EurasiaNet, 20 March 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-gets-rare-plaudits-for-coronavirus-response>

53 Reuters, “Georgia PM Declares Curfew Starting Tuesday to Halt Coronavirus Spread,” 30 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-georgia/georgia-pm-declares-curfew-starting-tuesday-to-halt-coronavirus-spread-idUSKBN21H24Z>

54 Giorgi Lomsadze, “Georgia Experiences Its First Wave of COVID-19,” EurasiaNet, 18 September 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-experiences-its-first-wave-of-covid-19>

55 Hasan Huseynli, Tamar Karchava, and Ann M. Koenig, “Azerbaijan and the Republic of Georgia: A New Century of Education in the Caucasus Region,” (AACRAO 96th Annual Meeting, New Orleans, 2010, 10), <https://docplayer.net/7180498-Azerbaijan-and-the-republic-of-georgia-a-new-century-of-education-in-the-caucasus-region.html>

56 Scholaro Pro, “Education System in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.scholaro.com/pro/Countries/Georgia/Education-System>

57 OECD iLibrary, “OECD logoOECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia,” 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bbc437ae-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/bbc437ae-en>

58 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

59 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 108.

60 OECD iLibrary, “OECD logoOECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia,” 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bbc437ae-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/bbc437ae-en>

61 OECD iLibrary, “OECD logoOECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia,” 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bbc437ae-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/bbc437ae-en>

In 2019, approximately 64% of college-age Georgians were enrolled in higher education.^{62, 63} The country has 24 public and 81 private higher education institutions.⁶⁴ Tbilisi is home to major institutions of higher education. The Tbilisi State University and the Academy of Science are the country’s most prominent colleges.⁶⁵ Higher education can follow several tracks, with higher vocational schools continuing from secondary school.⁶⁶

Restaurants

Although Georgia is renowned for its hospitable home cooking, one can easily find restaurants in major cities. Some serve traditional Georgian cuisine while others cater to European tastes.⁶⁷ Some restaurants still follow the Soviet-style and serve plain dishes with little variety.⁶⁸

May I have a glass of water?

Customer:	May I have a glass of water?	eRtee tchikaa tskaalee daamaaleveenet too shaydzlebaa?
Waiter:	Yes, sir!	kay, baatono!

Exchange 16

Most restaurants in Tbilisi are open for lunch and dinner, with lunch served between 2 and 3 p.m. and dinner starting at around 8 p.m. Restaurant opening hours may not adhere exactly to the information posted at the restaurant or online. For higher-end restaurants, reservations can be made through social media.⁶⁹

Are you still serving breakfast?

Customer:	Are you still serving breakfast?	saawzmis tchaama isev shaydzlebaa?
Waiter:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 17

Restaurant menus can be extensive, but most offer information in Georgian, Russian, and English, as well as pictures of the dishes. Communal eating is the norm, and many menu items are meant to be shared. Many restaurants require a minimum order of *khinkali* dumplings. Bread typically accompanies main courses.⁷⁰

Do you have dessert?

Customer:	Do you have dessert?	deseRtee gaakvt?
Waiter:	Yes, we have cake, fruit, and nuts.	kay, gwaaks naamtsKhvaaRi, Khelee daa gozinaakee

Exchange 18

62 World Bank, “School Enrollment, Tertiary (% Gross)—Georgia,” 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?locations=GE>

63 OECD Data, “Enrollment Rate,” 2018, <https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/enrolment-rate.htm>

64 EuroEducation.net, “Georgia,” 2006, <https://www.euroeducation.net/prof/goergco.htm>

65 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 90.

66 Hasan Huseynli, Tamar Karchava, and Ann M. Koenig, “Azerbaijan and the Republic of Georgia: A New Century of Education in the Caucasus Region,” (AACRAO 96th Annual Meeting, New Orleans, 2010, 10), <https://docplayer.net/7180498-Azerbaijan-and-the-republic-of-georgia-a-new-century-of-education-in-the-caucasus-region.html>

67 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 46–47.

68 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 75.

69 Emily Lush, “Eat Like a Georgian: Tbilisi Restaurant Etiquette & Tips,” Wander-Lush, 31 March 2019, <https://wander-lush.org/tips-for-eating-out-in-tbilisi-georgia/>

70 Emily Lush, “Eat Like a Georgian: Tbilisi Restaurant Etiquette & Tips,” Wander-Lush, 31 March 2019, <https://wander-lush.org/tips-for-eating-out-in-tbilisi-georgia/>

Breakfast is the most difficult meal to order in restaurants. Some establishments serve staples such as eggs and bread, but most simply offer *khachapuri*, a popular cheese bread, or *kikliko*, bread pan-fried in a savory egg batter.^{71, 72, 73}

I'd like some hot soup.

Customer:	I'd like some hot soup.	tsKhelee soopee momitaanet too shaydzlebaa
Waiter:	Okay.	kaaRgeet

Exchange 19

A type of salty mineral water known as Borjomi has been a national favorite since the beginning of the Soviet era; it is said to carry the curative properties of the Borjomi springs. A saltless variety is also available.⁷⁴ Green tea, grown in Georgia's western lowlands, is a popular drink, as is strong Turkish coffee.⁷⁵

I would like coffee or tea.

Customer:	I would like coffee or tea.	k-haawa an chaay meendaa too shaydzlebaa
Waiter:	Sure.	Raa tkma unda

Exchange 20

Bills in Georgian restaurants are typically not split among the various diners. One person, usually a man, picks up the tab.⁷⁶ While tipping is not mandatory, a 10–15% gratuity is appreciated for good service. Two additional charges to the bill are a tax of 18% and a 10–20% service charge. Most restaurants in Tbilisi accept credit cards.⁷⁷

Put this all on one bill, okay?

Customer:	Put this all on one bill, okay?	es kvelapeRi chekshee shemikwaaneet, kaaRgeet?
Waiter:	Okay.	kaaRgeet

Exchange 21

71 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 30.
 72 Emily Lush, "Eat Like a Georgian: Tbilisi Restaurant Etiquette & Tips," Wander-Lush, 31 March 2019, <https://wander-lush.org/tips-for-eating-out-in-tbilisi-georgia/>
 73 Georgian Journal, "Kikliko—Crispy Georgian Toast with Ajika Sauce and Sulguni," 15 September 2015, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/georgian-cuisine/31435-kikliko-crispy-georgian-toast-with-ajika-sauce-and-sulguni.html>
 74 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 30.
 75 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999),
 76 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 83.
 77 Emily Lush, "Eat Like a Georgian: Tbilisi Restaurant Etiquette & Tips," Wander-Lush, 31 March 2019, <https://wander-lush.org/tips-for-eating-out-in-tbilisi-georgia/>

Marketplaces

Tbilisi has a wide array of shopping venues, including markets offering high-quality goods, flea markets, and an open-air flower market.⁷⁸ The largest food market is the Dezerter Bazaar, spread out over some 2 sq km (0.77 sq mi).⁷⁹ The Dry Bridge flea market offers a wide variety of goods like household items, arts and crafts, and Soviet memorabilia.⁸⁰

Khandzali, a short narrow dagger worn with traditional Georgian clothing, is a favorite visitor purchase. Other items include carpets, ceramics, and crafts made from wood and metal. Drinking horns and items of national dress are also popular souvenirs. Traditional tunics with cartridge holders sewn in the chest and sheepskin capes worn in the mountains are especially common.⁸¹

Is the market [bazar] nearby?

Visitor:	Is the market [bazar] nearby?	saadamey aaKhlos baazaaRee aaRees?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	kay aay ik, tkvens maRdzevniv

Exchange 22

Bargaining in markets is possible. A savvy haggler can expect to save roughly 30% off the initial price. Shops tend to stay open late. Large shops will usually be open until 10 p.m., and small kiosks may stay open until midnight or later.⁸²

Do you sell traditional Georgian hats?

Buyer:	Do you sell traditional Georgian hats?	tRaadits-oolee kaRtoolee koodebee gaakvt?
Seller:	No.	aaRa

Exchange 23

Georgia's national currency is the lari (GEL). One lari is subdivided into 100 tetri.⁸³ Lari banknotes circulate in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200. In November 2020, USD 1 was worth GEL 3.3. ATMs accepting major cards are easily found in Tbilisi and most other cities. Most hotels and stores in Tbilisi accept credit cards.⁸⁴

How much longer will you be here?

Buyer:	How much longer will you be here?	kidev Raamdenee Khaanee iknebeet aak?
Seller:	Three more hours.	kidev sami saati

Exchange 24

78 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 113.

79 Emily Lush, "Visiting the Dezerter Bazaar, Tbilisi's Biggest Food Market," Wander-Lush, 28 July 2019, <https://wander-lush.org/dezter-bazaar-tbilisi-market/>

80 Atlas Obscura, "Dry Bridge Market," 26 March 2019, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/dry-bridge-market>

81 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 79, 114.

82 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 67.

83 Lonely Planet, "Georgia in Detail: Money and Costs," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/a/nar-gr/money-and-costs>

84 XE, "XE Currency Converter: 1 USD to GEL = 3.31493 Georgian Lari," 24 November 2020, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=GEL>

Currency exchange venues are easy to find in Tbilisi, and black market deals offer little advantage.⁸⁵ Banks and specialty currency exchange shops accept USD, euros, and the currencies of neighboring countries for exchange.⁸⁶

Do you accept U.S. currency?		
Buyer:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	dolaRs aayighebt?
Seller:	No, we only accept Lari.	aaRa, chven mKholod laaRebs

Exchange 25

Urban Traffic and Transportation

Tbilisi has a two-line rapid-transit metro with trains that run every 2–6 minutes. The system covers 26.4 km (16.4 mi) and serves 23 stations. The metro is currently undergoing a vast improvement project, with plans to modernize trains, renovate existing stations, and add new lines and stations.^{87, 88, 89} Above ground, buses are an inexpensive way to move around Tbilisi.⁹⁰

Will the bus be here soon?		
Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	aavtoboossee maaley movaa?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 26

Taxis are considered the most convenient way to get around Tbilisi and other major cities. In the past, unofficial taxis—private individuals operating personal vehicles—were widespread. A 2019 reform of the taxi industry mandated vehicle inspections, registration, and clearly visible taxi signs on car roofs. White became the standardized color for all cabs. Some major hotels have private taxi services.^{91, 92}

Is this airline safe for domestic travel?		
Visitor:	Is this airline safe for domestic travel?	aadgilobRivee fRenebistvis aam aaveeyaaKhaa-zebit mgzaavRobaa oosaapRtKho-aa
Local:	Yes, of course.	kay, Ra tkma unda

Exchange 27

85 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Lonely Planet, 2004), 37.

86 Lonely Planet, "Georgia in Detail: Money and Costs," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/a/nar-gr/money-and-costs>

87 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 67–70, 92.

88 Mapa-Metro, "Metro of Tbilisi," n.d., <https://mapa-metro.com/en/georgia/tbilisi/tbilisi-metro-map.htm>

89 Railway Pro, "EBRD Loan Approved for Tbilisi Metro Modernization," 1 May 2020, <https://www.railwaypro.com/wp/erbd-loan-approved-for-tbilisi-metro-modernisation/>

90 iExplore, "Georgia (Caucasus)—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/georgia-caucasus/transportation>

91 iExplore, "Georgia (Caucasus)—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/georgia-caucasus/transportation>

92 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

Georgia has four international airports, in Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, and Mestia, allowing international travelers to directly reach different parts of the country.⁹³ Georgia’s air travel industry, although small, has relatively new aircraft and high standards.⁹⁴ At least five domestic airlines offer flights within Georgia, including between Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Mestia, and Svaneti.^{95, 96} In 2016, passenger traffic increased by 25%, making Georgia’s aviation market one of the fastest growing in the world.⁹⁷

Is there a gas station nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a gas station nearby?	saadmey aaKhlos kalonka aaRees?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 28

Cars are available for rent in Georgia, with or without a driver. All rental cars are supposed to have a “car passport” registration card, which makes it legal to drive the car within Georgia. Tbilisi’s roads can be narrow and confusing, and satellite navigation directions may not always reflect reality. Georgia has one of Europe’s highest traffic accident death rates. Drivers may disregard speed limits and lane discipline; intoxicated driving occurs around major holidays.^{98, 99, 100}

Where can I rent a car?

Visitor:	Where can I rent a car?	saad shaydzlebaa vikeeRaa-o maankanaa?
Local:	By the square.	skveRtaan

Exchange 29

93 One Way Tour, “Airports in Georgia Country,” 18 November 2019, <https://onewaytour.ge/airports-georgia-country/>
 94 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 261–262.
 95 Lonely Planet, “Georgia in Detail: Getting Around,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/narratives/practical-information/transport/getting-around>
 96 World Data, “The 3 Largest Airports And Airlines in Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/georgia/airports.php>
 97 World Bank, “Georgia: From Reformer to Performer,” 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
 98 iExplore, “Georgia (Caucasus)—Transportation,” n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/georgia-caucasus/transportation>
 99 Caravanistan, “Driving in Georgia,” 5 May 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/transport/driving/georgia/>
 100 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, “Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report,” 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

Street Crime

Tbilisi's crime rates are similar to a midsize U.S. city. Crimes of opportunity such as cell phone theft and purse snatching are common, as are more serious crimes. People using public transportation are common targets for petty theft. Foreign visitors are advised to avoid the political demonstrations common in Tbilisi because tensions can quickly escalate. The cities within the self-declared autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are outside the control of the central government, and crime in these areas is very high.^{101, 102}

There are an estimated 4,000 street children in Tbilisi. Most are ethnic Georgians, while others are Armenian or Azerbaijani migrants or IDPs from the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts. The main drivers for the children ending up on the streets are poverty, family dysfunction, and violence. To survive, the children form into gangs and turn to begging, petty crime, or prostitution.^{103, 104}

101 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 66.

102 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

103 OC Media, "Georgian Street Children Are 'Used as Shields' in Crimes," 25 July 2018, <https://oc-media.org/georgian-street-children-are-used-as-shields-in-crimes/>

104 UNICEF, "Children Living and Working in the Streets of Georgia," September 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/reports/children-living-and-working-streets-georgia>

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Georgian word *blat* is used to denote bending the rules and can refer to anything from patronage to fraud. True False
2. The Georgian government has built permanent housing for most of the 301,000 internally displaced persons from the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts. True False
3. Georgian restaurants are known for a wide array of breakfast offerings. True False
4. Tbilisi has yet to acquire an underground metro system despite multiple governmental and private sector initiatives. True False
5. Driving in Tbilisi can be confusing and disorienting. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment Answers

1. True:
The word *blat* grew out of the restrictive communist system. Its continued usage since independence signifies the corruption and black-market trading found in Georgia's cities.
2. False:
The government is reluctant to pursue efforts for permanent housing and full integration of internally displaced persons because its focus remains on the persons' eventual return to the disputed areas.
3. False:
Breakfast is the most difficult meal to order in restaurants. Some establishments serve staples such as eggs and bread but most simply offer *khachapuri*, a popular cheese bread, or *kikliko*, bread pan-fried in a savory egg batter.
4. False:
Tbilisi has a two-line rapid-transit metro system with trains that run every 2–6 minutes. The system covers 26.4 km (16.4 mi) and serves 23 stations.
5. True:
Tbilisi's roads can be narrow and confusing, which can complicate satellite navigation directions.

Chapter 5 | Rural Life



Oxen pull cargo along a road in Ushguli.
Flickr / Arian Zwegers

Introduction

Georgia's countryside, with its rugged mountain villages, ancient monasteries, and legendary vineyards, is a source of national pride and lore. The rural population—today some 40% of Georgians—has seen its way of life affected by Soviet attempts at communization and post-independence land reforms. After decades spent neglecting agriculture, the authorities in Tbilisi are starting to realize the sector's importance to the nation's food security and welfare. Reforms in education, healthcare, and regional governance aim to grant rural authorities more autonomy to deal with unique local issues, while infrastructure development efforts seek to reduce regional disparities. Nevertheless, the standard of living in rural areas remains lower than in cities. The disputed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are further burdened by entrenched and intractable conflicts with the central government.^{1, 2, 3}

- 1 Benjamin Kemper, "A Guide to Georgian Wine Country," Conde Nast Traveler, 5 September 2018, <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/a-guide-to-georgian-wine-country>
- 2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 3 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Land Tenure and Distribution

Georgia’s agricultural land distribution has changed drastically since the country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. During the Soviet years, the country’s agricultural sector was administered like much of the rest of the republics, with all supply and demand decisions made by central authorities. Large government-run collective farms were devoted to producing a single crop.⁴

Do you own this land?		
Official:	Do you own this land?	es mitsaa tkveneeyaa?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 30

In 1992, the Georgian government began land reforms that granted farmers control of their farms. New policies led to decentralized ownership of land, either through privatization or leasing. Farming households received up to 1.25 hectares (3 acres) of land and farmers who were involved in animal breeding in mountainous areas up to 5 hectares (12 acres) of pastureland. Over three million small agricultural land plots were created and passed into the private ownership of rural farmers. Medium- and large-sized farms often occupied leased land. The process has resulted in the privatization of 45% and the leasing of 30% of the country’s agricultural land.^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10}

What crops do you grow?		
Official:	What crops do you grow?	Raa mosaavalee mogkaavt?
Local:	I grow potatoes, grapes, and apples.	momkaavs kaRtofilee, kuRdzenee da vaashlee

Exchange 31

While the privatization and fragmentation of farmland constituted a needed departure from the old Soviet-era practices, they have had some counterproductive effects. Many of the family-sized plots of land are used primarily for subsistence farming and are under-cultivated or farmed with outdated methods and equipment. This underutilization contributes to the low productivity of the agriculture sector. Smallholders are also reluctant to register their land with the government, due to prevailing mistrust or fear of interference. Land registration is seen as an important precursor to policies of land consolidation that would enable agricultural practices to become more productive and efficient. Less than 45% of Georgia’s land is believed to be registered.^{11, 12, 13, 14}

4 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 116.
 5 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 46.
 6 Joseph Gogodze, Iddo Kan, and Ayal Kimli, “Land Reform and Rural Well Being in the Republic of Georgia: 1996–2003,” Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Center for Agricultural Economic Research, (Discussion Paper No. 1.07, January 2007, 2–3), <http://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/huaedp/7168.html>
 7 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 116.
 8 Asian Development Bank, “Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary,” 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
 9 Sopiko Japaridze, “Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom,” Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
 10 International Trade Administration, “Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector,” 8 October 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>
 11 Rati Kochlamazashvili, “The ‘Achilles’ Heel’ of Georgia’s Agriculture: Incomplete Land Registration,” Georgia Today, 15 April 2019, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/15253/The-%E2%80%9CAchilles%E2%80%99-Heel%E2%80%9D-of-Georgia%E2%80%99s-Agriculture%3A-Incomplete-Land-Registration>
 12 Sopiko Japaridze, “Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom,” Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
 13 Asian Development Bank, “Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary,” 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
 14 World Bank, “Georgia: From Reformer to Performer,” 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

In 2017 and 2018, the government introduced a policy banning foreigners from owning Georgian farmland. The policy was intended to slow the rapid acquisition of valuable land by outside interests, a well-documented problem. An unintended consequence of the policy was that small farmers were unable to obtain business loans from foreign banks that operated in Georgia because their farmland was no longer eligible to be used as collateral. By 2019, approximately 1,500 loans had been denied. That same year, the government began exploring ways to amend the law, such as allowing foreign banks to own agricultural land for up to two years.^{15, 16}

Rural Economy

Some 43% of land in Georgia is designated as agricultural land, and only 35% of that land is considered arable.^{17, 18, 19} Farmers in Georgia produce a wide variety of crops that grow in the sunny subtropical climate of the western lowlands. Georgia's agricultural diversity has historically been key to the country's economy.²⁰ Citrus fruits and tea thrive in the western region, while the central highlands are more suitable for barley and oats. Eastern Georgia is renowned for its wine.²¹ Important commercial crops include sugar beets and tobacco.²²

Although only a small portion of land is suitable for agricultural production, nonagricultural land may be used for grazing livestock. The lower valleys provides pastures for milking cows and goats. The highlands at the edge of the mountains are suitable for beef cattle and sheep.²³ Herders raise their livestock on separate pastures during the summer and winter months. In addition to traditional livestock, bee and silkworm rearing also contribute to the rural economy.²⁴

Despite abundant agricultural resources, Georgia's rural economy is performing well below potential. Under the Saakashvili administration, a strong emphasis was placed on industrial and urban development, with the countryside being valued primarily as a draw for tourists. Domestic food production was neglected: Between 1991 and 2016, food production decreased by three-fourths, and today Georgia imports 80% of its food. The

situation is undermining the country's food security and has contributed to rural malaise. Over a quarter of rural residents live in poverty, 9% more than in urban areas.^{25, 26, 27, 28, 29}

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- 15 Umberto Bacchi, "Georgia's Ban on Foreign Landowners Leaves Farmers in Limbo," Reuters, 16 April 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-landrights-agriculture/georgias-ban-on-foreign-landowners-leaves-farmers-in-limbo-idUSKCN1RT03Y>
- 16 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 17 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 18 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 19 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 20 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 116.
- 21 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 48.
- 22 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 23 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 117.
- 24 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 25 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 26 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 27 I. E. Meskhia, "Food Security Problems in Post-Soviet Georgia," ScienceDirect, June 2016, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1512188716000105>
- 28 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 8 October 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>
- 29 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

Since coming to power in 2012, the Georgian Dream party has prioritized agricultural development. Initiatives include low-interest agricultural loans, marketing Georgian wine and other products abroad, a law favoring the establishment of cooperatives among small farmers, developing improved irrigation technology, and increased social assistance for people living in mountainous regions, where herding is a primary occupation. As a result, Georgia's cultivated land has increased by some 600,000 hectares (1,482,632 acres) and hundreds of agricultural enterprises have been established or expanded.^{30, 31, 32, 33}

Georgia's rural workday is scheduled around farming and offers less free time than in the cities. Men tend to the crops or the animals while women primarily manage the home, which includes cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. Additionally, women may also help around the farm.³⁴

Rural Transportation

The quality of roads outside of Georgia's cities varies. Many of the main highways have been improved recently and are in good condition, but one-third of the secondary roads are in poor condition. Secondary roads are also often poorly lit. In mountainous regions, the roads can be narrow and steep, and drivers may encounter free-ranging livestock.^{35, 36, 37, 38, 39}

Buses, minibuses (*marshrutky*), and trains are common and convenient ways to travel in rural Georgia. Bus routes cover the entire country, including once-a-week service to remote mountain villages. Minibuses can be crowded, and some do not depart until all their seats have been filled. A rail network connects all the major cities. Trains are considered slow, but many Georgians like to book overnight trips between Tbilisi and the Black Sea coast. On the Black Sea, ferry services provide connections to locations in Turkey.^{40, 41, 42}

Georgia is currently undertaking a major transport network expansion and improvement effort in a bid to capitalize on its strategic location and become an international transit hub. As part of this effort, the country's highways are being expanded and brought up to international motorway standards of two lanes per direction. In 2019 and 2020, over 1,600 km (994 mi) of roads were built and improved, a significant increase over previous years. The project,

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- 30 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 31 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 32 I. E. Meskhia, "Food Security Problems in Post-Soviet Georgia," ScienceDirect, June 2016, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1512188716000105>
- 33 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 8 October 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>
- 34 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 124–128.
- 35 Caravanistan, "Driving in Georgia," 5 May 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/transport/driving/georgia/>
- 36 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>
- 37 Asian Development Bank, "Georgia Transport Sector Assessment, Strategy, and Road Map," 2014, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/34108/files/georgia-transport-assessment-strategy-road-map.pdf>
- 38 Logistics Capability Assessment, "Georgia Road Network," n.d., <https://dlca.logcluster.org/display/public/DLCA/2.3+Georgia+Road+Network>
- 39 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 40 iExplore, "Georgia (Caucasus)—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/georgia-caucasus/transportation>
- 41 Lonely Planet, "Georgia in Detail: Getting Around," 28 August 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/narratives/practical-information/transport/getting-around>
- 42 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

financed in large part by loans from European and Asian banks, is also intended to improve connectivity between cities and reduce regional standard of living disparities.^{43, 44, 45, 46, 47}

The centerpiece of Georgia’s transportation network is the East-West Highway, which bisects the country horizontally from Georgia’s Black Sea ports, through Tbilisi, and to the Azerbaijani border. The highway carries over 60% of Georgia’s foreign freight trade and is a crucial link in international trade between the Caspian and Black seas. The highway is a priority in Georgia’s road improvement efforts and is projected to be fully modernized by 2025. It is currently used by 13,000 vehicles per day.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

The mountains dividing Georgia from Russia remain largely inaccessible. The two countries are linked by the Georgian Military Highway, which begins in Tbilisi and runs north along a centuries-old route.⁵² The highway traffic is dominated by large trucks, which are only allowed to travel in one direction at a time, leading to traffic queues and delays.⁵³ In winter, the route can be affected by ice, landslides, and avalanches.⁵⁴

Rural Healthcare

The remote and dispersed nature of Georgia’s rural areas often requires a decentralized, innovative, and unconventional approach to medical care. To provide effective treatment, rural doctors must be familiar with the unique life circumstances of the populations they serve. Resource constraints in rural areas mean that rural primary care providers must rely on outpatient care and forego referrals to specialists, who are often not available. Rural doctors operate with considerably less supervision and accountability than their urban counterparts, many being required to send reports to the health ministry only once per year.⁵⁵

Is there a medical clinic nearby?		
Official:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	aak aaKhlos saameditseeno kleeneekaa aaRees?
Local:	Yes, over there.	kay, ay ayk

Exchange 32

43 Asian Development Bank, “Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary,” 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>

44 Asian Development Bank, “Georgia Transport Sector Assessment, Strategy, and Road Map,” 2014, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/34108/files/georgia-transport-assessment-strategy-road-map.pdf>

45 Agenda.ge, “Georgia Building 140 Km of New Highways, 70 Km of Which to Open in 2020,” 3 July 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2111>

46 Agenda.ge, “What Will Georgia Look Like in 2020? Gov’t Announces Major Development Plan,” 16 September 2016, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2016/2191>

47 Agenda.ge, “800 Km of Roads Rebuilt across Georgia in 2019,” 10 December 2019, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/3360>

48 Agenda.ge, “‘Crucial’ Modern Highway Nearing Completion, Set to Connect Tbilisi with Batumi,” 18 July 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2283>

49 Mustapha Benmaamar et al., “Georgia’s Transport and Logistics Strategy: Achievements to Date and Areas for Improvements,” January 2015, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/623591468191346382/pdf/96577-REVISED-WP-PUBLIC-Georgia-Box391464B-Final-Jan2015.pdf>

50 World Construction Network, “ADB Grants \$278m Loan to Improve East-West Highway in Georgia,” 27 November 2019, <https://www.worldconstructionnetwork.com/news/adb-grants-278m-loan-to-improve-east-west-highway-in-georgia/>

51 Asian Development Bank, “ADB \$300 Million Loan to Build New Section of Georgia’s East-West Highway,” 27 September 2018, <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-300-million-loan-build-new-section-georgias-east-west-highway>

52 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 10,51.

53 Caravanistan, “Driving in Georgia,” 5 May 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/transport/driving/georgia/>

54 World Bank, “Georgia: From Reformer to Performer,” 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

55 World Health Organization, “Quality of Health Care in Georgia,” 2018, https://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/373737/geo-qocphc-eng.pdf

Medical facilities in the countryside are owned by the central government, local governments, or the private sector. Rural medical infrastructure is considered subpar, with poor sanitary conditions and a shortage of medical supplies. The infant mortality rate is higher in rural areas than in cities. Medical services are severely limited in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.^{56, 57, 58}

Rural Education

Georgian society values education; most students in rural areas have access to schools.⁵⁹ The historic emphasis on education and proliferation of schools in both urban and rural areas have contributed to the country’s nearly universal literacy rate.⁶⁰ Despite this emphasis on education, post-independence economic hardships have reduced school funding. Many schools have outdated materials, canceled sports programs, and buildings in need of repair.⁶¹

Is there a school nearby?		
Official:	Is there a school nearby?	aak aaKhlos skola aaRees?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 33

Georgia’s decreasing rural population has led to diminished enrollment rates in rural schools. In some rural areas, the student to teacher ratio is 2:1, compared to the national average of 8:1. Some 65% of the country’s schools enroll 25% of the student population. The situation has affected the quality of rural education, with rural students lagging 1.5 years behind their urban counterparts. The central government has granted rural schools increased financial autonomy to better address such challenges.^{62, 63}

Do your children go to school?		
Official:	Do your children go to school?	tkweni shvilebi daadeeyaan skolaashee?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 34

56 World Health Organization, “Quality of Health Care in Georgia,” 2018, https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/373737/geo-qocphc-eng.pdf

57 Levan Baramidze, “Reproductive Health in Georgia,” Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 27 September 2017, https://www.gfmer.ch/Endo/PGC_network/Georgia.htm

58 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, “Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report,” 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

59 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 126.

60 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

61 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 126.

62 OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia. Chapter 1, The Education System in Georgia,” 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bbc437ae-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/bbc437ae-en>

63 World Bank, “Georgia: From Reformer to Performer,” 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

Who's in Charge?

Georgia is subdivided into 12 regional level administrations, including nine regions; the capital city, Tbilisi; and two officially recognized autonomous republics, Abkhazia and Azaria. Azaria is under the administrative control of the central government in Tbilisi, while Abkhazia is a breakaway republic occupied by Russian troops. The breakaway region of South Ossetia, also occupied by Russian troops, consists of parts of other regions and is not recognized as an individual entity by Tbilisi.^{64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69}

Georgia's regional administrations are further subdivided into 64 self-governing municipalities. The number of administrations and municipalities may change as Georgia undergoes regional administrative reform. The government of each municipality consists of a council (*sakrebulo*), the legislative body; a mayor (*gamgebeli*), the chief executive; and a city hall (*gamgeoba*), the administrative body.^{70, 71}

Does your village leader [tavkatsi] live here?

Official:	Does your village leader [tavkatsi] live here?	tkweni soplis tavkaatsee aak tsKhovRobs?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 35

Councils oversee a municipality's budget and taxation policies and have the authority to establish commissions and working groups concerning legal, financial, economic, educational, cultural, and social matters. Councils also monitor the activities of the mayor and city hall and can remove a mayor through a vote of no confidence.^{72, 73}

Will you take me to your tavkatsi?

Official:	Will you take me to your tavkatsi?	sheygidzleeyaat soplis taavkaatstaan tsaamikvaanot?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 36

- 64 Government of Georgia, "Regions of Georgia," n.d., http://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=227
- 65 Michail Angelopoulos et al., "Local and Regional Democracy in Georgia," Congress of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 7 November 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808e551a>
- 66 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 67 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Ajaria," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ajaria>
- 68 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Abkhazia" 25 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Abkhazia>
- 69 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "South Ossetia," 10 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Ossetia>
- 70 Government of Georgia, "Regions of Georgia," n.d., http://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=227
- 71 Michail Angelopoulos et al., "Local and Regional Democracy in Georgia," Congress of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 7 November 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808e551a>
- 72 Michail Angelopoulos et al., "Local and Regional Democracy in Georgia," Congress of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 7 November 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808e551a>
- 73 Transparency International Georgia, "The New Local Self-Government Code: Overview of the Main Novelities," 10 March 2014, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/new-local-self-government-code-overview-main-novelities>

Mayors nominate the heads of municipal services and the municipality’s administrative and territorial divisions. Mayors also establish commissions within city hall to administer infrastructure, procurement, land use, licensing, and social services. Twice a year, mayors provide accountability reports to the council.^{74, 75}

Respected Mr. Giorgi, we need your help.		
Official:	Respected Mr. Giorgi, we need your help / advice / opinion.	baatono geeyoRgi, chven tkvenee daaKhmaaReba / Rcheva / aazRees mosmena gvtchiRdeybaa
Local leader:	Okay.	kaaRgeet

Exchange 37

Village elders, especially in Georgia’s mountain regions, have played an important role in local government for centuries. Traditionally, a village assembly would choose a headman who was responsible for village administration. Soviet administration in the 20th century reduced local autonomy, but some vestiges of the old system led by village elders survived through independence in the early 1990s. As the country emerged from Soviet rule, tribal traditions resurfaced in local leadership.⁷⁶

Where is the nearest checkpoint?		
Official:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	saad aaRis waakhlo-esi blokpostee?
Local:	Two kilometers from here.	aakeydaan oR kilometRishee

Exchange 38

Important communal networks, known as clans, drive a large portion of the political system in Georgia. While not based entirely along kinship lines, Georgian clans value loyalty, personal friendship, and strong leadership. The resulting “clannishness” is often cited as a stumbling block to modern democratic norms.⁷⁷ Representatives of regional or family clans are often the driving force behind local political parties and government.⁷⁸

74 Michail Angelopoulos et al., “Local and Regional Democracy in Georgia,” Congress of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 7 November 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808e551a>

75 Transparency International Georgia, “The New Local Self-Government Code: Overview of the Main Novelties,” 10 March 2014, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/new-local-self-government-code-overview-main-novelties>

76 David Lasaberidze, Konstantine Kandelaki, and Niko Orvelashvili, “Local Government in Georgia,” in *Developing New Rules in the Old Environment: Local Governments in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Igor Munteanu and Victor Popa, (Central European University Press, 2003), 269–271, <https://iuristebi.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/local-government-in-georgia.pdf>

77 Ghia Nodia and Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach, “The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties—Achievements, Challenges and Prospects,” OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2006, 76–77, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11871213.pdf>

78 David Lasaberidze, Konstantine Kandelaki, and Niko Orvelashvili, “Local Government in Georgia,” in *Developing New Rules in the Old Environment: Local Governments in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Igor Munteanu and Victor Popa, (Central European University Press, 2003), 275, <https://iuristebi.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/local-government-in-georgia.pdf>

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Border Crossings

Georgia has functioning border crossings with all its neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. There are three crossing points with Turkey, at Vale, Sarp, and Kartsakhi. The sole crossing with Russia is at Dariali in the Caucasus Mountains. The five crossings with Azerbaijan are at Tsiteli Khidi, Mtkvari/Vakhtangisi, Samtatskaro, Lagodekhi/Tsodna, and Gardabani. There are four crossings with Armenia, at Ninotsminda, Guguti, Akhkerpi, and Sadakhlo. Most crossings operate 24 hours a day, although some are only open during daylight hours. Four Black Sea ports—Batumi, Supsa, Poti, and Kulevi—are open to foreign ships.^{79, 80, 81}

Is this all the ID you have?

Guard:	Is this all the ID you have?	piRaadobees sKhva motsmobaa aaR gaakvt?
Driver:	No.	aaRa

Exchange 39

Two additional border crossings with Russia—Gantiadi in Abkhazia and Roki in South Ossetia—are in breakaway territories that are not under Georgian control. The Abkhazian Black Sea ports of Sukhumi and Ochamchire are also not under Georgian government control.⁸²

Are you carrying any guns?

Guard:	Are you carrying any guns?	yaRaghee gaakvt?
Driver:	No.	aaRa

Exchange 40

Citizens from the European Union can enter Georgia with an identification card instead of a passport. Citizens from over 90 countries, including the United States, can enter Georgia without a visa and stay for up to 12 months. For people from countries not on the list, visas can be obtained either online or from Georgian consulates.^{83, 84}
⁸⁵ In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia closed its land borders to all foreign visitors. As of late 2020, citizens of 18 European countries were permitted entry by air, provided they adhered to stringent virus testing and self-isolation procedures.⁸⁶

Show us the car registration.

Guard:	Show us the car registration.	maankaaanis RegistRaatsees saabooti gvachvenet
Driver:	Okay.	kaaRgeet

Exchange 41

- 79 Caravanistan, “Georgia Border Crossings,” 21 November 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/border-crossings/georgia/>
- 80 Advantour, “Georgia Border Crossings,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/georgia/border-crossing.htm>
- 81 State Commission on Migration Issues, “Georgian Border Checkpoints,” n.d., http://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=152&clang=1
- 82 State Commission on Migration Issues, “Georgian Border Checkpoints,” n.d., http://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=152&clang=1
- 83 Lonely Planet, “Georgia in Detail: Entry & Exit Formalities,” 28 August 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/narratives/practical-information/directory/entry-exit-formalities>
- 84 Caravanistan, “Georgia Border Crossings,” 21 November 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/border-crossings/georgia/>
- 85 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, “Georgian Visa Information,” n.d., <https://www.geoconsul.gov.ge/HtmlPage/Html/View?id=956&lang=Eng>
- 86 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, “Regulations for Crossing the Georgian Border in Connection with the COVID-19 Pandemic,” 2 December 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/CoVID-19-sakitkhebi/sazgvriss-kvetis-regulaciebi.aspx>

Checkpoints

The multiple crossings into the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are controlled by military checkpoints. On the Georgian side, the checkpoints are manned by Georgian soldiers, while on the breakaway sides there are checkpoints manned by soldiers of the de facto authorities and other checkpoints manned by Russian soldiers. Both Georgia and the de facto authorities have at times closed down or restricted the crossings amid heightened tensions. Georgian police occasionally set up checkpoints along the buffer zone separating South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia.^{87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92}

Landmines

Georgia is not a signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty or the Convention on Cluster Munitions. While Georgia supports the treaties' principles, it states that its inability to control the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia prevents its accession. Georgia does not produce mines but does retain a stockpile of mines from when it was part of the Soviet Union. Georgia claims that it stopped using mines in 1996, but Georgian troops are known or suspected to have used mines between 2001 and 2008 in regions surrounding Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁹³

Is this area mined?		
Visitor:	Is this area mined?	es aadgilee daanaaghmooleeyaa?
Local:	Yes, near the border with Russia.	kay, Roosetis saazghvaaRtaan

Exchange 42

The majority of Georgia's landmine dangers lie in the Abkhazia region in the northwest. During the 1991–93 conflict, Georgian and Abkhazian forces laid tens of thousands of mines. Many of the mines were laid by Abkhazian forces to create a barrier between Abkhazia and Georgia proper and prevent the repatriation of displaced ethnic Georgians. The area along the Inguri River, a natural border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, was heavily mined; flooding in the area has the potential to displace landmines, posing a threat to locals.^{94, 95}

- 87 OC Media, "South Ossetia Tensions Rise as Georgia Sets up New Police Checkpoint," 29 August 2019, <https://oc-media.org/south-ossetia-tensions-rise-as-georgia-sets-up-new-police-checkpoint/>
- 88 France24, "Georgia Warns of Risk of 'Confrontation' with South Ossetia," 30 August 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190830-georgia-warns-of-risk-of-confrontation-with-south-ossetia>
- 89 International Federation for Human Rights, "Georgia: Checkpoint Closures Have Led to a Critical Humanitarian Situation in South Ossetia," 22 November 2019, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/georgia/georgia-checkpoint-closures-have-led-to-a-critical-humanitarian>
- 90 Alex Reynolds, "How to Get from Georgia to Abkhazia," Lost with Purpose, 16 October 2020, <https://www.lostwithpurpose.com/georgia-to-abkhazia/>
- 91 Olesya Vartanyan, "Easing Travel between Georgia and Breakaway Abkhazia," International Crisis Group, 5 September 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/abkhazia-georgia/easing-travel-between-georgia-and-breakaway-abkhazia>
- 92 Caravanistan, "South Ossetia Border Crossings," 5 May 2020, <https://caravanistan.com/border-crossings/south-ossetia/>
- 93 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Georgia: Mine Ban Policy," 18 December 2019, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2019/georgia/mine-ban-policy.aspx>
- 94 United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs Mine Clearance Policy Unit, "Georgia – Landmines Country Report," ReliefWeb, 29 May 1996, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/ACOS-64DGK6?OpenDocument>
- 95 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Georgia Country Profile," n.d., <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/1999/georgia.html>

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Since independence, Georgia's agricultural land has been consolidated under the ownership of a handful of large agribusiness companies. True False
2. Georgia has made profitable use of its agricultural potential and can meet most of its food needs domestically. True False
3. Georgia has undertaken a major project to expand and modernize its highways. True False
4. The remote and dispersed nature of Georgia's rural areas often requires a decentralized, innovative, and unconventional approach to medical care. True False
5. Citizens from the European Union can enter Georgia with an identification card instead of a passport. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Land reforms led to more than three million small agricultural land plots—totaling 1.25–5 hectares (3–12 acres)—being transferred as private ownership to rural farmers and herders.
2. False:
Despite abundant agricultural resources, Georgia’s rural economy is performing well below potential, and Georgia imports 80% of its food.
3. True:
Georgia’s highways are under renovation to make them compliant with the international motorway standard of having two lanes in each direction.
4. True:
Rural doctors rely on outpatient care and forego referrals to specialists due to resource constraints. Many rural doctors are required to send reports to the health ministry only once per year.
5. True:
Citizens from over 90 countries, including the United States, can also enter Georgia without a visa and stay for up to 12 months.

Chapter 6 | Family Life



A traditional wedding ceremony in Tbilisi.
Flickr / Chiara Neve

Introduction

Family is central to Georgian culture and life. Weddings are joyous occasions that blend traditional customs and modern celebrations. Men are considered the head of families and women are commonly expected to handle the household work. A typical household often includes extended family members, with elders such as grandparents afforded a great amount of respect and deference by the rest of the household; it is also common for grandparents to assist in child-rearing. In Georgia's patriarchal society, women face difficulties with inheritance rights and post-divorce stigma. More acute problems like domestic violence and child marriage are also present.^{1, 2, 3}

1 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

2 Countries and Their Cultures, "Georgia," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>

3 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Typical Household and Family Structure

Family ties are a central part of Georgian culture, in particular the extended family. It is common for traditional households to have 1–2 parents and children each, as well as grandparents—up to three generations in one household. If a family lives with extended relatives, it is typically the husband’s family, although living with the wife’s family is not as stigmatized as it once was.^{4, 5}

How many people live in this house?

Official:	How many people live in this house?	aam saaKhlShee Raamdenee aadamyanee tsKhovRobs?
Local:	Six.	ekvsee

Exchange 43

Blood relations are not the only familial bonds recognized by Georgians. “Spiritual” kinships are relationships with people who may not share a family line but are treated as equal family members nonetheless. Before the Soviet era, wet nurses commonly breastfed nonbiological children under their care, which created a siblinghood of sorts with the wet nurse’s biological children and a bond between the families that would endure for generations. Although this practice has largely faded over time, other extra-familial bonds remain prominent in Georgian culture.^{6, 7, 8}

Godparents are significant and common in Georgian society. Godparents are usually chosen from among the parents’ lifelong friends. More than a role model, a godparent will essentially become part of the family. Tradition dictates that descendants of the parents and the godparents—now considered kin—should not marry for 14 generations. Another traditional kinship ritual requires that two individuals cut their fingers and mix blood to create a sworn siblinghood relationship.^{9, 10, 11}

Are these people [children] part of your family?

Official:	Are these people [children] part of your family?	es KhaalKhee tkvenee ojaaKhees tsevRebee aReeyaan?
Local:	Yes.	kay

Exchange 44

Georgian women are typically responsible for the household while the men control resources and are expected to handle financial responsibilities. Grandparents often play an active role in child upbringing. In some cases, the adult couple will provide care for the elder relatives. Living with extended family makes housing more affordable, as many couples are unable to afford housing on their own. Urban and rural Georgian families generally maintain this same household composition, although rural Georgians are not commonly as geographically close to extended family as their counterparts in cities.^{12, 13, 14, 15}

4 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>
 5 EveryCulture, “Mingrelians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Kinship.html>
 6 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>
 7 EveryCulture, “Mingrelians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Kinship.html>
 8 EveryCulture, “Georgians,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Georgians.html>
 9 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>
 10 EveryCulture, “Mingrelians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Kinship.html>
 11 EveryCulture, “Georgians,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Georgians.html>
 12 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
 13 EveryCulture, “Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>
 14 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>
 15 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 129.

Georgia's LGBT community faces adversity in the country's conservative society. In 2020, Georgia ranked 30th among 49 European countries for protecting against LGBT discrimination. While discrimination against sexual orientation is illegal, LGBT people are usually met with staunch rejection from family members and intense opposition from society at large. They are often insulted with the term "pederast" and portrayed as a threat to the national identity. Anti-LGBT efforts, sometimes violent, are led by the Georgian Orthodox Church and the far-right Georgian March party. In recent years, pro-LGBT activists, based primarily in Tbilisi, have seen some progress, with the emergence of several gay-friendly nightclubs and the screening of a movie about a gay relationship. In 2019, organizers braved threats of violence to hold a small pride parade outside of the interior ministry.^{16, 17, 18, 19}

Status of Women in the Family

Georgian society is patriarchal, with defined gender roles for women and men. Women are primarily responsible for the household and raising of children. It is common for women to be employed and work outside the home, most often in education, medicine, science, media, or agriculture. Domestic violence is a significant concern in Georgian households; it is estimated that one in seven Georgian women experience domestic violence in their homes. Progress toward addressing violence against women has been hindered by social attitudes, distrust in the justice system, and a culture of silence that persists today.^{20, 21, 22}

Compared to other European and Western countries, gender equality is not generally considered a significant concern in Georgia. Men view cooking and cleaning as women's work and will seldom help with such chores.²³ Georgia's national epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is emblematic of the significance of masculinity, chivalry, and honor in society. The poem proclaims that love and friendship can conquer all foes, and these values have become deeply entrenched in the national culture.^{24, 25, 26}

Female-led households accounted for approximately 26% of Georgian households in 2015. Even with antipoverty measures implemented by the government, these homes fared worse than households led by males. Poverty in male-led households decreased from roughly 35% to 20% while in female-led households the decline was from 38% to 24%. This pattern is present in both urban and rural areas. Female labor participation—at about 58%—is about average for the region and slightly above that of Eastern European countries.²⁷ Inheritance rights are also more vulnerable for women because of discrimination resulting from the country's patrilineal kinship system.

16 Andrew Roth, "Georgia Prepares for First LGBT Pride amid Threats of Violence," *Guardian*, 16 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/16/georgia-prepares-for-first-lgbt-pride-tbilisi-amid-threats-of-violence>

17 Rayhan Demytrie, "LGBT Rights: The Film about Gay Love Shaking up Georgia," BBC News, 23 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50821544>

18 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Small LGBT Pride Rally Held In Tbilisi," 8 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-s-gay-pride-parade-cancelled-after-threats-received/30043630.html>

19 Agenda.ge, "ILGA-Europe: Georgia Ranks 30th among 49 Countries in Terms of Protecting LGBT People," 15 May 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1526>

20 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

21 UN Women Georgia, "One in Seven in Georgia Experiences Domestic Violence, New National Study Finds," 6 March 2018, <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/03/one-in-seven-women-in-georgia-experiences-domestic-violence-new-national-study-finds>

22 Council of Europe Office in Georgia, "Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Georgia," 30 September 2019, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-in-georgia>

23 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 67.

24 Margaret Kaeter and Justin Burke, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 122.

25 Roger Rosen and Jeffrey Jay Fox, *Georgia: Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 19.

26 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 66.

27 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer: A Systematic Country Diagnostic," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

For example, if a woman becomes a widow, she typically will move in with her deceased spouse's family and is expected to forego any inheritance rights.²⁸

In 2010, the Georgian government passed a law that prohibits gender-related discrimination and establishes gender equality provisions within the workplace. The government has also made acting on gender prejudices while committing a crime an aggravating factor, although this stipulation is rarely enforced. While sexual assault is illegal in Georgia, the law does not specifically address spousal rape.^{29, 30}

Status of Elders, Adolescents, and Children

Elders

Georgian culture is hierarchal and holds elders in high esteem. Cultural norms dictate that elders are greeted first in social settings, as age is a key factor in how much respect is given to others. Traditionally, the eldest male of a household acts as the symbolic head of the family. He is consulted on important family decisions, often deciding the outcome. When multiple generations live together in one household or at family gatherings, elders are commonly given great respect. Younger family members typically defer to them for most group decisions. The oldest female will manage the home and direct the affairs of the other women.³¹ It is considered rude to display anger toward elders in public.^{32, 33} In some villages and rural areas, reverence for elders goes even further, affording some elders a special role within the local government.^{34, 35}

It is expected that the elder percentage of Georgia's population will increase over time, potentially rising from 16.85% today to 25.3% by 2050.³⁶ As their numbers rise, Georgian elders have encountered significant challenges in relevant resources and services. The pension system in particular is considered inadequate.³⁷ In 2015, more than 700,000 Georgians qualified for elder pension benefits. In 2018, the pension system underwent a comprehensive reform to better provide for retirement.^{38, 39}

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- 28 OECD, "Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Report for Eurasia: Chapter 3. Discrimination in the Family," n.d., <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/60bb29a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/60bb29a4-en>
- 29 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, "Georgia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," 11 March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>
- 30 Asian Development Bank, "Georgia: Country Gender Assessment," December 2018, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479186/georgia-country-gender-assessment.pdf>
- 31 EveryCulture, "Georgians—Kinship," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>
- 32 Commisceo Global, "Georgia: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/georgia-guide>
- 33 Best Georgian, "Tips on Georgian Etiquette & Customs," n.d., <https://bestgeorgian.com/georgian-etiquette-customs/>
- 34 David Lasaberidze, Konstantine Kandelaki, and Niko Orvelashvili, "Local Government in Georgia," in *Developing New Rules in the Old Environment: Local Governments in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Igor Munteanu and Victor Popa, (Central European University Press, 2003), 269–271, <https://iuristebi.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/local-government-in-georgia.pdf>
- 35 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, "Take Care of Time: Ageing in Georgia Seen through the Eyes of Its Older Citizens," n.d., https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Capacity_building/Road_Maps/Georgia/Publication/Take_care_of_time_-_Ageing_in_Georgia.pdf
- 36 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 24 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>
- 37 Bart de Bruijn and Maka Chitanava, "Ageing and Older Persons in Georgia: An Overview Based on the 2014 General Population Census Data," 2017, http://census.ge/files/results/publication/en/2.%20Ageing-Engl_Print_F.pdf
- 38 World Bank in Georgia, "Country Snapshot," October 2018, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/387101539181212433/Georgia-Snapshot-Oct2018.pdf>
- 39 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Pension System Reform in Georgia," December 2017, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/13980.pdf>

Adolescents

Legally, Georgians remain adolescents until the age of 18 but socially are considered adults at 16. Approximately 10.9% of the population was aged 15–24 as of 2020. Georgian adolescents are often expected to support the household in some manner as they get older, through chores or financial support. Types of support differ between genders—girls most often assist with household chores, cooking, and care for elder relatives while boys assist fathers or male elders with any necessary repairs. Rural adolescents are often involved in working farmland and selling products at local markets. In 2018, unemployment for youth ages 15–24 stood at approximately 29.9%.^{40, 41, 42}

Children

Children are considered the focal point of the family. A child’s education and development are highly important, especially in higher social classes. The most common number of children per household is two. Grandparents often assist the parents with child-raising. Children are expected to be obedient, demonstrate respect to household elders, and contribute to the household by performing chores. Differences between the genders exist—male children are expected to demonstrate strength and courage while female children are typically expected to be modest and learn common domestic skills. Parents encourage their children to participate in traditional dances or other performance arts and take great pride in their children’s accomplishments in these activities. It is common for older children to contribute financially to a household or assume more household responsibilities, such as running errands.^{43, 44, 45}

Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

Marriage

Marriage traditions dictate that the potential groom is the person to typically initiate a proposal. Matchmaking, known as *machankloba*, was once common, with the male suitor’s female relatives arranging for a meeting with potential brides under various guises and pretexts before directly discussing marriage. Today this tradition has largely fallen out of fashion, although it is still common for blessings from both families to be sought as part of a proposal.^{46, 47, 48}

The Georgian Orthodox Church prohibits marriage between individuals that share relations up to the seventh degree. If two individuals share a last name, it is assumed that they are related or have a high degree of shared blood, and therefore a match would be considered taboo. This social convention is typically respected in religious and nonreligious households.^{49, 50}

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- 40 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 41 EveryCulture, “Georgian,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>
- 42 Humanium, “Children of Georgia,” n.d., <https://www.humanium.org/en/georgia/>
- 43 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 44 EveryCulture, “Georgian,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>
- 45 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>
- 46 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Marriage and Family,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Marriage-and-Family.html>
- 47 Caucasus Travel Guide, “Georgian Wedding,” n.d., <http://www.caucasustravelguide.com/georgia/traditions-cuisine-and-wine/traditions/wedding-traditions.html>
- 48 Advantour, “Georgian Wedding Traditions,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/georgia/traditions/wedding.htm>
- 49 Encyclopedia.com, “Georgians,” 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/commonwealth-independent-states-and-baltic-nations/cis-and-baltic-political-geography/georgians>
- 50 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>

Underage marriage is a significant and persistent issue in Georgian society. In 2019, 14% of the adult female population consisted of Georgians who were married under the age of 18, a statistic that has remained consistent in recent years. Georgia’s child-marriage rates are the highest in the region and just below the worldwide average.⁵¹ The highest concentration of underage marriages occurs in rural areas and among ethnic minorities.⁵²

Divorce

Divorce was relatively rare in the past but has become more common in recent times. In 1999, Georgia recorded 1,622 divorces; in 2019, that number was 11,205. While a divorced woman can usually expect support from extended family, there is still a stigma surrounding divorce that often results in difficulties remarrying. The stigma is especially pronounced in rural areas, and rural divorce rates are lower than elsewhere in the country. The Georgian Orthodox Church only recognizes divorce once both parties have—in the eyes of the church—exhausted all possible reconciliatory measures.^{53, 54, 55}

Birth

Georgia has long had a negative fertility rate trend, but there are signs it is changing. Financial initiatives to encourage pregnancy have helped, including new parental leave benefits.⁵⁶ The birth rate in Georgia in 2020 was 11.6 births per 1,000 people, contributing to a 0.05% population growth. There is an average of 1.05 male babies per 1 female baby. The infant mortality rate is 13.8 for every 1,000 live births.^{57, 58} Citizenship is granted at birth through parentage or being physically born within the country, meaning children born to stateless parents are granted Georgian citizenship.⁵⁹ Birth customs have modernized, departing from traditional practices such as rearing infants in special cradles.⁶⁰

Congratulations on your new baby!		
Visitor:	Congratulations on your new baby!	baavshvis shedzenas geelotsavt!
Local:	Thank you.	maadlobaa

Exchange 45

51 OECD, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Report for Eurasia: Chapter 3. Discrimination in the Family,” n.d., <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/60bb29a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/60bb29a4-en>

52 Caucasus Research Resource Center, “Policy Bulletin: Child Marriage in Georgia: Economic and Educational Consequences,” January 2019, http://crrc.ge/uploads/tinymce/documents/PolicyBriefs/Early_Marriage_Policy_Brief.pdf

53 EveryCulture, “Georgians—Marriage and Family,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Marriage-and-Family.html>

54 National Statistics Office of Georgia, “Divorces,” Geostat, n.d., <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/324/divorces>

55 OECD, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Report for Eurasia: Chapter 3. Discrimination in the Family,” n.d., <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/60bb29a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/60bb29a4-en>

56 Bradley Jardine, “Georgia’s Baby Boom and the Union of Church and Birthrate,” Eurasianet, 20 November 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/georgias-baby-boom-and-the-union-of-church-and-birthrate>

57 Central Intelligence Agency, “Georgia,” *World Factbook*, 17 December 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

58 Charles F. Westoff and Florina I. Serbanescu, “The Relationship between Contraception and Abortion in the Republic of Georgia: Further Analysis of the 1999 and 2005 Reproductive Health Surveys,” Macro International Inc., August 2008, 2, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADM639.pdf

59 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, “Georgia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” 11 March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

60 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Family Events

Weddings

Weddings in Georgia are a mix of the traditional and the modern. After a couple decides to marry, they hold an engagement party where the two families get to know each other. On the wedding day, the groom, accompanied by family and friends, goes to the bride’s house, where the bride’s family is waiting with a feast of cake, other sweets, and wine. From there the couple heads to the wedding ceremony, which can be religious, civil, or both.⁶¹

Orthodox wedding ceremonies are held in a church. The bride and groom wear crowns and hold candles while a priest performs the ceremony, which includes an exchange of rings. At the end of the ceremony, the priest leads the couple around the church three times. The couple may visit a religiously significant place after the ceremony.⁶² The wedding banquet is held at a restaurant or in an outdoor setting. It includes a wide variety of traditional and often meat-heavy dishes, as well as a Western-style wedding cake. Upon arriving, the couple breaks a plate by stepping on it. The celebration also includes modern and traditional dancing and cutting the wedding cake.⁶³

Funerals

After death, the deceased’s body is kept at home in a coffin for up to five days. A table with an icon, a lighted candle, food, and water is set up at the head of the coffin. Friends and family come by to pay their respects and bring food for the immediate family, who do not cook in the house during this time. Loud wailing, sometimes by professional mourners, is common.⁶⁴

I offer my condolences to you and your family.

Visitor:	I offer my condolences to you and your family.	veezeeyaaRebt tkvens mtsooKhaaRebas
Local:	We are grateful for your kindness.	dedee maadloba goalisKhmeRebeestvis

Exchange 46

Funerals are sometimes preceded by a church service. At the burial, chants are sung and a priest blesses the gravesite. Small family cemeteries are common. For 40 days after death, a mourning period known as ormoci, women close to the deceased wear black and men do not shave their beards. Ormoci ends with a church service and a meal for close family.^{65, 66}

Despite traditional Islamic prohibitions, Georgia’s Muslim Ajarians often include portraits and non-Arabic inscriptions on tombstones. Religious passages are often read at the tomb after a person’s death.⁶⁷ Wills designate the division of property after death. When a death occurs without a will, inheritance laws state that children receive a division of their parent’s property. If there are no children, the property is divided among the relations closest to the deceased.⁶⁸ Georgia’s civil code gives men and women equal inheritance rights.⁶⁹

61 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

62 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

63 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

64 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

65 CultureGrams, “Georgia,” 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

66 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 120.

67 George Sanikidze and Edward W. Walker, “Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia,” (Working Paper 14, University of California, Berkeley, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Fall 2004), <https://escholarship.org/content/qt7149d486/qt7149d486.pdf>

68 EveryCulture, “Georgia—Marriage, Family, and Kinship,” n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>

69 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia,” U.S. Department of State, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

Rites of Passage

At the age of 16, Georgians are considered adults socially, although they won't be able to vote and marry until 18. Georgians celebrate birthdays as well as name days, which are days in the Orthodox calendar commemorating the saint for which a person was named. It is tradition to not celebrate the first and 40th birthdays, as a way to ward off misfortune and ensure a long life.⁷⁰

Naming Conventions

Among the country's Georgian population surnames ending in idze and adze, which mean "son of," are common, as are names ending in shvili ("child of").⁷¹ Names ending in dze are more common in western Georgia, while names ending in shvili are typical for families from eastern Georgia. Mingrelians, the large Georgian ethnic group that dominates the coastal lowlands, often have surnames ending in ia, ua, and ava. Additional surnames may signify aristocratic families or note a family's connection to a particular village or region. When women retain their maiden names, a common occurrence in Georgia, children take their father's surname.^{72, 73} Ethnic Muslims have largely changed their family names to Turkish surnames because of the assumption that Georgian names indicate Christianity.⁷⁴

70 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

71 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Cultures of the World: Georgia*, (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 86.

72 EveryCulture, "Mingrelians—Kinship," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Kinship.html>

73 EveryCulture, "Georgians—Kinship," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Georgians-Kinship.html>

74 George Sanikidze and Edward W. Walker, "Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia," (Working Paper 17, University of California, Berkeley, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Fall 2004). <https://escholarship.org/content/qt7149d486/qt7149d486.pdf>

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Georgian families throughout the country adhere to the nuclear family model. True False
2. Georgia has one of the highest rates of gender equality in Europe. True False
3. Matchmaking is the most common method of engagement and marriage in Georgia. True False
4. Georgian tradition dictates that the groom ritually kidnap the bride a few hours before the wedding ceremony. True False
5. After a Georgian passes away, members of the immediate family do not cook for up to five days. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment Answers

1. False:
While the nuclear family unit is found in urban areas, the traditional household arrangement is 1–2 parents and children each, as well as grandparents—up to three generations in one household.
2. False:
Georgian society is patriarchal, with defined gender roles for women and men. Women are primarily responsible for the household and raising children while men are expected to handle financial responsibilities.
3. False:
Matchmaking (*machankloba*) is a tradition in which a male suitor's female relatives arrange for meetings with potential spouses. This once-popular tradition has fallen out of favor in the modern-day.
4. False:
On the wedding day, the groom, accompanied by family and friends, goes to the bride's house, where the bride's family is waiting with a feast of cake, other sweets, and wine.
5. True:
Friends and family visit the house to pay their respects and bring food for the immediate family.

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Further Readings and Resources

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Georgian Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Georgia has made it easy and convenient for foreign persons to legally purchase land within the country. True False
2. A history of conquests by foreign powers has made Georgians reluctant to show hospitality to outsiders. True False
3. The Greater Caucasus Mountains form a natural border between Georgia and Russia. True False
4. According to tradition, Christianity was brought to Georgia by a Roman soldier who later became Saint George. True False
5. The greater Tbilisi metropolitan area has been the main focus of Georgia's urban development efforts in recent years. True False
6. Kinships are an important social dynamic in Georgian culture. True False
7. A high-speed rail network makes it possible to reach most parts of Georgia from Tbilisi within two hours. True False
8. Shish kebab of lamb, beef, or pork is the most common grilled food in Georgia. True False
9. Tbilisi is Georgia's capital and economic and cultural hub. True False

10. The Georgian Orthodox Church enjoys a privileged status in Georgia, including tax exemptions and the use of state symbols in its publications. True False
11. Tbilisi's air is polluted by cigarette smoke and exhaust from vehicles, urban heating, and burning trash. True False
12. Elders are revered in Georgian culture. True False
13. Georgia's East–West Highway connects the Black Sea in the west to the Azerbaijani border in the east. True False
14. Many aspects of Georgian cuisine bear a striking resemblance to that of Northern India, an interesting foreign influence not yet fully understood in origin. True False
15. As Joseph Stalin's birthplace, Georgia enjoyed a privileged status among Soviet republics during his rule. True False
16. The Georgian Orthodox Church maintains a stance of strict neutrality when it comes to national politics. True False
17. Georgia's universal healthcare system has eliminated out-of-pocket expenses. True False
18. Divorce rates were relatively low in the past but have risen recently. True False
19. Georgia recognizes three autonomous republics within its borders: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Tskhinvali. True False
20. A *tamada* is a toastmaster who plays a central role in traditional Georgian feasts. True False

21. Mikheil Saakashvili reestablished governmental control of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia breakaway regions after rising to power in 2004. True False
22. Georgia's Muslim minority population is considered the most religiously observant Muslim community in the Caucasus region. True False
23. Bargaining at Georgian markets is usually frowned upon by locals. True False
24. Modern-day wedding cakes are taboo in Georgian wedding banquets. True False
25. The multiple crossings between Tbilisi-administered territory and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are controlled by military checkpoints. True False
26. Georgia's independence day commemorates the gaining of autonomy from the Persian Empire in 1723. True False
27. The services sector is the greatest contributor to Georgia's economy. True False
28. Many of Georgia's Orthodox churches are built in a distinctive architectural style unique to the country. True False
29. Taxis are considered the most convenient way to get around Tbilisi and other major cities. True False
30. Last names ending in *shvili* and *dze* are common in Georgia. True False

Georgian Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment Answers

1. False:
In 2017 and 2018, the government introduced a policy banning foreigners from owning Georgian farmland. The policy was intended to slow the rapid acquisition of valuable land by outside interests, a well-documented problem.
2. False:
Hospitality is a hallmark of Georgian culture and a direct result of the Georgian concept of friendship, which is considered a great virtue.
3. True:
The Greater Caucasus Mountains, a series of high peaks and gorges, span the northern part of Georgia.
4. False:
According to tradition, Christianity was brought to Georgia by a woman known as Saint Nino, who gained favor at the royal court by performing miracles. Saint George is Georgia's patron saint.
5. True:
The area, which also includes the cities of Rustavi, Mtskheta, and Gardabani, has received a disproportionate share of services, commodities, and labor markets over the rest of the country's urban areas.
6. True:
"Spiritual" kinships, relationships between people who may not share a family line but are treated as family members nonetheless, are common in Georgia.
7. False:
Although a rail network connects all the major cities, trains are considered slow. Many Georgians like to book overnight trips between Tbilisi and the Black Sea coast.
8. True:
In Georgian shish kebab, known as *mtsvadi*, the meat is skewered and grilled with fresh or marinated vegetables.
9. True:
The city reflects Georgia's diverse history and is a microcosm of the country's multiethnic nature.
10. True:
A constitutional agreement known as a concordat is the legal basis for the strong bond between the state and the church.

11. True:
The city's air is laden with toxic substances such as nitrogen dioxide. In 2016, an alarming 20% of the city's population suffered from a respiratory disease.
12. True:
Georgian culture is hierarchal. Cultural norms dictate that elders are greeted first and will often be the symbolic head of the family.
13. True:
The highway is the centerpiece of Georgia's transportation network and carries over 60% of the country's foreign freight trade.
14. True:
Clay ovens, cast-iron skillets, curry spice blends, and some culinary terms are similar between the two regions.
15. False:
Stalin showed no favoritism toward his birthplace after his rise to power; he quashed nationalistic expressions and ensured that Moscow kept a close eye on the republic.
16. False:
Since 1991, warring political factions have repeatedly turned to the church for mediation and approval. The church strongly supported the Georgian Dream party, which came to power in 2012.
17. False:
Despite notable improvements to the quality of healthcare since the implementation of universal healthcare, out-of-pocket health expenses persist and place a notable burden on households.
18. True:
The stigma of divorce is most severely felt in rural areas despite the divorce rate increase throughout the country. The Georgian Orthodox Church only recognizes divorce after meeting specific criteria.
19. False:
Georgia only recognizes Azaria and Abkhazia as autonomous republics. The breakaway region of South Ossetia consists of parts of other regions and is not recognized as an individual entity by Tbilisi.
20. True:
The *tamada* directs toasts and uses wit, eloquence, and improvisation to ensure that the entire meal runs smoothly.
21. False:
Ethnic tensions resulted in a brief war in 2008 in which Russian occupied the two breakaway regions and recognized their independence.
22. False:
Georgia's Muslims do not actively promote a religious identity; few attend religious services at mosques and fasting during the month of Ramadan is rare.

23. False:
Bargaining in markets is possible. A savvy haggler can expect to save roughly 30% off the initial price.
24. False:
The wedding banquet includes a Western-style wedding cake. Cutting the cake is a ceremonial part of the celebration.
25. True:
On the Georgian side, the checkpoints are manned by Georgian soldiers, while on the breakaway sides there are checkpoints manned by soldiers of the de facto authorities and other checkpoints manned by Russian soldiers.
26. False:
Independence day commemorates Georgia declaring independence from the Russian Empire in 1918 after the previous year's Bolshevik Revolution.
27. True:
The services sector makes up 67.9% of the economy, followed by industry at 23.7% and agriculture at 8.2%.
28. True:
In the triple church style, the two side naves are separated from the central hall by walls and the only access to each side is through doors.
29. True:
A 2019 reform of the taxi industry mandated vehicle inspections, registration, and clearly visible taxi signs on car roofs. White became the standardized color for all cabs.
30. True:
Names ending in *dze*, which means "son of," are more common in western Georgia, while names ending in *shvili*, which means "child of," are typical for families from eastern Georgia.