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Valerie J. Bunce
Cornell University

Sharon L. Volchik
George Washington University

Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies



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Center on Democracy, Development,
and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Stanford University
Encina Hall
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650-724-7197
Fax: 650-724-2996
<http://cddrl.stanford.edu/>

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**Azerbaijan's 2005 Parliamentary Elections: A Failed Attempt at
Transition**

**Valerie J. Bunce
Cornell University**

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**Sharon L. Wolchik
George Washington University**

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The 2005 elections in Azerbaijan qualify as a failed transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Opposition political leaders mounted election campaigns, but were easily out-manuevered by President Ilham Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) and its allies. This alliance won an allegedly overwhelming victory in parliamentary elections, but these elections were widely seen as seriously flawed. International and domestic election monitors documented blatant fraud and falsification of election results.¹ As a result, the YAP, affiliated parties, and so-called independents accounted for all but eight of the 115 seats in the legislature. Of the eight opposition candidates elected, several boycotted parliament to protest the fraudulent nature of the elections. Although several opposition parties had formed a pre-election bloc, and some non-governmental groups attempted to mount citizens' campaigns, regime harassment and intimidation, coupled with the ability of the Aliyev government to use patronage to shore up support, prevented the development of any widespread challenge to the ruling party.

As the following pages demonstrate, the ability of the Aliyev regime to maintain its hold on power reflected both internal and external factors. Although there is no way to judge the level of actual support for the government, Aliyev retained control of the security apparatus. Through its control of oil and gas revenues and the tight links between most business endeavors and politics, and its control of the broadcast media in particular, the regime was also able to prevent the opposition, which was more united than in previous elections, from mounting effective campaigns to mobilize citizens as voters or protestors. Thus, although the Aliyev regime was vulnerable along certain dimensions (sizable groups living in poverty amidst high economic growth and rampant corruption in particular), in others, it was not. The lack of clear outside interest in seeing regime change in Azerbaijan was another factor that worked in the regime's favor. Thus, although Western governments, semi-governmental and non-governmental organizations were active in promoting the development of civil society and undertook a wide variety of activities designed to improve the quality of the elections, educate voters, and encourage them to participate in the elections, critical actions in the transnational democracy promotion networks that played such an important role in the successful use of elections to challenge semi-authoritarian rule in other contexts,² they were not committed to and in some cases actively opposed a change in regime in Azerbaijan. Numerous external players were active in Azerbaijan, but most, including the United States, had relatively little interest in seeing the Aliyev government replaced by another. Consequently, they put little pressure on the government to hold free and fair elections or refrain from oppressing the opposition. Arguing that Azerbaijan needed "evolutionary" rather than revolutionary change, they put other, higher priority interests above democratization in Azerbaijan.

Long-term Factors

Religious, cultural and ideological legacies. The citizens of Azerbaijan are nominally Muslim. However, most are in fact secular, and there appears to be little support for radical Islam³. Prior to the war in Nagorno-Karabagh, Azerbaijan had a minority Christian (Russian and Armenian) population that accounted for approximately 11.6% of

its population in the last census conducted during the Soviet period, in 1989. According to the 1989 census, about 85 percent of the population was Azerbaijani (5.8 million), 5.8 percent was Russian (392,300), and 5.8 percent was Armenian (390,500)⁴. Today, after the war and the loss of control over Nagorno-Karabakh, according to the US Department of State “Azerbaijan: International Religious Freedom Report 2007” approximately 96 percent of the population is Muslim (Azeri); the remainder of the population consists mostly of Russian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Jews, and other ethnic-religious groups⁵.

The more important influence from Azerbaijan’s past, however, is political rather than cultural or religious, i.e., the legacy of the Soviet period. From its incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1921 to the end of the USSR in 1991, Azerbaijan’s fortunes were closely tied to those of the Soviet regime. Thus, it experienced the same type of industrialization and had the same political organization as the other Soviet republics. These legacies left both an imprint on the political life of the newly independent state in the 1990s and a set of tasks similar to those other postcommunist states faced after the end of the communist regime. Briefly put, leaders of independent Azerbaijan faced the need to create a new system of government to replace the communist regime, find a way to survive economically without being part of the Soviet Union, and define a new pattern of relations with their neighbors and the world at large. In the case of Azerbaijan, as in a number of ex-communist states, there was also a need to deal with a frozen conflict, in this case the occupation of part of the country by Armenian and Russian forces.⁶

With the exception of Ebulfez Elchibey, leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front that came to office as the result of free and fair elections in 1992, all of Azerbaijan’s top political leaders have been members or high officials of the communist party. Given his age, Ilham Aliyev was less involved, but even he was a member of the party and taught at MGIMO (the Moscow Institute of International Relations), the training ground for top Soviet diplomats⁷. In this respect, Azerbaijan falls squarely into the post-Soviet, as opposed to Central European post-communist camp: i.e., Soviet authoritarianism was replaced not by liberal democracy but by other autocratic governments, with a brief exception to be discussed below.

Clans and ‘trust networks’: Azerbaijan’s society is widely held to be characterized by clan relationships. Based in part on kinship and in part on geography, these patronage networks play an important role in the country’s economic as well as political life. The ability to start a business or run an economic enterprise depends on membership in one of these networks. The clans that dominate the regime, including that centered around the Aliyev family, make use of the sizable revenues from oil and gas to keep their networks intact. The very close links between politics and economics in Azerbaijan mean that political office holding is tied very directly to the officeholder’s economic status. Strong ties, and preferably, kinship, are required to engage in large-scale economic activity. Entrepreneurs are dependent on higher-level state officials to maintain control of their enterprises and provide protection against efforts to extort money from them.⁸

Opponents argue that the power of the Aliyev regime rests on a set of intertwined hierarchies. These include a regional hierarchy reflected in the fact that Azeris from Armenia and Nakhchivan hold the key positions in the government and also monopolize key industrial and business sectors. The regime also rests on a clan hierarchy centered on the Aliyev family. Numerous state officials are direct members of this family⁹. The families/clans of other top state officials staff lowerlevel bureaucratic positions. Finally, there is a hierarchy based on corruption, which is endemic. State positions are filled as the result of bribery, which links officials or their proxies at various levels¹⁰.

These relationships are embedded in and center on competition for resources and wealth. Opposition activists argue, in fact, that it is this feature of the cleavages in the regime that holds the system together. Because those involved in these networks, which reach down to the lower layers of the apparatus and permeate all sectors of the economy, realize that all will lose if the regime changes, they unite to resist pressure to change or threats to the regime¹¹.

Type of autocracy: As has been the case in most of the countries that have experienced democratizing elections commonly termed electoral revolutions, Azerbaijan has a mixed, or semi-authoritarian, political system.¹² Despite its authoritarian character, the Aliyev regime, like most other political systems at present, feels compelled to organize elections, even though most are rigged and their results falsified, in order to maintain the myth of popular support, reaffirm its power, and give lip service to the internationally accepted norm of democratic rule.¹³ As a result, there are regular opportunities for the opposition to focus on the failings of the regime and attempt to come to power. To date, however, the authorities have been successful in manipulating and falsifying the election results, and preventing the opposition from mounting an effective challenge. Although the regime holds elections, these are clearly rigged to elect the incumbent (or his son in the most recent presidential elections) and the parties supporting him. Similarly, constitutionally guaranteed rights of free assembly and freedom of the press are routinely ignored. The Aliyev regime has also succeeded to a large extent in deflecting international criticism of election irregularities.

Nature of authoritarian rule and previous attempts at democratic transition: Azerbaijan presents an interesting case from the perspective of transitions, as it experienced a brief period after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 that raised hopes that democratic politics would take root. As Azeris proudly point out, Azerbaijan was a parliamentary republic during its brief period of independence from 1918 to 1920. Although this fledgling government was quickly conquered by the Red Army, its multiparty system, civil and political liberties, and national versus religious orientation are a legacy that democrats in Azerbaijan cherish.¹⁴ However, it soon became clear that this brief democratic legacy would have little impact on postcommunist politics. From June 1991 to March 1992, Ayaz Mutallibov served as President. In March 1992, Mutallibov was forced to resign due to the situation in Nagorno-Karabagh. In June 1992, the nationalist leader Ebulfez Elchibey won 60 percent of the vote in presidential elections that were generally judged to have been democratic,¹⁵ after several months of political turmoil.¹⁶

Elchibey's government, however, also soon fell victim to the war in Karabagh. With the "victory" of Armenia, supported by Russia, Azerbaijan lost 16 percent of its territory and gained 700,000 refugees from the newly occupied areas.¹⁷ Defeat provided the pretext for a referendum on Elchibey's presidency in which over 90 percent of those voting expressed a lack of confidence in the president. Forced to flee to Nakhchivan by a paramilitary uprising in 1993, Elchibey was replaced by Heydar Aliyev, who was elected President in 1993 and remained in that office until shortly before his death in 2003. The former head of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Aliyev presided over a regime that became increasingly autocratic. Able to rely on oil revenues, his government oversaw a complicated system of patronage networks, often described as clans, that came to control most of Azerbaijan's wealth, including privatized state enterprises and new businesses, as well as the country's sizeable oil and gas resources. The transfer of power to Heydar's son, Ilham, who was elected president in October 2003, raised hopes that the regime would become more moderate. However, Ilham disappointed these hopes, despite his talk of the need to cooperate with NATO and the EU and enact economic reform, and has instead continued many of his father's practices, including his strategy of rule. International assessments of the degree of democratization, such as Freedom House rankings, in fact found that Azerbaijan regressed on all measures except corruption, which remained the same, between 2003 and 2005. Since Ilham Aliyev came to power, the country's overall ranking fell from "partly free" to "not free."¹⁸

As occurred in many of the cases in which democratizing elections succeeded in ousting semi-authoritarian leaders, the attempt by the opposition to use the 2005 elections to defeat Ilham Aliyev was preceded by earlier efforts to bring about democratic change in Azerbaijan. However, although the opposition learned from its earlier defeats, it was also defeated in 2005. In the 2003 presidential elections, the opposition considered running a single candidate. However, the surprise addition of Ilham Aliyev as a second candidate in addition to his father for the YAP and Heydar Aliyev's illness threw a new factor into the race. Some in the opposition felt that it would be easy to defeat Ilham. Isa Gambar, former speaker of Parliament and head of the Musavat party, termed the situation "original," and, along with Ali Kerimli, head of the People's Front movement, and Etibar Mammadov, head of the Azerbaijan National Independence Party, claimed at least publicly to believe that confusion over the future of the regime and the fact that there were two candidates from the same party would split the ruling party and lead to an opposition victory. Others, however, argued that the structure of Heydar's regime would still be in place and would secure a victory for Ilham. Spokespersons for YAP disclaimed any problem with the dual candidates and adopted the slogan "Two candidates, one campaign."¹⁹

Eight other candidates, including seven from opposition parties, eventually ran for president in the 2003 elections. Leaders of several of the opposition parties met in London but decided not to run a single candidate. Rather, they agreed to support the candidate who would garner the most votes in what they anticipated would be the second round of the election.

In the end, there was no second round, and Ilham was elected in elections which were widely condemned as not meeting the standards of the international community. As it would in 2005, the Aliyev regime used intimidation and force against opposition leaders. Rallies and meetings with voters on the outskirts of Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, were broken up and, on several occasions, police and other regime supporters (described frequently as "athletically built people" in civilian clothes), clashed with opposition supporters, with resulting serious injuries to supporters and some leaders. Widespread interference with the efforts of opposition leaders to post their materials or meet with voters continued throughout the campaign.²⁰

Immediately after the 2003 election, a planned march and peaceful protest organized by opposition leaders led to violent clashes between police and opposition supporters in which many citizens were injured. The violence in turn was used by the Aliyev regime as an excuse for a massive crackdown on the opposition and the arrest of many opposition leaders, including many at local levels. Numerous election observers who refused to sanction the fraud they witnessed by signing documents that the elections had been free and fair, as well as civil society leaders, were also arrested. In addition to the 196 protestors who were arrested immediately, over 600 supporters of the opposition were arrested in the following two months, and over 100 were imprisoned after unfair trials. Human rights groups documented police torture of those detained and called on Western leaders and the EU to protest the violation of political and civil liberties involved in these events.²¹

Although the detainees and political prisoners were eventually released, the restrictions on public activity by the opposition remained in effect until the approach of the 2005 election. The crackdown and Ilham's consolidation of his own power after the death of his father in December 2003 set back the development of both the political opposition and civil society in Azerbaijan considerably.

Structure of the economy and level of economic development: The structure of Azerbaijan's economy clearly strengthens the hand of the regime. Nearly a classic case of a resource dependent country, 50 percent of GDP and 90 percent of foreign exports in Azerbaijan currently come from energy exports.²² GDP per capita was 991 in 2004. (www. Unitad.org). GDP grew an astonishing 26 percent in 2005 and a more astonishing 36 percent in 2006. Growth was highest in the oil and gas sectors, which account for around one-third of GDP; however, non-oil output has also increased at an annual average rate of 15 percent since 1999.²³ Its human development, however, lagged behind. In 2004, Azerbaijan ranked 91st out of 177 on UNDP's human development index²⁴, in 2005, it ranked 101st of 177, and in 2007, Azerbaijan ranked 99th out of 177 countries in terms of UNDP's Human Development Index, above Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, and Tajikistan, but below Armenia, Ukraine, and Belarus.²⁵ Inequality, measured using the Gini index, in the early 2000s was slightly higher than in other non-Baltic former Soviet republics. In 2006, the World Bank estimates that over 29 percent of the population lived in poverty, 8 percent of them in extreme poverty.²⁶ Approximately 20 percent of the population was unemployed in 2003, a figure that

decreased to 9 percent in 2005²⁷. But the booming growth is unlikely to last. Experts expect growth to decrease sharply by 2009 and 2010 while they rate the economy's prospects for broad-based economic development as poor.²⁸ Thus, the phenomenal growth in GDP due to foreign investment in the energy sector in recent years has not trickled down to any great extent to the populace as a whole, and the growth rates are themselves now vulnerable. According to the World Bank and UNDP, Azerbaijan ranks in the lower middle-income levels on per capita income, which was \$1,240 in 2005, and is a middle-income country in terms of human development.²⁹ In

Class and social structure: The country's social structure reflects the development that occurred under communism as well as the changes that have occurred in the years since 1991. There is near universal (98.8 percent) literacy among those 15 and older, and education levels have increased. As in other postcommunist states, the last decade has seen a change in the social structure as previously forbidden groups such as capitalists and entrepreneurs have reappeared. In contrast to the situation in many formerly communist countries, however, in which the structure of the economy has shifted from its former emphasis on heavy industry to focus on the service sector, in Azerbaijan, industry (particularly non-manufacturing sectors) has grown considerably faster than agriculture or the service sector.³⁰

Urbanization and industrialization. Azerbaijan, as other less developed former Soviet republics, experienced industrialization largely during the Soviet period. However, the urbanization and industrialization that took place under Stalin slowed after destalinization. Urbanization, in fact, began to decline in 1960; the urban sector (measured by urban growth, the urban population, and the distribution of employment in industry, agriculture, and services, began to increase again in 2001 but still has not reached 1960 levels.³¹ Employment in industry also declined during the late Soviet period from 29% of the population in 1985, to 11% in 1999. Most of this decline happened in the post-Soviet years³². Nearly half of all households continue to depend on agriculture, which contributes only 8 percent of GDP, for their livelihoods.³³

Unlike many of the former Soviet republics which have sizeable ethnic, and particularly Russian, minorities, Azerbaijan's population is primarily ethnically Azeri (95.8 percent). There are relatively few Russians (2.8 percent of the population). There is a small (1.5 percent) Armenian minority, as well as very small Ukrainian, Avar, Turkish, and other minorities.

Financial infrastructure: Funding sources were tightly controlled by the regime, and this control intensified prior to the elections. Since Heydar Aliyev's consolidation of his power in 1995, the regime has had near exclusive control of the economic and financial resources of the country. Since then, access to a political office has been a prerequisite for engaging in business activity, as well as the source of illicit financial resources. In fact, because of the systemic control of the regime's bureaucracy over almost all of the financial resources generated in the country, financial power in Azerbaijan has been described as 'bureaucratic capital'.³⁴ Before the 2005 elections, Aliyev further tightened

his control over the country's financial resources by imprisoning and persecuting several wealthy and influential members of his regime³⁵.

Level of technological development: The opposition in Azerbaijan had access to the electronic media, although internet usage by the population remained limited, particularly outside the capital. In 2006, only 9.8 out of 100 persons used internet in Azerbaijan, broadband subscribers were 0.03 per 100 people³⁶. PC ownership was also low, only 2.3 per 100 persons owned a PC in 2006³⁷. The regime also limited the ability of its opponents to use the internet to mobilize supporters by its control over the content of materials posted and the opposition's access. This trend has continued and intensified since 2005³⁸. There was a 50 percent increase in the number of people with mobile phones between 2004 and 2005 (from 18 to 27 per 100)³⁹. Mobile phone use in Azerbaijan was higher in 2004, 2005, and 2006 than in Armenia, similar to that in Georgia, and lower than that in Belarus and Ukraine.

Strength of the state: The state, dominated by the Aliyev clan, retained considerable capacity in 2005. Aliyev and the clan leaders loyal to him were able to use patronage and coercion to maintain the loyalty of the bureaucracy as well as of the security and military forces. The police, for example, received salary increases, some of which were seven-fold, as well as new cruisers prior to the start of the 2005 election campaigns. But, while the coercive organs of the state functioned very effectively to carry out Aliyev's orders, infrastructure has been neglected, and in some locales religious organizations are providing social services customarily provided by governments.

Migration/refugee flows: As the result of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh, there are approximately 700,000 refugees from the territory which is currently occupied by Armenia with the support of Russia. The presence of these displaced persons is yet another factor that keeps the war a central issue in politics.

Other long-term structural factors: Two other long-term factors have strengthened the hands of the regime and made efforts to change the regime more difficult. These are the legacy of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh and the country's geopolitical position. The unsettled state of Nagorno-Karabagh and the widespread perception that Armenia unjustly "occupies" this region that should rightfully be part of Azerbaijan are powerful tools for the ruling elite to use in maintaining its power. The country's geopolitical position including its proximity to Iran and Iraq, as well as its oil and gas resources also have an important impact on political developments and the ability of the regime to withstand efforts to change it. As we will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, security and energy considerations have led the US and other Western democracies to soft-pedal their criticisms of the regimes of both Heydar and Ilham Aliyev and moderate their statements concerning electoral irregularities. As a US Foreign Service officer noted in an interview in Baku in March 2007, "Why should we support regime change in Azerbaijan? The regime here has been a good friend of the United States."⁴⁰

Short-term factors that helped strengthen the autocratic regime

Economic factors: The Aliyev regime remained strong on the eve of the 2005 elections. Real GDP growth and continued foreign investment in the energy sector provided resources to retain its support among the elite, and there were no Azeri equivalents of the Ukrainian businessmen who supported the Orange Revolution. The ruling elite concentrated around the President controls all of the levers of power and most of the country's economic resources. Oil revenues allow the regime to provide benefits to its supporters at all levels. As noted above, the phenomenal growth of the economy in 2005 allowed the Aliyev regime to continue to reward its supporters well. However, compared to other successor states to the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan shows a fair degree of inequality, and over 40 percent of the population is estimated to live in poverty.⁴¹

The International Labor Organization estimates that approximately 30 percent of the labor force is employed by the government in one capacity or another. The government thus has and frequently uses cutbacks in working hours or loss of jobs as threats against those who support the opposition.⁴²

Elite unity: Just as the opposition drew lessons from Ukrainian and Georgian developments, Aliyev also took steps to consolidate his power and prevent any challenges similar to those that occurred in Ukraine in 2004 or Georgia in 2003 prior to the 2005 elections. Thus, in October, he dismissed several members of the government and had others arrested on charges that they had misused state funds, organized riots, and plotted a coup, lest they become potential rivals.

Aliyev continued to have a firm grip on the police and security forces, as well as on the nation's military in 2005. Corruption continued to be rampant. Transparency International ranked Azerbaijan 137th of 159 countries in 2005.⁴³

In addition to the importance of political linkages in the economy and the power of clan networks, the excesses of the regime also make top leaders reluctant to peacefully relinquish power and contribute to the unity of the regime. In a situation reminiscent of the communist era, when top party leaders in many states were reluctant to allow even relatively minor changes, as after the death of Stalin, because of their own complicity in the crimes of that era, members of the ruling groups in Azerbaijan have good reason to fear that they would be prosecuted should they lose power. As a dissident intellectual who wished to remain anonymous stated,

During the 12 years since Heydar Aliyev's post-communist advent to power, the regime has built its wealth on violent means, tortures, assassinations, and a widespread destitution. The regime members know that they would not be left untouched if they are overthrown. Their property would be confiscated; some of them deserve hanging in the main square in Baku. If a successor government would fail to punish the culprits who oppressed us, then ordinary citizens, the relatives, sons or daughters, of the regime victims would do this. The upper

echelons of Azerbaijan's government do not really have an alternative to holding on to power. There is a 'win-or-die' situation and they know this. This is the source of their unity in crisis.⁴⁴

The regime also does not hesitate to use coercion and violence against its opponents. Recent evidence of some of the actions mentioned above is found in the health problems of Ruslan Bashirli, leader of the Yeni Fikir youth organization developed after he was arrested in August 2005. Bashirli, who has remained in prison since that time, passed out while being interrogated in March 2006 and allegedly has kidney, liver and heart problems related to his arrest and confinement⁴⁵.

Impact of participation in war or other conflict: In Azerbaijan's case, it is defeat, rather than victory, in an armed conflict that helps keep the current regime in power. The loss of territory to Armenia in the war in the early 1990s in Nagorno-Karabagh helped destabilize an earlier democratic government as well as the first post-Soviet government of Mutallibov. As even a casual visitor to Azerbaijan can attest, the war and Azerbaijan's loss of territory to Armenia dominate conversation about politics and are used very adeptly to justify the need for a strong government. Thus, in addition to using material incentives to reward its supporters and maintain their loyalty, as well as coercion against the opposition, the regime also uses normative incentives, in this case, the call to Azeri patriotism due to the unresolved situation in Nagorno-Karabagh, to preempt calls for change.

Short term precipitating factors for transition

Factors weakening the existing regime: Many of the short term precipitating factors that have favored transitions elsewhere were not present in Azerbaijan in 2005. As noted above, there was rapid economic growth rather than crisis. The Nagorno-Karabagh situation also strengthened the regime. After succeeding his father in 2003, Ilham Aliyev appeared to be firmly in control of the country. Corruption and the close links between the political and economic spheres could potentially have provided a rallying point for the population. However, the regime's control of economic life as well as the coercive apparatus of the state made it very difficult to mobilize citizens around this issue. As noted above, the interrelationship between politics and economics and the interconnected hierarchies of power also made it very difficult for ordinary people to challenge the regime.

Economic crisis/decline in social and economic conditions: As discussed above, there was significant economic growth rather than crisis in Azerbaijan in 2005. At the same time, many citizens did not benefit from this growth, a fact that two of the opposition blocs emphasized in the election campaign. They also, along with the Liberal Party, also pointed to the rampant corruption noted above.

Illness or death of the autocratic leader: This factor was important in the 2003 presidential elections, when Heydar Aliyev was known to be dying, but not in 2005.

Ilham Aliyev, who was then 42 years old, had been successfully installed as his father's successor in 2003 and had consolidated his position as head of the regime.

Defeat in war: As noted above, Azerbaijan's defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s continued to be a live political issue. However, rather than weakening the Aliyev regime, the unsettled situation there in fact served to strengthen the regime as many people felt it was too risky to change regimes under these circumstances.

Divisions within the ruling elite: Some analysts have suggested that there were tensions in the ruling group between those who served Heydar Aliyev, Ilham's father, who are more conservative, and younger, Western oriented "reformists."⁴⁶ Shortly before the November 2005 elections, the ministers of Health and Economic Development, as well as several officials and businessmen who had kinship and friendship ties to them, were arrested on charges of attempting a coup against the president. It was later revealed that the charges in fact were related not to a real attempt to unseat the President but to a longstanding feud between these ministers and another member of the cabinet. Observers note that there were longstanding tensions between former Minister of Health Ali Insanov and his group, the Yeraz, or "Yerevan Azerbaijanlisi," (Azerbaijanians from Yerevan who were deported in the 1980s) and the Nakhchivan group that has surrounded Ilham Aliyev since he came to power in 2003.⁴⁷

Although such episodes indicate that there are divisions among the supporters of the regime that erupt from time to time, the complicity of all factions and the potential loss of benefits to all that would result from regime change have to date at least limited significant defections. These factors also made it difficult for the opposition to challenge the regime effectively.

Mass protests due to extraordinary events: In contrast to the situation in several of the countries in which oppositions successfully used elections to oust autocrats, there was no single incident or series of incidents that demonstrated, as happened elsewhere, that the regime had so overstepped its boundaries as to be intolerable. Thus, in contrast to the situation in Serbia prior to 2000, where Milosevic was imprisoning members of the youth group Otpor as young as 12, or in Ukraine, where the murder of journalist Georgy Gongadze illustrated the desperation of the regime and led many citizens to agree with the slogans "It's Enough!" and "Time for a change," in Azerbaijan, the regime's level of repression remained relatively constant. Although it reacted violently against demonstrators at a June rally it permitted, the fact that it had allowed the demonstration to take place in fact was viewed by certain outside observers at least as a sign of movement in the right direction. This lack of a precipitating event in turn made the opposition's task of mobilizing citizens to vote and to vote against the regime more difficult.

Legitimacy of and support for the regime: Given the widespread falsification of votes and other flaws in the electoral process in Azerbaijan, as well as the absence of independent public opinion polls, it is not possible to estimate how much support the Aliyev regime had. The regime controlled State Central Election Committee's reported

that seats in parliament were divided between the ruling party, independents and the opposition Azadliq bloc in the ratio of 45-32- 5 (%)⁴⁸. Exit polls conducted by Mitofsky International, Edison Media Research, and CESSI, Ltd. allegedly found that the vote was divided between ruling party, independent candidates, and the opposition coalition in the ratio of 32 percent to 39 percent to 14. However, Mitofsky himself cast doubt on these results in an article he later wrote exposing how their polling was manipulated and falsified by Azerbaijanian government and its ally organizations, and explaining why the results could not be trusted⁴⁹.

Both outside election monitors and the opposition contested this version of the election's results. OSCE observers judged the vote counting process in 2005 to be "bad" or "very bad" in 43 percent of the polling stations it monitored, for example.⁵⁰ Opposition monitors and observers, who documented nearly 21,000 cases of falsification, estimate that opposition candidates won enough votes to obtain 70 percent of the seats in parliament⁵¹.

Institutions that drew attention to the faults/weaknesses of the regime: The media, NGOs, and the political opposition all drew attention to the regime's faults. Although the government remained in firm control of the broadcast media and also published numerous daily papers, there was greater diversity in the print media, and the opposition had access to several print outlets. The opposition paper Yeni Musavat, in fact, had the largest daily circulation (14,350) in 2003, a figure nearly twice that of the two state newspapers Khalg, which had a daily circulation of 6,615, and Azerbaijan, with 7,534. Azadliq, another opposition outlet, had a daily circulation of 5,610⁵². Radio Free Europe analysts note, however, that due mainly to the fact that most of the population cannot afford them as well as the lack of development of advertising, most newspapers without state subsidies are published in only a few thousand copies. A public opinion poll cited by Baku Today found that less than 3 percent of the population read newspapers regularly; 70.8 percent read then rarely or not at all. Most Azeris get information about public events from the broadcast media, which were and are firmly under the control of the regime⁵³.

As we will discuss in more detail in a later section, NGOs in Azerbaijan, particularly the youth organizations, also pointed out problems with the regime. Government repression, however, and the limited access these organizations had to most voters, meant that these critiques did not reach large numbers of people.

Due to international pressure, including that by the EU's Venice Commission, the regime agreed to some changes in the Election Code prior to the 2005 elections. Most of these were largely cosmetic and involved minor changes in wording. As the OSCE Final Opinion on the Amendments to the Election Code of Azerbaijan noted, "Unfortunately, the most important suggestions have not been implemented by the authorities of Azerbaijan in spite of the repeated recommendations from the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The adopted amendments (referred to in the following text as "the law") reflect the recommendations of 2004 only to a limited degree, dealing mostly with technical and minor issues."⁵⁴ The election

commission agreed to maintain a website and publish lists of voters, without their addresses, however. But the commission remained under the control of those loyal to Aliyev and did not play an independent role.

The Constitutional Court was also involved after the elections, but did not act independently. Although it overturned the election results in six districts, it sanctioned the general results of the elections. In addition, one of the results it voided was a ruling by the Central Electoral Committee that had awarded a seat to Ali Kerimli, a prominent opposition leader. Disappointed with this outcome, the opposition once again split in regard to their participation in the May 2006 rerun elections. Lala Shevket, who was declared the winner in one of the contested districts, refused to take her seat in protest of the fraudulent nature of the election, which she maintained made the whole parliament illegitimate.⁵⁵ Musavat, on the other hand, agreed to participate in the May 2006 run-off elections.

Personal charisma of the autocrat and the opposition: In contrast to his father Heydar, Ilham Aliyev does not appear to be viewed as a charismatic leader. Raised largely in Moscow where his father's political career was centered prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ilham was employed as an academician at an institute that trained high-level diplomats for the Soviet regime. From 1991 to 1994, he worked as a businessman in Moscow and Istanbul. Media reports at that time alleged that he was heavily indebted to a Turkish casino owner and something of a playboy. In May 1994, he was appointed vice president of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan and in 1995, he was elected to the parliament. He later served as president of his country's Olympic Committee and headed its delegation to the Council of Europe. In January 2003, he became vice president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and a member of its bureau. In August 2003, he was appointed Prime Minister.

As we will discuss in more detail below, few of the opposition leaders are viewed as charismatic. RFE/RL analysts claim that Ali Kerimli, leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party is "one of the most charismatic" leaders in Azerbaijan; they also view Lala Shevket who heads the Liberal Party as "one of the opposition's most politically sophisticated thinkers."⁵⁶ However, there was no single charismatic leader who could unify the opposition and serve as a symbol of the movement for change.⁵⁷ Many of the leaders of the political opposition had been active in politics for some time prior to 1995, and were thus either linked to the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh or tarred in other cases, by their association, however brief, with the regime or that of Heydar Aliyev. As the result of both regime pressure and personal inclination, most confined their activities to the capital most of the time. Persistent and courageous though they had proved themselves in the face of arrests, beatings, imprisonment, and other harassment by the regime, none had the charisma of some of the leaders of the successful democratizing elections in the region, such as Saakashvili in Georgia or Yushchenko in Ukraine.

Preventive action by the regime: Although the use of violence by the regime was not widespread, the government used force against demonstrators and opposition leaders on numerous occasions. Several opposition activists, including the editor and technical

director of the opposition Azadliq bloc were beaten and then photographed in compromising positions with prostitutes,⁵⁸ and one, Elmar Huseynov, editor of the journal *Monitor*, was murdered. Numerous others, as noted above, were arrested for their activities in opposing the regime. Repression against the opposition intensified after the 2003 presidential elections that saw Ilham Aliyev take the top position in the state. This intensification illustrates a little discussed fact about efforts to use elections to democratize, i.e., the costs of failure, which can be considerable and longlasting to the opposition.

In October 2005, the regime prevented the return to Azerbaijan of Rasul Guliyev, the former speaker of parliament, widely seen as someone who could appeal both to dissatisfied elements in the clans supporting the President and certain elements of the opposition. Detained in Ukraine at Baku's request, Guliyev eventually left Ukraine for London and gave up his ambitions to run for office in Azerbaijan.

The government also made every effort to separate the coalitions and promote internal cleavages within them. An example of this effort to divide the most influential opposition parties from inside became public in August 2005, when Ramiz Tagiyev, a former political prisoner and advisor to Kerimli, alleged at a news conference that Security Ministry agents offered him \$1,000 to foment discord within Kerimli's PFPA.⁵⁹

Aliyev also took action against mass mobilization by the opposition, even going so far as to as to have police officers confiscate orange material in shopping centers in Baku in order to prevent the opposition, which had chosen it as the color of its campaign in reference to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, from using it.⁶⁰ Youth activists, including Ruslan Bashirli, leader of Yeni Fikir, were detained and accused of working with the Armenian intelligence services; several other young leaders were also arrested and accused of accepting funding from foreigners to overthrow the government.⁶¹ The government broke up meetings opposition candidates attempted to hold with their supporters and beat and arrested opposition supporters who tried to hold a rally in Baku in October prior to the election. Members of the opposition party were detained, and twenty-seven were seriously injured at a rally organized by Azadliq in October.⁶²

Regime "blunders." As noted above, the regime clearly falsified the results of the elections as well as, as we will discuss below, taking actions prior to the elections to prevent the opposition from running an effective electoral campaign. However, despite widespread agreement among all outside election observers aside from the delegation from the CIS that there had been widespread fraud and falsification, this action did not provoke mass protest. The opposition, as we will discuss below, held protest rallies, but these did not engage the large numbers of citizens needed to bring about a reversal of the election results or a change of regime. Instead, the regime remained in power.

The Opposition:

Despite the concentration of power in the hands of the Aliyev family and significant limits on the activities of the opposition, opposition political parties continued to be active during the 2005 elections, as did a small, but important non-governmental sector. Two opposition coalitions, Azadliq (Freedom) and YeS (abbreviation for Yeni Siyaset, or New Politics) were created to participate in the 2005 elections. Inspired by the events in Georgia and Ukraine, Isa Gambar and other opposition leaders joined forces in 2005 in the Azadliq alliance. In addition to Gambar's Musavat party, the alliance included the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan led by Ali Kerimli and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. The Yeni Siyaset or New Policy bloc also participated. This bloc brought together the National Independence Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Intelligentsia Movement and Ali Masimov, the former Prime Minister under Ebulfez Elchibey. The Liberal Party of Azerbaijan led by Lala Shevket also fielded candidates. The opposition coalitions were formed well ahead of the elections, as part of the opposition's election campaign strategy. The parties in the coalitions had cooperated on short-term, smaller scale acts –denunciations and boycotts--before, but never on the scale and to the degree of their 2005 election cooperation. Each bloc/coalition put forward common parliamentary candidates (representing all 3 of the parties that each bloc united) and also supported a number of independent candidates.

Voter choice in the 2005 elections was complicated by the pseudo opposition: the many “independent” candidates who actually supported the Aliyev regime and the copy-cat parties the regime organized to parallel many of the opposition parties. Two of the major parallel parties were the United Azerbaijan Popular Front and Modern Musavat, which were created prior to the presidential elections in 2003.⁶³

Opposition leaders: Most leaders of the opposition were operating outside state structures such as the parliament in 2005. Many, however, were familiar faces in political life in Azerbaijan who had been involved in politics prior to or since Azerbaijan's independence in 1991. Several, including Lala Shevket of the Liberal Party of Azerbaijan and Eldar Namazov of the YeS (Yeni Siyaset /New Policy Alliance) party, were high ranking officials in the early years of Heydar Aliyev's rule. Lala Shevket, a doctor of medical science who served as a department head in the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation and was involved, along with Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and other leading intellectuals, in forming the Movement for Democratic Reforms in 1991, was invited to return to Baku to become State Secretary under Heydar Aliyev in 1993. She resigned from this position in 1994, after criticizing Aliyev's administration as corrupt and intolerant of diverse views and, in 1995 founded the Liberal Party of Azerbaijan.⁶⁴ Eldar Namazov resigned in October 1999 from the position of aide/advisor to Heydar Aliyev and became the leader of the New Party Alliance on the eve of the 2005 elections.⁶⁵

Other opposition leaders, such as Isa Gambar and Ali Kerimli, had been active in the Elchibey government. A historian from a family of academicians who was an academic in Nakhichevan, Gambar became involved with the democratic reform movement, the Azerbaijan Popular Front, and a part of its government in 1991. In 1992, he was elected speaker of the parliament and served as acting president of Azerbaijan in May and June

1992. In that year, he left the APF and founded the Musavat party, which he has continued to lead. Gambar ran for President against Ilham Aliyev in 2003, garnering an alleged 13.97 percent of the vote compared to the 76.84 percent Aliyev allegedly received in what were widely held to be fraudulent elections. Put under house arrest, Gambar and some 600 opposition activists who were jailed in 2003 were the nucleus of the opposition in 2005.

Ali Kerimli first became active in politics as a law student in the 1980s when he organized the Yurd (Homeland) movement, which he brought into the Azerbaijan Popular Front in 1989. He served as deputy chair of the Front's supreme council from January 1992 to April 1993, when he was appointed Secretary of State of Azerbaijan. He was elected to parliament in 1995 and again in 2000; he also served as Elchibey's assistant during that period. When the APF broke up after Elchibey's death in 2000, Kerimli became head of the "reformist" wing, which included several activists of the Yurd movement.⁶⁶

The young activists of Yeni Fikir, (New Thinking), though closely associated with Kerimli, were largely political neophytes. Generally students, many had been active in the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party prior to the founding of Yeni Fikir, which was often referred to as the "youth wing" of APFP.⁶⁷

The ideological unity of the opposition: The opposition coalitions brought together parties with very different orientations. Azadliq and YeS both ran on platforms that emphasized an increase in social welfare, including aid for the most vulnerable groups in the population and, in the case of Azadliq, anticorruption measures as well as poverty reduction measures.⁶⁸ The Liberal Party of Azerbaijan, by way of contrast, supported a free market economy but also anti-monopoly measures and state price regulation in areas such as electricity and railroads. Disagreements over the issues of selection of single candidates (YeS/New Policy Alliance wanted its candidates to represent the blocs in all of the constituencies), joint vote monitoring on election day, a joint assessment of the election results, and joint action after the elections also prevented the opposition coalitions from uniting into a single coalition.⁶⁹ As with many opposition groups in the postcommunist world, ideological divisions were less important than personality differences and personal ambitions. But, although there were differences in their programs as well as on more tactical issues, opposition groups were united in wanting to see a change in regime and the re-creation of democratic government in Azerbaijan. The coalitions did unite in protests to contest the official results after the elections.

Views on violence. The opposition was also united in its rejection of violence as a technique and reliance on peaceful protest as well as election-related activities as a strategy to bring about regime change. Well-acquainted with the techniques of non-violent conflict espoused by authors such as Gene Sharp, opposition leaders were also aware of and in some cases had observed firsthand the democratizing elections in other postcommunist states such as Georgia and Ukraine⁷⁰.

Mass Mobilization: The opposition blocs discussed above ran candidates in the election of 2005, but the opposition had neither the resources nor the opportunity to organize a large-scale civic movement. In addition to the external limitations imposed by the regime on the ability of the opposition to build effective, mass-based political parties or a broad citizen's movement, a reluctance to engage in many of the techniques outside experts on party development and voter mobilization counseled, such as door to door campaigning, canvassing, and personal contact with voters and potential supporters, also served to limit the opposition's reach.⁷¹

In the course of the 2005 campaign, both the Azadliq and the YeS coalitions held meetings with thousands of voters in the countryside. Azadliq, for example, held meetings with voters in 34 of the country's 65 rural districts. Some of these attracted over 10,000 voters, according to party leaders⁷². However, the main base of support for the opposition was in the capital, due to the fact that it was much more difficult for the regime to apply surveillance techniques in a large city than in smaller towns and villages, as well as the difficulties in delivering opposition dailies outside the capital and the effectiveness of the negative image of the opposition the regime fostered in the official broadcast media.⁷³

In their attempts to reach voters, opposition and NGO activists employed many of the same techniques used in other attempts to unseat autocrats by elections. Some of these, such as the orange tee shirts and orange flags, were taken directly from the experience of other successful electoral challenges, in this case, in Ukraine. Parties also sold or distributed other resistance symbols, such as badges and bandanas with YeS and Azadliq symbols to ordinary citizens.⁷⁴ These do not appear to have been as ubiquitous in Azerbaijan as in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, or Slovakia, however, where opposition logos, posters, tee shirts, and slogans were evident in massive numbers and played an important role in spreading awareness of the opposition campaign and gaining new supporters. Some of the posters prepared for protests were in English and addressed the US President: "Help us, Mr. Bush!", "Mr. Bush, do not lose a friendly Muslim country!"⁷⁵

Given the low penetration of internet and cell phone use in Azerbaijan, these technologies were not key parts of the opposition's strategy. Regime interference also made it difficult for opponents of Aliyev to use the internet as a means of communication.

Often harassed, and operating from rundown offices on the outskirts of the capital or in borrowed quarters, opposition political leaders were sometimes physically threatened or beaten or arrested. This repression intensified shortly after the 2003 presidential elections, when opposition activists and leaders were beaten and many imprisoned. Despite this pressure from the regime, opposition leaders were generally able to organize meetings of their members and supporters, publish and circulate opposition newspapers, as well as meet with foreigners.

In June 2005, the government yielded to international pressure after it violently suppressed a peaceful demonstration on May 21st and once again allowed the opposition to organize a rally in the Baku suburbs, the first officially permitted opposition

demonstration since the 2003 presidential elections. But, although the government allowed this rally, it continued to harass opposition leaders and supporters during authorized rallies and brutally broke up another demonstration in September 2005.⁷⁶ In addition, the locations where the opposition was permitted to organize such events were generally outside of the city centers, and they were typically limited in duration to a few hours.

In general, the opposition followed the procedure the government established for holding demonstrations. Thus, they organized peaceful protests outside of Baku, as required by the government, shortly after the November 2005 elections which drew approximately 20,000 people. Another 30,000 protested at a similar rally held on November 19.⁷⁷ However, opposition leaders and participants in authorized demonstrations also suffered intimidation and, on occasion, beatings and detention. On November 26, 2005, Lala Shevket and Ali Kerimli called on citizens at a protest that had been approved in Baku to remain where they were after the end of the approved time period. This demonstration was brutally repressed by the police, and numerous demonstrators were injured.⁷⁸

Civil society: Numerous NGOs, most supported by outside funding, participated in election related activities, including voter education and get out the vote campaigns. During the elections, two coalitions of Azerbaijani NGOs, as well as some individual organizations, observed the elections. The first coalition, the Election Monitoring Center united 14 NGOs and sent 2,315 observers to 124 of the 125 electoral districts. The second coalition, the Coordinative Advisory Council for Free and Fair Elections (CACFFE) which was comprised of 48 NGOs, sent out 2,237 observers to 80 districts. Members of CACFFE managed to obtain full election documentation in 32 districts. Both the Monitoring Center and CACFFE recorded a number of falsifications to conclude that a revote was needed⁷⁹.

Prior to the election, numerous NGOs funded by outside actors engaged in activities to increase voter awareness, improve the quality of political party platforms and election monitoring, and monitor the media. The National Endowment for Democracy, for example, supported six regional resource centers which provided office support and informational resources for NGOs and activists, as well as the Election Monitoring Center and the Support Center for Democratic Elections to produce informative television and print materials about the rules and regulations governing the electoral process. NED also assisted the Azerbaijan Lawyers Association and the Azerbaijan Foundation for Development of Democracy in providing legal assistance to voters and candidates⁸⁰. The Open Society Institute supported 9 local NGOs to train voters and observers on their rights, and another 9 local NGOs to monitor election legislation amendments and the securing of election rights. OSI-AF in Azerbaijan also funded 4 educational projects on elections run by local NGOs in four rural regions, three of which targeted youth.⁸¹ Another local NGO, the Najafov Foundation, was also involved in pre-election media monitoring.⁸²

There were also several youth organizations that were active in the elections. These included Yeni Fikir (New Thinking) which opposition leader Ali Kerimli of the Popular

Front helped found in April 2004. Drawing their inspiration from youth organizations in countries that had experienced democratizing elections, Yeni Fikir activists participated in trainings for non-violent conflict and attempted to emulate the get out the vote campaigns that had proved successful elsewhere. A number of other youth organizations, including Magam, (Moment, also translated as It's Time), Dalga, (Wave) and Yokh (No) were also active, despite harassment by the regime.⁸³

The influence of youth movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, as well as other outside experts in non-violent conflict was evident in the fact that one of these organizations, Magam, launched its activities in April 2005 with a translation of Gene Sharp's 1993 book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. The book is considered a virtual bible for Azerbaijan's youth organizations, and all four actively disseminated it.

Yokh gained prominence in February 2005 when Razi Nurullayev, head of the Azerbaijani Society for Democratic Reform, began working for the organization. At the same time, the group started focusing on issues, such as the campaign against corruption, that did not, on the surface, clash with government policies.⁸⁴

Dalga was a rather loose group that held very small scale demonstrations for varying purposes—to protest oppression of media, as well as to express condolences to the US embassy on the anniversary of September 11, for example. There is no evidence that Dalga was affiliated with the opposition. In fact, this organization may have had links with some pro-governmental youth organizations, a possibility given credence by the fact that this group's members, if detained, are never kept for more than a few hours.

The Orange Movement of Azerbaijan, established in March 2005 by 89 students from Baku State University and the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy, acted as more of an underground organization. Police spent weeks scouring Baku Internet cafes in late March for those responsible for disseminating a message that announced the group's formation and described the Aliyev administration as "murderers and kidnappers" who posed "an obstacle for the nation's economic prosperity."⁸⁵

No information is available on the partisan affiliations of the Orange Movement of Azerbaijan. In contrast to Yeni Fikir, which is closely linked to Ali Kerimli, the other three youth organizations discussed do not have close affiliation with any political party, but can rather be accurately described as non-partisan, pro-democracy groups. As a member of one of these organizations, Huseynov of Magam put it: "For us, it does not matter who is in power – [the governing] Yeni Azerbaijan Party or the opposition. We are for establishing rule of law in society, where all citizens, without any exclusion, have equal rights."⁸⁶

Hampered by the regime's repression, which included expulsion of members from university, and the arrest of Yeni Fikir chairman, Ruslan Barhirlı, in August 2005 on charges of attempting to overthrow the government and accepting funds from foreign non-governmental organizations and Armenian intelligence agencies, the youth

organizations were not successful in raising turnout, which dropped to 46 percent according to official results.⁸⁷

Religious organizations: Religious organizations did not play a role in the opposition. Nominally Muslim, most Azeris are secular, and religious parties have had notably little success.

Business and economic groups: In contrast to the opposition in Ukraine, the Azeri opposition was unable to count on financial support from a strong dissatisfied element of the business sector at home. As discussed above, many large businesses in Azerbaijan are owned directly by those in power. Others involved in large business enterprises in Azerbaijan are inevitably members of the networks of power discussed above. There is no equivalent, at least as of yet, in Azerbaijan, of the Ukrainian businesspeople, ranging from oligarchs to owners of small and medium size businesses, who defected from the Kuchma regime in Ukraine and played such an important role in financing and supporting the Orange Revolution. Nor were labor or other economic groups involved.

The media: As noted above, the media were largely controlled by the regime. Observers estimate that the state owned and “public” TV outlets devoted approximately 79 percent of their coverage to regime candidates. The few independent journals and newspapers of the opposition had limited circulation, and their editors and journalists often suffered beatings or harassment.⁸⁸

External Factors

Numerous international actors influenced or attempted to influence the outcome of the 2005 elections in Azerbaijan. These included the US and other Western governments; Russia; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international election monitoring bodies; and American and Western NGOs. Activists and “graduates” of previous democratizing elections attempted to share their experiences and tactics, and the example of successful popular mobilizations elsewhere in the postcommunist region was an important inspiration for the opposition. Multinational corporations, by their investments in Azerbaijan’s resource sector, also played a role, albeit indirectly.

The “Neighborhood:” At the time of the 2005 elections, Azerbaijan resided in a “mixed” neighborhood. Thus, many of the nearby states, including Armenia and the Central Asian states, as well as Russia, had autocratic or semi-autocratic regimes. Others, however, such as Georgia and Ukraine, had recently experienced democratizing elections that had led to a marked opening up of political life and movement, frequently interrupted by backsliding, toward creation of liberal democracies.

External Factors suppressing or actively discouraging democratic development:

Linkage to a non-democratic regional hegemon: Despite its backing of Armenia in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh, Russia was an important player in Azerbaijan. Although the country’s first two post-Soviet leaders had refused to become part of the

Commonwealth of Independent States that succeeded the Soviet Union, Heydar Aliyev brought Azerbaijan into that group. One of his first decisions, in fact, was to create a 10 percent share for Russian Lukoil in oil exploration at the expense of Azerbaijan's State Oil consortium.⁸⁹

Political/diplomatic linkages to a power which sought to perpetuate the autocratic regime: All of the opposition leaders interviewed for this project and independent experts agreed that Russia had a strong interest in the maintenance of Azerbaijan's current regime that defends and balances Russia's interest against Western influence in the country⁹⁰. Opposition leaders in Azerbaijan are convinced that Russia provided diplomatic and unofficial support to the Aliyev government in falsifying the elections and suppressing mass protests.⁹¹ These claims are supported by the report of the CIS election monitoring team and the subsequent strengthening of relations between the two countries.⁹² Vladimir Putin visited Azerbaijan in February 2006, two months after the repression of post-election protests in Baku. During his visit, Putin congratulated Ilham Aliyev on the outcome of the 2005 elections and discussed improving the strategic and trade partnership between the two countries.⁹³

Economic Linkages to a power supportive of the autocratic regime: As we will discuss more fully in the next section, Azerbaijan had significant economic linkages to Russia at the time of the 2005 elections. Lack of publicly available data prior to 2006 makes assessing the degree of this linkage difficult; analysts estimate that Russia ranked third after Turkey and the US in trade with Azerbaijan in 2005.⁹⁴ In 2006, after the elections, Russia was the largest single trading partner of Azerbaijan, after the EU, but before Turkey and the US. In that year, trade with Russia accounted for 13% of Azerbaijan's total external trade, while trade with Turkey and the US accounted for 6.6 and 2% respectively.⁹⁵ Thus, analysts either misestimated Russia's share of Azerbaijan's trade in 2005, or there was a substantial increase in Russian-Azerbaijan bilateral trade after 2005.

Social/religious/cultural linkages to a power that supported the autocratic regime: After the 1995 consolidation of the Heydar Aliyev's regime, there was a sizable migration of Azeris, including many from rural areas, to Russia. Many of these still have active connections and family ties to Azerbaijan⁹⁶.

Active "autocracy promotion." As discussed above, opposition activists claim that Russia actively supported the Aliyev regime during the elections. They also argue that Russian leaders strengthened economic linkages between the two countries after the 2005 elections. While we do not have hard evidence to evaluate these claims, at the very least the Putin leadership in Russia was pleased with the outcome and supportive of Aliyev's continuation in power.

External factors that may have aided democratic development

Military occupation. As noted before, part of Azerbaijan was taken over by Armenia with Russian assistance in the early 1990s and remains in Armenian hands. Many Azeris fled the region, and the issue remains a sore point in Azerbaijan.

Paramilitary intervention. There was no paramilitary intervention in the 2005 elections.

Covert military intervention. There was no covert military intervention to overthrow the Aliyev regime or support opposition forces. Nor is there any evidence that outside intelligence services provided information useful to the opposition.

Sanctions. To our knowledge, no outside actor threatened or imposed economic sanctions on the regime in support of a transition to democracy. As we have discussed, US and other Western diplomats hinted at closer relations with Baku if the 2005 elections were free and fair, but they did not threaten the regime with concrete sanctions if they were not. Nor did they impose such penalties when the regime falsified the election. Competing foreign policy priorities, including security issues, the war in Iraq, and energy needs, clearly influenced these actions in the case of the US and may have also influenced those of European countries.

European countries, through the Council of Europe, attempted to use normative sanctions to influence the regime, but to little effect. Thus, although several of the recommendations of the Venice Commission intended to improve the quality of voter participation in the elections and prevent fraud, such as the inking of fingers of voters, were adopted by the Aliyev regime, they proved to be ineffective in influencing the outcome, i.e., in preventing widespread falsification of results, to say nothing of intimidation of and actions against the opposition and its supporters.⁹⁷

Democratic Conditionality. The US and European Union attempted to use democratic conditionality to induce the Aliyev regime to hold free and fair elections. However, the “carrots” or benefits to be gained were diffuse, and the consequences of not complying with outside calls for free and fair elections were limited. Thus, although as we have discussed in earlier sections of this paper, US and other Western ambassadors and leaders called for free and fair elections and promised improved relations with the regime, they did not hold out very attractive, concrete benefits for such compliance. The EU, for example, could not use a tool it used very effectively⁹⁸ to encourage regime change in Slovakia and Croatia, the promise of eventual EU membership to encourage democratic regime change in Azerbaijan. Similarly, given the country’s scores (political rights- 37%, civil liberties –41%, control of corruption –18%, government effectiveness 24%, rule of law –48%, voice and accountability –32%), the US could not realistically hold out the promise of participation in the Millennium Challenge.⁹⁹

But the most important limit on the effectiveness of efforts to use democratic conditionality in Azerbaijan were two other factors we have discussed previously. These were first, the limited interest of the US and other Western governments in seeing regime change in Azerbaijan, given the perceived value of stability in that country and the “good ally” reputation of the Aliyev regime, at least among US officials. Thus, the verbal support of President Bush and others for free and fair elections and the implicit threat of loss of the possibility of better relations with the US were not credible to the regime, given other US interests and priorities. Secondly, the very high cost to Aliyev and those

surrounding him of regime change also limited the ability of outside actors to use conditionality to support a democratic transition. In the face of the economic benefits they would have lost and likely threats to their personal security should they have allowed free and fair elections in which the opposition had a chance at defeating them, it is not clear what benefits outside actors would have had to offer the Aliyev leadership to have had a real influence on regime actions.

Linkage, integration, convergence

Geographical linkage: Azerbaijan borders Russia, Iran, Georgia, and Armenia and has a connection to Turkey through its enclave in Nakhichevan.

Political/diplomatic linkages: Azerbaijan was a member of the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the CIS, and GUAM (a grouping that originally included Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova and is intended to counter Russian influence in the region¹⁰⁰) at the time of the 2005 elections. It was also a member of the Asian Development Bank at the time of the attempted transition. The country had observer status in the World Trade Organization, and its leaders aspire to full membership.

Economic Linkage: Azerbaijan's economic linkages are dominated by oil and gas. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which originates in Baku and passes through Georgia and Turkey began operation shortly before the 2005 elections. This project has been the largest single factor shaping Azerbaijan's economy and international economic partnerships. The inauguration of this pipeline in January 2006 was followed by a 40.2 percent growth rate in 2006, the highest in the CIS and ten times greater than growth in Russia, according to a report of the Intergovernmental Statistics Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)¹⁰¹

The BTC's major shareholders are BP (30.1%), the Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR (25%), followed by Unocal (US, 8.9%), Statoil (Norway, 8.71%), Turkish Petroleum (6.53%), ENI (Italy, 5%), TotalFinaElf (France, 5%), Itochu (Japan, 3.4%), ConocoPhillips (US, 2.5%), Inpex (Japan, 2.5%) and Delta Hess (a joint venture of Saudi Delta Oil with American Amerada, 2.36%).¹⁰² The largest shareholder of the BTC, UK's BP is operating four major projects in the Caspian region on behalf of its consortium partners which already add up to more than "\$20 billion of investment, with a further \$10 billion likely to be spent mainly on offshore development by the end of the decade."¹⁰³ According the US-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce (USACC): "The BTC partners have contributed more than \$100 million to community investment, environmental and cultural heritage protection programmes among 454 communities along the pipeline's route. At current oil prices the major oil and gas fields and pipelines will provide revenues to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey of more than \$150 billion between 2005 and 2024."¹⁰⁴

Total investment in Azerbaijan's economy amounted to 7118.5 million US dollars in 2005, an increase from the 5992.7 million invested in 2004¹⁰⁵. Of these investments (in 2005, in million USD) 3799.9 went to the oil sector, 4030.4 were direct investments, 698.4 were financial credits, and 230.5 were investments in joint stock companies.¹⁰⁶

Trade: Publicly available reports on Azerbaijan's trade only start in 2006. In that year, Azerbaijan's international trade amounted to 11.64 billion dollars: 5.27 billion in imports and 6.37 billion in exports. The EU countries are Azerbaijan's main trading partners: about half of Azerbaijan's trade is with the EU. The three next largest trade partners are Russia, Turkey and Israel, in that order. Russia accounted for 13.1% of Azerbaijan's external trade in 2006, Turkey and Israel 6.6% and 6.1% respectively.¹⁰⁷ While we do not have the exact numbers for the years prior to 2006, analysts' estimates for the year 2005 suggest that the EU was the dominant trade partner in that year also.¹⁰⁸

Socio/religious/cultural linkage. Azerbaijan has very strong ethnic and linguistic connections to Turkey. The Turkish government finances numerous Azerbaijani students to attend university in Turkey each year. In 2005, for example, around 2,000 students from Azerbaijan were studying in Turkey and Russia. In 2005, Azerbaijan sent 1,503 higher education students to Turkey, and 1,258 to Russia.¹⁰⁹ After the 1995 consolidation of the Heydar Aliyev's regime, there was a sizable migration of Azeris, including many from rural areas, to Russia. Many of these still have active connections and family ties to Azerbaijan.¹¹⁰ Despite the cool official relationship with Iran, there are increasingly close cultural and petty trading links to that country.¹¹¹ The northern territories of Iran are populated by ethnic Azeris who speak the same dialect of Turkish as is spoken in Azerbaijan.

Technological and communication linkage: State TV broadcasts selected Russian and Turkish television programs. Satellite connections that receive Russian, Turkish, European and US television channels are widely available among the upper middle and upper classes. In the southern regions of the country, citizens can watch certain Iranian channels.

Civil society linkage: Civil society organizations had links to numerous international NGOs, party organizations, and advocacy groups abroad. The Open Society Institute, IFES, IRI, and NDI were the largest of the groups involved in transnational networks to strengthen civil society and promote democracy at the time of the 2005 elections. Numerous other transnational organizations, including Save the Children, OXFAM, the Eurasia Foundation, and many others had offices or programs in Azerbaijan.

Monitoring and reporting:

Election Monitoring: In 2005, an International Election Observation Mission, which included representatives from the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and NATO's Parliamentary Assembly, observed the elections. The IEOM mission report noted that the positive progress made compared to previous elections, as in the area of

candidate registration, was undermined by government interference in campaigning and media bias that favored pro-government candidates. It also noted significant deficiencies in tabulating election results¹¹². The 2000 Parliamentary elections were observed by the international observer missions of OSCE (with PACE), Human Rights Watch, and NDI; the 2003 Presidential elections were observed by the international observer missions of OSCE (joint with PACE), Human Rights Watch, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe's (IDEE).¹¹³

As noted earlier, IFES, IRI and other international NGOs also trained domestic election monitors. As the result of a last minute decision on the part of Aliyev, NGO activists and some youth leaders were able to act as election observers during the elections. Along with international observers, domestic election monitors documented numerous violations of proper procedure, complaints that eventually led to the invalidation of the results and new elections in a few constituencies.¹¹⁴

Russia and other members of the CIS also sent a monitoring mission. Consisting of 640 observers, including 42 long-term observers, the mission concluded that the elections had respected Azerbaijani law and would strengthen democracy in the country.¹¹⁵ A variety of local NGOs and representatives of the regime also monitored the elections.

In addition, three organizations, Mitofsky International, based in New York, P.A. Consulting, based in Washington, D.C., and Saar Poll, based in Estonia, conducted exit polls in 2005. The results of these polls, two of which appear to have been paid for by the Azeri government, were very controversial. The head of Mitofsky International later published an article about the pressure the Azeri government put on his firm not to release their results in a timely manner and other government manipulations of the polls¹¹⁶. USAID funded the third poll. Although the results of this poll were similar to those of his firm, Mitofsky argued that the USAID polls disadvantaged the opposition, due to the fact that the five main districts where opposition candidates won or were strong were left out of USAID's randomly selected sample.¹¹⁷

Human rights monitoring: A number of international organizations and other external actors monitored human and political rights in Azerbaijan. These reports, which were conducted regularly by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the US State Department, were published annually. In addition to general evaluations of the situation, the reports typically include the number and names of political prisoners and detailed discussion of cases in which human rights have been abused. Available in English on the websites of these organizations, the reports, as well as Freedom House and Transparency International reports on Azerbaijan, were translated and published in opposition newspapers. These newspapers are the only way that the population learns of these reports. Due to the significant resource limitations of these publications, their reach is very limited. The *Azadliq* daily, which is the only newspaper that regularly translates such reports, is published in only 5,000 copies. *Yeni Musavat*, another opposition daily, publishes the reports occasionally in approximately the same number of copies.¹¹⁸

The government does not publicize these reports, but it does accuse some of the reporters of these organizations of being against Azerbaijan for ethnic, religious, or other reasons.¹¹⁹

Democracy financial and technical assistance.

Official development aid. Azerbaijan was the recipient of official development aid, which totaled \$224,500,000 in 2005, almost double the total in 1995 –118,620,000.¹²⁰ Official aid was used primarily for economic and social development. Some funds were also used for government capacity building. Official aid gave priority to economic reform and strengthening government institutions. At the same time, USAID implemented a variety of programs aimed at strengthening political parties, voter education, and support for independent media, as well as anti-corruption and rule of law programs. USAID also provided broadcast transmitters to seven regional TV stations.¹²¹ In 2005, USAID focused on activities to ensure free and fair elections. Activities funded included training of political parties and domestic observers; a pilot exit poll during the municipal elections and a national exit poll during the legislative elections. Overall, however, USAID funding for democracy and governance programs in Azerbaijan has been lower than levels of funding in many other post-Soviet states. In 2004, USAID spent \$38,782,000 on democracy, conflict, and humanitarian assistance. USAID's budget for Civil Society Program in Azerbaijan in 2004 and 2005 was \$5,900,000 and \$6,470,000 respectively, compared to \$93,406,000 in Armenia, \$94,339,000 in Ukraine, and \$73,657,000 in Georgia. USAID's spending on democracy and governance programs actually decreased in Azerbaijan in 2005 to \$3,735,500. Although USAID aid for these purposes also decreased in Armenia and Ukraine in 2005, the amounts (\$74,938,000 and \$81,250,000) remained substantially higher than those spent in Azerbaijan and increased significantly in Georgia to \$10,850,000.¹²²

The EU decided to include Azerbaijan as well as Armenia and Georgia in the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004 and began the process of negotiating an action plan with each in 2005. Human rights groups hope that Azerbaijan's inclusion in the ENP will provide the EU with leverage to improve respect for human and political rights in Azerbaijan.¹²³ The EU has been the main provider of aid to Azerbaijan: it granted 15 million euros to Azerbaijan for 2004-2005 under the Tacis National Action Programme for support for institutional, legal and administrative reform; support for the private sector and economic development, and the Institutional Building Partnership - Civil Society (IBPP) and Policy Advice (PAP), which were to be instruments for the preparation of further administrative reforms.¹²⁴

Total humanitarian aid to Azerbaijan (excluding US and the EU) in 2005 was 5,065,881 and comprised following donors: Norway (2,089,508; 41.2% of total), Italy (1,219,512; 24.1 %), Switzerland (1,162,791; 23.0 %), United Nations (340,629; 6.7 %), Germany (250,941; 5.0 %), United Arab Emirates (2,500; <0.01%)¹²⁵. Between 2001 and 2005, the IMF gave Azerbaijan a credit of 54.71 (in SDR millions) for a poverty reduction strategy.¹²⁶

OSCE/ODIHR provided approximately 670 long- and short-term observers to monitor the 2005 elections. Observers noted some improvement in the pre-election period regarding candidate registration, meeting of deadlines by the Central Election Commission (CEC) in regard to technical preparations, voter education campaigns by the CEC, and the decision to use invisible ink to mark voters' fingers, among others. The OSCE/ODIHR report also noted that candidates were able to make use of free airtime and hold rallies with their supporters, although "many" opposition rallies were prevented or restricted by the regime. Overall, the report noted that significant irregularities were observed in 13 percent of polling stations observed and concluded that the elections overall did not meet OSCE and other international standards for democratic elections.¹²⁷ The OSCE/ODIHR mission observed similar irregularities in the repeat elections held in May 2006 in the ten districts in which the Central Election Commission and the Constitutional Court invalidated the November 2005.¹²⁸

Private and semi-governmental aid. Numerous private and semi-governmental foundations provided aid to Azerbaijan. These included the Soros Foundation, IFES, NDI, and IRI which funded activities related to democracy promotion as well as others which implemented projects related to social-economic development, community building, education, health, and refugee issues. The latter included the Eurasia Foundation, CHF International, Counterpart International, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, the International Health Group, the International Medical Corps, the International Finance Corporation, International Relief and Development (IRD), Pathfinder International, Relief International, World Hope International, UNDP, Transparency International, World Vision International, OXFAM, and Save the Children.¹²⁹

Election monitor/observer trainings and voter education topped the list of activities funded by the Open Society Institute, IFES, NDI and IRI in Azerbaijan prior to the 2005 elections. IRI claims to have trained 900 local election observers, OSI about half of that through its grants to several local NGOs¹³⁰. As one would expect, the work of IFES centered on election related activities. These included efforts to promote change in the Election Code through work with the Presidential apparatus and the Central Election Committee, together with the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. IFES also focused on capacity building at the Central Election Committee and work on the national voter registry.¹³¹ IFES also provided comprehensive election and voter education training to 48 young people from 7 regions with the expectation that they would transfer their knowledge to their communities through small projects.¹³² These pre-election activities were very meager compared to IFES's activities prior to the 2003 presidential elections when it had trained approximately 10,000 election officials sitting on precinct, district and central electoral commissions.¹³³

International NGOs also focused on get-out-the-vote activities and fighting voters' alienation from the political system in the pre-election period in 2005. One of the goals of the civil society program of OSI for 2005, for example, was "To streamline the

atmosphere of frustration and depression in public sentiments in order to keep people still believing in their ability to influence the democratization process.”¹³⁴ IFES in turn carried out a special voter education program designed to motivate those groups supposedly least likely to vote: youth, women, people with disabilities, and internally displaced people.¹³⁵

None of these four organizations carried out parallel vote tabulation during the elections, but OSI supported such activity for the additional elections held May 16 for the 10 constituencies where the vote was annulled¹³⁶.

All of these organizations organized some pre-election activities in rural areas, but none had a program covering all of the rural regions of Azerbaijan, with the exception of IRI’s campaign training programs. IRI reports indicate that it provided campaign training activities which included message development, get-out-the-vote tactics, leadership issues, door-to-door canvassing, and media training for “over 1400 participants from the election headquarters of representatives of both ruling and opposition political parties, as well as independent candidates.”¹³⁷

Many of the programs of private, semi-official organizations focused on civil society and the NGO sector. The Soros Foundation funded three main sets of programs: civil society, education and information technologies. The civil society programs included projects focused on increasing the transparency of oil revenues, media building, gender, health, civil society (NGO building, electoral monitoring, rule of law, judiciary/courts, legal aid, decentralization and aid to local government, fundamental freedoms advocacy and art.¹³⁸

We do not have complete data on the total amount spent by these groups. However, it appears that aid for civil society development was far smaller than the \$224.5 million official development aid spent on economic development and strengthening of the government apparatus.¹³⁹ The Soros Foundation, for example, which was the largest of non-official donors focused on civil society building, spent \$140,411 on projects related to law; \$118,449 on media projects; and \$47,525 on projects focused on strengthening civil society in 2001. In addition, the Foundation spent \$136,281 on women’s empowerment projects and \$92,085 on cooperation among NGOs in former communist countries. Total aid to civil society, including the latter activities, amounted to \$543,751¹⁴⁰. Between 2001 and 2005, the organization’s total grants budget in Azerbaijan increased from \$1,678,107 to \$2,196,530.¹⁴¹

NED’s programs focused on support for groups such as the Azerbaijan Lawyers Association, think tanks such as the FAR Center for Economic and Political Research, which monitored religious freedom, and undertook campaigns to increase awareness of electoral rights, and civil education, as well as conducted public opinion polls, an Election Monitoring Center to inform the public about the electoral process and produce radio and television announcements encouraging voters to participate in the elections, the Azerbaijan Foundation for the Development of Democracy, which sponsored debates among candidates and seminars for monitors and members of the electoral commissions and conducted a public opinion poll; as well as several other groups that encouraged voter turnout and sponsored civic education programs. NED funds also provided support

for development of the NGO sector and youth groups. It also supported Azadliq, the country's oldest independent newspaper, to publish a report on human rights violations and the abuse of power prior to the 2004 municipal elections. NED funding for programs in Azerbaijan was \$220,594 in 2000; \$159,750 in 2001; \$ 284,292 in 2002; \$411,988 in 2003; \$434,766 in 2004; and \$525,506 in 2005.¹⁴²

IRI's programs focused on political party development/campaign assistance, election surveys, women's empowerment, and youth involvement in politics. IRI officials put particular emphasis prior to the 2005 elections on encouraging party leaders to take their message to the voters in face-to-face meetings, door to door canvassing, etc. Many party leaders resisted these suggestions, as they were not usual in Azeri politics.¹⁴³ As noted above, IRI also provided training for election monitors in 2005.

NDI's projects focused on many of the same issues, including civil society development, training for political party leaders, and election reform and monitoring. NDI was in direct conflict with Azerbaijanian authorities during 2005 for funding youth groups.¹⁴⁴ NDI also organized projects to increase women's empowerment and an election monitoring group which was, however, not allowed to monitor the elections.

To sum up, the work of international NGOs in Azerbaijan prior to the 2005 elections was not easy. As noted earlier, NDI came into conflict with the regime due to its work with youth. IRI's relations with the government were also poor, and its Azerbaijan director was killed in 2000 under very doubtful circumstances.¹⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, OSI was at pains to disassociate itself from political struggles, and IFES made sure to invite government officials to participate in its trainings.

Diplomacy, normative pressure and persuasion. As in previous elections, Western governments, including that of the US, urged the Azeri government to take steps to ensure free and fair elections. President Bush's statement during a May 2005 visit to Georgia that noted that "Now, across the Caucasus, in Central Asia and the broader middle East, we see the same desire for liberty burning in the hearts of young people. They are demanding their freedom—and *they will have it*"¹⁴⁶ was believed by many in Azerbaijan to be a signal to the Azerbaijani government that it must hold free and fair elections¹⁴⁷. Some of the approximately 10,000 protestors who demonstrated in Baku in early June to call for free elections, for example, carried slogans addressing Bush¹⁴⁸. US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Reno Harnish stated that Washington would "issue a comprehensive warning" to the Central Election Committee and the Azerbaijani authorities if any attempt were made to falsify the vote¹⁴⁹. Madeline Albright's visit to Azerbaijan in the summer of 2005 highlighted a similar message: that the Central Electoral Commission needed to be truly independent and ensure that elections were free and fair.¹⁵⁰ Ambassador Harnish noted in July 2005 that Washington was conducting talks with the authorities and the opposition to promote what he called a "new, evolutionary model of political change" in Azerbaijan which would allow the opposition to hold up to a third of the seats in parliament and which would involve cooperation between opposition deputies and the more liberal members of the YAP to gradually liberalize without triggering a conservative counter reaction.¹⁵¹

In May, the Aliyev government acknowledged certain mistakes in the conduct of elections and proposed steps to overcome problems resulting from a “post-Soviet mentality.” In October, the government enacted certain measures, including lifting the ban on NGOs with substantial foreign support and lifting limitations on domestic election observers to comply with external demands, at least on the surface. However, these measures had little impact on the elections or on the opposition’s ability to contest them.

Despite these strong statements, the actual pressure exerted on the government by the US and other outside actors appears to have been minimal. Evident in evaluations of the elections afterwards, which noted irregularities but also progress from previous elections in certain areas, but did not call for new elections, this approach reflects the unwillingness of the US and its allies to rock the boat in Azerbaijan, given other security, strategic, and energy considerations. A USAID report on the agency’s activities in the country in the period leading up to the 2005 elections captures this perspective: “Since independence,” it notes, “Azerbaijan has experienced a number of upheavals that have impeded its democratic progress. Political turbulence in the early 1990s made it difficult for democracy to take root. The new Ilham Aliyev government, which came to power in 2003, appears to be more open to democratic reform.”¹⁵² The report also captures another critical aspect of the US approach to democratic development in Azerbaijan: “USAID has made great efforts to forge constructive relationships with the government and our implementing partners in order to bring the benefits of economic growth and political *improvement over previous elections in some areas. However, we share the preliminary pluralism to an every-increasing proportion of the Azerbaijani population.*”¹⁵³

The US statement on the 2005 elections, released a day after the elections stated:

The United States believes that the November 6 parliamentary elections were an improvement over previous elections in some areas. However, we share the preliminary assessment of the OSCE Observer Mission that, despite these improvements, the elections did not meet a number of international standards. The Government of Azerbaijan’s decision to allow large numbers of candidates to register and provide them with greater access to the media gave voters a real choice on election day. Implementation of measures outlined in the May 11 and October 25 Presidential decrees, including allowing exit polls and extensive monitoring by domestic and foreign observers, improved voter lists, and finger inking all contributed to a more orderly and transparent vote. We are disturbed, however, by credible reports in selected districts around the country of major irregularities and fraud that may have disenfranchised voters in those districts. Flaws included credible reports of serious violations in vote counting and tabulation as well as intimidation of observers. The OSCE’s preliminary assessment also noted significant problems in the pre-election period. These irregularities, if left uncorrected, would harm the improvements we have noted. We note President Aliyev’s stated intent to take corrective action. The United States looks to his government to do so in those districts where impartial and transparent investigations show that irregularities and fraud affected the results. We call on all citizens of Azerbaijan to address complaints about election

violations through legal and peaceful channels and to refrain from violence. We urge the government of Azerbaijan to allow for peaceful freedom of assembly and to exercise restraint in responding to protests.¹⁵⁴

This attitude was also evident in the reaction of the US Embassy when the Constitutional Court of Azerbaijan confirmed the results announced by the Central Election Committee (considered falsified by the observers and the polls) and annulled the election results in 10 constituencies (including the mandate of two key opposition candidates from these districts), the US embassy issued a statement the next day congratulating the Constitutional Court for canceling the election results and expressing “optimism about working with newly elected members of parliament”.¹⁵⁵

Azeri opposition leaders protested the lack of the promised “harsh response” to the falsification of the election results, which they attributed to the US need for oil and the support of Azerbaijan’s government due to the country’s proximity to Iran¹⁵⁶. In a meeting at the headquarters of the Azerbaijan Popular Front party, after the elections between the US Ambassador, the leaders of Azadliq, Lala Shevket, and Ali Kerimli, Kerimli noted that the US embassy had welcomed changes in his constituency twice: once when the Central Election Commission named him the winner and once when the Constitutional Court overturned that decision¹⁵⁷. Lala Shevket publicly asked a reporter for the New York Times, “Why is freedom and democracy not a top priority in Azerbaijan?...Is it because we are not Christian? ...Or is it because we have oil?”¹⁵⁸

There was no US pressure after or reaction to the violent suppression of mass protests after the falsification of the elections. Before the Constitutional Court of Azerbaijan approved the election results, the US embassy expressed hope regarding the government’s commitment to democratization. The official US statement applauded the decision of the constitutional court to annul the results in several constituencies in which fraud had occurred and urged the government to take additional action to address the concerns of the international community. However, it did not condemn the government’s use of violence against peaceful protesters or deplore the violation of their human rights.¹⁵⁹

Democratic example, contagion and learning. The opposition’s effort to unite in 2005 was clearly influenced by the developments in Georgia and Ukraine. Isa Gambar, for example, made a brief trip to Ukraine to support Yushchenko in 2004, and he and other opposition leaders explicitly referred to the Ukrainian developments as part of their strategy prior to the 2005 elections.¹⁶⁰

The regime also clearly had the Georgian case in particular in mind. Shortly before the elections, the Ministry of the Interior stated in a widely publicized television appearance: “I am warning all those forces out there who hope to see a change in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is not Georgia. Our government is very well-prepared to handle unrest.”¹⁶¹ As in Armenia, the regime painted a very negative picture of Georgia after the ouster of Shevardnadze, frequently referring to the “chaos” and alleging that living standards had declined.¹⁶²

The efforts of outside NGOs and graduates of earlier democratizing elections to support democracy in Azerbaijan were limited, in large part due to restrictions on the activities of NGOs with substantial sources of foreign funding and government action to prevent them from entering Azerbaijan. Thus, although it is clear that the Orange and Rose Revolutions had an impact on the strategies of several opposition groups and particularly on the youth organizations, whose leaders explicitly looked to these examples as inspiration,¹⁶³ the regime was quite effective in limiting their actual presence in and impact in Azerbaijan. Pora activists from Ukraine attempted to come to Azerbaijan to train Yeni Fikir supporters, only to be turned away by the authorities at the border, for example. Other “graduates” of successful attempts to use elections to democratize, such as the Slovaks and Serbs, appear to have had little interest in developments in Azerbaijan either because they judged the prospects for successful emulation of their efforts to be minimal or because they were engaged elsewhere.

As noted earlier, the writings of nonviolent conflict gurus such as Gene Sharp and films such as *Bringing Down a Dictator* by Steve York were known in opposition circles in Baku. One of the youth organizations was explicitly inspired by Sharp’s 1993 book, , and other youth activists also propagated and were influenced by his theories. However, the efforts of activists to use these techniques or get out the vote techniques used in other “color revolutions” were severely limited by preemptive action on the part of the regime.

Interaction Between Domestic and External Factors

Control. No external power directly controlled the course of events in Azerbaijan in the 2005 elections. Russia was widely held to have supported the maintenance of the Aliyev regime, but did not directly control developments. The US provided verbal support for free and fair elections as well as democracy assistance but did not directly intervene.

External incentives. As discussed above, the “costs of adaptation” for the existing regime were very high and involved the likelihood of criminal prosecution as well as loss of political power if the opposition had won. Given the close links between politics and economics in Azerbaijan, defeat of the Aliyev regime would also have entailed substantial economic losses for the large number of groups and individuals dependent on their political and familial links to Aliyev.

A number of actors used a variety of incentives to try to achieve the outcome they desired in the elections. As noted earlier, the US used public exhortations to the regime to make changes to level the playing field and ensure free and fair elections. The US Ambassador in particular urged Aliyev to move toward a partial sharing of power with the opposition, a model frequently described as “evolutionary” rather than “revolutionary” change. President Bush allegedly promised Aliyev that US-Azerbaijan relations would move to a ‘new strategic level’ if the elections were free and fair, a move that would have involved closer links to the US and a state visit by Aliyev to Washington.¹⁶⁴ However, the US did not react strongly to the beating and arrest of opposition demonstrators or the election

violations that occurred. Azerbaijan's strategic and economic importance evidently outweighed concern over the violation of democratic procedures for American policy-makers and officials.

USAID's budget for Azerbaijan (in thousands of dollars) decreased immediately after the 2005 elections from \$37,355,000 in 2005 to \$ 35,000,000 in 2006. The budget increased somewhat to \$39,368,000 in 2007, but went down radically to \$26,345,000 in 2008. The requested budget for Azerbaijan for 2009 was \$24,700,000.¹⁶⁵

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary assembly (PACE) Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR attempted to use the pressure of international public opinion and issued recommendations to improve several, more or less technical, aspects of the elections prior to the campaign. Two of these recommendations, including inking of fingers of voters and the lifting of a ban on NGOs with 30 percent or more foreign funding, were adopted approximately two weeks before the elections. However, these measures were not fully implemented and in any case were too late to affect the outcome of the elections.¹⁶⁶ The PACE co-rapporteur for Azerbaijan criticized the fraud involved after the elections and threatened that the country might be expelled from the Council of Europe, but it was not.

Several European ambassadors evidently joined the US ambassador at a meeting with opposition leaders in early November at which they offered to urge the government to give twenty, and when the opposition refused, thirty seats to the opposition.¹⁶⁷ It is unclear what incentives or benefits the ambassadors were prepared to offer the regime in return for adopting such a proposal.

EU officials also used public statements to try to influence the outcome of the elections. Thus, EU officials such as the Commissioner of External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, were very critical prior to the elections. However, the EU Presidency issued a muted reaction to the vote itself noting some improvement since the 2003 presidential elections but continued problems in the counting of votes and interference in the voting process.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to the role the prospect of EU membership played in increasing support for the opposition in Slovakia in 1998, the EU had few concrete incentives to use to influence events in Azerbaijan.

Members of democracy assistance groups attempted to use moral suasion and material aid to encourage the population to vote and the opposition to unite and use effective campaign tactics. Severely hampered in their activities, they proved unable to increase turnout or support the development of a mass citizens' movement. The assessment of the Crisis Group's team in Azerbaijan in November 2005, which noted that "The biggest differences between Azerbaijan and those ex-Soviet states were post-election revolutions have happened in the past two years are the lack of popular engagement in electoral politics and citizens' weak belief in their ability to effect change,¹⁶⁹" echoes those of democracy activists in Central Europe who have often noted that hope on the part of citizens and optimism regarding the possibility of change have been key elements in successful attempts to use elections to overthrow autocrats. Unfortunately, the transnational democracy promoting networks that worked so effectively with domestic

actors to encourage these beliefs in other cases were not able to achieve the same thing in Azerbaijan in 2005.

It is difficult to judge the cost of compliance with external calls to democratize. On the one hand, as opposition activists argue, regime change may well have had very high costs for those associated with the Aliyev regime. At the very least, they would have lost many of the tools used to maintain their economic power. Even an agreement to allow “evolutionary” change, such as that advocated by the US and several other ambassadors, by allowing the opposition more seats in parliament would have been costly, as it would have opened up the possibility of more fundamental change, including the end of Aliyev’s rule. Although public opinion polls conducted by IFES in 2006 found that 44 percent of respondents felt the 2005 elections “completely met” or “mostly met” international standards, these results have been questioned by others, including Ilkin Hacirza oghlu Mammadov, a journalist with Radio Liberty’s Azerbaijan service.¹⁷⁰ If these results have any validity, the regime appears to have some degree of support among the populace, if largely due to economic benefits. Thus, those candidates associated with Aliyev may well have won a certain share of the seats in parliament even if elections had been free and fair. A parliament in which the opposition held a significant share of seats, however, would clearly have endangered many officials at all levels of government who used their offices for personal gain.

Ilham Aliyev and those associated with him were the “veto” players in these elections. With support from the military, judiciary, bureaucracy and business elites, many of whom were indebted to Ilham and his father before him for their positions, he was in a position to ignore most of the outside pressure brought to bear regarding election procedures. As noted earlier in this discussion, the ruling group and those associated with it held nearly all the levers of influence in society. They were thus very powerful compared to those who wanted fundamental change.

The political opposition, leaders of certain NGOs, and youth activists were the “change agents” in Azerbaijan. Many of these individuals had links to external actors, including the US and European groups, promoting change. Many had worked with IRI, NDI, the Open Society Foundation, and other Western organizations promoting democracy. Compared to those opposing change, they had very little power. Based largely in the capital, they had few links to broader groups of citizens. They also had little to promise citizens in return for taking the risks involved in voting for the opposition or supporting opposition parties more actively.

In the absence of reliable public opinion data, it is difficult to know whether the association of these individuals and groups with outside supporters of change helped or hurt them. Clearly, Azeri “change agents” learned numerous campaign techniques, methods of organizing supporters, etc. They also gained information about mobilizing citizens. However, many appeared to be reluctant to adopt the techniques advocated by external actors promoting democracy, in part because of their novelty, and in part because of their perceived lack of fit with local traditions and practices.¹⁷¹ Fear of repression also limited the utility of these connections. NGOs in particular benefited

materially from outside support from the US and other donors interested in democracy promotion, in terms of financial support as well as technological and technical assistance. At the same time, the regime made good use of its power to label these groups, as well as the opposition, as tools of outside forces. The ambivalent stand of many outside governments toward the Aliyev regime and their failure to take strong measures against the regime when it violated human rights and beat and tortured protestors, to say nothing of falsifying elections, also led to a certain distrust of these actors among opposition activists. Those external actors, such as Victor Yushchenko, who had been involved in defeating authoritarian governments in neighboring states had a higher degree of credibility and their experiences were seen as valuable. Their direct influence on developments in Azerbaijan was limited, in large part because they were generally not allowed to enter the country.

As the earlier discussion of the policies of the US and European governments illustrated, the external incentives offered by outside actors working for change from the top, i.e., by persuading the Aliyev regime to adopt reforms designed to promote free and fair elections or allow the opposition a larger share of seats in parliament, were not compelling. The US clearly could have delivered on its promise of a better relationship with Azerbaijan and a visit by the President to the US. However, this incentive did not outweigh the risks to Ilham Aliyev and his supporters of free elections or power sharing. Threats by Council of Europe representatives to expel Azerbaijan from that body would have been difficult to carry out and thus also had little impact. In the end, the Aliyev regime calculated, evidently correctly, that its value as an ally and economic partner to the US and European governments would outweigh concern over electoral fraud and falsification and oppression of the opposition.

Bottom up approaches by external actors, focused largely on political parties and NGOs, relied on clear moral incentives as well, in the case of parties, as on self-interest. Thus, outside democracy promoters worked to improve the chances of the political opposition in the elections, which would have benefited individual leaders had they come to power, as well as the country as a whole had the Aliyev regime been ousted. Work with NGOs also combined both moral and material incentives. Belief in the benefits of democracy as a system of government, with its attendant respect for political opposition and human rights, was the main incentive used to try to mobilize voters and activists. External actors also used moral incentives to motivate the leaders and employees of the NGOs they supported; those whose livelihood depended on such support had additional incentives to work to fulfill the goals of their organizations and thus contribute to change.

International socialization. Opposition activists and supporters of regime change frequently note Azerbaijan's brief experience with democracy in the early part of the 20th century. It is difficult to know what impact this interlude had on domestic norms and political values, particularly given the Soviet experience that followed it. At the very least, Azerbaijan was in a better position than many postcommunist states that did not have any domestic experience with democracy.¹⁷² Many of the leaders of the opposition had either been associated with the reform efforts of Gorbachev in the late 1980s or had

been officials of the democratically elected but soon deposed Elchibey government. Youth activists also had an affinity with democratic values.

Perceptions of the external actors promoting democracy varied by both the actor and domestic actor involved. Many opposition activists and leaders clearly were suspicious of most Western actors as the result of earlier experience. Some felt Western support for regime change in Azerbaijan was weak due to the fact that the country is largely Muslim.¹⁷³ Youth activists appear to have had more positive views of outside democracy supporters¹⁷⁴.

Azerbaijan was in a mixed neighborhood and the elites and population were pulled in both directions. For those associated with the regime, the country's proximity to Russia and other autocratic regimes was the primary influence. For those in the opposition and NGO community, the experiences of other postcommunist and particularly post-Soviet states such as Georgia and Ukraine in defeating authoritarian leaders were clearly perceived as relevant by both the regime and its opponents. The Aliyev regime and those who supported it saw these newly democratic states as threats; the opposition saw them as examples of what could be achieved. Given the lack of systematic and unmanipulated public opinion polling, it is difficult to know how much average citizens knew about the activities of either of these two "hubs" or to which they were attracted.

External actors, including those engaged in both official and unofficial democracy assistance activities, frequently used normative persuasion. Many organized discussion meetings, political party training, professional training for lawyers and journalists, and educational activities, including citizen education and focus on human rights. In the case of USAID, to take an example, these activities intensified in the period prior to the election. We do not have any systematic information on the effectiveness or impact of these activities, apart from the fact that they did not lead to a mass mobilization of voters or protestors or a defeat of the regime.

Lesson Drawing.

There was no crisis in Azerbaijan prior to the 2005 elections. As noted earlier, the economy was booming, and Ilham Aliyev had a firm grip on the reigns of power. Given the control of the media by the regime, there was no open debate on the benefits of adopting a different system or regime change. Opposition activists were influenced by the move in more democratic directions in Georgia and Ukraine after the Rose and Orange Revolutions. These events and the successful use of the electoral model of democratization in these countries clearly inspired opposition leaders, who both emulated and adapted the strategies, tactics, slogans, and symbols of several of these episodes. At the same time, these external experiences did not necessarily change the goal the opposition had been working toward in Azerbaijan, which was a functioning democratic system. Although they provided evidence that change was possible, the successful changes of regimes in other postcommunist states also embittered some opposition activists who viewed differences in outside support for change in these countries and in Azerbaijan as the chief reason for their lack of success in ousting Aliyev.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

Despite the hopes of some in the opposition that Azerbaijan would experience a democratizing election similar to those that happened in several other post-communist states, the 2005 elections did not lead to a regime transition. There are several explanations for this failure. As numerous scholars have pointed out, one of the preconditions for a democratic transition by way of elections is a vulnerable autocrat. Many analysts argue that Ilham Aliyev would have been likely to have won the 2003 presidential elections and his party the 2005 parliamentary elections, even if these elections had been free and fair, though by a smaller margin than the “official” results. The regime’s ability to buy the support of the country’s business elite due to petrodollars, the clan ties that link politicians and others, and the role the government plays in providing employment all served to co-opt potential opposition to the regime. The government’s control of most media outlets, as well as of the police and army, and Ilham’s preemptive moves against potential rivals within the leadership further insulated the regime from challenge. And, as the numerous attacks on the opposition prior to and in the course of the election campaign illustrated, the regime did not hesitate to defend its interests with force against its opponents.

The threat to Aliyev and chances of a democratic victory were further reduced by the nature of the opposition. The opposition did learn the lesson of previous democratizing elections to some degree by 2005. Thus, there was a united opposition that cooperated in the election campaign. But, many of the leaders of the opposition were tainted in the public eye by association with the government that “lost” Karabagh. Former government officials themselves in some cases, they were also suspect due to the opportunities they were perceived to have had to pilfer public resources and suspicions that their chief aim in running for office was to have such opportunities again. In addition, the opposition parties were small, with poor organizational development and weak links to the population, particularly outside the capital. The opposition also lacked a figure capable of capturing the popular imagination or articulating a radically different vision of politics. There was no one who could accomplish what Slovak democracy activist and now European Director of the German Marshall Fund Pavol Demes terms the central task of those who seek to use elections to democratize: inspire hope that real change is possible and move ordinary citizens from pessimism and passivity to optimism and action. Imitation parties and pseudo-“independents” who actually supported the regime cluttered the field and further alienated voters from the political process. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, the opposition remained fragmented and conflicted about its role and how best to proceed. Marginalized by regime harassment and propaganda, and forced to work in very difficult conditions, opposition leaders also appear to be bitter about what they perceive to be the ambiguous stance of the United States and other Western governments concerning the irregularities evident in the election and the regime in general.

In addition, there was no broad based campaign to get out the vote by civil society groups, which were generally very weak. Youth organizations based on the Ukrainian and Georgian models existed, but remained small and were not able to mobilize large

numbers of people. The broadcast media remained largely in state hands, and use of cell phones and the internet, which played important mobilizing roles in Ukraine in particular, was not widespread.

Azerbaijan also lacked several of the external influences that weakened autocrats and strengthened democrats in successful democratizing elections in postcommunist countries. Chief among these were interest and support for regime change on the part of the US and European governments. Stability and strategic considerations clearly trumped democratic change as a US goal in Azerbaijan. Despite rhetorical support by US officials, including then President Bush and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, for free and fair elections, there is little evidence of the kind of pressure the US exerted in Ukraine or Georgia on leaders to allow the opposition to assemble and refrain from using force, to say nothing of the active approach the US used in ousting Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia in 1998 or Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in 2000. US funding for democracy related programs and civil society development was relatively modest in Azerbaijan and did not increase markedly in the run up to the 2005 elections. The EU played a similarly cautious role. Despite clear evidence of fraud and failure to heed the prescriptions of international election monitoring bodies prior to and after the 2005 elections, progress continued on extending the ENP to Azerbaijan. In both cases, officials noted violation of the procedures for free and fair elections, but criticism was muted and reports also noted improvements in several areas, despite evidence of widespread intimidation and coercion of the opposition and electoral fraud. “Graduates” of previous successful democratizing elections attempted to play a role in Azerbaijan, but generally gave less emphasis to activities in this country than to those in Belarus, for example. Those who did attempt to be active were frequently thwarted by the authorities.

As this brief summary indicates, it is not only factors that weaken autocrats and strengthen the opposition that are important in considering the outcome of elections in countries such as Azerbaijan¹⁷⁶. As we have argued in other venues, the primary way in which a transition from semiauthoritarian regimes to democratic regimes has occurred in the postcommunist world has been through democratizing elections. In fact, in the postcommunist world, this path, which has involved the full implementation of a specific model of regime change, the electoral model, has been the only one to date that has led to democratic breakthroughs.¹⁷⁷ For postcommunist cases at least, then, the critical issues are those that facilitated or hindered the full application of the electoral model. In Azerbaijan, conditions to date have not been favorable for the application of this model. On the other hand, there is also little evidence that the hopes of outside actors that gradual, evolutionary change, without implementation of such a model, will lead to a democratic breakthrough will be fulfilled. A question that can only be posed, rather than answered, is whether the failed attempt to produce a transition in the 2005 elections in Azerbaijan will be just one more in a series of failures or whether it, like failed attempts before the successful democratizing elections in a number of other postcommunist countries, will serve as a dress rehearsal for later efforts that will succeed.

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283-304 for a discussion of the importance of elections in the modern world and the opportunities they provide for popular mobilization and democratization.

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