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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

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Stepping into the Unlimited Phase: Ilham Aliyev's Third Term

By Rashad Shirinov, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Abstract

Azerbaijan's sixth presidential election since independence, held on 9 October 2013, was again neither free nor fair. It granted President Ilham Aliyev his third term after term limits had been eliminated by a referendum in 2009. However, the election itself passed essentially unnoticed because the media completely ignored the opposition and the incumbent refused to campaign. This situation left the citizenry uninformed about political developments in the country and particularly about the activities of the opposition. In addition, the permanent repression and violation of human rights has created a climate in which the citizenry is not (and has no willingness to be) involved in politics. The status quo is here to stay.

Background

On October 9, 2013 Azerbaijan conducted its sixth presidential elections since gaining independence. The elections have been heavily criticized by domestic and international observers as having failed to meet international standards and the Azerbaijani government's commitments and obligations to international institutions. The preliminary statement of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), which observed the entire electoral process including campaigning, legal framework, work of the election administration, and the media, concluded that the voting and counting processes were flawed by substantive irregularities, such as ballot stuffing and 'carousel' voting (individuals casting multiple ballots). OSCE/ODIHR also concluded that in 58% of the observed polling stations, the vote counting process was 'bad or very bad'. Nevertheless, ruling party members and the Central Election Commission dismissed this statement, saying that it 'showed disrespect for the will of the Azerbaijani people' and is 'based on false information provided by the opposition'.

Now if we turn back and examine the picture from at least 2003, some things will become clearer. The year of 2003 became a landmark in Azerbaijan's new history, as it was the point when the 'son replaced the father': the deteriorating health of the former Soviet official and KGB general Heydar Aliyev (or even his alleged death in July 2003) pushed the ruling elite to agree on his son Ilham as the united candidate of the ruling party. Ilham Aliyev's accession to power in 2003 was surrounded by extensive violations of the electoral law and suppression of fundamental freedoms. Hundreds of opposition activists attempted to protest against the falsification of the elections on October 16, 2003, and the government responded with a massive crackdown: arrests, torture, and intimidation were widespread. OSCE/ODIHR reported that 600 persons were arrested throughout the country. Moreover, many election officials who represented opposition parties were intimidated to sign fraudulent final protocols of the vote

count. OSCE/ODIHR also concluded that 'overall, the presidential election was a missed opportunity for a credible democratic process. Progress toward democratic elections in Azerbaijan will now depend first and foremost on the political will of the authorities'.

Ilham Aliyev quickly consolidated his rule after 2003. However, it would be a mistake to attribute this to his personal capacity and skills. Two things are important to bear in mind in order to understand why Ilham Aliyev's rule has lasted so long. Firstly, it is about oil. The major oil contracts and investments were agreed before 2003, but the real oil money, in fact, started to inundate the country after 2005. This is the year when Azerbaijan's biggest oil project, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, started to rake in revenues. So, although Ilham Aliyev did not have the skills of a politician or of a statesman as his father did, his rule enjoyed a constant stream of oil money, which made it easier to buy supporters and suppress opponents.

The second important feature of the Ilham Aliyev period is the transformation of the political, economic and administrative structure from simply authoritarian to oligarchic and authoritarian. Under Ilham Aliyev, the government gradually turned into a 'union of oligarchs'. Indeed, ministers of the post-2003 government (and certainly, most of them retained their posts as Ilham Aliyev stated he would continue the 'political course of Heydar Aliyev') have become much more influential than before. Ilham Aliyev has to some extent decentralized the grip on the political regime and become something resembling a 'first among equals'. He has become a mediator and a 'consensus point,' around which all those who intend to perpetuate the system agree. Those inside the regime who disagreed with this arrangement and Ilham Aliyev's role soon faced punishment (e.g., imprisonment for embezzlement).

Referendum 2009

The next presidential elections in 2008 were calm and uncontested because the opposition boycotted them.

But soon after President Aliyev won re-election, a new political crisis emerged. Mehriban Aliyeva, the first lady who also represents the increasingly powerful Pashayev family, started to be seen as a replacement for Ilham Aliyev after his final second term as a president. Her media coverage increased, although the propaganda of her becoming the next president was not forthright. It was more inferred than explicit. However, the prospects of her becoming president cautioned the biggest and most powerful clan of Nakhchivanis (originating from the enclave of Nakhchivan), the group that has the most extensive representation inside the Azerbaijani ruling elite. Thus, the referendum that would eliminate term limits for the presidency was seen as an exit from the impasse that emerged between various factions inside the elite. In January 2009, an amendment to the constitution was adopted through a referendum allowing the incumbent president to run for an unlimited number of times. This change was criticized by the Venice Commission (the Council of Europe's advisory body on legislation) which warned that the changes 'may prove a serious setback on Azerbaijan's road to consolidated democracy'.

Pre-Electoral Situation 2013

Several traits marked the pre-electoral situation in Azerbaijan before the October vote in 2013. First of all, from the very beginning the entire pre-electoral debate was focused around the issue of the 'third term'. There was an impression among the politically active parts of the society that 'Ilham Aliyev did not win the approval' of the bigger hegemonic states in the region (mostly Russia, the US, Europe). Rumors were floating around that Ilham Aliyev was trying to secure the support of the great powers, but it was not easy. There was a sense that the big powers would not close their eyes on such a blatant 'usurpation' of power by Aliyev. These reports were widespread in oppositional media outlets throughout 2012–2013.

On June 12, 2013 the foreign policy advisor to the president, Novruz Mammadov, made a statement in which he said that, Ilham Aliyev's presidency had been 'approved by the big states'. He also added that those countries, which want to use the 'third term' issue against Azerbaijan, would fail.

The second important development was that on June 7 major opposition forces and civil society groups came together to establish the National Council of Democratic Forces—an unprecedented coalition of political party members, intellectuals, and youth and NGO activists. Although stronger unions of opposition blocs existed before the elections in the past, the power of the National Council lay in the fact that in such a non-

permissive environment it had attracted a broad range of forces and individuals to unite against the regime. Another unprecedented development in Azerbaijani politics was that major political parties had agreed to support a candidate without political party affiliation. A united candidate of the opposition was a response to a long standing expectation of political and civil society that all the forces inside the country who disagree with Aliyev's regime should speak with one voice. Rustam Ibrahimbeyov, a renowned script-writer and movie director, founded the National Council and was the united candidate of the opposition. On June 7, Ibrahimbeyov was elected chairman of National Council and on July 2 he became its consensus candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. However, as Ibrahimbeyov had dual citizenship (Azerbaijani/Russian), the Central Election Commission did not register his candidacy. Thus, Jamil Hasanli, another intellectual-historian and former MP replaced Ibrahimbeyov as presidential candidate of the National Council.

It is important to emphasize that the entire pre-electoral phase in Azerbaijan was marked with arrests, intimidation and harassments against Aliyev's political opponents. Among those arrested on fake charges were seven members of the NIDA Youth Movement, a group that has criticized the Aliyev government and staged protest actions.

Russian Involvement

An important part of the pre-election period was the involvement of Russia. It was perhaps for the first time in 20 years after independence that news started to emerge about Russia's probable involvement in a regime change in Azerbaijan. The Union of Azerbaijani Organizations in Russia, known as the 'Billionaires Union' (since several Russian billionaires of Azerbaijani origin joined it), was established in Russia and seemed to have an interest in Azerbaijan's domestic affairs. Rustam Ibrahimbeyov and former Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Abbasov were among the most vocal members of the Union. Although the Union did not directly criticize the ruling regime in Azerbaijan, it was largely seen by Azerbaijani ruling politicians as a Russia-backed project.

However, the expectations of a regime change supported by Russia vanished when Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Baku on August 13. The visit was seen by many as a sign of direct support for Aliyev's third term.

Immediately before the Elections: Campaigning

Generally, the campaigning environment in Azerbaijan can be described as extremely restricted. Usually, there is a considerable amount of fear among citizens. More-

over, the authorities have significantly reduced the legal pre-election campaigning period from 60 to 23 days. The extremely unfavourable situation for the opposition circumscribed the possibilities for campaigning. The authorities again used the usual tactics of putting forward 'fake candidates', people whose role was only to create a façade of competition and attack the united opposition's candidate during the one-hour debates on public TV. These so-called debates (which were actually a roundtable with 6 minutes of air time allocated to each of the 10 candidates) became the only opportunity for the National Council's candidate to campaign on TV. Although opposition candidates were able to hold rallies in designated places, they often encountered obstacles.

The ruling party officials made it clear at the beginning of the campaigning that Ilham Aliyev did not need advertising, because 'he is well known for the good work he has done'. However, Aliyev paid visits to the regions of Azerbaijan and opened facilities, which should be in fact be considered campaigning.

Conclusion

The re-election of Ilham Aliyev in a highly dubious environment of electoral fraud and human rights violations was probably the second important turn in his career

after he came to power in 2003. Although the experience of 2003 was quite shocking for the population of Azerbaijan, the 2013 elections passed by peacefully.

The October 2013 election has made it obvious that continuous electoral manipulations have largely undermined citizens' confidence in any election. On the other hand, the regime's extensive control of media, permanent informal ban on freedom of assembly, and continued harassment, intimidation and arrest of dissidents has left the citizenry uninformed about political developments in the country and particularly about the activities of the opposition. Both issues have paved the way to the formation of a citizenry, which is not (and has no willingness to be) involved in politics. Although the National Council focused on shaking the status quo, it could gain little leverage against the powerful regime.

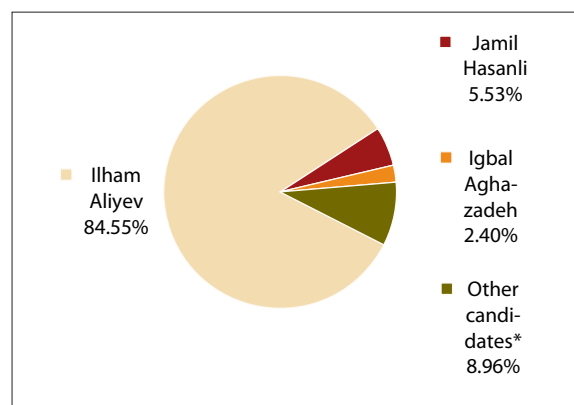
Ilham Aliyev seems to have won a green light for the further consolidation of his rule in Azerbaijan and the status quo appears likely to continue as long as he satisfies the security and energy interests of the major global powers. Perhaps more importantly, the status quo promises to last as long as oil resources are sufficient to keep the active part of population content. What happens after oil production decreases remains a huge question mark.

About the Author

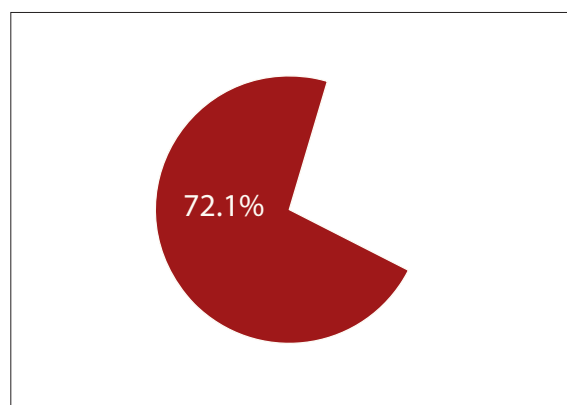
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Information of the Central Election Commission on Preliminary Results of the Presidential Elections Conducted on October 9, 2013 (12.45 p.m., October 10, 2013)

Election Results



Voter Turnout



* *Guđrat Hasanguliyev: 1.99%, Zahid Oruj: 1.45%, Ilyas Ismayilov: 1.07%, Araz Alizadeh: 0.87%, Faraj Guliyev: 0.86%, Hafiz Hajiyev: 0.66%, Sardar Mammadov: 0.61%.*

Source: <http://www.msk.gov.az/en/newsmsk/661/>

The Opposition's Strategy in Azerbaijan's 2013 Presidential Elections

By Shahin Abbasov, Baku

Abstract

Azerbaijan's opposition, fragmented and weakened by repressions over the course of two decades, managed to unite and participate in the October 9 presidential elections with a broad coalition, which included traditional secular, pro-Western parties, Islamists, some pro-Russian forces, and even former Soviet functionaries. As a result, the opposition backed a single candidate and held relatively large rallies for the first time in many years. However, this unity was not sufficient to win at the ballot box. While the opposition succeeded in mobilizing protest voters, it failed to overcome the general public's strong skepticism in the possibility of political change via elections. Now the major challenge for Azerbaijan's opposition is to maintain its new-found unity until the 2015 parliamentary elections.

Milestone in Opposition Unity

Incumbent President Ilham Aliyev scored a landslide victory on October 9 and was re-elected for his third presidential term with more than 84 percent of the votes. His major rival, the candidate of the National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) opposition bloc, Jamil Hasanli, officially won a bit more than five percent, while none of the eight remaining candidates exceeded three percent. While the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) international observation mission said in its preliminary reports that the elections fell short of meeting democratic standards, were neither free nor fair, and witnessed numerous violations and rigging, hardly anyone doubted Aliyev's victory.

The government, which enjoys huge administrative and financial resources, overwhelmingly dominated during the entire election campaign and provided the incumbent head of state with a comfortable victory thanks to its total control over election commissions at all levels.

The oppositional NCDF, which lacked serious financial resources, suffered from repressions (several activists were arrested and intimidated during the campaign) and did not have access to television and radio broadcasts, nevertheless conducted a relatively bold campaign for its candidate, holding three rallies in Baku and making trips to several regions. However, it fell short of what was needed for victory.

For the first time in almost two decades, Azerbaijan's major opposition parties and groups united and established the National Council of Democratic Forces election bloc in early June 2013. The engine behind this process was the well-known Azerbaijani Oscar-winning screenwriter Rustam Ibrahimbekov, who began criticizing the Ilham Aliyev government about three years ago and has faced strong government pressure ever since.

He proposed the idea of the National Council as a broad coalition of opposition forces and was elected

its chairman and single candidate for the presidential elections in July. The 125-member NCDF includes the leaders of the two major secular pro-Western parties, the Popular Front Party (PFPA) and Musavat, the Ibrahimbekov-led Forum of Intellectuals, the Liberal party, the "EL" movement which includes former high-ranking functionaries, activists of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, several well-known representatives of civil society, and some small opposition parties.

The failure to unite due to the personal ambitions of party leaders had often provoked criticism from the media and local analysts in the past. It also led to widespread apathy among grass-root level activists and functionaries. Therefore, the creation of the NCDF was considered by many as an important milestone and inspired protest voters.

However, Rustam Ibrahimbekov failed to secure registration as a candidate. The Central Elections Commission rejected his application because of his dual citizenship (along with his Azerbaijani citizenship, the screenwriter also had a Russian passport and Azerbaijan's legislation bans people with dual citizenship from running for office). In July–August, Ibrahimbekov unsuccessfully tried to revoke his Russian citizenship until it became clear that he would not be allowed to participate in the elections.

Thus, the opposition faced the dilemma of how to proceed with its campaign. There was no unity inside the National Council concerning a strategy after Ibrahimbekov was barred from running. Some insisted on having a back-up candidate, others believed that a boycott would be the best way, while a third fraction said that several candidates, including Musavat party leader Isa Gambar, Popular Front Party chairman Ali Kerimli and others should run separately.

Ultimately, the NCDF agreed on running another united candidate only in late August. By that time, the opposition had already wasted a considerable amount of time that could have been devoted to organizing a

decent campaign and had lost momentum—enthusiasm among grass-root opposition activists, which was strong in the early summer after the creation of the National Council, had declined.

On August 23, the NCDF decided to nominate Jamil Hasanli, 61, as the replacement for Ibrahimbekov in the presidential elections. Ibrahimbekov himself supported the decision.

Hasanli is a former deputy chairman of the Popular Front Party and advisor to former president Abulfaz Elchibey (1992–1993). He served as an independent (no party-alignment) Member of Parliament for two terms in 2000–2010 and is a well-regarded professor of history and author of several books concerning the foreign policy of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918–1920 and the history of the Cold War.

The choice of Hasanli could be considered another milestone in the history of Azerbaijan's opposition. For the first time in its history, a wide spectrum of opposition forces united behind a well-known representative of the scientific elite, rather than a party leader or functionary. Hasanli is not associated with any political party or group and has a clean reputation, which complicated the work of the government's political spin-doctors who organized a negative PR campaign against him.

During the campaign, Hasanli won popularity, especially among protesting youth groups, and now, in the post-election period, will likely remain on Azerbaijan's political scene as a reputable and respected leader who could preserve opposition unity in the future.

Predetermined Result Dominated the Campaign

From the very beginning of the campaign, no serious political analyst in Azerbaijan doubted that the results had been predetermined—incumbent Ilham Aliyev was the obvious frontrunner and his landslide victory was expected.

During the entire three-week campaign period, there was little campaign activity, either in the country's capital Baku or in the provinces. There were few campaign posters on the streets. A handful of faded informational posters from the Central Election Commission (CEC) calling on citizens to vote and explaining voters' rights were poorly designed and easily overlooked among the sea of large commercial advertising billboards.

Television stations did not show much interest in the elections either. Surprisingly, no single private TV or radio channel in Azerbaijan applied to the CEC for a license for paid election advertising, election talk shows or debates. Such "voluntarily" abstinence among broadcasters who might have secured commercial gains indicates the total dependence of TV stations on the Pres-

idential Administration and that the government was not interested in an active and competitive campaign.

Propaganda appeared only on Public Television (İctimai TV, İTV) which is legally obliged to provide free air time to candidates. Each candidate received 18 minutes total free broadcast time in several debates on İTV.

Overall, according to Anar Mammadli, the head of Election Monitoring and Teaching Democracy Center (EMTDC), a Baku-based election watchdog, there was no "election atmosphere" anywhere in the country. "The campaign took place in a very calm atmosphere and was almost invisible for the general public," Mammadli said. According to him, it was not possible to hold free and fair elections while "political freedoms, the right to assembly and freedom of speech were seriously restricted."

One of the campaign's main features was the passive behavior of President Aliyev. He did not hold a single campaign rally, make any trips to the regions and never participated in televised debates, to which he delegated ruling Yeni Azerbaijan party leaders. Unlike the 2003 elections when Aliyev promised 600,000 new jobs, doubling the GDP and many other future accomplishments, this time the President did not make a single campaign promise for the next five years. His campaign slogan was "Davam" (Continue) and mainly described the economic successes of his ten-year presidency. He also signed a series of executive orders increasing salaries for almost all government employees, including teachers, doctors, soldiers, law-enforcement officials, pensioners and others.

Hasanli, in contrast, conducted a relatively bold campaign, taking into account the NCDF's lack of resources, and targeted Aliyev personally in his criticism. During his speeches on televised debates, campaign rallies and meetings with people in the regions, Hasanli focused on the issues of endemic corruption in Azerbaijan and the country's poor democracy and human rights record.

"People in this country have to pay bribes from the day they are born until their death and Ilham Aliyev is personally at the top of this corrupted pyramid. Aliyev is ruling the country like his personal business empire," Hasanli, whose campaign slogan was "Basdi" (Enough), said during his campaign appearances. He presented public documents about the enormous capital flow out of the country by members of the Aliyev family and other high-ranking officials as well as information concerning a number of companies and accounts registered by the ruling family in various offshore zones.

Among Hasanli's promises was a "golden amnesty," i.e. the unconditional release of all political prisoners; measures to protect property rights and to guarantee the independence of the courts and the promotion of

freedom of religion, including permission for observant Muslim women to wear hijab where desired.

He has made a few populist-sounding pitches, too: state subsidies for the agriculture sector and government payback of small-scale personal loans; cutting utility prices in half and a two to threefold increase in pensions and the salaries of teachers and doctors. He also promised to remove all restrictions imposed by country's migration legislation for Georgian citizens of Azerbaijani heritage.

Despite a lack of time and resources, Hasanli and the NCDF conducted an active campaign with trips to six regions and three campaign rallies in Baku. This strategy of talking about the country's most important problems and not being afraid to target the president personally increased Hasanli's popularity and mobilized some protest voters and youth.

However, the shortage of time and resources, as well as the general apathy of the population, which does not believe in the possibility of political change via elections due to the traditionally wide-spread election rigging in the past, took its toll. Hasanli's meetings and rallies were not massive, with maximum participation of about 7,000 people. Several incidents with obstacles created by the police and provocateurs trying to spoil the rallies took place during Hasanli's trips to the regions.

Opposition activists and journalists also came in for a disproportionate share of police attention, as well, ranging from the arrests and beatings of National Council activists to charges of alleged drug trafficking for one opposition journalist, Parviz Hashimli.

Ten activists from the pro-opposition NIDA youth movement faced charges of allegedly preparing a coup and making Molotov cocktails. The intended presidential candidate Ilgar Mammadov, leader of the Republican Alternative (REAL) movement, remains in prison on charges of having allegedly incited popular unrest earlier this year and was not registered as a candidate.

Another presidential candidate, who conducted a relatively active campaign, was a Member of Parliament from the opposition Umid (Hope) party, Iqbal Aghazadeh. He was cautious in criticizing the government and never singled out President Aliyev personally, but held several rallies and offered as many as eight differ-

ent programs targeting various social groups of the population—youth, teachers, pensioners, the unemployed among others. His campaign slogan was "Change your life." He came in third after Hasanli, but with just 2.4 percent of the vote.

The remaining seven candidates—non-partisan Member of Parliament Zahid Oruj; the United Azerbaijan Popular Front Party's Gudrat Hasanguliyev; the National Revival Movement Party's Faraj Guliyev; Social-Democrat Party leader Araz Alizade, and Modern Musavat Party chief Khafiz Hajiyev—either praised the government and attacked Hasanli and the National Council or were passive—the Justice Party's Ilyas Ismayilov, Democrat Party chairperson Sardar Mammadov.

New Challenges for the Opposition

The opposition lost this election, which according to the OSCE/ODIHR international observation mission, was undermined by limitations on the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association and fell short of meeting democratic standards.

Opposition candidate Jamil Hasanli demanded canceling the election results due to "their total falsification." "In fact, yesterday, Ilham Aliyev usurped power," Hasanli said at a press conference on October 10. His campaign appealed to the court to overturn the results.

However, it is clear that the opposition will not be able to organize strong resistance and protests and that the situation in the country will become quiet again soon.

The real challenge for the opposition now is to maintain unity and gradually increase its popularity among the population to ensure active participation and more votes in the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for November 2015. There is a good basis for optimism—the wide coalition of political forces in the NCDF and a respected leader in Jamil Hasanli. However, the question of whether the opposition will withstand the ongoing government repressions and will be able to stay united despite numerous internal controversies and divisions, remains open.

"This election is not the end of our fight," Hasanli said but emphasized that the opposition will use only peaceful protests to advance its cause.

About the Author

Shahin Abbasov is an independent Azerbaijani journalist and analyst. From 2004, he has been a freelance correspondent of the Internet publication Eurasianet (www.eurasianet.org) in Azerbaijan. He worked for 14 years in the print media, including working as a deputy editor-in-chief of *Zerkalo* and *Echo* newspapers in Baku.

Different Meanings of the October 2013 Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan: Elites, Opposition, and Citizens

By Farid Guliyev, Bremen and Baku

Abstract

This article offers a contextual analysis of the Azerbaijani October 2013 presidential elections making a number of arguments: (1) during good times (when economic and political shocks are absent), elections are unlikely to induce incumbent defeat or democratic breakthrough; this explains why the October elections were business as usual; (2) the October elections had different roles and meanings for different actors: winning with a fabricated landslide was used by the leader to signal his own and his regime's strength and to intimidate opponents; for the opposition, it was an arena to mobilize support and to expose government corruption; for citizens, elections were less relevant as something affecting their everyday lives; (3) many citizens hold an instrumental and clientelistic view of government as a system to deliver particularistic services which matches well with the clientelism at higher political levels and might complicate collective action and impede the prospects of the country's democratization in the future.

Certainty of the Election Results

Most modern authoritarian regimes hold regular elections that allow opposition candidates to compete for government offices. Yet, as the playing field is skewed towards the ruling party, opponents have no real chance to win. Under such conditions, elections sometimes can increase the prospects of liberalization or even democratization of authoritarian regimes. However, in the absence of economic or political crises, which would result in division among ruling elites and loss of support for the regime, elections are not likely to induce incumbent defeat. Instead, they will likely serve to shore up the survival prospects of the existing regime.

Contestation during the October 9 elections in Azerbaijan was not fair as existing political and economic conditions favoured the incumbent's victory. Ilham Aliyev, now 51, has served as president for ten years since he succeeded his father Heydar in 2003. The unprecedented oil boom allowed Aliyev's government to accumulate great wealth in the state and spend it (the assets of the state oil fund, the nation's savings fund, reached US\$34 billion this year). A large amount of public funds has already been spent in a relatively short period of time and mainly on infrastructure projects. Under conditions of weak government oversight and an 'opaque' procurement system, there is plenty of room for diverting these funds into officials' pockets. This increase in state spending ensured the loyalty of elites.

Thanks to the pre-emptive measures taken in 2009 to scrap presidential term limits, which had been set at two terms, the president could now run for a third (and more) term. Alleged coups in 2005 notwithstanding, Aliyev's political power has not been seriously challenged by contenders from within the elite. There

are no immediate expectations that he will step down. As economic and political crises were notably absent during this year's election cycle, conditions were simply not ripe for any government turnover, let alone regime transition.

Even before the voting began, it was known who was going to win. In an election deemed deeply flawed by international observers, President Aliyev secured a third term in office. The incumbent was so confident in his victory that he did not run an election campaign (except for the fact that state-run TV channels were running it for him), did not appear in televised debates and even had his inauguration prepared before official results were announced. Such certainty contrasts sharply with election contests in democratic countries, which are characterized by high levels of *ex-ante* uncertainty as to who will be the winner.

Even though the election outcomes were pre-determined, the elections were not unimportant or meaningless. In this essay, I show that the October elections had different meanings and played different roles for three distinct sets of relevant actors: the regime, the opposition, and the population. First, for the regime actors—the incumbent president and ruling elites—the election was an act of projecting strength and intimidating potential opponents. Second, for the old opposition parties it was a chance to contest the hegemony of the current leadership and its legitimacy, and for the new entrant political movement REAL, it was a learning experience and an opportunity to prepare for future elections. Third, for the citizens, who have largely clientelistic-particularistic expectations and an instrumental view of government, voting was less relevant as many believe that elections were not going to bring about changes affecting their lives.

Elections—Different Roles for Different Actors

Ruling elites

For the president and the elite, the landslide victory in the October elections signalled the regime's strength and the futility of any opposition. The voting took place at a time when the regime had been in place for twenty years and had already consolidated power sufficiently so that it had the ability to hold and win elections. Patronage-based elites compete with each other. Their rivalries, often reported in local opposition newspapers, have remained peaceful throughout the years. The ongoing oil boom significantly enhanced the leader's ability to share the spoils with the elites. A distinct feature of the core group within the elites is its remarkable entrenchment and stability: 20 out of a total number of 43 key ministers and high government officials have served in their positions for more than 10 years. Moreover, family ties and inter-marriages cement Azerbaijani elite solidarity. Some Azerbaijani parliamentary members, ministers and state officials are related to each other as parents-in-law as their sons and daughters are married to each other. Finally, the regime-state fusion is an additional factor complicating internal elite division and the emergence of strong elite contenders. The regime's patronage network thoroughly 'penetrates' the state apparatus leaving no space for bureaucratic autonomy and thus no space for a moderate opposition to emerge from within the state elite. In other words, the regime and the state apparatus are merged into one hard-line actor who is 'unconditionally committed to perpetuating the dictator's rule'.

Opposition

If for the ruling elites the elections served to demonstrate how powerful their regime is, for traditional opposition parties, united for the first time into a pre-electoral coalition called the National Council, it was an opportunity to attempt to change the status quo, to rally support, and 'to demonstrate that the emperor is naked' by exposing government corruption, in an effort to win next time. Even though the opposition parties joined forces, mobilized supporters to their rallies, and their leader Jamil Hasanli used allocated airtime on TV to criticize the president's family and government for corruption and increasing authoritarianism, the opposition parties included in the National Council remained organizationally weak and deprived of financial and other resources. One indicator to gauge the strength of opposition under authoritarianism is the extent to which its members are represented in the legislature. If an opposition presents a viable threat to the regime and cannot be bribed by rents, the regime will try to bargain with

it and offer parliament seats as policy concessions. In Azerbaijan, the government does not seem to take the official opposition parties as a serious threat as none of these parties have their deputies in the parliament after the last parliamentary elections were held in 2010.

REAL, the Republican Alternative movement, is an emerging opposition group, which has been working to establish a new political party with a strong programmatic platform. Its leader, Ilgar Mammadov, jailed earlier this year, was legally barred from running. Nevertheless, this year's electoral participation was a chance for the movement's leaders to enter Azerbaijani politics as a new political force and prepare for more active participation in future elections. This will not be an easy task given how few people regard and value political parties. The Caucasus Research Resource Center's (CRRC) surveys show that political parties are among the institutions least trusted by the people: only 16% of Azerbaijanis admitted trusting political parties.

People

For ordinary citizens, the October elections seem to be less relevant than for any of the other actors. For many Azerbaijanis, presidential elections were not seen as an important event because they believed that they will not affect their daily lives and because of the kind of attitudes people hold towards political participation in general. One opinion poll conducted in 2012 found that about 43% of respondents were of the opinion that elections had no influence on the welfare of their family.

It is difficult to imagine active voters with an interest in elections who do not discuss politics in private or do not read newspapers with political content. Voters in Azerbaijan are interested in neither. Survey evidence suggests that 32% of Azerbaijanis said they never discuss politics with friends/close relatives, and nearly 80% said they do not read print newspapers and news magazines that have political and current events content.

To cite more anecdotal evidence, I visited Baku during the election week and found passivity and lack of interest among some interlocutors in following candidate campaigns and going to the polls to vote. There was low visibility of campaigning, such as posters for candidates, except at some polling stations (This does not include large portraits of the founding president that dot the capital and other cities). Campaigning was limited to a special one-hour TV debate programme aired on only one TV channel, and occasional opposition rallies of loyal supporters were held in Baku before the voting day. More active deliberation was observed among opposition-minded users and pro-regime supporters on Facebook and other social media. Official results put the turnout figure at 72.1%, but considering the extent of

manipulation of the electoral process and ballot-rigging, it is not clear whether that number reflects the actual participation in the voting.

It is true that two thirds (68%) of Azerbaijanis admitted they would participate in a presidential election if held the following Sunday (22% said they would not). It is quite likely that many said they would participate because such participation is socially desirable or perhaps even administratively prescribed for public sector employees and teachers. About one fourth (24%) did not believe that voting was important for citizens. In addition, 43% did not approve of participating in protest actions (28% were positive, 16% said 'I do not know'). Notably, about 38% of respondents said they did not vote in the most recent elections (61% said they did).

It is also possible that those who are sceptical about voting hold this view because they believe that the elections are fraudulent. About 43% of Azerbaijanis identified the most recent 2010 parliamentary election as fair, but about 38% said they do not know. Such a large number of 'I do not know' responses indicate ignorance, indifference, or fear. Survey experts observed that Azerbaijanis tend to generally abstain from answering political or sensitive questions in surveys. For example, when asked about whether the country's domestic politics is moving in the right direction, 20% of the surveyed said they do not know (and interestingly, 26% said domestic politics does not change at all). Indifference may be due to the perception that elections are not clean or that the outcome of voting is fabricated. About 40% believe people are not allowed to express themselves openly (47% said they are)—indirect evidence that fear might be at work.

Attitudes towards government and clientelism

The attitude of citizens toward elections is shaped by the values and orientations they hold about voting as an essential component of democracy. CRRC surveys show that about half of the population considers Azerbaijan to be a full democracy or democracy with minor problems, 26% a democracy with major problems, and 14% not a democracy. About 63% Azerbaijanis believe that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, while for 17% it matters little what kind of government there is. Thus, a majority of the population do have pro-democracy beliefs.

But what do Azerbaijanis mean by democratic governance? This question is difficult to answer with the available survey data, but some preliminary inferences from this data can be drawn. First, Azerbaijanis tend to have attitudes towards government that are instrumental and clientelistic. Second, it is possible that people

view democracy, their preferred form of rule, and government in general primarily in instrumental terms as a stable mechanism for delivering services and benefits to their family or neighbourhood. When asked to list most important issues facing the country at the moment, most respondents indicated unresolved conflicts (which is not surprising), followed by a set of economic and social issue such as unemployment, poverty, corruption, low pensions and wages. It is telling that more intrinsically democratic values like violation of human rights are of marginal salience to the people.

Clientelism seems to be another important aspect of the people's value system. Clientelism in attitudes is difficult to measure directly, but respondents' view of government's role and the importance of connections could be a rough proxy. According to the CRRC, a majority of Azerbaijanis holds a paternalistic view of government: 66% agreed with the statement that 'People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent'. 20% held a more contractarian, 'government like an employer' view of the citizen-government relationship. When asked about factors determining finding a good job, most respondents (31%) said connections were the most important factor, along with education (21%) and doing favours for the 'right' people (another 17%). Nearly 90% of Azerbaijanis agreed that family values are an important characteristic of Azerbaijani society. Azerbaijanis are also more likely to trust their kin than their compatriots: 97% respondents said they trusted 'a lot' people in their family, whereas as many as 70% said they did not trust people in their country (26% trusted rather moderately).

Such views also dominate citizens' explanations for why they support the incumbent president. Supporters seem to care about stability understood in economic terms. According to Rufat Garagozlu, head of the sociological service ADAM, '[Those who back Aliyev] fear losing their jobs and revenues in case of political change'. 'When you ask such people whether they want democracy or stability, they say they want stable development, even with restricted freedoms. Even though they have problems because of corruption, they say they are not sure what will happen if other forces come to power', Garagozlu said. In a brief survey carried out in the capital Baku, among the reasons for voting for Aliyev respondents mentioned the following: improved living standards, including wages and pensions; new parks and a new beautiful look for the city; the lack of viable alternatives; being used to having Aliyev as president; he will be elected anyways; and Aliyev's elites have 'full stomachs' while the alternative candidates are hungry and unpredictable.

Azerbaijan therefore is a society in which people emphasize family values, connections and favours, and

have low levels of societal trust. Other forms of informal transactions and practices are common. These types of attitudes are highly compatible with clientelism at the higher political level, which can be defined as the asymmetric relationship of power between patrons and clients, in which patrons exchange resources with clients in return for clients' vote, support and loyalty. Clientelistic relationships are oriented toward the provision of patronage, particularistic benefits rather than public goods, and are more amenable to corruption.

Conclusion

The October presidential elections had different meanings for the different actors involved: for the incumbent, victory with a large margin was meant to signal regime strength and deflect potential dissent; for opposition groups, the elections were a chance to rally support and

debunk regime legitimacy; for the citizens, the elections were less relevant as something affecting their everyday lives. Whether the role of elections will change in the future will very much depend on the change in context. What seems clear is that without economic and political crises, elections are unlikely to induce incumbent defeat or democratic breakthrough. While elections are an important arena of contestation, it is economic crisis as well as other exogenous shocks and changes in the power elites that will open a window of opportunity for change.

Many people in Azerbaijan hold instrumental and clientelistic views of government as a system to deliver particularistic services which matches well with the clientelism at the higher political levels and might complicate collective action and impede the prospects for the country's democratization in the future.

About the Author

Farid Guliyev is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. His current research examines the relationship between oil wealth and political regime dynamics in nondemocratic and hybrid regimes.

CHRONICLE

From 16 July to 23 October 2013

16 July 2013	Armenia Defence Minister Seyran Ohanyan visits Georgia and meets with Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Alasania to discuss cooperation between the two countries
18 July 2013	Tamar Sanikidze is appointed new Education Minister in Georgia to replace Giorgi Margvelashvili who is the ruling party Georgian Dream's candidate for the presidential elections in October 2013
22 July 2013	The European Union and Georgia "successfully conclude" negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) that will allow Georgia better access to the EU market for its goods and services
27 July 2013	The leader of the minority parliamentary group United National Movement (UNM) David Bakradze is named UNM presidential candidate for the presidential elections in October 2013
29 July 2013	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili visits Singapore and meets with President Tony Tan to discuss bilateral relations and the deepening of cooperation between the two countries in the areas of trade and investments, noting that the Singaporean model served as a guarantor of success for Georgia's reforms
30 July 2013	The state-owned Azerbaijani SOCAR company says that it is forming a consortium with Western oil companies to construct a Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) to transport Azerbaijani gas via Greece, Albania, and across the bottom of the Adriatic Sea to Italy
31 July 2013	Angry Azerbaijani homeowners stage a protest against the demolition of their homes in Baku's Xutor district where houses have been demolished to create space for a new local highway in Baku
8 August 2013	Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili says that Tbilisi is open for dialogue "with our Ossetian and Abkhazian brothers" during a speech to newly enlisted soldiers in the Georgian city of Gori five years after the Russian-Georgian war
8 August 2013	Azerbaijani forces reportedly capture an ethnic Armenian serviceman from the defence forces of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh who had accidentally entered the territory of Azerbaijan
11 August 2013	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili attend a reception on a visiting US navy ship making a four-day port call in Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi
13 August 2013	Russia's state-run Rosneft and the Azerbaijani state energy company SOCAR sign a broad oil and gas cooperation agreement on the sidelines of a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku
15 August 2013	Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with Abkhaz leader Alexander Ankvab in Sochi to discuss cooperation ties
15 August 2013	Internal Security Minister of Israel Yitzhak Aharonovitch visits Georgia and meets with Georgian Interior Minister Irakli Garibashvili to discuss cooperation in the fight against organized crime and in the sphere of public security
16 August 2013	The presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey meet in Qabala in Azerbaijan for a summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States to discuss the potential formation of a free-trade zone between the four countries as well as a proposal by Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev to build a railway connecting Turkey with the Chinese western city of Kashgar via Central Asia
27 August 2013	Hundreds of Georgian Muslims gather in Tbilisi to protest the removal of a mosque's minaret by local authorities in the village of Chela in the Samtskhe-Javakheti province
29 August 2013	A group of Georgian Orthodox Christians protest the restoration of the minaret of a local mosque in the Samtskhe-Javakheti province and try to block the road leading to the village of Chela in an attempt to prevent the return of the minaret after inspectors examined it in the capital Tbilisi
2 September 2013	A new statue of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin is vandalized hours after it is unveiled in the Georgian town of Kevali
5 September 2013	Georgian Interior Minister Irakli Garibashvili announces that 144 audio and video recordings containing scenes of an intimate character involving politicians, journalists and celebrities made under the previous government have been destroyed
13 September 2013	EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele says that Armenia cannot sign association and free trade agreements with the EU while it also wishes to join a Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus during an informal meeting of foreign ministers of the Eastern Partnership member states
17 September 2013	Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Alasania visits Georgian troops stationed in the Afghan province of Helmand during his fourth visit since he became Minister in October 2012

17 September 2013	A new cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church opens in Moscow
19 September 2013	The Armenian government adopts a preliminary roadmap toward joining a Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus
19 September 2013	The Georgian Prime Minister's special representative for relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin meet in Prague in the framework of a format launched in December 2012 to address trade, economic, humanitarian and cultural issues in Russian–Georgian bilateral relations
21 September 2013	A former official of the Constitutional Security Department, Oleg Melnikov, is extradited from Ukraine to Georgia where he faces criminal charges, among others related to the high-profile murder of banker Sandro Girvlyani
23 September 2013	Georgian Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York
23 September 2013	An Armenian court sentences former presidential candidate Vardan Sedrakian to 14 years in prison for the attempted murder of a rival before the presidential elections of February 2013
8 October 2013	The Russian consumer-protection agency Rospotrebnadzor denies access to the Russian market to 28 alcoholic beverages produced in Georgia
9 October 2013	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev is reelected for a third term with nearly 85% of the vote
9 October 2013	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili offers to hold a session of the National Security Council (NSC) over the process of “shifting occupation lines” deeper into Tbilisi-controlled territory through the installation of fences by Russian troops across the administrative boundary line with the breakaway region of South Ossetia
10 October 2013	The US State Department says that the presidential elections in Azerbaijan fell short of international standards
10 October 2013	Georgia President Mikheil Saakashvili congratulates Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on winning a third term, adding that it is a “fully deserved historic victory”
12 October 2013	Opposition activists hold a demonstration at a stadium in Baku to protest the presidential elections' results in Azerbaijan with the Azerbaijani police briefly detaining around ten activists at the end of the rally
14 October 2013	An appeals court in Yerevan orders the release of prominent opposition youth activist Tigran Arakelian ruling that he can be freed under a national amnesty announced by the government to mark the 22 nd anniversary of Armenia's independence
15 October 2013	Former Georgian Defense Minister David Kezerashvili is arrested in France after a Tbilisi court issued an arrest warrant against him in absentia on charges of corruption
18 October 2013	An Azerbaijani man is charged with the murder of a Russian man in Moscow on 10 October which sparked violent antimigrant riots in Moscow's Biryulyovo district
22 October 2013	Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili says that outgoing Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili may face prosecution, among others, in a case related to the death of former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in 2005
23 October 2013	The Foreign Ministers of Poland and Sweden visit Georgia and hail the country's progress ahead of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, but warn against the use of selective justice

Compiled by Lili Di Puppò

For the full chronicle since 2009 see www.laender-analysen.de/cad

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Denis Dafflon, Lili Di Pippo, Iris Kempe, Natia Mestvirishvili, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines

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