

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Azerbaijan

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>-7</td> <td>-7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	-7	-7	0	<b>Democ:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	7	7	0	<b>Durable:</b>	15			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authority Trends, 1991-2010: Azerbaijan</b></p> <p>The graph shows a significant increase in authority around 1993, peaking at approximately 1.5, followed by a sharp decline to about -7.5 by 2000, where it remains stable through 2010. A vertical dashed line marks the year 1993.</p>
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<b>Polity:</b>	-7	-7	0																						
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<b>Tentative:</b>	No																								
SCODE	<b>AZE</b>	CCODE	<b>373</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 June 2011</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	1	4	2	4	2																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date			30 June 1993	Begin Date																					
				12 November 1995																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: Yes, Nagorno-Karabakh (c. 20%)</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	1995																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	President Ilham Aliyev (YAP); initially directly elected October 2003; reelected 15 October 2008, 88.7%																								
<b>Legislature</b>	Unicameral: National Assembly (125 seats; 100 directly elected, 25 proportionally elected; most recent elections, 7 November 2010) New Azerbaijan Party (YAP): 71 Other parties: 12 Non-partisans: 42																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Supreme Court																								

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)**

With the rise of Ilham Aliyev to the position of president in October 2003, executive recruitment in Azerbaijan has taken on the attributes of a modern-day dynastic system. For over 30 years President Heydar Aliyev, a former KGB and Communist Party leader under the former Soviet system, successfully maintained his hold on power through the use of intimidation, corruption and fraud. In an effort to consolidate political power in the hands of the Aliyev family in the post-Soviet era, the increasingly frail patriarch actively engineered his son's political rise to the top echelon of politics in this country over the past decade.

<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Heydar Aliyev was reelected to the post of president for the last time in October 1998 in a process marred by numerous irregularities, opposition boycotts and a blatant disregard for transparency. Amidst widespread speculation over his health, President Aliyev began the process of selecting a designated political successor. With his selection to the position of deputy chairman of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party in November 2001, Ilham Aliyev, the President's son, was placed in direct line to succeed his father. In order to guarantee the succession of Aliyev by his son, a controversial referendum was held in August 2002 that proposed to change the constitution to allow the prime minister, instead of the chairman of parliament, to be deputy head of state. Under the new constitution, the president would be allowed to select the prime minister. The political implications of these constitutional changes were that if Heydar Aliyev were to become physically incapacitated, he would be able to hand the running of the country over to his prime minister (potentially his son) until elections were called. The referendum, which also included significant changes to the electoral process, passed with 97% of the vote but was widely condemned as fraudulent. In response to this referendum massive street protests erupted in the capital, Baku. Ilham was granted the post of prime minister in August 2003 in advance of the October 15 elections, which, according to government results, he subsequently won with over 80% of the vote. International observers claimed that this election fell well short of meeting international democratic standards for fairness and transparency. Once again, mass demonstrations erupted in the streets of Baku. Heydar Aliyev died in December 2003, only two months after his son took over his former post as president. President Ilham Aliyev easily won reelection in the October 2008 presidential election over six minor candidates; the main opposition parties boycotted the election.

**Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)**

The Parliament's independence from the executive branch is marginal at best. Fraud and other electoral irregularities marred the 1995, 2001 and 2005 legislative elections. Azerbaijan's parliament functions like an addition to the presidential cabinet. Over 90% of parliament members are associated with Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party and, in a system plagued by corruption and clan loyalty, owe their political allegiance to the Aliyev family (75% of MPs are "Aliyev's people" from his native Nakhichevan region – an enclave which is sandwiched between Armenia and Iran). In this sense, Azerbaijan is more similar to a personalistic dictatorship than to an institutionalized one-party state. The judicial branch also demonstrates little independence from the executive branch.

With the transfer of executive power to Ilham Aliyev in 2003 the actual degree authority held by the new head of government remains unclear. While Heydar maintained his hold on power by sidelining political rivals, cultivating powerful international allies (first the Soviet Union and, later, the United States), and by using state patronage to buy the commitment of political and clan loyalists, the ability of Ilham to dominate the political arena in the same way as his father remains uncertain. By all accounts, Ilham lacks his father's charisma, political skills, intelligence and ruthlessness. Moreover, his independence from the Nakhichevan clan, which has long been the seat of political power in Azerbaijan, remains clouded. It remains unclear whether Ilham will run the clan, as his father did, or the clan will run him. A referendum held on 18 March 2009 approved twenty-nine changes to the constitution, most notably the abolition of presidential term limits.

**Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)**

While elements of political factionalism are strong in Azerbaijan, the hegemonic ambitions of the Aliyev regime make political participation closer to restricted in orientation. Despite being allowed to organize and operate, the government seeks to prevent opposition parties from achieving electoral success. Intimidation and corruption are used to fracture the opposition and maintain the regime's control over the political process. Mass street demonstrations led by pro-democracy opposition parties, and government-sponsored intimidation of such demonstrations, are common features of Azerbaijan politics. While the Popular Front, the broad-based independence movement led by the country's first president, Abulfaz Elchibey, has long opposed the policies of the Aliyev regime, the party splintered in 2000 following the death of its leader, leaving it ineffectual. During 2002 two new opposition blocs emerged and subsequently challenged the government in street protests that were violently disbanded. The legislative election of 6 November 2005 brought no real change to the level or nature of political participation in Azerbaijan. The human rights record of the regime remains poor and press censorship and intimidation are common.

Complicating the political mix even further, ethnic- and clan-based struggles continue to define politics in this country. There exist an estimated 115 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups seeking various levels of

autonomy, independence and statehood. This situation is most evident in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh (which constitutes 20% of Azerbaijan's total territory) whose ethnic Armenian population (with the help of Armenian troops) has maintained de facto autonomy since 1994. In 2003 President Heydar Aliyev came close to resolving this political struggle by pledging to cede permanent control of the region to Armenia in secret negotiations. However, once information of these negotiations leaked out, he was either unwilling or unable to push the Azerbaijani people to accept this unpopular compromise. Despite several high-level meetings between concerned officials, little progress has been made on this issue through 2009.

Legislative elections were held on 7 November 2010. In this election, which came under criticism from both opposition parties and international observers, the ruling YAP won 71 out of 125 seats. Moreover, so-called independents – all of who are loyal to President Aliyev – were afforded 42 seats while 10 small quasi-parties won the remaining 12. Only one of these ten parties has a record of taking critical stances on government policy. Despite creating a unified electoral block, the main opposition parties in the country, the Azerbaijani Popular Front and Musavat, were unable to win a single seat. International observers criticized the vote as not meeting international standards. While the elections were held in a peaceful manner, nonetheless, limitations on freedom of assembly and speech created an uneven playing field that strongly favored the YAP.