

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization

FARID GULIYEV

Abstract: The hybrid regimes comprise the majority of contemporary political constellations. However, the hybrid regime paradigm does not account for the diversity among these regimes. Drawing on the case of post-Soviet Azerbaijan, the present study establishes a new conceptual framework—the sultanistic semiauthoritarian model that amalgamates two theories: semiauthoritarianism and sultanism. This article argues that sultanistic semiauthoritarianism can be considered as one of the most serviceable conceptual frameworks to deal with the case of post-Soviet Azerbaijan’s political regime.

Key words: Azerbaijan, democratization, hybrid regime, semiauthoritarianism, sultanistic, transition

There have always been ambiguous political regimes: neither fully democratic nor clear-cut authoritarian. These political systems can persistently resist moving toward either democracy or authoritarianism. They live as if they were frozen in a certain temporal sequence of political change. Contemporary political science has a distinct subfield of democratic transitology, which claims to explain different trajectories of political change. However, even the most advanced fivefold categorization of modern political regime types¹ developed by such distinguished scholars of the transition school as Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) has a serious discrepancy when it comes to uncertain political systems. As a partial solution of the problem of incomplete transitions, they have introduced a new category of sultanism to be used in reference to extremely patrimonial regimes that coalesce around a highly personalistic and dynastic-prone ruler who exercises power at his own unrestricted discretion.

Farid Guliyev holds a master’s degree in political science from Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Currently, he is enrolled in the PhD program in political science and international relations at Khazar University, Baku, and teaches political science at Qafqaz University, Baku, Azerbaijan.

In addition, Houchang E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz devoted a special volume to sultanistic regimes, which was published in 1998. In *Sultanistic Regimes*, they predicted that sultanism's reemergence should not be ruled out. However, they could not expect their prophecy to be so promptly self-fulfilling. Five years later (October 2003), Azerbaijani president Heydar Aliyev succeeded in transferring presidential power to his son, Ilham Aliyev. Dynasticism was the first sign that the perception of Azerbaijan transitioning to democracy was at least overly optimistic. Some analysts (Roeder 1994; Mamed-zadeh 2001), took another extreme. They proposed to locate Azerbaijan on the continuum of authoritarian regimes. However, some peculiarities of Azerbaijani regime give us a solid ground to claim that it does not fit the pure authoritarian model.²

In the light of these events, how can we treat post-Soviet Azerbaijan? Which conceptual framework should we think of? Currently, these and similar questions are asked about analogous cases where the character of the political regime is ambiguous. In fact, these regimes fall into the gray zone. The concept of the gray zone was introduced as a solution to the problem of identifying the growing quantity of hybrid political systems.

The problem of defining the gray zone regimes remains one of the central themes in contemporary transition and democracy studies. In recent years, many political scientists have tried to solve this problem.³ However, there is still no consensus on how to name the hybrid regimes.⁴ Most recently, Thomas Carothers (2002a) pointed to the uselessness of associating hybrid regimes with democracy no matter which qualifier accompanies it. For him, these regimes are not necessarily transitioning to democracy as transitology simplistically assumes. In fact, they may not undergo any political change at all. Nor do they unavoidably follow the teleological path from authoritarianism toward consolidated democracy. There are some other alternative directions they might choose to follow. Moreover, hybrid regimes can choose not to choose any of the existing directions or, worse, not to move at all.

Marina Ottaway joins Carothers's end of transition perspective. Her 2003 book is an attempt to support Carothers's search for a new framework that can fill some important gaps in conventional transitology. Ottaway (2003) inaugurates semi-authoritarianism as an appropriate framework for investigating hybrid regimes. To demonstrate the advantages of her innovative frame, she applies semiauthoritarianism to some real-world cases (Egypt, Venezuela, Senegal, Croatia, and Azerbaijan). Postcommunist Azerbaijan appears in her study as an example of decaying semiauthoritarianism that is moving in an authoritarian direction.⁵

Ottaway's contribution to Azerbaijani studies is immense given the poor state of research on Azerbaijan, despite the increasing interest in Azerbaijan in the Western media and academia concerning the recent developments (see, for example, Mydans 2003; Weir 2003; Holley 2003; *BBC News* 2003a; Mulvey 2003; and Cohen 2003). There is not much done about Azerbaijan—neither from a comparative nor from an area studies perspective.

The present study joins some attempts already made at framing the case through the lenses of political change research. Here I must acknowledge the fol-

lowing theoreticians' analyses who, with their works, encouraged my research and on whose laborious efforts my research draws to some extent: Daniel Heradsveit,⁶ Audrey Altstadt,⁷ Thomas Goltz,⁸ Svante E. Cornell,⁹ Alec Rasizade,¹⁰ and Marina Ottaway (2003).

Ottaway's exploration of Azerbaijan as a case of semiauthoritarianism is an important contribution to the theoretical conceptualization of postcommunist Azerbaijan. Taken as such, the concept of semiauthoritarianism explains much and there is no doubt that it is an invaluable contribution to the ongoing discourse of reconsidering transitology's conventional framework, with its loose focus on transition *to* democracy.

However, Ottaway neglected to consider some essential traits of Azerbaijani political reality, particularly dynastic tendencies. Why has dynastic power succession become possible in postcommunist Azerbaijan? Does it not manifestly portray a more complex nature than simply semiauthoritarianism in the Azerbaijani political regime? What about the informal institutions that still dominate the Azerbaijani sociopolitical life? The present study tries to show how semiauthoritarianism as a conceptual framework can be enriched through its synthesis with another analytical model that also deals with failed transitions—sultanism.

Sultanism as an analytical concept has been applied to some Latin American cases (plus the Marcos regime in the Philippines and the Pahlavi regime in Iran). Through its theory-building case study the present research, on the one hand, complements Ottaway's theoretical framework and, on the other hand, reintroduces sultanism, now used to interpret a distinct case of the post-Soviet political transformation. The concepts of semiauthoritarianism and sultanism are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, mutually supplemental. As compared with pure semiauthoritarianism and pure sultanism, the new framework that combines the two has some significant advantages. Semiauthoritarianism is useful to explain more about formal institutions, whereas sultanism can be used to depict the informal dimension. This study also has a theory-confirming component: the new framework will be applied to Azerbaijan.

My core research thesis is that Azerbaijan's transition, initially aimed at democracy building, was not completed and has led to the installation and consolidation of a new type of hybrid political constellation. The present study shows that the regime type in Azerbaijan can be best described as *sultanistic semiauthoritarian*,¹¹ for it has intrinsic characteristics of two. Interestingly, sultanistic semiauthoritarianism started to acquire its institutionalized form in 1993 when Heydar Aliyev buried the second democratic experiment (a one-year Elçibey's government of 1992–93) in Azerbaijani history.¹² Paradoxically, Azerbaijani experience demonstrates a reverse trajectory of transition: not from authoritarianism to democracy but from a democracy-oriented rule to semiauthoritarianism. Compared to some Central Asian states (Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan) Azerbaijan is more democratic (Cornell 2001b). There are opposition parties (*muxalifet*), civil society organizations, and semifree press outlets in Azerbaijan. However, these loci of democracy, pluralism, and openness are allowed to the extent that they do not menace the regime's existence.

The purpose of this work is threefold: First, to locate Azerbaijan in the vast array of the gray zone political regimes. Second, to set up a new analytical framework (which is the fusion of semiauthoritarianism and sultanism), contributing to the conceptualization of the post-Soviet Azerbaijani political regime. Third, to stimulate future research. Throughout my work on this research one idea has always been with me—how to write this article in such a way that it would provoke a wave of critical reactions. That is how, I believe, social sciences develop.

Conventional Transitology Challenged: The Modern Debate

The Gray Zone Concept

Why has the Azerbaijani political regime been so poorly investigated? One possible answer is that this is because of its nondemocratic or, more precisely, ambiguous nature. As Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way rightly wrote, “whereas an extensive literature has emerged concerning the causes and consequences of democratization, emerging types of democracy, and issues of democratic consolidation, remarkably *little* research has been undertaken on the emergence and persistence of nondemocratic regimes” (2002, 63, emphasis added). Similarly, Ottaway pointed out that, “[d]espite their growing importance, however, semi-authoritarian regimes have not received systematic attention” (2003, 5).

As empirical evidence clearly delineates, there is a variance of political regime outcomes of socioeconomic and political transitions in postcommunist societies. Some countries (most of the Central and Eastern European countries plus the Baltic republics) have demonstrated that they can achieve liberal democracy and consolidate it afterwards. They perfectly accomplished the goals set up at the beginning of transformations, thus, adding up to the number of existing democracies. Others have proved less successful. In most post-Soviet countries, the third wave¹³ democratic euphoria of the early 1990s has been replaced with the general disillusionment in and despair with democracy prospects among the populace of these post-Soviet societies, and within the wider international community as well. More than a decade after the break-up of the Soviet Union, we are still confronted with questions about why communist autocracy has not been replaced there by genuine democracy. It is debatable that most of the postcommunist republics are in transition to different brands of nondemocracy ranging in a variety of political regime outcomes. Surprisingly, some of the post-Soviet states have a stable and prevalent tendency to become even more undemocratic (take, for instance, Uzbekistan or, even worse, Turkmenistan). In these cases, nondemocracy tends to become institutionalized, undermining the very prospects of successful and complete transition and further consolidation. This is particularly true with the region that is often geographically identified as Central Asia and the Caucasus.¹⁴ However, this is not a subregional peculiarity; all states of the post-Soviet world demonstrate a clear variance in transition outcomes and all still have to do a lot to become democracies and not merely façade democracies.¹⁵ Like some other successor polities of the former Soviet Union, post-Soviet and postcolonial

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The inability or unwillingness of these countries to continue the democratization process and the persistence of the political constellation that has replaced the previous authoritarian regime have called into question the validity and explanatory value of conventional transition and consolidation studies. For its short life-span, transitology has produced a vast amount of literature which, has one important weakness, for it draws almost exclusively from transitions in Latin America and Southern and Eastern Europe. Unlike the majority of post-Soviet cases, most of these transitions have been more successful.¹⁶ This creates a problem and calls into question the usefulness of

crossregional generalizations. Conclusions we can infer from successful transition stories are different and hardly applicable to the countries whose transitions took somewhat different trajectories, leading them either into the gray zone or back to an almost Soviet-type dictatorship.¹⁷

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Post-Soviet successor regimes have been differently conceptualized. Some authors (Huntington 1991, 1996; Brzezinski 2001) emphasize that the history and culture make transition to democracy difficult in this region. Samuel Huntington (1991, 1996) argues that democracy is more likely to continue in countries of Western culture. Similarly, Zbigniew Brzezinski (2001) underscores the importance of the past. He suggests classifying the fifteen post-Soviet states into three categories. The first category includes the Baltic states, which are moving toward sustainable democracy. The second category includes countries of nominal democracy—the Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, and Belarus. The rest of the post-Soviet regimes are of ambiguous nature. This third category consists of Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia. These “unstable authoritarian and yet also semi-anarchic political systems” have some democratic institutions (Huntington 2001, 20). What served as a basis for such a classification was the cultural and historical background. The Baltic states were a part of Western European tradition. Russia and other states belong to Orthodoxy and Islam, which do not fit for democracy. Some scholars even started to speak of cultural geographical determinism. One of them, Ghia Nodia, referring to Michael Mandelbaum, discovered a formula: “The more ‘Western’ you are, the more likely it is that you will be both more prosperous and more democratic” (2001, 29). Other scholars (Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998; Linz and Stepan 1996) have tried to explain post-Soviet transitions focusing on the problem of triple transition (simultaneous democratization, marketization, and state building) or “stateness.” Most importantly, almost all scholars of post-Soviet transitions have recognized the variety of political change outcomes in the

post-Soviet area, and that this variance appeared because post-Soviet regimes have moved in different paths (not necessarily democratic or authoritarian). In short, they joined the gray zone.

Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter (1986), two of the most prominent scholars of transition and consolidation studies, argue that there might emerge two kinds of gray zone regimes: *democraduras* (in Spanish, "democrathard") and *dictablandas* ("dicta-soft"). *Democradura* connotes a "restrictive, illiberal democracy," and *dictablanda*, a "liberalized authoritarian regime" (Diamond 2002, 24). O'Donnell continues the discussion of the gray zone in his 1996 article, "Illusions about Consolidation," in which he claims that there is a category of countries that "reverted to new brands of authoritarianism;" these are the countries that "seem to inhabit a gray area; they bear a family resemblance to the old established democracies, but either lack or only precariously possess some of their key attributes" (O'Donnell 1996, 34). O'Donnell was one of the first political scientists who pointed to the problem of conceptualization of incomplete gray area states, although he has not further developed this theme.

Larry Diamond (1996) sees the problem of the gray zone in competing interpretations of democracy, and locates it in the gap between minimalist electoral and liberal definitions of democracy. Adam Przeworski (1991), Joseph Schumpeter (1947), Samuel Huntington (1991), and Robert Dahl (1971, to an extent) represent the minimalist tradition. They are grouped together because all of them understand democracy as an electoral system. As Przeworski put it, democracy is "a system in which parties lose elections" (1991, 10). The broad-based (thick definition) perspective says that democracy requires not only a transparent electoral procedure, but also the respect for civic rights and political freedoms (such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, consciousness, and the like). Given that democracy is the rule by the people and for the people, the liberal perspective stresses government accountability to the public and the need for the government's powers to be limited by the rule of law.

For Diamond, the gray zone is somewhere between electoral and liberal democracy (Diamond 1996, 25). The author solves the problem by introducing the category of pseudodemocracy, a certain kind of electoral democracy. It is distinct from electoral democracy because it lacks "a sufficiently fair arena for contestation to allow the ruling party to be turned out of power;" and from authoritarianism because it "tolerate[s] the existence of independent opposition parties" (Diamond 1996, 25). But, Diamond's usage of the word democracy to denote the gray zone regimes was to be contested by other transition scholars as inappropriate and not allowable.

Most recently, conventional transitology has been challenged by Thomas Carothers's famous article "The End of the Transition Paradigm" (2002a), which became a starting point for a growing literature collection on the gray zone countries. The author argues that political scientists and democracy-promotion agencies have mistakenly been thinking (and continue to do so) of gray zone regimes as if they were moving toward democracy. As an example of such a mode of thinking, take, for instance, Nodia's contention that, "[p]ostcommunist transitions, however

‘troubled,’ may still be regarded as transitions to democracy” (1996, 15).¹⁸ However, as Carothers claims, “many countries that policy makers and aid practitioners persist in calling ‘transitional’ are *not* in transition *to* democracy” (2002a, 6, emphasis added). Most of the third-wave countries, he argues “are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy. They have entered a political gray zone” (Carothers 2002a, 9). Carothers goes on to criticize the transition paradigm’s (as he calls it) main assumptions. His critical points can be summarized as follows:

1. the transitional country definition is vague, and transformation studies have to avoid teleological tenets;
2. the opening-breakthrough-consolidation step-by-step linear movement assumption does not hold as the practice of some gray zone countries demonstrate it;
3. students of transition research overestimate the key role of elections, which should be considered as merely one arena for democracy promotion, but not as overwhelmingly important;
4. a country’s democratization success depends not only on political elites; the no preconditions perspective on democracy¹⁹ is not correct; we should not avoid the importance of structures (culture, historical legacies, and so on);
5. transitology tends to take for granted the effective modern state in place, however, the third wave transitions have clearly shown that it is hard to democratize under conditions of simultaneous statebuilding;²⁰ statebuilding and democracy building might be incompatible with each other.

Carothers divides the gray zone countries into two categories. Separation is linked to one of the two prevailing syndromes: the feckless pluralism or dominant-power politics. According to Carothers, Azerbaijan, like other former Soviet Union countries, belongs to the latter, which is characterized by the domination of a single political actor.²¹ Both syndromes have a certain degree of stability, which makes it difficult for countries to move out of them (Carothers 2002a, 13). According to the political scientist, most of the postcommunist and third world countries find themselves in the gray zone of a neither democracy nor dictatorship situation. Besides being the most common political condition, it is also a state of normality for them (Carothers 2002a, 18).²²

Having introduced the concept of the gray zone, which will be discussed at greater length in subsequent sections in application to Azerbaijan, I move on to recognizing certain limitations of transitology that add to Carothers’s final call for “new frameworks, new debates, and perhaps eventually a new paradigm of political change” (2002a, 20).

The Challenge of Informal Structures

Traditional institutions and practices, rather than Communism, have turned out to be the most powerful factors in political lives of Caspian states.

I think that the problem with understanding post-Soviet democracy may be compared with the study of an iceberg, which has two parts—above-water, which consists of modern political institutions with elections, political competition, constitutional rules and norms, etc., and underwater, which is significantly bigger and more important than the visible half.

—Oleksandr Fisun (2003, 2)

The present research draws heavily on transitology and consolidology, which, as all other tracks of social sciences, have their limitations. When applied to the region of Central Asia and the Caucasus, which belongs to predominantly tradition-based communities, these limitations should take a special deal of attention. What are those limitations of transitology that are necessary to be reflected upon beforehand?

It goes without saying how increasingly important the region of Central Asia and the Caucasus has become due to its geostrategic location and the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea basin.²³ More and more people from the academic community are getting involved in exploring the complexities of the societal and political processes taking place within the countries and in the region as a whole. Despite this, however, transitology has long tended to neglect transitions in the post-Soviet south, which still remains pretty much a lacuna in the transition literature. Most of post-Soviet studies have concentrated on Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltics, as if other successor states were nonexistent. From time to time, the area has fallen into oblivion. It always requires laborious efforts and an outstanding commitment to undertake research in this forgotten area. I stress this as a weak point of transitology—it privileges one area and discriminates the other.

Contemporary transitology has some more serious limitations as far as non-Western societies are concerned. Needless to say, the great majority of contemporary research in the social sciences is drawn on (and confined to) the cases and empirical studies of Western societies. Western-oriented political studies have certain bounds. This raises a question, to what extent is Western scholarship applicable to the vast, mostly tradition-based, area of the Caucasus and Central Asia?²⁴ Or, more precisely, how pertinent is transitology as an analytical tool for depicting the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia? To answer these questions, I focus on the structural feature of informal institutions in Asian society. Hans-Joachim Lauth, in his article, “Informal Institutions and Democracy” (2000), gives an interesting analysis of the democracy-informal institutions relationship. One idea from this article is worth mentioning here: “[W]ithout the inclusion of informal institutions, the analysis of the functioning of a democracy remains incomplete” (Lauth 2000, 45). Hence, we need to look at informal institutions, which can tell us more about actual politics.

Two scholars, Kathleen Ann Collins and Vagif Guseynov, point to the importance of the informal institutions in the analysis of Central Asian and Caucasian communities. In her “Clans, Pact, and Politics in Central Asia,” Collins (2002) discusses five Central Asian countries and concludes that to grasp transitions in Central Asia,

we have to look closer at clans, the informal institutions that are diffused within Central Asian society. She wrote that, “[d]espite the centrality of clans to social, economic, and political life in Central Asia, students of regime transition have generally ignored them;” moreover, “those who focus only on formal institutions are missing much of the story” (Collins 2002, 141). She argues that the formal institutions are simply a façade, and that all Central Asian countries, with their weak state structure and institutions, are moving toward government by informal, personalistic, and nonconsolidated “clan hegemonic” regimes. Shkolnikov (2002) shares Collins’s ideas. According to him, “Western democracy-promoting organizations have often failed to appreciate the extent to which traditional institutions in Caspian societies (such as kinship networks) managed to survive the Soviet period and still influence the societies of the region” (Shkolnikov 2002, 2). Some scholars (e.g., Narozhna 2004) approaching transformational processes from the angle of civil society point out that Western donor organizations have overlooked the differences between East European and post-Soviet and Western conceptions of civil society. While Eastern European vision emphasizes the national community model of civil society, with high appreciation of national identity and religious and traditional values, Western thinking of civil society accentuates individualism and rationalism influenced by neoliberal ideology. Neoliberal reforms and policies that neglected “local, culturally specific visions and concepts of civil society” replicated “Soviet totalitarian policies directed at deliberate fragmentation and atomization of national identities” (Narozhna 2004, 309). It is important to bear in mind that “[a]ny transfer of developmental models without appreciation for and understanding of cultural context is an inherently troublesome enterprise, and one almost necessarily doomed to fail” (Narozhna 2004, 309).

Guseynov’s 2004 article entitled “Aliyev After Aliyev: A Hereditary Succession of Power as a Means to Keep It”²⁵ is an extension of Collins’s assumptions about the clan hegemonic nature of Central Asian politics to Azerbaijan. The author argues that there is nothing surprising in the recent dynastic succession in Azerbaijan (meaning the October 2003 presidential elections). He claims that it has deep roots in national psychology and is a natural outcome of the ambiguous processes that have taken place in the last thirty years of the country’s history (which coincides with Heydar Aliyev’s rulership of Azerbaijan). His argument is that Azerbaijani politics can be understood only as state-tribe politics, which is based on *yerlibazliq*—an Azerbaijani version of region- and tight network-based kinship. According to Guseynov, father-to-son power handover is an attempt to secure the now ruling and dominating *Yeraz/Nakhichevan*²⁶ clan’s interests.

Thus, while treating the cases of Central Asia and the Caucasus we must keep in mind that analysis of formal institutions (presidency, elections, civil society, etc.) can distract our attention from the core realm of pseudopolitics—competing clans as precivic forms of institutionalized relations. Future students of social change interested in interpreting political processes in the Caucasus and Central Asia will need to look deeper into informal structures. Societies in this region are different from Western ones, and Western scholarship’s operational apparatus, based on experiences of Western democracies or Latin American and Southern

TABLE 1. Azerbaijan: Precommunist, Communist, and Postcommunist

Azerbaijan Democratic Republic	Soviet Azerbaijan	1918–1920	1920–1991	1991–1992	1992–1993	1993–present
Secular democratic parliamentary republic (first in the Muslim world)	One of the fifteen Soviet republics of the USSR	Former communist leadership rule	Democratically elected nationalistic government	Relatively stable and persistent sultanistic semiauthoritarian regime		

and Eastern European democratization practices, is not always the best way of conceptualizing. Existing transitological scholarship, grounded in the Western political tradition of deliberating about formal institutions while analyzing politics, is only somewhat applicable to the Azerbaijani and Central Asian cases because in these societies (unlike Western or Western-type democracies) what matters most is ethnic, religious, regional, clan, community, family, personal, tribal, and other informal specific relations inherent in these societies.

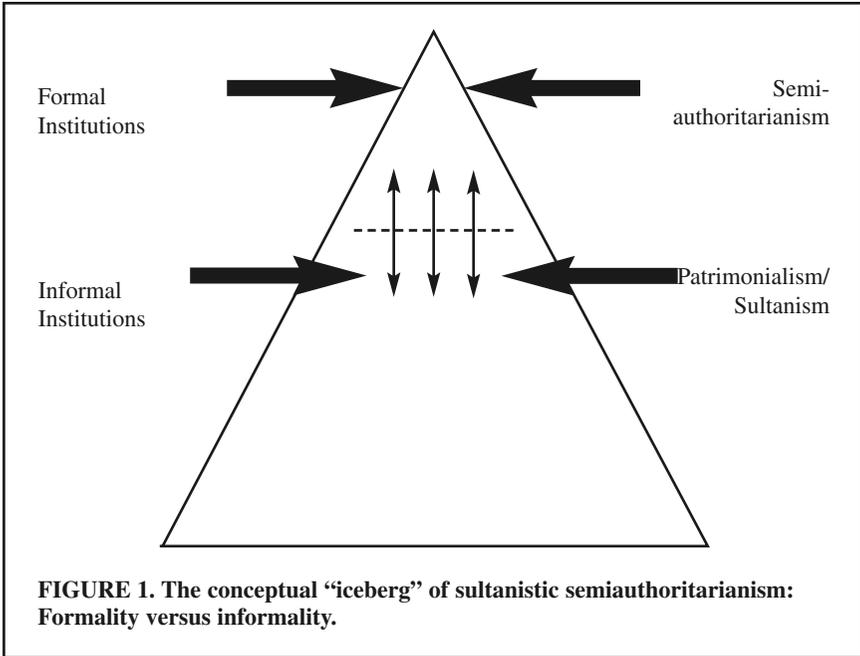
Vladimir Gel'man supports this idea. He argues that the conventional model of transition is "incomplete and insufficient" to explain political change in post-Soviet countries (Gel'man 2003, 87). A distinction between formal and informal institutions, the rule of law and arbitrary rule is a crucial dividing point between "transitions to democracy" and transitions "to a somewhat different regime" in the post-Soviet states (Gel'man 2003, 93). In the latter case, dominance of informal institutions and arbitrary rule calls for reconsideration of conventional transitological framework, which takes formal institutions and the rule of law for granted. (They are supposed to be there by default.)

The present study acknowledges that postcommunist Azerbaijan has few institutionalized formal institutions (most important of them are the state, civil society, elections, and independent judiciary), a low level of "civicness,"²⁷ and an underdeveloped political culture. The present research recognizes the necessity to reconsider and refresh the conventional analytical model, which mistakenly assumes that all transitional states are heading toward democracy and ignores that some of them tend to hybridize.

Post-Soviet Azerbaijani Hybrid Regime: Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism?

Political Hybridology: In Search of Definition

Larry Diamond's "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes" is an excellent account of hybrid regimes. The author explains his view on hybrids by stating that "[o]ne of the most striking features of the 'late period' of the third wave has been the unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian" (Diamond 2002, 25).²⁸ Generally speaking, the hybrid regime approach tries to solve the problem of political regime classification. Its main argument is that the gray zone countries are hybrid regimes. However, if we take the definition of hybrid as something "produced from the mixture of two species,"²⁹ it becomes clear that this qualifier does not give us the meaning of the regime type that it signifies. Hybrid implies that there were only two regimes (democracy and authoritarianism), and their mixture has produced a new species with the qualities of the protoregimes mixed in a proportion (20 percent democracy + 80 percent authoritarianism, or in other compositions). But this underestimates the value of novelty in a new regime and completely ignores features it might have from other types of regimes (such as totalitarian or sultanistic). I argue that the new species is substantially novel; it may or may not reproduce qualities of its parents. Accepting the hybrid nature of a new regime, we are underestimating its distinctive individuality. However, for the sake of discussion



I provisionally recognize the notion of hybrid regimes, and adhere to the idea that regime classification is “the never-ending dialogue” (Diamond 2002, 21). At the same time, this must not distract us from our search for a proper name for different regimes of the gray zone. As Levitsky and Way state, “It may therefore be time to stop thinking of these cases [hybrid political regimes] in terms of transitions to democracy and to begin thinking about the *specific* types of regimes they actually are” (2002, 51; emphasis added).

Among scholars, there are at least two who explicitly or implicitly think that Azerbaijani political system is of a mixed or hybrid nature. However, the empirical reality they are talking about in their accounts has supported my hypothesis that post-Azerbaijan can be referred to as a striking example of a sultanistic semiauthoritarian type of hybrid regime. How Azerbaijan allows us to construct the model of sultanistic semiauthoritarianism will be considered later. First, we will discuss how confusing it is for some political analysts to define the Azerbaijani political system. Alec Rasizade and Svante E. Cornell, for example, implicitly pointed to the mixed nature of the political regime in Azerbaijan.

Alec Rasizade’s “Azerbaijan in Transition to ‘The New Age of Democracy’” is about Azerbaijani protracted transition. Rasizade sees the country as a community of potentially harsh social-economic disparities. Although not naming it hybrid or mixed, he makes the following implicit characterization of Azerbaijani polity as a mixed regime, which I found to be in complete accord with basic assumptions of the hybrid regime theory:

Azerbaijan is neither a democracy nor a clear-cut authoritarian state of the sort found in the Middle East and Central Asia. An active and diverse opposition, a relatively free press, and a vibrant political life exist in the country. Opposition leaders criticize the regime openly and harshly, organize demonstrations and rallies demanding the president's resignation, something unthinkable in the region. (2003, 353)

Cornell is another adherent to the hybrid regime perspective. In his article "Democratization Falters in Azerbaijan" (2001b), he adopts a position that is very similar to Rasizade. Analogously, Cornell uses the "neither a democracy nor a clear cut authoritarian state" formula to characterize Azerbaijan, which is "torn between powerful tendencies toward both democratization and authoritarianism" (2001b, 119–20). Both authors are correct in their observations that the Azerbaijani political constellation is of a mixed nature. However, their finding does not give an answer to the question, how is Azerbaijan different from other cases of hybrid regimes?

In subsequent sections, I will discuss the basic assumptions of two theoretical concepts that are more specific in their approach to hybrid regimes—semiauthoritarianism and sultanism. I believe that we can benefit more from merging them rather than splitting them apart. Ottaway (2003) rightly underscores that the gray zone countries would be better referred to as semiauthoritarian, but within semiauthoritarianism there is a striking variance. It is beyond the scope of this work to give any exhaustive classification of all regimes belonging to the hybrid regime category. One thing is clear is that Venezuela and Azerbaijan, both considered semiauthoritarian according to Ottaway, are different. Although Ottaway points to this variance (Azerbaijan as an example of "semi-authoritarianism of decay" and Venezuela as a case of "democratic decay"), it would be more correct and useful to talk about specific characteristics of the varied gray zone political regimes. Strangely enough (and this is her study's weakness), Ottaway does not even mention sultanism in her book, not even in the list of references for the gray zone and uncertain transitions. I take the opportunity to fill in the gap by combining these two important theories: semiauthoritarianism and sultanism. Taken separately both have some deficiencies; taken together they compensate and complement one another. My ultimate purpose is to design a new theory to fit the political context of postcommunist Azerbaijan. Final stage of the chapter is the application of a newly invented sultanistic semiauthoritarian sub-category to demonstrate how Azerbaijan fits the neoteric model.

The Authoritarian Regime Approach

The authoritarian regime approach is still popular with some foreign analysts and Azerbaijani intellectuals to characterize a type of regime existing in present-day Azerbaijan. The analyses that adopt such a perspective tend to oversimplify today's political reality of the country. Saying that post-Soviet Azerbaijan is fully authoritarian is like saying that it is nondemocratic; neither says anything essentially *new*. The problem is that post-Soviet Azerbaijan is in the gray zone where many political regimes fall that are neither purely authoritarian, nor fully fledged democratic.

Ilham Mamed-zadeh's (2001) publication from *Central Asia and Caucasus* with the showy title "Authoritarian Regime in Azerbaijan and Its Transformation Potentials" is a good example to demonstrate how the followers of the authoritarian regime approach underestimate the much messier political context of Azerbaijan. Primarily, the author does not provide any definition for authoritarianism. The only way to understand his way of thinking is a loosely explained typology of post-Soviet regimes. He mixes up all post-Soviet states into a category of the authoritarian regime, however, for Russia he uses superficial democracy.

Philip G. Roeder's 1994 article, "Varieties of Post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes" is another exemplary analysis. Roeder speaks of various types of authoritarian regimes and suggests qualifying Azerbaijan in various temporal sequences from the beginning of the 1990s as an autocracy and balanced republic (1994, 66). He is correct that there has been "the retreat from previous gains of democratization" in almost all former Soviet states (Roeder 1994, 61). However, it did not necessarily lead to "the consolidation of new forms of authoritarianism," as he claims (Roeder 1994, 61). One important thing about post-Soviet political regimes that he neglects to show is that it was something not clearly authoritarian, which has been solidified in the post-Soviet world. Using authoritarianism to define the new regimes is the opposite extreme side as using democracy (for example, electoral democracy or façade democracy). Both should be avoided as confusing. How well does it characterize Azerbaijani political reality to call its regime partially democratic as suggested by Michael McFaul (2003)? The present research argues that it is of greater benefit to talk about different forms (or subcategories) of hybrid, not authoritarian, regimes.

Despite this, Azerbaijan is often labeled as authoritarian. In the realm of domestic politics, it sometimes takes the form of an ideological conflict. Government uses the language of the conventional transitions model with its teleological guise—we are steadily, gradually, and successfully moving toward democracy, and the opposition, on the contrary, has adopted and utilizes the language of dissents, one that existed under the Soviets.

Heydar Aliyev used to reflect on democracy. To illustrate how he used democratic rhetoric, I am presenting his most frequently quotable "democracy is not an apple" passage in full:

Some people think we should be able to establish democracy in a short time, but that's impossible. Azerbaijan is a young nation and democracy is a new concept. The U.S. has been advancing on the path of democracy for a long time—more than 200 years. You have achieved a lot, but you are still working on it. Democracy is not an apple you buy at the market and bring back home. (Aliyev 1997)³⁰

It is not my purpose to go deeper into the government-opposition discourse on regime type. One thing is clear: that the authoritarian regime model as a theoretical construct does not help much in our case. Nodia was correct that, "most post-communist transitions are indeed transitions from something that is not democracy to something that *is* or *tries to be* or at least *pretends* to be democracy" (1996, 17; emphasis in original). Any assumption that Azerbaijan is completely authoritarian makes no troubles, because if there was no transition then why should we

bother at all? I now proceed to the discussion of two theories of the gray zone type of political systems: semiauthoritarianism and sultanism. Most importantly, my goal is not to retell the old stories, but to look at Azerbaijan through a new prism that would be more helpful. Any theoretical framework is merited for its explanatory quality. The more it explains, the worthier it is.

The New Framework: Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism

Semiauthoritarianism

The theory of semiauthoritarianism deserves a special discussion. The issues that Ottaway opportunely raises in her study are really very urgent: transitology has needed such a work. *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* best exemplifies the hybrid regime way of understanding political life. The author declares from the very beginning that, “[s]emi-authoritarian regimes are political hybrids” that combine features of both democracy and authoritarianism (Ottaway 2003, 3). Democracy has a certain façade character, because there are no checks for strong personal power in such a political system, because there are no strong formal institutions. Ottaway’s explanation for choosing the term semiauthoritarianism is more advantageous as compared with other terminological speculations:

I have chosen the term semi-authoritarian to denote these hybrid regimes because labels including the word *democracy* are not adequate to capture their defining features, namely, their deliberate nature. Semi-authoritarian regimes are not failed democracies or democracies in transition; rather, they are carefully constructed and maintained alternative systems. If semi-authoritarian governments had their way, the system would never change. (Ottaway 2003, 7; emphasis in original)

According to Ottaway, all semiauthoritarian regimes share the following fundamental characteristics (2003, 14–19):

- limits on the transfer of power
- weak institutionalization
- disconnect between political and economic reform
- limits on civil society

Semiauthoritarian regimes are not simply interim political constellations that will necessarily end up as consolidated democracies with the completion of transformations. They are distinct political systems that are consciously and purposefully maintained by political elites who are highly interested in their longevity. One important thing about semiauthoritarian regimes is that they are not necessarily transitional. To make their systems live longer, political elites play games: They manipulate the election process, manage media flows, impede the strengthening of political institutions, and so on. However, there are also structural conditions that are not as conducive to democratization in these countries, including state building, socioeconomic conditions, ethnic or religious polarization, and the lack of embeddedness of the elites. According to Ottaway, there are three main subtypes of semiauthoritarianism: regimes in equilibrium (i.e., Egypt), regimes in decay (i.e., Azerbaijan), and regimes undergoing dynamic change (i.e., Croatia).

Sultanism

What is so interesting about sultanism? Sultanism, as an extreme form of traditional political authority based on the ruler's discretion, was described by Max Weber in *Economy and Society*. The theory of sultanism was further developed by Chehabi and Linz. In 1998, they edited the book *Sultanistic Regimes*, which consists of two parts. The first part, written by Chehabi and Linz, introduces the reader to the theory of sultanism. Here the term sultanism receives its definition, which, for the sake of academic accuracy, is given below:

The ideal type of a contemporary sultanistic regime . . . is based on personal rulership, but loyalty to the ruler is motivated not by his embodying or articulating an ideology, nor by a unique personal mission, nor by any charismatic qualities, but by a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators. The ruler exercises his power without restraint, at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system. The binding norms and relations of bureaucratic administration are constantly subverted by arbitrary personal deci-

TABLE 2A. Sultanism: Essentials

Characteristic	Sultanism
Pluralism	Economic and social pluralism does not disappear but is subject to unpredictable and despotic intervention. No group or individual in civil society, political society, or the state is free from the sultan's exercise of despotic power. No rule of law. Low institutionalization. High fusion of private and public.
Ideology	Highly arbitrary manipulation of symbols. Extreme glorification of ruler. No elaborate or guiding ideology or even distinctive mentalities outside of despotic personalism. No attempt to justify major initiatives on the basis of ideology. Pseudoideology not believed by staff, subjects, or outside world.
Mobilization	Low but occasional manipulative mobilization of a ceremonial type by coercive or clientilistic methods without permanent organization. Periodic mobilization of parastate groups who use violence against groups targeted by the sultan.
Leadership	Highly personalistic and arbitrary. No rational legal constraints. Strong dynastic tendency. No autonomy in state careers. Leader unencumbered by ideology. Compliance to leaders based on intense fear and personal rewards. Staff of leader drawn from members of his family, friends, business associates, or men directly involved in use of violence to sustain the regime. Staff's position derives from their purely personal submission to the ruler.

sions of the ruler. As a result, corruption reigns supreme at all levels of society. The staff of such a ruler is constituted not by an establishment with distinctive career lines . . . but largely by people chosen directly by the ruler. Among them we very often find members of his family, friends, business associates, or individuals directly involved in using violence to sustain the regime. . . . No regime type fits this ideal type perfectly. (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 7–8)

The second part of the book, *Country Studies*, is a collection of essays on sultanistic regimes in different parts of the world. These are the cases of Central American countries (the Dominican Republic under Trujillo, Cuba under the

TABLE 2B. Sultanism: Essentials—The Implications of Prior Nondemocratic Regime Type for Paths to Democratic Transition

Path	Sultanism
Some regime-specific possible transition paths and likely outcomes	<p>Given dynastic tendencies of sultanism, if the sultan dies of natural causes, family members will attempt to continue the sultanistic regime; thus, normally no regime-led liberalization will take place.</p> <p>If the sultan is dependent on a foreign patron, a continuation of a crisis and pressure by the patron might lead the ruler to hold snap elections that he thinks he can control. Defeat in elections is a possibility, especially if an external patron supports the opposition. But democratic governance will be greatly aided by continued engagement of the patron in the democratization process. The foreign patron can sometimes force the sultan to step down.</p> <p>The most likely domestic cause for the defeat of the sultan is assignation or revolutionary upheaval by armed groups or civil society. Upheaval could be supported even by business groups, because of their dislike of the sultan's extreme use of arbitrary power. A provisional government is most likely. However, there is a high chance that the interim government will claim to act in the name of the people and will postpone elections to carry out reforms. Given the previous lack of autonomy of civil or political society, there is a high chance that groups associated with the sultan but claiming legitimacy for having supported the uprising will achieve nondemocratic power. The best chance for democratic transition is if internationally supported, democratically inclined leaders lead revolutionary upheaval, set a date for elections, and allow free contestation for power.</p>

Source. Linz and Stepan (1996, 44–45, 58–60).

Batista regime, Nicaragua under the Somoza regime, and Haiti under Duvalier), the Pahlavi in Iran, and the Philippines under the Marcos regime.

The features of sultanism, were well described by Linz and Stepan (1996). According to these authors, sultanism, as a distinctive type of nondemocratic regime,³¹ has the following characteristics:

- fusion of the private and the public
- familial power and dynastic succession
- no distinction between a state career and personal service to the ruler
- lack of rationalized impersonal ideology
- economic success depends on a personal relationship to the ruler
- the ruler acts only according to his own unchecked discretion
- no rule of law
- low institutionalization
- highly personal pseudoideology
- “rewards and fear” principle of legitimizing unrestrained personal rulership

Patrimonial governance does not rely on bureaucratic administration or on any other form of rationalized administrative procedures. There is no distinction between the state and the regime. They simply overlap. Suffering from a legal-rational legitimacy deficit, the leadership of a sultanistic regime tries to compensate for this through proliferating a cult of personality.

Corrupt, highly personalistic and arbitrary power and a lack of a coherent political ideology makes sultanism distinct from other forms of nondemocracy. Sultanism is different from pure authoritarianism due to its unpredictability. For Linz, “authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism: without elaborate and guiding ideology . . . without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits actually quite *predictable* ones” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 38; emphasis added). Sultanistic regimes are also apparently distinguishable from totalitarian systems because there is no mobilizing ideology (like that of National Socialism or Communism). Also, there are few chances that a sultanistic regime will be replaced by democracy because sultanism impedes the strengthening of democratic forces and creates structural hindrances to political liberalization. Experience evidences that a sultanistic ruler’s removal almost always results in another dictatorship.

Why Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism?

Chronologically, it was first Anatol Lieven (2000) who suggested applying the theory of sultanism to the former Soviet countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan.³² He expressed the idea of adequacy of sultanism in explicating political developments in this part of the world. Oleksandr Fisun made similar observations. Like Lieven, Fisun (2003) also talks about post-Soviet hybrid regimes, and doubts whether they are moving toward democratic governance or somewhat different regimes. His main hypothesis is that “post-Soviet political tra-

jectories after the fall of Soviet Union, in most cases, are leading to renewal, modification and rationalization of the patrimonial domination, but by no means to the establishment of Western-style rational-legal competitive democracy” (Fisun 2003, 2). And in agreement with Gel’man (2003), Fisun sees the main border between, on the one hand, transitions in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe, and, on the other, the post-Soviet transitions, in the weak formal rational-bureaucratic institutions. The neopatrimonial governance compensates for this weakness of post-Soviet societies. Fisun makes an interesting attempt at the classification of the former Soviet regimes, which is presented in tables 3 and 4.

Hence, Fisun qualifies Azerbaijan under Aliyev as a case of sultanistic neopatrimonialism—with one significant shortcoming: sultanism and neopatrimonialism are often used interchangeably.

Commenting on *Sultanistic Regimes* and post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, Lieven wrote that, “it would be extremely negligent if it did not analyze several post-Soviet states” (2000). Chehabi expressed some interesting ideas on this matter, partially supporting my hypothesis: “It seems to me that Azerbaijan *fits* well the sultanistic model. In our piece, we speak of ‘sultanistic tendencies,’ and perhaps you could analyze the politics from this

TABLE 3. Basic Forms of the Neopatrimonial Post-Soviet Regimes

Basic forms	Distinctive feature of policymaking	Ideal-type cases
Bureaucratic neopatrimonialism (high–medium separation)	State-bureaucratic monopolization and semicoercive centralization of neopatrimonial domination, operating via secret police structures; populist or patriotic mobilization and plebiscitarian elections	Belarus, Future of Putin’s Russia?
Oligarchic neopatrimonialism (low–medium separation)	Formation of wide strata of oligarchic or regional rent-seeking actors, acting together with or in place of governmental institutions primarily via clientistic networks of patronage and pork barrel rewards	Yeltsin’s Russia, Ukraine, Georgia
Sultanistic neopatrimonialism (minimal separation)	Extreme concentration of power, pure personal rulership, façade elections, and clan models of voting	Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Source. Fisun (2003, 5–6).

TABLE 4. Comparative Typology of the Posttransitional Post-Soviet Regimes

	Sultanistic Neopatrimonialism	Oligarchic Neopatrimonialism	Bureaucratic Neopatrimonialism	Rational Bureaucracy
Level of competition or separation	Minimal	Low–medium	High–medium	Mostly completed
Competitive		Russia (under Yeltsin), Georgia, Ukraine (2002–present), Moldova	Russia (under Putin I)	Baltic states
Semicompetitive	Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan (under Aliyev), Kyrgyzstan (under late Akaev)	Ukraine, Armenia (after 1998), Kyrgyzstan (under early Akaev)	Belarus (under Lukashenka), Russia (under Putin II?)	
Low-competitive	Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan	Tajikistan		

Source: Fisun (2003, 6).

point of view. Our book came out in 1998, and so work was finished in 1996. If we had to redo it, we would add *a chapter on the ex-Soviet south*" (emphasis added).³³ Therefore, there are some reasons to add Azerbaijan to *Sultanistic Regimes*. Perhaps it would be more correct to talk about sultanistic trends as Chehabi rightly noted. This is also the way that Chehabi and Linz put it in their book, that "no empirical reality fully matches all characteristics of a sultanistic regime . . . it would be preferably to talk about 'sultanistic tendencies'" (1998, 9).

To recap, this is a primarily theory-building case study, created as a result of exploring the specific case of Azerbaijan. The new theoretical framework is going to be created as a result of merging two theories. However, it is a theory-confirming case study as well, for the created theory will be tested. Ottaway writes that Azerbaijan is a semiauthoritarianism of decay, meaning that it moves through a more institutionalized semiauthoritarianism (like Egypt's) toward a greater authoritarianism. This is probably true, however, we need some qualifier to distinguish the variety of semiauthoritarian regimes. The word decay explains the declining trend, the backward inversion, but does not tell much about the substantive nature of the political regime in Azerbaijan. It is semiauthoritarian, but every semiauthoritarian regime is semiauthoritarian on its own. To more precisely define the semiauthoritarian type of political regimes, it is more appropriate to talk about the various subtypes of semiauthoritarianism. If the idea of categorizing semiauthoritarianism is thus accepted, then Azerbaijan is a sultanistic type of semiauthoritarianism to which, probably, belong some Central Asian countries.³⁴

Why is it so? For simplicity, I suggest thinking of the Azerbaijani political space as consisting of two intertwined realms: (1) the realm of informal institutions, and (2) the realm of formal institutions.

The formality-informality dichotomy is related to Max Weber's threefold typology of legitimate domination: legal impersonal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority (Weber 1978). The prevalence of formal institutions is a trait of legal legitimacy, whereas the dominance of informal institutions characterizes traditional and charismatic authority. Some scholars (Lauth 2000; Gel'man 2003; Fisun 2003) correctly point out that formal and informal institutions are the mutually substitutive or compensatory components of a political continuum. Ottaway's theoretical considerations are important to explain mainly the realm of formality, because it demonstrates how the semiauthoritarian leader manipulates formal institutions. There is a slight Western bias in her analysis; in a way she underestimates the role of informality in shaping Azerbaijani politics. This limitation of the transitions model has already been discussed. Without placing informal politics into the political proper, no complete picture can be drawn. That is how sultanism jumps in. Sultanism is advantageous for its broader and deeper analysis of basic sociocultural structures. Applying sultanism to Ottaway's investigation of Azerbaijan as the semiauthoritarianism of decay will be supplemented with the survey of the informal component and an explanation of dynasticism.

Applying the New Framework

Political Development: An Overview³⁵

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan represents a case of social change that brought about simultaneous transformations in some fundamental spheres of Azerbaijani social life. The end of the 1980s marked the rise of Azerbaijani dormant national self-consciousness, which was a natural reaction to Armenian claims to the Nagorno-Karabakh part of Azerbaijani territory. The unwillingness of the Kremlin to settle the emerging interethnic clash encouraged the creation of Azerbaijan Xalq Cebhesi (AXC) (or, in English, the Azerbaijan Popular Front—APF)³⁶ which was organized by Azerbaijani intellectuals. It was later restructured into Azerbaijan Xalq Cebhesi Partiyasi (the Party of the Azerbaijan Popular Front). In January of 1990, under the pretext of fighting Islamic fundamentalism, Moscow sent in troops to crush the independence movement led by AXC. Approximately two hundred people (mostly civilians) were killed. However, nothing could have stopped the decline of the USSR and the drive for independence of the Azerbaijani people, which resulted in the country's sovereignty in 1991.

After independence, Azerbaijani political history can be divided into three parts: (1) communist rule (1991–1992), (2) national-democrats in power (1992–1993), and (3) sultanistic semiauthoritarian regime (since 1993).

The year 1992 indicates the critical watershed that divides Azerbaijani history into two parts: communist and postcommunist. Communists (as political force) were completely discredited in February 1992 after “[m]ore than 600 Azerbaijanis [were] killed as they [fled] an Armenian attack on Karabakh town of Khodzhalı” (BBC Timeline 2004). Transitologists stress the importance of the first democratic election (the so-called critical elections) that breaks away from the past and lays ground for a new future. This kind of central event in Azerbaijani post-independence history took place in June 1992, when the Popular Front's leader, Ebülfez Elçibey, was elected president, thus ending the communist rule in the republic. It was also a major shift in the political elite, because even those who recently had been communist *partocrats* now had at least to pretend to be democrats. More importantly, the 1992 presidential elections were the first and the last fairly contested democratic elections (namely elections in literal meaning of the word, not communist-style quasiaelectoral machinations) in post-Soviet Azerbaijani history.³⁷ All subsequent elections would be rigged and accompanied by significant irregularities.³⁸ The 1992 presidential election is important also in symbolic terms as it repeated the first democratic experience Azerbaijan had in the years of its first independence (1918–1920).³⁹ It showed that there was a possibility for democracy in a newly emerged postauthoritarian state with only a two-year precommunist democratic legacy.

However, the Popular Front could not manage to stay in power for its term due to the Azerbaijani defeats in war with Armenia and lack of bureaucratic skillfulness (Altstadt 1997, 2003; Cornell 2001b; Molla-Zade 1998). Fredo Arias-King (2003) sees the AXC leadership's failure in lack of lustration and institutional reform, in other words, in poor choices made by Elçibey. The author argues that

“Elchibey’s poor management eventually destroyed him, despite his good intentions” (2003).

Thus, in 1993 the nationalistic government (AXC), unable (or incompetent) to surmount domestic and international difficulties, had to hand over power to the former communist *nomenklatura*, led by Heydar Aliyev. He brought the country to the Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), signed a cease-fire with Armenia (1994), and negotiated dozens of oil contracts with foreign businesses. From that moment on, the Azerbaijani regime has been consolidated under the strong rulership of Aliyev.⁴⁰ Heydar Aliyev ruled Azerbaijan twice in its Soviet and post-Soviet history: he was first secretary of the republic’s Communist Party for fourteen years from 1969 until 1982,⁴¹ and he was “elected” the president of Azerbaijan for a five-year term in 1993 with “reelection” for the post in 1998.⁴² In total, his leadership of Azerbaijan lasted for almost thirty years.

In 2003, Azerbaijan was expected to experience political succession crisis. However, despite some conflict, Heydar Aliyev succeeded in promoting his son to presidency. Heydar Aliyev, one of the most controversial figures of communist and postcommunist politics, died shortly after the election. On October 2003, Ilham Aliyev was “elected” the new Azerbaijani president. The word “election” is in quotation marks because as the Observer Mission organized by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe wrote about it, “the presidential elections of October 15, 2003 in the Republic of Azerbaijan cannot be qualified as what in the practice of civilized nations is called ‘elections.’”⁴³

Reality of Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism

Azerbaijan has a much more active civil society than most of the other countries that emerged out of the antidemocratic experiences of Soviet rule. Most importantly, Azerbaijan has a vibrant press that produces six major daily newspapers.

—Brenda Shaffer (2002a)

Although post-Soviet Azerbaijan largely fits the model of semiauthoritarianism, there are some discrepancies. Nor is it a clear-cut case of sultanism because, as has been concluded in previous sections, there is no such a thing as a pure sultanistic regime. This section postulates that to understand the case of Azerbaijan, it is necessary to integrate theories of semiauthoritarianism and sultanism. This can be achieved through the analysis of Azerbaijani political reality. Hence, Azerbaijan is the case that creates a new model that can be extended to some other similar cases in the future.

Ottaway’s description of Azerbaijan as a semiauthoritarian regime is quite accurate. In her insightful case study of Azerbaijan, she explains her preference for the term semiauthoritarianism to authoritarianism for two reasons. The first reason is that there are some open areas: opposition parties (with their newspapers, candidates in elections), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private universities (Ottaway 2003, 69). Similarly, Cornell argues that compared to

the Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan “remains relatively open and responsive to international criticism and pressure” (2001b, 130). Cornell’s supposition is clearly supported by the fact that the Azerbaijani government released all political prisoners under continuous pressure from Council of Europe (Council of Europe Spokesperson and Press Division, 2004). Ottaway’s second argument is that the present regime is *not* institutionalized. As she explicates it, “He [Heydar Aliyev] has not, so far, created a political *system* that can last” (Ottaway 2003, 69, emphasis in original). Ottaway’s conclusion is that semi-authoritarianism in Azerbaijan is “as good as it gets” (2003, 70).

However, as was noted earlier, a major weak point of Ottaway’s perspective is that she overlooks the dynastic tendencies in Azerbaijan. Although she asks how the international community should react to Heydar Aliyev’s intentions to enthrone his son, she does not provide any significant explanation why this is going to happen in Azerbaijan and to what extent it is conditioned by the peculiarity of Azerbaijani power. Dynasticism is the first indicator that power is conceived of as something personal (or familial) not related to political institutions. It signifies that a ruler wants to “keep power in family,” and governance merely becomes a “family business” (Mulvey 2003).

Eric M. McGlinchey has pointed out that, “Central Asian rule today is moving more toward dynasty than democracy” (2003, 1). He argues that presidential power in Central Asia is weak because it has no ideology and is based on three founding pillars: selective repression (to repress the few to intimidate the many), revitalized patronage networks, and the new norms of executive unassailability (McGlinchey 2003, 1–2). His ideas about Central Asian presidential republics are particularly true about Azerbaijan. Here we find an even more sophisticated form of familial-dynastic power mechanism that achieved its ultimate goal—father-to-son transfer of presidential office.

It is evident that institutionalized corruption and nepotism, which are peculiar traits of a sultanistic type of political regime, are present in Azerbaijan. Family, cronies, clans, and patronage are more influential social constructions than formal legal institutions. The Academy of Public Administration under the president of the Azerbaijan Republic in Baku, for instance, is not understood as a higher education institution that operates under the institution of presidency. On the contrary, it is perceived by the university administration and professorship as a service for training a younger generation of *Aliyevphils*.⁴⁴ There even exists a new school of thought called *Aliyevshunashliq*, which literally means “Aliyev studies”⁴⁵ and serves to proliferate the cult of personality around Heydar Aliyev. This is what Chehabi and Linz describe as sultanistic leaders’ attempts to legitimize their regime by creating charisma that they lack or an ideology that “reflecting the regime’s personalism, often bears the ruler’s name” (1998, 13–14). However, this is a pseudoideology, because such an ideology is “elaborated after the ruler has assumed power . . . [it] is not believed to be constraining on the ruler and is relevant as long as he practices it” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 53). The lack of elaborate political ideology was emphasized by Yashar Mammadli, a political observer in Baku who contends that “[t]oday there is no concrete political ideology in Azerbaijan except for *musavatchiliq*⁴⁶

which is deeply rooted and grounded in the multilayered Turk national substance capable of modernizing itself from time to time” (1998, 3).

Aliyev has always emphasized his *patriarchality*, that is, being “the Father of the Nation” or “the Leader,” claiming the role that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk played in the history of Turkey. Analogy here is very instrumental in understanding Aliyev’s actions and mode of thinking. He was perceived as the savior of the people, without whom the nation could not survive the chaos of 1990–93. Similarly, another sultanistic leader, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, also claimed to be a savior (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 14).

In addition, personality plays a decisive role not only in what presidential power is concerned. Leaders and not political ideologies are a crucial component in political party formation. Swietochowski emphasizes this in his discussion of Azerbaijani politics in which he distinguishes its three specialities:

- the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute as an incremental stimulus for the political arousal and an unquestionably central locus for the development of the political
- party formation evolving around the individuals rather than political platforms or ideological projects
- the importance of regional-based kinship links and loyalties (1999, 420–21)

The last, explains Swietochowski, is a remnant of the precolonization period when Azerbaijan was divided into territorially semiautonomous principalities, *khanates* (1999, 421). Developing Swietochowski’s idea of clan-based political parties, some authors (for instance, Guseynov 2004; International Crisis Group 2004) bring the specific data on regional affiliation of major political organizations. The governing Yeni (New) Azerbaijan Party represents the political and economic interests of the ruling *Nakhichevan* and *Yeraz* clans. These two clans have been dominating Azerbaijani political life for decades, given that Heydar Aliyev has been their leader. Isa Qambar, the leader of the opposition Musavat Party, is said to be a promoter of the Nagorno-Karabakh clan’s interests.⁴⁷ Family, kinship-based groups, and regional networks are the focal social institutions of Azerbaijani society that penetrate and pervade formal governmental structures. The International Crisis Group describes this as follows:

Much of Azerbaijan’s political and economic systems operate on a pyramidal web of patronage and often-institutionalized corruption where regional and clan influences remain strong. The president and his family sit at the apex of this pyramid. Regionalism provides a crucial under-pinning to the patterns of influence. (2004, 9)

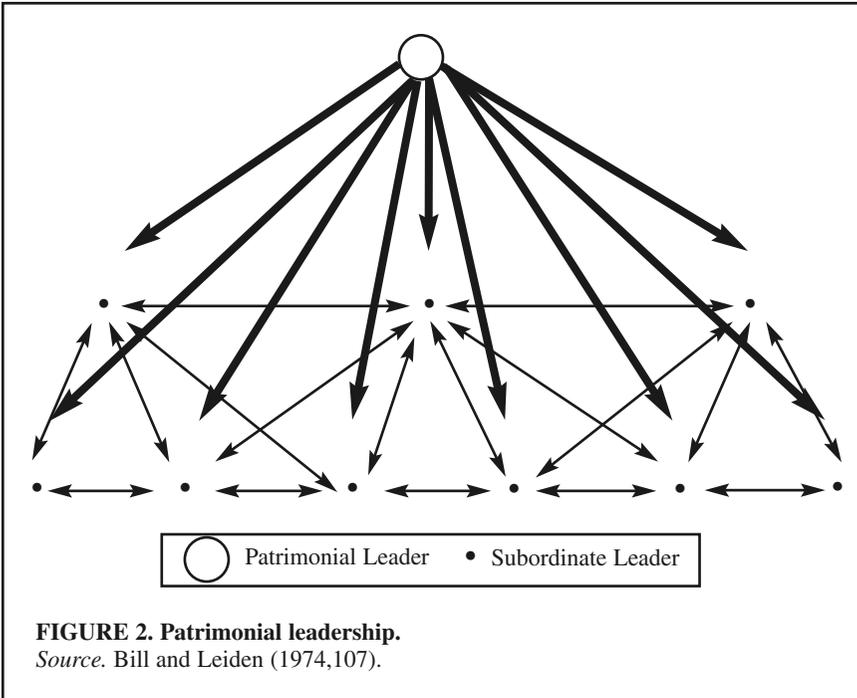
Weak political institutions are the foremost challenge to Azerbaijani prospects for democratization. Altstadt (2003) explains that both Heydar Aliyev’s might and the institutional weakness are Soviet legacies. In Soviet times, republic-level institutions were subordinate to the Kremlin, being neither representative nor powerful. After the breakup of the USSR, the newly born political institutions “were weak because key political leaders, including [A]liyev, chose power, or their own ideals, over state building” (Altstadt 2003, 4).

At first glance, Azerbaijan has a democratic constitution adopted in 1995. It guarantees the extensive rights that all modern democratic constitutions usu-

ally encompass. In reality, however, it is far from democracy. Although the constitution envisages the independence of the three branches and the division of powers, in reality the executive dominates. The judiciary and parliament are not able to counterbalance the hyperpowerful and dominant executive which, in the form of the strong presidentialism prescribed by the 1995 constitution, was designed by then president Heydar Aliyev to guarantee the interests of the ruling elite. There are actually no checks and balances: the judiciary is a sub-branch of the executive-presidential power. The *Milli Mejlis* (the national assembly) is “an appendage” to the executive.⁴⁸ As Leyla Yunus, director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy in Baku, argues, all kind of elections in Azerbaijan—parliamentary, presidential, and municipal—were rigged, and members of the parliament of both the 1995 or 2000 parliamentary elections were not selected by the people, because they were appointed to their seats personally by the president (2001, 5). Or as the International Crisis Group eloquently noted, it took only twenty minutes for the *Milli Mejlis* to approve the 2004 state budget (2004, 10). Does this not show how marginal the parliament is vis-à-vis the strong presidential power?

One explanation of patrimonialism in Azerbaijan is the evidence that it is a predominantly Muslim tradition-based society and inherits the traditional social, economic, religious, and political systems of the past. In this respect, Azerbaijan demonstrates a clear resemblance to Middle Eastern countries. James A. Bill and Carl Leiden (1974) argue that the patterns of patrimonial leadership in the Middle East have their roots in the life and politics of the Prophet Mohammad and are based on personal charisma. There are six characteristics of patrimonial leadership as displayed in the Middle East: personalism, proximity, informality, balanced conflict, military prowess, and religious rationalization (Bill and Leiden 1974, 111). The first three are particularly important. Patrimonial community, as the researchers illustrate, is a web of personal relationships—an extended household. Formal bureaucracy can be developed and even enlarged, however; given that the patrimonial societies are made up of tribes and clans, it is the personal or familial networks where real decisions are made. Personalism is closely linked to proximity and informality. Informal patterns dominate the political, because the patrimonial leaders do not pay much attention to building and strengthening formal institutions (Bill and Leiden 1974, 115–16).

As Bill and Leiden said, “the patrimonial form of rule represents little more than an extension and expansion of patriarchalism” (1974, 104). For them, patrimonialism has, for centuries, been a dominant pattern of leadership. In patrimonial systems, as they explain, bureaucracy is recruited on the basis of personal loyalty to the leader, not according to any other objective criteria (such as professionalism or merit). What is more important is that, “[i]n the Islamic world . . . shahs, sultans, and shaykhs have tended to rule in a paternal, patriarchal, and patrimonial manner. Government has been personal, and both civil and military bureaucracies are little more than extensions of the person of the leader” (Bill and Leiden 1974, 105). The functioning of the patrimonial leadership structure is schematically shown in figure 2.



As figure 2 demonstrates, there are two kinds of relationships in the patrimonial system: vertical and horizontal. Vertical relations prescribe an absolute subordination to the leader. On a horizontal level, below the rank of the sovereign, who is unquestionably the ultimate emanating source of power, there is a constant competition, because offices are relatively equal in authority. What is at stake in this struggle is to achieve a greater sympathy of the leader. The leader is aware of this and, in turn, encourages rivalry. That is how the Azerbaijani government has been formed under the Aliyevs. The Azerbaijani leadership is a clear-cut pattern of patrimonialism—one that can be found in many Middle Eastern countries. Here, the pattern is the same as in many modern sultanistic countries of the Muslim world—the sultan identifies himself with the prophet, and considers the state his own household. Not surprisingly, Allahshukur Pashazade, the head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Caucasus, often likened Heydar Aliyev to the prophet.

Some authors (Suny 1996a, b; Saroyan 1996; Shkolnikov 2002; Fairbanks 1996) stress the crucial impact of the Soviet nationality policy and “survivals of the past” (in Fairbanks’s words) on the formation of post-Soviet political systems. From the perspective of nationalism studies scholars such as Rogers Brubaker (1996), Soviet policies toward local titular nationalities have institutionalized territorial nationhood. Discussing the Soviet and post-Soviet nationalisms, Brubaker claims that ethnonationalism flourishes nowadays because of the Soviet regime’s policies to institutionalize territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality. As a result of this pol-

icy, a political field was created, which made the emergence of the post-Soviet nationalisms possible. Brubaker quite accurately interprets the rise of ethnonationalisms in the ex-USSR. He is correct that “territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality were pervasively institutionalized social and cultural forms,” which “[u]nder glasnost . . . were readily politicized” (Brubaker 1996, 18).

The authors mentioned place a special emphasis on the policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization)—the creation of and reliance on national cadres (Shkolnikov 2002, 4; Suny 1996a, 238; Suny 1996b, 377–78; Saroyan 1996, 404). Shkolnikov, for instance, explains that in the Caspian region, the Western democracy-promoting agencies’ primary targets have been to strengthen new political institutions and to eliminate the Soviet heritage. However, this position failed to take into account “the extent to which Soviet institutions have been adapted to serve local customs and traditions, rather than the needs of the former political center in Moscow” (Shkolnikov 2002, 3). Shkolnikov quotes Oliver Roy’s interesting comment on the influence of *korenizatsiia* on revitalization and preservation of traditionalism and traditional institutions in the Soviet Union: “Kinship and clan networks were recomposed on the basis of the territorial and administrative structures put in place by the Soviets” (Oliver Roy, quoted in Shkolnikov 2002, 3). The political scientist’s conclusion is that the impact of *korenizatsiia* and the critical significance of traditional institutions should be taken into account by Western democracy-promoting organizations.

It is an established fact that corruption and nepotism flourish in political regimes in which patterns of patrimonialism are prevalent. Azerbaijan is no exception to this, being among the world’s most corrupt nations. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (2003) ranks it 124 out of 133 countries. Elizabeth Lash, in her case study, “Azerbaijan and Corruption,” explains that one of the most important reasons why Azerbaijan is extremely corrupt is its neopatrimonial structure and the dominance of patronage networks (2002, 37). She also points out that it was due to Aliyev’s comeback to power in 1993 that Azerbaijan, struggling to build democracy, transformed to a “neopatrimonial dictatorship” (Lash 2002, 41).⁴⁹

Another feature of sultanism is a lack of rule of law. Again, the Azerbaijani regime’s numerous violations of human rights have been frequently reported. In recent memory, dozens of opposition members and supporters have been detained for protesting against the fraudulent presidential election in October 2003.⁵⁰ Repression and violence against opposition and dissent are the main means by which the government can maintain its grip on power. Most recently, the U.S. administration released its report on human rights in the world, stating that, “[t]he Azeri government’s human rights record in 2003 remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. The Government continued to restrict citizens’ ability to change government peacefully” (U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country reports on Human Rights Practices, Azerbaijan 2003). The report also documents some noticeable cases of arbitrariness in authorities’ actions and a number of serious violations of human rights.

Looking back into the past, we can see that sultanistic semiauthoritarianism began to acquire its fully-fledged form starting from 1993 when Heydar Aliyev

seized power, which was possible because then incumbent president, Ebülföz Elçibey, demonstrated incapacity to rule the country. That was the major event in post-Soviet Azerbaijani history. As Cornell rightly put it, “[w]hile [A]li[y]ev’s advent to power has brought stability to Azerbaijan, it also put an end to the country’s first democratic experiment” (2001b, 119). The 1993 presidential election was manipulated, which is again a first sign of democracy backlash. Interestingly, as Cornell wrote, “[i]t is reasonably certain than [A]li[y]ev would have won the 1993 presidential election overwhelmingly even if it had been held under proper democratic conditions” (2001b, 121). This is very similar to what Ottaway says about semiauthoritarian regimes, particularly when she describes the “elections paradox.” She correctly points out that many semiauthoritarian rulers do hold popular support, and “paradoxically, they [semi-authoritarian leaders] could probably win by fair means many of the elections they so assiduously manipulate” (Ottaway 2003, 144).⁵¹

Ottaway points out that there are some structural conditions that are unfavorable to the foundation and institutionalization of democratic institutions and practices. In this case, there are such conditions: weak political institutions, weak state (building the state from scratch), newly constructed national identity, the introduction of market economy. However, the most formidable of them has always been the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which the Azerbaijani political elite has used as an excuse for its authoritarian-prone policies. To understand why there was no success with democracy in Azerbaijan, it is always necessary to have these conditions in mind. It was naïve to expect a real democratic advancement in Azerbaijan under Heydar Aliyev’s leadership. The problem is not so much in the agency as in structural conditions. Yes, Heydar Aliyev was a dictatorial leader. However, it would be much more naïve to expect it if there was another leader as long as structural conditions remain there (Ottaway 2003, 14). There was a hope for democracy under the leadership of Elçibey, but that attempt failed principally because of the presence of these democracy-unfavorable conditions. The theory of sultanism, similarly, points to macrostructural (economic conditions and the international context) and institutional variables that enhance the chances for sultanism-minded persons to come to power. Among socioeconomic conditions, the presence of natural resources can secure a sultanistic regime’s existence. One of the most significant factors is “the interest in ‘order’ of foreign investors who have established stable ‘business relations’ with the ruler” (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 28).

The sultanistic model pays a special attention to external influences’ role in democratization. The U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan has undergone several stages: from clearly discriminatory (section 907)⁵² to friendly (after Azerbaijan unconditionally joined the U.S.-led campaign to counter terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq). Two factors have constantly determined American policy toward Azerbaijan—its energy resources and geographical location. The latter is unquestionably important, given American plans to access Caspian hydrocarbon reserves (and transport them to Western markets bypassing Russian territory), to penetrate into the Inner Asian region, and to undermine the hostile Islamic regime in Iran.

These factors seem to be much more essential for the U.S. interests than sheer preoccupations with promoting democracy worldwide.

All case studies presented in Chehabi and Linz's volume bear one thing in common—all sultans were explicitly or implicitly supported by the United States. The U.S. support sometimes played a vitally important part for the lives of these regimes. This pattern continues to hold on in the case of Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, in this regard, is more a case of rule than a case of exemption. Although the American government points out at times all the non-democratic deeds of the Aliyevs in its numerous press releases and reports, it does not do it in a way that could damage the strategic relationship with oil-rich Azerbaijan. This was again demonstrated after the 2003 presidential election when U.S. State Department confirmed that “[t]he United States will work with president-elect [I]lham [A]liyev.” (U.S. Department of State, press release, October 21, 2003). That has been the main discussion topic for many articles that appeared after the presidential elections in Azerbaijan when the father-to-son power handover has taken place. Many asked then, what is the role of the West, and the United States in particular, in promoting democracy? Are they really concerned with democracy in oil-rich Azerbaijan? Or did America ignore democracy at the expense of its oil interests? One journalist even complained that “[t]he U.S. commitment to democracy does not extend to Azerbaijan” (*Mother Jones*, December 5, 2003).⁵³

Hence, sultanistic rulers have enjoyed U.S. support. Yet, as Chehabi and Linz wrote, “America was interested not in perpetuating sultanistic rulers per se, but in maintaining stability and a general pro-American stance under strong state” (1998, 32). This reasoning echoes back to the cold war–era justification of the U.S. cooperation with traditional autocracies conceptualized by Jeanne Kirkpatrick (1979). Kirkpatrick argues that authoritarian countries are more likely to democratize because, unlike totalitarian states that seek to rebuild society according to an invented ideology and control all spheres of society's life, authoritarian regimes are less repressive and more “susceptible of liberalization” and democratic political change. Stable authoritarian regimes, even those not always compliant to human rights and democratic principles, can serve as trustworthy allies of the United States.

Does it not accurately explain why the Aliyevs' main political message has always been stability and Western-oriented policy? As in the case with other sultanistic regimes, it is unlikely that the United States will give up supporting Ilham Aliyev because there are too many things at stake.

To summarize, I have discussed the theories of semiauthoritarianism and sultanism, and have pointed to the advantages of the new sultanistic semiauthoritarian theoretical framework. Theoretical usefulness of the semiauthoritarian model has been acknowledged. The case study of Azerbaijan conducted by Ottaway has shown that it fits the semiauthoritarian subtype of hybrid regimes. Yet, the present study has pointed to some weaknesses of Ottaway's model. The most important among them are the failure to explain dynastic succession and the exclusion

of informal institutions from the analysis. These conceptual shortcomings can be overcome through a cross-theoretical combination of semiauthoritarianism with sultanism. The theory of sultanism has developed a better analytical approach to fill in the gaps of semiauthoritarianism. My conclusion is that it is more accurate to talk in terms of sultanistic tendencies. First, there are no pure cases of sultanism. This idea was confirmed by the authors of the theory. Second, there are some loci of democracy and openness in Azerbaijan that are not existent under pure sultanism. These elements of democracy are confined to a certain framework that makes any fundamental changes in the regime practically impossible. The political regime (the Azerbaijani elite) feels secure within these shields that enable it to act stubbornly, neglecting the voices of dissent and opposition. To conclude, post-Soviet Azerbaijan belongs to the semiauthoritarian type of political regime with strong sultanistic tendencies, and it is an oversimplification to call Azerbaijan authoritarian. Neither is it accurate to consider it purely sultanistic. As the present case study has shown, the sultanistic semiauthoritarianism model has proved to be of better explanatory value and of greater utility.

Conclusion

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan's difficulty in democratizing can be explained by all three dominant schools of post-Soviet transitions. Certainly, there is a problem with triple transition (three-fold simultaneous transition: state building, marketization and democratization) and stateness. However, the present study has corroborated the assumptions of the perspective that emphasizes the primacy of history and culture (and, in the past, in general). As it has been demonstrated, Azerbaijan has experienced not only some transformation from the Soviet dictatorship and colonialism but the revival of such traditional informal social constructions as patriarchy and patrimonialism. Informal structures flourished in Soviet times, thanks to the policy of *korenizatsiya*, when the Kremlin allowed communism with a "national face" in the periphery. This led to the resurrection of the traditional clan and kinship relations. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, inspired by the success of the first democratic experience of 1918–20 (which the nation did not even know about under the Soviets) made an attempt to build democracy. In Azerbaijani history, it was only twice that the ruling elite was much preoccupied with ideas of democracy and political freedoms: in 1918–20 (the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic) and in 1992–1993 (Elçibey's government). With his return to power, Heydar Aliyev substantially transformed Azerbaijan. However, he did not go too far in "authoritarianizing" the country given the historical memories of the two democratic experiments. Moreover, he could not ignore the opinion of the West, with which he negotiated big investment contracts. This explains why the new regime had to accept some democracy in the form of the semi-free press, opposition, and civil society. That is how semiauthoritarianism emerged and has been existing from that moment on. The range of semiauthoritarianism proposed by Ottaway is not sufficient. The present study suggests that we should better talk in terms of semiauthoritarianisms, that is, various sub-categories of it. Semiauthoritarianism, Azerbaijani-style, has two important peculiarities: dynasticism

and the dominance of informal politics. The latter has deep historic roots, can be related to Islam, and is similar to the Middle Eastern patterns of patrimonial leadership. Traditional institutions survived the Soviet rule (due to *korenizatsiya*). Both characteristics are found in another form of political regime—sultanism. The theory of sultanism gives us a better grasp of these peculiarities of post-Soviet Azerbaijani politics. It points to the primacy of sociocultural structures. The present research has shown that we can sort out Azerbaijan to a specific subcategory of semiauthoritarian political systems—sultanistic semiauthoritarianism. The fusion of semiauthoritarianism with sultanism, which is proposed as a result of this study, gives the analytical tool, which, to a certain extent, represents an attempt to revitalize the debate about the applicability of the transition to democracy model to post-Soviet societies with their weak states, distorted bureaucratic-rational way of legitimating and the lack of many institutions whose functions are accomplished and substituted by more tradition-based structures.

The empirical case study has confirmed the validity and greater serviceability of the new sultanistic semiauthoritarian framework. However, the study recognizes that comparative research must be conducted to show whether the newly created model is generalizable or not. The present research has implicitly pointed to the similar patterns in Central Asian countries. Yet, a comparative analysis needs to be undertaken to test this hypothetical supposition.

To conclude, Azerbaijan belongs to the gray zone majority of contemporary political regimes. However, the term “gray zone” is too ambivalent, and countries that fall in it differ in some essential aspects. In general, the introduction of the term “semiauthoritarianism” to delineate the gray zone regimes has significantly ameliorated the conceptualization of these regimes. The theory of semiauthoritarianism that was already there helped us to handle some principal challenges of the convention transitology. However, the case of Azerbaijan appeared to be more complicated (dynastic succession, the prevalence of informal institutions over legal-rational ones) and has challenged the theory of semiauthoritarianism. The study resulted in the establishment of the new framework that combines the two theories and is set forth as a more serviceable one.

NOTES

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1. Linz and Stepan (1996) contend that there are five modern ideal types of political regime, one of which is democratic, and the rest are nondemocratic (totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian, and sultanistic). See Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000). However, their categorization is quite negligent to the notion of a gray zone regime that is placed at the center of the present analysis.

2. Authoritarianism is “a political system in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined but actually quite predictable norms.” For this definition, see Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consol-*

idation, 45. Azerbaijani leadership is not bound by any predictable norms. Everything is at almost complete discretion of the ruler.

3. For the discussion of the gray zone problem see the list of writings in Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 271–74, and especially, Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January 2002), 5–21; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (April 1997): 430–51; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 51–65; Larry Diamond, “Is the Third Wave Over?” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (July 1996): 20–37; Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 21–35; Andreas Schedler, “The Menu of Manipulation,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 36–50; Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November–December 1997): 27–43; Marc F. Plattner, “Liberalism and Democracy: Can’t Have One Without the Other,” *Foreign Affairs* (March–April 1998): 171–80.

4. According to Collier and Levitsky (1997) there are hundreds of subtypes of politically ambiguous regimes, including semidemocracy, pseudodemocracy, protodemocracy, virtual democracy, illiberal democracy, electoral democracy, authoritarian democracy, weak democracy, partial democracy, delegative democracy, façade democracy, ambiguous, and hegemonic electoral authoritarian.

5. For a similar analysis, see Olga Prygoda, “Azerbaijan’s Political Institutions: A Semi-Authoritarian State” (Washington, DC: Eisenhower Institute, 2003).

6. See Daniel Heradstveit, “Democratic Development in Azerbaijan and the Role of the Western Oil Industry,” *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 3 (2001): 261–88. In his analysis, Heradstveit focuses on the impact of the Western oil business on democratization of Azerbaijan, which is, of course, one of the most important aspects of Azerbaijani transition. Those who are interested in the role of oil in Azerbaijani politics or in oil-related issues can also consult Heradstveit’s book *Democracy and Oil: The Case of Azerbaijan* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Reichert, 2001) or, for example, Terry Lynn Karl, “Crude Calculations: OPEC Lessons for the Caspian Region,” and David Hoffman, “Azerbaijan: The Politicization of Oil” in *Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Robert Ebel and Rajan Menon (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), chaps. 3 and 4; see also Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weintal, “Prelude to the Resource Curse: Explaining Oil and Gas Development Strategies in the Soviet Successor States and Beyond,” *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 4 (May 2001): 367–99.

7. Two of her analyses should be mentioned here: “Azerbaijan and Aliyev: A Long History and an Uncertain Future,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, no. 5 (September–October 2003): 3–13; and “Azerbaijan’s Struggle Toward Democracy,” in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In my view, Altstadt’s account of Aliyev and post-Soviet Azerbaijan is one of the most comprehensive and intelligent works ever written, not only on Heydar Aliyev but also on contemporary Azerbaijan.

8. Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter’s Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn Post-Soviet Republic* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998). A detailed story of how Azerbaijan as a state emerged, the problems the country faced, and the events that occurred in and over the Nagorno-Karabakh war with neighboring Armenia.

9. Svante E. Cornell is the editor of the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/> and the executive director of Cornell Caspian Consulting, <http://www.cornellcaspiant.com/>. He periodically writes on political processes in the Caucasus and in Azerbaijan. See, for instance, Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001); “Democratization Faltering in Azerbaijan,” *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 2 (April 2001): 118–31.

10. Alec Rasizade is a senior associate at the Historical Research Center in Washing-

ton, DC. See Alec Rasizade, "Azerbaijan in Transition to the 'New Age of Democracy,'" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36 (2003): 345–72.

11. "Sultanistic semiauthoritarianism" is used for simplicity and strictly connotes semi-authoritarianism with sultanistic tendencies.

12. The first was the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918–20.

13. The notion of democracy waves belongs to Samuel P. Huntington. See Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 12–34.

14. The term "Central Asia and the Caucasus" is frequently used to refer to a region that encompasses the countries of the southern rim of the former Soviet Union because of some commonalities they share. This geographical definition is conditional and is correct only partially because there are great differences between Central Asia and the Caucasus in general and between the countries within the region. Some analysts tend to include Azerbaijan into this entity. The author of the article has a somewhat different perspective, which is that we cannot and should not include Azerbaijan into the Central Asian region because historically and culturally these two have developed separately, although there are certain common patterns in their modern political development. The latter deserves a separate investigation.

15. The term is suggested by Ronald Suny in his paper "Reform, Revolution, Transition, Transformation: Façade Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Post-Communist World" at the workshop on "Regime Transitions from Communist Rule in Comparative Perspective" sponsored by the Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law of the Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, Stanford, California, November 15–16, 2002.

16. At least, most of them are regarded as democracies, although with some qualifying adjectives, such as delegative, that is, neither (or poorly) institutionalized nor consolidated democracies. See Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (January 1994): 55–69.

17. These and other limitations of transition studies will be discussed more extensively in the subsequent sections. For the conceptual stretching debate, see a series of articles in *Slavic Review*, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" *Slavic Review* 53 (Spring 1994): 173–85; Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review* 54 (Spring 1995): 111–27; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Post-Communism?" *Slavic Review* 54 (Winter 1995): 965–78; Valerie Bunce, "Paper Curtains and Paper Tigers," *Slavic Review* 54 (Winter 1995): 979–87.

18. Or take, for instance, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan's assumption that "[d]emocratic transition and consolidation involve the movement from a nondemocratic to a democratic regime." In Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition*, 38.

19. An overly optimistic "no prerequisites" stream in democracy studies was started with Dankwart Rustow's 1970 publication, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* (April 1970): 337–63. Rustow's followers were Philippe C. Schmitter and Guillermo O'Donnell, who also argued that there are no preconditions for democracy—"anyone can do it."

20. I came across similar ideas in Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, "Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third-Wave Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 31 (2001): 331–54. The authors of the article see one of the main problems of third-wave democracies is that democratic elections were introduced there before well-functioning institutions of the modern state had been constructed. As a result, Russia, for instance, was to "Build the Ship of State at Sea," rephrasing the subtitle of Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss's book *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

21. It is interesting to note that the author suggests to conceptualize Central Asia and Belarus as "out-and-out authoritarian systems" (13).

22. On the whole discussion over “the End of the Transition Paradigm,” besides Carothers’s article, see the debate under the title “Debating the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (July 2002): 5–38; especially Guillermo O’Donnell, “In Partial Defense of an Evanescent ‘Paradigm’”; Ghia Nodia, “The Democratic Path”; and Thomas Carothers, “A Reply to My Critics.”

23. On the geopolitics, increasing importance of the Caucasus in the ten-year retrospect, and a call to U.S. policymakers to pay more attention to the region, see, for instance, Zeyno Baran, “The Caucasus: Ten Years after Independence,” *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 221–34. On American engagement with the Caucasus and Central Asia, see Svante E. Cornell, “America in Eurasia: One Year After,” *Current History* 101, no. 657 (October 2002): 330–36; Farid Guliyev, “Plani Vashingtona i Azerbaidzhan” [Washington’s Plans and Azerbaijan], *Echo* 17, no. 509 (January 28, 2003): 2; Farid Guliyev, “Rossia sosredotochivaietsa, Amerika podstupaiet” [Russia is concentrating, America is approaching], *Echo* 61, no. 553 (April 3, 2003): 2.

24. The Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, held the conference workshop with the interesting title: “The Illusions of Transitions: Which Perspectives for Central Asia and the South Caucasus?” March 17, 2004. Tellingly, the keynote address had an even more interesting title: “Central Asia in the 20th Century: How Useful is ‘Transition’ to Explain the History of This Region?”

25. This is the English translation of the Russian title, “Aliyev posle Aliyeva: Nasledovanie Vlasti kak Sposob yeye uderzhaniya.”

26. Nakhichevan is an Azerbaijani region where Heydar Aliyev was born. “Yeraz” refers to Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan (now in Armenia). For the discussion of the Yeraz/Nakhichevan regional elite’s role in Azerbaijani politics and economy see also Hoffman (2000); Luong and Weintal (2001); Guseynov (2004); International Crisis Group’s (ICG) Report “Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf,” Europe Report no. 156, (Baku/Brussels, May 13, 2004).

27. Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 63–120.

28. According to Diamond’s classification of regimes, Azerbaijan is sorted out to the category of hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes alongside with the Central Asian republics (except Turkmenistan, which belongs to the politically closed authoritarian class), some countries of Asia (Singapore, Cambodia, Pakistan), Africa (Burkina Faso, Uganda, Angola, Chad) and the Middle East (Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia). See table 2 in Diamond 2002, 30–31.

29. See the online Hyper Dictionary’s definition for the word <http://www.hyperdictionary.com>.

30. This and other quotes of the former Azerbaijani president are available on Azerbaijan International’s Web page at http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/topics/Quotes/quote_aliyev.heydar.html (accessed April 14, 2004). See also Azerbaijan International’s interviews with Heydar Aliyev, http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/heydar_aliyev/heydar_aliyev_index.html (accessed May 23, 2004). Another source for some of Heydar Aliyev’s speeches in English is “Heydar Aliyev’s Heritage” *International On-line Library*, <http://aliyevheritage.org/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0027> (accessed May 2, 2004).

31. For the discussion of the specific qualities of sultanism, see also Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*; Houchang Chehabi and Juan Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes*. For critical reviews of the concept of sultanism, see M. Crawford Young, “Resurrecting Sultanism,” *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (July 1999): 165–68; Jason M. Brownlee, “Low Tide after the Third Wave: Exploring Politics under Authoritarianism,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 4 (July 2002): 477–98.

32. In addition, Lilia Shevtsova also suggested grouping Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan as openly sultanistic

regimes. See Lilia Shevtsova, "Russia's Hybrid Regime," *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 4 (October 2001): 65. The usefulness of the concept in explaining Central Asian and South-Caucasian politics was also mentioned by Tanya Charlick-Paley, Phil Williams, and Olga Oliker, "The Political Evolution of Central Asia and South Caucasus: Implications for Regional Security," in *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus*, ed. Olga Oliker and Thomas S. Szayna, 13–14 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003).

33. Personal correspondence with Dr. Houchang E. Chehabi.

34. Charles H. Fairbanks makes an interesting attempt to classify Caucasian and Central Asian regimes. He suggests three political patterns. The first category is characterized by the strong presidential power, the lack of power sharing, the rule by government parties, and weak or weakening states. This category includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan belong to the second category of strong-state autocracies. And, finally, the third category is stateless community, which is found only in Chechnya. It should also be noted that Fairbanks is quite optimistic about democracy in Georgia and Azerbaijan: "Here [in Azerbaijan and Georgia] democratic change is entirely possible. The decisive moment will be the 'free' elections without which no successor president can claim legitimacy" (2001, 54).

35. For longer accounts on Azerbaijan's political development, see Altstadt (1992, 1997, 2003), Guseynov (2004), Cornell (2001a, 2001b), Fuller (1994), Hiro (1994, 1998). For more general data see, for instance, the Economist Intelligence Unit's "Country Report: Azerbaijan" (2003), which contains all necessary statistical and informative data. The most up-to-date (2004) commentary is International Crisis Group's Report "Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf."

36. There is unanimity of views on the key role of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which was an impulse to the formation of and mass support for the independence-seeking AXC. For instance, Altstadt states, "Gorbachev's campaign for *glasnost* and *perestroika* did not launch Azerbaijan's Popular Front, as had been the case in the Baltic republics. Rather, political activism developed in response to the Karabagh policy of neighboring Armenia" (2003, 4). Fuller has a similar vision, "[t]he perceived threat to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity [from the Armenians] served as the catalyst for the creation of a Popular Front that in 1989 succeeded in mobilizing the population against the republic's conservative Communist Party leadership" (1994, ix).

37. "On June 7, 1992, Popular Front Chairman [Ebülfez Elçibey] won Azerbaijan's first contested election, with about 60 percent of the vote." Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Presidential Elections and Independence Referendums in the Baltic States, the Soviet Union and Successor States, A Compendium of Reports (1991–1992)* (Washington, DC: CSCE, 1992), 169.

38. For a detailed account on elections in Azerbaijan, see Shakhin Abbasov and Farid Gahramanly, "Azerbaijan: Election and Power," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6, no.18 (2002): 32–38.

39. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan declared itself the successor state of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), which existed before communism (1918–20) and which was the first republic of the Muslim East. Post-Soviet Azerbaijan exploits ADR's symbols (the national hymn, the national flag, and so on) and some elements of its dominant ideology formulated by Alibey Huseinzade. It was the idea of a modernized Muslim Turk, fusing the elements of Western civilization, reformed Islamic culture, and ethnonationalism. See Audrey Altstadt, "Visions and Values: Roots of Today's Society in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic," *Caspian Crossroads Magazine* 6, no. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S.-Azerbaijan Council, 2002).

40. "Colossus on the Stage of Azerbaijani Politics for More than 30 Years"—that is how the BBC has characterized Heydar Aliyev. See *BBC News*, "Obituary: Heydar Aliyev," December 12, 2003.

41. Here I must add that in 1982, Aliyev was appointed first deputy prime minister of the USSR and held this position until 1987, when he was ousted by Mikhail Gorbachev.

42. In 1993, Heydar Aliyev was elected with 98.8 percent of the vote. In 1998, he was reelected, receiving 76 percent of the vote. However, as Levitsky and Way put it, “As a rule of thumb, regimes in which presidents are reelected with more than 70 percent of the vote can generally be considered noncompetitive” (2002, 55).

43. See the reports on presidential elections in Azerbaijan released by the Observer Mission, organized by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE): “The Azerbaijan ‘Election,’” press releases, and “Votum Separatum—Dissenting Opinion,” <http://www.idee.org/azerbaijanelections.html> (accessed May 4, 2004).

44. From my personal experience. I am an alumnus (master’s degree) of this academy.

45. See *Dayaz*, “Lichnost Geydara Aliyeva v Istorii Azerbaydzhana” (Aliyev’s Personality in Azerbaijani History); and Ali Hasanov, ed., “An Important Contribution to Aliyev Studies,” with a foreword called “An Important Contribution to Aliyev Studies” written by Ali Hasanov, book’s editor <http://www.day.az/news/showbiz/7293.html> (accessed May 20, 2004).

46. The ideology of *Musavatchiliq* is named after the Musavat party, which was the major political actor in the years of Azerbaijan’s first independence (1918–20). Its cornerstones are *Turkleshme* (Turkification, strengthening of Turkish national identity), *Islamlashma* (Islamization, belonging to Muslim community or *Ummet*), and *Muasirleshme* (Modernization, Westernization, European ideals).

47. On clans in Azerbaijan, see note 26. On political parties, see Altstadt, “Azerbaijan’s Struggle Toward Democracy,” 147–49; Cornell, “Democratization Falters in Azerbaijan” (2001b); Fariz Ismailzade, “Azerbaijan’s Presidential Elections: Party Platforms and Prospects for a Unified Opposition,” *Caucasus Election Watch, Caucasus Initiative* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies); Araz Aslanli, “The Situation in Azerbaijan before the Presidential Elections,” *Stradigma E-journal of Strategy and Analysis* 8 (September 2003): 1–8; Daan van der Schriek, “Little to Lose: Opposition in Azerbaijan,” *Eurasianet* (February 3, 2003).

48. See the revealing essay on the Azerbaijani legislature and its evolution in Farid Arifoglu and Shakhin Abbasov, “The Azerbaijani Parliament—Hostage to the Executive,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6 (2000): 44–50. For the 1995 constitution, see the official Web site of the Azerbaijani parliament, <http://www.meclis.gov.az/> (accessed May 23, 2004).

49. For more on corruption in Azerbaijan, see the official Web site of Transparency Azerbaijan and, especially, Rena Safaraliev and Ilgar Mammadov, Global Corruption Report-2004 Azerbaijan; ICG Report, 2004, and Irada Guseynova, “Millioneri iz Baku skromni i nezametni” (Baku Millionaires are Timid and Hidden), *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, October 23, 2003.

50. See Human Rights Watch reports and publications on the organization’s Web page, <http://hrw.org/doc?t=europe&c=azerba> and, particularly, “Crushing Dissent: Repression, Violence and Elections in Azerbaijan,” *Human Rights Watch* 16, no.1 (January 2004).

51. An American diplomat from the U.S. embassy in Baku has expressed identical ideas on a public lecture, Baku, April, 2004. He was determinately arguing that in the presidential election held in October 2003, Ilham Aliyev would have won the election without manipulation.

52. Section 907 of the U.S. Freedom Support Act banned direct assistance from the United States to the government of Azerbaijan “until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of forces against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh” (Section 907, Restriction on Assistance to Azerbaijan). The U.S. president waived section 907 in January 2002. Since then, the waiver has annually been extended. The clause is rightly regarded as discriminatory and unfair, because instead of sanctioning Armenia who militarily occupied and holds 20 percent of Azerbaijani territories (Nagorno-Karabakh and seven regions beyond), the U.S. Congress, following the influential Armenian lobby, took a one-sided stance in the conflict. Shkolnikov writes that the

waiver of Section 907 “is likely to open opportunities for democratization activities in that key Caspian state [Azerbaijan]” (2002, 8).

53. On this topic, see Barak A. Salmoni, “Electoral Survival of the Most Corrupt? Azerbaijan, Georgia, and American Regional Goals,” *Strategic Insights* 1, no. 10 (Monterey, CA: Center for Contemporary Conflict); editorial *Washington Post*, “Our Man in Baku,” January 25, 2004; editorial *Washington Post*, “A ‘Strong Performance’?” October 22, 2003; Hafiz Pashayev, “Critiquing the Election in Azerbaijan,” *Washington Post*, October 30, 2003; Ariel Cohen, “Aliiev Dynasty or Azerbaijani Democracy? Securing a Democratic Transition,” *WebMemo*, no. 324, August 6, 2003, the Heritage Foundation.

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