

The Democratic Façade in Azerbaijan: An Analysis

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I. Introduction

In his victory speech after the 2013 Azerbaijani election, President Ilham Aliyev stated, “I am grateful to the Azeri people for voting for me and putting their trust in me and the future development of the country.”¹ This quotation depicts the democratic façade that is taking place in Azerbaijan. This essay argues that while Azerbaijan appears to be a democracy, in reality, it is an autocracy. First, it will assess the historical foundations and that have led to the corrupt state of Azerbaijan’s government today. Next, it will examine the lack of horizontal accountability through the existence of powerless institutions, specifically, a weak legislature, and judiciary, which have enabled the executive to expand its power and exert control over society. Finally, it will evaluate the absence of vertical accountability through a censored press, and restrictions on freedom of expression. This paper concludes that the deleterious state of democracy in Azerbaijan will not improve unless the international community takes a stronger stance and places limits on the power of the executive.

II. Historical Background and Theoretical Perspectives

In order to understand the current state of affairs in Azerbaijan, it is necessary to assess its political history. The Republic of Azerbaijan initially became independent in 1918. Azerbaijan formally entered the Soviet Union in 1922, under whose control it remained until declaring independence in 1991.² The first post-Soviet elections took place in 1991, which resulted in the election of Abulfaz Elchibey, who was ousted by a military coup a year later.³ In 1993, Heydar Aliyev, the former first secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, was elected with an alleged 99 percent of the vote.⁴ The strengthening of executive power began in 1998, after Aliyev won the Presidential

election with over 77 percent of the vote.⁵ During this time, the first non-democratic measures were implemented, as legislation was approved reducing the minimum requirement of voter participation from 50 percent to 25 percent.⁶ This move enraged opposition groups, who protested Aliyev's actions, to no avail.⁷

During the 1998 parliamentary elections, the voters approved a new constitution, which expanded the President's power.⁸ This extension of executive power included the right to appoint the Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet of Ministers, the Prosecutor-General, and the Supreme Court judges.⁹ By adding these amendments to the constitution, President Aliyev was attempting to administer his son's rise to power.¹⁰ The gradual implementation of non-democratic means into the system of government in Azerbaijan demonstrates that in 1998, Azerbaijan, under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, was moving toward a state of a "self coup".

Next, in 2002, due to Heydar Aliyev's poor health, he was unable to continue his term as president.¹¹ Thus, he introduced constitutional amendments allowing for the Prime Minister to act as President until the next elections in the event of death or illness of the President.¹² This referendum allegedly passed with 97% of the vote, yet prompted massive protests from the public at large.¹³ As a result of this addendum to the constitution, President Aliyev appointed his son, Ilham Aliyev, to the role of Prime Minister, thus enabling him to assume the role of President due to his father's poor health.¹⁴ Throughout his presidency, Heydar Aliyev retained his power through corruption, intimidation, and fraud, which allowed him to construct his son's political rise.

Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev was determined to maintain the tight grip on power that his father implemented. He won the 2003 presidential election with over 80 percent of the vote.¹⁵ The high number of purported participation raised concern in the international community. For example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe termed the election as fraudulent.¹⁶ Opposition groups were outraged as well, which resulted in protests that were suppressed by the government.¹⁷ In response, the government limited both freedom of religion and the press as they detained and put on trial over 600 opposition figures.¹⁸ The opposition was ultimately unsuccessful, as they lacked cohesion as well as support from the international community.¹⁹ As a result, in 2008, Mr. Aliyev once again allegedly won 89 percent of the vote with a 75 percent voter turnout.²⁰ Similar to previous elections, the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe stated that this election did not meet international standards of being free and fair.²¹ In sum, the Aliyev family took advantage of a rigid democratic process and a lack of international will to intervene to turn Azerbaijan into an autocratic state.

Ilham Aliyev's acts while in power solidified the auto golpe in Azerbaijan. The pivotal event that led to Aliyev's secure grip of presidential power took place in 2009, when the majority of the parliament voted for a referendum that eliminated Presidential term limits.²² This plebiscite allowed for Aliyev to be re-elected as many times as possible, directly contradicting the constitutional limitations placed on term limits, and essentially constitutionally mandating an autocracy in Azerbaijan.²³ The international response was negative, but passive. For example, the European Commission condemned the referendum, calling it a "serious setback" for the development of democracy in

Azerbaijan.²⁴ However, once again, the international community did not take action to prevent these measures from coming into force.

The history of Azerbaijan has illustrated that there has and continues to be a lack of horizontal and vertical accountability, a phenomenon which will be elaborated on in subsequent sections of this essay. First, the fabrication of free and fair elections, as well as restrictions on freedom of the press and expression prevent the ability of citizens to hold the government accountable, thus eliminating any potential vertical accountability. In addition, there is an absence of horizontal accountability between government branches. While in theory, the constitution has mandated a separation of power between the political branches, in practice, the executive exerts dominance over the legislature and judiciary, resulting in a fusion of powers, and allowing for a democratic façade in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.²⁵ Therefore, Azerbaijan currently functions as a “personalistic dictatorship” which is enabled by a lack of checks and balances from the legislature and judiciary on the dominant executive branch.²⁶

Presidents Heydar and Ilham Aliyev have constitutionally expanded their power. The theoretical basis to the absorption of power by a leader who is democratically elected is known as an “autogolpe”.²⁷ This theory emerged from Latin American literature and is based on the actions of the former President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori. Fujimori was able to gain power by taking advantage of the “weak consolidation of democratic institutions and norms” in Peru.²⁸ This term equally applies to both President Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev’s strengthening of executive power in Azerbaijan, which was done after both men were democratically elected. The autogolpe, also known as a presidential self-coup, has dominated domestic politics in Azerbaijan.²⁹ This essay argues

that President Heydar Aliyev began the process of an autogolpe, and President Ilham Aliyev further entrenched the additional powers to the president by gradually seizing power through constitutional means.

III. The Resource Curse

It is essential to note that the President's ability and ease to consolidate power by a "self-coup" is largely due to the role of oil profits in allowing for corruption and patronage. On a macro level, the "resource curse", as Olsen termed it in 1965, refers to the fact that natural resources, in this case, oil profits, allow governments to consolidate power in the hands of a few while keeping their regime durable, thus preventing the likelihood of democratic transitions.³⁰ When a state controls the oil sector, this likely leads to inflexible control by the government and elites.³¹ Specifically, in petro-states, political control tends to be centralized; using the resource "rent" for private gain, rather than for the benefit of the country.³² Thus, oil revenues make it possible for rulers to increase expenditure on patronage.³³ Specifically, in Azerbaijan, this is exactly the case. Aliyev uses profits from oil revenues to bribe and influence legislators, top judges, elites and businesses in Azerbaijan.³⁴ The high levels of corruption are reinforced by Freedom House's *Nations in Transit 2013* report, which classifies the degree of corruption in Azerbaijan as a 6.75 out of 7; with 7 being the most possible corrupt.³⁵

Oil contributes immensely to the wealth of the executive in Azerbaijan. Oil profits historically been a dominant source of revenue for the government, but oil production and exports have increased since the late 1990s.³⁶ For example, in 2006, oil revenues rose to 34.5 percent of Azerbaijan's GDP.³⁷ Therefore, the President's increase in power has been enabled largely due to the oil revenues collected by the government. While this

essay will focus on the institutional consolidation of presidential power in Azerbaijan, it recognizes the integral role of oil revenues in facilitating the President's grappling of power.

IV. Weak Legislature

First, this paper will examine the absence of horizontal accountability in Azerbaijan. Horizontal accountability is defined by Olsen as the presence of "state agencies that are legally empowered and factually willing and able to take actions ranging from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to possibly unlawful actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state."³⁸ The first institution that this paper will analyze in connection to the strong executive is the legislature of Azerbaijan. The legislature is a unicameral body, consisting of the National Assembly, known as the Milli Majlis. Out of the 125 seats, 100 members are directly elected, and 25 are proportionately elected, both to serve 5-year terms.³⁹ Therefore, the legislature operates by a "single-party plus" system. The legislature is currently and has historically been controlled by President Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party (YAP).⁴⁰ This party was set up by Heydar Aliyev in 1992 as a "mask for the patronage networks on which his regime is really based."⁴¹ Currently, the YAP holds 71 of the 125 seats in the National Assembly, and is the only party with more than 3 seats.⁴² This continuous dominance has been enabled through both internal and external corruption.

Internally, the YAP is controlled through patronage and intimidation.⁴³ The executive is therefore able to maintain dominance over the legislative branch due to the high levels of power over the YAP. While in theory, the legislative branch is independent from the executive branch, this separation is non-existent in practice. Members of the legislature are persuaded through widespread corruption and bribery from the executive

branch. Therefore, the legislative branch “functions like an addition to the presidential cabinet.”⁴⁴ For example, over 90% of the members of parliament are associated with Aliyev’s New Azerbaijan Party and are loyal to the Aliyev family, and 75% are “Aliyev’s people”.⁴⁵ Recent measures have tightened the executive’s control over the legislative. For example, in June 2010, the parliament passed a law “On Standard Normative Acts.”⁴⁶ This law requires the legislature to match its legislative agenda with the agenda of the executive.⁴⁷ The Milli Majlis has therefore been accused to be “a rubber-stamp body with no oversight or public debate function.”⁴⁸ Thus, the parliament in Azerbaijan has no independence as an agency of the state to hold the executive accountable.

Externally, the YAP’s dominance is secured through a biased media and a lack of freedom of expression.⁴⁹ The legislative branch is strongly isolated from the public, and legislative actions are not transparent to the Azerbaijanis. For example, there is no disclosure of legislative actions, such as TV broadcasts of legislative meetings.⁵⁰ In addition, the political opposition is strongly constrained. While opposition parties are allowed to exist to maintain to appearance of a true democracy, the government does everything in its power to restrict the voice of these parties.⁵¹ For instance, in 2013, the government introduced public financing for political parties, which, may appear to be a progressive step, but ultimately lead to the “deliberately unequal distribution of these new resources.”⁵² The purpose of these measures are to ensure that the opposition parties get minimal support in terms of resources and to maximize the funding given to the NAP.

The opposition has continuously attempted to rally together and oppose the government, through mass street demonstrations, and boycotts of the elections.⁵³ However, those who attempt to run against the National Azerbaijan Party are oppressed

and persecuted.⁵⁴ Specifically, there have historically been two main opposition parties, Musavat, and the Popular Front, that have been marginalized by the government.⁵⁵ Opposition parties have been weak and unable to challenge the authority of the Aliyev's rule to power. For example, A National Democratic Institute (NDI) report described opposition parties in 1995 as "tiny organizations with limited resources and organizational strength."⁵⁶ This situation has not improved. According to a United States Congressional Commission on Azerbaijan, "The political space for dissenting voices has been shrinking in Azerbaijan over the past few years."⁵⁷ This was clearly demonstrated prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections the government faced the threat of the "colour revolutions" of Georgia and Ukraine.⁵⁸ Thus, in order to prevent opposition groups from using the popular will from these revolutions to their advantage, the government has repressed speech and freedom of assembly and attempted to prevent the opposition from campaigning.⁵⁹ Therefore, it is evident that the executive, with the assistance of the legislature, takes extreme measures to restrain the capabilities of opposition parties.

As a result of the restriction on the capabilities of the opposition parties, the YAP receives exponentially more seats in the legislature. Specifically, legislative elections reinforce the notion that there is a lack of political plurality in Azerbaijan. For example, in 1995, during the first "democratic" legislative elections, the APF and Musavat candidates together received only 5 seats in the parliament.⁶⁰ Five opposition parties and 600 independent candidates were barred from these elections.⁶¹ The international community criticized this election as neither free nor fair, thus violating the minimum international standard for determining if a country is a democracy.⁶² Further, the

parliament did not accept several recommendations of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.⁶³ The YAP dominated the 2000 elections as well with fraudulent polls.⁶⁴

Legislative elections in Azerbaijan are continually dominated by corruption and fabricated results. During the 2005 legislative elections, the opposition gained just 10 seats as the majority of seats went to the YAP and those loyal to Aliyev.⁶⁵ The opposition once again organized many rallies, which were suppressed by the government.⁶⁶ The 2010 legislative elections came under criticism from both opposition parties and international observers, and the YAP won 71 seats.⁶⁷ Moreover, “independents”, meaning those who are loyal to President Aliyev, won 42 seats.⁶⁸ The main opposition parties, the Azerbaijani Popular Front and Musavat, were unable to win a single seat.⁶⁹

The opposition parties are beginning to unite and attempt to strengthen their capabilities, however, so far to no avail. Despite the previous schism in opposition parties, in May 2013, the opposition parties united to form the National Council of Opposition Forces.⁷⁰ This unprecedented step has led to the marriage of organizations and civil society groups, headed by one candidate, Jamil Hasanli.⁷¹ The National Council was predicated on a commitment to democracy, free elections, the implementation of the rule of law, and challenging the rule of President Ilham Aliyev.⁷² It has become apparent to the various political parties that they cannot challenge the dictatorial policies of President Aliyev without uniting their resources and personnel.⁷³

Therefore, the legislature as an institution cannot hold the executive accountable as per Olsen's definition, as the majority of members of parliament are loyal to Aliyev and oppositions are strongly marginalized. There is a lack of political pluralism in Azerbaijan's legislature, which has led to an uneven playing field among the various

political parties, and the assurance that opposition parties are barred from gaining representation and a voice in the legislature. It is evident that the executive maintains a tight control over the legislative branch, which has enabled President Aliyev to expand his powers using legal means. Thus, through strong party discipline, the president is able to achieve his goals while maintaining the illusion of a democracy run by checks and balances and a separation of power.

V. Inadequate Judiciary

Next, this paper will examine the weakness of the judiciary in Azerbaijan, which facilitates the President's centralization of power. The judiciary, headed by a 9 person Constitutional court, is another institution that is strongly influenced by the executive.⁷⁴ The judiciary, like the legislature, suffers from a lack of horizontal accountability. This provision is permitted by the constitution, as Section 8 states that "the President of the Republic is the guarantor of the independence of the judicial power."⁷⁵ Thus, the constitution itself illustrates that there is a fusion of the executive and judiciary, which prevents a fair and impartial judiciary from ensuring that country is governed by the rule of law.

First, the selection of judges in Azerbaijan is strongly controlled by the executive. Judges are chosen based on a series of exams, and, if they succeed, are recommended by the Judicial- Legal Council, which is controlled by the Ministry of Justice, a ministry of the executive.⁷⁶ The appointment of judges is ultimately decided by the President or parliament, based on the court, and judges are appointed for 15 year terms.⁷⁷ Therefore, the selection of judges is not regulated or impartial, rather, it is based on political allegiance. In addition, patronage and corruption are widespread practices within the judiciary, and allow the executive to influence the decisions of judges. Due to the judge's

low salaries, judges seek financial compensation from the executive, thus enhancing the desire for corruption.⁷⁸

Next, Azerbaijani judges are essentially puppets of the executive and do not follow the rule of law. According to Azerbaijan's constitution, individuals are entitled to justice "on the basis of legal equality of all before the law and the courts."⁷⁹ However, in practice, the disregard of the rule of law includes the avoidance of necessary procedural elements of a trial. For example, verdicts are largely unrelated to any evidence presented during a trial.⁸⁰ Also, judges often issue warrants for arrest after the fact.⁸¹ In addition, judges often fail to read verdicts publicly or give the reasoning behind their judgment.⁸² Further, there are no written transcripts of judicial proceedings.⁸³ These facts are reflected in Freedom House's *Nations in Transit 2013* report, which classifies the judicial framework and independence as a 6.5 out of 7, with 7 being least independent.⁸⁴ Therefore, the courts do not enforce the rule of law and equal rights under the law to citizens of Azerbaijan.

Next, through its role as a tool to the President, the judiciary enhances the strength and power of the executive branch through its prosecution of political dissidents. The judiciary is used as an instrument of the executive to silence dissenters through fabricated charges, thus negating individuals' rights to freedom of expression. Specifically, many journalists have been detained and imprisoned for charges that are often not linked to their work.⁸⁵ These charges have included hooliganism, drug possession, weapons possession, inciting hatred, supporting terrorism, tax evasion, extortion, and appealing for mass disorder.⁸⁶ For example, in 2012, a court sentenced journalist Faramaz Novruzoglu to four and a-half years in prison for allegedly "inciting mass disorderly conduct and

border crossing violations.”⁸⁷ Local media and NGO sources believed that these charges were fictitious, and were placed in response to various posts on Facebook in which he criticized the government.⁸⁸ This is just one of many examples in which dissenters are prosecuted, demonstrating that the purpose of fabricated charges is to silence critical journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders.⁸⁹

In addition, Azerbaijani courts enable the President to silence domestic groups that could potentially challenge his power. For example, in 2008, Azerbaijani courts deregistered and annulled Azerbaijan's largest independent domestic election monitoring NGO, the Election Monitoring Center.⁹⁰ By ridding this NGO of its ability to monitor elections, the President is reinforcing the concealment of false elections and results that allow for his continuous rule over Azerbaijan. Thus, the judiciary, which is strongly controlled by President Ilham Aliyev, is used as a tool to prevent a strong civil society from forming in Azerbaijan, restricting basic human rights, and ensuring that opposing individuals are penalized for attempting to challenge the power of the executive.

The legislature and judiciary, which are essential branches of a democratic government, are theoretically supposed to hold the executive accountable. However, in Azerbaijan, these institutions are extremely weak and dominated by the executive. The above stated facts illustrate that there is no horizontal accountability in Azerbaijan, emphasizing the autocratic nature of the current regime.

VI. Restrictions Placed on the Press

Finally, the press in Azerbaijan is extremely censored and serves as a tool for the expansion of executive power. As a result of the weak institutional framework in Azerbaijan, there is little to no opportunity for citizens to hold their government accountable. Vertical accountability defined by Olsen as the existence of “reasonably free

and fair elections, freedoms of speech, the press, and association, which permit citizens to voice social demands to public officials (elected or not) and to denounce these same officials for wrongful acts that they may commit.”⁹¹ The press is controlled by the executive, and therefore, it cannot expose the government’s corruption. The absence of an independent press has thus led to the classification of 6.75 out of 7 in independent media by Freedom House’s *Nations in Transit 2013* report.⁹²

While Article 50 of Azerbaijan’s constitution guarantees citizens with freedom of information, these freedoms are disingenuous.⁹³ The Azeri authorities fail to respond to violations of this right and violate it themselves.⁹⁴ The executive has strong control over print and broadcast media, which allows for a reinforcement of support of the government to instill values amongst the population. For example, in 2009, the parliament passed a law that greatly restricted freedom of the press.⁹⁵ The amendments included restrictions on filming, photographing, or recording someone without his or her knowledge, serving to prevent independent organizations from distributing material on public events.⁹⁶ In addition, the amendments criminalized photographic documentation of a police officer abusing a citizen, thus increasing defamation charges.⁹⁷ By outlawing this, the government is placing restrictions on the ability of citizens to hold government agents, in this case, police, accountable for their actions. As noted by Emin Milli, an Azerbaijani who was arrested on a charge of “hooliganism” after criticizing the government online, “Azerbaijan’s president tries to sell the country as a tolerable version of authoritarianism.”⁹⁸ Milli describes how the President demonstrates a “behind the scenes” style of authoritarianism.⁹⁹ While he refrains from slaughter thousands in the streets, he seeks to surreptitiously arrest those who criticize the government.

In addition, broadcast media is largely obligated to report in favour of the government. This is because the President appoints members of the National Television Radio Council (NTRC), an organization that releases broadcast licenses.¹⁰⁰ The NTRC is under the control of the executive, and allows the President to ensure that the press is reporting messages that are biased in his favour.¹⁰¹ For example, ANS TV, a major news station, had its license suspended in 2006, and afterwards began to report more cautiously.¹⁰² Also, in 2009, the government banned the use of domestic airways for foreign broadcasters.¹⁰³ This meant that stations such as BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, would not be allowed to air in Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁴ By preventing foreign media outlets from airing in Azerbaijan, the government sought to restrict the population's knowledge of world events, which could in turn challenge the President's power.

Moreover, print media in Azerbaijan is subject to the influence of the executive. Approximately 80 percent of newspapers are owned by the state, 10 percent are owned by opposition parties, and 5 to 10 percent are politically independent and unbiased.¹⁰⁵ Government organizations, schools, hospitals and universities are compelled to subscribe to state-run newspapers.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the government regulates the amount of distribution of newspapers and journals, allowing for one distribution centre, as well as one kiosk per 10,000 persons.¹⁰⁷ In 2012, the state replaced kiosks owned by the private companies Qasid and Qaya, which distribute independent newspapers.¹⁰⁸ By buying companies such as these, the government expands its control over the private sector and can control the dissemination of news stories.

In contrast to state run media outlets, opposition newspapers and journalists suffer

tremendously. Opposition newspapers are faced with a dire financial situation, primarily because state owned corporations intentionally do not advertise in these papers.¹⁰⁹ In addition, they face hardships such as extra fines, and having many of their staff imprisoned.¹¹⁰ Therefore, opposition papers are marginalized by the state that does anything in its power to suppress their views. In addition, journalists who speak out against the state are persecuted. According to Azerbaijani Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), more than 50 foreign and local journalists were harassed or attacked in 2011.¹¹¹ The government has used the state- run media to spread misinformation about dissenting individuals, which includes the accusations of serious crimes.¹¹² In addition, the government frequently uses defamation laws to charge independent and opposition newspapers and prevent them from operating and to place them in a critical financial situation.¹¹³

The most recent surge of limiting freedom of expression took place in the wake of the Arab Spring of 2011. After the uprisings in the Middle East, the government took extreme measures to block the use of social media, specifically, blogs. Specifically, the government kept a tight watch through the periodic blocking of social media networks.¹¹⁴ Also, the government harassed and arrested citizens based on Facebook posts.¹¹⁵ Due to these factors, Freedom House's *Nations in Transit 2013* report has declared the level of independent media as a 6.75 out of 7.¹¹⁶ In addition, Reporters without Borders has ranked Azerbaijan 152nd out of 166 countries, and declared it a "predator of press freedom."¹¹⁷ It is evident that the press is severely restricted and controlled by the government. These measures have allowed for an increased power of the executive, as those who speak out against the government are persecuted and marginalized.

VII. The 2013 Election and Prospects for the Future

Based on the preceding sections, this essay has shown that the state of democracy in Azerbaijan is not improving. The electoral process, as speculated by the international community, is continuing to be a fallacy. For example, the most recent presidential Azerbaijani election took place on October 10, 2013.¹¹⁸ While previous elections have been condemned by the international community as not free or fair, in 2013, the election results were published a day *before* the election.¹¹⁹ The Azerbaijan Central Election Commission “accidentally” released statistics that indicated that Mr. Aliyev won the election with 72.76 percent of the vote.¹²⁰ In addition, the mobile application, the forum on which the results were released, displayed information about how many people voted at different times throughout the day.¹²¹ The fact the Central Election Commission even went as far as making up detailed information of voter turnout from each polling station illustrates the extent that the government goes to conceal the autocratic state. Thus, the events of the 2013 election epitomize the fictitious state of democracy, and lack of vertical accountability in Azerbaijan.

To demonstrate the poor levels of democracy in Azerbaijan today, it is essential to analyze Freedom House’s *Nations in Transit 2013* report, which compares Azerbaijan’s democratic levels from 2004 to 2013. Freedom House has classified Azerbaijan as not

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Electoral Process	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00
Civil Society	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25
Independent Media	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Governance *	5.75	n/a								
National Democratic Governance	n/a	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50
Corruption	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75
Democracy Score	5.63	5.86	5.93	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.39	6.46	6.57	6.64

free, and has assigned it a 6.64 on its measurement of democratic levels of a country.

This scale is ranked from 1-7 with 1 being the closest to democracy and 7 the furthest.¹²²

Finally, the international community plays a salient role in determining the fate of Azerbaijan's democratic future. As demonstrated in previous sections, the international community has condemned the elections and state of human rights in Azerbaijan. However, no state or organization has taken a harsh stance on the human rights abuses in the country. Thus, international NGOs must simultaneously continue to bring the corruption and prevention of human rights to the attention of the international community. In fact, Azerbaijan has attempted to improve its image on the public stage, while maintaining its corrupt state domestically. For example, In 2001, Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe.¹²³ In order to become a member of the Council of Europe, a state must ratify treaties declaring that it will attempt to increase its democratic stance through means such as consolidating democratic institutions and obeying the rule of law, none of which has happened in Azerbaijan.¹²⁴ While this appeared to be a positive step towards achieving a state of democracy in Azerbaijan, instead, the state of human rights abuse has deteriorated. In addition, the government hosted two international events in Baku, its capital, in 2012, namely, the Eurovision song contest and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).¹²⁵ These events have allowed Azerbaijan to strengthen its appearance internationally without taking steps toward democratic reform.

Both the United States and European states have invested tens of billions of dollars in Azerbaijan's oil and gas industry, which demonstrates that it is not in their interest to act out against Azerbaijan. For example, "[international] disregard for criticism, especially of democratic shortcomings, has increased with the growth of oil wealth and the country's

strategic importance as a transit route for both energy and troops.¹²⁶ Western countries exert a large influence over Azerbaijan financially. Thus, rather than supporting this autocratic, repressive state, the international community could work to exert its influence and isolate Azerbaijan until changes are made in the way of democracy. For example, sanctions would be an integral step by the international community to send the message to Azerbaijan that they will not allow for President Aliyev's oppressive policies to continue. Therefore, in order for the international community to influence the actions of Azerbaijan, countries such as the US and members of the EU would have to elevate the importance of human rights and democracy over their economic preferences.

VIII. Conclusion

This essay argued that while Azerbaijan appears to be a democracy, it has evolved into an autocracy. First, it assessed the historical foundations and that have led to the corrupt state of Azerbaijan's government today. Next, it analyzed the lack of horizontal accountability through the existence of powerless institutions, specifically, a weak legislature, and judiciary, which have enabled the executive to expand its powers and exert control over society. Finally, it assessed the absence of vertical accountability through a censored press, and restrictions on freedom of expression. This paper concludes that the deleterious state of democracy in Azerbaijan will not improve unless the international community takes a stronger stance and places limits on the power of the executive.

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