



Azerbaijan — Va-PoReg Country Report

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11/07/1917 End Part of Other Country [of Russia]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Following a series of conflicts between the Russian Empire and Iran, the treaties of Golestān (10/24/1813) and Turkmenchay (02/28/1828) redefined the border between the two empires. As a result, Russia gained control of Baku, Shirvan, Ganja, Nakhichevan (Naxçıvan), and Yerevan. Notably, there was no distinct Azerbaijani state before 1918, and the Muslim population in Transcaucasia, instead of identifying with a continuous national tradition like the Georgians and Armenians, considered themselves part of the broader Muslim world, the ummah. The Russians referred to them as „Tatars,” and the term Azerbaijani (azərbaycanlı) only gained prominence among urban nationalist intellectuals in the pre-revolutionary era. It was during the Soviet period that this ethnonym became the official and widely recognized name for this group of people.¹

On 11/07/1917 the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was proclaimed. While the Bolsheviks claimed authority over the Caucasus in the aftermath of the October Revolution, Azerbaijani political forces together with other Caucasian parties including the Dashnaks, Mensheviks, and Socialist-Revolutionaries (Eserler) resisted Bolshevik authority and established a Transcaucasian transitional government to manage the transition toward Azerbaijani and South Caucasian sovereignty. The Azerbaijani Musavat party played a leading role in this process. From 11/26/1917 to 11/28/1917, elections for the All-Russian Constituent Assembly were held, in which Azerbaijani voters participated. On 02/14/1918, the Transcaucasian Seym was established in Tiflis, with the 44 Muslim Azerbaijani representatives forming its largest and most cohesive faction. However, the Seym cannot be classified as an electoral regime for Azerbaijan in the sense of the Va-PoReg codebook for several reasons. First, the elections of 11/1917 were organized by the Russian Provisional Government as elections to a Russian federal institution, not as elections to an Azerbaijani governing body. Second, Azerbaijani representatives could not travel to Petrograd due to the October Revolution and therefore repurposed their electoral mandates for a different institutional purpose than the one for which they had been granted. Third, the Seym as a governing body thus lacked direct democratic legitimation as such (Tosun 2018: 98-100). On 04/22/1918, the Seym proclaimed the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR), encompassing the majority of the modern territories of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, along with portions of Russia and the Ottoman Empire.² Azerbaijan was a constituent part of the TDFR, not a subordinate entity, making a coding of Part of Other Country inappropriate for this phase. The TDFR's existence proved extremely brief: serious contradictions between the national interests of its constituent peoples prevented the development of coherent state institutions. On 05/25/1918, the Georgian delegation left the Seym and proclaimed Georgian independence on 05/26/1918, leading to the dissolution of the TDFR. On 05/28/1918, the Muslim faction of the Seym constituted itself as the National Council of Azerbaijan and proclaimed the independence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR). The National Council assumed both legislative and executive functions but was not the product of a genuine Azerbaijani electoral process. On 06/17/1918, the National Council dissolved itself and transferred all legislative and executive authority to the Provisional Government of Azerbaijan, leaving the republic without any representative body until 11/1918. The ADR nonetheless represented a genuine transitional effort toward parliamentary democracy, guaranteeing civil and political rights to all citizens regardless of ethnic origin, religion, or sex, and committing itself to the convening of a fully elected Constituent Assembly. The regime is

therefore classified as a Non-Electoral Transitional Regime throughout this entire phase until the opening of the ADR Parliament on 12/07/1918. Universal suffrage was formally introduced, making Azerbaijan the first Muslim-majority country to enfranchise women.³

12/07/1918 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, the parliament of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic held its first session in Baku, marking the transition to an electoral regime. The Parliament consisted of 120 deputies representing multiple ethnic and religious communities: 80 Muslims, 21 Armenians, 10 Russians, 1 German, and 1 Jew. Its composition rested on an electoral foundation in the sense of the Va-PoReg codebook: 44 of its Muslim members were the representatives originally elected in the All-Russian Constituent Assembly elections of 11/26/1917–11/28/1917, which were conducted on the basis of universal, free, and proportional suffrage. Although these elections had been organized by the Russian Provisional Government rather than by an Azerbaijani institution, they constituted a genuine popular electoral mandate that formed the core legitimating basis of the Parliament. The remaining 36 Muslim deputies and the representatives of national minorities were selected through a combination of partial elections and appointment by authorized national organizations, municipal bodies, and representative associations. Crucially, from the moment of its opening, the Parliament established a direct relationship of executive accountability: the government of Prime Minister Fatali Khan Khoyski immediately submitted its resignation to the Parliament, which accepted it and recommissioned Khoyski to form a new government, confirmed by parliamentary vote on 12/26/1918. The executive was thus indirectly grounded in the electoral foundation of the Parliament from the outset. By the end of 1919, the Parliament comprised 11 political party factions and held a total of 145 sessions, with genuine multiparty debate and functioning opposition. The ADR was also among the first countries in the world to grant women equal political rights, including the right to vote. However, the regime falls short of Electoral Democracy for several reasons. The electoral foundation of the Parliament was indirect and partial: no genuinely Azerbaijani parliamentary elections were held during the entire existence of the ADR, as the planned elections to a Constituent Assembly were never conducted due to ongoing warfare and the state of emergency. A significant portion of deputies were appointed rather than elected. Territorial conflicts with Armenia, the precarious security situation, and repeated states of emergency substantially limited civil liberties and constrained the effective exercise of executive accountability. The regime is therefore classified as an Electoral Hybrid Regime for this phase, reflecting the presence of a functioning multiparty parliament with an indirectly elected executive on the one hand, and the significant deficits in civil liberties and executive constraints on the other. The last session of the Parliament was held on 04/27/1920, on the eve of the Soviet invasion.

04/28/1920 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Communist Ideocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: This date marked the end of the ADR through Soviet invasion. Azerbaijan was declared the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), formally independent but constituting a semi-sovereign external satellite state under de facto control of Soviet Russia (RSFSR). The coding as Communist Ideocracy reflects the formal statehood of the ASSR as a nominally sovereign Soviet republic. Although the Soviet invasion effectively eliminated genuine Azerbaijani political autonomy, the ASSR retained formal institutional structures of statehood and was not directly incorporated into the RSFSR. This situation is analogous to other semi-sovereign regimes in the Va-PoReg dataset, such as Vichy France, which are coded according to their regime type rather than as Part of Other Country, precisely because formal statehood, however hollow, was maintained. A coding as Part of Other Country [of Russia] would only be appropriate if formal statehood had been abolished entirely. For consistency, this coding decision applies uniformly to comparable cases of Soviet-imposed semi-sovereign republics, such as Armenia (1920–1922) and Georgia (1921–1922). On 03/12/1922, the ASSR was incorporated into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR), together with Armenia and Georgia, a federative union of the three South Caucasian Soviet republics formally retaining their institutional identities while being administered from Moscow through Communist Party structures.

12/30/1922 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, Azerbaijan, as part of the TSFSR, became part of the USSR. However, the communist regime continued to rule. Soviet authorities imposed central socialist policies aimed at the systemic integration of Azerbaijan into Soviet political structures. These policies were further accompanied by ideological education, purges of nationalist elements, and the establishment of a communist single-party system. Repressions reflected major Soviet patterns, with heightened severity during the Stalinist era. From 03/1937 to 11/1938, the Great Purge included mass arrests, executions, deportations of intellectuals, religious leaders, and suspected political opponents. Resistance in Azerbaijan remained primarily underground, with only few scattered armed uprisings in rural areas. Specific economic attention was paid to oil extraction, with Azerbaijan being responsible for over 60% of the Soviet Union's oil production. The urbanization and resource wealth present in Azerbaijan lead to different forms of repression and loyalty-reward structures, compared to Baltic or Central Asian member states.

10/18/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date „under the leadership of the Communist Party and Mütəllibov” independence was regained (Nichol 1995, Lansford 2012c: 90, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 42). Although the communist party ruled during this period, this regime is not classified as a communist ideocracy because of the party's ideological distancing from Marxism-Leninism. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Political liberties are absent according to LIED and can be interpreted as not really present per V-Dem's PCLI. According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held.

03/06/1992 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: After suffering great losses to the Armenians in battle, armed opposition party Azerbaijan Popular Front protesters seized government buildings on 03/06/1992. Elements of the military participated but the leadership refused to evict the mobs. The popular uprising ousted Mütəllibov, leading to control by the National Assembly, which contained about half communist successor deputies and half opposition deputies (Altstadt 1992: 109, Lansford 2012c: 90, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 42). According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions.

06/07/1992 End Democratizing Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date the first competitive presidential election took place, which was won by Abulfaz Elçibey of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP).⁴ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The election was considered as not competitive by LIED. V-Dem's CEI scored ambiguous electoral cleanliness. Whereas, according to V-Dem's EF&FI free and fair election conditions were given. As classified by FH, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free and is categorized as rather not free in our interpretation. Besides, LIED classifies the political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as ambiguous. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

06/04[-15]/1993 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: A militia led by military commander Surat Hüseynov overthrew President Elçibey and brought Heydar Aliyev to power.⁵ On 06/16/1993 „the elected president fled the capital in the face of rebellion by a faction of the military” (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 42). The leader of the military rebellion agreed to allow Aliyev, speaker of parliament to replace the ousted president, while the military leader became prime minister in the new government (Nichol 1995, Lansford 2012c: 92).⁶ As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. Based on our observations, executive and legislative

elections were absent during this period, which contradicts the observations of LIED. Per FH, the country is classified as not free with a score between 11 and 14 and falls under the not free category in our interpretation.

10/03/1993 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date, presidential elections were held. Heydar Aliyev of the New Azerbaijan Party received most votes and was elected president in polls marked by fraud and irregularities. Political power was concentrated in the hands of Aliyev and his extended family, corruption is rampant, and human rights violations are severe.⁷ After Aliyev's death in 2003, a cult of personality formed around him, which has persisted to this day.⁸ On 10/15/2003 upon Heydar Aliyev's demise, power transitioned to his son, Ilham, signaling the initial dynastic transfer of power within the post-Soviet realm.⁹ On 09/26/2018 a constitutional referendum extended presidential terms to seven years and created two vice presidents. It also gave the president the ability to suspend the legislature. Aliyev named his wife, Mehriban Alyeva, as one of the new vice presidents. Aliyev was re-elected president on 04/11/2018, with 86 percent of the vote. The OSCE and other international groups condemned the balloting as unfree and unfair, and several major opposition groups boycotted it (Lansford 2021). Presidential elections were held on 02/07/2024. Incumbent president Ilham Aliyev won his fifth consecutive term with over 92% of the vote, defeating his closest competitor Zahid Oruj, who obtained just 2% of the vote. The election occurred within an authoritarian context characterized by repression of the opposition and independent media in Azerbaijan. The two main opposition parties, Musavat and Popular Front, decided not to field candidates and urged voters to boycott the election due to its undemocratic nature. Additionally, many candidates featured on the ballot had previously expressed admiration for Aliyev, leading to the absence of genuine opposition contenders amidst the crackdown on independent media and journalists. Due to the dissolution of the parliament on 06/27/2024 snap elections were held on 09/01/2024. President Aliyev's ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) secured another majority, winning 68 out of 125 seats.¹⁰ GWF and AF classify the regime as personalist, HWF, LIED and RoW as an electoral autocracy. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED states that elections were not competitive. V-Dem's CEI and EF&FI have scored elections in this period as neither free. In accordance with FH, the country is categorized as not free, with a score between 11 and 14 and is classified as such in our analysis. An exception can be identified between the years 1979 and 1999, during which the country is classified as not free with a score between 9 and 10 and falls into the rather not free category in our interpretation. LIED categorizes political liberties as absent since its independence. According to V-Dem's PCLI, political liberties have been not really present, except for the years 1992 and 1993, for which the presence of political freedoms was classified as ambiguous. In 1994, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. Since 1995, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. Although Azerbaijan exhibits characteristics of a personalist regime during this period, the existence of elections to the executive and legislative branches of government places it in the category of electoral autocracies with the subtype personalist.

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Altstadt 1992, Grotz/Motika 2001, Hale 2005, Lansford 2012c)

Notes

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan/Russian-suzerainty>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcaucasian_Democratic_Federative_Republic

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Azerbaijan; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Independence_of_Azerbaijan

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Azerbaijani_presidential_election

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Azerbaijani_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

⁶ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/AZE>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilham_Aliyev

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heydar_Aliyev

⁹ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/AZE>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Azerbaijani_parliamentary_election

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