



Azerbaijan

Last update:	9 November 2010
Author:	
Population:	8,303,512 (July 2010 est.)
Prime minister:	Artur Rasizade (Since November 2003)
President:	Ilham Aliyev (Since October 2003)
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party – Yeni (New) Azerbaijan party
Last election:	Parliamentary 7 November 2010
Next election:	Presidential October 2013
Sister parties:	None



On 15 October 2008 presidential elections took place in Azerbaijan, featuring another landslide victory for the incumbent president Ilham Aliyev. The election was judged by many international observers as an improvement compared to the last one and to other countries in the region, as the election day was seen as relatively peaceful. However, many also regretted the lack of political competition and of opportunities thereof during the period preceding the election. Issues concerning human rights, freedom of press and freedom of assembly are still very much alive in the country and the incumbent president's refusal to address them properly is not doing any good.

INTRODUCTION

After the long-lasting years of rule by President Heydar Aliyev, ended by his death in 2003, his son took over the scepter in both the ruling party (YAP) and the country. Ilham Aliyev started his term in October 2003 by cracking down the opposition that was protesting his undemocratic election. The latest presidential elections in 2008 seem to have gone by more peacefully. The voting day itself was judged as largely up to international standards by international monitors. However, the period leading up to the elections did not give the opposition enough opportunity for campaigning and getting their message out. The opposition itself was also very divided over the issue of whether or not to boycott the elections, making it appear weak. The country is also still burdened by the deadlocked conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and widespread corruption. The latest parliamentary elections on 5 November 2005 were marred by fraud and did not bring any democratic changes.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

The President

Azerbaijan has a strong presidential system with a weak separation of powers. The Azerbaijani Constitution empowers the President to appoint and dismiss the government. Following the country's independence in 1993 elected President Heydar Aliyev, a former Soviet communist leader ruled the country with his New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) with strict hand, leaving little room for freedom and democracy. YAP has maintained its absolute majority after the marred 2000/2001 and 2005 elections. Just two weeks before the presidential election of October 2003, he stepped down due to health reasons and several months later past away. His son, Ilham Aliyev, won the election



with a landslide victory. Although it was expected Illham Aliyev 's policy would change for the better compared to his father way of governing, his policy remained very much alike and no major reshuffles within the government took place. However, Aliyev’s ability to control his government has reached less far than that of his predecessor. Government officials are accusing each other of corruption and even in the YAP some divisions became apparent. The divisions run along traditional regional dividing lines or clans, but also within these clans fragmentation is occurring as a result of different financial interests.

Government

The coalition headed by the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), a party aligned with President Aliyev, retained a majority of seats in the legislature in the 2005 elections. However, the main power lies with the President, who forms the Cabinet of Ministers. The highest executive body is the Cabinet of Ministers appointed by the President. The PM, appointed by the President, is head of government. In 1997, President Aliyev issued a decree creating a National Security Council, which “provides the conditions for the realisation of the Presidential authorities on the protection of people rights and freedoms, independence and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity”.

Parliamentary elections 2005

On 6 November 2005 parliamentary elections took place in Azerbaijan. They were the first since President Ilham Aliyev replaced his father. These elections were seen as an important test for democracy. Two main opposition blocks contested in the poll: Azadliq (Freedom) –a pro-Western bloc– the “New Politics” bloc, which included the Azerbaijan Social Democratic Party. Of the total of 125 seats to be divided, the ruling YAP won 56 seats compared to the opposition with just about 10 seats. The rest of the votes went to independent candidates and small satellite parties, largely supporting the ruling regime.

The opposition claimed the poll was largely fraudulent and called for a re-election. Consequently, the CEC annulled results in ten constituencies and early elections were held in May 2006. YAP won 5 seats of the 10 remaining seats. The rest went to representatives of the loyal opposition, the Adalat (Justice) Party and the Civil Solidarity Party. None of the newly elected MPs were women. The PACE election observation mission noted "improvements in voting process".

Presidential elections 2008

On 15 October 2008, Presidential elections were held in Azerbaijan. Mr Aliyev was re-elected as President. His main contestant was Iqbal Agazade , from the Umid party.

Elections results

Candidate	Party	Votes %
Ilham Aliyev	Yeni (New) Azerbaijan party	88.73
Iqbal Agazade	Umid (Hope) Party	2.86
Fazil Gazanfaroglu	Great Creation Party	2.47
Qudrat Gasanguliyev	Unified Popular Front Party	2.28
Gulamgusein Alibeili	independent candidate	2.23
Fuad Aliyev	Liberal Democratic Party	0.78
Khafiz Gadzhiev	Muasir (Contemporary) Musavat Party	0.65

Despite the election day was judged peaceful and marked considerable progress compared to previous years, several opposition parties boycotted the poll due to unfair conditions. After the poll the OSCE found that because of the boycott of the opposition “the poll lacked genuine competition and thus did not meet all principles of a pluralistic democratic vote”. The OSCE also noted shortcomings in the vote count.



Run up to the elections

In the run up to the poll the opposition was facing many difficulties in campaigning. There was a great lack of press freedom and human rights were still often violated with journalists being imprisoned. Combined with the parties' doubts concerning their participation in the presidential elections, their position was quite weak. Some, like the Great Creation Party, believed the opposition chances would be real if the elections would be held in a democratic fashion. Others, like the Social-Democratic Party (SDP) believed that in the current working conditions no opposition candidate had any chance of winning the poll. SDP chairman Araz Alizade stated: "There is not one person among the opposition, whom people trust. The opposition has no finances and its leaders have no team. Therefore, Aliyev is a favourite in the presidential race". Several parties, including SDP and the Popular Front of Azerbaijan Party, decided to boycott the elections.

In June Electoral Code Amendments were passed by the Parliament, diminishing the campaigning period by 45 days (120 to 75) – a move strongly criticised by the opposition as well as the OSCE.

Aftermath In the aftermath of the elections, chief of the public policy department of the presidential administration Ali Hasanov stated that the authorities will cooperate with those opposition parties, that took part in the presidential elections held on 15 October. Furthermore, Artur Rasizade was appointed as the new PM. Rasizade was a former communist activist and eventually occupied several high-profile government positions.

Constitutional referendum 2009

The presidential term that was prior set to five years and allowed to be re-elected solely once, was reviewed by means of a referendum on 18 March 2009. Citizens were consulted on whether President Aliyev should be granted the right to run for an unlimited term starting 2013. Despite opposition calls to boycott the poll, there was a turnout of 71 per cent.

92.2 per cent voted for scrapping the limit. Prior to the referendum, polls already showed that many citizens would vote "yes" as they see their President as the man that played a crucial role between 2003–2007 – a period in which the country's GDP expanded by an average of more than 20 per cent per year, making it one of the fastest growing economies worldwide. Supporters said they are committed to democracy, but that abolishing term limits "would help protect the country from political and economic instability". The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe stated, nevertheless, that constitutional amendments violate democratic commitments made by Baku in 2002. According to the president of the Congress, by the implementation of the amendments Baku's delegation jeopardises its CoE membership.

Parliamentary elections 2010

On 7 November Parliamentary elections were held in Azerbaijan. Aliyev's ruling party secured 73 seats in the 125-seat parliament, this includes two seats that were won by party members who ran independently. This means that Aliyev has secured his control over the country's parliament. Also three of Aliyev's relatives, among which his wife Mehriban Aliyeva, won seats in the parliament. Eighty-one members of parliament retained their seats. According to the CEC the voter turnout was 50.15 per cent.

The opposition Azerbaijani Popular Front/Musavat, did not win one single seat in the Assembly. The opposition bloc accused Aliyev and his adherents of committing widespread fraud aimed at consolidating his dominance over political life in Azerbaijan.

While the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) called the elections free and fair, Western observers noted that some "serious violations" had taken place. According to the OSCE "the conduct of these elections overall was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the democratic development of the country". Head of the short-term OSCE observer mission, Wolfgang Grossruck, said that "despite all the efforts made, the country needs to do much more to make progress in developing a truly pluralist democracy". Other Western observers, such as the Council of Europe and the European Parliament said limitations of media freedom and freedom of assembly, and a deficient



candidate-registration process "further weakened the opposition and made vibrant political discourse almost impossible." Also voter intimidation had taken place.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Human rights

After the presidential election in 2003, human rights organisations and Western governments expressed their concern about what is described as the lowest point in ten years. The protesters that were arrested in the aftermath of the poll reported they had been tortured in custody. In March 2004 President Aliyev released nearly 130 prisoners, including a former PM.

Other reported human rights violations include the lack of freedom of speech and the use of violence against journalists, restrictions regarding freedom of association by refusing to register some political parties and harassing domestic human rights activists and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and discrimination of certain ethnic minorities and women. In 2007, human rights groups and the West have harshly criticised Azerbaijan in 2007 for the harassment and imprisonment of opposition journalists.

Azerbaijan became a member of Europe's leading human rights body –the Council of Europe– after the flawed elections in 2000/2001, which was a controversial step in the first place.

Gender and minority representation

There are no legal arrangements for women's participation in politics. The traditional norms in society do restrict women's role in politics. In the latest presidential elections one female candidate was registered, who came on the third place with 3.6% of the votes. The percentage of woman members in political parties ranges from 45% in the ruling YAP party, to 24% in AMIP and 15% in Musavat. The practice known as family voting, which means that men cast the votes of the female members of their families, still exists but is declining. In NGOs, however, women play a much more prominent role.

Minority political participation focuses on two problematic issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict . The first concerns the voting of the population living in the separatist region, which consist mainly of Armenians. The enclave is practically under control of the Armenian government (see below). In this area elections cannot be held.

The second problem as a result of the conflict is the enormous burden of some 800,000 displaced persons (IDP's) living under dreadful circumstances. About 250,000 IDP's are entitled to vote, however the failure of the Central Election Commission to issue specific instructions reduced the transparency of the process of registration and voting in IDP constituencies.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Nagorno-Karabakh is the mountainous territory in the west of Azerbaijan inhabited by about 150,000 people. It has been part of Armenia until 1923, when Stalin decided to merge it into the Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan granting the area the status of autonomous region.

In 1988, when the Soviet Union was still intact, the mainly Armenian population used the room of the perestroika to link the territory to Armenia. In the following years tensions between Azeri's and Armenians rose, resulting in refugee movements, mass demonstrations and pogroms.



In 1991, when Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent also Nagorno Karabakh proclaimed independence. As a result, the conflict turned into a major international dispute. An armed war from 1992 to 1994 left more than 30,000 dead and over 1 million displaced. Since then, no solution has been found. The situation is referred to be a “frozen conflict”.

International mediation efforts, which call for the enclave and Azerbaijan to form a common state, remained inconclusive. The mediations are operated by the OSCE, which founded for this purpose the so-called Minsk Group.

In the beginning of 2004 the Minsk Group decided to boost the peace process by organising several top-level meetings for Armenian and Azerbaijani government officials. However, it seems that the frustration about the failure to reach an agreement grows. Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities have stressed that while they remain open to negotiations, their positions are unchanged. This means that Yerevan will not accept any settlement that leaves the region a constituent part of Azerbaijan, while Baku will not consent to a deal in which Karabakh operates beyond the control of Azerbaijani authorities.

Also the latest important attempt to settle the conflict at two days talks in Rambouillet on 10 and 11 February 2006 did not bring the parties closer to each other. Observers noted that 2006 would be a good year to solve the Karabakh issue, as there are no elections in either Azerbaijan or Armenia.

Since the Southern Caucasus countries are also included in the New Neighbourhood policy of the European Union, many see a role for the EU in the peace process. Particularly since the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, said that the EU’s “ring of friends” cannot tolerate conflicts and strongly hinted at a greater involvement of the EU.

The unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is perceived to be the largest threat to peace and security in the South Caucasus and the wider region. While Turkey showed its solidarity with Azerbaijan by closing the Armenian border, Russia still sees the whole region as its near abroad and is operating military bases in Armenia.

Internally displaced persons (IDP’s)

As a result of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh large numbers of internally displaced persons are living under dreadful circumstances. An estimated 570,000 displaced persons pose an enormous social problem to the government.

Most of the IDP’s live in shelters, while about 135,000 refugees live in tented camps or improvised huts, which offer insufficient protection from the climate in Azerbaijan. Others live in small rooms with friends or family. Lack of basic needs such as clean water, food and sanitation cause diseases and relatively high infant mortality among IDP’s. Children of IDP’s are less likely to attend school than non-IDP’s because parents cannot afford the expenses. Furthermore, unemployment is high (only 20 percent has a job) and 63 percent of the displaced population live below the poverty line, compared to 49 percent for the total population.

The government allocates more oil revenues to help these vulnerable people than the years before. The National Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was adopted in 2003, includes extended plans to improve the situation of IDP’s, with the help of funds from IMF, the Asian Development Bank and the Worldbank.

However, support from the international community in general, and the UNHCR in specific, has declined. All in all, the needs on the ground seem to bigger than the resources of the government. Moreover, their social and legal status continues to deprive the IDP’s from a normal life.

The lack of progress in the settling the conflict, occasional violence, and the settlement of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, indicate that large-scale return is highly unlikely.



Religion and the state

Azerbaijan's state system is strongly secular, while the majority of the population is Islamic. Although religion has not been a source for tensions, more lately the government accuses radical Islam of causing social unrest, while at the same time neglecting the legitimate concerns of Islamic population who were demanding gas, electricity and water supplies. Russia can easily aggravate the situation by cutting the power supplies to northern Azerbaijan.

Soviet style approaches towards religion became apparent in June 2004 as the police several times removed by force Muslim prayers from an old mosque because officials want to make a carpet museum in this building.

In 2002 the government founded a new institute that conducts research into the finances of religious organisations. Among the investigated is the South Caucasus Board of Muslims – an institute that is widely respected for positive contributions to stability and dialogue in the country. Since the research the Board has been accused of corruption and is undermined.

The pressure plays into the hands of radical movements, which saw their influence grow. While Shiite Islam is the main religion, the Azeri's are known for their secular way of life – especially when compared to neighbouring Iran. Radical Shiites operate mainly through the banned Islamic Party of Azerbaijan.

In the north the power of small pockets of Sunni fundamentalists are informally supporting the separatists in the nearby conflict areas of Dagestan, Chechnya and the Pankisi Gorge. The population in these areas is vulnerable for extremism because of the isolation, low living standards, and growing frustration with government inefficiency.

Caspian oil and gas politics

Azerbaijan is ranked among the twenty most oil-rich countries in the world. Considerable oil and gas reserves are located in the Caspian Sea and this has been a major factor in triggering international engagement in the region.

Main concerns are the transit routes for gas and oil, and the legal status of the Caspian Sea for exploration and drilling rights. The transit routes are all about political influence. Russia tries to concentrate the routes on its territory in order to control the energy flows, while the Caucasian republics as well as the USA have sought alternative routes to reduce Moscow's influence in the region.

The most famous project is the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which runs from Azerbaijan via Georgia to the Turkish port Ceyhan. The estimated cost of the USA-backed project is 2.95 billion dollar, which is paid by the involved oil companies (mainly BP), the involved countries and additional support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank.

The pipeline, opened in May 2005, is the first to open up the resources of the Caspian Sea for the outside world at the same time bypassing Russian territory. Main concerns according to human rights organisations are the lack of compensation for people who lost land, health and safety risks for the workers, human rights violations against opponents of the project, and the threat to access to water for local people. Environmental organisations also have been very critical, as the pipeline runs through the Borjomi National Park in Georgia and causes pollution. The second major concern has been the determination of the judicial status of the Caspian Sea. The bordering countries sought to reach an agreement that would maximise the access to the reserves, which means there are different approaches to the division in territorial zones. Due to the absence of a complete agreement, the exploitation of oil is arranged by bilateral agreements between the concerning countries. By late 2003 many of the legal disputes had been settled.

The energy sector is the most important economic sector in Azerbaijan: 40 percent of budget revenue and 90 percent of exports came from oil in 2003. The energy sector accounts for more than 40 percent of the GDP and more than 60 percent of investment. However, the money is mostly invested in uncompetitive sectors rather than invested in reforms.



Pyramid society, clans and corruption

The political and economic system in Azerbaijan is largely based on a pyramidal web of patronage. Clans, mainly based on regional origin as well as the ruling elite, keep the system intact to secure their financial and power interests.

Two clans, the Nakhichevanis and Yerazi, have dominated politics for decades. As a result, other clans were excluded from power. Heydar Aliyev had its origin in both clans, which gave him a strong powerbase and an opportunity to build a certain unity between the two clans.

The Aliyev family stands on the top of the pyramid and makes sure that key-positions in all spheres of society are taken by closely related and like-minded. The father of the current president started well before his resignation as president to replace older people in his surroundings with younger, in order to move his son to the top and secure family interests. This structure has developed into extensive bureaucracy and corruption. Corruption in all spheres of society poses the largest threat to the functioning of the state.

Most ministers have bought their jobs and many are directly related to the president. Moreover, membership of the president's party, YAP, is a precondition for state employment. Furthermore, persons closely related or loyal to the president can be found in key-positions in the judiciary, banks, academic institutes, business sector, state oil companies, diplomatic scene, media as well as security services.

It goes without speaking that the top of the pyramid also represents the wealthiest part of society, highly involved in the oil and gas business. However, as a consequence of the corruption it is often difficult to distinguish private wealth from government property.

Analysts consider opening up of the economic and political scene to new faces as vital for further development of Azerbaijan and combating corruption. In 2004, Illham Aliyev has carefully started with appointing new young government officials to implement reforms. It won't be an easy job for him to open up the system, since he has to balance between interests of domestic oligarchs, of western criticsers and of his clan / family interest.

However, time is pressing even more since many high educated youngsters leave the country searching for a better future elsewhere.

International relations – general

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, most nations moved quickly to recognise Azerbaijan's independence, and several established full diplomatic relations within the first year. The first was Turkey in January 1992. To broaden its relations with nations both East and West, Azerbaijan joined a number of international and regional organisations, including the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and NATO's Partnership for Peace. It has observer status in the WTO.

Relations with neighbouring countries

Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbours are mixed. Azerbaijan is a member of GUUAM (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) and has besides close ties with Turkey. The relationship with Iran is more complex. A great deal of trade occurs between the two nations, but a number of recurring disputes – over the division of Caspian oil reserves, the status of the ethnic Azeri population in Iran, and Azerbaijan's friendship with Israel – have soured relations.

Azerbaijan's distrust of Russia stems from the transfer of large quantities of Russian-made arms to Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Kremlin has a strong political standing in Azerbaijan, notably in settling the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Russia has also repeatedly sought to dissuade Azerbaijan from participating in a major US-supported Caspian Sea petroleum pipeline project. 2007 saw a low-point in Russia-Azerbaijan relations, when



Baku stopped receiving Russian gas and halted transport of its oil through Russia. Since 2009, however, a boost in bilateral relations has occurred. In June, Gazprom signed a deal with Azerbaijan's State Oil Company to import natural gas from Azerbaijan and then pipe it to Europe. Gazprom will import 500 million cubic metres of Azeri gas already from 2010. Although currently still low purchases, import levels are expected to rise. The signing ceremony was attended by both Azerbaijan's President and the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who then visited the country.

United States

The United States opened an in Baku in March 1992. It has been actively engaged in international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as a co-chair of the Minsk Group. The US and Azerbaijan have signed a bilateral trade agreement, which entered into force in April 1995 and confers to Azerbaijan the status of most favoured nation. The US also have a bilateral investment treaty with Azerbaijan.

The Freedom Support Act of 1992, has been the cornerstone of US efforts to help Azerbaijan during its transition. Under the act, the US was providing approximately million in humanitarian, democracy, and reform assistance to Azerbaijan in 2006. US humanitarian programs in Azerbaijan focus on community development, health and economic opportunities, and support services.

European Union

EU relations with Azerbaijan are governed by EU's Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. Following the enlargement of the EU the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was established and Azerbaijan was included in 2004. On the basis of bilateral priorities, also a National Indicative Programme (NIP) has been adopted in agreement with the Azerbaijani authorities. The NIP covers the period from 2007-2010. For this period an indicative total sum of €92 million has been allocated; in addition to the ENPI national programme, Azerbaijan will also benefit from the ENPI regional and interregional programmes, plus a number of thematic programmes such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights – EIDHR.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (SDPA)

The founding conference of the Social Democratic Party was held in December 1989 with most of the original members coming from the Popular Front. One of the co-chairmen at that time, Zardusht Alizadeh, is also one of the founders of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan. The party was the first non-communist party and opposition party to be officially registered (1990). When Ayaz Mutalibov was the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the party had one Member of Parliament, which was Araz Alizadeh, the present co-chairman of the party.

In 2000 internal problems emerged which lead to a split in the party. One part supported the leadership of Araz Alizadeh, while his brother, Zardusht Alizadeh, led the other part together with the President of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly and winner of the Olof Palme Peace Prize, Arzu Abdullayeva. The Social Democratic Youth Organisation supported the latter branch. The problems rose when Araz Alizadeh, who lived in exile in Moscow came back to Azerbaijan. The brothers, who are not on speaking terms, called themselves co-chairman, while Arzu Abdullayeva was the deputy chairman.

The SDPA did not take part in the 2000/1 elections since it was obvious they were going to be unfair. For the 2005 parliamentary elections the SDPA joined the "New Politics" bloc (Yes), which also includes the Movement for National Unity and the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan, the Civil Forum for the Sake of Azerbaijan. The party did not gain any seats in the parliament.

At a party congress on 27 August 2003 former President Ayaz Mutalibov was elected co-chairman. Mutalibov brought with him a part of the Civic Unity Party (VHP), which he has been chairing. He is living in exile since 1992 and was warned by the authorities that if he would return he would risk to be arrested. Zardusht Alizadeh did not participate in this congress and since then he is neither a co-chairman of SDPA nor member.



The newspaper “Istiglal” (Independence) is linked to the party. Zardusht Alizade was also the head editor of this newspaper – until the splitting of the party. Now he is known mostly as a political scientist. His appearance in the media is often linked to his political expertise and when giving comments he is often described as being a liberal political analyst, without reference to his social democratic background.

Like most Azeri’s, the Alizadeh brothers consider Nagorno–Karabakh to be part of Azerbaijan. While former members of the party Zardusht Alizadeh, Arzu Abdullayeva and the Social Democratic Youth Organisation are for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, including a high status for Armenians living in Nagorno–Karabakh, together with the Azeri community, the current leaders of the party are in favour of a military solution. In an interview in 2000 Araz Alizadeh said: “As for the problem of Karabakh, we have an Armenian aggression and we must secure ourselves against this. But we shouldn’t make concessions in this matter. Some of our politicians say that if we start a war against Armenia, we could upset the latter. We have to defend our lands and let Armenia be upset.”

The party has a consultative status in the Socialist International.

Co-chairmen: Araz Alizadeh and Ayaz Mutalibov

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Pro-government:

New Azerbaijan Party (YAP)

The YAP is the ruling party of Azerbaijan. It was formed by Heydar Aliyev in 1993 to support his political career. Many high functions in the party are given to members of the Aliyev family. Since the death of Heydar Aliyev, his son Illham Aliyev took over the presidency of the country and the leadership of the party – of which he was first deputy chairman. The party is especially strong in the region of Nakhichevan and is dominated by people from this district. Former communist officials are also strong within the party. The YAP first institutionalised its power during the 1995 parliamentary elections, when it won an absolute majority of seats and effectively transformed the legislation into a body loyal to the president. It remains firmly in power by rigging the elections and oppressing the opposition.

Leader: Illham Aliyev

Website: www.yap.org.az

Azerbaijan Communist Party (AKP)

The Communist Party was formally disbanded in September 1991. Nevertheless, former leaders and members of the communists continued to play a role in the family- and patronage-based political system. Many got a prominent place in the government led by Aliyev, who was himself a communist leader. However, the revived communist party is plagued by splits ever since its formal foundation in 1993. The most well-known is Firudin Hasanov’s faction, which supports the government and is viewed as the only legitimate bloc by the government. Hasanov was a presidential candidate in the 2003 elections – in which he gathered only 0.5 percent of the votes. The other three factions are led by Ramiz Ahmedov (pro-Russian and close to Zyuganov’s party), Sayat Sayadov (self-proclaimed as faithful to Marxist–Leninist–Stalinist ideals), and Musa Tuganov (considers himself a part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

Alliance for the sake of Azerbaijan (ASA)

This is a small pro-governmental party, founded in 1994. The party is represented in the parliament with one seat.



Its leader was registered to run in the presidential election of 2003, but withdraw its candidacy.

Leader: Abutalib Samedov

Social Prosperity Party

The Social Prosperity Party is a small pro-governmental party. It opened a office in Baku especially to campaign for Illham Aliyev in the 2003 presidential election.

Leader: Hussein Kyazymly

Ana Vatan (AV) or Motherland Party

The Motherland Party is a small pro-governmental party, which was established in 1990. Since 1993 it switched its allegiance to Heydar Aliyev and his party. Many members are from the same region in Armenia as Heydar Aliyev. The leader, Fazail Agamali is a former deputy minister for social protection.

Leader: Fazail Agamali

Opposition:

Musavat Party

The Musavat Party dates from Azerbaijan's period of independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918–1920, although the majority of the party's current leaders were members of the Popular Front. In 1992 Musavat was re-established as a political party in Azerbaijan, after operating underground and in Turkey during the Soviet period. Nowadays Musavat is one of the major opposition parties.

Initially, the party's ideology consisted of nationalism, pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism. Later it became more secular in its orientation. Like in the Popular Front, there has been a debate in the party on nationalism and liberalism. A compromise was found when the party programme was adopted and the liberal Isa Qambar became party leader. He has also come to be regarded as the leader of the country's democratic opposition. Musavat took part in the Democratic Congress. Musavat is commonly characterised as the party of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and former officials of the Elchibey government.

During the 1995 elections, Musavat was banned from the proportional ballot on grounds that it failed to gather enough signatures to register. The government repeated this argument to ban Musavat from contesting the proportional ballot in the 2000 parliamentary elections. As a result of international pressure, the Central Election Commission ultimately reversed the ban in response to a request from president Aliyev to do so. International pressure has also been necessary to protect Musavat members who have been subjected to acts of extraordinary pressure and intimidation by the government during the campaign.

In the 2000/1 elections the party received 2 seats in the parliament, but because of the repression the party decided to boycott the sessions. However one member ignored this decision and stayed in the Parliament.

In the aftermath of the 2003 presidential election many Musavat activists were detained and mistreated. The leader of the party was one of the presidential candidates. He was the only one receiving a substantial part of the votes, reaching the second place after Aliyev – however still at large distance (14% against respectively 76%).

For the 2005 parliamentary elections Musavat joined the Azadliq bloc and gained 5 seats in the parliament. In



February 2006 the party decided not to boycott the parliament and the repeated elections in May 2006. The other members of Azadliq did not share this strategy and after a conflict Musavat left the bloc.

Leader: Isa Qambar

Website: www.isaqambar.az

Azerbaijan Popular Front (AHCP)

The Popular Front, was formed to lead the country's movement for national independence. The party's chairman Elchibey was elected president in the country's first democratic elections in 1992. The Popular Front government came to an abrupt end when it was unseated by the bloodless coup in 1993 that brought Aliyev to power.

The party became one of the main opposition parties, though it lost many leaders to other parties. It takes part in the Democratic Congress, which is a loose form of co-operation among opposition parties.

As a result of the absence of Elchibey due to his ban to the exclave of Nakhchivan, a younger group supporting liberal ideas, led by Ali Kerimli, came to dominate. A more conservative group kept on supporting Elchibey. Presently, two separate groups, each with its own list, claim the party's name. The 'reform' version is led by Ali Kerimli and the 'original' version led by Mirmahmud Mirali-Oglu, who followed up Elchibey after his death in 2000.

Attempts to reunite the party have failed and another split further weakened their position. The Central Election Commission, de facto under governmental control, has recognised the wing led by Kerimli. In the previous parliament the party occupied six seats of a total 125 in parliament. The support base can mainly be found in Baku and the isolated Nakhchivan region – which is the home of Elchibey.

For the 2005 elections the progressive wing of the party led by Ali Kerimli joined the Azadliq opposition bloc. In the aftermath the leader aimed at unleashing another “coloured revolution” and called for a boycott of the parliament and repeated 2006 elections. This stance led to a conflict with coalition partner Musavat resulting in the falling apart of the Azadliq bloc.

In November 2006, the party was evicted from its offices in Baku, according to officials due to unpaid rent. The party however called the eviction part of a campaign to silence dissent.

Leaders:

reform wing: Ali Kerimli

original wing: Mirmahmud Fattayev

pro-governmental: Gudrat Hasanguliev

Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP)

Ehtibar Mamedov was formerly a member of the Board of the Popular Front and in the late 1980s he was identified with the radical nationalist wing. In 1991 he founded the AMIP in opposition to the Popular Front government under Elchibey. He supported Aliyev's accession to power, but rejected offers to join his government. The AMIP was treated by the government as a 'loyal opposition' – in contrast to the more radical opposition of the Popular Front and Musavat – until 1998, when Mamedov ran against Aliyev in elections for the presidency that year. Mamedov was the only major candidate who ultimately chose to stay in the race rather than boycott, capturing enough votes, as confirmed by local and international observers, to go to the second round. While official results gave Mamedov 12%, independent calculations gave him approximately 25 to 30%. The AMIP was punished for Mamedov's strong performance after the elections, as the government cracked down on the party's commercial and financial sponsors. Besides, in 1998, Mamedov was convicted to a five-year sentence, because of falsely claiming that a minister was preparing a coup against Aliyev. In 2003 he was released. The party describes itself as centre-right, focusing on liberalisation of the economy and strengthening of democracy.



For the 2005 parliamentary elections AMIP joined the “New Policy” Bloc (YeS).

Leader: Ehtibar Mamedov

Website: www.amip.info

Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP)

The ADP was founded in Nakhichevan in 1992. It gained influence and recognition in 1998 after Rasul Guliyev, former Speaker of Parliament under president Aliyev and presently a political exile, became co-chairman. The party was unable to register to participate in the 1995 parliamentary elections. However, the party benefited from discontent of YAP members who left the party and joined ADP out of loyalty to Guliyev. By 1999 the party had six members, the biggest opposition faction in parliament. As a result of the success of the party and its chairman, the government increased pressure. Since joining the opposition, Guliyev has been accused of corruption and several of his acquaintances have been arrested on charges of terrorism and treason. ADP managed to get registration partly as a result of international pressure. Similarly, the Central Election Commission accepted the ADP's list for the proportional system only after international organisations intervened.

For the 2005 parliamentary elections the party joined the Azadliq bloc. The leader, Guliyev tried to return, but failed as he was arrested in Ukraine. The authorities in Azerbaijan took strict measures to prevent a warm welcome and blocked the roads to the airport.

In the summer of 2006, the party fell victim to infighting. Dozens of DPA supporters defected to the political movement Azerbaijan's Path as a result of fights for influence between the party's deputy chair Sardar Calaloglu and Guliyev's associate Aydin Guliyev.

Leader: Rasul Guliyev

Website: www.guliyev.com

Civic Solidarity Party (VBP)

The Civic Solidarity Party was founded in 1992 and is ever since led by Sabir Rustamkhanli. The leader was Press and Information Minister in the period 1991–1995. The VBP is an opposition party and member of the Democratic Congress since 1998. Main idea is the civil unification of Azerbaijani people. Rustamkhanli rejected a medal of honour awarded by president Aliyev in 1998 and was nominated as presidential candidate in the 2003 elections, in which he received 0.8% of the votes.

Leader: Sabir Rustamkhanli

Yurddash Party (YP)

This is a small opposition party, formed in 1991 by the current chairman Mais Safarli. The party is close to the Popular Front and focuses on protecting the interests of Azerbaijanis, in and outside the country. Yurddash is part of the Democratic Congress. The chairman is editor of The Baku Times, an English newspaper in Baku.

Leader: Mais Safarli