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# DIRTY GAMES BEHIND DEMOCRACY

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This essay was originally submitted to POLS 110: Introduction to Global Politics with Dr. Gent Carrabregu on October 30, 2016. The topic of this essay is why Azerbaijan is identified as a dictatorship instead of a democracy.

Recently, the Panama Papers released an extensive amount of information about the Aliyev family that is currently ruling Azerbaijan. The website for the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists has published various documents regarding the president's and his family's involvement in a sprawling offshore complex and how they have built an empire of hidden wealth (Fitzgibbon et. al, 2016). After this publication, the international media started to pay more attention towards the governance of the country and the activities of the Aliyev Family. Media emphasized the various violations of human rights, the ongoing corruption in the country and Aliyev Family's dominance in political and economic aspects of the country. In what follows, I shall argue that the reasons for Azerbaijan's descent into a dictatorship are a lack of coordination goods, an extensive amount of oil production, and the Aliyev family's monopoly over the country's politics.

Coordination goods are key to the democratic development of a country. They are a means through which the public can use to be more involved in public relations and to address concerns to the government. Some coordination goods include freedom of speech, peaceful protests and access to non-biased media (Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 2005, p. 82). According to De Mesquita and & Downs, providing coordination goods significantly decreases the survival prospects of incumbent regimes (Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 205, p. 84). In my opinion, the poor provision of coordination goods increased the likelihood of dictatorship in Azerbaijan.

One examples of this is that the Azerbaijani government oppresses the freedom of speech in media. A well-known Azerbaijan journalist, Khadija Ismayilova, was sentenced to seven and a half years in jail for embezzlement and tax evasion (BBC Europe, 2015). Ismayilova has previously published articles against the Aliyev Family, including the current president Ilham Aliyev. In one of her recent reports, she talked about the businesses and the offshore bank accounts that the family was linked to in the Panama Papers (BBC Europe, 2015). As a result, Ismayilova has been imprisoned. The Secretary of the Council of Europe, General Thorbjorn Jagland, has expressed worry in regards to the trend against human rights activists and journalists in Azerbaijan and expressly said that the ongoing situation would have a "chilling effect on freedom of expression in the country" (BBC Europe, 2015). Moreover, Amnesty International in its 2015/2016 annual report published several other incidents related to the oppression of the freedom of association, expression and assembly, and regarding the torture and arrests of individuals who express ideas against the government and the Aliyev family (Amnesty International, 2016). The above-mentioned factors could lead us to assume that democracy does not function well in Azerbaijan. According to the Polity IV measure of democracy, suggested by Dahl, Marshall, Gurr and Jaggers, the country's regulation of political participation and the competitiveness of political participation has an important role for a country in order to be considered as a democracy (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013, p. 155-156). The country is democratic if it has a Polity Score higher than +6 and is a dictatorship if the score is lower than -6 (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013, p. 155). According to the latest Polity IV Country report, Azerbaijan has a Polity Score of -7, which clearly classifies the country as a dictatorship (Center for Systemic Peace, 2010).

Oil and Gas production played an enormous role in the development of the Azerbaijani economy. Crude

## DIRTY GAMES BEHIND DEMOCRACY

Petroleum occupies 87% of their annual exports, bringing approximately \$22.4 billion in income to the country (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016). With petroleum taking making up a large portion of exports and oil being a major factor for the national economy, Azerbaijan is actually at an increased risk of turning into a dictatorship. Bates and Rogowski both argue that if the human capital becomes the engine of economic growth in an economy, then states are forced to negotiate with the holders of such assets in a way that democracy is almost unavoidable (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013, p. 197). The non-mobility of the vital economic assets, such as gas and other natural resources, prevent the chances of a country being democratic. This resource curse states that countries with plenty of natural resources tend to experience dictatorship, low levels of economic development, civil war and poor governance (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013, p. 197). All of these conditions already exist in Azerbaijan. Dozens of protests and complaints about social-economic issues have only emphasized the government's lack of governance (Shiriyev, 2016). Additionally, since 2010, the GDP and the oil GDP Growth rates of Azerbaijan have continued to decrease. According to the Asian Development Bank's Country Partnership Strategy report, country's GDP growth has decreased from 35% in 2006 to 5% in 2013 and the Oil GDP growth decreased from 62% in 2006 to 1% in 2013 (Asian Development Bank, 2014, p. 3). As it can be assumed, these numbers reveal a low level of economic development in Azerbaijan, a consequence of a resource curse and a cause of dictatorship.

The Aliyev Family, which has recently been at the center of the Panama Papers scandal, has already been governing Azerbaijan for more than twenty-three years. The family has taken the politics of the country under their control. From the political side, it can be seen that the third president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, has been in the presidential office from 1993 to 2003. Heydar Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party proposed his son, Ilham Aliyev, the current president of Azerbaijan, as a presidential candidate in 2003. The Ilham Aliyev received 75.38% of the popular vote and took the governance with a perfect victory (IFES 2003). In the next two elections that took place in 2008 and 2013, Ilham Aliyev received 87.34% and 84.54% of the popular vote, respectively. There are two reasons behind receiving a high percentage of votes. Corruption is one large factor behind the reelection of Aliyev. The president has a control over various high-level governmental institutions, including the electoral authorities. In 2013, a day before the elections, the Azerbaijani election authorities had accidentally released the voting results, with Ilham Aliyev winning 72.76% of the popular vote (Fischer 2003). This incident suggests that the election committee is a puppet institution in the country, dictated by the Aliyev regime. The fact that

Azerbaijan does not have a second big party also suggests something about the country's dictatorial regime. While under a system of political oppression and when faced with possible violence from police, politicians of smaller parties are unable to organize massive campaigns to reach out to the population (Amnesty International, 2013). The Democracy-Dictatorship measure provided by Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland states that a country is classified as a democracy if it fulfills four requirements (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013, p. 152). One of the requirements is that an alteration in power under identical electoral rules should take place (152). In the case of the Azerbaijani election system, it is obvious that this requirement is not met, as Ilham Aliyev has been a president for more than three terms. Another measurement, the "Freedom House," measures democracy by a series of fifteen questions, under four primary categories: freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights. In the result each country gets a point between one (most free) and seven (least free). Taking into account the incidents recorded by the Amnesty International Organization and analyzing the official 2016 Freedom House statistics, Azerbaijan has a 6.5 freedom rate, which suggests that the country is not free and is, rather, an autocracy. (Freedom House, 2016).

Under the title of democracy, Azerbaijan experiences a dictatorial regime by the Aliyev Family. The factors such as the ignorance of human rights, petroleum-based economy, and one-family ruled government leads the country to corruption, weakens its economy and builds the future of Azerbaijan on a dictatorship.

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## DIRTY GAMES BEHIND DEMOCRACY

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