



Azerbaijan

Last update:	12 October 2016
Population:	9,651,349 million (World Bank 2015 est.)
Prime minister:	Artur Rasizade
President:	Ilham Aliyev
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party - Yeni (New) Azerbaijan party
Last election:	1 November 2015 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	2018 (presidential elections)
Sister parties:	None

After years of rule, President Heyder Aliyev died in 2003. His son, Ilham Aliyev, took over the ruling party and his father's post as president of Azerbaijan. Ilham Aliyev started his first term in October 2003 with cracking down the opposition that was protesting his undemocratic election. On 9 October 2013, after months of intimidation and restrictions on the opposition, Aliyev was elected for a third term. The opposition regretted the lack of political competition, the insufficient access the media and the pressure by the government. The opposition did not have enough opportunity to campaign and oppose the president. The country is also burdened by widespread corruption and a deadlock conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The constitutional referendum of 26 September 2016 extended the presidential mandate from five to seven years, two vice-presidential posts were created and the president was granted the right to schedule early presidential elections and dissolve the parliament. In total 29 constitutional amendments that strengthen the power of the president and state officials were approved.

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 2005 elections. After his resignation, his son Ilham Aliyev became president in October 2003. Although it was expected Ilham Aliyev's policy would change for the better compared to his father's way of governing, it remained very much the same and no major reshuffles within the government took place. In 2009, following his re-election as president in 2008, Aliyev passed a referendum which removed the presidential consecutive term limit, thereby allowing him to run for president as many times as he wishes. He was re-elected for a third term in 2013. In 2016, as a result of the referendum, the presidential mandate was extended from five to seven years. The president was also granted the right to schedule early presidential elections and dissolve the parliament if twice in one year it adopts no-confidence measures against the government or rejects presidential nominees to the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, or the governing board of Azerbaijani Central Bank.

Government

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. Heydar Aliyev had his origin in both clans, which gave him a strong powerbase. 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 people. 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.

Political issues

Human rights organisations and Western governments expressed their concerns about violations in Azerbaijan further during the presidential elections in 2013. International observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

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criticised the presidential election for failing to meet international standards. It assessed counting in 58 percent of the polling stations observed as bad or very bad. It also said arrests and intimidation of opposition political activists, a restrictive media environment, and violations of the freedoms of assembly and association marred the pre-election campaign.

There are limitations to freedom of expression and assembly and the rights to liberty and fair trial. The authorities have arrested dozens of political activists on bogus charges, imprisoned critical journalists, broke up several peaceful public demonstrations, and adopted legislation that further restricted fundamental freedoms. Torture and ill-treatment continue with impunity. The authorities did not effectively investigate credible allegations of beatings, threats, and other abuses in custody made by several arrested political activists. There are no legal arrangements for women's participation in politics. The traditional norms in society restrict women's role in politics. NGO leaders continue to face threats and harassment from the authorities, including raids by security forces, the confiscation of equipment and imposition of travel bans. Online and social media activities critical of the authorities continue to be prosecuted on fabricated charges, typically drugs-related. Independent journalists continue to face threats, violence and harassment. Azerbaijan was ranked 162 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2015 World Press Freedom Index, which shows the media situation is critical and continues to get worse.

The government continued its urban renewal campaign in the capital Baku, forcibly evicting hundreds of families without adequate compensation. Some homeowners continued to face forced eviction in the lead-up to May 2013 opening of central Baku's Winter Garden, a complex with parks and shops. Hundreds more have been forcibly evicted in previous years to make way for parks, roads, a shopping center, and luxury residential buildings. Most evictees have not received fair compensation based on market values of their properties.

Human Rights violations were also reported from two of the biggest events that took place in Azerbaijan's capital Baku. In 2012 Azerbaijan hosted the Eurovision Song Contest. Many journalists covering Eurovision reported extensively on the human rights situation in the country, including through interviews with many of those now detained, imprisoned or in hiding. Furthermore, before the 2015 European Games in Baku, organizations and media outlets such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Platform London and The Guardian staff were all prevented from entering Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

This region 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. Nowadays it is an Armenian populated enclave in Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh has been de facto independent from Azerbaijan since the war in the early 90s that ended with a truce signed in 1994, but is not recognised by any country as an independent state. Since then, no peace agreement has been found and the situation is referred to be a "frozen conflict". As a result of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, an estimated 570,000 displaced persons pose an enormous social problem. 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 of the Azeri fugitives is highly unlikely. Azeri President Ilham Aliyev continues to assert Azerbaijan's claim with increasing forcefulness as the Nagorno-Karabakh takes almost one-fifth of Azerbaijan's official territory.

Elections

Electoral System

On the national level Azerbaijan elects a head of state – the president – and a legislature. The head of state and head of government are separate from the country's law-making body. The president is the head of the state and head of executive branch. The president is elected for a five-year term by the people. The position was limited to two terms, but since 2008, the constitution of Azerbaijan was amended, abolishing any term limit for the office of president. The president appoints all cabinet-level government administrators (ministers, heads of other central executive bodies). The people elect the president; the prime minister is appointed by the president and confirmed by the National Assembly of Azerbaijan.

The National Assembly (Milli Məclis) has 125 deputies. Before 2005, 100 members were elected for a five-year term in single-seat constituencies and 25 members by proportional representation. Since 2005, all 125 members are elected in single-seat constituencies. Azerbaijan is a one party dominant state. Opposition parties beside the New Azerbaijan Party are allowed, but are widely considered to have no real chance of gaining power.

Constitutional referendum of 2009

The presidential term that was prior set to five years and allowed the president to be re-elected solely once, was reviewed by

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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 percent.

92.2 percent 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 and 2007 – a period in which the country's GDP expanded by an average of more than 20 percent 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

On 1 November 2015 parliamentary elections were held in Azerbaijan. Almost all opposition parties withdrew from the elections before they even started because of restrictive measures, including increased requirements that have restricted free air time on TV that only the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) meets. Election day proceeded calmly and the official voter turnout was 55 percent.

The full results were announced one day after the elections. Aliyev’s New Azerbaijan party (YAP) held its 71 seats in the 125 seat parliament. Independent candidates with no party affiliation gained 42 seats, although they are expected to vote along with the YAP, giving Aliyev effective control over the parliament. The 12 remaining seats were split over 11 smaller parties. In total 27 new MPs were elected into parliament. 11 of the current MPs are so-called “MPs for life” because they have occupied their seats since Azerbaijan’s independence in 1991.

Ahead of the elections the OSCE announced it would for the first time not observe the elections, because the regime made it “impossible for the mission to carry out effective and credible election observation”. The European Parliament also decided not to send any observers. The elections were observed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), that said that “despite shortcomings, the significant increase in voter turnout and the transparency of voting and counting procedures demonstrate another step forward” for the country. PACE had a limited team observe the election and many have criticized its positive assessment. After the publication of the PACE mission, three delegates with PACE said in a statement that “the situation in the country with respect to political freedoms, freedom of expression and media, and freedom of assembly and association does not provide conditions for holding free and democratic elections.”

Election results

Party	Number of seats
New Azerbaijan Party	71
United Azerbaijan Popular Front	2
Azerbaijan Democratic Reforms Party	1
Great Liberation Party	1
National Revival Movement	1
Azerbaijan Social Democrat Party	1
Motherland Party	1
Unity Party	1
Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party	1
Azerbaijan Social Welfare Party	1
Civil Union Party	1
Civil Solidarity Party	1
Independent MPs	42

Presidential Elections

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On 9 October 2013, presidential elections were held in Azerbaijan, in which Aliyev was re-elected as President. His main contestant was Jamil Hasanli, who represented nearly all of the country's opposition parties, including Musavat and the Azerbaijan Popular Front, in a newly formed opposition coalition called the National Council of Democratic Forces.

Election results

Candidate	Party	Votes %
Ilham Aliyev	Yeni (New) Azerbaijan party	84,55 %
Jamil Hasanli	National Council of Democratic Forces	5,53 %
Iqbal Agazade	Umid (Hope) Party	2,40 %
Qudrat Hasanguliyev	Unified Popular Front Party	1,99 %
Zahid Oruc	Independent candidate	1,45 %
Ilyas Ismayilov	Adalet Party	1,07 %
Araz Alizade	Social Democratic Party	0,87 %
Farac Quliyev	National Revival Movement	0,86 %
Hafiz Hacıyev	Modern Musavat	0,66 %
Sardar Calaloglu	Democratic Party of Azerbaijan	0,61 %

Run up to the elections

In the run up of the poll the opposition was facing many difficulties in campaigning. Due to the formula of the Central Election Commission for structuring all election commissions, the pro-government forces obtained since the beginning a de facto majority, the OSCE noted. Ten candidates were registered for the election of which only Jamil Hasanli represented viable opposition. Four were denied registration. In the months ahead of the election there was a great lack of press freedom and human rights were still often violated with journalists being imprisoned on what is widely seen as trumped-up charges. Continued allegations of candidate and voter intimidation and a restrictive media environment marred the campaign. Human Rights Watch released a report in September, stating the authorities of Azerbaijan were responsible for a crackdown on journalists and a "dramatic deterioration" of freedom of expression, assembly and association. It adds that the authorities had arrested dozens of political activists on "bogus charges", imprisoned critical journalists, and broken up peaceful public demonstrations.

Despite these violations, 2013 marked the first time Azerbaijan's opposition presented a united front. The National Council of Democratic Forces was first represented by filmmaker Rustam Ibragimbekov, who was well known on the world stage. Ibragimbekov was, however, denied registration as candidate due to his dual citizenship (Azerbaijan and Russia) and was replaced by the lesser-known Jamil Hasanli.

Election day and aftermath

During election day several opposition activists circulated photos and videos appearing to show cases of 'carousel voting', where voters are bused in groups from one polling station to another in an effort to cast numerous ballots – though these could not be verified. The OSCE stated that a high number of observers assessed the situation in polling stations on election day as negative, with significant problems in the opening, voting and counting procedures. They reported clear indications of ballot box stuffing in 37 polling stations, and the counting was assessed negatively in an unprecedented 58 percent of the stations observed.

Social Democratic Parties

Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (SDPA)

Party Leader: Araz Alizadeh and Ayaz Mutalibov

Number of seats: 1

The founding conference of the Social Democratic Party was held in December 1989, with most of the original members coming

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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 and opposition party to be officially registered (1990). When Ayaz Mutalibov was 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 led 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 2000/2001 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 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 lives 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 Alizadeh was also the head editor of this newspaper, until the splitting of the party. Now he is mostly known 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."

Other Parties

New Azerbaijan Party (YAP)

Party Leader: Ilham Aliyev

Number of seats: 71

<http://www.yap.org.az/en/>

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 Ilham 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.

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Motherland Party (Ana Vatan) (AV)

Party Leader: Fazail Agamali
Number of seats: 1

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.

Equality Party (Musavat)

Party Leader: Arif Hacili
Number of seats:
<http://musavat.org.az/>

The Equality 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 become to be regarded as the leader of the country's democratic opposition. The Equality Party took part in the Democratic Congress. The party is commonly characterised as the party of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and former officials of the Elchibey government.

During the 1995 elections, the party was banned from the proportional ballot on grounds that it failed to gather enough signatures to register. The government repeated this argument to ban the Equality Party 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 2000/2001 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 elections many activists of this party 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 percent against respectively 76 percent).

For the 2005 parliamentary elections the Equality Party 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 the party left the bloc.

Azerbaijan Popular Front (AHCP)

Party Leader: Ali Kerimli
Number of seats:
<http://www.axcp-az.org/>

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.

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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.

Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP)

Party Leader: Ehtibar Mamedov

Number of seats:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20130703051830/http://amip.az>

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 percent, independent calculations gave him approximately 25 to 30 percent. 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).

Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP)

Party Leader: Sardar Jalaloglu

Number of seats:

<http://adp-muxalifet.blogspot.nl/>

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.

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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.

Civic Solidarity Party (VHP)

Party Leader: Sabir Rustamkhanli

Number of seats: 1

<http://vhp.az/>

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 from 1991 to 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 percent of the votes.

Yurddash Party (YP)

Party Leader: Mais Safarli

Number of seats:

Yurddash 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.

Biographies

Ilham Aliyev

President

Born in 1961, Ilham Aliyev, son of former president Heydar Aliyev, studied International Relations at the Moscow State University after which he gained his PhD in history. In 1994 he became vice-president of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR). He participated as one of the key figures during the negotiations between Azerbaijani government and Western oil companies during the conclusion of new contracts now known as Contract of the century. The following year Aliyev was elected to the National Assembly of Azerbaijan and later became president of the National Olympic Committee (still incumbent) and head of the Azerbaijan delegation to the Council of Europe.

In August 2003, two months prior to the presidential elections, he was appointed Prime Minister. In October, Heydar Aliyev, suffering failing health, stepped down as president and in a controversial move, appointed his son, an independent candidate, as his party's sole presidential candidate. According to the official outcome of the elections, Aliyev gained 76.84 percent of the votes, which was heavily contested by the opposition.

His presidency is marked by a lack of improvement in both democratic standards and human rights record. Repeated protests were staged against Aliyev's rule in 2011, calling for democratic reforms and the ouster of the government. Aliyev has responded by ordering a security crackdown, using force to crush attempts at revolt in Baku.

Artur Rasizade

Prime Minister

Artur Rasizade was born on 26 February 1935 in Ganja. He studied engineering at Azerbaijan Institute of Industry and worked in machine construction for the oil industry for more than twenty years.

Rasizade was an active member of the Communist Party for a long time during the Azerbaijan SSR and held the post of Deputy

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Prime Minister from 1986 to 1991. Rasizade is Prime Minister of Azerbaijan since 1996. In 2003, though, due to health problems, he transferred his power to Ilham Aliyev for three months. He officially returned to his post after Aliyev was elected President. Rasizade is a member of the New Azerbaijan Party.

Arif Hajili

Leader of Musavat

Arif Hajili was born on 22 January 1962 in Yukhari Tala village. He studied journalism at Baku State University and worked as an editor at Zagatala radio station during 1983-1988. Later Hajili was a member of the Supreme Council between 1990-1995. He worked as a State Advisor for the territorial government and control of Azerbaijan during the reign of Elchibey in 1992-1993 and was a political prisoner after the rule of Aliyevs started.

Hajili has been involved with Musavat since the 1990s. He was Head of its Executive Committee and member of Divan (supreme body of Musavat) since 2006. Hajili was elected Chairman of the party in 2014.

Ali Kerimli

Leader of Popular Front of Azerbaijan

Ali Kerimli studied law at the Baku State University. He started his political career early; at the age of twenty he founded a movement for democratic reform. He led this movement until it merged with the Popular Front of Azerbaijan in 1989, after which he became leader of the university department of this popular movement. After graduating in 1991, Kerimli became both a teacher at the university and a journalist for the independent Azadliq newspaper. In 1992, he entered the government of Elchibey, but he resigned just like Gambar after Heydar Aliyev came to office. After the death of Elchibey, the PFA split into a reform-oriented wing and a conservative wing, Kerimli became leader of the former. He was also active in organising the 2011 protests against Aliyev.

Source

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