

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2024-4-34>

## THE EMERGENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF AZERBAIJAN AS A POST-SOVIET COUNTRY: THE PERIOD OF PRE-INDEPENDENCE

*Javid Yusubov,*

*Postgraduate Student, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Baku, Azerbaijan)*

*ORCID ID: 0009-0004-9638-9408*

*javidyusubov1@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** The study examines the institutionalization of Azerbaijan's political system during the pre-independence and Soviet eras, focusing on its unique political evolution from the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijan SSR). The ADR (1918–1920), as a secular republic, achieved significant democratic milestones, including a representative parliament and women's suffrage, laying the groundwork for modern political institutions. However, the Soviet annexation replaced this with a centralized, one-party system under the Communist Party, which dominated governance. Despite political repression during the Soviet period, advancements in socio-economic sectors, particularly the oil industry, were notable. Heydar Aliyev's leadership from 1969 significantly modernized Azerbaijan's economy and improved living conditions. In the 1980s, Gorbachev's reforms and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict intensified national movements, ultimately leading to Azerbaijan's independence in 1991. The study concludes that Azerbaijan's political system reflects a dual legacy of democratic aspirations from the ADR and centralized control from the Soviet era, shaping its post-Soviet trajectory.

**Key words:** Political institutionalization, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), Azerbaijan SSR, National movements, Democratic aspirations, Historical Analysis, Political System.

**Introduction.** The study focuses on Azerbaijan's political institutionalization, emphasizing its transition from Soviet rule to independence and the resulting impact on governance and development. Understanding the historical evolution of these institutions sheds light on Azerbaijan's current political dynamics and its place in the broader post-Soviet context, where many nations grapple with similar challenges like nation-building and state consolidation. While Azerbaijan stands out with its unique development, it shares commonalities with other post-Soviet states, such as the influence of Russia-West geopolitical tensions and the pursuit of sovereignty. These dynamics affect Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policies, compelling it to balance relations with Russia and the West. The last part of this research will delve into the structure and evolution of Azerbaijan's political system, from the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to the Soviet period, culminating in independence. This analysis will explore the historical factors and milestones shaping Azerbaijan's modern political framework and institutional characteristics.

### **Research methods**

This study adopts a historical-comparative approach to examine the institutionalization of Azerbaijan's political system during the pre-independence and Soviet eras. Using archival documents, historical records, and secondary sources, it traces the development of political institutions from the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) in 1918 to the Soviet period up to 1991, identifying key milestones and socio-political trends. The comparative method highlights similarities and differences between Azerbaijan and other post-Soviet states, focusing on how geopolitical tensions between the West and Russia shaped its political trajectory. Additionally, legislative and constitutional documents from the ADR and Soviet periods are analyzed to explore their influence on Azerbaijan's early governance and institutional framework.

### ***The Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to explore the emergence and evolution of Azerbaijan's political system, focusing on its institutionalization during the pre-independence and Soviet periods. In terms of research objectives, the study aims to analyze the key stages of political institutionalization in Azerbaijan by examining the establishment of democratic institutions during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the structural transformations under Soviet rule.

### **The Initial Elements of the Formation of Azerbaijan's Political System Before the Soviet Period**

After World War I and the collapse of the Russian Empire, national self-determination emerged in the Caucasus. Azerbaijan declared its independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) on May 28, 1918, in Tiflis, marking a historic milestone. Founded on democratic and secular principles, the ADR became a pioneer in the Muslim world by establishing a representative political system. In December 1918, Azerbaijan held its first parliamentary elections, with representatives from various ethnic and religious groups. The parliament played a crucial role in governance, passing important laws and ensuring civil rights, including granting women the right to vote – a groundbreaking achievement for the Muslim world (Abışov, 2018, p. 8).

Despite the allocation of seats, Armenians and Russians initially abstained from participating in the parliament. The Russian National Council in Baku refused to join, citing opposition to Azerbaijan's independence from Russia. However, the Slavic-Russian Society sought cooperation in state-building (Məmmədli, 2014). Armenians joined parliamentary activities two months later, forming two factions by April 1919. Their participation was seen as prioritizing separatist goals over contributing to Azerbaijan's state-building efforts (Məmmədli, 2014).

Moreover, the presence of 11 factions and groups in the parliament, which concentrated supreme power in its hands with a membership of fewer than 100 people, seriously hindered independent state-building in the complex domestic and international conditions. For instance, the Socialist faction regularly called for Azerbaijan's unification with Soviet Russia, advocated for the opening of a diplomatic mission in Soviet Russia, and eventually supported the intervention of the Red Army in the country (Abışov, 2018, p. 8).

On June 4, 1918, the "Treaty of Friendship between the Government of the Ottoman Empire and the Azerbaijan Republic" was signed. This treaty was the first official international document signed by the Azerbaijan Republic. Ten days later, on June 14, two more significant agreements were signed in Batumi, alongside the "Peace and Friendship" agreement (Hacıyeva, 2020).

The first agreement concerned military assistance, under which the Ottoman Empire committed to providing military support to Azerbaijan to protect its territorial integrity and independence. The second agreement regulated economic and trade relations between the two countries, laying the foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation and resource exchange. These documents, ratified by the Azerbaijani parliament, played a crucial role in strengthening Azerbaijan's independence and establishing diplomatic and economic ties with foreign countries, particularly in the context of the unstable international environment of that time (Hacıyeva, 2020).

The legislative activity of the parliament of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) represents a significant milestone in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. The adoption of the "Azerbaijan Parliament Instruction" on March 17, 1919, marked an important step in the organization and regulation of the highest legislative body of the country. This document, consisting of 200 articles, established the procedures for parliamentary sessions, election of officials, agenda discussions, voting, as well as the organization of commissions and the powers of the Presidium of the parliament (Əkbərov, 2024). During the ADR's existence, the parliament passed several important legislative acts that contributed significantly to the development of the republic's legal and governmental system. Examples of these acts include (Əkbərov, 2024):

1. *Law on Azerbaijani Citizenship* (August 11, 1919) – This law defined the criteria and procedures for acquiring Azerbaijani citizenship, promoting the formation of national identity and legal protection of citizens.

2. *Law on the Creation of the Customs Border Guard of the Azerbaijan Republic* (August 14, 1919) – This law provided for the establishment of a structure responsible for protecting state borders and ensuring the country's economic security.

3. *Law on Strengthening Punishment for Bribery* (September 29, 1919) – This law increased penalties for corrupt practices, contributing to the reinforcement of law and order and enhancing public trust in state institutions.

4. *Law on the Conditions for Exporting Raw Materials from the Borders of Azerbaijan* (December 11, 1919) – This act regulated the export of raw materials, which was crucial for protecting the economic interests of the republic.

5. *Regulation on Elections to the Assembly of Enterprises of the Azerbaijan Republic* (July 21, 1919) – This regulation established the rules and procedures for elections to representative bodies of enterprises, promoting democratic processes within the economy.

6. *Regulation on Elections of Members to the City Councils in the Azerbaijan Republic* (August 7, 1919) – This document outlined the election procedures for local government bodies, aiding the development of local self-governance.

7. *Regulation on the Press* (October 30, 1919) – This act regulated media activities, ensuring freedom of speech and the press, which is a key element of a democratic society.

The legislative activity of the ADR parliament played a crucial role in the formation of the legal system and the strengthening of state governance. The adoption and implementation of the above-mentioned legislative acts laid the necessary legal foundation for the functioning of the young state. The laws passed by the parliament covered a wide range of issues, from citizenship and anti-corruption measures to election organization and economic regulation.

In addition to the parliament, the government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) served as the highest executive body, accountable to the parliament. During periods when the Azerbaijani National Council was inactive, the government also performed legislative functions. According to Article 6 of the Declaration of Independence of Azerbaijan, until the convening of the *Majlis-i Mabusan* (parliament), the head of the administration was the National Council, and the Provisional Government was accountable to it (Mahmudov, 2014). The National Council tasked one of its members, Fatali Khan Khoyski, with forming the first cabinet of ministers. Fatali Khan Khoyski became the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs. On May 30, 1918, the ADR government sent out official statements via radio telegram to the major political centers of the world, announcing Azerbaijan's independence. The telegram indicated that the government was temporarily based in Ganja (Mahmudov, 2014).

On June 16, 1918, the National Council and the government relocated to Ganja. At the second session of the National Council on June 17, Fatali Khan Khoyski briefly reported on the activities of the government he had organized in Tbilisi and requested his resignation. After lengthy discussions, it was decided to dissolve the National Council and transfer all legislative and executive power to the Provisional Government. A decision was also made to convene a Constituent Assembly within six months (Mahmudov, 2014).

The National Council formed the second cabinet under Fatali Khan Khoyski, establishing the Council of Ministers and ministries. Azerbaijani was declared the state language on June 27, and educational institutions were nationalized on August 28 (Şükürov, 2017). On September 15, 1918, the Caucasian Islamic Army, consisting of Azerbaijani and Turkish forces, liberated Baku, and the ADR government relocated there on September 17. The second government was restructured on October 6, and the tricolor flag was adopted on November 9 (Şükürov, 2017).

The ADR parliament held its first session on December 7, 1918, during which Khoyski presented his government's report and resigned. He later formed a third cabinet, which faced criticism in early 1919, leading to his resignation on February 25 (Mahmudov, 2014).

The ADR government established key state institutions despite challenging political conditions, implementing economic and social reforms to advance industry, agriculture, transportation, and education. Diplomatic efforts led to the ADR's de facto recognition at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, marking a significant achievement for the young republic (Şükürov, 2017).

Despite its achievements, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic lasted only two years. In April 1920, the republic was occupied by the Red Army, and Soviet power was established on its territory. However, the legacy of the ADR significantly influenced the further development of the Azerbaijani state. The experience of creating democratic institutions, ensuring civil rights and freedoms, and the aspiration for independence became important elements of Azerbaijan's national consciousness and political culture. The period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic from 1918–1920 is one of the most important stages in Azerbaijan's history. During this short but eventful period, the foundations of the country's modern political system were laid. Despite the difficulties and challenges, the ADR became a symbol of the Azerbaijani people's desire for independence, democracy, and progress. The legacy of this republic continues to influence the political life of modern Azerbaijan, inspiring new generations to preserve and develop democratic values.

### **The Evolutionary Characteristics of Azerbaijan's Political System During the Soviet Period**

The period of Azerbaijan's existence as part of the Soviet Union was marked by significant changes in the country's political system. The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijan SSR) was formally proclaimed on April 28, 1920, following the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan. This event marked the beginning of a new stage in the country's history, characterized by a socialist model of governance and integration into the Soviet political system. The political system of the Azerbaijan SSR was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, which involved a one-party system with the Communist Party playing the leading role. All major decisions in the state were made by party bodies, while the Council of People's Commissars (renamed the Council of Ministers in 1946) exercised executive power. The main organs of state power in the Azerbaijan SSR were the Supreme Soviet, the Council of Ministers, and the local Councils of People's Deputies. The Supreme Soviet, composed of deputies elected by the population for a five-year term, was formally the highest body of state power. However, in practice, the real power was concentrated in the hands of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Yılmaz, 2013).

During the Soviet era, Azerbaijan adopted several constitutions reflecting the USSR's evolving political and socio-economic framework. The first, adopted in 1921, established Soviet principles like proletariat dictatorship, public ownership, and planned economy. The 1937 Constitution aligned with the USSR's 1936 Constitution, emphasizing centralized governance and socialist legality under Stalinist policies. The final Soviet Constitution, adopted in 1978, highlighted socialist achievements, Communist Party leadership, and economic planning (Kazımlı, 2004).

Azerbaijan underwent significant socio-economic transformations during this period, marked by industrialization, collectivization, and the growth of the oil industry. Advances in education, healthcare, and culture improved living standards. While the Soviet era modernized Azerbaijan, it also brought repression, curtailed civil liberties, and suppressed national identity, leaving a complex legacy.

The appointment of Heydar Aliyev as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in 1969 marked a turning point in the republic's history. Under his leadership, the country underwent significant socio-economic transformations and achieved notable successes in various areas. Although the nationalization of major sectors of the economy in Azerbaijan had occurred in the early years of Soviet rule, during Heydar Aliyev's leadership, special attention was paid to the

modernization and efficient management of nationalized enterprises. During this period, the republic achieved significant success in industrialization and the modernization of production capacities. One of the key directions was the development of the oil industry. Azerbaijan, with its rich oil reserves, actively modernized its oil enterprises and introduced advanced technologies under Aliyev's leadership, which significantly increased oil production and processing volumes. This, in turn, strengthened the republic's economic potential. Heydar Aliyev's leadership was also marked by the implementation of large-scale social and infrastructure projects. During his tenure, housing construction improved significantly: numerous new residential areas, schools, hospitals, and other social facilities were built. Particular attention was paid to improving the living conditions of the population, especially in rural areas (Ömərov, 2012, p. 14).

Aliyev actively supported the development of education and science. During this period, new educational institutions, research institutes, and cultural institutions were established. This contributed to the improvement of educational and cultural standards in the republic, the training of qualified personnel, and the development of scientific potential. One of the important aspects of Heydar Aliyev's leadership was the development of transport and communication infrastructure. New roads, bridges, railways, and airports were built during this period. This improved transport accessibility and contributed to the development of trade and industry. Under Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan experienced a cultural renaissance. New theaters, museums, art galleries, and cultural centers were opened. Support for national culture, traditions, and the arts contributed to the strengthening of national identity and the development of the republic's cultural heritage (Əliyev, 1981).

The 1980s marked a period of significant changes in the political and socio-economic life of the Soviet Union, including the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijan SSR). This decade was characterized by the onset of reforms aimed at *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), as well as the rise of national movements, which had a profound impact on the political system of the republic. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, initiated a series of reforms known as *perestroika* and *glasnost*. These reforms aimed to revitalize the stagnant economy, promote democratic processes, and increase the transparency of the state system. In Azerbaijan, as in other Soviet republics, economic and political changes began to take shape. Economic reforms included attempts to decentralize economic management, introduce market-oriented elements, and encourage private initiative. These measures were intended to boost productivity and improve the economic situation. However, in Azerbaijan, where the economy was heavily dependent on centralized planning and the oil industry, these reforms often encountered challenges.

One of the key characteristics of the 1980s was the rise of national movements in various Soviet republics. In Azerbaijan, against the backdrop of *glasnost*, the desire for national self-determination and autonomy intensified. In particular, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians escalated. In 1988, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh expressed a desire to secede from the Azerbaijan SSR and join the Armenian SSR, which led to mass protests and ethnic clashes. These events contributed to the political mobilization of the Azerbaijani population, increasing pressure on the Soviet authorities and accelerating the process of democratization. In response to the crisis, the central leadership in Moscow often resorted to force, which only exacerbated the situation and undermined trust in Soviet authority.

Azerbaijan's political system began to change under the influence of nationwide reforms and the growing national movement. By the late 1980s, demands for greater autonomy and independence for the republic intensified. In 1989, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) was formed, becoming a powerful political movement advocating for national interests and democratic reforms. Under pressure from the PFA and other civil forces, changes in the republic's political structure began in 1990. The first multiparty elections were held, marking a significant step toward democratization. However,

this process was accompanied by conflict and instability, reflecting the complexity of the transitional period.

The reforms and national movement of the 1980s had a profound impact on the political system of the Azerbaijan SSR. The growing political activity of the population and the demands for democratization led to the gradual weakening of the Communist Party's monopoly. Key outcomes of this period included (Ak, 2001):

- *Political pluralism*. The introduction of a multiparty system and the formation of civil society.
- *National consciousness*. The strengthening of the national movement and the pursuit of sovereignty.
- *Conflicts and instability*. The exacerbation of ethnic conflicts and socio-political tensions.
- *Transition to independence*. The preparation for Azerbaijan's exit from the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent state.

In summary, the period of Azerbaijan's existence as part of the Soviet Union saw profound political, social, and economic changes that shaped the country's political landscape. While the Soviet era brought about modernization, industrial growth, and improvements in living standards, it was also characterized by repression and the suppression of national identity. The 1980s reforms and the rise of national movements fueled the drive for democratization and independence, leading to the eventual dissolution of Soviet power and Azerbaijan's emergence as an independent state. The legacies of this era continue to influence the country's political and social structures today.

**Research Findings.** The research reveals a complex trajectory in the institutionalization of Azerbaijan's political system, highlighting the interplay between external influences and internal dynamics. During the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, Azerbaijan's political institutions evolved in response to both local aspirations and broader geopolitical pressures. Overall, the development of the political system in Azerbaijan until the independence (1991) has gone through two stages. These stages are listed in the table below:

Table 1

#### Initial Stages of the Formation of the Political System in Azerbaijan Before the Independence (1991)

Stage	Period	Key Characteristics
The Period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic	1918–1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The first secular republic in the Muslim world;</li> <li>– Democratic elections and the establishment of a parliament;</li> <li>– Guaranteeing civil rights and freedoms.</li> </ul>
The period of the USSR	1920–1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Integration into the USSR as the Azerbaijan SSR;</li> <li>– Centralized planned economy;</li> <li>– One-party system (Communist Party);</li> <li>– Repression and state control over all spheres of life.</li> </ul>

One of the key findings is that Azerbaijan's political institutionalization was initially shaped by the democratic values established during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) period, where civil rights and parliamentary democracy were pioneering for the Muslim world. However, this progress was curtailed by the Soviet annexation, which imposed a Marxist-Leninist system that stifled pluralism and centralized power under the Communist Party. Despite these limitations, the Soviet period also facilitated economic and infrastructural development, particularly in the oil sector, which would become critical to Azerbaijan's post-independence economy.

The research also identifies Heydar Aliyev's leadership as a turning point in the Soviet era, where pragmatic modernization of nationalized industries and strategic investments in infrastructure played a vital role in solidifying Azerbaijan's economic foundation. His governance strategy balanced the

state's need for central control with the development of key sectors, ensuring economic stability amid broader Soviet decay.

Moreover, the rise of national movements and reforms in the 1980s, fueled by Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost, led to increased political mobilization and demands for independence. The study highlights that the national consciousness that arose during this time was crucial not only in challenging Soviet control but also in preparing the groundwork for the eventual transition to independence.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that Azerbaijan's political system is the result of a dual legacy: the democratic aspirations from its brief period of independence and the centralized authoritarian governance from the Soviet period. These historical tensions continue to shape Azerbaijan's political landscape, where efforts to balance sovereignty, external pressures, and modernization remain central to its development as a post-Soviet state.

**Conclusion.** The study of Azerbaijan's political institutionalization reveals a multifaceted process shaped by both historical legacies and external geopolitical pressures. The transition from the democratic ideals of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) to the authoritarian framework imposed by the Soviet Union illustrates the nation's complex political evolution. While the ADR period laid a foundation of democratic governance, the subsequent Soviet era replaced these aspirations with a centralized, one-party system that restricted political pluralism and civil rights. However, this same period also brought about significant socio-economic developments, particularly in the fields of industrialization, education, and infrastructure, which would later prove vital for Azerbaijan's independence.

Heydar Aliyev's leadership during the late Soviet era marks a critical phase in Azerbaijan's institutional and economic modernization. His pragmatic approach to governance, focusing on strategic investments and state-led modernization, allowed Azerbaijan to build a more resilient economic base, even within the constraints of Soviet rule. This foundation was instrumental during the post-Soviet transition, where the country navigated the challenges of independence while leveraging the infrastructure and resources developed during Soviet times.

The findings also underscore the significance of the 1980s reforms and the rise of national movements, which catalyzed Azerbaijan's push for sovereignty. The national consciousness that emerged during this period not only empowered the Azerbaijani people to resist Soviet control but also set the stage for the formation of a new political system upon independence. The shift from a Soviet socialist model to a more independent, nation-state structure reflects the enduring struggle between centralized control and democratic aspirations.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan's political system today is a product of its unique historical journey, where competing legacies of democratic aspirations and authoritarian governance coexist. The country's ability to navigate these dynamics, while balancing external influences from Russia and the West, continues to define its political trajectory. Moving forward, Azerbaijan's challenge lies in further consolidating its sovereignty and democratic institutions while fostering economic and political stability in a complex regional context.

#### References:

1. Abışov, V. (2018). Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyətinin xarici siyasətində parlamentin yeri. *Azərbaycan*, 18(9), 8.
2. Ak, E. (2001). *Turkism a historical overview of Azerbaijan: Russian Azerbaijan national independence Azerbaijan at the beginning of centuries of national enlightenment*. İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi.
3. Əkbərov, R. (2024). *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyətinin (I Respublika) dövlət və hüquq tarixi*. Bakı: Qanun.
4. Əliyev, H. (1981). *Sovet Azərbaycanı*. Bakı: Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı.

5. Hacıyeva, D. (2020). 917–1922-ci illərdə Azərbaycan-Türkiyə münasibətləri. Bakı: Elm və təhsil.
6. Kazımlı, E. (2004). Avropa İnsan Hakları Sözləşməsi və Azərbaycan anayasası. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi.
7. Mahmudov, Y. (red.) (2014). Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti ensiklopediyası. 1-ci cild. Bakı: Şərq-Qərb.
8. Mahmudov, Y. (red.) (2014). Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti ensiklopediyası. 2-ci cild. Bakı: Şərq-Qərb.
9. Məmmədli, A. (2014). AXC- Ermənistan əlaqələri. Şərqdə İlk Demokratik Respublika ("28 may-Respublika günü" ilə əlaqədar elmi-praktik konfrans): Məqalələr toplusu (pp. 197–204). Bakı: Elm və təhsil.
10. Ömərov, V. (2012). Sovet dövründə müstəqil milli dövlət quruculuğu üçün Ulu Öndər Heydər Əliyev tərəfindən bazanın yaradılması. Səs, 13(12), 14.
11. Şükürov, O. (2017). Azərbaycan Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşu ve çöküşü (1918–1920). Isparta: Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi.
12. Yılmaz, H. (2013). The Soviet Union and the Construction of Azerbaijani National Identity in the 1930s. *Iranian Studies*, 46(4), 511–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.784521>.