

УДК 323(479.24)

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DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.18524/2304-1439.2018.2\(31\).144303](http://dx.doi.org/10.18524/2304-1439.2018.2(31).144303)

SULTANISM AND SEMI-AUTHORITARIANISM IN POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

The article is devoted to the research of hybrid political regime in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The aim of the research is to apply a new conceptual framework, proposed by political scholar Farid Guliyev, combining concepts of sultanism and semi-authoritarianism. The research concludes that sultanistic semi-authoritarianism can be suitable model to study systemic political transformations of Azerbaijan at the beginning of XXI century.

Key words: Azerbaijan, hybrid regime, semi-authoritarianism, sultanism.

The aim of the article is to apply a new conceptual framework, combining concepts of sultanism and semi-authoritarianism in study of political transformations of post-soviet Azerbaijan at the beginning of XXI century. We can distinguish the following **tasks**: 1) reviewing the concept of the gray zone of political regimes; 2) revealing main features of «sultanism» and «semi-authoritarianism»; 3) applying cross-theoretical approach to political development of post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Analysis of Researches. One of the central topics of transition and democracy studies is the existence of hybrid political systems, which fall under the category of gray zone of political regimes. Larry J. Diamond, American political scientist in the field of democratic studies, argues that many of new regimes are not democratic, they may or may not undergo political changes, and be in transition from authoritarianism towards consolidated democracy, so they fall into the «political gray zone between full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship are in fact electoral democracies, however feckless and poorly functioning, but many fall below the threshold of electoral democracy» [4, p. 23].

Thomas Carothers, who holds position of a Vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, states that it is evident that most of the countries moving away from authoritarianism tend not to follow a three-part process of democratization — opening, breakthrough, and consolidation. Moreover, he claims that elections in these regimes do not facilitate fostering of democratic development, and underlines the influence of economic, social, institutional preconditions. Also, the challenge of state-

building along with democracy-building one, that is faced by the countries of gray zone [2, p. 17].

We consider that the concept of gray zone introduces a solution to the problem of identifying post-soviet political development of Azerbaijan. Some peculiarities of Azerbaijan's political system give us reasons to assume that it does not fit to pure authoritarian or democratic model. That is why cross-theoretical approach of sultanism and semi-authoritarianism will be applicable in case of Azerbaijan.

The term «sultanism» was originally developed by German sociologist, philosopher and political economist Max Weber in his work «Economy and Society», who referred to it as to a form of traditional authority and an extreme case of patrimonialism.

Further conceptualization of sultanistic regime emerged from Juan Linz's comparative analysis of nondemocratic regimes. Houchang E. Chehabi, Iranian-German political scholar, and Juan J. Linz, Spanish sociologist and political scientist, argue that, the ideal type of contemporary sultanistic regime is based on personal rulership, loyalty to which is not motivated by his embodying or an ideology, mission and charisma, but by a mixture of fear and rewards for collaboration. The ruler's power is exercised at his own discretion, and is not restrained by rules, commitments to an ideology or value system. This rulership subverts bureaucratic administration and leads to corruption at all levels of society. The salient feature of this type of regime is the weakness of traditional and legal-rational legitimation as well as the lack of ideological justification [3, p. 7].

Sultanistic regime is highly personalistic and can be characterized by the fusion of the private and the public, familial power and dynasticism. Staff of leader are members of his family, friends, business associates, or men directly involved in the use of force to sustain the regime. Thus, staff's position derives from their personal submission to the rule, and there is no distinction between a state career and personal service to the ruler [7, p. 579].

As a result, patrimonial administration is established and maintained by the ruler's benefices to the staff in order of their service to his private purposes. Neopatrimonial administration is an organizational hybrid of patrimonial networks built into the formal bureaucratic organization [7, p. 583].

The point is that no regime can fit perfectly to above-mentioned ideal type. That is why sultanism can be restrained by legal-rational norms and the ruler's discretion is less extensive. Constitutional facade and multiparty system are maintained, elections are organized, but incumbent government stays in power and actions of the opposition are restricted [3, p. 18]. Society is penetrated unevenly, as there are some public life areas that threaten the ruling groups. Oppositional activists of sultanism usually concentrate abroad as intellectuals are driven into exile by regime [3, p. 26].

In addition, natural resources, such as oil as in case of Azerbaijan, highly profitable production of which is in hands of one or few entrepreneurs can provide the resources for this type of regime [3, p. 27].

Before moving on to the theory of semi-authoritarianism, it is necessary to give definition of authoritarianism. According to Robert E. Bedeski, who is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science at the University of Victoria, authoritarianism is historically generated response to state crises of political order, democratic failure, social polarization, economic stagnation, and international instability, which main characteristics are dictatorship of an elite, with the occasional personality cult. Authoritarianism is a theory and a political system associated with dictatorship, and is based on obedience to authority, opposing political autonomy of individuals [1].

Modern authoritarian systems usually operate through single, dominant parties, which control government and other key spheres of social life. Regime can be characterized by concentration of executive, legislative, and judicial power and absence of popular competitive elections, as the problem of succession of power is usually solved by the party machinery [1].

Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan in their work «Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe» stated that authoritarianism is a political system with limited political pluralism, having no guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities [11, p. 44]. They highlighted that under authoritarian political system power is exercised by leader or small group, operating within formally ill-defined, but predictable norms, as well as, with system of institutions to generate and allocate power in predictable way [11, p. 62].

Passing to the theory of semi-authoritarianism it is important to distinguish work «Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism» by political transformations analyst Marina Ottaway, who states the existence of semi-authoritarian regimes, which fall under the category of hybrid regimes [13]. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to disappearance of the particular type of institutionalized authoritarianism associated with socialism, with its massive single party and complex ideological apparatus. Semi-authoritarian regimes are political systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with illiberal or authoritarian practices. Such regimes leave enough space for political parties and organizations of civil society to operate, for an independent press to function to some extent, for private businesses to grow and for some political debate to take place [13, p. 3]. They are established in unfavorable conditions for democratic consolidation, such as weak institutional system, authoritarian traditions, socioeconomic problems, and ethnic, religious or territorial conflicts [13, p. 4].

In addition, semi-authoritarianism has undermined the so-called donor's model, which interprets, democratization as a three-phase process: liberalization, transition and consolidation [13, p. 8–9]. Firstly, these regimes show that liberalization and transitional elections can constitute the end of democratization process, creating semi-authoritarian regimes. Secondly, the negative impact of such conditions as stagnant economies or ethnic polarization was demonstrated. Thirdly, it was shown that semi-authoritarian outcome is

not something imposed by autocratic leaders on a population, but it is something accepted and desired by the population [13, p. 13–14].

The outstanding feature of semi-authoritarian regimes is the existence of mechanisms effectively preventing the transfer of power through elections from the hands of the incumbent leaders or party to a new political elite or organization, blocking power transfers function despite the existence of formally democratic institutions and the degree of political freedom granted to the citizens of the country. The regime may hold open multiparty elections. However, there is no way to challenge the power of the incumbents. Elections are not the source of the government's power, and thus voters cannot transfer power to a new leadership [13, p.15].

Semi-authoritarian regimes doesn't have the party machine, like authoritarian one, and an open election system, like democratic one. Their stability is based on the leadership of an individual or small elite, rather than on institutions. So the power of semi-authoritarian regimes is based on a mixture of two factors: manipulation of formal democratic institutions by incumbents and acceptance of the regime by citizens [13, p. 17].

Despite existence of opened spheres of social life, semi-authoritarian governments may impose limitations on civil society organizations and independent media, including restrictive registration laws and overt and covert pressure to limit their political activities [13, p. 18].

Marina Ottaway reveals three types of semi-authoritarianism: regimes in equilibrium, regimes in decay, and regimes that are experiencing dynamic change [13, p. 20]. Countries of semi-authoritarianism of decay did not experience formal return to the single-party system, opposition political parties and civil society organizations are allowed. Some independent media organizations still operate despite many restrictions and arrests of journalists. However, the political space is closed for any changes and there are no factors affecting the balance of power [13, p. 21].

According to Marina Ottaway Azerbaijan is a case of the semi-authoritarianism of decay, considering the overall situation in the country, economy stagnation in all sectors except oil one, and fragmentation of political parties and civil society [13, p. 24].

Farid Guliev, policy analyst, who focuses on the politics and political economy of Central Asia and South Caucasus, divides political history of Azerbaijan after independence into three parts: communist rule (1991–1992), national-democrats in power (1992–1993), and sultanistic semi-authoritarian regime (since 1993) [8, p. 414].

The Aliyev family has ruled Azerbaijan and shaped its politics for a last few decades. Heydar Aliyev held the position of first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party from 1969 until 1987. After military coup of March 1993, he won president elections with 99 % of the vote, and was reelected with 78 % support in 1998 [9, p. 2]. Heydar Aliyev claimed that he played role of «the Father of the Nation» or «the Leader» as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk played in the history of Turkey, and was perceived as the savior of the nation from the chaos of 1990 –1993 years [8, p. 417].

In 2003 Heydar Aliyev passed power to his son. Ilham Aliyev took the reins of his father's campaign and won office with 78 % of the vote [9, p. 340]. In short, despite the presence of multiple opposition parties, Azerbaijani presidential elections have been dominated since 1993 by the incumbent regime. These dynamics define Azerbaijan as a stable case of sultanistic semi-authoritarianism. Thus, the father-to-son succession is a valid feature of sultanism, as well as regime's political patronage, which is interested in keeping that regime in power. The system built around Aliyevs depends on the Nakhchivan and Yeraz clans, that proves existence of neopatrimonial networks [5, p. 80].

Current situation in Azerbaijan confirms statement of the so-called «resource curse», as revenues from natural resources contribute to the maintenance of sultanistic regime, reducing in different ways the pressure for democratizing the system. Crucial moment was signing of the «Contract of the Century» in 1994. State ownership of the country's oil resources, through the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR), has provided the presidential family with informal control over the energy sector, allowing them to spend revenues from this sector on to maintenance of political stability in the country, through public spending, repression, and the creation of patronage networks [10, p. 127].

The existing patronage system is characterized by a dynamic relationship between political and economic power, as political power is used to gain more income and vice versa, which raises the resistance of ruling elite to both external and internal challenges [10, p. 130].

Thus, institutionalized corruption and nepotism, which are peculiar traits of a sultanistic type of political regime, are present in Azerbaijan. Family, kinship-based groups and regional networks are influential social institutions of Azerbaijani society that penetrate formal governmental structures, weakening political institutions [8, p. 417]. Azerbaijan is extremely corrupt nation due to its neopatrimonial networks. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2017) ranks it 122 among 180 countries [14].

According to Farid Guliyev, one explanation of patrimonialism in Azerbaijan is that it is a predominantly Muslim traditional society with inherited social, economic, religious, and political systems of the past. In this respect, Azerbaijan resembles Middle Eastern countries, where patterns of patrimonial leadership have their roots in the life and politics of the Prophet Mohammad and are based on personal charisma [8, p. 418].

Another evident feature of sultanism in Azerbaijan is the lack of rule of law. Numerous violations of human rights, detention of oppositionists, and tightened grip on civil society especially during Arab Spring protests in 2011, which raised concern among the ruling elite. For incumbent government, the global threat of Islamic extremism is a point of vulnerability and source of political leverage, becoming a justification for sending out political dissent [6].

Due to the theory of semi-authoritarianism in Azerbaijan were present favorable conditions for its foundation and institutionalization such as weak political institutions, newly constructed national identity, introduction of mar-

ket economy and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which country's political elite has used as an excuse for its authoritarian political practices [8, p. 421].

The democratic stimulus was relatively weak from the beginning, as Azerbaijan was pushed toward a new political system not so much by internal factors but by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It can be proved by the fact of reelection of former communist party leader — Heydar Aliyev to the presidency in 1993. Moreover, economic conditions of country has not facilitated further political change — weak private sector, the natural resources sector has not been a subject to privatization and has been dominated by monopolies or oligopolies, the absence of full scale privatization process has not given rise to an independent business class. Corruption has become the defining factor of this system, diminishing political pluralism [12].

Presence of some open domains — opposition parties, independent media and operating non-governmental organizations proves that Azerbaijan is not fully authoritarian. Thus, in Azerbaijan opposition parties exist both legally and in practice. In Azerbaijan opposition parties' leaders continue to deepen their ties with Western governments and organizations. Under these conditions, incumbent government can not act aggressively against the opposition, as it will be noticed by human rights monitors or the Euro-Atlantic community. Due to that, Azerbaijan's authorities without actually forbidding opposition parties, use formal and informal means to undermine their political effectiveness [9, p. 346].

Further, executive branch dominates in Azerbaijan, which is noted for semi-authoritarianism. Although, democratic constitution was adopted in 1995, which guarantees extensive rights like all modern democratic constitutions and envisages the independence of three branches and division of powers [8, p. 418].

Conclusion. Regime of post-Soviet Azerbaijan is in the gray zone of political regimes. As it is hard to characterize it as neither purely authoritarian, nor fully democratic. The Azerbaijani case fits a cross-theoretical combination of semi-authoritarianism with sultanism. The cross-theoretical approach is chosen because there are no pure cases of sultanism, and there are present elements of democracy and opened spheres of social life in Azerbaijan that can not exist under pure sultanism or authoritarianism. However, elements of democracy are restrained to certain limits in order to prevent fundamental changes in political domain, what is a feature of semi-democratic regime.

Azerbaijani incumbents hold regular multiparty elections, allow parliaments to function, and recognize within limits, the rights of non-governmental organizations, independent press and opposition parties to operate. However, regime is not in danger of losing its power, as the democracy game is played and control is retained. All above mentioned proves presence of semi-authoritarianism in Azerbaijan.

Within the theory of sultanism, one can see the fusion of private and public sectors, a strong tendency toward familial power and dynastic succession, absence of distinction between a state career and personal service to the ruler, lack of ideology and effective functioning of rational-legal norms, the

dominance of executive branch of power, and dependence of economic power on a personal relationship to the ruler, proving existence of neopatrimonial networks in society. Furthermore, revenues from vast natural resources make it possible to maintain regime's stability.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 24.06.2018

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СУЛТАНІЗМ ТА НАПІВАВТОРИТАРИЗМ В ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКОМУ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНІ

Резюме

Стаття присвячена дослідженню політичного режиму пострадянського Азербайджану, який підпадає під категорію гібридних і тому не має виключно авторитарного або демократичного характеру. Метою дослідження є застосування нової концептуальної моделі, запропонованої політологом Фарідом Гулієвим, яка поєднує концепції султанізму та напіваторитаризму. Крос-теоретичний підхід застосовується з причини наявності елементів демократії та відкритих сфер суспільного життя, що було б неможливим в умовах ідеального султанізму або авторитаризму. Проте прояви демократії мають обмежений характер з метою запобігання кардинальним політичним змінам, що є особливістю напівдемократичних режимів.

В Азербайджані регулярно проводяться багатопартійні вибори, функціонують парламент та неурядові організації, є незалежні засоби масової інформації та опозиційні партії. Однак сам режим не ризикує втратити свою владу, оскільки відбувається «гра в демократію» і зберігається контроль, що є характерним для напівавторитаризму. В межах теорії султанізму можна зазначити злиття приватного та державного секторів, сильну тенденцію до сімейної влади, відсутність розмежування між державною кар'єрою та особистим підпорядкуванням лідеру, відсутність ідеології та ефективно функціонуючих раціонально-правових норм, домінування виконавчої гілки влади та залежність економічного добробуту від особистих стосунків з правителем, що доводить існування неопатримоніальних мереж у суспільстві. Крім того, політична стабільність в країні забезпечується за рахунок доходів від енергетичного сектора.

Таким чином, проведене дослідження дає можливість зробити висновок, що султаністський напіваторитаризм є відповідною концептуальною моделлю для вивчення системно-політичних трансформацій пострадянського Азербайджану на початку XXI століття.

Ключові слова: Азербайджан, гібридний режим, напіваторитаризм, султанізм.

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СУЛТАНИЗМ И ПОЛУАВТОРИТАРИЗМ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНЕ

Резюме

Статья посвящена исследованию политического режима постсоветского Азербайджана, который подпадает под категорию гибридных и поэтому не имеет исключительно авторитарного или демократического характера. Целью исследования является применение новой концептуальной модели, предложенной политологом Фаридом Гулиевым, которая сочетает концепции султанизма и полуавторитаризма. Кросс-теоретический подход применяется по причине наличия элементов демократии и открытых сфер общественной жизни, что было бы невозможно в условиях идеального султанизма или авторитаризма. Однако проявления демократии имеют ограниченный характер с целью предотвращения кардинальных политических изменений, что является особенностью полудемократических режимов.

В Азербайджане регулярно проводятся многопартийные выборы, функционируют парламент и неправительственные организации, независимые средства массовой информации и оппозиционные партии. Но сам режим не рискует потерять свою власть, поскольку имитирует демократию и сохраняет контроль, что характерно для полуавторитаризма. В рамках теории султанизма можно отметить слияние частного и государственного секторов, сильную тенденцию к семейной власти, отсутствие разграничения между государственной карьерой и личным подчинением лидеру, отсутствие идеологии и эффективно функционирующих рационально-правовых норм, доминирование исполнительной ветви власти и зависимость экономического благосостояния от личных отношений с правителем, что доказывает существование неопатримониальных сетей в обществе. Политическая стабильность в стране обеспечивается за счет доходов от энергетического сектора.

Таким образом, исследование позволяет сделать вывод, что султанистский полуавторитаризм является соответствующей концептуальной моделью для изучения системно-политических трансформаций постсоветского Азербайджана в начале XXI века.

Ключевые слова: Азербайджан, гибридный режим, султанизм.