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POLITICAL SCENE AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE CLASH OF GENERATIONS: ANALYSIS OF EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 9, 2020 IN AZERBAIJAN

Abstract: Although the early parliamentary elections of February 9, 2020 were announced under the banner of reforming the inert political system in which key players and rules were protected for nearly 30 years, they were still marred by irregularities and unequal opportunities. In the results of the election, the bulk of the old parliament returned and nothing seemed to have changed on the visible side of the political scene. However, this election revealed the “under-layer streams” of the political system, some ending and emerging trends of the political scene. In the article, we study the trends of the political system, the dynamics, causes and dialectics of these trends in the context of the political culture of politicians and the people. The main focus here is that the political scene, which has been static for decades and whose actors and political culture have not undergone any renewal, is exhausted in public opinion and the new generation with ideological differences is faced with the need to organize from scratch.

Key words: election, voter, post-Soviet, political culture, political opinion.

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Introduction

Early parliamentary elections were held in Azerbaijan on February 9, 2020. In terms of the mechanism, executors and principles, these elections were no different from the previous ones. [38; 32]. The country's ruling and opposition political forces, their approaches to elections, expectations, principles of action and strategies have not changed. Even the apathetic attitude of the population towards the elections remained the same. However, these elections were a unique event in the country's political life, an undeniable expression of a turning point. These elections showed that nothing can and will not remain the same, and revealed the social, natural, objective and dialectical reasons for the current situation. [34]. These natural bases are associated with the fact that the active part of the country's population is a new, different generation. Now, a change in the political scene, of the players and the rules of the game is inevitable. But how should this change be and at what level? Both in the government and in the opposition,

the demand for change on the part of society and its inevitability is understood logically, expressed in the language of approval. But in fact, both poles play according to the instinct of self-preservation. The government seeks to maintain its position through “rejuvenation” - personnel change (which it presents as “reform”), while the opposition recognizes [28] the depletion of traditional forces in public opinion and encourages new young politicians to cooperate [26]. It is often forgotten that digesting several people and persistence of the same leaders with the same set of rules and the same system of relationships does not reflect a society that has changed in 30 years. Not only the active and young part of Azerbaijan, but also the middle and older generation are clearly tired of the participants in the political scene, who have not changed in 30 years, who have lost their trust and political resources, of their accusations against each other. The candidates witnessed this while communicating with voters during the election campaign. Personal contact with voters revealed real

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public opinion, which is not reflected not only in traditional media, but also in social networks. Because the traditional media is controlled by political power and politicized. On social media, groups with an active political culture demonstrate political attitude and accordingly, social media becomes a political battleground for rivals. However, the campaign and elections showed that these groups and their supporters make up about five percent of the population. Given that 90-93 percent of the population did not vote as an expression of distrust of democracy and the entire political scene, the Institute for Democratic Initiatives, which monitored the most interested constituencies, estimated voter turnout at about 20 percent [23]. According to opposition and independent candidates and their observers, 7-10 percent of voters turned up, and more than 96 percent of those who came supported independent candidates who did not belong to the party. Thus, it is obvious that about 95 percent of the population that has been lost by the existing political forces is a social base. As we have seen, public opinion, along with all communities and generations, ignores the political scene inherited from the 1990s and demands new strength. The new generation does not bear the burden of various political and ideological focus positions and the sins, mistakes and mistrust of the past. Although, their 'innocence' has an advantage over the older generation, objective and subjective, natural and artificial restrictions on the possibilities of organization, at least, by changing the political scene on the opposition front in accordance with the public challenges prevents legitimization.

Methodology

Because the current theoretical framework for electoral research is largely based on the electoral cultures and practices of established democratic systems, electoral imitation in authoritarian systems and the electoral institution that serves them, as Dalton and Klingeman put it, transcend the boundaries of "old theory" [11] and are difficult to explain on the base of those theories. Therefore, the study is not based on any specific theoretical election models. Historical chronological and retrospective analysis was initially used in the study. It is necessary to understand the current players, especially the public opinion, under the historical conditions in which the current situation is built, and the dynamics of the formation of these conditions are. The systematic approach also takes the lead at all stages of the study.

The elements of the system are government, opposition, public opinion, political culture, candidates and voters. The study also examines the role of the political psychology of the electorate. My personal candidacy in the elections, as well as my observation of the election campaign of dozens of candidates whom I personally know in the government, in the opposition and as independent

candidates and who are friends with me on social networks, have become invaluable data for this research. Through my role as a candidate in this election, my one-on-one conversations with hundreds of voters, meetings with constituency groups, obstacles that I personally encountered from the executive branch, and my unconventional electoral strategy, which began with competing with other candidates and ended with a joint struggle (to prevent election fraud and obtain facts of violations of the law, launch a post-election complaint mechanism, publish facts of election fraud and our protest against the results, and file lawsuits), have become invaluable methodological contribution to this study [22]. As a competitive candidate during the election campaign and as a political scientist, I analyzed a large number of platforms, as well as learned the demands, problems, behavior and beliefs of the electorate. [44]. After the elections, I studied the impressions and opinions of candidates and observers, systematized all this information.

Background - retrospective analyze of elections

The first parliamentary elections of the 3rd republic of Azerbaijan were held in 1995. The reason for the postponement for 4 years was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and coups d'etat in its context, the decision of the political leaders who came to power to work with the obedient parliament of the Soviet era. These elections were held during the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, who came to power in 1993, reached an agreement with regional and global centers of power, and took full control of political power. Since then, the institution of parliament and parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan had a "mission" to maintain the status quo and strengthen the institution of the presidency in such a way as to make the president and his government absolute. This mission was incompatible with democratic elections, especially since the problem of the legitimacy of political power was growing. However, even in the first parliamentary elections, when Heydar Aliyev did not doubt his legitimacy, the list of deputies for election was predetermined by the head of state, was under his direct control and depended on his principled position, which also corresponded to the principle of Soviet quotas. At that time, the quota system was somewhat different from the Soviet one. That is, if in Soviet times there was a quota for workers and peasants, then in the post-Soviet period there was a quota for opposition and neutrals. However, in the post-Soviet period, as in the Soviet period, there was a quota for writers, poets, artists, that is, for the cultural elite, which has public authority outside of politics. A notable problem in the parliamentary elections that began in 1995 (which were supposed to maintain the status quo and provide internal political guarantees to strengthen the regime) was setting a precedent of

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including the opposition on the government's secret list. Later, secret dialogues between the government and the opposition - struggle, games and actions within the opposition generated by this unofficially adopted electoral quota - were accompanied by fragmentation and weakening of the opposition, imitation of some of them in the "pro-government opposition". The opposition either took part in it or remained on the sidelines, boycotting the elections in general and calling for the inaction of the elections (in accordance with normal democratic consciousness, instead of recognizing the voter as a source of political power and activating it, an attempt was made to form an opinion based on insufficient voter turnout in international circles and to prove the illegitimacy of the election results), which plunged people into apathy, and as a result, the political system became an arena where political power could operate as comfortably as possible. One of the main reasons for this was that the opposition, throughout its entire activity, was focused not on people who are the source of political power, but on internal and external political actors, opponents and international political circles. It was a trace of Soviet political culture that existed for 30 years in the post-Soviet period. A special role was played by psychological pressure both on the opposition and on public opinion in order to create an "invincible" image of power in society since the time of Heydar Aliyev. The death of Heydar Aliyev in 2003 and the nomination of his son Ilham Aliyev for the presidency mobilized the opposition on the eve of the elections, uniting it into the Our Azerbaijan Bloc and reasoning voter turnout. However, the violent crackdown on protests against the October 15 presidential election resulted in the arrests of more than 100 activists and the deaths of two people, as well as, continued support from a number of international organizations, including the Council of Europe [49; 15], as well as regional and global powers [41], negatively affected both public opinion and political activity. Thus, these facts not only increased the distrust of the possibility of democratic changes in public opinion, but also created an image of oppositional political activity in general, which did not produce results at the public level, and failed, also was dangerous at the individual level.

The ruling party, led by the president, won a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections of the first convocation in 1995 based on a majoritarian electoral system: 60 members of the NAP (New Azerbaijani Party - the ruling party led by Heydar Aliyev), 56 neutral members, 4 members of the Popular Front Party, 4 members of the ANIP and 9 members of 7 different parties. Of these, 27 were elected through proportional representation in multi-member constituencies, while the rest were elected through the majority system in single-member constituencies. The neutrals, mainly from the fields of literature, art, science, and education - were elected

with government support, thus were loyal to the government. Since some parties are in open coalition with the government, the term "pro-government" political parties has emerged in public opinion. It was argued that the elections were undemocratic and were rigged by official structures, and that the opposition was admitted to parliament on a pre-drawn list with a certain quota, entering into a secret dialogue with the authorities. It should be noted that this situation became one of the reasons for quarrels and disagreements in the opposition, created negative precedents, laid the foundation for mistrust in the electoral institution and blocked the possibility of its democratization.

Parliamentary elections of the second convocation were held in 2000. As a result, 83 NAP members, 31 neutral members, 8 Popular Front Party members, 2 ANIP members and 9 members from 5 parties, that of 26 of them were elected in multi-member districts under the proportional system, and the rest in single member districts under the majority system.

In 2003, Heydar Aliyev died after a serious illness, and his son Ilham Aliyev was elected president. In the October 15 presidential elections, the opposition formed a coalition and nominated a single candidate. On the eve of these elections, the opposition's struggle with the ruling party was the culmination of the 27-year rule of the NAP. At the end of election day, the opposition declared victory and called on their supporters to protest, claiming that the election results were rigged by the authorities. Brutal crackdown on protesters during marches on 16th October, the absence of an opposition candidate among the protesting crowd on election morning, the death of two people, including one child, and the arrest of more than 100 people, followed by the support of Ilham Aliyev by regional and global powers and European institutions through the adoption of the election results, left people in the square alone, wanting democratization. It can be said that the events of October 16, 2003, the actions and positions of local and foreign political actors in these events became a turning point in the direction of increasing political apathy in society and strengthening power [31]. Later, the enrichment of the Azerbaijani economy with oil revenues, the growth of the bureaucratic structures and the strengthening of its resources of pressure allowed the government to take full control of the electoral institution, weakened and divided the opposition. After that, the government easily made the desired changes to the electoral system, the principles of formation and work of electoral commissions.

After amendments to the electoral system in 2005, all deputies began to be elected under the majoritarian system. In the parliamentary elections of the third convocation held in the same year, 63 NAP members, 44 neutral representatives, 5 Musavat Party members and 12 people from 10 parties were elected.

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It should be noted that this result was obtained in the context of processes within the opposition and between the authorities and the opposition. Thus, animosity between some of the leading opposition parties in the last elections and in the previous presidential elections intensified, there was some division, and several MPs represented in the previous elections entered parliament with a different party affiliation and with a more loyal position towards the government. Representatives of parties claiming to be the rival of the ruling party did not enter parliament. [24]. The government presented these forces to society and international organizations as "constructive opposition" and "radical opposition". Opposition outside parliament did not accept the opposition, which broke away from it and managed to get into parliament, as a real opposition. One of the reasons for this was that these individuals and political parties did not vote or protest against any bills and resolutions submitted by the government and the NAP during one or even several parliamentary sessions.

In 2010, elections to the Milli Mejlis of the 4th convocation were held in a similar way and ended. There were no significant changes in the composition. However, a tradition of apolitical businessmen entering parliament began to form. Rival political forces complained to the CEC about the election fraud. The 2015 elections did not differ significantly from the previous ones [40]. Even these changes in the composition of parliament were minor. An important political fact was the decision of rival political forces to boycott the elections, stating that they were convinced that the elections would be rigged anyway. The decision to boycott was previously made by these forces in a joint statement in the 2008 presidential election. Opposition's boycott tactics and their calls for the population to boycott the elections, pushed both, the opposition and the public to give up the struggle, to accept the defeat unequivocally, to hold elections as a completely free arena for the government, and to abandon the institution of elections in public opinion and to face political apathy.

Reform policy and early parliamentary elections

Despite the strengthening of the constitutional and real power of the president, the lack of political resources in parliament and its complete control by the executive branch, the composition of the parliament was an expression of the division of real power and the measure of this division. Thus, the dynamics of the struggle for political and economic resources within the government created an appropriate composition in parliament. After the 2015 parliamentary elections, Mehriban Aliyeva's power factor was further strengthened, the institution of vice president was established in 2016 with an amendment to the constitution, and in 2017 Mehriban Aliyeva was appointed First vice president. After that, a dual power

emerged within the executive branch, especially in the presidential administration: the struggle between the head of the presidential administration and the first vice president became more open and severe. As a result of this struggle, key members of the administration (who were also assistants of the president) were fired, followed by the head of the presidential administration. In society, Mehriban Aliyeva's team was called "reformers", and Ramiz Mehdiyev's team was called "the old guard". In the parliamentary elections to be held in November 2020, both the "old guard" and businessmen, nicknamed "pocket deputies of Ramiz Mehdiyev", were expected to be replaced with new cadre. It should be noted that the changes in the executive branch were presented by the government as a timely reform, and as a reform, there was a change of cadre, not rules and principles. Senior officials, who had already grown stronger and became oligarchs, were replaced by younger technocrats studying abroad (but it was obvious that the new team's human resources were weak). Following these fundamental changes in the executive branch, the decision was made to hold early parliamentary elections, despite the next parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2020. It was stated that the reforms carried out by the president cannot continue in the current parliament, that the current parliament is inefficient and that new forces are needed. The question, which came to the agenda at the end of November 2019, was formalized in a few days. Thus, parliament was dissolved on November 28, and early parliamentary elections were scheduled for February 9, 2020.

Public confidence in the early elections

In particular, the removal from office of the head of the Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev and his team, who have played a key role in managing and maintaining power for almost 30 years, has instilled confidence in the society that reforms will take place. Thousands of young people have run for municipal elections (December 23) since these resignations. Municipal elections were a test of the government's intention to carry out political reforms and open the doors of the elite to society [3]. The municipal elections, like the previous ones, were marred by allegations of total falsification and irregularities, and the opposition and independent activists considered their result illegal. It was a resource in promoting a boycott propaganda of the opposition, which boycotted the last elections and did not support participation in the early parliamentary elections. It should be noted that a few weeks after the announcement (December 5) of the parliamentary elections, that is, during the nomination of candidates for the parliamentary elections, violations in the municipal elections and the debates on the results of these elections dealt a mortal psychological blow to chance of voter turnout.

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Election conditions. Opportunities. A new element in the elections

The public, in addition to the restrictions imposed by the government, entered the campaign environment by observing the animosity and attacks of the two main opposition parties against each-other. The boycott tactics of the Popular Front Party and the ReAL's determination to run in elections were among the main themes of the growing rivalry between the two parties after the release of ReAL leader Ilgar Mammadov, who mainly attracted the attention of European institutions. In fact, none of the politically preventive changes that were supported by all opposition forces and which were important for democratic elections were implemented by the government. Thus, the prerequisite was the existence of an electoral law, an electoral institution, an electoral mechanism that would ensure the elimination of political monopolies, opening the doors of the elite to society, what could be adequate to the declared reform. Because the electoral law and electoral mechanism, as David Schultz said, are not neutral, even if they are obliged to apply the democratic principle enshrined in the constitution with respect to the source of power. Usually they can serve to preserve political advantages, depending on the degree of freedom of society, the dominant role of the individual, political party, tribe or class. In short, the reform of the electoral system, that is, the necessary changes in the electoral legislation, the principles of organizing electoral commissions, the resignation of personnel claimed for electoral fraud, and the release of all political prisoners was envisaged.

However, unlike in previous elections, the government's tactic in the stage of registering candidates was different. There were not any artificial obstacles to registering candidates and the process was further simplified. Unlike previous elections, the ruling party did not allow party members to run on their own. Thus, the NAP decided to represent the party with only one candidate in each constituency according to the party list. The elimination of obstacles to candidates, on the one hand, prompted young political activists to join the process, because it gave some hope of opening, and on the other hand, it created a chaotic abundance of candidates in a society which did not have democratic electoral traditions. Many neutral, mostly non-political, active and passive candidates were registered. Such candidate chaos caused some confusion and sometimes irony in society. The role of executive bodies in the growth of candidates was also felt. A similar situation developed in the municipal elections on the eve of the parliamentary elections. It looked as if a long list full of passive candidates, with candidates following the main competing candidates with the same last name or first name, was necessary to confuse the electorate.

This factor was necessary for the ruling political force not only on election day, for some manipulative steps during the election campaign, but also to restrict election campaigning based on the abundance of candidates.

General characteristics of candidates

On the one hand, the softening of the candidate registration process, on the other hand, the opportunities created by the majoritarian elections have resulted in a majority of independent candidates and a large number of non-politicians. A total of 1637 candidates were registered in 125 constituencies. 316 of them withdrew their candidacy, and 1321 continued to compete. 77.5% of candidates were independent candidates, 82% of them presented their candidacy in person.

If we want to classify sociologically the candidates who joined the electoral process, they can be divided into the following groups:

1. Serious politicians, who were pushing to be elected. The political spectrum of these candidates can be divided into the following categories:

1.1. Politicians without ideology and 30 years of experience. Most of these politicians have electoral experience, but the overwhelming majority do not have a particular vision or ideological direction. For a long time, their political debates have focused on the authoritarian rule of the ruling political group and the spectrum of attitudes toward power within the opposition. On the other hand, the leading political parties in power and opposition have defined the rules of the game and political themes as a mass party (NAP declares its 700,000 membership, APFP and Musavat Party consider themselves parties of the movement uniting all ideological poles in the traditions of the National Liberation Movement) without ideology, whose main goal is political power, because of the claim to represent the whole society. While it could be seen that the platform of several candidates at the party leader level in these elections served a specific ideological context, their agenda was a struggle beyond ideological perspectives.

1.2. Left-wing youth. In the last years of the existence of the USSR, the Social Democrats opposed the collapse of the empire and were considered by public opinion as the modern successors of the Communists. For this reason, they (the most famous of them later worked for NGOs as political experts) lost its active political arena during independence. After the Social Democrats, left-wing political orientation has begun to flourish in the past few years in the predominantly right-wing Azerbaijani political environment after a break of 25-30 years. Unlike other activists, left-wing youth do not make demands on human rights and the solution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Their propaganda of the Soviet era and the spread of Leninism shows that this trend is not the result of the rise of the left-wing in Europe, but the

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result of Russia's work with the youth in recent years, especially in the education system. [36; 27].

1.3. Right-wing youth. Among them are classical liberals, neoliberals and nationalists. Liberals are mainly educated in Europe and America and are influenced by Western political schools. Some of them have been imprisoned for political reasons in the past. These are representatives of different political parties or independent candidates who entered into a temporary alliance with representatives of different political poles in electoral blocs. The main ideological support of the right-wing in Azerbaijan is nationalism, which maintains the relevance because of historical and ongoing geopolitical processes, especially Russian imperialism, the occupation by Armenia and the threats of Iran. However, the foundations of Azerbaijani nationalism were laid by the school of Akhundov's enlightenment and are in a synthesis with Europeanism.

1.4. Independent intellectuals of the middle generation who have no party affiliation, but have promising political intentions. Until now, these people were unable or unwilling to join the closed political elite of government and opposition. They are outside the political arena because of the barriers created by the political system for the emergence of a new political force. However, they are on social networks and play an important role in shaping public opinion.

2. Influential non-political figures applying for election. Among them are well-known doctors, teachers, cultural figures and journalists. They do not interfere in political affairs and declare that they will contribute to legislative activity in their fields

3. Entrepreneurs running for elections. The voters who support them are those who try to solve their problems on a personal level and are not interested in politics

4. Candidates who do not hope to be elected and are participating for trading purposes. Their expectation from the process is to sell the voter support they can get to one of the strongest candidates. They participate in the election campaign and spend time and investment, since they take into account the possibility that the voter's vote has a certain value (in the case of relatively democratic elections). Democratic elections provide these traders with an open platform, and the political culture of a poorly educated voter becomes fertile ground for such candidates

5. Those who view the election campaign as an opportunity for self-promotion of professional or future political activity

6. Candidates from parties who are on the candidate list for an election and do not enter into serious competition process. This is mainly done in order to show the presence of party cadres. However, due to the lack of party support or personal potential (cultural or financial), they do not lead the process and mainly help their leaders in the election campaign

7. Random persons who are included in the list of candidates for the elections and do not join the campaign. This is done in order to split the votes of a strong opponent, creating some kind of misunderstanding on election day (with the same last name, with the same region, etc.)

The problem of the political platform of candidates

Many of the candidates did not present the platform at all, while some presented their flyers towards the end of the campaign, focusing on the challenges and promises made by various candidates throughout the campaign. Those who represented the political platform from the very beginning of the elections did not turn it into a system based on a certain ideology. With the exception of one or two people, the overwhelming majority (including young people proudly declaring their ideological orientation) did not offer a political program. With the exception of ReAL Party (not registered at the period of election), all the traditional political parties in the political arena, including the ruling NAP, did not come up with their own political programs. The campaigns, challenges and promises of the vast majority of candidates actively participating in the election campaign, including most politicians with many years of electoral experience, are mainly focused on the district and at the local social level. As if the candidates will be elected to a municipality that deals with local infrastructure, environmental and social problems and has an appropriate budget. Some find their place in parliament for legislative work dedicated to some concrete sphere or, if they are lawyers, for drafting laws. In short, with the exception of rare cases, there were no speeches that had an ideological concept and its programmatically presentation on a political platform, discussing the appropriate strategic line. In fact, the political elite [33; 8] and its candidates, who must lead the political culture and value system of society, democratic thinking and participation, have shown that they cannot play a leading role in this case. Following are the causes of the problem:

The lack of democratic electoral traditions led to a further decline in the political culture of all parties.

1) Deterioration of the social situation of the population, growth of social demands

2) The failure of the municipal system, the indifference of the executive power to local people and additional difficulties created by corruption for residents. That is, expectation from the deputy a solution to the accumulated social problems of the municipality and executive authorities

3) The limited political power of parliament and the inability of parliamentarians to play a political role does not create a real requirement, such as a duty to provide a political vision for candidates. On the contrary, the existence of such a vision has long been

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a mild prohibition by the government for members of Milli Majlis

4) The absence of party factions in parliament and their traditions of political and ideological struggle. Adoption of laws in parliament under the control and dictate of the executive branch

5) Becoming of the right-wing into the only ideological pole in Azerbaijan due to the threats emanating from the communist past of the left-wing and imperialist claims of Russia. The stability of this situation does not provoke ideological discussions in society. Deideologization caused by these and other national and global trends

The problem of political apathy of voters

Voter's attitude to elections is formed, first of all, by belief in the institution of elections and the dependence of the election result on his will. It can be said that the apathy of voters in Azerbaijan is mainly related to the distrust of voters in the elections. This mistrust has developed and grown over almost 30 years of political history.

The fact that parliament is formed entirely on the basis of a list prepared in advance by the government and that electoral fraud is an obvious game is an indisputable fact in public opinion. That is, the first factor is the voter's unconditional distrust of the desire of the political power to hold democratic elections and the legitimate and transparent activities of its respective structures and election commissions. It should be noted that the electoral system, rules and criteria have been formed over the years to protect the hegemony of the ruling party [7; 1]. However, although the distrust of the Azerbaijani voter in the electoral institution is a sufficient factor in his political apathy, it is not the only factor.

The second factor is public distrust of the limited powers of the Milli Mejlis and the deputies, the quality of their activities for citizens [50]. An authoritarian regime and the lack of the rule of law, have also increased the distrust of the legislature. The amendments to the Constitution maximized the institution of the presidency and violated the principle of separation of powers. Ministers became oligarchs, and local executives became local feudal lords. Deputies who are considered active tend to play the role of advocates for government activities, forging personal interests with the executive to expand business opportunities. In this case, it is difficult for a deputy to defend the interests of citizens before the executive authorities who are partners in corruption. Thus, the deputy has obligations not to citizens, but to the political leadership, which can be traced not only in the activities of the deputies, but also in their speeches of representatives of political power [30]. In political science, a citizen's trust in a legislative institution and the deputy can theoretically be presented separately from each other [25]. Because this theory is based on the existing practice in

democratic systems, and therefore the attitude of the electorate to the institution and to the deputy is studied by different polls as a subject of different levels. In our case, the system does not create conditions for the differentiation of the citizen's attitude to the institution and to the representative, as well as the need for the representative to win the confidence of the citizen from whom political will has been taken away. As a result, the attitude towards the institution and the representative is interconnected, one generates the other.

The third factor is public distrust of the political system as a whole, including the opposition. Endless confrontation within the opposition, especially the inability of public opinion to forgive the transfer of power by the leading opposition force a year after it came to power in 1992, as well as the continuation of decades of party leadership, the lack of dynamism and democracy within the party, on the contrary, disappointment of public opinion caused by the elimination of influential cadres from these parties as a result of undemocratic competition exacerbated the problem of the legitimacy of the opposition.

The factors described above reflect the result in the political culture of voters, in their expectations from the deputy or in their distrust of him. According to Barry, "democracy forms a civic culture" [4]. When I was running as a candidate, more than 90 percent of voters expressed no confidence in the elections. This was stated by most of the candidates on social networks. Some openly said: "The deputy is for himself, we don't need a deputy". This response was the essence of no confidence in the elections and reflected the opinion of the majority. The content of the appeals to the candidate also showed that the voter does not need a deputy. People need executors who solve their personal problems, at best, infrastructure issues, because in practice they do not see the power of the law and the legislature in solving the accumulated social problems. If the law does not work, if decisions depend on the will of the executors, then either the deputy is not needed as a legislator, or the voter expects him to deal with social or infrastructure issues.

Total distrust of the political system, its institutions [13; 14] and actors [16; 21; 48], which was created and strengthened in voters, made them possible to distance oneself from politics. This has become the biggest challenge for a new generation and independent candidates who want to attract the electorate to the polls in order to prevent electoral fraud and get them out of political apathy. The anger that had accumulated over the years against deputies and officials was directed at active candidates who shared the same social fate as themselves. The voter complained to all candidates he met about officials and deputies with whom he could not meet, and said: "You are all like that". These elections showed that the results that I have observed so far, even in 1999,

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when I conducted a survey of leading politicians from 11 political parties [20], have not changed in 20 years, but have strengthened. Thus, political parties are separated from society, and people are outside the political activities of political groups. The entire struggle of political forces was waged with each other, and they did not need to report to the people. In turn, society has learned to ignore them. The main problem mentioned by all opposition groups and independent activists who want change is that society is ignoring politics and the political system.

One of the biggest obstacles to getting voters out of apathy and involving them to participate in elections is the habit of not showing up at the polls over the past decade thanks to opposition boycott decisions as well. According to political theory, one of the main factors ensuring a massive voter turnout is the activity of political forces aimed at mobilizing voters [42; 9; 39; 47; 6]. The lack of voter turnout on election day, the population's ignore the political system, and political apathy are seen in the interests of a number of political forces, starting with the ruling party. In last several elections, leading opposition forces have traditionally boycotted the elections, arguing that voter turnout was in the government's interest to show that the elections took place. The "secret" list of deputies is published in the media by the opposition leader a few days before each elections. The fact that this list, inaccessible to the highest positions of power, somehow reached the opposition leader some days before elections, and the fact that the list accurately reflects the composition of parliament after the elections raises many questions and confirms that neither the government nor the traditional the opposition is not interested in voter turnout. As in 2015, Jamil Hasanli, the chairman of the National Council, which decided to boycott these elections, presented to the media a list of candidates for the parliamentary mandate a few days before the elections: "there is no need to wait for the election day, February 9, because there are no elections in the country". He "proved" to the society the pointlessness of coming to the polling stations, saying: "Please, 12 days before election day, check out the list of deputies who will be "elected" on February 9" [51; 46].

Election environment

As a result of legislative changes in 2008 and 2010, the period allotted for the election campaign was reduced from 60 to 23 days.

No free airtime was allocated on Public Television for candidates' speeches. On the contrary, prices were inflated. For the vast majority of candidates it was impossible to get access to this price, and for the rest it was pointless. In general, the campaign took place on social media, especially Facebook, as media prices were high. 75% of television appearances focused on government candidates [23]. Some candidates have also taken

advantage of the YouTube channel. The electoral environment was practically absent outside of social networks. Even the placement of candidates' posters was accompanied by severe restrictions and obstacles. All this made it extremely difficult for candidates to activate and mobilize voters. The active part of society on social networks, especially on Facebook, is mainly public figures, representatives of the middle class. The social network in which young people are active is Instagram. Due to the fact that the majority of voters are outside the Facebook arena, and the campaign environment is on Facebook, voters were also outside the campaign environment.

On the other hand, the competitive field created for the candidate by television appearances and debates [10] also shapes the voter's expectations of the candidates and the criteria for comparing them. The loss of this opportunity led to a decrease in the quality of voter assessment, further rising of manipulation and the candidate's ability to avoid the basic required presentations (platform, program and strategy, ideological principles, reasoned discussion skills, etc.). While there are opportunities to reach out to voters through social media video ads and even live broadcasts, very few candidates have used them, and most of them have not developed appropriate political platforms. The election period stimulates the formation of an electoral culture, a democratic political culture of the voter (as well as politicians), in particular, the development of political cognition and ideas about the political and legislative obligations of parliament and candidates [2]. Therefore, such a restriction on the election campaign should have had a negative impact on the quality of citizens' demands and choices, as well as on voter turnout on election day.

Joint action of candidates in many constituencies

The softening of the nomination process has given candidates some hope that there is a political will to hold democratic elections. However, numerous reports that local executive bodies unlawfully interfered in the election campaign in favor of the ruling party and involved local governments in this work soon made it clear that the elections would be falsified in election day. Shortly thereafter, some of the candidates withdrew their candidacy under pressure from the executive branch. Despite the same pressure and uneven playing field, the candidates, who said they were fighting to the end, focused their fierce competition with each other on jointly fighting irregularities and electoral fraud. In other words, the struggle of candidates in some constituencies has turned into a joint struggle for fair elections. It was necessary to jointly instruct and systematize observers to observe the electoral process in order to prevent fraud, and if this was not possible, to gather facts, file a joint complaint after the election and make it public.

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One of the main reasons for this was the lack of organizational support of the vast majority of candidates in the face of state resources in the hands of the ruling party. In the constituencies where such unions were created, the chairpersons of the constituencies and precincts, who had many years of experience in organizing electoral fraud, faced difficulties in carrying out “traditional” actions. These difficulties also arose for the Central Election Commission after the elections in connection with the facts collected by the candidates who filed a complaint and their joint activities, which they disclosed and disseminated on social networks. The CEC canceled election results in 4 constituencies and invalidated the results at 328 polling stations in 54 constituencies [29]. However, most of the allegations of grave irregularities that must lead to the annulment of the election results were ignored and the courts did not satisfy the plaintiffs’ complaints. 236 candidates, including 11 political parties and independent candidates, signed a joint statement that they will not recognize the officially announced election results [43]. Members of the International Election Observation Mission, including the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, issued a joint statement reflecting a negative opinion [5].

The role of the February 9 elections in renewing the political scene

According to the official election results, 70 NAP members, 41 neutralities, 3 members of the CSP, 6 members from 6 different parties were elected to parliament. One member of the unregistered ReAL Party was able to enter parliament as a neutral candidate. There was no difference between the resigned parliament of the 5th convocation and the new parliament, neither in terms of political composition, nor in terms of key persons. Thus, people who were demanded by public opinion to leave (former Soviet cadres who angered the public with their speeches and were not recognized by society because of their inaction, despite almost 30 years of experience in parliament) were re-elected to parliament. In many districts, previous deputies expelled by local residents during the election campaign were re-elected. Therefore, “Why was the parliament dissolved?”, “If the same people return to parliament again, why are early parliamentary elections needed?” questions were on the agenda after the elections.

In this election, there were many independent candidates, their observers and active volunteers who helped the candidates. By exposing in detail election fraud, portraying lawlessness and sharing it on social networks, they clearly demonstrated the already well-known crisis of electoral and legal institutions. They also showed the public the real situation with the

social base of political groups, the problem of the legitimacy of both the ruling party and the opposition. This fact also exposed the political collapse of traditional political forces. The existence of a new generation of politicians, albeit disorganized, is another fact. In short, the ruling political party NAP, which has been a political monopoly for 30 years, and the traditional opposition (the Popular Front and ANIP in the 1990s and the political forces that emerged from them) have already lost their place in the public consciousness. These elections severely damaged the fortresses created by the government and traditional opposition for more than 25 years before new generations, and opened the doors of the political arena for society. They showed the government, opposition and society that the political system was about to break the 30-year monopoly of power that emerged 30 years ago and lost its legitimacy.

Conclusion

The early parliamentary elections on February 9, 2020 clearly showed that society has undergone natural changes and that new generations are its locomotive, and the political arena, which has been static and closed to society for decades, not only represents this society, but is also separated from it. It turned out that society has long lived its own destiny, and political forces are in relations with each other. People who were not connected to the political system (did not even have the right to do so) and for decades were de facto banned from political activity turned into an island where the inhabitants have changed and which no longer hears or accepts the words of politicians.

Thus, it can be said with confidence that the biggest indicator of the situation of the political system in these early parliamentary elections is the problem of the legitimacy of the ruling and opposition political forces. The political apathy of people, their lack of control over the electoral institution and even their absence in elections are confirmed by scientific literature as the main features of the internal policy of authoritarian regimes and the result of their purposeful activities [35]. The problem of the legitimacy of decades of authoritarian rule is also natural and has a scientific basis as an inevitable consequence [18; 19]. Political apathy is a deliberate choice of authoritarian regimes. As a result, (loss of control over the government, ineffective and corrupt governance), illegitimacy and growing anger become the biggest problem. Since the political apathy of the people is in the interests of an authoritarian government, the problem we are studying is the problem of the legitimacy of the opposition, mistakes in reaching it, and the role of the opposition in the political apathy of the people.

Azerbaijan's political opposition has been weakened by deficiencies in principles of action, openness to manipulation by government, and

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isolation from society. But these mistakes also contributed to the political apathy of society. One of them is that the opposition political forces do not work properly with society; in general, at the center of their political activity is not society, but the political system, focusing all their attention and energy on their rivals. Second, because they did not hold parliamentary elections during their rule, they did not give people the first experience of forming a democratic parliament. If they had such experience, they would recognize their first flaw, develop a political and electoral culture and lay the foundation for a democratic parliament in the country, which would make it difficult for the ruling party to consolidate the direction or content of subsequent processes. Third, political deals, concessions and agreements that run counter to transparency, fairness and the law allow lawlessness to grow and become more and more absolute. Thus, in the event of these violations in the first parliamentary elections, the opposition recognized the results of the elections and contributed to the legitimacy of this trend. One of the main problems created by the opposition is that people understand that the results of all elections are determined in advance by political will. It is clear that in both 1995 and 2000, the opposition agreed to a certain quota at the direction of the government (of course, the government was forced to allow a certain amount of opposition to parliament, given the internal and external conditions and its unlimited possibilities in that time). Thus, the opposition helped to make the dominance of the political will of the government absolute in the public consciousness, that is, to force the society to admit its weakness and defeat in the face of the government. In the following period, internal and external conditions became more favorable for the government, and it did not allow its rivals to enter parliament. After that, the loyal opposition, which the government calls "constructive", enters parliament, and we observe the boycott tactics of the opposition, which no longer help, but rather alienate citizens from the electoral institution, making the field more comfortable and hassle-free for the government.

In order to strengthen and protect the barrier between the society and the opposition, the power controlled the society and its resources, contributed to the strengthening of intrigue within the opposition and undermined the credibility of the opposition.

A nation in political apathy is a great force that does not listen to politicians. Early elections showed the potential of the people as a great player, which in fact is not politically and ideologically headed by any political force. One thing became clear to everyone:

the existing political forces in the political arena either do not exist in public opinion, or have exhausted their possibilities to convince people in any situation. The emergence of new forces is a historic necessity, and as an important outcome of the February 9 elections, it prompted calls for a new generation of politicians.

On the eve of the elections, when polarization and contradictions between the two clans within the government intensified, the monolithic nature of the government began to disappear. Antagonism within the government initiated the process of removing certain forces of the political elite from power. The government presented this process as "rejuvenation" or even "reform" in response to the demands of social dynamics and the challenges from the people. People who had lost all confidence in the political system as a whole had certain hopes and expectations in connection with the resignation of Ramiz Mehdiyev and his team, who were the main figures in the government. At the same time, early parliamentary elections became a test of the political government's promises to carry out reforms, the last chance to win people's confidence that the government will move towards democratic changes, at least softening the regime. The loss of this opportunity has put the government, as well as the opposition, in a situation of irreversible illegitimacy. The very fact of losing this latter opportunity has become a serious political result for public opinion, government, opposition and even international actors interested in the region.

Representatives of the generation that came into politics with the National Liberation Movement - the leading cadres of traditional political parties - continue to carry their original ideological identity. That is, they are trying to express a broad ideological umbrella based on an independent and sovereign national statehood. For the past thirty years, the closure of the political scene has prevented the emergence of the rival ideological poles. In these elections, independent representatives of the right and left, especially liberal and feminist ideologies, entered into chaotic and disorganized political activity. The elections not only presented the society with a new generation with bright ideological poles, but also revealed their need for organization. This need has forced competing independent candidates in some constituencies to temporarily organize a fight against electoral fraud. It was clear to each candidate that it was impossible to achieve results in the next elections by continuing their political activities individually [37]. Public opinion already has challenges to these new forces to create new political parties on an ideological basis.

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