

Key Features of Political Culture in Contemporary Azerbaijan

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Abstract. *This study examines the principal features of political culture in the Republic of Azerbaijan through four interrelated dimensions: the Soviet political legacy, the impact of the Karabakh conflict, paternal authority in the national mentality, and the constitutional principle of secularism. The study uses qualitative document analysis and thematic interpretation of academic literature, legal sources, and selected publications on Azerbaijan. The findings indicate that Soviet-era centralized governance contributed to political caution, limited civic initiative, and expectations of vertical decision-making. At the same time, independence, generational change, civil-society activity, and digital communication have encouraged more participatory attitudes. The Karabakh conflict strengthened national identity, attachment to statehood, and the prioritization of security and stability; following the restoration of territorial control, reconstruction, reintegration, and long-term peace have become more prominent in public discourse. Paternal norms support expectations of strong leadership and collective trust, while also creating a risk that personal loyalty may outweigh institutional accountability. Secularism provides a legal and social framework for the political inclusion of different religious and ethnic groups. Overall, Azerbaijan's political culture combines historical continuity with gradual modernization and remains shaped by the interaction between stability, national solidarity, civic participation, and institutional development.*

Keywords: *political culture, Soviet legacy, Karabakh conflict, paternal authority, secularism, Azerbaijan*

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Müasir Azərbaycanı siyasi mədəniyyətin əsas xüsusiyyətləri

Dəniz Vəliyeva 

Xülasə. *Tədqiqatda Azərbaycan Respublikasında siyasi mədəniyyətin əsas xüsusiyyətləri dörd qarşılıqlı əlaqəli istiqamət üzrə araşdırılır: sovet siyasi irsi, Qarabağ münaqişəsinin təsiri, milli mentalitetdə paternal hakimiyyət və dünyəvilik prinsipi. Məqalədə elmi ədəbiyyatın, hüquqi mənbələrin və Azərbaycanla bağlı seçilmiş nəşrlərin keyfiyyət yönümlü sənəd təhlili və tematik şərh tətbiq edilir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, sovet dövrünün mərkəzləşdirilmiş idarəetmə modeli siyasi ehtiyatlılıq, məhdud vətəndaş təşəbbüsü və şaquli qərarvermə gözləntilərinin formalaşmasına təsir göstərmişdir. Bununla yanaşı, müstəqillik, nəsil dəyişikliyi, vətəndaş cəmiyyəti fəaliyyəti və rəqəmsal kommunikasiya daha iştirakçı yanaşmaları gücləndirmişdir. Qarabağ münaqişəsi milli kimliyi, dövlətçiliyə bağlılığı, təhlükəsizlik və sabitlik prioritetlərini möhkəmləndirmişdir.*

Paternal normalar güclü liderlik və kollektiv etimad gözləntilərini dəstəkləyir, lakin şəxsi sədaqətin institusional hesabatlılığı üstələməsi riskini də yaradır. Dünyəvilik müxtəlif dini və etnik qrupların siyasi integrasiyası üçün hüquqi və sosial çərçivə təmin edir. Ümumilikdə, Azərbaycanın siyasi mədəniyyəti tarixi davamlılıqla tədrici modernləşməni birləşdirir.

Açar sözlər: siyasi mədəniyyət, sovet irsi, Qarabağ münaqişəsi, paternal hakimiyyət, dünyəvilik, Azərbaycan

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Introduction

In the contemporary period, the extent of public participation in political processes, trust in the state and its institutions, and attitudes toward democratic values have become increasingly significant. Political culture therefore has both scholarly and practical importance. It provides a framework for understanding how citizens perceive authority, institutions, participation, legitimacy, and their own role in public life. Classic studies define political culture through the orientations that individuals and groups develop toward political institutions and processes, while later research links these orientations to historical experience, modernization, and institutional performance (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Political culture may be understood as a system of values, beliefs, expectations, and behavioral patterns that shapes society's relationship with the political system. In Azerbaijan, this culture has developed through the interaction of imperial and Soviet legacies, independence and state-building, armed conflict, national traditions, constitutional principles, and contemporary social change. Azerbaijan's post-Soviet political development cannot be explained through a single factor; historical continuity and institutional transformation operate simultaneously (Altstadt, 2017; Cornell, 2011). This article analyzes four factors that are especially visible in contemporary Azerbaijan: the Soviet political legacy, the influence of the Karabakh conflict, paternal authority in the national mentality, and secularism. The aim is to identify how these factors shape political expectations and behavior, and how their interaction influences the balance between stability, solidarity, participation, and institutional modernization.

Materials and Methods

The study employs a qualitative research design based on document analysis and thematic interpretation. The source base includes scholarly books and journal articles on political culture and post-Soviet transformation, the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and research concerning the Karabakh conflict, multiculturalism, secular governance, national identity, and patterns of political authority. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the four analytical themes and their capacity to clarify historical, legal, and sociocultural dimensions of political culture.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the literature was reviewed to identify recurring explanations of political attitudes and institutional expectations. Second, the material was coded under four thematic categories: Soviet legacy, conflict and national solidarity, paternal authority, and secularism. Third, the categories were compared to determine where they reinforce or constrain civic participation and political modernization. Because the study is interpretive and does not use survey

data or interviews, its findings describe dominant tendencies in the literature rather than measuring the attitudes of the entire population. This limitation is considered when drawing conclusions.

Results

The Influence of the Soviet Political Legacy

The political culture of contemporary Azerbaijan was shaped not only by developments following independence but also by the long period of Soviet rule. Its effects remain visible in patterns of political behavior and in citizens' relationship with the state. Soviet governance was highly centralized: major political decisions were made within the union-wide party structure, while opportunities for autonomous local participation were limited. The system encouraged compliance with vertical administration more strongly than individual political initiative. These conditions contributed to a political style in which many citizens adopted the position of observers rather than active participants (Jabarov, 2024; Rose et al., 1998).

The hegemony of the Communist Party also reduced representative institutions to a largely formal role. Although parliaments, elections, and other political mechanisms existed, effective power was concentrated within the party hierarchy. As a result, formal institutions could be perceived as distant from actual decision-making. Restrictions on free political expression further encouraged caution and self-censorship. The idea that silence offered security became embedded in everyday behavior, and elements of this disposition continued into the post-Soviet period (Jabarov, 2023).

Nevertheless, the legacy is neither uniform nor permanent. Since independence, new institutions, civil-society initiatives, educational opportunities, transnational contacts, and information technologies have widened the channels through which citizens receive political information and express public concerns. Generational change is especially important because younger citizens encounter different models of communication and participation. The evidence therefore suggests a gradual, uneven transition: expectations of centralized authority remain influential, but they coexist with demands for transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful civic participation (Altstadt, 2017; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

The Influence of the Karabakh Conflict on Political Culture

Political culture is shaped not only by institutions and ideology but also by the long-term consequences of war and political conflict. The Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Karabakh, the Second Karabakh War of 2020, and the developments of 2023 became decisive reference points in Azerbaijan's public consciousness. The conflict strengthened national identity, attachment to statehood, and the political priority assigned to security and territorial integrity (de Waal, 2013; Naghiyeva, 2025).

For decades, the Karabakh issue was experienced not simply as a territorial dispute but as a national tragedy, a displacement crisis, and a symbol of collective memory. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the early 1990s produced deep social trauma while also mobilizing political consciousness. The idea of restoring territorial integrity reinforced social cohesion around a common objective. Consequently, stability and security frequently took precedence in public assessments of political processes (Naghiyeva, 2025).

The conflict also influenced the hierarchy of political priorities. Social and economic demands were often discussed alongside the argument that the restoration of territorial integrity had to come first. After Azerbaijan restored control over its territories, public discourse increasingly turned toward

reconstruction, return, reintegration, regional development, and a durable peace. This shift creates space for political culture to focus more strongly on institutional effectiveness, social policy, and public participation; however, the enduring effects of conflict and displacement require careful and long-term assessment.

National Mentality and Paternal Authority

Political culture has deep social and cultural roots. In Azerbaijan's traditionally patriarchal social structure, the authority associated with the father or senior family figure can influence expectations of public leadership. Within the family, the father is often understood as a protector, decision-maker, and bearer of responsibility. In political perception, this model may be projected onto the state and its leaders, encouraging an image of the strong leader as a guardian of collective welfare (Arik, 2024). Such a pattern can support expectations of continuity, order, and responsibility. At the same time, it may give priority to confidence in a leader over the citizen's direct and sustained participation in institutions. When political legitimacy is strongly personalized, symbolic and moral expectations may become more influential than programmatic choice, competition, and institutional accountability. Respect for age, experience, loyalty, and tradition can therefore serve both as stabilizing cultural resources and as factors that slow the development of impersonal, rules-based political relations (Almond & Verba, 1963; Smith, 1991).

Paternal authority should not be treated as an unchanging or exclusively Azerbaijani characteristic. Social norms transform as education, urbanization, digital communication, women's participation, and generational change alter family and public relations. The relevant finding is therefore not that paternalism fully determines political behavior, but that it remains one cultural lens through which authority, protection, responsibility, and loyalty may be interpreted.

Secularism, Multiculturalism, and Modernization

Secularism is one of the central legal foundations of political culture in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Constitution establishes the secular character of the state, separates religion from the state, and guarantees equality regardless of religious affiliation. This legal framework supports equal political status for citizens of different faiths and helps prevent any single religious doctrine from acquiring official ideological authority (Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 1995).

The significance of secularism is reinforced by Azerbaijan's multiethnic and multiconfessional composition. Legal equality, religious neutrality, and the protection of cultural diversity create conditions for broader inclusion in political and social life. Research published in the journal *Scientific Work* emphasizes the constitutional foundations of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan, while research in *Scientific Research* highlights the role of balanced public communication in supporting intercultural dialogue and social cohesion (Habibova, 2021; Allahverdiyeva, 2024). These principles are relevant to political culture because trust and participation are strengthened when citizens perceive public institutions as equally accessible.

For many younger citizens, secularism is not only a constitutional provision but also part of a modern social outlook. Expectations of transparent decision-making, professional administration, rational policy, and open communication are compatible with secular governance. The development of digital media can expand pluralism and access to information, but it can also intensify polarization and misinformation. Thus, the modernization of political culture requires not only technological access but also media literacy, ethical communication, and institutional responsiveness (Allahverdiyeva, 2024).

Discussion

The findings show that the four factors do not operate separately. The Soviet legacy and paternal authority can both strengthen expectations of vertical leadership, yet their historical origins are different: one is linked to a centralized political system, while the other emerges from longer-standing social norms. The Karabakh conflict added a powerful security dimension, encouraging unity around territorial integrity and statehood. Secularism, in contrast, provides a constitutional basis for inclusion and creates opportunities for pluralism within a shared civic framework.

This interaction produces a political culture characterized by both continuity and change. Stability and national solidarity remain highly valued, but they increasingly coexist with demands for effective institutions, access to information, professional governance, and citizen involvement. Comparative studies of post-authoritarian societies suggest that democratic political culture develops not only through formal institutional change but also through repeated experiences of participation, accountability, and trust (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Rose et al., 1998). For Azerbaijan, this means that political modernization depends on the practical relationship between citizens and institutions as much as on legal design.

The analysis also indicates that cultural explanations must be used carefully. Concepts such as paternalism, mentality, or collective loyalty should not be presented as fixed national traits. They are historically conditioned patterns that vary across generations, regions, educational groups, and social contexts. Future research should therefore test the themes identified here through representative surveys, interviews, and comparative analysis. Such work could measure how age, education, displacement experience, media use, and institutional contact affect political trust and participation.

Conclusion

The Soviet period continues to influence Azerbaijan's political culture through political caution, formalism, and expectations of centralized decision-making. These tendencies, however, are gradually being reshaped by independence, social change, civil-society activity, education, and digital communication. Contemporary political culture is therefore not a simple continuation of the past, but a field in which inherited habits and new forms of participation interact.

The Karabakh conflict left a deep mark on citizens' relationship with the state and on the language of public debate. It reinforced national unity, security concerns, and attachment to statehood. The restoration of territorial control has opened a new phase in which reconstruction, reintegration, social development, and peace can occupy a larger place in political discourse.

Paternal authority remains relevant to expectations of strong leadership, collective trust, and administrative stability. Yet this cultural pattern is capable of transformation and can coexist with greater institutional accountability and citizen initiative. Secularism, meanwhile, offers an essential legal and social foundation for equal participation by diverse religious and ethnic groups. Taken together, these findings suggest that the future development of Azerbaijan's political culture will depend on maintaining stability and solidarity while expanding transparent institutions, pluralistic discussion, and meaningful civic participation.

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