# NATIONALIST RHETORIC AND PUBLIC LEGITIMACY IN ILHAM ALIYEV'S AZERBAIJAN

Benjamin Midas

A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in the Global Studies department in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Chapel Hill
2016

Approved by:

Erica Johnson

Michael Morgan

Chad Bryant

ABSTRACT

Benjamin Midas: Nationalist Rhetoric and Public Legitimacy in Ilham Aliyev's Azerbaijan
(Under the Direction of Erica Johnson)

This thesis explores the question of why nondemocratic leaders use nationalist rhetoric in ways very similar to democratic leaders through a case study of Azerbaijan. I argue that Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev uses nationalist rhetoric in order to build public legitimacy for his regime. Despite not needing to build a base of support for legitimate elections, Aliyev needs to legitimate his regime in the eyes of his citizens. To do so he uses nationalist themes in his speeches that resonate with Azerbaijani population to develop popular support. These themes come from applying theories of nationalism to the context of Azerbaijan. I will show the nationalist themes Aliyev utilizes in his speeches and how the use of those themes changes in response to events in Azerbaijan. Aliyev modulates his nationalist rhetoric in response to events in predictable ways, which shows how he manipulates nationalist themes to generate support.

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# INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan is a small country in the southern Caucasus ruled by President Ilham Aliyev. Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union, but became and independent country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Officially, Azerbaijan has all the hallmarks of a democracy, but in practice, Azerbaijan functions as an authoritarian state. Its president Ilham Aliyev is virtually guaranteed to win elections through rigging the system against his opposition. Azerbaijan is an example of a hybrid regime, a regime that combines aspects of democratic government with more authoritarian principles.[1] The term generally connotes a regime with very weak democracy in which the institutions of democracy exist but do not function properly. Despite these circumstances, President Aliyev devotes a great deal of time and effort to developing nationalist ideology in his speeches.

Ilham Aliyev never misses an opportunity to develop the great Azerbaijani nation. In speeches, addresses, and interviews, Aliyev constantly praises the strengths of the Azerbaijani nation as the best, strongest, freest, etc. nation in the world. Aliyev devotes considerable time to the theme of Azerbaijani's national greatness. At first glance, this might not seem so unusual. Nationalist rhetoric can be an effective tool to build support for an election. Aliyev's use of nationalist rhetoric is similar to his counterparts in western liberal democracies. The more a politician can ingratiate themselves with a national group, the more they could depend on their

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[1] Larry Jay Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 51–65.

group's support in an election.  Building a base of electoral support seems like a basic component of the democratic system.

Azerbaijan, as noted above, is not a true democratic system, however.  Aliyev does not necessarily need to mobilize a wide base of support to win elections in Azerbaijan because through marginalizing the opposition and possibly altering election results, Aliyev would most likely win the election regardless of who actually supports him.[2]  As in many hybrid regimes, democracy in Azerbaijan is a shaky proposition at best.  The regime frequently intimidates opposition politicians and creates a political framework in which real opposition has no chance of materializing and challenging the regime.  The elections are rigged and Aliyev does not necessarily need to spend time trying to win them legitimately.  Why then would president Aliyev devote time to trying to win over the public to his cause?

I will argue that the Aliyev regime's stability and Aliyev's efforts at nation building go hand in hand.  Creating a strong sense of nationhood in Azerbaijan helped lead to the situation in which Aliyev currently finds himself.  He is unquestionably a corrupt, autocratic president, but many Azerbaijani people approve of Aliyev and his government.  Aliyev does not need to create an electoral base of nationalist supporters in the sense that he needs a base to win presidential elections.  Nevertheless, creating such a base through his nation-building rhetoric in speeches helps keep his approval ratings high.  Azerbaijani citizens who approve of Aliyev, who buy into his proclamations on the greatness of the Azerbaijani nation are less likely to challenge Aliyev politically.  Aliyev does not technically need all these supporters to show up at the polls on

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[2] REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 9 October 2013 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report; Warsaw December 24, 2013

election day and vote for him, but their support offers his regime a level of stability that is unique in the post-Soviet context.

Azerbaijan is a unique country in many ways. It is a majority Muslim state that was once part of the Soviet Union. In some ways then, its transition to a corrupt hybrid regime may not seem very unique at all. Many of the post-Soviet states in Central Asia followed a similar trajectory after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In many post-Soviet states, hybrid regimes developed when a leader with autocratic tendencies took power and refused to give it up. What makes Azerbaijan unique is how stable the Aliyev regime has been, stretching back to Ilham's father, Heydar Aliyev, who served as president before Ilham. The Central Asian states witnessed political violence in several forms after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even Azerbaijan's neighbors in the South Caucasus experienced various levels of political upheaval. In contrast, Azerbaijan has had relatively little violence since the Aliyevs came to power.[3] Ilham Aliyev has not dealt with serious challenges to his regime in his two terms as president. Political opposition exists in Azerbaijan, but it has never gathered much momentum in challenging Aliyev. I argue that part of this regime stability can be explained by public support generated by Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric.

I will use three bodies of literature to help explain why Ilham Aliyev exerts so much time and energy building up the Azerbaijani nation. The first is the literature of nationalism itself. Many scholars have written about nation building form a variety of theoretical perspectives and

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[3] Süha Bölükbaşı, *Azerbaijan : A Political History* (London ; New York: Distributed in the U.S. and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

about a variety of cases.[4]  Nation building and nationalism is an extremely important aspect of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the years following.[5]   I will show how Azerbaijan and Ilham Aliyev fit into this complex body of literature by exploring how Aliyev's methods compare to other leaders' methods of nation building.  Does Aliyev's use of nationalism fit with existing explanations of nation building or are his practices unique?  Is such top-down nationalism common or effective?  Are there analogous examples of political stability through nation building or is Azerbaijan a more unique case? Nationalism is an integral part of understanding Ilham Aliyev's speeches.  Aliyev uses nationalism to build solidarity in the public and generate legitimacy for his regime.

I will also use literature that explores the idea of authoritarian legitimacy.  Authoritarian leaders such as Ilham Aliyev are not universally reviled by their citizens.  Many are not as popular as Aliyev, but many do seek some kind of legitimacy through elections or other means. I will show how Aliyev's efforts to build support and legitimacy through nation building rhetoric fit into the wider context of authoritarian legitimacy.

Finally, I will explore the literature on hybrid regimes.  Azerbaijan certainly fits the mold of a hybrid regime.  It combines aspects of both democratic and authoritarian government, most typically through competitive elections which are usually not free or fair.  It is important to understand how hybrid regimes tend to function in general and how Azerbaijan compares. Azerbaijan is an interesting case in terms of hybrid regimes again because of how popular and

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[4] For a broad overview of nationalism see 1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006) and Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

[5] Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence : Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000)

stable the Aliyev regime has been. I argue that Aliyev uses nationalism to generate public legitimacy and this helps explain the stability of hybrid regimes.

### *Data and Case Selection*

Aliyev became president in 2003 after his father, Heydar Aliyev, passed the reins of power to him. He won two subsequent elections and remains Azerbaijan's president. Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993 amid the political and economic turmoil of Azerbaijan's post-Soviet transition. A former Communist Party official during the Soviet era, the elder Aliyev promised the people of Azerbaijan stability and order. After two terms as President and in failing health, Heydar appointed his son, Ilham, as his successor and stepped aside to allow his son to ascend to the presidency.

In many ways, Ilham Aliyev continued the legacy of his father. He continued to base his rule on economic and political stability that Heydar Aliyev cultivated. The younger Aliyev made nationalism a central theme of his regime that he utilized in all of his speeches. He conveys a consistent message about the Azerbaijani nation, where it has been, where it is now, and where it will go in the future. This consistent narrative serves to legitimate his place as president of Azerbaijan. Only Ilham Aliyev can guide the Azerbaijani to the glorious future he so eloquently lays out.

What makes Ilham Aliyev's constant promotion of this nationalist rhetoric so interesting is that fact that he is doing it despite the fact that he is president of a state with dubious democratic credentials. During the 2013 election in which Aliyev won his third term as president, election monitors pointed out a wide variety of electoral irregularities.[6] These

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[6] REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 9 October 2013 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report; Warsaw December 24, 2013

practices are consistent with our contemporary understanding of hybrid regimes.  The research

on hybrid regimes focuses on how leaders steal elections through various means, be it through

outright rigging the vote or by subverting the institutions of democracy to preclude serious

opposition.  In this case, we see a leader in a hybrid regime going beyond these typical

techniques.  While Aliyev is most likely not totally unique, his use of nationalism shows a

method of hybrid regime rule not typically studied.  Aliyev's speeches sound like the stump

speeches of a candidate in a liberal Western democracy trying to court voters.  Although Aliyev

does necessarily need the votes in the polls, clearly Aliyev is concerned with promoting his

nationalist narrative in order to gain domestic legitimacy among the Azerbaijani population and

legitimately gain their votes.

To understand Ilham Aliyev's efforts at nation building, I will utilize the practice of

content analysis on the content of his speeches in order to detect recurring nationalist themes.

Content analysis involves developing a method to code qualitative data to show trends in almost

any kind of material.  The coding is dependent on the specific subject being studied and involves

a close reading of texts to both develop the coding rules and gather the data.[7]  I will focus on how

Aliyev aggrandizes the Azerbaijani nation and what kind of characteristics he imbues it with.  I

will also try to parse how Aliyev relates his idea of the Azerbaijani nation to his people and how

he relates it to the rest of the world.  This rhetoric about the Azerbaijani nation allows Aliyev to

present himself as a legitimate leader despite the non-democratic nature of his regime.

All of Aliyev's speeches are published online on the official website of the President of

Azerbaijan.  This collection includes speeches to wide audiences, remarks to smaller groups of

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[7] Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh, "Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology," *Library Trends* 55, no. 1 (2006): 22–45.

people, as well as statements made in a variety of state functions. I use the English translations of speeches provided on the official website. There is the possibility that these translations are not exactly the same as Aliyev's speeches in Azerbaijani or that certain phrases associated with these themes do not translate perfectly and could be inadvertently overlooked. While this is a potential weakness of this study, I believe the English translations provide compelling evidence of Aliyev's use of nationalist rhetoric.

I will focus my analysis around two events in recent Azerbaijani history, the 2012 border clashes with Armenia and the 2013 presidential elections. These events will show how Aliyev changes the nationalist content of his speeches relative to events and his need for public support. The data will show that Aliyev uses nationalist rhetoric more at times when his regime needs legitimacy, such as an election.

In this thesis, I ask why a leader in a hybrid regimes would develop nationalist rhetoric in his speeches. Using content analysis of President Aliyev's speeches, I demonstrate that a need for public support causes higher rates of nationalist themes in Aliyev's speeches. The next chapter presents a discussion of the methodology for the content analysis. The thesis then continues with a literature review in which I lay out the theoretical framework of my argument from a variety of perspectives. With this framework in place, I will move on to a case study of Azerbaijan in which I will analyze the nationalist rhetoric of Aliyev's speeches. I will show that Aliyev's use of nation building rhetoric constitutes a unique example of a hybrid regime president using nationalist themes to strengthen his own legitimacy. This will show the complexity of hybrid regimes that is often overlooked. Even when elections are not free, leaders in hybrid regimes use this strategy, and most likely others, to gain support. This thesis helps shed light on the nuances of hybrid regime leadership.

*Methodology*

To show how Ilham Aliyev uses nationalism to gain domestic legitimacy, I focus on the content of his speeches. I show how Aliyev expresses themes of nationalism, in what terms, in what contexts, and how often. I focus on speeches centered around two events in Azerbaijan: (1) the outbreak of violence on the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2012 and (2) Aliyev's third presidential election in 2013. These two different contexts show how Aliyev uses nationalist rhetoric in response to different situations and they illustrate my argument that Aliyev uses such nationalist rhetoric in an attempt to generate genuine public support.

Looking at these two events, I examine speeches during a period from one month before to one month after the events to show trends in Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric. Election cycles are obviously times in which one would expect politicians to ramp up efforts to build support and court voters. Aliyev is no different and uses nationalism to this end during election cycles regardless of the fairness of the impending election. The outbreak of violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2012 represents one of the major recent developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. The war with Armenia is one of the major pieces of Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric. Such a major event in the progress of the war provides another insight into how Aliyev uses nationalist themes. At times when Aliyev needs more support, he uses more nationalist themes. In total, I examine the content of 37 speeches over these two time periods.

To analyze Aliyev's speeches, I use the practice of content analysis, which allows me to discover trends in qualitative data.[8] I examine Aliyev's speeches and code the frequency of nationalist terms and ideas within them. In particular, I search for instances of six core pieces of nationalist rhetoric, inclusive language, shared history, positive characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation, favorable foreign comparisons, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev, and the threat of Armenia. Looking at speeches across a duration of time and surrounding two distinct events allows me to discover trends and consistency in

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[8] Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh, "Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology," *Library Trends* 55, no. 1 (2006): 22–45.

Aliyev's usage of these terms. I examine each speech individually and count instances of these terms to show that Aliyev is using these themes in order to generate public support.

Nationalism provides very diverse opportunities in terms of rhetoric. One of the most important aspects of nationalism is the construction of in-groups and out-groups. I find instances of this in Aliyev's speeches by searching for several different specific terms. When Aliyev refers to shared Azerbaijani history, he is creating a sense of inclusiveness. He also frequently extolls the many virtues of the Azerbaijani nation and transfers those attributes to his audience. He also compares Azerbaijan to foreign nations to highlight the superiority of Azerbaijan. These strategies create the sense of what it means to be Azerbaijan and brings Aliyev's audience into that nation. These strategies allow Aliyev to generate public support by utilizing the power of nationalism to create solidarity.

Aliyev also uses a shared view of Azerbaijan's history to consolidate the nation. He focuses on several common themes to shape this historical narrative. It relies heavily on a shared history of oppression during the Soviet period in which Azerbaijan was unable to exert her will. Aliyev characterizes the immediate post-Soviet period as one of chaos and corruption. The ascension of his father Ilham Aliyev to the presidency pulled Azerbaijan out of chaos and into the current period of stability and prosperity. Aliyev positions himself as a continuation of his father's positive legacy. Aliyev's nationalist version of Azerbaijan's history positions him as the capable leader of a strong Azerbaijani nation. Aliyev also delineates the nation by describing those outside the nation negatively. He also creates external threats to the nation. All of these strategies relate to the ongoing conflict with Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev describes Azerbaijan's superiority to Armenia, but also the threat Armenia represents to Azerbaijan. He extends this analysis to many countries around the world. Contrasting other nations to Azerbaijan allows Aliyev to strengthen the solidarity of the Azerbaijani nation. This solidarity leads to increased legitimacy for Aliyev's regime because he is not just the leader of the Azerbaijani state, but the Azerbaijani nation as well.

In analyzing Aliyev's speeches, I count the instances of these six themes to establish trends in the way Aliyev uses these themes.  These ideas and terms are not concrete combinations of words that appear, so there is an element of discretion involved in the coding of these speeches.  My intent, however, is not to establish definite statistical trends in these speeches, but rather to point out more qualitative trends.  The exact coding of the speeches will not be completely replicable, since there will be interpretation of Aliyev's meaning to some degree.  I believe the results of the coding, however, are persuasive in illustrating trends in Aliyev's speeches and demonstrate the ways in which Aliyev uses nationalism to gain public support.

By analyzing speeches surrounding the violence in 2012 and the election in 2013, the data show that Aliyev's use of these nationalist themes changes in predictable ways.  After the violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan started in 2012, Aliyev needed to rally support, and we see an increase in the nationalist rhetoric after the violence began.  Around the 2013 election, one would expect high levels of nationalism in speeches before the election to generate support for his presidency and tapering to low levels after the election when public support is less necessary.  The data presented in the case study chapter show that Aliyev's speeches match these expectations.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

I examine why a non-democratic leader in a hybrid regime, such as Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan, would devote time and effort to developing nationalist rhetoric. A hybrid regime is a regime that combine aspects of both democracy and authoritarian rule and much of the current research focuses on the authoritarian aspects of these regimes. I argue that leaders in hybrid regimes must do more than simply coerce voters through force and strengthen a base of cronies, they must also "court the voters" even though these elections may be unfair. I argue that nationalism is a tool that leaders of hybrid regime use to gain domestic legitimacy and this process is often overlooked in literature on hybrid regimes.

Through a case study of the hybrid regime Azerbaijan and its president, Ilham Aliyev. I show that Ilham Aliyev manipulates ideas of nationalism in his speeches in order to gain the support of Azerbaijani citizens without recourse to force. Nationalism is a powerful force in the post-Soviet context that creates solidarity among a group of people based on nationality, or their notion of a shared history and similarity.[9] Aliyev uses his speeches as a platform to construct a specific narrative of Azerbaijan. His nationalist vision of the past, present, and future serves as a legitimating principle of his regime. He can modulate the nationalist rhetoric in his speeches in reaction to situations in which he and his regime require stronger legitimacy.

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[9] Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence : Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000).

By reaching out to voters through nationalist rhetoric, Aliyev creates a base of legitimate support in the population. In developing this argument, I rely primarily on three bodies of literature, that of hybrid regimes, authoritarian legitimacy, and nationalism. The literature of hybrid regimes will show that Azerbaijan does conform to the characteristics of hybrid regimes, but this question is insufficiently explained by simply theories about hybrid regimes. Hybrid regime literature focus on the structure and organization of these regimes. It focuses on how elites interact with opposition and how institutions function. In terms of elections, much of this literature focuses on how the regime rigs elections and protects itself from losing power. Azerbaijan fits into this mold, but Aliyev's manipulation of nationalism goes beyond the treatment elections receive.

The literature of authoritarian legitimacy explores the ways in which nondemocratic regimes generate legitimacy and why legitimacy is important in these regimes. This literature shows how nondemocratic regimes build legitimacy. It is based on the idea that nondemocratic regimes are concerned with more than just rigging elections or ruling through non-democratic practices. Despite convention wisdom, authoritarian regimes employ a range of strategies to engender legitimate public support. I will use this literature to show how and why a leader in an authoritarian and/or hybrid regime might employ strategies to secure domestic legitimacy.

Finally, I will use literature on nationalism to show how the practices and mechanics of nationalism can contribute to legitimacy in hybrid regimes such as Azerbaijan. Much of the broader literature on authoritarian legitimacy focuses on populism as a way non-democratic regimes generate legitimacy. Nationalism is another strategy that can build legitimacy. This literature will show how significant a force nationalism can be. I will use it to the ways in which a non-democratic leader such as Aliyev could use it to build legitimacy.

In the following paragraphs I will show how each of these bodies of literature relates to my argument. I start with hybrid regimes, then the literature of authoritarian legitimacy, and finally the literature of nationalism. After examining the relevant aspects of each, I will pull these threads together to provide the conceptual background of my argument.

### *Hybrid Regimes*

The literature of hybrid regimes focuses on regimes that do not fit neatly into the categories of democracy or autocracy, instead these regimes mix elements of both to varying degrees. Some regimes are more democratic and some more authoritarian.[10] These types of regimes proliferated in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. As dozens of states started to transition from communist rule, political scientists and other observers struggled to accurately categorize what they saw.[11] Many of these regimes espoused democratic rhetoric and established democratic institutions, but also exhibited authoritarian tendencies. I will show how several of these theories describe hybrid regimes and how it relates to the use of nationalist rhetoric in attempts to gain regime legitimacy in Azerbaijan.

Mikael Wigell argues that typical definitions of hybrid regimes oversimplify the phenomenon and miss the nuance that makes such regimes so distinctive.[12] He gives an

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[10] For a broader overview of the research on hybrid regimes see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 51–65,; Jason Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3; and Larry Jay Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002)

[11] Valerie J Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "DEFEATING DICTATORS: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 43–86.; Daniela Donno, "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 (2013): 703–16.; Joakim Ekman, "Political Participation and Regime Stability: A Framework for Analyzing Hybrid Regimes," *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 30, no. 1 (2009): 7–31.

[12] Mikael Wigell, "Mapping 'Hybrid Regimes': Regime Types and Concepts in Comparative Politics," *Democratization* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 230–50.

overview of previous conceptions of hybrid regimes based on a regime's democraticness. Most

of these conceptions suggest that a regime is either democratic or it is not. Wigell argues that

such a conceptual framework misses the nuance of hybrid regimes entirely because it cannot

capture the difference between two regimes that are both semi-democratic in the sense that they

contain different blends of democratic and authoritarian elements.

Instead, Wigell offers a slightly different conception of liberal democracy that is based on

two dimensions, electoralism and constitutionalism. Electoralism is a mechanism that makes

governments responsive to the demands of the people, while constitutionalism places limits on

the power of that government. By mapping regimes along two spectrums, Wigell creates a much

more nuanced conception of regime types. He offers four types that vary in their levels of both

electoralism and constitutionalism: democratic, constitutional-oligarchic, electoral-autocratic,

and authoritarian. A constitutional-oligarchic regime, for example, consists of unelected leaders

working with a strong constitutional framework, while an electoral-autocratic regime contains an

elected leader with few limits on his power. This nuanced view allows one to place regimes with

varying levels of democratic institutions into different conceptual categories. This increased

specificity allows us to look at Azerbaijan and its regime without trying to describe it in simply

democratic or authoritarian terms, which gives more space for analysis of how the regime

functions.

Matthijs Bogaards also offers a more nuanced view of hybrid regimes.[13] Bogaards points

to a similar problem as Wigell in the conceptualization of hybrid regimes. Previous theories are

vague, Bogaards argues, because they rely on rooting the regime in either democracy or

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[13] Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism," *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2009).

authoritarianism, but, crucially, it is one or the other, never both.  In other words, Bogaards explains, a regime may be a flawed type of democracy or a flawed authoritarian regime.  Such a conception also fails to capture nuance and is not very useful when comparing regimes.

Bogaards also points out that this framework rests on the idea that regimes are transitioning and hybrid regimes are inherently unstable.  These frameworks implicitly suggest that hybrid regimes will eventually move to either the democratic or authoritarian side of the spectrum.  Rooting regimes in either democracy or authoritarianism makes sense if regimes are inherently moving towards one or the other, but Bogaards suggests that hybrid regimes can be stable.  This stability mandates a more nuanced method for categorizing and understanding hybrid regimes.  Regime stability makes examining Aliyev's legitimacy building strategies possible because it is not assumed that his regime will eventually fail.  Instead, by arguing that this hybrid regime could be durable, studying the practices of the regime becomes crucial for understanding it.

Both of these conceptual frameworks help to understand Aliyev's regime in Azerbaijan. The regime combines elements of both democracy and authoritarianism.  Aliyev faced democratic elections to retain the presidency, but those elections were fraught with practices more closely associated with authoritarian regimes.  As Wigell argues, this is not simply a case of a flawed democratic regime or a flawed authoritarian regime, it combines aspects of both in a unique way.  Azerbaijan appears fairly stable, as Bogaards argues, so claiming it is a transitioning regime is not satisfying.  It is not simply a transitory regime, but a regime with considerable durability.

Other scholars studying hybrid regimes focus on the more concrete dynamics of institutions and governance in hybrid regimes. Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman, and Henry E.

Hale use Russia to describe governance in a hybrid regime.[14]  They argue that the institutional

makeup of hybrid regimes emerges from a series of what they call dilemmas.  They identify

three dilemmas of elections, mass media, and the state.  A regime's responses to these dilemmas

shapes the authoritarian and democratic aspects of that regime.  In the case of Azerbaijan, this

conception of dilemmas helps us understand how Aliyev's regime approaches elections (and the

conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh) in terms of their potential risks and benefits.

The dilemma of elections refers to the necessity of elections in hybrid regimes, but also

their risk.  Elections serve to legitimize leaders in hybrid regimes, but also open them up to

considerable risk because there is a chance the incumbent could lose or that the elections could

spark revolutionary activity.  Hale, Petrov, and Lipman argue that regimes must hold elections,

but mitigate their risks somehow.  In Azerbaijan, we can conceive of Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric

as one way to mitigate the risk of elections.

Mass media behaves in a similar way, they argue. It is necessary, but opens the regime up

to risk.  Media gives the regime a better idea of public opinion and allows it to formulate policy

accordingly, but also opens the regime up to criticism.  As with elections, they argue, regimes

must walk a tight rope of allowing media that is useful to the regime without allowing it to

become damaging.

Petrov et al's final dilemma, the dilemma of the state, refers to how functional institutions

are in a hybrid regime.  An example of an institution could be elections.  If elections function

properly, that is accurately record votes and lead to a regime change accordingly, then the regime

obviously fails.  If the regime creates effective institutions for governance, it runs the risk of

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[14] Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman, and Henry E. Hale, "Three Dilemmas of Hybrid Regime Governance: Russia from Putin to Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 1–26.

diluting its own power to those institutions. The regime must balance the existence of these institutions with their ability to cause the regime harm. Weak institutions make governance the personal responsibility of those in charge of the regime.

Petrov, Lipman, and Hale use three examples from Russia to illustrate these dilemmas. In 2005, Putin's regime tried to reform in-kind social benefits by replacing them with cash payments. In 2008, the regime prepared to build a highway through the Khimki Forest, a beloved national landmark. And in 2011, the results and conduct of elections led to protesters in the streets. In all three cases, regime policies met with fierce public resistance. The regime responded to each crisis and dilemma and evolved into a unique constellation of democratic and authoritarian tendencies. The regime still allowed elections, but made it more difficult for opposition candidates to run at all, lessening the chances for protests on the day of the elections. The regime also expanded its control of the media to quiet opposition voices. In the case of Azerbaijan, we see similar tendencies, but Aliyev also uses nationalism as a tool to build a broad base of support. By building this support, Aliyev lessens the chance of protests against his regime and the risk of a free media. He mitigates the danger of elections by trying to create a base of citizens who will actually vote for him. He uses media to expand his nationalist rhetoric and bases his rule and control of the state firmly in terms of Azerbaijani nationalism.

Thomas Sedelius and Sten Berglund used Ukraine as a case study in their work on hybrid regime dynamics.[15] They argue that a semi-presidential system, a system with both a president and a parliament, in hybrid regimes exacerbates the problems of institutional conflict and political stalemate. When a parliament and prime minister exist alongside a president, there is

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[15] Thomas Sedelius and Sten Berglund, "Towards Presidential Rule in Ukraine: Hybrid Regime Dynamics Under Semi-Presidentialism," *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012).

conflict as all three try to maintain and grow their power. In particular, they identify two types of semi-presidential systems, premier-presidential and president-parliamentary. The difference is based on the relative strengths of the president and the parliament. In a president-parliamentary regime, the president can easily overpower the parliament, while in a premier-president system, the two are more equal. Most post-Soviet states adopted some type of semi-presidential system. Azerbiajan fits the model of a president-parliamentary system, which in line with Sedelius and Berglund, gives Aliyev considerable power over politics in Azerbaijan.

Semi-presidentialism of either type creates institutional conflict, however. The president, prime minister, and parliament all jockey for power and influence, at times to the detriment of substantive policy making. Sedelius and Berglund show this to be the case in Ukraine, which they argue to be a premier-presidential system. Ukraine's post-Soviet political situation has been defined by conflict between its president and prime minister. Yanukovych and Yushchenko before the Orange Revolution and Yushchenko and Tymoshchenko after it. These conflicts stalled development of democracy in Ukraine as each tried to increase their power at the expense of the other. In many ways the conflict between the president and parliament is another example of the dilemma of the state in a hybrid regime referenced by Petrov, Lipman, and Hale. The institutional strengths of the president, prime minister, and parliament determine how the regime responds to challenges and shapes its democratic and authoritarian aspects.

This literature on hyrbrid regimes is helpful in understanding the nuances and institutional dynamics of Azerbaijan's regime. Certainly, Azerbaijan combines democratic and authoritarian elements in a way that fits the description of a hybrid regime. Aliyev's regime is driven by the forces described here, in short, the tension between its democratic and authoritarian elements. His regime holds elections, but they are typically not very democratic. The regime

exercises control over the media to keep opposition voices out and strengthen Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric.

This body of literature is less useful for understanding the role of legitimacy in a hybrid regime because it focuses on how the regime rigs elections to stay in power. Most literature of hybrid regime glosses over a leader's own domestic legitimacy, which could be measured through their public approval, in favor of analysis of the concepts and institutions that drive hybrid regimes. My argument that Ilham Aliyev uses nationalism to gain domestic legitimacy is based in part on the idea that Ilham Aliyev cares about his own domestic legitimacy. Much of the literature of hybrid regimes seems to assume that leaders only rig elections and focus on keeping opposition unable to challenge them. What is missing is how leaders might accomplish their goals by genuinely gaining the support of their citizens. I turn now to the literature of state legitimacy in authoritarian regimes to show how significant legitimacy is even in nondemocratic regimes.

*Authoritarian Legitimacy*

Eugene Huskey argues that authoritarian rulers must govern with what he calls a velvet fist, which refers to a combination of coercive and persuasive practices by the regime.[16] The position of the authoritarian ruler is more complex than simply coercing its citizens with force and rigging elections, these rulers must make their citizens want to follow them instead of forcing them. Powerful presidencies and Soviet legacies allow individuals to rule through a system of patronage in which personal connections to the president are very important. Many presidents came to power on a surge of nationalism and solidified their positions through this

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[16] Eugene Huskey, "Authoritarian Leadership in the Post-Communist World," *Daedalus* 145, no. 3 (July 1, 2016): 69–82.

system of patronage.  The presence of elections and the act of winning them also legitimates these presidents without recourse to violence.  Rulers must strike a balance between winning the election and rigging it to the point of illegitimacy.  Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric is one mechanism of striking this balance.  It is likely that Aliyev rigs elections in his favor, but by building a base of support with nationalist rhetoric, elections seem more legitimate to the population because they do vote for him.

Huskey also notes that these authoritarians typically create an ideology to legitimate their presidential rule and this often involves placing the person of the president above politics in some way.  The president acts for the good of the people, it is others who make the unpopular policy mistakes.  Aliyev's nationalism could serve a similar role as an ideology.  Aliyev places himself above politics by creating a unique place for himself in the context of the Azerbaijani nation as its leader.

Aleksei Makarkin makes a similar argument about the role of legitimacy in an authoritarian or hybrid regime context.  [17] Makarkin argues that the Russian regime derives its legitimacy from a uniquely Russian social contract.  In the Russian social contract, the population trades loyalty to the regime in return for stability, which Makarkin defines as mainly economic stability.  It is essentially populism in that the state derives its legitimacy from giving the population the economic benefits of a stable, growing economy.

Makarkin traces the roots of this populist bargain to the Soviet period.  Citizens acquiesced to Soviet rule because the Soviet Union provided them with a stable economy and an increasing standard of living.  The Soviet Union collapsed because it became unable to deliver

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[17] Aleksei Makarkin and Peter M. Oppenheimer, "The Russian Social Contract and Regime Legitimacy," *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November 1, 2011): 1459–74.

stability or growth by the end of the 1980s. Yeltsin ultimately lost support because he too proved unable to provide economic stability in the 1990s. Putin's regime, Makarkin argues, remains so durable because it can uphold this social contract. Putin is a legitimate leader because he provides Russian citizens with a stable economy and improves their standard of living. This social contract-based legitimacy is economic in nature, not political. In Makarkin's view, Russian citizens care less about the nature of their political system than they do their economic prosperity, which allows many of the authoritarian aspects of Putin's regime. Makarkin offers the basis for authoritarian legitimacy, but my research shows that economics are not the only basis of this stability. Aliyev uses nationalism in a similar way to economics in Makarkin's view.

I argue that there can be more to the idea of a social contract than just economic stability. Aliyev's nationalism is another way of the regime giving his citizens what they want. Aliyev focuses on certain issues of nationalism, specifically the conflict with Armenia, and delivers results on those issues, just as Makarkin argues Putin delivers economic stability. Aliyev uses a similar mechanism to Makarkin's theory, but it is framed in different terms.

Honorata Mazepus et al argue that such populist practices are only half the picture of legitimacy.[18] They argue that legitimacy, which they define as citizens transferring power to the regime not out of fear, but out of concurrent values, relies upon the output of the state and the input of its citizens. Output refers to populist economic practices noted by both Huskey and Makarkin, while input refers to the values of a regime's citizens. A regime must, they argue, appeal to its citizens for not only material reasons, but also in terms of their values and attitudes.

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[18] Honorata Mazepus et al., "A Comparative Study of Legitimation Strategies in Hybrid Regimes," *Policy Studies* 37, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 350–69.

Legitimacy becomes not only a perception of what the regime stands for, but also an evaluation of the ability of the regime to benefit its citizens. Legitimation strategies consist of rhetorical claims about the regime or specific actions by the regime to encourage citizens to buy into the regime.

Mazepus et al examine three hybrid regimes as cases studies for their theory of regime legitimacy, Russia, Venezuela, and Seychelles. In Russia, they make a similar argument to Makarkin. Putin's regime, they argue, is perceived as legitimate because it created a stable economic environment for its citizens. Putin replaced communist ideology with his own ideology of stability and order. Mazepus et al combine the economic aspect of the regime's legitimacy with a more rhetorical form of legitimacy based on the charismatic personality of Putin himself. Aliyev replaces Putin's ideology of stability and order with his own based on nationalism.

The above concepts of legitimacy in authoritarian or hybrid regimes all focus mainly on economic aspects of the relationship between the regime and its citizens. Patronage and populist policies serve as the driving force of legitimacy. It is a compelling argument in its logic and simplicity, but it does not cover all potential sources of legitimacy. I argue that certain kinds of rhetoric and ideology can also serve to legitimate the regime, such as nationalism.

David Lewis argues that state legitimacy in nondemocratic regimes is based on the regime constructing a hegemonic discourse that significant social groups, that is large groups in society, internalize.[19] A hegemonic discourse is one that constrains the possibility of political alternatives. Regime legitimacy, then, rests on the regime's ability to promote the message that

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[19] David Lewis, "Blogging Zhanaozen: Hegemonic Discourse and Authoritarian Resilience in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 421–38.

it is the only game in town and make its citizens believe that.  In this framework, control over

media is an essential aspect of regime legitimacy.  The regime must be able to promote its own

messages to its citizens.  Aliyev promotes his nationalist rhetoric in similar ways, through his

speeches and in the media.

This literature helps explain why Ilham Aliyev would care about domestic legitimacy.

As Mazepus et al note, no regime wants to appear illegitimate.  Regardless of the degree of

democracy in Azerbaijan, Aliyev wants his citizens to support his regime, he wants his citizens

to view him as a legitimate leader.  The literature also provides several methods that leaders in

hybrid regimes use to gain legitimacy, including economic patronage, populist policies, and the

rhetoric of state strength.  Nationalism is a potential method of regime legitimation that is not

articulated.  Nationalism can build a broad base of support without economic policies.  In the

post-Soviet context, it has historically been a powerful force.  I argue that it remains a powerful

potential source of nationalism.

*Nationalism*

As Ernest Gellner argued, at its core, nationalism is a political ideology that seeks to give

distinct nations political control over themselves, the national unit and the political unit should

be congruent.[20]  Each distinct nation should govern itself and its own territory.  Who constitutes

the nation remains a point of contention in the research of nationalism both broadly speaking and

specifically in the post-Soviet context.  Many scholars note the power of nationalism as a

mobilizing force both during the collapse of the Soviet Union and afterwards.  I will show how

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[20] Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

nationalism both shaped and was shaped by the events following the collapse of the Soviet Union and how it remains relevant in many post-Soviet states, including Azerbaijan.

In the introduction to his book *From Voting to Violence: Democratization to Nationalist Conflict*[21]*,* Jack Snyder argues that nationalism is a way to cope with the social change wrought by the collapse of the Soviet Union and attempted transition to democracy. Snyder defines nationalism as a political ideology that says people who see themselves as distinct should rule themselves. He argues that this conception of nationalism, based as it is on the perception of distinctiveness, allows leaders to use nationalism to come to power and remain in power. Snyder also points out that nationalism is inherently a political force that has many potential outcomes. Self-rule, Snyder claims, does not necessarily mean democracy, just the absence of rule by an outside power, which could be nondemocratic. A nationalist dictator would be better than a foreign president. Snyder's basic conception of nationalism and its utility are very applicable to Azerbaijan. Nationalism proved to be a powerful force near the collapse of the Soviet Union and Heydar Aliyev harnessed it to come to power in 1995. Ilham Aliyev continues to lean on nationalism to strengthen his own regime.

Rudolf de Cilia et al.[22] that, as imagined communities, nations are created and shaped discursively. These authors define the nation in terms of Bordieu's concept of habitus, the nation is a set of common ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. The most basic concept of nationalism is that of the in-group and out-group. The nation must be delineated as to who is part of it and who is not. They argue that the differences between the two groups are nearly as important as the

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[21]  Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence : Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[22] Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1999).

similarities that bring the nation together.  This is a core component of Aliyev's nationalism in Azerbaijan.  He very clearly defines the Azerbaijani nation against the out-groups of Armenia and other foreign enemies.

Rogers Brubaker argues that nationalism is central to understanding post-Soviet regimes and their nationalism was shaped by the institutional structure of the Soviet Union.[23]  Every nation in post-Soviet space is a product of Soviet institutions.  Soviet policy broke society up into national units based on republics, regions, and even towns.  These units served as the basis for claims of sovereignty. Brubaker argues that while the Soviet Union did repress expressions of nationalism, it also created a certain way of understanding the world, in that it created distinct groups of people based on conceived nations.  Relationships between different groups came to be based on the ideas of these nations being different.  Dividing the population into so many units and demarcating those units with territory, language, and so on, Soviet institutions created a type of political understanding based on the concept of the nation.  Brubaker points out that one's nationality remained important throughout the Soviet period to the point of appearing on passports.  These institutions shaped the way Soviet citizens related to each other and the rest of the world, which in turn shaped nationalism in the successor states.  Soviet legacies included the groundwork of nationalist rhetoric and action.  Aliyev's understanding of what constitutes the Azerbaijani nation comes from this Soviet legacy.  He uses the Soviet framework to describe who is and is not part of the Azerbaijani nation, which is one of the core concepts of his nationalist rhetoric.

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[23] Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 1 (1994): 47–78.

J. Paul Goode argues that nationalism became a major source of legitimacy for the successor regimes of the Soviet Union.[24]  These regimes must create an ideology that legitimizes the regime and their Soviet legacy allows nationalism to serve this role.  Goode argues that the theory that hybrid regime durability is based on elite unity ignores very important aspects of how post-Soviet hybrid regimes function.  Goode argues that the successor regimes needed to prove that they were worthy of the loyalty of their citizens.  Nationalism provided an easy method of building a base of support.  It also allowed regimes to attack their opposition by disparaging the nationalist credentials of the opposition and linking it with foreign entities.  Nationalism gives the regime an easy way to neuter the opposition, which shows how nationalism can be manipulated by leaders for specific purposes, as in Azerbaijan.

*Conclusion*

Taken together, these bodies of literature provide a strong conceptual framework for analyzing state-led nationalism in Azerbaijan and specifically in the speeches of its president, Ilham Aliyev.  The most basic aspect of nationalism being the construction of in-groups and out-groups.  My analysis of nationalism will start by focusing on how Aliyev constructs these groups, which is informed by Soviet legacies.  This involves inclusive aspects of building who is part of the Azerbaijani nation and what that inclusion means and exclusive aspects of who is not and what being outside the nation means.  This will show how nationalism can be used to create support for a leader by pulling members of the nation together against perceived outside dangers.

When considering the question of the relationship between hybridity and nationalism, a thorough understanding of hybrid regimes, authoritarian legitimacy, and nationalism is necessary

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[24] J. Paul Goode, "Nationalism in Quiet Times," *Problems of Post-Communism* 59, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 6–16.

as these concepts form the basis of my argument.  Ilham Aliyev manipulates nationalism as a method to generate domestic legitimacy, which is necessary even in nondemocratic regimes. Such discursive strategies of legitimation are present in other hybrid regimes and the flexibility and power of nationalism, especially in the post-Soviet context are well documented.  The next section of this thesis will analyze the content of Ilham Aliyev's speeches to discern this discursive trends.

# CASE STUDY

To answer the question of why Ilham Aliyev devotes so much effort to developing a nationalist rhetoric in his speeches, I now examine the content of Aliyev's speeches. Using the practice of content analysis, I show trends in how Aliyev utilizes nationalist themes in his speeches. By noting the frequency with which Aliyev references nationalist themes, I establish the prevalence and consistency of these themes in Aliyev's rhetoric. I have determined that the most significant nationalist themes present in Aliyev's speeches are inclusive language, a shared Azerbaijani history, the positive characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation, favorable foreign comparisons, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev, and the threat posed by Armenia to the Azerbaijani nation. I carefully analyzed 37 of Aliyev's speeches and coded for these themes by counting how many times Aliyev reference them in his speeches. In the following sections, I describe the theoretical roots of these themes and offer examples to show how theory translates into Aliyev's speeches. Then I will show the data on the usage of these themes in Aliyev's speeches in reaction to the 2012 violence with Armenia and his 2013 presidential election.

Despite expectations of authoritarian regimes, Aliyev must court the population for genuine support. One of the way he accomplishes this goal is through the use of nationalist rhetoric. I argue that Aliyev uses nationalist themes as a legitimating principle for his regime to generate this support. To show this, I analyze speeches centered around two events in Azerbaijan, a series of border clashes with Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2012 and Ilham Aliyev's third presidential election in 2013. These speeches will show how Aliyev manipulates

nationalism in response to events. If Aliyev does use nationalist themes to gain popular support, one would expect to the see the content of his speeches change in response to these events. In the case of the border violence, we would expect to see Aliyev use more nationalist rhetoric after the violence to rally support against Armenia, whereas before the violence, one would expect the content of his speeches to be more benign. Similarly, one would expect more nationalist content in speeches before the presidential election to generate support, but less so after the election when it is less necessary.

I demonstrate that this is indeed the case by showing how Aliyev's use of nationalist themes changes in relation to the above events. In the following pages I offer a brief overview of the history of Azerbaijan in order to establish some of the major themes on which Aliyev draws for his speeches. I then elaborate on the specific nationalist themes that Aliyev uses in his speeches. Then I describe how Aliyev used those themes in relation to the 2012 clashes with Armenia and his third presidential election in 2013. This analysis shows how Aliyev used nationalism to gain support by showing the way he modulated his use of nationalist themes in response to significant events.

*Historical Context*

Azerbaijan emerged as an independent country in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The modern independent state of Azerbaijan came into existence like many other post-Soviet states in a climate of economic chaos and political instability. The full story of Azerbaijan's independence begins before 1991, however. In 1988, amid the climate of Gorbachev's *glasnost*, tensions between Azerbaijan and its neighbor Armenia began to increase.

In many ways, the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia helped speed the centrifugal forces that tore the Soviet Union apart.[25]

National minorities across the Soviet Union took advantage of the relaxed political situation to agitate for increased autonomy and political rights. Nationalism provided a ready-made vehicle for political mobilization and the leaders of national republics in the Soviet Union took advantage. The structure of the Soviet Union had preserved national identities through the promotion of national cultures and the creation of national political elites. In the 1980s, these elites took advantage of the currently existing national cultures as political bases of support. Across the Soviet Union, movements sprang up to fight for the rights of their nationalities.[26]

The situation was no different in Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the environment of *glasnost*, groups came into existence in both Armenia and Azerbaijan to agitate for their political and cultural rights. Things quickly came to a head regarding the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nagorno-Karabakh was officially part of the Azerbaijan Republic per decisions made in the early Soviet period on how to divide the territory of the South Caucasus. While officially a part of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh was surrounded by Armenia territory and a majority of its inhabitants were Armenian. This led to a clash between the government of Azerbaijan who wanted to keep Nagorno-Karabakh officially part of Azerbaijan and the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh who felt no strong connection to Azerbaijan and sought autonomy from both Armenia and Azerbaijan.[27]

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[25] Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden : Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War, 10th-year anniversary edition, revised and updated.* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 17-19

[26] Snyder, 199-203

[27] De Waal, 144-145

For a majority of the Soviet period, the region remained relatively stable and peaceful. Tension existed between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region, but the central Soviet government was able to manage the situation to keep it from exploding. Before the 1980s and the loosening political climate, there was no avenue for dissent over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. This meant there were no major challenges over the region. By the 1980s, this ceased to be the case. As nationalist movements in the republics gained momentum, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh became increasingly important. Armenia wanted to protect the ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and began to press for Nagorno-Karabakh to officially become part of Armenia. Azerbaijan wanted to maintain its territorial integrity and viewed Nagorno-Karabakh as an inviolable part of that territory. Both republican governments lobbied the central Soviet government, which proved increasingly unable to manage the conflict.[28]

As the central Soviet government lost its ability to manage the competing claims over Nagorno-Karabakh, tensions rose until violence broke out. At the time, many Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia and vice versa, to say nothing of the intermingling of populations in Nagorno-Karabakh itself. In Nagorno-Karabakh in 1979 there were 123,000 Armenians and 37,000 Azerbaijanis.[29] Escalating violence in Armenia and Azerbaijan led to ethnic minorities being driven out of each republic. Fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh drove most Azerbaijanis out and Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself independent. Violence continued sporadically, and the status of the territory remains unresolved to this day. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan insist that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of their countries, while Nagorno-Karabakh itself insisted on its

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[28] Süha Bölükbaşı, *Azerbaijan : A Political History* (London ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 78-80

[29] De Waal 154

independence.[30]  The proliferation of nationalist movements helped pull the Soviet Union apart

and perhaps the most violent nationalist movements were in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, the nationalist Musavat party controlled the newly independent

government.  They   The party came to power during the collapse of the Soviet Union riding a

wave of nationalist, anti-Soviet sentiment.  The party followed a similar path to many post-

Soviet states by liberalizing politics and the economy through transition to market principles.

Despite the natural resource wealth of Azerbaijan, the transition to the market economy proved

chaotic.  Many citizens faced economic hardship and corruption was rampant.  Despite the

assumption that democracy would easily fill the void of the Soviet Union, economic instability

reigned supreme and democratic principles were dubious at best.

In 1993, Heydar Aliyev, the father of Ilham Aliyev, defeated the Musavat party and

became president of Azerbaijan.  He had been a party official in Azerbaijan in the 1970s and

used the chaos of the 1990s to return to power.  The elder Aliyev based his rule on bringing

economic stability to the country.  To this end, Aliyev took advantage of Azerbaijan's natural

resources as much as possible.  Azerbaijan had a long history of oil production and Heydar

Aliyev sought to use its wealth of oil to boost Azerbaijan's faltering economy.  To this end,

Aliyev signed the "Contract of the Century" in 1994, which sought to cash in on Azerbaijan's oil

through cooperation with foreign companies.  The deal proved incredibly lucrative for

Azerbaijan and gave its economy a stable base.[31]

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[30] Ohannes Geukjian, Ethnicity, *Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus : Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012) 187-189

[31] Bolukbasi, 206-207

While Aliyev did stabilize the Azerbaijani economy through effective management of its natural resources, he did little to further democracy in Azerbaijan. Aliyev adopted many authoritarian practices in order to stay in power in Azerbaijan. He kept elections and other democratic institutions, but created a system in which it was unlikely he would ever lose an election. He made it nearly impossible for any kind of political opposition to operate effectively. Heydar Aliyev laid the foundation for Azerbaijan becoming a hybrid regime.[32]

With his health failing, Heydar Aliyev transferred power to his son, Ilham. This transition of power was unique in post-Soviet history. Several post-Soviet leaders, such as Yeltsin, picked successors when they left office, but only in Azerbaijan was the successor the son of the current president. It is a testament to the stability of Heydar Aliyev's political system and its lack of space for opposition that his son came in as president without significant opposition. In many ways, Ilham Aliyev carried on the legacy of his father. He focused his efforts on maintaining economic stability in Azerbaijan and protected his own position as president by marginalizing dissent and tightly controlling the political process.[33]

Despite relative internal stability, Nagorno-Karabakh remained a constant problem for independent Azerbaijan. Although the pro-Armenia government of Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself independent shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, independent Azerbaijan maintained that Nagorno-Karabakh was part of Azerbaijan. Fighting continued off and on between Armenia and Azerbaijan throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The OSCE created the Minsk group in 1992 to try to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The group managed to broker ceasefires between Armenia and Azerbaijan when violence became widespread, but the

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[32] *Ibid,* 217-218

[33] Bolukbasi, 217-218

parties have not been able to fully settle the conflict. Because of its significance in Azerbaijan's history in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, both Heydar and Ilham Aliyev made Nagorno-Karabakh a core component of their presidencies.[34]

Aliyev first became president in 2003. His father Heydar was president, but in failing health. Ilham served in several political appointments before 2003, but as Heydar's health deteriorated, he appointed Ilham prime minister, so when Heydar stepped down from the presidency due to his health, Ilham became president. Opposition groups protested this transfer of power, but they were unable to mount significant resistance to stop it and Ilham entrenched himself as president.[35]

The 2013 election marked Ilham Aliyev's third presidential election. He won previous elections comfortably in results the opposition, as much as Ilham allowed them to participate at all, contested. Foreign observers concluded that the elections were neither free nor fair. The 2013 election proved no different. The government harassed opposition groups and made it difficult for them to participate in the election. The OSCE election monitoring group in Azerbaijan noted many significant irregularities in the election and called the entire election process flawed.[36] Aliyev won by a comfortable margin and began his third presidential term in October 2013.

Since 2003, Ilham Aliyev continues to rule Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh continues to simmer. Ilham Aliyev adopted many of the practices of his father. He maintained a tough line against Armenia and focused on the economic stability of Azerbaijan as a paramount goal. The

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[34] De Waal, 269-270

[35] *Ibid,* 285

[36] REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 9 October 2013 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report; Warsaw December 24, 2013

younger Aliyev also solidified Azerbaijan as a hybrid regime by undermining its democratic institutions but allowing those institutions to continue to exist and functioned in a weakened form. Ilham also cemented the use of nationalism as a cornerstone of regime legitimacy. I now elaborate on the nationalist themes commonly utilized by Ilham Aliyev before showing how he utilizes these themes in his speeches.

### *Nationalist Themes and Analysis of Aliyev's Speeches[37]*

I analyze Ilham Aliyev's speeches for six different nationalist themes, inclusive language, a shared Azerbaijani history, the positive characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation, favorable foreign comparisons, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev, and the threat posed by Armenia to the Azerbaijani nation. These six themes came out of various theories of nationalism described in the earlier review of the literature and the process of analyzing Aliyev's speeches. In order to analyze these themes, I examined 37 speeches and tallied the number of times Aliyev referenced these themes to illuminate trends in his rhetoric. In the following sections I describe the theoretical roots of these themes and offer examples to show how theory translates into Aliyev's speeches.

When examining Aliyev's speeches, I focused on speeches centered around two specific events. This allows me to show how Aliyev's uses of nationalist rhetoric changes in response to different events, which show nationalisms utility. The first event is border clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani military forces over Nagorno-Karabakh in June 2012. The fighting was limited in scope but tens of soldiers on each side died. Both sides claimed it was an armed incursion by the other into their territory. I examine the speeches Aliyev gave from a month

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[37] As noted earlier, President Ilham Aliyev's speeches are available from the official website of the president of Azerbaijan at http://en.president.az/news/speeches. All references to speeches come from this source. All translations used are the English translations provided by the website.

before the incident and a month after the incident looking for noticeable trends in how he uses

nationalist themes. These trends demonstrate my argument that Aliyev uses these nationalist

themes when his regime needs genuine public support.

### *Inclusive Language*

De Cilia et al argues that the most important aspect of nationalism is the creation of in-

groups and out-groups. That is, defining who is and who is not part of the nation. De Cilia

argues that the most fundamental way these groups form is through language usage, specifically

pronouns. To create a sense of group solidarity pronouns like "we" and "our" are used, while to

delineate those outside the nation, "they" is the pronoun of choice. While this may seem like a

minor semantic choice, it can go a long way in establishing an important sense of group

solidarity.[38]

In terms of Aliyev's speeches, this particular aspect of nationalism is very prevalent.

Aliyev constantly uses the pronoun "we" in a variety of situations. Some instances seem

straightforward, such as "We are a hardworking nation." Aliyev also uses "we" in situations that

seem somewhat stranger, such as "we will continue our economic policy." The first example is a

very clear example of nationalist rhetoric, while the second example seems less so. Even the

second, example, however, creates a sense of solidarity between Aliyev and his audience and

among the audience. Obviously, not everyone in the audience is involved in economic policy

decisions, but, by phrasing the sentiment the way he did, Aliyev creates a link between himself

and the Azerbaijani people.

Aliyev follows similar patterns referring to things with the possessive pronoun "our."

Often he refers to things such as "Our country" or "our future" both of which have clear

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[38] 1. Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 149–73.

nationalist connotations. Other times, however, he will refer to something technical or mundane as "ours," such as "our cement plant." The function is the same, however, it creates a connection between Aliyev, his audience, and the idea of the nation.

Before the June 2012 clash with Armenia, the nationalist rhetoric in Aliyev's speeches is relatively subdued. In the month before the violence, he gave six speeches to a variety of audiences. His use of these themes is fairly consistent. The most prevalent is how he uses pronouns to create a sense of solidarity. In the month before the violence, Aliyev used this kind of inclusive language 15 to 30 times in his speeches. After the violence began, Aliyev used this language much more. In speeches after the violence, Aliyev used these pronouns 30 to 50 times per speech, with one speech having 101 instances of these pronouns.

As noted earlier, if Aliyev was using nationalism to curry public support, one would expect to see high levels of nationalist rhetoric before the October election and lower levels afterwards when there was no immediate need to generate support. This trend is clearly visible when looking at Aliyev's use of inclusive language. Aliyev used nationalist charged language 25 to 30 times per speech a month out from the election and 45 to 50 times per speech immediately before the election. After the election in October, Aliyev's use of this nationalist theme dropped to about 20 to 25 times per speech. There was a clear spike immediately before the election when Aliyev needed public support the most.

This data shows how Aliyev used this nationalist theme to gain support in response to these two events. Aliyev needed support after clashes with Armenia started in 2012, so he used this kind of inclusive language to create that support in the form of national solidarity. Similarly, when he need the publics' vote before the October election, he increased his usage of this kind of

language, while after the election, his usage went back to normal. This data clearly shows how Aliyev used nationalist rhetoric to generate public support when he needed it.

### *Shared Azerbaijani History*

De Cilia argues that another important aspect of nationalism is a shared history. De Cilia describes this as a common set of historical memories that represent the experience of the nation. These memories can be ancient folklore or more recent events. The significance of a shared history lies in its widespread nature. A shared history is something that most people who could be said to belong to the nation can identify with. It is usually a fairly basic and straightforward representation of the past, nuance is lost because it must be relatable to a large group of people.[39]

Aliyev consistently develops a shared history of the Azerbaijani nation in almost all of his speeches. The shared history that he articulates is simple and universal to almost every living Azerbaijani citizen. The Azerbaijani nation was oppressed by the Soviet Union for decades and only became independent 20 years ago. Since independence, Azerbaijan has come a long way towards becoming a modern nation. This narrative of Azerbaijan is relatable to a large swath of the population because it describes relatively recent events. This shared history also develops the sense of solidarity of the nation by standardizing what it means to be part of the nation. Part of what it means to be Azerbaijani is to have suffered Soviet oppression and to enjoy and take full advantage of independence now.

In a speech at a meeting of the council of Ministers in 2013, Aliyev invoked Azerbaijan's shared history repeatedly. At one point he remarked, "Our compatriots were driven out and deported not only from Nagorno-Karabakh, but also from our historical lands of Erivan, Zangezur and Goycha – first in the 1940-1950s and then in the 1980s." This statement builds a

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[39] 1. Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," Discourse & Society 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 149–73.

shared history of victimhood both at the hands of the Soviet government and the Armenians. It constructs a narrative of Azerbaijanis pushed out of their rightful homes by foreign enemies. It is a call for solidarity lest Azerbaijan suffer similarly today.

This nationalist theme sees a similar uptick in its usage after the violence with Armenia begins. Aliyev referenced the shared history of the Azerbaijani nation once or twice in his speeches before the violence began. In some speeches, he did not reference shared history at all. After the violence began, Aliyev brings up shared history much more consistently in his speeches. There are only two speeches in which it does not come up at all and in one speech Aliyev references shared history seven times. After the violence, Aliyev uses the idea of shared history three to four times in his speeches as opposed to roughly one time before the violence, a slight but noticeable increase.

Aliyev consistently used the theme of shared history in his speeches around Aliyev's election in 2013, but at very low levels, typically once or twice per speech. This level did not noticeably increase as the election approached. Despite the lack of increase in the use of this theme in this context, this theme also shows how Aliyev uses nationalism to generate public support. When violence with Armenia began, Aliyev leaned on the idea of a shared and unique Azerbaijani history to unite the Azerbaijani people.

*Positive Characteristics of the Azerbaijani Nation*

Another theme consistent in Aliyev's speeches is the various virtues of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani nation. This is perhaps one of the most recognizable aspects of Aliyev's nationalism. Aliyev often talks about the good qualities of Azerbaijan as a state. It is independent, it is stable, it is a rich state. Many of the virtues he highlights of the Azerbaijani state come from the experiences of Soviet rule. Independence and stability are important in

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Aliyev's nationalism because they were absent during the Soviet and immediate post-Soviet period. Aliyev also highlights the virtues of the Azerbaijani people. The Azerbaijani people are hardworking, capable, citizens of the world. The characteristics he highlights of the nation itself have less to do with the legacy of Soviet rule directly, but many relate back to the idea of the independent, self-sufficient Azerbaijani citizen.

"At the same time, Azerbaijan is a rapidly growing and modern state and it is developing so fast that we can create such beautiful works of architecture." This quote from a 2012 speech at a birthday celebration of Ilham's late father shows the fundamental essence of this theme. Azerbaijan is modern and it is growing. The grim days of Soviet rule are in the past and now Azerbaijan is modern. This modernity means beautiful architecture is possible in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani people are members of a strong, growing, capable nation.

Related to this aspect of Aliyev's nationalism is optimism about the future for Azerbaijan. In his speeches, Azerbaijan is always improving. Its economy is growing and diversifying, its Olympians are winning more medals, its army is getting stronger. Azerbaijan is becoming more and more relevant in the world. Aliyev's brand of Azerbaijani nationalism is very forward looking. There is a constant sense of improvement in his rhetoric. To be Azerbaijani is to look toward the future for the improvement of the Azerbaijani nation.

After the inclusive language that subtly encourages nationalism, the most common nationalist theme in Aliyev's speeches is the positive characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation. Before the violence with Armenia, Aliyev highlighted positive aspects of the Azerbaijani nation two or three times per speech. After the violence began, it was five to seven times per speech. This increase represents a very clear trend in Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric.

Aliyev used the theme of praising Azerbaijani characteristics the same way around the time of his third presidential election. He used this theme three to five times a speech before the election, but increased as the election drew nearer. Closer to the election, Aliyev referenced this theme seven to nine times in his speeches and it dropped down to its pre-election levels quickly after the election. In both of these events, it is clear how Aliyev uses this theme to generate public support when his regime needs it. In both events, his praise of Azerbaijani virtues changes as expected.

### *Favorable Foreign Comparisons*

Ilham Aliyev also elaborates on the out-group in his speeches. Part of this is comparing Azerbaijan to the rest of the world in a positive light, pointing out how much better the Azerbaijani nation is than others and how much it is progressing. This involves highlighting the development of Azerbaijan and contrasting it against other countries or nations. Aliyev invokes the economic chaos of the former Soviet Union and Europe to show how strong the Azerbaijani economy is for not being chaotic. These comparisons help build up the image of the Azerbaijani nation by contrasting it against others.

In a speech at the opening of a surgical clinic at the Azerbaijan Medical University in 2013, Aliyev remarked, "International organizations, including the World Health Organization, speak highly of Azerbaijan's achievements in this sphere. Some time ago the European Office of the World Health Organization emphasized the reforms under way in Azerbaijan." This kind of rhetoric shows how advanced Azerbaijan is as a country. It points out Azerbaijan's equality in the international arena and also the progress made by Azerbaijan since it became independent. It lauds Azerbaijanis' virtues while also showing the progress to be had in the future.

One of Aliyev's most consistent tactics to incorporate this aspect of nationalism into his speeches involves pointing out Azerbaijan's position in international ratings systems. In 2012, he also pointed out that international credit rating agencies upgrade Azerbaijan's credit rating when many other states were being downgraded. Before his third presidential election in 2013, he often pointed out that international agencies rated Azerbaijan as improving steadily on fighting corruption. These things allow Aliyev to build up pride in the Azerbaijani nation by defining it against an inferior other nation. Aliyev uses this theme fairly consistently in his speeches. Before the violence with Armenia, in 2012 Aliyev utilized this theme two to three times per speech. After the violence broke out, Aliyev's use of this theme increased to five to seven times per speech.

This trend is most clearly present when Aliyev compared Azerbaijan favorably to other nations before his third election. When examining this nationalist theme, it was present in low levels in Aliyev's speeches before the election. He used it two or three times per speech a month away from the election. In two speeches immediately before the election, however, he used it 12 and 20 times. Then after the election, its presence in his speeches quickly dropped to two or three times per speech. In this case, there was a very stark contrast between in usage immediately before and after the election.

Examining this nationalist theme, the reality of its use clearly lines up with the expectations regarding Aliyev's need for public support. After violence with Armenia began, Aliyev used this nationalist theme significantly more in his speeches. The presidential election in 2013 offers a very clear example of Aliyev utilizing this nationalist theme to generate support. Immediately before the election, he hammered home the point of Azerbaijani's positive international position and then after the election, he rarely mentions this theme in his speeches.

*Legacy of Heydar Aliyev and the Threat of Armenia*

The legacy of Heydar Aliyev also features heavily in Ilham Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric. In his speeches, Heydar Aliyev is an almost mythical figure who brought Azerbaijan out of the chaos of the Soviet collapse. He is almost the father of the modern Azerbaijani state. Ilham invokes his father's legacy to justify the course the country is on as a continuation of that legacy. Ilham even refers to his father as the great leader or "our great leader."

Ilham's description of his father in these terms has two functions. First, it makes Heydar Aliyev part of the shared history of the Azerbaijani nation. He becomes a symbol of the nation. His policies led to the stability and upward trajectory of the nation. Heydar binds the Azerbaijani nation together as much as the flag or the national anthem. Second, by talking about Heydar in these terms and claiming to be a continuation of his policies, Ilham transfers that significance to himself and his regime. His regime is more legitimate because of its relation to Heydar's regime.

Another aspect of this "in-group out-group" formulation in Aliyev's speeches is the presence of Armenia as an existential threat to the Azerbaijani nation. Aliyev often references foreign threats to Azerbaijan and Armenia is most the constant and menacing threat. Armenia especially constitutes the most out of all out-groups. The threat of Armenia helps define the Azerbaijani nation by giving it something against which to measure itself.

The theme of the Armenia threat is common in Aliyev's speeches. It typically takes the form of Armenia's role in Nagorno-Karabakh. "The illegal Armenia occupation of our lands" is a typical formulation found in almost all of Aliyev speeches. Aliyev also references the international community siding with Azerbaijan against Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. The superiority of Azerbaijan to Armenia in almost every respect is another constant refrain in

Aliyev's speeches.   In reference to economics, military strength, demographics, Aliyev espouses the strength of the Azerbaijani nation and the weakness of the Armenian nation.  References to other foreign threats to Armenia usually come in the form of vague conspiracies directed against Azerbaijan by unnamed foreign actors.

These final two nationalist themes, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev and the threat of Armenia feature less consistently in Aliyev's speeches.  Their use is more contextual and it is more difficult to pick out definite trends in their use.  This is surprising in the case of the Armenia threat considering that there was actual violence occurring in 2012.  Aliyev does mention the Armenia threat and even does so eleven times in one speech after the violence with Armenia occurred, but the use of this nationalist theme was much less consistent.  Aliyev referenced the legacy of his father in many speeches, but there is also no clear trend.  These two nationalist themes are significant in Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric.  These are powerful nationalist themes, but their use is more context dependent than the other themes.  Aliyev seems to pick and choose which audiences he uses these themes for and as such there are no clear trends in their use as with the other themes.

### *Conclusion*s *from Data*

To answer the question of why Ilham Aliyev devotes so much effort to developing nationalist themes in his speeches, I argue that doing so allows Aliyev to generate public support for his regime, despite the assumption that leader in hybrid states do not necessarily need widespread public support.  I analyzed Aliyev's speeches looking for six nationalist themes, inclusive language, positive aspects of the Azerbaijani nation, shared Azerbaijani history, favorable foreign comparisons, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev, and the threat of Armenia.  I focused my analysis around two events, 2012 border violence with Armenia and Aliyev's 2013

presidential election.  According to my argument, Aliyev's use of these themes should change

depending on the situation in terms of when he needs public support.  Aliyev should court public

support more after violence with Armenia began and before his presidential election.

Examining Aliyev's speeches in the months before, during, and after the 2012 border

clashes with Armenia, a clear trend emerges.  In four of the six nationalist themes being

analyzed, usage increased after the violence began.  Aliyev responded to the violence by

increasing the nationalist content of his speeches.  In the other two nationalist themes, there were

no clear trends, their use tended to depend on the nature of the speech being given and its

audience.  What is clear, however, is that Aliyev's use of nationalist themes did respond as

expected to the violence with Armenia.

As with the case of the 2012 violence with Armenia, there appears to be a clear trend

regarding these nationalist themes.  In three of the nationalist trends studied, Aliyev appeared to

modulate their usage relative to the presidential election.  As the election drew closer, Aliyev

ramped up his nationalist rhetoric in order to gain more public support.  After the election, his

use of these nationalist themes returned to their pre-election levels.  This trend was very clear in

the data regarding inclusive language, Azerbaijani positive characteristics, and favorable foreign

comparisons.  The trend was less clear in the other three nationalist themes studied, but overall,

one can clearly see Aliyev utilizing these nationalist themes in response to the 2013 presidential

election in a predictable manner.

The data presented here shows that, in general, Aliyev's use of nationalist themes aligns

with expectations based on my argument.  Aliyev ramps up his use of nationalism after violence

with Armenia begins.  His nationalist rhetoric is relatively dormant before the presidential

election in 2013, but picks up dramatically immediately before the election.  Afterwards, his use

of nationalist themes returns to its low pre-election levels.  By examining these nationalist themes in Aliyev's speeches, it is clear that he uses these themes to generate public support when he needs it.

**CONCLUSION**

In this thesis, I examined the question why would a leader in a hybrid regime spend time developing nationalist themes in their speeches. I focused on Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan to examine this occurrence. Azerbaijan fits the bill of hybrid regime with its mixture of some democratic and some authoritarian elements and nationalism features heavily in the speeches of Ilham Aliyev. I argued that Aliyev used nationalist themes in his speeches in order to gain public legitimacy for his regime.

This nationalist rhetoric functions similarly in Aliyev's regime as it would in a more fully democratic regime. In both cases, leaders employ nationalist rhetoric in order to gain genuine support from the population. The key difference is that the votes that population casts matter more in one regime than the other. Seen in this way, Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric is one of the more democratic aspects of this hybrid regime.

I showed this using the practice of content analysis, which is a methodological technique that allows one to discern trends in qualitative data. I coded Aliyev's speeches for six nationalist themes that I determined to be significant based on theories of nationalism and the context of Azerbaijan, inclusive language, shared history, positive characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation, favorable foreign comparisons, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev, and the threat of Armenia. These themes came out of the literature on nationalism which suggested several core components of nationalist ideology. I used this theoretical framework to develop these six themes based on the rhetoric of Ilham Aliyev.

There are many different ways to employ content analysis and, for this project, I coded speeches for occurrences of these nationalist themes and examined how the frequency of these nationalist themes changed. I focused on speeches centered around two recent events in Azerbaijan to show the utility of Aliyev's nationalist rhetoric, the 2012 border violence with Armenia and Aliyev's third presidential election is 2013. These events provided a frame of reference for analyzing Aliyev's speeches against theoretical expectations based on the idea of regime legitimacy,

If Aliyev does use these nationalist themes to gain legitimacy for his regime, it would be expected that his usage in his speeches would reflect his regime's need for legitimacy. After the 2012 violence with Armenia, Aliyev would need support for his regime in a time of crisis more than he would before the violence started. With regards to his election in 2013, Aliyev would need public legitimacy before the election, but be less concerned with it immediately after the election. These expectations allowed me to test the idea that Aliyev used nationalist themes to gain public legitimacy.

The data gleaned from Aliyev's speeches through the techniques of content analysis supported the idea that nationalism helped Aliyev generate public support. The trends present in Aliyev's speeches matched the expectations set out here across many of the nationalist themes. Before the violence with Armenia in 2012, Aliyev's speeches contained some nationalist rhetoric, but after the violence started, his nationalist rhetoric increased dramatically. Similarly, a month away from his 2013 election, Aliyev's speeches contained a low level of these nationalist themes. As the election drew closer, this level increased markedly and then decreased again once the election passed. The data showed clear trends in when Aliyev chose to use nationalist rhetoric that support the idea that he uses nationalism to gain public legitimacy.

One of the most interesting findings involved nationalist themes that did not see their usage increase in predictable ways. Aliyev did not employ the threat of Armenia as a nationalist theme more in the aftermath of violence with Armenia in 2012, which is a strange departure from what one would expect. There is no clear reason for why Aliyev chose not to use this theme more after violence with Armenia started, but it does suggest that perhaps there is more nuance to the use of these themes. Perhaps this particular theme responded to different events or Aliyev used it under different circumstances.

This data shed light on the complexities of politics in hybrid regimes. Most scholarship focuses on the structural aspects of hybrid regimes and how such regimes are vulnerable to democratic transition. This focus misses out on how democratic institutions can function even in their weakened state in a hybrid regime. Aliyev's use of nationalism in his speeches suggests he still cares about creating a base of support in the population. His concern with the population's feelings is significant because it suggests the complex nature of how hybrid regimes function.

This research represents a compelling starting point for more scholarship. Aliyev's speeches are only one way the Azerbaijani state could utilize nationalism to gain popular legitimacy. Other state actions may also show how nationalism can be used to gain popular legitimacy. Nationalism also is not the only tool that Aliyev and the Azerbaijani state could use to generate public support. Other methods could work in the same way as nationalism in this case. More research can further illuminate how hybrid regimes build public legitimacy and what this means in terms of their function and durability.

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