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Political Pluralism and Multi-Party Democracy

Abstract

Democracies are largely based on majority rule. The promotion of the dominant concept of democracy, founded on a majoritarian or pluralistic system at the national level, is closely connected with the concept of democracy within the party. The concepts of democracy implemented at both national and party levels exhibit a certain parallelism. The fact that the internal activities of political parties deviate from the concept of pluralist democracy and remain open to leader dominance through an oligarchic structure results in the formation of a majoritarian-based democracy at the country level. The objective of this study is to analyze political pluralism and multi-party democracy.

Keywords: *democracy, political pluralism, party, multi-party democracy*

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Siyasi plüralizm və çoxpartiyalı demokratiya

Xülasə

Demokratiyalar əsasən çoxluğun idarəçiliyinə əsaslanır. Ölkə səviyyəsində hakim demokratiya anlayışının majoritar və ya plüralist oxda irəliləməsi partiya daxilindəki demokratiya anlayışı ilə sıx əlaqədədir. Ölkə və partiya miqyasında həyata keçirilən demokratiya anlayışları müəyyən paralellik nümayiş etdirir. Siyasi partiyaların daxili fəaliyyətinin plüralist demokratiya anlayışından uzaqlaşması və oliqarxik quruluş vasitəsilə liderlərin hökmranlığına açıq olması ölkə səviyyəsində demokratiya anlayışının majoritar oxda formalaşmasına səbəb olur. Tədqiqatın məqsədi siyasi plüralizm və çoxpartiyalı demokratiyanın təhlilidir.

Açar sözlər: *demokratiya, siyasi plüralizm, partiya, çoxpartiyalı demokratiya*

Introduction

Political pluralism and multi-party democracy are important attributes of modern civilization. After freeing itself from the totalitarian communist regime and gaining independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan initiated the process of creating various socio-political movements and political organizations. As this process deepened, political parties emerged in the country's political landscape. This process of formation continues to this day. In 1992, the parliament adopted a separate law on "Political Parties." Following this, it was announced that more than 60 parties had been established in the republic, of which 48 were registered with the Ministry of Justice. Later, due to mergers and the cessation of activities of certain parties, their number decreased slightly. Currently, 36 political parties have official legal status (Azərbaycan Respublikasında siyasi sistemin demokratik transformasiyası prosesində çoxpartiyalılığın inkişafı xüsusiyyətləri, 2015).

Research

In the autumn of 1995, for the first time in the history of the Republic of Azerbaijan, elections to the Milli Majlis were held under a proportional system based on both majoritarian and multi-party

systems. Three parties—the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AXCP), and the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP)—managed to surpass the 8% threshold and sent their deputies to parliament through party lists. Parties such as Democratic Entrepreneurs, Democratic Independence, Musavat, Civil Solidarity, and Motherland nominated candidates in majoritarian constituencies. Thus, despite all the shortcomings characteristic of the transition period, political pluralism and multi-party democracy were affirmed in Azerbaijan (Azərbaycan Respublikasının ictimai-siyasi həyatında siyasi partiyaların rolu, 2012).

From the above, it can be concluded that a political party is a specific type of civil association that openly declares and carries out activities aimed at gaining political power and controlling its implementation within the limits established by law, in accordance with the general principles and objectives accepted by the majority of its members and supporters.

Political parties are characterized by the following external features:

- A social base (a relatively stable group of voters supporting the party in elections and various public events);
- Formal membership;
- An internal structure that unites party bodies and organizations;
- The ability to mobilize party members and supporters to defend their actions and demands;
- A group of political leaders and government officials representing the party at national, regional, and local levels;
- The reflection of ideology and political stance in program documents and election platforms;
- Internal disciplinary bodies regulated by party statutes;
- A special financial and material base.

Political parties differ from other civic associations in that their activities directly express political interests and are aimed at obtaining, exercising, and controlling power. Unlike a mafia clan or a political group, a party openly declares its aspiration for power and operates transparently. The goals, principles, and leaders of a political party are known, and both the state and public opinion can oversee its activities. Most political parties reject conspiratorial or secret methods of seizing power and adhere to procedures of political struggle – open and democratic elections (Azərbaycanda çoxpartiyalı sistemin xüsusiyyətləri, 2011).

Given the special place and role of political parties in society, their activities in many countries are regulated by law. Important legal acts related to this area include:

- The constitution, which reflects the opportunities and social goals of political parties;
- Laws regulating the status, creation, registration, functions, and activities of parties;
- Laws on elections, parliamentary activity, and other regulations related to political parties;
- Constitutional control and judicial decisions that define the practice and interpretation of not only individual but also general legal norms.

In modern conditions, democracy is difficult to imagine without the free activities of political parties. It is the parties that shape the ideological and political background of electoral campaigns and ensure the nomination and election of a significant number of real candidates. This helps them financially, organizationally, and in terms of publicity (Sravnitel'nyy analiz mnogopartiynykh dinamicheskikh sistem v sovremennom mire na primere postsovetskikh stran (Rossiya, Gruzuya, Azerbaydzhan), 2017).

Political parties registered in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan have the right to nominate candidates directly for the presidency and the Milli Majlis. Candidates are approved by the highest party bodies in accordance with party statutes. To form party lists for elections to the Milli Majlis under a proportional electoral system, it is necessary to collect 20,000 candidate signatures, while presidential elections require 50,000 voter signatures.

In several countries, there is a practice of full or partial reimbursement of financial expenses incurred by political parties during electoral campaigns. The distribution of funds depends on the number of votes received in elections (Austria, Italy, Germany, the USA) or the number of mandates obtained (Sweden, France). Parties registered with the Central Election Commission in Russia,

Azerbaijan, and several other CIS countries have equal opportunities to use state funds as well as national television and print media for their election campaigns (Əsgərov, 2014).

Laws also regulate the amount of money parties can raise to finance their election campaigns and require financial reports to be submitted to the Central Election Commission after elections.

During the inter-election period, parliamentary activity serves as a crucial form of political struggle between parties and lends dynamism to the entire political life of society. Through parliamentary activities, parties participate in lawmaking, oversee the government and budget, discuss domestic and foreign policy issues, and determine national priorities. Parliamentary activities allow party leaders to gain experience in public administration, engage in dialogue, persuade partners, and find mutually acceptable compromises.

A key element driving parliamentary mechanisms is party groups and parliamentary factions. Through dialogue, the composition and leadership of the speaker and deputy speakers, parliamentary committees, and commissions are determined.

Voting is often determined by party and factional discipline. The results depend on the degree of compromise and agreement reached both within the party and among party groups and factions.

In each country, the multi-party system can take different forms depending on social conditions and historical context. More parties do not necessarily mean better representation; what matters is that parties actively participate in the process of forming a government. Another important factor in the formation of a multi-party system is the presence of political freedom in society and the level of competition among social groups.

Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori suggests that there can be two types of multi-party systems, depending on the level of party polarization within each system[8]:

- **Bipolar.** In this system, two well-organized and established political parties with historical and social roots dominate the political scene. It represents a party system where ideological polarization occurs between two poles, the number of parties with the potential to form a government or coalition does not exceed five, and these parties align with one of the two poles.

- **Multipolar.** This is a system in which there are more than two poles and more than five parties with the potential to form a government or coalition.

A distinguishing feature of a multi-party system is the coexistence of parties with different ideological characteristics. There are three types of party systems, classified by the number of parties and their features (Main trends in the formation and functioning of non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan, 2020):

- **Single-party systems**
- **Two-party systems**
- **Multi-party systems**

A **single-party system** is most characteristic of totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes. Such regimes exclude pluralism of opinion and open competition among various parties. Single-party rule essentially represents a monopoly of one party over power. This type of party system merges with state structures, making it difficult to distinguish their functions.

A **two-party system** is most common in well-established democratic regimes such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Typically, all parliamentary seats are held by representatives of two dominant parties, which alternate in forming the government.

In **multi-party systems**, there are no restrictions on parties, and no party enjoys privileges over others. This prevents any single party or ideology from monopolizing state governance. A multi-party system also encourages the division of society into political groups (Hacıyev, 2014).

The advantages of a multi-party system can be summarized as follows:

- It promotes political pluralism and democracy within society.
- It strengthens competition in political life.
- It provides citizens with ideological choices.
- It allows for the creation of diverse political and economic development models.
- It expands the influence of public decisions on government actions.
- It supports the continued existence of parliament, which is a key indicator of people's power.

- It creates conditions for more experienced, pragmatic, and competent politicians to come to power.

- It positively contributes to the development of political awareness in both society and individuals.

However, a multi-party system also has its disadvantages:

- It can lead to excessive politicization of society, increasing the risk of political polarization and conflict.

- It may prevent political stability over long periods.

- It often results in coalition governments, which in some cases negatively affect the continuity of governance.

- Since political parties focus more on internal competition, public trust in political elites may decline.

During the transition period after gaining independence, Azerbaijan took serious steps to shift from a single-party system to a multi-party system. This process was also part of the transition to democracy, as multi-party governance is one of the most important indicators of a democratic society and state. For this reason, after restoring independence in 1992, Azerbaijan adopted a multi-party system. Naturally, the country's transition to multi-party politics was shaped by both the current needs and demands of society and its historical past. The Azerbaijani state essentially chose the path of a multi-party system based on democratic principles (Əsgərov, 2014).

Conclusion

Parties do not create crises in society; rather, they express public dissatisfaction, diverse interests, and the sentiments of social classes and groups. Where ruling parties see themselves as worthy and legitimate partners for dialogue, civilized ways of resolving existing contradictions and conflicts can be found, avoiding severe social tensions and upheavals.

Thus, studying global experiences in multi-party democracy, establishing national traditions of civic competition and partnership among political forces, and working towards the political socialization of broad segments of the population—especially youth—should become a primary goal for the state, political parties, the press, and the academic community.

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