

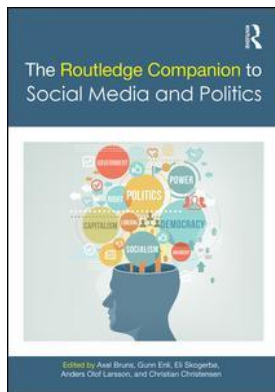
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On: 03 Oct 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics

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Digital Knives Are Still Knives

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315716299.ch16>

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Published online on: 21 Dec 2015

How to cite :- Katy E. Pearce, Farid Guliyev. 21 Dec 2015, *Digital Knives Are Still Knives from: The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* Routledge

Accessed on: 03 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315716299.ch16>

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DIGITAL KNIVES ARE STILL KNIVES

The Affordances of Social Media for a Repressed Opposition against an Entrenched Authoritarian Regime in Azerbaijan

Katy E. Pearce and Farid Guliyev

Introduction

Twenty-first century authoritarian regimes manage and deter dissent in less overt forceful ways than in the past, instead using more creative methods for repression of those that oppose them. Some argue that information and communication technologies can provide new opportunities for oppositionists to overcome barriers. This case study of authoritarian Azerbaijan will look at the challenges that regime critics face and how technology and social media can be leveraged to overcome these challenges, especially due to reduced costs of content creation and distribution as well as organising without co-location. We identify six ways that the Azerbaijani opposition is repressed: (1) The opposition cannot be elected or engage with the formal political process; (2) it cannot communicate with citizens because of strict media control; (3) it cannot freely assemble or rent offices; (4) individuals face tremendous harassment; (5) it has internal capacity challenges; and (6), it lacks credibility with the general population. We then address affordances of technology and social media for each of these challenges. Despite the affordances of technology, we find that in Azerbaijan the challenges faced by the opposition remain (and may even be amplified) in the era of social media. Social media are not empowering oppositionists because the increased visibility and surveillance of opinions shared on social media silences rather than empowers, online activities are swiftly and severely punished, and there is greater competition amongst opposition personalities due to social media creating a new space for opposition outside of the traditional parties.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is both an ideological construct and a set of formal and informal institutions that govern access to and exercise of authority. In such environments, authority exclusively rests with a leader or a small group (Linz 2000) and citizens experience great social control, and are commonly excluded from policy making and denied civil liberties (Vaillant 2012). However, in the 21st century, it has become more difficult for authoritarian regimes to maintain control over their citizens for a number of reasons. First, there is no longer a large Soviet patron helping to support broader authoritarianism (Dobson 2012; Levitsky & Way 2010). Second, the democracy promotion community (organisations like the National Endowment for Democracy, National Democratic Institute, and European Endowment for Democracy) provides financial and educational support to opposition movements (Dobson 2012). Third, transnational human rights advocacy groups (like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) coordinate campaigns from democratic states that impact politics within authoritarian states (Keck & Sikkink 1998). And finally, fourth, information and communication technologies have provided citizens access to information and means to organise themselves in ways previously unavailable (Dobson 2012), and as a result, authoritarian leaders have had to become more sophisticated, savvy, and nimble (Dobson 2012); appear more democratic (Linz 2000); and avoid using overt force (Schatz & Maltseva 2012). Instead, the means by which authoritarian regimes now maintain control are legitimisation (demonstrating that they have support), repression (actual or threatened physical sanctions), and co-optation/loyalty (tying strategically relevant actors to the regime elite; Gerschewski 2013; Schatz 2009).

Authoritarian Azerbaijan

While Azerbaijan experienced some political liberalisation after the Soviet collapse, the country has developed in increasingly authoritarian ways, especially over the past decade. Today, Azerbaijan is considered to be one of the most authoritarian of the post-Soviet states (Frichova Grono 2011), although it engages in the performance of particular democratic norms (Heinrich 2011). Azerbaijan is a hegemonic electoral authoritarian regime (LaPorte 2014), that is, a type of electoral authoritarianism in which although elections are held regularly and political opposition is legally allowed, the elections are uncompetitive (Howard & Roessler 2006) and “little more than a theatrical setting for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power” (Schedler 2002a: 47). Rather than choosing representatives, elections in these kinds of autocracies serve to gain external legitimacy, even if it is only performative (Wilson 2005), to gather and signal information, to manage intra-elite relations, and to project strength to the population.

Azerbaijan’s ruling regime has been in power, essentially, since the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the exception of 15 months of rule by the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party in the early 1990s, post-Soviet Azerbaijan was ruled by a former Soviet-era leader, Heydar Aliyev. Aliyev consolidated a highly personalistic authoritarian regime, with a backbone of a patronage network formed from his former Soviet allies and clan connections (King 2008). After Heydar Aliyev’s death in 2003, he was succeeded by his son, Ilham Aliyev, who maintained his father’s system of balancing competing patronage networks—although with some differences (International Crisis Group 2010). The

regime elite tightened power beginning in the mid-2000s when the oil boom began (Ahmadov 2011; Guliyev 2009; Radnitz 2012). While concentration of economic resources within the governing elite is the primary contributor to the regime's hegemony, wealth also allows the regime to maintain an elaborate patronage system to manage personal loyalty through exchange of material rewards (Guliyev 2012, 2013).

In authoritarian systems, the regime relies on active and passive loyalty of the strategic elites through co-optation and material enticements but also requires the passive support of the population sometimes through coercion (Stepan 1990). Thus, the Azerbaijani regime exerts strong social control on its citizens. Citizens fear the regime (Abbasov 2010; Gahramanova 2009) and assume serious repercussions for not adhering to what the regime wants (Pearce 2015). Many Azerbaijanis are apathetic about the possibility of change (Abbasov 2010). In this environment, Azerbaijanis distrust others and self-censor (Gahramanova 2009; Pearce & Vitak 2015).

Opposition in Azerbaijan

Those who do not adhere to social control and do not passively (or actively) support the regime are considered 'opposition'. Some 'oppositionists' are formally affiliated with oppositional political parties (in Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party [APFP] and the Musavat Party). The Azerbaijani opposition groups that emerged out of the turbulent early 1990s, APFP and Musavat, were emasculated, but throughout 1990s and early 2000s they still acted as a 'small constraint on the ruling elite's power' (Ahmadov, 2011: 208), especially during the highly contentious presidential succession in 2003 and parliamentary elections in 2005, where the opposition parties won six of 125 seats (Freedom House 2014). But by the parliamentary elections of 2010, the opposition parties had been so marginalised that they received no seats (Freedom House 2014). But confusingly, the regime also maintains power by co-opting potential opponents through a handful of 'pocket' opposition parties, which are government-created and controlled to mimic an opposition and channel it for regime-supporting directions for the purpose of performing democratic practices and prevent opposition vote coordination (Schedler 2013). But oppositionists not affiliated with a political party have become increasingly common. This is for two reasons. First, the term 'oppositional' is used to label anyone promoting Western-style democracy. This allows the regime to create a sense of *us* and *them* and claim that any pro-democratic thinking is motivated by a desire to come to power (Bedford 2014). Second, the Internet and social media have provided a new space to be oppositional that previously required the scaffolding of an organisation. In this paper we use the term "the opposition" to include both those who are affiliated with a party, and those who are not.

Opposition Repression

While these opposition parties and individuals are tolerated—LaPorte (2014) argues that it would be too difficult and costly to annihilate them completely—Azerbaijan and other authoritarian regimes make life difficult for these individuals and organisations through repression (Gerschewski 2013; Levitsky & Way 2010) which simultaneously harms oppositionists and deters others from considering becoming one. Opposition parties and oppositionally minded individuals in Azerbaijan are repressed in six distinct ways: The opposition cannot be elected or engage with the formal political process; it

is not allowed to communicate with citizens because of strict media control; it is not allowed to freely assemble or rent offices; individuals associated with the opposition face tremendous harassment; the opposition has capacity challenges; and it lacks credibility with the general population.

Given the repression faced by regime opponents, some believe that information and communication technologies can allow the opposition to overcome barriers. This case study will examine what information and communication technologies, and especially the Internet and social media, afford for oppositionists in Azerbaijan. For context, it is important to note that not all Azerbaijanis are on the Internet or use social media. Only a third of adults, as of a November 2013 national survey, have *ever* used the Internet, and only 13 per cent of Azerbaijani adults use the Internet daily. Those who use the Internet are likely to be male, urban, and well-educated (Pearce & Rice 2014). And, as of July 2015, according to Facebook, only 16 per cent of Azerbaijanis (ages 14 and over) are on Facebook, although 28 per cent of Azerbaijani men and 11 per cent of Azerbaijani women are on the site.

Cannot be Elected or Engage in the Formal Political Process

Authoritarian regimes vary in the degree to which opposition parties are allowed to engage in the formal political process, ranging from strictly managed participation to being excluded altogether (Lust-Okar 2005). Elections are the primary means for a party to become involved in the political process. Elections in hegemonic authoritarian states, like Azerbaijan, typically serve to enhance regime resilience by providing a veneer of popular legitimacy and more importantly as informational signalling and elite management tools (Schedler 2013). Although the current Azerbaijani regime allows elections to occur, and opposition candidates occasionally get on the ballot, it also ensures that non-pocket opposition candidates cannot be elected by employing electoral manipulation and fraud at all of stages of an election: registration, campaigning, voting, and counts (Bedford 2014; Herron 2011; Sjöberg 2014). Social media do provide an alternative platform for campaigning, and a lot of pre-election activity does occur online in Azerbaijan.

But it is unknown how much support the opposition has, regardless of any campaign efforts. Few are willing to publicly endorse the opposition, and even if opposition votes are registered, manipulation of results gives no sense of reality. Even if individuals support the opposition privately, they hide their views both offline and online because of the risk of being persecuted. The lack of information about the preferences of others—preference falsification—has a serious impact on elections. Voting for the opposition is a ‘tipping game’ because citizens will only vote for the opposition if they think that others will as well (Kuran 1991).

Social media can have an impact on preference falsification through the process known as *preference revelation*—a mechanism in which individuals make their private preferences known. Social media can make it easier for people to reveal their preferences, sometimes without facing repercussions for preferring something unpopular or undesirable, and for others to learn of different preferences (Lynch 2011). However, unlike Lynch, we argue that in fact support registered digitally may be *riskier* because of greater visibility and the ability to be captured as evidence. Individuals calculate the audience, the likelihood of an audience member will disagree, and the possible repercussions of revealing the preference (Pearce & Vitak 2015). While social media make revelations easier, they also mean that the preference is more visible to a broader audience

(Ellison & Vitak 2015). Given that Azerbaijani society has a norm of (perceived and real) surveillance and punishment for violations from family, peers, and the authorities, social media surveillance also increases the likelihood of repercussions (Pearce 2015; Pearce & Vitak 2015). Azerbaijanis have already seen severe consequences of social media distributed dissent, which results in increased self-censorship (Pearce 2014, 2015; Pearce & Hajizada 2014; Pearce & Kendzior 2012; Pearce et al. 2014).

Some argue that social media can have an impact on elections as a tool for sharing information about fraud (Reuter & Szakonyi 2013), but again, fear of repercussions holds many back. In Azerbaijan, because of the likelihood of repercussions for noting election fraud, especially on social media, it is unlikely that most citizens would share such information. In the 2013 election, although there was documented fraud, few social media users in Azerbaijan were willing to share this information.

Cannot Communicate with People Because of Media Control

Authoritarian regimes repress opposition through careful control of information flow (Schatz 2009; Whitten-Woodring & James 2012). Such regimes do not want citizens to receive information because it can legitimise the opposition (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993), bring about critical discussions (Whitten-Woodring & James 2012), and potentially allow oppositionists to broadcast plans for mobilisation (Whitten-Woodring & James 2012). In Azerbaijan, the regime controls all mainstream print and broadcast media, has banned opposition and independent media outlets, and harasses newspaper kiosks and print shops willing to distribute opposition print news (LaPorte 2014). Even during elections, opposition candidates have almost no access to mainstream media (LaPorte 2014). Given such an environment, one of the most powerful effects of the Internet and social media is the potential for alternative information dissemination and deliberation, either between citizens (Leijendekker & Mutsvairo 2014; Reuter & Szakonyi 2013) or from organisations or alternative news outlets (Leijendekker & Mutsvairo 2014).

The mechanism through which alternative information could aid the opposition is through what Bailard (2014) calls *window opening*—exposure to wider information and *mirror holding*—using the new information to create a different evaluation of the political situation. Azerbaijani formal opposition parties, opposition-allied media outlets and organisations with opposition leanings all use social media in order to share information and events. In fact, the Facebook pages of these organisations are much more dynamic than the official websites. But it is important to note that merely liking an opposition organisation or politician has repercussions (Pearce & Vitak 2015), so Facebook ‘likes’ are no indication of actual popularity among citizens, and with bots and fake accounts, Facebook ‘likes’ may not even represent actual people with Facebook profiles.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that social media’s role as an information source is the most significant affordance of the Internet for the opposition in Azerbaijan. Some would argue that without the Internet, there would be no alternative media in Azerbaijan today.

Cannot Freely Assemble or Rent Offices

Denying freedom of assembly—the right of individuals to form and participate in peaceable, noncommercial groups, including the ability to dissent (Inazu 2011) and

preference signification (Muller et al. 1980)—is another way that authoritarian regimes repress opposition. Thus, unsurprisingly, in Azerbaijan, freedom of assembly and opposition parties' and organisations' ability to assemble in public spaces is severely restricted (Bedford 2014; LaPorte 2014). The regime rarely issues permits for opposition events (rallies or protests), and when it does it is at the last minute and the location is far from the city centre and difficult to find. Once at an event, the police presence is overwhelming. Officers line the walls of the nearest metro system, multiple police vehicles surround the event space, and upon entering, individuals are frisked and bags are searched, and sometimes events turn violent and participants are detained or physically assaulted (Amnesty International 2011). Also pro-regime social media users flood event-related hashtags and pages with mockery and threats. Not only does this intimidate those wanting to attend the event, but it also discourages non-attendees.

Related to the challenges in being able to gather, Azerbaijani opposition parties and oppositional-minded organisations also have serious challenges renting office space (LaPorte, 2014), which makes it difficult for the leadership to meet and conduct routine organisational business. Laptops and Wi-Fi do make it easier for groups to gather and work together, and the Internet does reduce barriers for organising without co-presence and at a reduced cost (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Earl & Kimport 2011; Lynch 2011). There is evidence that these gathering affordances have led to both offline (Breuer et al. 2014) and online collective action (Bondes & Schucher 2014) in some authoritarian contexts.

In Azerbaijan, oppositionists have also leveraged the affordances of social media to work around the regime's roadblocks to freedom of assembly. First, social media allow for an event's location and time to be distributed much more easily and affordably. Second, the difficulty in finding the location is reduced through Google Maps and longitude/latitude coordinates. Often, the event's Facebook page will include annotated directions on a Google map (see Figure 16.1). Third, if an event turns violent or the location suddenly changes due to violence, attendees use social media to inform others.

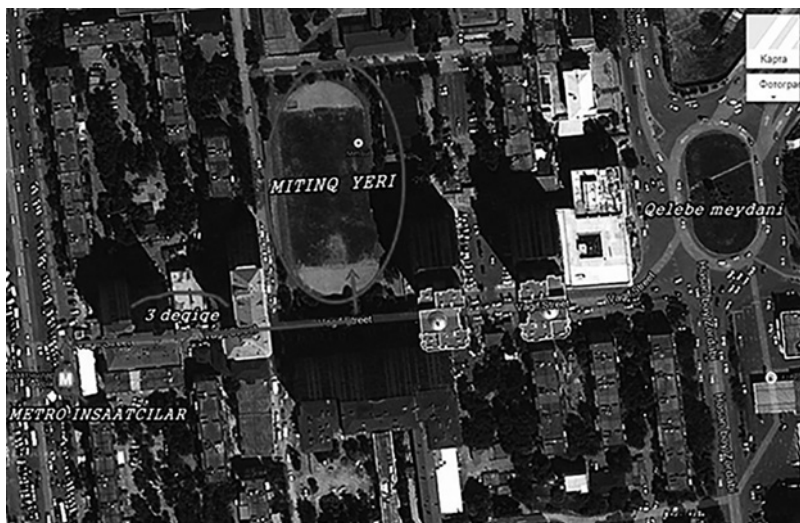


Figure 16.1 Annotated Map to a Rally (*Miting*) Location Posted on a Facebook Event

However, an additional affordance (or hindrance) of social media for events is the ability for individuals to RSVP with great visibility. Because Azerbaijanis are generally fearful of letting their political preferences be known, clicking ‘attending’ on an opposition-organised event has symbolic purposes because of the publicness of the act—one’s Facebook followers will see the ‘attending’ in their newsfeed and anyone viewing the event page will see that individual on the list of attendees. Even if one is not able to attend the event, merely clicking ‘attending’ demonstrates to that individual’s audience that the individual supports the event and may inform a wider audience that the event is taking place. Yet, clicking ‘attending’ also increases individual risk—family, friends, strangers, or the authorities witness this and there could be repercussions.

Individuals Face Tremendous Harassment

Perhaps the most common and powerful form of opposition repression comes in the form of harassment (Dobson 2012; Schatz 2009). This harassment includes surveillance, physical harassment and intimidation, and denial of career and educational opportunities (Gerschewski 2013). Azerbaijan is no exception to this sort of activity (Gahramanova 2009; LaPorte 2014; Pearce 2015; Radnitz 2012), with oppositionists experiencing blackmail, recording and distribution of intimate relations photos and videos, arbitrary arrests, long prison sentences, beating, torture, kidnapping, and the inability to be hired (Human Rights Watch 2014; U.S. Department of State 2013). Harassment has increased dramatically since 2012, and especially in the second half of 2014, with dozens of journalists, human rights workers, and political activists being arrested and imprisoned on bogus charges (Human Rights Watch 2013). Harassment creates a tremendous challenge for formal or informal opposition groups to recruit members and attract supporters as many Azerbaijanis are, reasonably, deterred from criticising the government.

Yet, technology affords documentation and dissemination of proof of harassment. Taking screenshots of online harassment or photographing assault provides evidence. This is essentially counter-surveillance, which some argue can potentially reduce harm (Wilson & Serisier 2010), especially in the case of dramatic visual images, like severe beatings (Lim 2013). Moreover, social media provides a means to disseminate this information. As highlighted by Howard (2011), social media can aid those experiencing harassment to broadcast their grievances to the outside world and (of particular importance) reach transnational human rights groups and international media outlets. Using social media to broadcast human rights violations allows oppositionists direct and indirect access individuals and organisations that may be able to help (Joseph 2012), which should, hypothetically, raise the cost of harassment for the regime (Lynch 2011). But these authors do not also consider the importance of evidence for domestic audiences as well for awareness-raising and solidarity.

A case of domestic and international attention received because of documentation of graphic images is the brutal August 2014 beating of Azerbaijani human rights advocate and journalist Ilgar Nasibov. Photographs of the results of the beating were released (by his family) to opposition online newspapers a few days later. Because on Facebook a thumbnail photo is used when sharing a photo, the sharing of the news story about Nasibov’s beating meant that a user’s Facebook newsfeed was filled with gruesome images, making it impossible to ignore the story. Because of the shocking and unintentional viewing of these photographs, it is possible that this story received more

attention than other cases of physical violence, both amongst Azerbaijani social media users and the broader international community.

Have Internal Challenges and Capacity Problems

Although the Azerbaijani opposition faces external problems, it also has internal capacity issues. Scholars describe the Azerbaijani opposition parties as personality-driven (LaPorte 2014), internally fractured (LaPorte 2014), divided (Guliyev 2009), “feeble and disorganized” (Radnitz 2012: 61), “completely ineffective” (LaPorte 2014: 1) and unable to organise efficiently (Bedford 2014). We do not claim to be able to untangle these issues or determine their causes, but we will attempt to describe some specific ways that the opposition is challenged internally.

First, the opposition parties do not embody broad values that are an alternative to the current regime. As Przeworski (1991) rightly observes, undermining the source of the regime’s legitimacy does not make a difference; what matters is proposing an alternative. The Azerbaijani opposition parties fail to demonstrate clear differences from the regime. Nor do the opposition parties and unaffiliated oppositionists formulate specific alternative policy solutions. Even if they could disseminate information more widely or become a part of the formal political process, the lack of coherent policies does not register confidence in these groups’ abilities. New policies for Azerbaijan’s poor and deteriorating education and health systems are relevant and low-hanging fruit for opposition parties to pick, yet they do not present alternatives to the population.

Next, most of the traditional opposition parties are organised around particular personalities who are veteran politicians from the 1990s. Some observers argue that these parties thus operate as personalist party machines rather than mature organisations with rules and platforms. If social media afford anything for these capacity problems, it may be in providing a space for experience gaining, learning via cross-national sharing of ideas, and deliberation within the movement, which can all help an opposition movement develop better strategies (Nikolayenko 2011). If social media provides opportunities for oppositionists to learn more effective tools, it could help reduce these internal challenges.

Credibility Problem

Another problem for the opposition is that the general population may not find them credible. Some Azerbaijanis believe the opposition is poorly organised, vulnerable, and dysfunctional (LaPorte 2014; Sultanova 2014). This is a problem that is both external and internal. Externally, because oppositionists cannot participate in the political process, it is difficult for them to demonstrate their capacity or credibility to citizens. This is compounded by the way in which oppositionists are portrayed on state-controlled media. As Schedler (2002b) remarks, authoritarian regimes orchestrate aggressive campaigns to destroy the reputation of opposition candidates and groups. But the opposition’s credibility problem is also due to actual capacity issues. Nonetheless, without the ability to convey credibility to citizens, opposition parties and groups have little hope to gain support, much less power. However, just as social media can allow oppositionists to disseminate information and campaign, social media can allow a group to build its reputation and establish political credibility (Housholder & LaMarre 2014).

Conclusion: New Players

Azerbaijanis are using social media to address credibility issues. A number of individuals and some organisations have used social media creatively and wisely to move from lesser-known oppositionists to influential voices within the opposition by growing an audience and sharing their opinions widely. Many of these oppositionists have larger and more dynamic social media followings than the traditional opposition party leaders do. Mixing personal content (such as informal photographs and humorous news articles) with political content, these personalities are much more attractive to the average Azerbaijani social media user than middle-aged professional politicians reposting texts from speeches.

These newer oppositionists are unencumbered by the challenges that a large organisation faces when deciding what messages to deliver and positions to take on issues, and often can draw attention to regime behaviour in a way that the traditional parties cannot. An individual can post an immediate reaction to the news of an arrest of a human rights activist, simultaneously spreading the news and letting it be known how she or he feels about the situation, as well as often sparking a discussion of the arrest. Musavat or the APFP and their leaders must collaborate on a statement, which inevitably means compromise between strong personalities and demonstrations of loyalty to particular personas, cautiously presenting an opinion (likely full of compromises or crafted to not displease certain individuals) and generally take hours, if not days, to react. Meanwhile, the unaffiliated have been discussing the issue at length, deliberation has occurred, organising around a reaction has been discussed, all the while the traditional parties are left in the digital dust.

The newer opposition organisation (seeking party status), the REAL (Republican Alternative) movement is one such case. The organisation uses social media to promote its policies and actively engages with organisational members and interested individuals. Interestingly, it has built its reputation almost entirely through social media, although it engages in many offline activities as well. REAL ran over a dozen candidates in the 2015 Parliamentary election with highly professional digital posters and an organized social media campaign.

Individuals can also build their political reputations via social media in Azerbaijan by being known as information disseminators (such as Hebib Muntezir, arguably one of the most important information sources in Azerbaijan, with over 22,000 followers on Facebook), or promoting their professional journalism online like popular young photojournalist Mehman Huseynov (129,000 Facebook followers), investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova (18,000 Facebook followers), interesting political commentators (such as journalist Mirza Khazar (10,000 Facebook followers), historian Altay Goyushov (15,000 Facebook followers), or political aspirants like Natiq Jafarli (10,000 Facebook followers), Erkin Gadirli (11,000 Facebook followers), Bakhtiyar Hajiyev (14,000 Facebook followers), and Emin Milli (17,000 Facebook followers). There would be no other way for these individuals to have grown their political influence without social media. But this political influence comes at a cost. These individuals become targets themselves. Some have fled Azerbaijan. Some have lost their jobs. Many have spent time in prison related to their online activities. And Muntezir was allegedly the target of an assassination attempt, while Milli's brother-in-law was imprisoned and Milli received a death threat about his online reporting.

But while these individuals have followings and credibility, it is unlikely that the opposition's overall credibility problem is being alleviated by these individuals in any meaningful way. While it is possible that these individuals' credibility could impact overall attitudes toward the opposition, it seems as if their role is more as a healthy alternative to the traditional parties to those already oppositionally minded. It remains unknown whether this independent type of opposition personality is recruiting new Azerbaijanis to the opposition. And while these new social media oppositionists have inserted new healthy blood of pluralism into the backwater of opposition politics in Azerbaijan, this process, like most opposition politics in Azerbaijan, has been driven by personalities rather than deliberation and institution building. These upstarts' social media presence and discussions are sometimes squabbles and have yet to lead to concrete deliberation. The lack of concrete policy solutions have hurt the traditional opposition parties in the past, and it seems that history may repeat itself with these upstarts, resulting in detrimental consequences for the institutionalisation of the opposition and its capacity to organise and sustain collective action. But time may prove otherwise.

We have documented the ways that the Azerbaijani opposition is repressed and how social media have and may possibly afford opportunities to reduce the challenges faced. Yet, we remain pessimistic about the opposition's ability to leverage social media to fully overcome the challenges it faces. We also suggest that social media may in fact threaten the traditional opposition because it affords greater competition from these independent upstarts. Social media allow for new ways for individuals to participate in and escalate opposition activities besides joining a formal opposition group. In this way, social media are more inclusive and participatory (Lim 2012). But social media also harm the monopoly that the traditional opposition parties have had for years.

This competition may cause greater division within oppositionally minded Azerbaijanis. It appears as if independents are *doing something* because of their social media activity, making the traditional opposition parties look even less capable than believed before social media. Additionally, some of these independent oppositionists are not shy in expressing their disdain for the traditional opposition parties. While some younger oppositionists have allegiances based on family ties, many independents, to differing degrees of politeness, ignore or bash the traditional parties via social media.

In conclusion, even if the opposition leveraged the affordances of social media to address the existing challenges it faces, these new challenges of overcoming social-media enhanced fear and dealing with competition compound the problems faced by the opposition. The small victories via social media do little to contribute to the greater battle that the opposition needs to fight. While perhaps social media may ease some pain (especially if social media can help to decrease harassment), because the regime is firmly entrenched, there is no hope—digital or otherwise—for the Azerbaijani opposition.

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