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Dynamic Development?

– Leapfrogging Critical Stages of Democracy with
Information and Communication Technologies in Azerbaijan

Tanja Korhonen
Paola Lundén

Abstract

Based on a minor field study in Azerbaijan, this thesis aims to explain the relation between advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) and development of democracy in Azerbaijan. Interviews have been conducted with representatives from the governmental and non-governmental sector in Baku. The semi-structured interviews were categorised into topics on ICT and democracy and analysed qualitatively. Theories on sultanistic semi-authoritarianism in combination with theories on ICT development and the digital divide constitute the foundation for the analysis. The thesis elaborates on the assumption that political initiatives and strategies influence democratic development. Manoeuvring the development of ICT and negotiating the digital divide are central themes in analysing the results. The regime type of Azerbaijan is the independent variable and democratic development is the dependent variable.

The conclusion suggests that by leapfrogging, critical stages of development are omitted and hence the result is not consolidated democracy. Instead, this political manoeuvre gives an appearance of genuine democratisation, but turns the development into a weak- or pseudodemocracy.

Key words: Azerbaijan, the Internet, development of democracy, leapfrogging and digital divide

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1 Introduction

“Let’s convert black gold into human gold.”¹

The issue of democratisation is influenced by many aspects and information and communication technologies (ICT) can be considered to be one component of the process. Our focus on ICT elaborates on the notion that there is a dialectical relationship between technological development and society. We view ICT as increasing transparency, and offering access to information and influence. It is also considered a forum and a possible channel for the spread of democratic ideas and intercommunication.

We recognise ICT to be a fascinating area of study, especially in this geographical area, where research in this matter is sparse. We have encountered a wide range of reactions as to our choice of subject, thematically as well as geographical. Some people we met in Azerbaijan as well as in Sweden were bemused and appeared to think that our research was odd and slightly amusing, but the originality has not been questioned and most were overwhelmingly positive. It is our conviction that the topic and the case are quite logical and highly topical, as Azerbaijan is currently undergoing significant development in the information and communication sector and it is often said that Azerbaijan aspires to become an IT hub for all Caucasus and Central Asia².

One can assume different views upon technology and social change; utopian or dystopian, optimistic or pessimistic.³ During the course of the five months that we have spent on studying and working on the topic of this thesis, we have vacillated in indecision as to our point of view on the impact of ICT. Initially we aspired to study the role of the Internet in promoting and fostering democratic development. However, it soon became evident that we had overestimated the significance of ICT as an accelerator of democratic development in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, we recognise that we had not grasped the significance of sultanistic semi-authoritarianism⁴ as a political force on the development of ICT whilst formulating the topic of our research.

The development of ICT in Azerbaijan is at a relatively early stage with limited access, and the effects of ICT on democratic development are thus problematic to measure. However, our empirical findings suggest a linkage between some democratic elements and the development of ICT.

¹ President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, 2003, in *Information Society in Azerbaijan*, 2005:7.

² Perles, 2003:53.

³ Mcchesney in Herman & Swiss, 2000:6.

⁴ This will be further accounted for in section 4.

The link between the democratic elements and the development of ICT in Azerbaijan is visualised by strategies from the government to include the country in the information society as a part of a democratic strategy.

1.1 Disposition

The purpose and research question of this thesis is presented, choice of case is motivated and an overview of previous research in this field is accounted for in section 2. Reflections on methodology, material and sources are found in section 3, where our preconceptions are reconsidered and selection of interviewees is discussed. In section 4, we revise a theoretical framework consisting of theories on sultanistic semi-authoritarianism and pseudodemocracies on one hand, and ICT diffusion and leapfrogging on the other. The empirical findings from the case of Azerbaijan are found in section 5; this part is rather massive due to the empirical emphasis in our minor field study. The findings are, on the whole, categorised into clusters of ICT and of democracy, which will be further analysed in section 6. The analysis is illustrated by using a model we constructed on theories presented in section 4, and concluded in section 7. Further research by participation at an international symposium in Yerevan, Armenia, will be discussed in section 8.

2 Purpose and Central Topic to be Addressed

We are interested in exploring and explaining how the development of ICT is linked to the development of democracy in Azerbaijan. Although Azerbaijan does not classify as a democracy, our interviewees confirmed the existence of some democratic elements. Hence we had to reconsider our preconceptions of Azerbaijani as entirely authoritarian. Thus the research question for this thesis is:

How does the advancement of ICT and development of democracy in Azerbaijan relate?

Regime type is considered the independent variable and democratic development as the dependent variable. With consideration to our research question the causality is explained by means of ICT.

We will approach the question by assessing the perceptions on ICT and democratic development of representatives within different functions of society – both governmental and non-governmental. Our ontology will thereby be constructed by the perceptions of our interviewees. We will try to extract perceptions on democracy, political and social preconditions, and political strategies as indicators on the linkage between ICT and democracy in our analysis.

2.1 Choice of Case

Traditionally, South Caucasus and Azerbaijan has been recognised as a transit region on the ancient Silk Route and is today an area of high geopolitical importance. The country is currently undergoing significant economic progress, much due to the exploitation of its vast mineral deposits, and the ICT-sector is considered a state priority⁵.

The case of Azerbaijan can be described as a state with semiauthoritarian and sultanistic tendencies, and politically, the dynamic nature makes it an intriguing case to apply to our research question. Operationally, for Azerbaijan to be an applicable choice for our research question, three requirements need to be met. Firstly, the country can not be considered a consolidated democracy. Secondly, there is a development of ICT in the country. Thirdly, some degree of democratic development must be assessable, in order to evaluate the political strategies.

⁵ Decree 1.

2.1.1 Previous Research

Literature on transitology in political science tends to primarily focus on transition to democracy, but less on other transitions. The transition theories that we have encountered during our university studies and writing this thesis have overwhelmingly been applied to, and favoured, the Latin American contexts and Southern and Eastern European experiences. Farid Guliyev⁶ refers to Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way in "Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semi-authoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization" and states that "[...] whereas an extensive literature has emerged concerning the causes and consequences of democratization, emerging types of democracy, and issues of democratic consolidation, remarkably *little* research has been undertaken on the emergence and persistence of non-democratic regimes."⁷ Marina Ottaway asserts that "[s]emiauthoritarian systems are not imperfect democracies struggling toward improvement and consolidation but regimes determined to maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails."⁸ In accordance with Guliyev she points out that "[d]espite their growing importance, however, semiauthoritarian regimes have not received systematic attention."⁹ Thus, this implies the motive for our research.

Manuel Castells can be considered a pioneer and an authority within the social sciences on the subject of ICT and its relation with society, and is frequently referred to by other authors. The basic theme in Castells sociological three volumes "The Rise of the Network Society"¹⁰ is the transition from industrial society to informational society and how this affects all spheres of social life. However, we find Castells work not strictly applicable to a non-consolidated democracy, despite it still holds some relevant concepts. The field of ICT is developing at a tremendously rapid pace, and authors like Wilson have continued the research on ICT with more focus on political aspects, which is more relevant to our case.

"Evangelists of the Internet", as referred to by Hague and Loader¹¹, praise the virtues of technology and its capabilities to distribute power equally. "In its extreme form, the Internet is conceived as an electronic forum comprising a vast network of liberated and equal citizens capable of debating all facets of their existence without fear from national sovereign authorities."¹² Hague and Loader present some key features of interactive media claimed to offer the potential of a new variety of democracy¹³. In theory these are rightly applicable to a non-democratic context, in fact they are not dependant on any specific type of regime.

⁶ Guliyev, 2005.

⁷ Ibid:396.

⁸ Ottaway, 2003:3.

⁹ Ibid:5.

¹⁰ Castells, 1996.

¹¹ Hague & Loader, 1999:6.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Key features; Interactivity, global network, free speech, free association, construction and dissemination of information, challenge to professional and official perspectives, and break down of nation-state identity. Further reading: Hague & Loader, 1999.

2.2 Definitions

ICT and IT: ICT suggests a wider definition which includes radio, television, the Internet etc. We have decided to use the term ICT instead of IT which is more often used in literature in technological studies; ICT is more convenient to social sciences.

Digital divide: “The digital divide operates both within societies and between regions and countries.”¹⁴ We will only consider the intranational digital divide which refers to the “[...]inequality in access, distribution and use of information and communication technologies between different populations¹⁵” within a single country.

Democratic elements: Assessable elements in a non-democratic context suggesting democratic development, such as political and civil liberties.

The regions: In Azerbaijan, the term is used to refer to the rest of the country, i.e. all areas outside the capital, Baku.

Leapfrogging: By taking advantage of advanced information and communication technologies, developing countries can omit the traditional, time-consuming cycle of development; in this thesis the development of democracy. Leapfrogging is a contested issue: is it possible to leapfrog critical stages of development or not. We believe the latter.

¹⁴ Naughton, 2001:157.

¹⁵ Wilson, 2004:300.

3 Reflections on Methodology and Material

Our preconception is that the development of ICT is most established in Baku, the commercial and political centre of Azerbaijan. As such we believe that social impact and the development of ICT is most visible in this area. This was also confirmed by our interviewees¹⁶. Due to this, and to restrictions in time and logistics, we have chosen to narrow our empirical research to Baku.

The main part of our empirical research derives from primary sources and is based on interviews; the questions in the interviews are categorised in two topics – ICT and democracy. We sought to find common denominators in these two clusters, on which to construct our analysis. Neither of us speak Azerbaijani or adequate Russian and therefore, our interviewees were chosen on their English language proficiency. Interpreters were only used on five out of thirty five occasions, when we found it beneficial to disregard our language criteria. As our ontology is comprised of our interviewees' perceptions the validity of this restriction of criteria may be discussed. We are aware of that the language criteria may have resulted in a specific group of citizens and representatives; an elite of the society. However, we do not believe that our study would have gained in depth by speaking to “the man on the street”.

We aspired to be flexible to the research settings, and to be open to research methods that might appear to be relevant and useful to our study once we were in Baku. For instance, we were invited to participate in the Future Studies and Future of the Caucasus International Conference¹⁷, where we listened to the round table discussions. We believe that by entering the field and conducting interviews and making observations, we minimised the risk of being misguided. In retrospect, based on our experience and re-evaluated understanding, we cannot overestimate the importance of being present in the field, in order to increase the validity of our study.

A scholarship granted to us by the Swedish Institute¹⁸ financially enabled us to conduct a minor field study in Azerbaijan, May to June 2006. By being in Azerbaijan and immersing ourselves into the research setting, we hope that our study gained in depth and credibility – contact with the field gave us a more genuine and nuanced understanding of current affairs which would not have been possible to acquire from a distance.

¹⁶ Bagirov, Parviz. Interview: 2006-05-10; Mahmudova, Shahla. Interview: 2006-05-15; Bagirov, Shahin. Interview: 2006-05-15.

¹⁷ Organised by Azerbaijan Future Studies Society in coordination with the International Federation of Future Studies Society, Baku 18th – 20th May 2006. See: <http://futurestudies.az/>

¹⁸ For more information, see: www.si.se

3.1 Interview method

We have chosen to address the research question by conducting interviews with representatives from the governmental and the civil societal sector¹⁹ in order to attain an understanding as nuanced as possible of the political strategies behind the ICT-development and its consequences. We did not tape record the interviews, nevertheless, by being two interviewers taking notes we believe that the risk of loss of information was quite compensated. Also, we believe that by not being taped, the interviewees were more comfortable to express themselves²⁰. By requesting the consent of the interviewees to participate in our study before the interview began, the interviewees knew that they had the choice to be anonymous. After having replied to our questions, based on what they had said, the interviewees could decide how to be referred to²¹.

The interviews were semi-structured and non-standardised, and had a relatively informal style “[...]with the appearance of a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer format.”²² Furthermore, we did not have a structured list of questions; instead we used a range of topics to cover, to generate data via interaction with the interviewees²³.

3.2 Sample and Selection

Prior to our arrival in Azerbaijan, we established contact via e-mail with a number of preliminary interviewees at different NGO:s. This list was supplemented by our academic supervisor in Baku, Mr. Fariz Ismailzade²⁴, with contacts selected on linguistic accessibility and knowledge on the topic of ICT and issues of democracy in Azerbaijan. The contacts represented the civil societal as well as the governmental sector of Azerbaijani society, and were clustered accordingly.

We were very pleased that the interviews had spin-off effects; the interviewees mentioned other sources, projects and organisations that we investigated and contacted. Thus, ten initial contacts generated numerous others, of which we found about thirty additional interviews interesting and useful.

¹⁹ For more information on our interviewees, see p. 39-41.

²⁰ Mason, 1998:52, 55-56.

²¹ Ibid:56-58.

²² Ibid:38; Svensson & Starrin,1996:53 ff.

²³ Mason, 1998:38.

²⁴ Mr. Ismailzade lectures at the Western University in Baku (<http://www.wu.edu.az/>), and is involved in numerous projects and works for different organisations.

3.3 Reflections on Sources

Interestingly, the results of the data statistics regarding the development of ICT in Azerbaijan from the UN and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies respectively, are somewhat contrasting²⁵. It has been difficult for us to extract how the data has been assembled and analysed, and thus it complicates comparison and analysis of the validity of the results. Yet, both reports confirm the trend of ICT development, although in varying degree, that is fundamental for our research to be conducted.

Verbally expressed statistics by our interviewees are not considered as statistical facts as such. Rather we regard them as individual perceptions of the development of ICT as well as democracy, constituting our ontological point of view.

²⁵ UN Global E-government Readiness Report, 2005:210, states that there are 0.055 Internet users per 100 persons. E-Government as a Tool for Protection of Human Rights in Transitional Countries, 2005:19, claims that there are 368 Internet users per 10.000 inhabitants.

4 Revising a Theoretical Framework

Deriving from our empirical analysis of Azerbaijan and the phenomena of ICT, our framework is supported by theories on sultanistic semi-authoritarianism, which was not in our theoretical framework prior to the minor field study. We will combine this with theories on ICT and digital divide for a framework analysing social development and democratisation. In order to argue that the Internet has democratising properties, it is necessary to analyse the strategies on the development of ICT in light of political ideology²⁶. Our ambition is to propose a case-specific theoretical suggestion for Azerbaijan evolved from existing theories.

4.1 On Sultanistic Semi-authoritarianism

The concept of sultanistic semi-authoritarianism defines the present Azerbaijani regime and adequately explains the context theoretically²⁷. Sultanism²⁸ refers to a form of personalised rule, with the extensive personal presence of the president in all elements of governance. H.E Chehabi and Juan J. Linz state that the staff of such a ruler are chosen not on qualifications or merits, but rather on their loyalty to the family. Friends, business associates or others with personal submission to the ruler are privileged. As a result corruption reigns supreme at all levels of society²⁹.

Semi-authoritarian regimes are not necessarily transitional and may be depicted as specific political systems that are deliberately sustained by a political elite who plays games of democracy to secure their longevity. “They manipulate the election process, manage media flows, impede the strengthening of political institutions, and so on.”³⁰ This type of regime exhibits democratic elements but is more of a façade democracy or a pseudodemocracy; the regime is concerned with retaining its power by giving the appearance of being democratic whilst frequently violating basic democratic tenets³¹.

²⁶ SOU 1999:291.

²⁷ Initially we discussed the regime in terms of ‘monarchical presidency’. Brooker uses this concept to describe the method applied by aspiring personalist rulers in dictatorships. Azerbaijan is formally not a dictatorship, and the definition is thereby too narrow. Brooker, 2000:147.

²⁸ The term ‘sultanism’ was originally coined by Max Weber (1978) and was a classification of patrimonialism as a form of traditional authority where absolute authority is maximised and the traditional domination has developed “[...]an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master.” Chehabi & Linz, 1998:4; Brooker, 2000:130.

²⁹ Chehabi & Linz, 1998:7.

³⁰ Guliyev, 2005:407. A media council was established in January 2003, but according to the International Crisis Group, it is weak. “Six of its nine members are appointed by the president.” ICG, 2004:13-14.

³¹ Ottaway, 2003:3-5.

4.1.1 Pseudodemocracy

Regimes that are less democratic than the minimalist definition of democracy, but that can still be distinguished from overtly authoritarian, can be branded pseudodemocracies³². Operationally, Azerbaijan's sultanistic semi-authoritarian regime corresponds to Diamond's explanation of a pseudodemocracy as having "multiple parties and many other constitutional features of electoral democracy but that lack at least one key requirement: an arena of contestation sufficiently fair for the ruling party to be turned out of power."³³ Pseudodemocratic regimes are characterised by an environment in which a comparatively institutionalised ruling party makes "extensive use of coercion, patronage, media control, and other features to deny formally legal opposition parties a fair and authentic chance to compete for power. [T]he ruling party [in Azerbaijan: Yeni Azərbaycan Party³⁴] regularly wins massively and controls the overwhelming bulk of legislative seats and subnational governments."³⁵ Furthermore, it is asserted that this type of regime can be highly personalistic and formally democratic institutions exist, but only at a proclamational level. Interestingly, Diamond states that "pseudodemocracies tend to have somewhat higher levels of freedom than other authoritarian regimes."³⁶

Diamond made a classification of regimes at the end of 1997; the states are listed in order of their average Freedom House score on political rights and civil liberties³⁷. Free states, those with average freedom scores of 1.0 to 2.5, are synonymous with liberal democracies. States classified as non-liberal electoral democracies have an average freedom score of 3.0 to 5.0. Countries listed as pseudodemocracies have an average freedom score of 3.5 to 6.5 and countries that have a score exceeding 6.5 are classified as authoritarian regimes. Although the classification is from 1997, the framework appears to be functional at present. Using this framework today, Azerbaijan can, despite its worsening ranking according to Freedom House, be classified as a pseudodemocracy.³⁸

4.1.2 Structural Conditions

The Azerbaijani regime is ambiguous, and truly interesting, in the sense that sultanistic semi-authoritarianism does not exclude democratic elements. However, these elements have a certain façade character, due to the fundamental characteristics of semi-authoritarianism; *Limits on the transfer of power* refers to the existence and persistence of mechanisms that effectively prevent the transfer of power. This is perpetuated through the succession to the presidency, from the late president Heydar Aliyev, to his son Ilham³⁹. *Weak institutionalism* denotes

³² Diamond, 1999:15.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ ICG, 2004:10.

³⁵ Diamond, 1999:15.

³⁶ Ibid:16.

³⁷ See: Freedom House: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/Chart18File32.pdf>

³⁸ Diamond, 1999:279-280.

³⁹ Ottaway, 2003:16, 52.

that semi-authoritarian regimes, in contrast to their democratic and overtly authoritarian counterparts, “[c]annot develop the institutions they would need to perpetuate the allocation of power without causing the democratic façade to crumble” thus constantly undermining the institutions⁴⁰. *Reform disconnect* implies that semi-authoritarian regimes display a façade of democracy and market economy, controlled and manipulated by the government. The economic reforms taken are only a response to international pressure, and “[...]in most cases hurried and corrupt privatization programs transfer control over major economic assets from government officials as state representatives to the same government officials as private entrepreneurs⁴¹. *Limits in civil society* indicates that its contribution to democracy is restricted and smaller than it appears⁴².

4.1.3 Civil Society in Azerbaijan

Edwards refers to the public sphere as a space in which matters of community are developed and debated. “The extent to which such spaces thrive is crucial to the health of a democracy, since if only certain truths are represented, if alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression, [...]then the public interest suffers” and democratic development is hindered⁴³. Although Edwards’s concept of civil society is employed in a democratic context, the discussion of the public sphere as a forum for communication is helpful for us to create a theoretical understanding of the civic sphere in Azerbaijan.

Post-Soviet legacy has passified citizens and involvement is not encouraged in the civil societal sphere by the regime⁴⁴. Russel J. Dalton argues that political participation was ritualised in former Soviet states, which has impacts on how participation is perceived by the citizens today. Due to this legacy, Dalton asserts that there is a need for the creation of new forms of political participation in civil society and that post-communist countries face “[...]the challenge of integrating citizens into democratic politics and nurturing an understanding of the political process. [...]The patterns of civil society and voluntarism that reinforce citizen action movements in the West are seen as reflections of the mobilised society of the Communist era”⁴⁵. The new channels of information and communication technologies may offer a new form of participation more accepted by the citizens.

⁴⁰ Ibid:16-17.

⁴¹ Ibid:17-18. This could incite an investigation on Azerbaijanians 24 (out of 26) private Internet providers; are they disconnected from the state?

⁴² Ottaway, 2003: 17-18.

⁴³ Edwards, 2004:55.

⁴⁴ Anonymous at foreign NGO. Interview: 2006-05-16.

⁴⁵ Dalton, 2000:930-934.

4.2 On ICT

Huntington asserts that democracies and dictatorships become unbalanced, and thereby susceptible to change, when a country undergoes modernisation. However, Przeworski et al. did not find any empirical evidence to affirm Huntington's assumption; "[d]emocracies are not produced by the development of dictatorships [...]; not a single transition to democracy can be predicted by the level of development *alone* [emphasis added]."⁴⁶ This indicates that an authoritarian state that undergoes development and modernisation should simultaneously turn into a democracy. However, "analyses of the survival prospects of dictatorships [that are modernising] indicate that this is not the case".⁴⁷ In this respect, Azerbaijan makes an interesting case. The country is undergoing a steady degree of economic and technological development, and claims to be democratising. Whether we believe that this is the case will be further elaborated upon in the analysis in section 6.

"Countries hoping to develop must innovate or adopt new technologies that increase productivity."⁴⁸ A similar vision has been expressed by the current president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. "Without knowledge and new technologies it is impossible to gain success in modern world. It poses difficulties for both the people and the country. We may see that technologies, new methods, the scientific achievements largely define the development, and the increase of GDP of developed countries."⁴⁹

The ICT sector, according to Steven R. Perles⁵⁰, is promising in Azerbaijan as "[i]t capitalizes on human potential rather than mineral deposits, creating an industry with the potential to endure for many years."⁵¹ Perles argues that "[t]he growth of the IT sector and creation of the information society is a task that is important for a transitional country like Azerbaijan not only because of the commercial benefits the country can reap, but also because it advances democracy by creating transparency and conditions for citizen-participation in the governance of the country."⁵² In principle, we share Perles view; it *could* advance democracy. But certain fundamental requirements must be met.

ICT are "[...]deeply embedded within social structures, institutions and practices"⁵³ and the significance of both institutions and politics determines ICT outcomes. Ernest J. Wilson does not embrace the assumption that individuals can leapfrog structural or institutional constraints. "*Both* [emphasis added] structure and agency are central to large societal innovations like the information revolution."⁵⁴ Wilson's dialectical approach⁵⁵ has similarities to Eszter Hargittais

⁴⁶ Przeworski et al. 1996:40.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Milner, 2006:177.

⁴⁹ The World of Communication: 2005-12-07:1.

⁵⁰ Perles, 2003:53.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Wilson, 2004:37.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ McAnulla, 2002:278-279.

more structure-oriented approach. She considers the significance of economic indicators, human capital, institutional legal environment and existing technological infrastructure as structural predictors of Internet connectivity. Technology diffusion is strongly predicted by *economic wealth* for a population's adaptation of new technologies. Further, on the subject of *human capital*, Hargittai has found that the education level is important for a country to be more densely connected. More educated people with a high level of English language proficiency are quicker to adopt new innovations and take part in the global information society, than people with comparatively less education. The *institutional legal environment* in a country is relevant because "[...]national policies can enhance or hold back diffusion of technology, depending on their approach to regulating mechanisms, privatization or free competition."⁵⁶ Lastly, diffusion is reliant on sufficient *technological infrastructure* in the country, although it is argued that the existence of a monopoly in the telecommunications sector appears to have a considerable negative impact on a country's Internet connectivity⁵⁷.

4.2.1 The Digital Divide

The Internet can provide citizens with civic and political information through new telecommunications technology in a more accessible format than traditionally such as newspapers, radio, television et cetera⁵⁸. Theoretically, the Internet provides access 24/7 and it is time-effective because of its extensive reach. Further, people have time to reflect on the web and it is fairly anonymous. However, these virtues are unevenly distributed.

Wilson has constructed a ladder of access⁵⁹ divided into two sections: formal and effective access. This could be explained in terms of distribution and usage; a high level of distribution does not necessarily correspond to a high level of usage. Without interest and know-how, it is unsubstantial, regardless of how well developed the infrastructure is⁶⁰.

Physical access refers "[...]to the proximity that the potential user has to physical infrastructures and applications [i.e. computers, software] in a well-defined geographic space." *Financial access* considers supply and demand. This denotes the capacity of the customers' financial ability to use commercial and subsidised ICT services. Thus, the higher disposable income of the customer, the more likely he or she will be able to have the funds for services such as the Internet. Education, learning and training is what Wilson refers to as *cognitive access*; the intellectual ability of the individual to find, process, evaluate and employ the information he or she needs for everyday ICT-use and networking. *Design access* explains hardware and software for general application and accessibility through a well-designed human-machine interface; citizens must

⁵⁶ Hargittai, 1999:705.

⁵⁷ Ibid:704-711.

⁵⁸ Hague & Loader, 1999:105.

⁵⁹ This will be further elaborated in section 6.

⁶⁰ Wilson, 2004:304.

have access to attractive and relevant content, in their language, for their daily needs. The intercommunicative aspect is demonstrated by *production access* or the users ability to actively participate and “[...]produce their own content for their own local consumption” and for interaction with the outside world. *Institutional access* makes visible different organisational forms for political institutions to structure access to digital content in an appealing way by distributing access through schools, community centres, post offices et cetera. Lastly, *political access* refers to the ability of citizens to actively participate in the political sphere where the rules of the game are written. The citizens must have “[...]meaningful and legitimate access to regulatory agencies, government advisory bodies, joint private-public boards and other institutions.”⁶¹ This feature is not to be regarded as a step, but a technological nirvana where access is complete and the digital divide is obliterated.

It has been suggested that ICT will allow developing countries to leapfrog critical stages of social development by taking advantage of advanced technologies. By learning from the experiences of more developed countries, change will come more quickly⁶² than in the countries from where the experience derives⁶³. We are not convinced. By leapfrogging fundamental stages of development, the final result would be weak and unsustainable.

The effect of the ICT development is that the information revolution generates a widening gap between have and have-nots, rich and poor. The digital divide refers to problems of the distributional and developmental impact of ICT. It is an invisible barrier; including some, and excluding the rest who need the access but cannot obtain it⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Wilson, 2004:301-306.

⁶² Mannermaa, Mika. Interview: 2006-05-19.

⁶³ Wilson, 2004:14-15.

⁶⁴ Ibid:16-17.

5 Empirical Findings: the Case of Azerbaijan

In this section we will give an overview of our observations and the current situation in Azerbaijan. Primarily, we will cluster our interviewees perceptions on ICT and democratic development in Azerbaijan. Our first section focuses on the perceptions and strategies in the field of ICT and democracy from the governmental sector. The second section focuses on the perceptions, utilisation and expectations on the development of ICT and democracy from representatives from the non-governmental sector. As our thesis is based on a minor field study, this section comprises the principal part. The theoretical explanations, derived from the empirical findings, will be applied in the analysis in section 6.

Some empirical findings will be assembled and thus not referred to as quotes. Our own comments will be clearly marked by “we believe”, “in sum”, etc.

5.1 On ICT

As the development is considered the second state priority after oil, a reorganisation and the creation of Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies was incited 2003⁶⁵. We were informed by our governmental interviewees about the NICTS program and that this is a part of the new strategy⁶⁶. The program was launched in order to modernise and expand the ICT sector in Azerbaijan, and in 2004 the creation of e-governance was instigated by NICTS⁶⁷.

5.2 The Governmental Sector

The past five years have witnessed a rapid development of the telecommunications industry. The acceptance and usage of ICT as a working tool within organisations has increased, which has led to higher efficiency. “The

⁶⁵ Decree 2.

⁶⁶ National Information and communication technologies strategy for the development of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a joint program between the UNDP the State Admission Committee in Azerbaijan.

⁶⁷ Interview with Ilyas Naibov-Aylisli, project director at the National E-governance Network Initiative. Baku, 2006-05-22.

development of ICT is led by business and forwarded by the government⁶⁸ and the government has a vision of tripling the access to ICT by 2008⁶⁹.

5.2.1 Political Initiatives and Strategies

Azerbaijan aims to be involved in the “[t]he new socio-economic formation – the information society”⁷⁰, and an initiative has been taken on creating a technopark in the future. The aim of the technopark is to create an inspirational environment where young entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to create businesses within the ICT-sector⁷¹.

Our source at the Ministry of Education informed us about the state program⁷² aiming to computerise all schools in Azerbaijan, initiated and confirmed by a presidential decree in 2005. This suggested the “[...]positive role of modern technologies in the process of increasing the quality of education, formation of comprehensive development of [the] young generation and overall development of Azerbaijan.”⁷³ The aim of modernisation and computerisation of schools, as pointed out by our governmental representatives, is to intensify the use of computers and the Internet, and to bridge the digital divide between Baku and the rural areas, where there is a lack of sufficient telecommunication infrastructure⁷⁴.

We found that our interviewees associate the rise of ICT with elections⁷⁵. Most ministries have websites and during elections of November 2005, many candidates employed the Internet technology in their campaigns. The Central Election Commission Information Center provides an on-line voters list⁷⁶, where the voters can confirm that they are eligible to vote. Should a voters name not be on the list, an e-mail can be sent to the centre for submission⁷⁷. However, we could not obtain accurate figures on how many were in fact using this feature.

5.2.2 Regulation and Governmental Control

Freedom of press is now protected by law and censorship is abolished⁷⁸. However, the interviewees maintained that there is still some censorship in Azerbaijan, “[p]

⁶⁸ Naibov-Aylisi, Ilyas. Interview: 2006-05-22.

⁶⁹ Abbasov, Ali M. Interview: 2006-05-19.

⁷⁰ Abbasov, 2006-05-18, from the opening speech at the “Future Studies and the Future of the Caucasus” International Conference. The quote by President Ilhamn Aliyev “Lets turn black gold into human gold” agreeably sums the state priority.

⁷¹ Naibov-Aylisi, Ilyas. Interview: 2006-05-22.

⁷² “Program on provision of educational schools with information and communication technologies (2005-2007)”.

⁷³ Decree 1.

⁷⁴ Bajirzade, Muzad. Interview: 2006-05-19; Abbasov, Ali M. Interview: 2006-05-19; Bayramov, Ayaz A. Interview: 2006-05-09.

⁷⁵ Ismailzade, Fariz. Interview: 2006-05-08; Rajabli, Vusal H. Interview: 2006-05-15; Babayev, Igbal A. Interview: 2006-05-16.

⁷⁶ Published on www.infocenter.gov.az.

⁷⁷ Babayev, Igbal A. Interview: 2006-05-16. Mr. Babayev demonstrated the process; the person fills in a form and sends it to the center – i.e. an e-mail is sent directly to Mr. Babayev.

⁷⁸ Anonymous foreign diplomat. Interview: 2006-05-22.

people will be apprehensive about publishing or e-mailing a critical essay on the government” and ICT can only promote democratic development when there is full access, with no censorship or interception⁷⁹.

In October 2005, one month before the parliamentary elections, the news site www.day.az was shut down several times after publishing articles that were perceived as critical to the regime⁸⁰. There are other similar incidents on websites being shut down, because of spreading inappropriate information in view of the government⁸¹. According to Reporters Without Borders, an Azerbaijani blog featuring a satirical cartoon which portrayed the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and his government was made inaccessible on the 28th of July 2006⁸². This indicates a large strain on the freedom of press⁸³.

To the contrary, others claim that the government exercises little or no control of material published on the Internet; oppositional web pages are not being shut down and material that is not possible to publish in paper editions, can be published freely online⁸⁴.

In conclusion, the results on this matter are far from uniform. It is necessary to keep in mind that the empirical findings are perceptions, based on personal experience and knowledge, and must be treated as such.

5.3 The Non-Governmental Sector

The development of ICT is not an issue of only having the technologies or directly promoting democracy by means of ICT, but having the opportunity or possibility to obtain knowledge; given that people have access to it, ICT should promote *possibilities* for civil society, the economic and governmental sphere⁸⁵.

5.3.1 Education and Interaction

For ICT to encourage democratisation it is essential for institutions, the governmental and non-governmental sector to understand why they need computers⁸⁶. The state support of the computerisation of schools program is by some regarded as being “more on a hardware level”⁸⁷. Our interviewees stated that the recipients do not seem to want the equipment or really understand what to do

⁷⁹ Choe, Michael. Interview: 2006-05-12; Rajabli, Vusal H. Interview: 2006-05-15.

⁸⁰ Baimov, Elnur. Interview: 2006-05-23.

⁸¹ Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12; Nuri, Said. Interview: 2006-05-16; anonymous political scientist. Interview: 2006-05-13.

⁸² See Reporters Without Borders: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=18416

⁸³ Anonymous foreign diplomat. Interview: 2006-05-22.

⁸⁴ Baguirov, Adil. Interview: 2006-05-08; Rajabli, Vusal H. Interview: 2006-05-15.

⁸⁵ Naibov-Aylisli, Ilyas. Interview: 2006-05-22; Mannermaa, Mika. Interview: 2006-05-19.

⁸⁶ Anonymous development specialist. Interview: 2006-05-23; Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12.

⁸⁷ Mammadov, Samir. Interview 2006-05-17.

with it in education⁸⁸, and several non-governmental organisations have initiated programs to train teachers to integrate the use of computers and the Internet into classes⁸⁹. In sum, this reflects that state priority and the priority of citizens do not always correspond. It may also indicate the role of ICT development as a strategic move from the governments' part, on trying to make democratising efforts. Whether this is a strategy of merely giving the appearance of democratising by modernisation or not, will be further elaborated upon in later sections.

Another implementational problem that affects the state program is the lack of material in Azerbaijani⁹⁰. Less than five years ago letters in Azerbaijani did not exist on keyboards, but were introduced with the release of Windows XP. Consequently and rather logically, "websites with Azerbaijani letters has significantly improved Azerbaijani performance on the Internet" and the number of Azerbaijani websites and online newspapers increased dramatically⁹¹. To make the Internet content more appealing for Azerbaijanis, Osman Gündüz⁹² assembled a central catalogue. It contains the basic functions of computers, the Internet, e-mail and a Yellow Pages directory of e-resources: an Azerbaijani version of "Internet for Dummies"⁹³.

Our interviewees told us that the popularity of Yahoo-groups, especially, is intensifying, as well as e-mail and forums⁹⁴. Websites played a central role in the "Say NO to Corruption in Education"⁹⁵ campaign which protests against bribery within the Azeri education system⁹⁶. The Ministry of Education posted comments with fictive senders on the website to sabotage the campaign, but were revealed when IP:s were tracked and screen shots were published by newspapers⁹⁷.

5.4 On Democracy

ICT in the most developing countries are, in respect of democracy, still at a learning stage. ICT are a new feature influencing all spheres of society⁹⁸. "We are learning democracy, [and we] need to understand it theoretically to be able to practice it."⁹⁹ Thus, Azerbaijan is to be considered as democratising and many

⁸⁸ Anonymous at foreign NGO. Interview: 2006-05-16; Anonymous development specialist. Interview: 2006-05-13.

⁸⁹ Bagirov, Parviz. Interview: 2006-05-10; Mammadov, Samir. Interview 2006-05-17; Anonymous at a foreign NGO. Interview: 2006-05-16.

⁹⁰ Choe, Michael. Interview: 2006-05-12.

⁹¹ Anonymous political scientist. Interview: 2006-05-13.

⁹² Gündüz, Osman is the Preseident of the Azerbaijan Internet Forum.

⁹³ Gündüz, Osman. Interview: 2006-05-24. Also see: Gündüz, 2006.

⁹⁴ Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12; Hadjy-zadeh, Hikmet. Interview: 2006-05-09; Milli, Emin. Interview: 2006-05-08; Anonymous political scientist. Interview: 2006-05-13; Bayramov, Shahin. Interview: 2006-05-15; Nasibli, Sanan. Interview: 2006-05-12.

⁹⁵ SNOCE, in Azeri: Rushveteyox.de

⁹⁶ Also mentioned in Verner Karlsen, 2006:58. "A conclusion seems to be that, in spite of election fraud, violations against freedom of speech and assembly and in spite of continuous threat of interference from the police, some Azeri parties stand firm as civic opponents to the Azeri state."

⁹⁷ Hajiyev, Bakhtiyar. Interview: 2006-05-09.

⁹⁸ Mannermaa, Mika. Interview: 2006-05-19; Baguirov, Adil. Interview 2006-05-08.

⁹⁹ Nasibli, Sanan. Interview: 2006-05-12.

factors of life is being liberalised¹⁰⁰. In order to understand democratic values and to “[...]understand what democracy is, you must build up your own principles”¹⁰¹. Some interviewees talked about a custom-made definition of democracy for Azerbaijan. We find this problematic. Some requisites of a minimalist definition of democracy need to be met; when these have been adopted, they can be combined with other values– if they do not contest the democratic principles.

Television is by many considered as the most influential media, nonetheless, it is very un-free in Azerbaijan and not even the private television stations offer neutral or objective views on human rights, rule of law or democracy. The Internet could provide an alternative source of information in the easiest and, for the user, the most cost-effective manner to spread information and promote change¹⁰². “Socially, the medium [the Internet] is expected to act as a moderator of inequality by making low-cost information available to everyone without discrimination. [...] Yet others have argued that the technology contributes to increasing inequality given that it is unequally distributed among the population.”¹⁰³

5.5 The Governmental Cluster

As the governmental cluster represented a clear-cut policy regarding democratic development of Azerbaijan, this section offers a conformed perception of democracy with little variation. Additionally, our governmental interviewees were remarkably focused on the future of Azerbaijan and were hesitant to discuss the current state of affairs. All interviewees acknowledged rapid social development in general, and industrial and economic development in particular.

The influence of ICT is, from the governmental point of view, concentrated on how policies, laws and legal documents on ICT can increase institutional transparency¹⁰⁴, and how to bridge the digital divide in order to include the rural areas in the social development that Baku is experiencing¹⁰⁵. Strategies on democratic development also focus on how to increase freedom of expression. The strategy of e-government is believed to have the capacity of battle shadow economy and increasing transparency¹⁰⁶.

The development of ICT, predominantly the use of the Internet, could provide a channel for intellectual exchange and draw on experiences from democratic development in the United States and European countries¹⁰⁷. The governmental representatives recognise that citizens must have more access to information and

¹⁰⁰ Baguirov, Adil. Interview: 2006-05-08.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous development specialist. Interview: 2006-05-23.

¹⁰² Ismailzade, Fariz. Interview: 2006-05-08; Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12; Hajiyeve, Bakhtiyar. Interview: 2006-05-09.

¹⁰³ Hargittai, 1999:701.

¹⁰⁴ Mammadov, Bakhtiyar. Interview: 2006-05-19.

¹⁰⁵ Huseynov, Bilal. Interview: 2006-05-18.

¹⁰⁶ Abbasov, Ali M. Interview: 2006-05-19; Babayev Iqbal A. Interview: 2006-05-16.

¹⁰⁷ Alekbarov, Sahib. Interview: 2006-05-24; Bajirzade, Muzad. Interview: 2006-05-19.

higher levels of education in order to increase knowledge about democracy, develop democratic values and create democratic traditions in Azerbaijan¹⁰⁸.

5.5.1 Managing and Distributing ICT

A challenge to the 21st Century is the problem of unequal distribution of information; it has recently been revealed but is still poorly managed¹⁰⁹. As ICT are determined as a key factor for social-economical development by the government, it is of great importance for it to bridge the digital divide¹¹⁰. Equal distribution of information is an important duty for the government to expand the development to the regions. “Modernisation of education system in Azerbaijan together with development of ICT is considered the necessary step” in avoiding the increase of “legal inequalities existing between the members of the information society that may lead to tragedies like revolutions, wars and terrorism.”¹¹¹

Azerbaijan was admitted as a member state of the Council of Europe (COE) in January 2005. Strategies on the creation of e-governance follow recommendations from the COE in order to create e-governance as a *component of promotion of democracy* in the country. “[E]-governance is about democratic governance and not about purely technical issues, and [...]the full potential of e-governance will be harnessed only if ICT are introduced alongside changes in structure, processes and ways that the work of public authorities is organised.”¹¹² The members states of COE “should serve to further strengthen human rights, particularly the right of everyone to express, seek, receive and impart information and ideas” when developing and implementing initiatives of e-governance.¹¹³

5.6 The Non-Governmental Cluster

Azerbaijan is a partially democratic country; “Democracy exists only on a proclamational level”¹¹⁴. The democratic process has stagnated and “Azerbaijan is not as democratic as it seems to be”¹¹⁵. We have problems with police violating human rights and Azerbaijan needs to build democratic institutions operating on democratic values; create an independent court, have a free media, strengthen civil society and improve the educational system¹¹⁶. NGO Internet resource centres have been established in the regions to strengthen and increase their presence and

¹⁰⁸ Bajirzade, Muzad. Interview: 2006-05-19.

¹⁰⁹ Abbasov in: *The World of Communication*, 2005:28.

¹¹⁰ Abbasov, 2006-05-18, opening speech at the “Future Studies and the Future of the Caucasus” International Conference.

¹¹¹ Abbasov, 2006-05-18, opening speech at the “Future Studies and the Future of the Caucasus” International Conference.

¹¹² Committee of Ministers, Recommendation Rec(2004)15.

¹¹³ Committee of Ministers, Rec(2004)15E. 2004:5.

¹¹⁴ Anonymous board member of the George Soros Foundation. Interview: 2006-05-10.

¹¹⁵ Mammadov, Samir. Interview: 2006-05-17.

facilitate networking on the Internet¹¹⁷. “Networking on the Internet creates communication islands and could be described as micro-democratic societies” open for different political opinions and the free exchange of ideas¹¹⁸.

5.6.1 Baku and the Regions

Azerbaijan is still developing its technological resources, and ICT-development is more prominent in Baku than in the regions¹¹⁹. The difference between Baku and the regions cannot be overstated and the role of the Internet as source of information is more important in Baku¹²⁰. The difference between the regions and Baku is reflected by students from the regions not being as informed as Bakuvian students when going to university. They therefore have a disadvantage in knowledge of computers and information search¹²¹.

One of our sources explained that there is a mentality among citizens, especially in the regions, of “why do we need it [internet]?”. Also, older people do not appreciate the Internet, and think that “young people will be polluted and get too much information”¹²². Another source thinks that villages are not ready for the Internet as they do not understand the value of the technology. The villagers “[...] would just spam for fun and without understanding the impact” and the implementation should go slowly integrated with civic education¹²³. Further, the digital divide between Baku and the regions is augmented by the irregularity of electricity supply. If the benefits and services of the Internet “are available only to a selected few, then its democratising potential, not to mention its economic potential, will never be realised.”¹²⁴

Azerbaijanis do not have tradition of democracy, but the divide in citizens’ mentality is also a difference to take into account. Although this appears to be an expression of prejudice, our interviewees in Baku thought that “people in the regions are still Soviet-minded.”¹²⁵

5.6.2 The New Generation

Rather interestingly, one interviewee stated that “[w]e are European, we should be fully integrated in the European family and join the EU. European values should

¹¹⁶ Aliyeva, Jahan. Interview: 2006-05-10; Anonymous development specialist. Interview: 2006-05-23; Anonymous board member of the George Soros Foundation. Interview: 2006-05-10.

¹¹⁷ Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12.

¹¹⁸ Milli, Emin. Interview: 2006-05-08; Anonymous development specialist. Interview: 2006-05-23.

¹¹⁹ Bagirov, Parviz. Interview: 2006-05-10; Mahmudova, Shahla. Interview: 2006-05-15; Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12; Ismailzade, Fariz. Interview: 2006-05-08.

¹²⁰ Anonymous political scientist. Interview: 2006-05-13.

¹²¹ Mammadov, Samir. Interview: 2006-05-17.

¹²² Anonymous board member of The George Soros Foundation. Interview: 2006-05-10.

¹²³ Rajabli, Vusal H. Interview: 2006-05-15.

¹²⁴ Naughton, 2001:157.

¹²⁵ Anonymous at the Council of Europe. Interview: 2006-05-23.

be adopted, but [we should] also keep some of our own.”¹²⁶ One way to accomplish this is through interactive lectures on democracy and human rights in elementary school in order to slowly change the mentality of people. Today Azerbaijan has a “children’s parliament” where pupils talk openly about corruption in front of teachers and representatives from the Ministry of Education at the parliament. Our interviewee explained that this would not have been possible five years ago, and is a sign of Azerbaijan not being such a closed society anymore. However, civil society is weak and this is a generational issue. Young people are ready for democracy; they are more aware, understand international issues and are more active¹²⁷.

The same people are in power now as before and a change of generation in the parliament is a necessity for democratic development in Azerbaijan¹²⁸; “The president is making positive changes, but he needs to change his team”¹²⁹. The government must become younger, more professional and progressive and the opposition must also undergo reforms as people do not see alternative power in it. The reason why the opposition will not come to parliament today is the lack of financial resources, structure and charismatic leader¹³⁰. One interviewee suggested that the new face of the opposition will emerge from the more critical middle-class which is slowly growing in Azerbaijan¹³¹.

¹²⁶ Mahmudova, Shahla. Interview: 2006-05-15.

¹²⁷ Aliyeva, Jahan. Interview: 2006-05-10.

¹²⁸ Anonymous at the Council of Europe. Interview: 2006-05-23; Isgandarov, Ramil. Interview: 2006-05-12.

¹²⁹ Hajiyeu, Bakhtiyar. Interview: 2006-05-09.

¹³⁰ Anonymous at the Council of Europe. Interview: 2006-05-23. Anonymous board member of the George Soros foundation. Interview: 2006-05-10.

¹³¹ Baimov, Elnur. Interview: 2006-05-23; Nasibli, Sanan. Interview: 2006-05-12.

6 Analysis

At this stage of the thesis, we expect the reader to be familiar with the theoretical suggestions in section 4 and the empirical findings in section 5. Only when empirical findings that have not been presented in section 5, will the reader be notified. In this section of the thesis, we will present the case-specific theoretical suggestion that we have constructed using theories on semi-authoritarianism, in addition to ICT and democratic development.

We have constructed a model in order to simplify the theoretical explanation of the relation between the advancement of ICT and development of democracy in Azerbaijan. Our model is meant to be illustrative and not definitive; it describes the linkage between political strategies on ICT development and the ambitions of democratisation in strictly heuristic terms.

6.1 The Dichotomy of the Democratic Development

The dichotomy of the development of democracy in Azerbaijan is dependent on the current regime type. In order to discuss the democratising properties of the Internet, it is necessary to analyse the strategies on the development of ICT in light of political ideology¹³². Thus, we elaborate on the assumption that ideologically, the ultimate ambition of democratic development is for a country to become a consolidated democracy. When norms, procedures and expectations of democracy have become internalised and normalised by the process of habituation, actors will routinely and instinctively conform to written and unwritten rules of democracy. Democracies are consolidated when actors have an unquestioned and deep commitment to democracy and its procedures¹³³. By leapfrogging, as we perceive the case of Azerbaijan, traditional cycles of development towards a consolidated democracy are being omitted and the long-term process of habituation is being neglected.

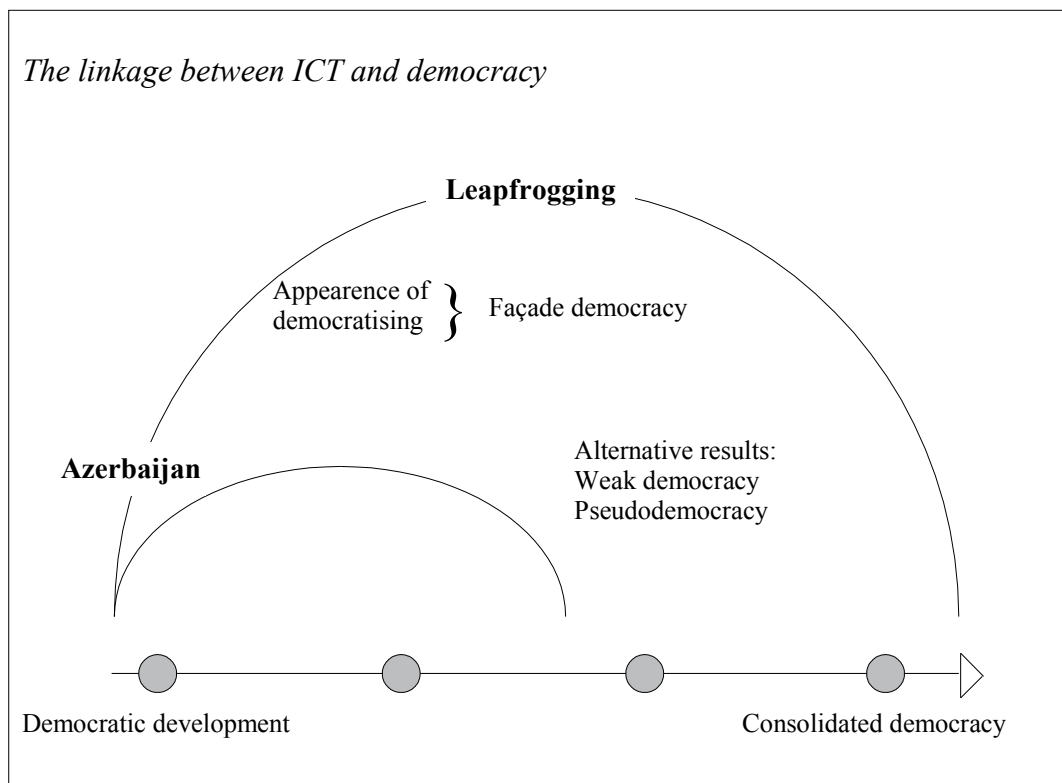
“Some people think we should be able to establish democracy in a short time, but that’s impossible. Azerbaijan is a young nation and democracy is a new concept. The U.S. has been advancing on the path of democracy for a long time - more than 200 years. You’ve achieved a lot, but you’re still working on it. Democracy is not an apple you buy at the market and bring back home.”¹³⁴

¹³² SOU 1999:291.

¹³³ Diamond, 1999:65.

¹³⁴ Aliyev, Heydar, late President of Azerbaijan, on his first official visit to the United States. 1997. www.azer.com.

In the case of Azerbaijan, we currently see two possible outcomes in terms of democratic development; the first being development towards a weak democracy, the second, sustaining its pseudodemocratic regime. The former is based on a genuine desire to eventually become a consolidated democracy, but the problem is the prevailing social and political conditions: the existence of a weak civil society in which citizens lack an understanding of democracy, where the dependency of the state is high and the opposition does not present an alternative transfer of power. The government is trying to make a quick fix by leapfrogging conventional cycles of democratic development. In the latter outcome, pseudodemocracy: At present, Azerbaijan lacks democratic tradition but the government, hence the sultanistic semi-authoritarian regime, is in no danger of losing its hold on power; it knows how to play the game of democracy *and* remain in power¹³⁵.



- Critical stages of democratic development;
 - ◆ Rule of law
 - ◆ Respect for human rights
 - ◆ Civil & political liberties, etc.

¹³⁵ Ottaway, 2003:5-7.

The result of leapfrogging, in our view, is that it is not a quick fix for a strong and sustainable democracy. “[M]ost postcommunist transitions are indeed transitions from something that is not democracy to something that *is* or *tries to be* or at least *pretends to be* democracy [emphasis in original].”¹³⁶ If the governments intention is not a future consolidation of democracy, and if it is fundamentally a cognisant façade, then Azerbaijan will remain a pseudodemocracy.

6.2 Negotiating the Digital Divide

As mentioned, the development of ICT in Azerbaijan is at a relatively early stage. The infrastructure is comparatively well constructed, but with limited penetration of Internet usage. However, citizens can access Internet through Internet cafés, work or at universities and school. Ambitious initiatives on increasing penetration and accessibility of the Internet have been taken from the governmental sector, though many of these initiatives are at the implementational stage. Upon elaboration of the issue of development and penetration of ICT, we will employ Wilson’s ladder of access with suggestions on how to negotiate the digital divide. We have inverted and modified the model in order to make it case-specific for our empirical findings of Azerbaijan¹³⁷.

If *physical access* is absent, the first step is clearly to provide sufficient infrastructure and to expand applications in order to make the country more densely connected. However, financial access is a necessary requisite. On negotiating the *financial access*, in terms of supply and demand, privatisation should be encouraged in order to enhance competition and promote investment. However, privatisation reforms, as a result of international pressure, can be problematic and take the form of a façade when the relocation of economic assets move “[...]from government officials as state representatives to the same government officials as private entrepreneurs¹³⁸.” Corruption is one of the central characteristics of a sultanistic semi-authoritarian state such as Azerbaijan, where everything is centred around the leader and his family, business associates and friends. If corruption is central, and nepotism likewise, and economic reforms are troublesome, it is not far-fetched to assume that privatisation takes the form of a façade.

If *cognitive access* is deficient (or using Hargittais term; *human capital* is poor) this should be enhanced by education in how to use a computer and the Internet to seek, find and process information. “[T]he ability to tap into and harness the information and communication resources of the Net is predicated on literacy and education.”¹³⁹ Information resource and training centres such as provided by the Caucasus Resource and Research Center, Azerbaijan Young

¹³⁶ Nodia, 1996:17.

¹³⁷ See Appendix I.

¹³⁸ Ottaway, 2003: 17-18.

¹³⁹ Naughton, 2001:157.

Lawyers Union and International Research and Exchange Board, are examples of civic education. Further, English and Russian language proficiency must be improved. The problem of IT-training is that it is difficult to transfer skills in IT-awareness. "ICT-development [in Azerbaijan] is like going back in time"¹⁴⁰. The development is here, but only a very small group of people have knowledge about Internet and Web. Also, there is not enough material in Azeri¹⁴¹. In Azerbaijan, the program of integration of ICT in education has encountered implementational obstacles and we believe that this is a problem of lack of continuity; feed-back and follow-ups should be encouraged as policies on sustainability. Corruption is a component also in the negotiation of the cognitive access of digital divide, or as expressed by one of our interviewees: "The program is all a public show and is fundamentally a visibility of corruption"¹⁴².

We believe that it would be advantageous to merge *design, content and production access*, as these are closely linked parallel developments. It is necessary to make the content on the Internet appealing to the common user and something has to motive the desire to learn more about the Internet¹⁴³. An OSI-initiated program called eRider aims to customise applications such as databases, websites, staff resources et cetera in order to encourage locally produced content¹⁴⁴. Osman Gündüz' book "Internet. Azərbaycan Internet Resursları" is an excellent empirical finding that considers the significance of design and content.

Taking content access further; an interviewee informed us about an educational CD, produced and financed by a private company, that was rejected by the Ministry of Education. We perceive this to be a key characteristic of sultanistic semi-authoritarianism; high centralisation and discouragement of privatisation and private initiatives. The last stage, the completion of an all-embracing information society, is to have negotiated the digital divide at the institutional level. Azerbaijan has grand programs and decrees on expanding the ICT-sector; however projects concerning E-Azerbaijan might be idealistic. This is due to leapfrogging and primarily Azerbaijan has to improve and fulfil the other stages on the ladder of negotiating the digital divide. Otherwise, the development will be unsustainable.

¹⁴⁰ Choe, Michael. Interview: 2006-05-12.

¹⁴¹ Choe, Michael. Interview: 2006-05-12.

¹⁴² Anonymous at the Council of Europe. Interview: 2006-05-23

¹⁴³ Choe, Michael. Interview: 2006-05-12.

¹⁴⁴ Bagirov, Parviz. Interview: 2006-05-10.

6.3 Social Impact

Azerbaijani citizens and the government recognise the country *as fairly democratic*, with a few imperfections such as corruption in courts and education, violations of human rights and they accept some infringement on their civil and political liberties. Civil society and perhaps the government recognise Azerbaijan as democratic to some extent, and thus it is clear that the definition of democracy has been reconstructed. This redefinition does not mean that Azerbaijan can be regarded as more democratic; rather, it can be understood as inducing a shift in mentality. The society has renounced some of the fundamental democratic principles.

Further, due to the digital divide in Azerbaijan, it is clear that elite are the actors on the Internet; because they have the financial means to do so. It is interesting to contemplate the effects of this on society as a whole, and on democratic development. Perhaps democracy is restricted to the micro-democratic islands in society, as expressed by Emin Milli regarding the networking, debate and exchange of ideas on the Internet. In sum, regardless of what the redefinition of democracy suggests, it is not encompassing system.

7 Conclusion

In this concluding section, the central subject is to explain how the advancement of ICT and development of democracy in Azerbaijan relate. We assert that the regime type of Azerbaijan, sultanistic semi-authoritarianism, is the independent variable. Democratic development is the dependent variable; it is reliant on the strategies of the regime. We have used leapfrogging as the explanation of the causality between the independent and dependent variables.

The government has an interest in giving the appearance of being democratising. This façade of democracy is made possible by the grandiose project of E-Azerbaijan, with all its programs on how to computerise and modernise different sectors and functions of society. Essentially, it is a way of diverting attention from real problems and issues in society, by instead praising the virtues of technology that are not accessible or understandable to people.

Policy documents that we have been given access to have had a strong focus on democracy. However; democracy on an advanced level, which we argue, is inappropriate and unrealistic for Azerbaijan and its ambition of E-Azerbaijan.

Deepening a democracy can be connected to e-projects such as e-governance, e-education, e-health, et cetera. Wilson's ladder of access, where the last step of access is the final goal, explains this chain theoretically. Will Azerbaijan become a consolidated democracy? Not in the near future. A country cannot advance into a democracy before the fundamental criteria are met; Azerbaijan cannot leapfrog the development, it is contrainuitive to deepen democracy before building it.

8 Further Research

As a result of our research in Azerbaijan, our supervisor Anders Sannerstedt and the international coordinator Boel Billgren at Lund University, gave us their recommendation to participate in the ATHGO International Symposium in Yerevan, Armenia. The symposium features “Information and Communication Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges in Landlocked Developing Countries”, October 3-6, 2006¹⁴⁵. The main objectives focus on ICT as a means of development in landlocked countries, and ICT is viewed as the microcosm of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number eight (8). The main goal of the symposium is to produce a resolution that will identify and suggest alternative strategies for securing a constructive outcome in meeting the goal set by the MDG 8 while utilizing the resources of both the developing and the developed world. The resolution will be forwarded to the UN Permanent Missions.

With the knowledge we have acquired whilst studying the relation between development of ICT and social progress, we hope to be able to make a valuable contribution at the workshops held at the symposium. We aim to further increase our interest and understanding of the Caucasus and the field of ICT in international cooperation with academics and professionals; we are interested in exploring the global perspective of our area of research.

¹⁴⁵ For more information, see: www.athgo.org. Link to 2006 Symposia: Yerevan – October.

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Appendix I

Modified model originally constructed by Ernest J. Wilson in *The Information Revolution and Developing Countries*, 2004:306. We have inverted the model and replaced comments in order to apply it to the case of Azerbaijan.

