

# Reflections on Political Science in Azerbaijan

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My interest in the world of politics began when I was a high school student. However, in the authoritarian structure of Soviet society political science as an independent scientific discipline, was, for a long period, considered to be a “capitalist” science. When I was in Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University there was no major in political science so I chose history as my major because it was the closest.

My area of academic interest is in the problems of transforming authoritarian systems into democratic ones. I worked as an expert at the Center for Strategic International Studies from 1992 to 1994. Since 1994 I have been a member of the department of political science of Western University in Azerbaijan. My university, established soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is one of the first private universities in Azerbaijan. As a pioneer in educational reform in Azerbaijan, Western University has paid special attention to the development of political science as a discipline and of its own political science program. For example, in 1997 we organized an international conference on “Teaching Political Science in the Transition Period.” This conference helped many scholars coordinate efforts in creating new approaches to political science pedagogy.

## Junior Faculty Development Program

I was a participant in the Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) for the 2003–2004 academic year. The JFDP is an academic exchange program administered by the American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS) and funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. As a visiting scholar I spent one academic year at the University of Kansas (KU).

It was a very useful year. Among other things, it taught me the importance of using contemporary information technologies in the teaching process. Unfortunately, using these technologies is still a wild

dream for a huge majority of teachers in the newly independent countries. That is why it is especially important to collaborate with our partners in the West. I am determined to bring these technologies to my country.

During my stay at KU, I discussed with members of the political science department and the university staff the possibility of joint projects between KU and Western University (WU). They were very receptive to these ideas.

An interactive course in Comparative Politics using the Internet and digital cameras to involve instructors at KU and WU, as well as Osh State University in Kyrgyzstan and National State University in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, is already underway. The goal of the course is to create an open, personal exchange between the students of each country through a series of classroom discussions led by their instructors. The course offers much in the way of higher education and public diplomacy.

- It provides an opportunity to build an interactive, personal relationship without travel.
- It gives a group of 40 students an international experience for less than the cost of one traditional exchange experience.
- It offers an international experience to populations that would not typically be able to obtain this experience.
- Students gain a better understanding of their own culture through contact with others.
- The academic element provides structure for the development of personal relationships.
- Students who later will travel or work in foreign countries, or with international audiences, develop a greater respect for other cultures.
- Universities may use the connection to develop other shared courses, such as distance learning classes on topics not readily available at the home university, recruitment of foreign students, or to aid research.

The past six months have seen important steps for APSA with regard to international programs. At its meeting in Chicago in April, the APSA Council endorsed a memorandum developed by the Committee on International Political Science addressing the internationalization of the Association (published in this section in the July issue of *PS*). Among other suggestions, the memo recommended increased funds for travel to the 2004 Annual Meeting by non-OECD scholars. See Association News for more information.

APSA continues its efforts for increased membership participation in international activities, such as the U.S. Department of State’s “Rights of the People” initiative, which sends U.S.-based scholars overseas on speaking tours. In the International Section of the July *PS*, Kirk Randazzo of the University of Kentucky described his experiences with the program.

This summer APSA hosted Elchin Rizayev, a faculty member of Western University (Baku, Azerbaijan) and participant in the State Department-funded Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) as an intern. In the following essay, Elchin describes his experiences in the U.S. and offers thoughts on the state of political science in Azerbaijan.

For more information on APSA’s international programs and activities, contact Bahram Rajaei, director of International and External Relations, at [brajaee@apsanet.org](mailto:brajaee@apsanet.org).

Part of this project is supported by KU through a grant from the U.S. State Department. Although the American and Azerbaijan universities provide basic equipment, there are some important aspects of the project which are not funded. I am trying to find extra support for this very promising project.

## Political Science in Azerbaijan

First, it is necessary to note that political science in our country has a very short history. In the former Soviet Union, political science was not an academic discipline but a tool of political influence and ideological propaganda. The process of democratization in the Soviet Union since the second half of the 1980s has led to the emergence of a political science that is non-ideological and independent from government control. The first departments of political science were established in 1989. However, since they evolved from departments of "Scientific Communism," they continued to be influenced by Marxism/Leninism.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an independent political science developed slowly and incompletely. However, a number of serious problems remain, especially in teaching. Paramount among these are separation of what is taught from vital realities and the use of outmoded theories.

The emergence of political science coincided with the struggle for independence in Azerbaijan and all of the communist block countries. That period was characterized by a strong polarization of all parts of society. Unfortunately, political science was shaped by that era's struggle for power. As a result, it has become more "political" rather than "scientific" as a discipline. Most political studies serve the interests of different political groups rather than attempt scientific explanation of political phenomena.

Despite the fact that more than 10 years have passed, the situation has not changed much. Some positive trends were not sustainable. Opportunities for Azeri scholars to conduct political science research in American universities have been limited.

For example, the Fulbright program has existed in Azerbaijan for almost 10 years, but just four Azeri political scientists have been able to participate.

Political science as a discipline in Azerbaijan is still taking shape. At this stage it is especially important to coordinate our efforts for professional development. We have organized groups of scholars to design programs of professional development. This activity is mostly based on the enthusiasm of a few scholars. Opportunities for international experience are especially important for us. I hope the American community of political scientists will be more active in international collaboration and cooperation.

## My Perceptions of Political Science in the U.S.

Political science as an independent scientific discipline originated in the U.S. Most of the famous schools are located here. Being here has made a significant contribution to my understanding about the place of political science in society. I think it is especially important how American scholars are trying to find relevant correlations between the applied and theoretical aspects of political research.

However, I have the impression that the study of political science focuses too much on domestic politics. At a time when globalization is increasing and inter-dependency is becoming more necessary, American universities need to widen the international component of their political studies' programs. A lot of American students are not very familiar of the world beyond the U.S.—especially the newly independent countries. A broader approach to political studies will help to create a new and better understanding of the world.

## APSA International Membership

COUNTRY	MEMBERS
Canada	349
United Kingdom	251
Japan	222
Germany	150
South Korea	61
Sweden	49
Italy	47
Australia	46
Netherlands	46
Israel	43
Mexico	38
Norway	35
France	33
Switzerland	31
Taiwan	29
Ireland	28
Brazil	27
Denmark	27
Spain	24
Belgium	21
New Zealand	16
Hong Kong, China	15
Nigeria	14
Austria	13
Greece	11
Finland	10
Scotland	10
Portugal	9
Russia	9
Chile	8
Turkey	8
Singapore	8
China	7
Egypt	6
India	6
Thailand	6
Armenia	5
Czech Republic	5
Poland	5
Venezuela	5
Argentina	4
Bulgaria	4
Croatia	4
Philippines	4
Serbia	4
South Africa	4
Peru, Romania, Ukraine, Indonesia	3
El Salvador, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Hungary, Bahrain, Uganda, Kyrgyzstan	2
Colombia, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Vietnam, Syrian Arab Republic, Bangladesh, Andorra, Cameroon, Latvia, Mongolia, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Malta, Estonia, United Arab Emirates, Iceland, Luxembourg, Togo, Yugoslavia	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,817</b>

## Upcoming International Events

### 2005

**March 18–23:** ECPR Joint Sessions, Grenada, Spain, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/>.

**March 31–April 2:** European Union Studies Association Ninth Biennial International Conference, Hyatt Regency, Austin, Texas, <http://www.eustudies.org/conf2005.html>.

**April 14–19:** ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Granada, Spain, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/granada/index.asp>.

**August 11–13:** The XIV NoPSA Conference, Reykjavik, Iceland, <http://sockom.helsinki.fi/NOPSA/iceland05.html>.

**August 24–27:** 1st World International Studies Conference Meeting, Istanbul, Turkey, <http://www.siyasilimler.org/>.

**September 8–11:** Third ECPR Conference, Budapest University of Economic Sciences, Hungary, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/>.