



AZERBAIJAN LOOKS TO ITS FUTURE: SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND TRENDS 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The IFES 2004 survey in Azerbaijan was conducted between June 21 and July 21, 2004 with a sample of 1,620 respondents throughout Azerbaijan. The sample consists of 1,000 interviews in a national sample and 620 over-sample interviews in select urban centers in Azerbaijan (Barda, Ganja, Kuba, Lenkoran, Nakhichevan and Zaqatala). The combined 1,620 interviews have been weighted to represent the national population on the basis of rural/urban mix, regional population proportion, and gender mix. The margin of error is plus/minus 2.4% for the entire sample. Eighty-four percent of the interviews were conducted in Azeri and 16% in Russian. The average interview lasted between 45 and 50 minutes. IFES conducted similar surveys of the Azerbaijani population in 2002 and 2003, and data from these surveys is used to highlight trends in public opinion in this report.

Following the survey, IFES also conducted focus groups with people interested in politics, and some findings from the focus groups are also included in this report. A total of eight focus groups were conducted—three with residents of Baku (two in Azeri, one in Russian) and one each with residents of Barda, Ganja, Kuba, Lenkoran and Zaqatala. The focus groups were conducted between September 2 and 5, and the number of participants in each group ranged from seven to eight. Each discussion lasted 1.5 to 2 hours.

I. Information and Media

Information About Political and Economic Developments: A majority of Azerbaijanis (55%) say they have a great deal or fair amount of information about political developments in the country, while 43% say they have little or none. Slightly fewer Azerbaijanis have similar levels of information about economic developments (50%), while 47% say they have little or no information. Men are more likely to have information about both political and economic developments than women, and urban residents are more likely to have information than rural residents. A majority of those 18 to 25 have little or no information about both economic and political developments. Information levels generally increase with age, with the exception of the 56+ age group, which has less information than those 26 to 55.

Lack of Information About Institutions and Initiatives: Even though a majority says they are informed about political developments in the country, few Azerbaijanis have information about specific political institutions and initiatives. A third or fewer say they have enough information about the judicial system, the activities of their municipal councils, and the power of their local executives. Only 37% have enough information about their rights as citizens, and only 40% know enough about the activities of the national government.

Regarding political initiatives, less than a quarter are aware of the law on advocates, the law on grants, the coordination center of the opposition, the law on public TV, or the Ombudsman. There is greater awareness of the law on the Constitutional Court (28%), the poverty reduction strategy (46%), and the unified election code (47%). In Baku and Lenkoran, awareness of constituency offices has increased from 19% in 2002 to 40% in 2004.

Most focus group participants, especially those from outside Baku, felt the need for more information about sociopolitical issues of interest to them, particularly the economy and the Karabakh conflict.

Media Sources: Television is the dominant media source in Azerbaijan, as large numbers of Azerbaijanis report using various TV channels much more than radio or newspapers. The most utilized television channels are Lider (84%), Az TV (79%), Space (77%), ANS (75%) and ATV (25%). Russian channels (51%) and Turkish channels (49%) are also frequently used. The most popular radio stations are Lider (20%), ANS (19%) and Space (15%). The most read newspapers are *Yeni Musavat* (7%), *Zerkalo* (7%), *Azerbaijan* (5%), *Khalg* (5%), *Azadlyq* (4%), *Echo* (4%) and *Azerbaijan Maullimi* (4%).

Objectivity of State and Private Media: A majority of Azerbaijanis believe that both state and private media are at least somewhat objective. Three-quarters (75%) of Azerbaijanis consider private media to

be at least somewhat objective, and 58% have similar opinions about state media. While urban and rural residents have similar views about private media, rural residents are more likely to think that state media is objective than urban residents (61% versus 51%). In Apsheron, 66% of residents disagree that the state media is objective while 33% agree. In Baku, 49% agree and 45% disagree.

Almost all focus group participants identified ANS as the most objective source for news on sociopolitical developments, and most identified state-run Az TV as a non-objective source. There were mixed responses for Lider and Space, as some participants felt that these sources are under government control. Most focus group participants believe that, for the most part, the private media is not free to report the news objectively in Azerbaijan.

Eighty-one percent of Azerbaijanis say that they are more likely to trust broadcast media to provide objective coverage of events while only 3% say they find the print media more objective. Eight percent trust neither type of source, and 4% say they trust both. In the 2003 survey, 72% named broadcast media and 6% print media as trustworthy.

II. Socioeconomic Situation

Satisfaction With Overall Situation in Azerbaijan: Satisfaction with the overall situation in Azerbaijan has increased significantly since the 2003 survey. In this survey, 50% say they are very or somewhat satisfied with the overall situation, compared to 31% in 2003. Forty-seven percent are dissatisfied with the overall situation. Urban residents are slightly more likely to be satisfied than rural residents, and satisfaction levels are highest in Kuba-Khachmaz (65%) and Muga-Salyan (64%).

Assessment of Economic Situation: The primary reason for increased satisfaction with the overall situation in Azerbaijan is the upturn in positive assessments of the economic situation since the 2003 survey. A majority of Azerbaijanis (54%) describe the current economic situation as good or very good. This compares to 27% who held the same opinion in the 2003 survey. Thirty-eight percent believe that the current economic situation is bad or very bad. Positive assessments of the current economic situation outnumber negative assessments in all regions, with the exception of Baku and Ganja.

In the focus groups, respondents who stated that the current economic situation is good most often referred to the recent economic improvement as well as their expectations for the oil industry and the income it will generate for Azerbaijan. Thus, assessments of the current economic situation may be based more on past experience and future expectations than on existing economic conditions.

Although Azerbaijanis are positive about the national economic situation, they are less likely to feel the same way about their own family's economic situation. A majority of Azerbaijanis (53%) say that their family's economic situation is bad or very bad, while 43% say it is good or very good. The only age group in which a majority say that their family's economic situation is good is the 18- to 25-year olds. Fifty-seven percent rate their family's economic situation at a similar level as the national economic situation, while 27% rate the national economic situation more positively and 16% rate it more negatively.

Expectations of the Future Economy: A plurality of Azerbaijanis (48%) are optimistic that the economic situation will be better in 12 months' time. Twenty-eight percent believe that it will be the same, and only 7% believe it will be worse. In the last two years, there has been a substantial increase in optimism. In 2002, only 23% felt the situation would be better in a year, and 32% felt it would be worse. In 2003, 31% felt it would be better and 32% worse.

Similar to expectations about the national economy in 12 months, a plurality of Azerbaijanis (40%) expect their family's economic situation to get better, while 32% expect it to remain the same and 11% expect it to get worse.

Biggest Problems Faced by Azerbaijan: When asked to list the biggest problems facing Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is most often mentioned (69%). Economic concerns also occupy public

discourse, as 40% of respondents list unemployment, 13% mention low standards of living, 6% identify improvement of social protections, and 6% list general economic problems.

Efforts to Develop the Non-Oil Economy: Less than a quarter (23%) of all Azerbaijanis are aware of efforts by the government to develop the non-oil economy. Even among those with a great deal or fair amount of information about economic developments in the country, 51% say they have not heard of any such efforts. Those who are aware of efforts to develop the non-oil economy are more likely to give a positive assessment of the national and their family's economic situation than those who are not aware of these efforts. Most of the focus group participants felt that money from the Azerbaijan oil fund should be used primarily to develop the agricultural, industrial and tourism sectors. Most of these participants also believe that corruption and the poor quality of the education system are the two biggest barriers to economic development in Azerbaijan.

III. Attitudes Toward Democracy

Meanings Attached to Democracy: When asked what living in a democracy means to them, 58% of Azerbaijanis name a freedom such as freedom of speech, to vote, etc. Eleven percent cite independence or sovereignty, 5% the rule of law, 4% information, 4% equality of all before the law and 4% human rights. Few Azerbaijanis cite a high standard of living or development (8%).

Democracy in Azerbaijan: Despite the idealistic meanings Azerbaijanis attach to democracy, they tend to evaluate it on instrumental grounds. Assessments of democracy in Azerbaijan are strongly related to assessments of current national and family economic situation. Overall, 46% of Azerbaijanis say that Azerbaijan is currently a democracy, 20% say it is not and 20% say it has elements of both a democracy and a non-democracy. Fourteen percent do not have an opinion on the issue. The number of people calling Azerbaijan a democracy has increased from 29% in the 2002 survey and from 42% in the 2003 survey to its present level of 46%. However, among those who think the current national economic situation is very bad, only 19% think Azerbaijan is a democracy. This figure is 27% among those who think the economic situation is somewhat bad, 62% among those who think the economic situation is somewhat good, and 75% among those think it is very good. A similar trend in opinions is found when comparing assessments of democracy in Azerbaijan to assessments of the family economic situation. Assessments of Azerbaijani democracy are related not to the fundamentals of democracy but to economic performance.

Attitudes Toward Judicial Institutions: Azerbaijanis generally do not have much confidence in their justice system. A majority (60%) disagree with the statement that their judicial system is unbiased (24% agree), 51% disagree that their justice system protects them from unjust treatment by the state (33% agree), and 47% disagree that they would be sure to be acquitted by the judicial system if they were wrongly accused of a crime (37% agree). Views of Azerbaijan as a democracy decline among respondents who disagree with these statements.

IV. Interest and Engagement in Politics

Interest in Politics and Government: Interest in politics has been gradually increasing among Azerbaijanis since the 2002 survey. In this year's survey, 61% said that they are very or somewhat interested in politics, and 37% said they are not. The level of interest has increased from those reported in the 2002 (56%) and 2003 (58%) surveys. Men are more likely to be interested in politics than women, and interest increases with the respondent's education level. Television is the main source of information about politics, with 81% saying they watch television at least a few times a month for news about politics, compared to 23% who do the same by reading newspapers.

Political and Voter Efficacy: The majority of Azerbaijanis (65%) think that people like them have little or no influence on the way things are run in Azerbaijan. Even 59% of those who think that Azerbaijan is a democracy do not believe that they have influence. Azerbaijanis are more optimistic about the influence of voters. Forty-one percent agree that voting gives people like them influence over decision making while

42% disagree. A bare majority of those who think Azerbaijan is a democracy (53%) think that voting gives them influence over decision making.

Voting in 2003 Presidential Election: Seventy-three percent of Azerbaijanis report that they voted in the 2003 presidential election. Another 5% state that someone else voted for them. Men were more likely to vote than women, and but there is little difference in reported turnout between urban and rural residents. Those who believe that voting has influence are more likely to have voted than those who do not think voting has influence. Those 18 to 25 were least likely to have voted (52%), while those 46 to 55 were most likely to have voted (90%). Among those who voted, 77% say that their name was on the voting list at the polling station at which they voted, while 5% say their name was not on the voting list. Eighteen percent do not know if their name was on the list or did not answer. Among those whose names were not on the list, 48% report that their precinct official added their name to the polling list and 43% report that he/she did not.

Most focus group participants reported that they saw or heard about actions on election-day that caused them concern about the administration of the presidential election. Among the actions cited were family voting, lack of secrecy at the polling station, irregular influences on voting choice, and voting list problems.

Voting in 2004 Municipal Elections: A quarter of Azerbaijanis (25%) say they are certain to vote in the December 2004 municipal elections, and another 33% say they are likely to vote. Twenty-two percent say they are unlikely or certain not to vote. Thirty-nine percent report having voted in the 1999 municipal council elections. Those who voted in the 1999 elections are far more likely to vote than those who did not vote in that election. The lowest likelihood of voting is in Ganja (18% certain, 19% likely).

When asked how fair they expect the 2004 municipal elections to be, 12% say that they expect the elections to be completely fair while 6% do not expect the elections to be fair at all. All other respondents take a position between these two extremes. A little more than a quarter (27%) expect the elections to be generally fair, while 13% expect them to be generally unfair. Twenty percent take a neutral position.

V. Local Governance and Civil Society

Municipal Councils: Eighty percent of Azerbaijanis are aware that their community has a municipal council. This figure is higher in rural areas (91%) than in urban areas (77%). Twenty-eight percent report that they have contacted their municipal council in the past for help in solving a problem or addressing an issue, more in rural areas (41%) than in urban areas (17%). However, when asked whether they would approach the municipal council or their executive authority for help in solving a problem, 40% named the executive authority, 11% their municipal council, and 19% said they would approach both equally. Nineteen percent say they would approach neither and 11% do not know who they would approach.

Public Service Activities and NGOs: When asked about public service or charitable activities in Azerbaijan, 6% answer that these activities are very common, 37% say they are somewhat common, 23% answer not very common, and 25% say they are not common or do not happen at all. Residents of urban areas are more likely to say that these activities are common in Azerbaijan.

Among those who think that public service or charitable activities take place in Azerbaijan, more think that the government alone is responsible for these activities than private organizations alone. When survey respondents are asked what proportion of residents in their communities they think are aware of NGOs that carry out these types of activities, 13% say that most are aware, 14% say some are aware, 34% say very few, and 25% say no one knows about NGOs. Respondents in Mil-Karabakh, Apsheron, Ganja, and Kazakh are more likely than the national average to say that most or some in their communities are aware of NGOs. Residents of urban areas are more likely (than residents of rural areas) to think that most or some in their communities are aware of NGOs.

Three-quarters of Azerbaijanis think that NGOs are essential or necessary for Azerbaijan. Fourteen percent say they would definitely volunteer for a NGO, 28% say they may volunteer, and 48% say they

would not volunteer. When asked about volunteering for a neighborhood facility such as a school or a hospital, 16% say they would definitely volunteer, 36% say they may volunteer, and 44% say they would not volunteer.

Attitudes Toward Political Parties: Most Azerbaijanis feel that political parties are either essential (25%) or necessary (38%). Very few believe that parties are not very (12%) or at all (11%) necessary. This finding is similar to that of the 2003 survey. However, few Azerbaijanis feel that parties are effective in communicating their ideas and principles to the Azerbaijani public. Three percent feel that political parties are very effective at this task, and 24% think they are somewhat effective. On the other hand, 34% believe that parties are somewhat or very ineffective. Nearly a quarter of Azerbaijanis (24%) say they do not know any political party's ideas.

Almost all focus group participants agreed that political parties are ineffective at communicating their ideas. Most felt that this is the case because most parties in Azerbaijan do not have good ideas. Few felt that parties' lack of access to media sources is the primary reason for their lack of knowledge about political party ideas. Most participants also felt that parties are primarily interested in power, not in playing a constructive role in politics.

When asked what parties represented the aspirations of people like them, 40% identified the New Azerbaijan Party, 5.5% the Musavat Party, 1.2% the Popular Front Party, and 1.1% the National Independence Party. Two percent identified other parties, while 40% said that no party represents their aspirations. Eleven percent do not know who represents their aspirations or did not give a response.

VI. Corruption and Women's Status in Azerbaijan

Corruption: A majority of Azerbaijanis (51%) say that corruption is very common in the country, and 26% say it is somewhat common. Corruption is more likely to be thought common in urban areas than in rural areas. Thirty-three percent of Azerbaijanis report that they have paid bribes in the past, 20% say that they have been asked for bribes but have not paid, and 33% say they have not been asked for bribes in the past. Among those who have paid bribes, the most common reasons were for medical care (12%) and for better grades for their children (6%). Not surprisingly, those who have paid bribes or been asked for bribes report that this occurred most often with public health institutions (20%) and schools and universities (11%).

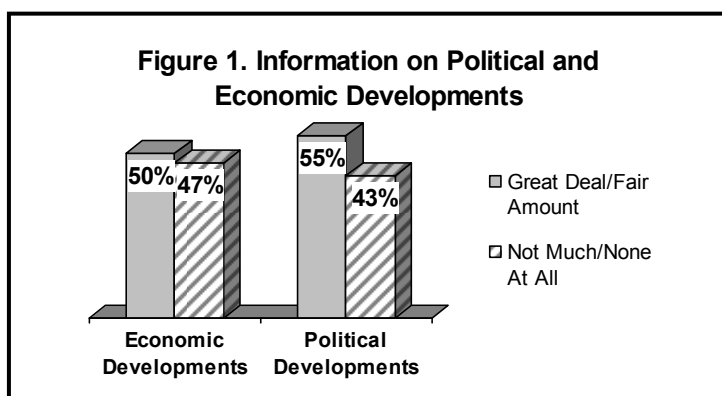
Respondents were also asked whether it was ever justified for people in Azerbaijan to take some specific corrupt actions. Twenty-four percent feel that it is never justified to pay a doctor for medical care, but 73% believe that this is always or sometimes justified. Fifty percent say it is never justified to pay for good grades for your child (46% say always/sometimes justified), 59% believe it is never justified to pay to receive social privileges one is not entitled to (35% answer always/sometimes), 65% say it is never justified to pay to receive utilities (25% say always/sometimes), and 67% believe it is never justified to pay a policeman to avoid a fine (28% answer always/sometimes).

Women's Status: More than three-quarters of Azerbaijanis agree that women have the same rights as men in Azerbaijan (85%) and are treated equally (79%). There is little difference between men and women in their agreement with these statements; however, despite this agreement, discussion in the focus groups revealed that in reality, Azerbaijani society imposes many strictures that limit the opportunities available to women. Most men and women in the focus groups argued that women should work primarily in the health care and education sectors, and many felt that a woman's role in Azerbaijan is defined primarily by her responsibilities at home and not by her occupational or educational achievements. Regarding women's participation in politics, most focus group participants were supportive of this but again referred to women's roles in the home as a factor limiting factor in women's political participation. Other survey data reveals the realities of women's role in Azerbaijan: women are significantly less likely to have technical secondary or post-secondary education than men (53% men versus 41% women) and are less likely to be in the workforce (employed or unemployed and looking for a job) than men (79% men versus 45% women), with 28% of women reporting that they are housewives.

I. INFORMATION AND MEDIA

While a significant percentage of Azerbaijanis say that they are generally informed about political and economic developments in the country, the survey findings show that the vast majority of Azerbaijanis lack information about specific governmental institutions and initiatives. Television is the dominant source of information for Azerbaijanis, but people have concerns about the objectivity and quality of information about this and other media. Azerbaijanis tend to profess higher levels of knowledge about local developments but are more likely to resort to non-media sources to learn this information.

Information About Political and Economic Developments: Public knowledge of political and economic developments has not changed significantly in Azerbaijan since the 2002 and 2003 IFES surveys. As in those surveys, a majority or close to a majority report having a great deal or fair amount of information about economic and political developments in Azerbaijan (Figure 1).¹



A majority of Azerbaijanis say that they have a great deal or fair amount of information about political developments in the country, while half say the same for economic developments. Combining responses to the two questions shows that 44% of Azerbaijanis have a great deal or fair amount of information about both economic and political developments in the country, 38% have little or no information about both of these areas, and 16% are informed about one but not the other.

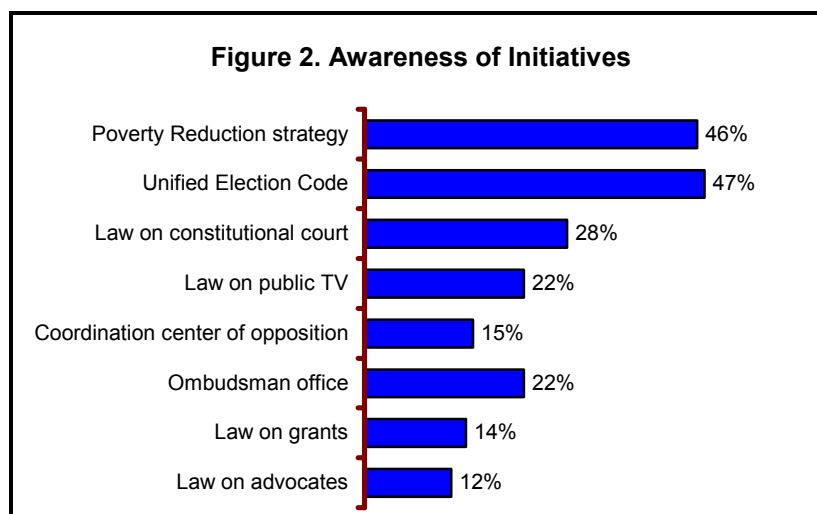
There are differences in information levels among important sub-groups in the population:

1. **Men versus Women:** Men are more likely to say they are informed about both political and economic developments than women (55% men versus 35% women), whereas women are much more likely to say that they have information about neither (45% women versus 27% men). The gender difference in information levels exists in both rural and urban areas, although it is more pronounced in rural areas. The gender gap persists when controlled for education, i.e., even at higher levels of education, a higher percentage of men than women tend to be informed.
2. **Rural versus Urban:** Residents of urban areas are more likely than those in rural areas to say that they are informed about both topics (49% urban versus 40% rural).
3. **Education:** As would be expected, information levels increase with education, with a majority of those with post-secondary education (57%) saying they are informed about both political and economic developments, compared to 17% of those with less than a secondary education and 37% of those with a secondary education.
4. **Age:** The youngest (18-25) and the oldest (56+) groups of respondents tend to have lower levels of information than those in the middle. While 50% of those 26-55 say they are informed about both political and economic developments, this percentage is 38% among those 56 and over and 34% among those 18-25.

¹ Question Text: "To begin, could you tell me how much information you have about political developments in Azerbaijan?" (n=1620)
"And how much information do you have about economic developments in Azerbaijan?" (n=1620)

Lack of Information About Institutions and Initiatives: While a majority of Azerbaijanis say that they have at least a fair amount of information about political developments in the country, most Azerbaijanis lack adequate information about specific political institutions and initiatives. When respondents were asked whether they have enough information to satisfy their needs, less than a majority say they have adequate information about the activities of the national government (40%), the rights of citizens (37%), the power of their local executive (33%), the activities of their municipal council (28%), and the judicial system (18%). Only 10% of Azerbaijanis say that they have enough information about all of these topics, while 40% say that they do not have enough information about any of these subjects.

Respondents were also asked whether they had heard of several important political initiatives. Figure 2 indicates that—with the exception of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Unified Election Code—the vast majority of Azerbaijanis have not heard of these important initiatives.²

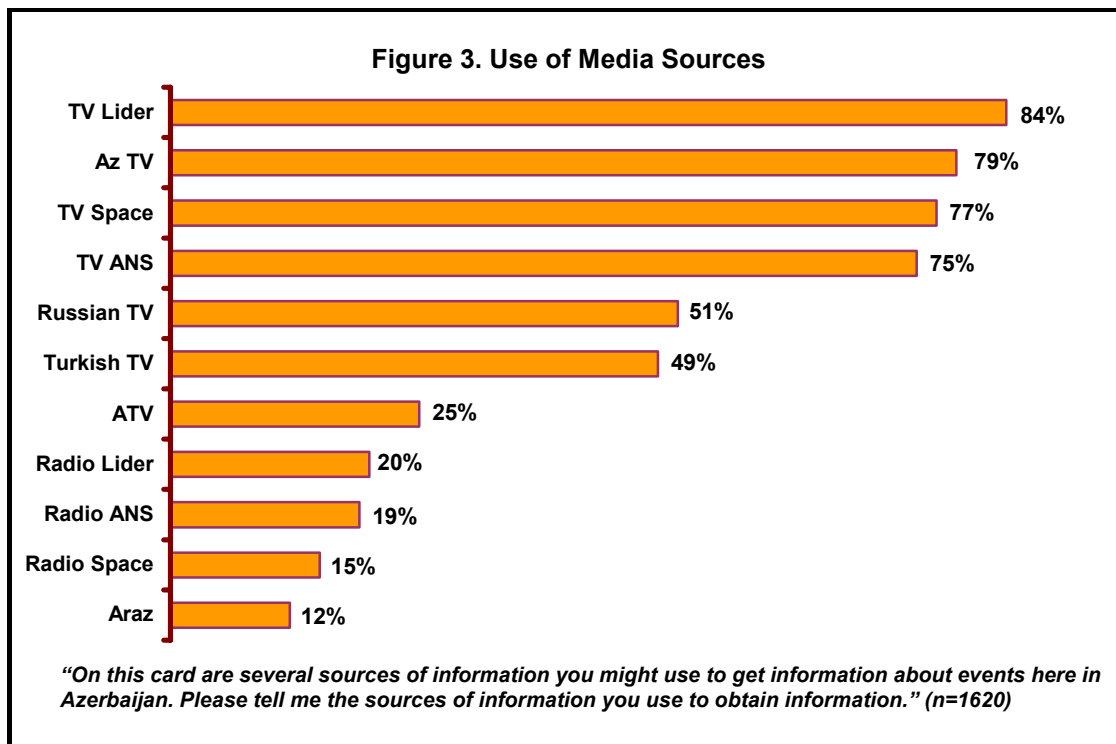


The percentage aware of these initiatives has not changed significantly from the 2003 IFES survey for most of the items in Figure 2. More Azerbaijanis are aware of the Ombudsman office than in 2003 (22% versus 13%) and slightly more are aware of the Unified Election Code (47% versus 40%).

Frequently Used Media Sources: The findings above indicate that, while many Azerbaijanis may have general information about political developments in the country, a majority lacks information about specific political matters. One conclusion that can be drawn is that this lack of knowledge is not for want of access to media in the country. Given a list of 26 different TV, radio and newspaper sources, nearly three-quarters of Azerbaijanis stated that they use four or more sources at least several times a week. This suggests a media environment in which users have a choice of many different alternatives for information and the means to take advantage of these alternatives. Thus, quantity of media does not seem to be a cause of the general lack of information about important topics. But the focus group and survey findings indicate that the quality of information from most of these media sources may be a cause.

Focus group participants indicated that while they use many different TV, radio and newspaper sources for information, there are very few that they find to be objective in presenting developments in Azerbaijan. In addition, many focus group participants cited the total or near total state control of many of the prominent TV sources as limiting the information available to them. Only one TV channel, ANS, was consistently cited as being an independent, objective source by participants in the focus groups. All other sources were found to be wanting by many in terms of independence and objectivity. Many participants stated that the information in the mass media is limited and does not touch on important topics, such as corruption and the state of the army. Figure 3 indicates that the primary media source for most Azerbaijanis is television, a medium that many participants feel is under significant state control.

² Question Text: "Have you heard of the following issues or activities?" (n=1620)



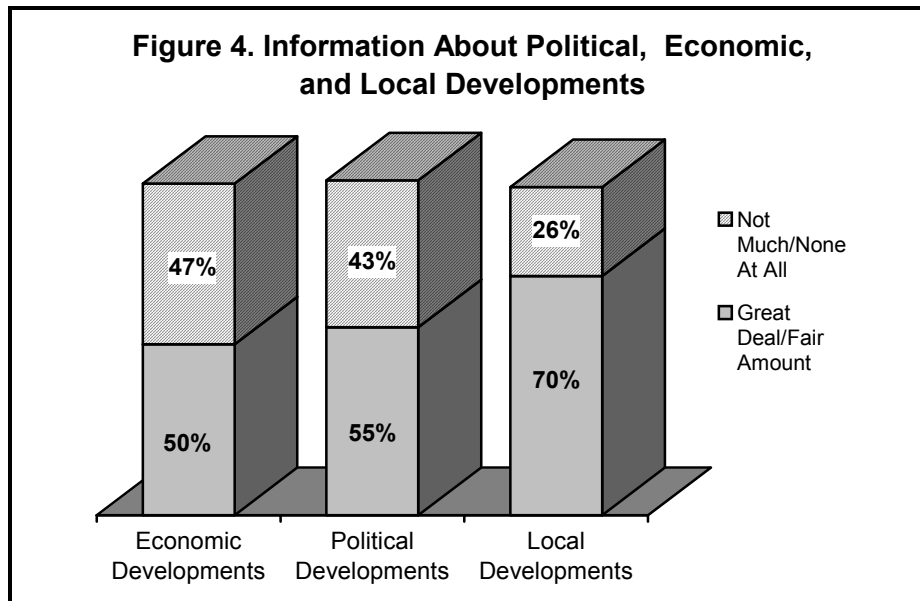
The figure above shows that many Azerbaijanis use television channels that are either state-controlled (Az TV) or viewed as not totally independent of state control (TV Lider, TV Space). As will be shown later in the report, this is a critical factor in opinion formation in Azerbaijan. On many issues of importance for the country, the access to and utilization of TV ANS—commonly perceived to be the most independent TV channel in the country—plays a role in the formation of attitudes and opinions on these issues.

Residents of urban areas are more likely to watch the cable television channels (Lider, Space, ANS, ATV) than those in rural areas. In rural areas, the most-watched channel is Az TV. Among the newspapers mentioned most often are *Zerkalo*, *Yeni Musavat*, *Azadlyz*, *Azerbaijan*, and *Echo*. *Zerkalo* and *Echo*, both Russian-language newspapers, are more likely to be read by urban residents than those in rural areas. None of the newspapers listed are read by more than 7% of Azerbaijanis.

Objectivity of State and Private Media: The lack of objectivity of media sources was a concern for many focus group participants. This concern is also indicated in the survey data. When respondents are asked about the objectivity of state and private media in their coverage of social and political developments in the country, very few strongly agree with this statement in both cases. In the case of the private media, 15% strongly agree that it provides objective coverage, while 60% somewhat agree, 13% somewhat disagree and 2% strongly disagree. Fewer Azerbaijanis agree that state media is objective—10% strongly and 48% somewhat—while 25% somewhat disagree and 7% strongly disagree. In the case of the state media, 32% disagree that it provides objective coverage compared to 15% for the private media.

In answering another question, respondents were asked to list the media they are more likely to trust among broadcast media or print media. Azerbaijanis' preference for television and radio is evident from the finding that 81% trust broadcast media more than print, while only 3% take the opposite view. Part of the reason may be that many newspapers in Azerbaijan are published by political parties and those who read these newspapers are aware that there is a specific point of view being presented in the newspaper. This view was voiced by a few focus groups participants who read newspapers.

Information About Local Developments: When asked how informed they are about developments in their city or village, more Azerbaijanis say that they have a great deal or fair amount of information about local developments than say so about national political or economic developments (Figure 4).³



There is surprisingly little difference in knowledge about local developments between rural and urban residents, or between residents in large cities or small towns and villages. One indication of the generally higher levels of information about local developments is that even among those who say they have little or no information about both national political and economic developments, 46% say they have at least a fair amount of information about local developments.

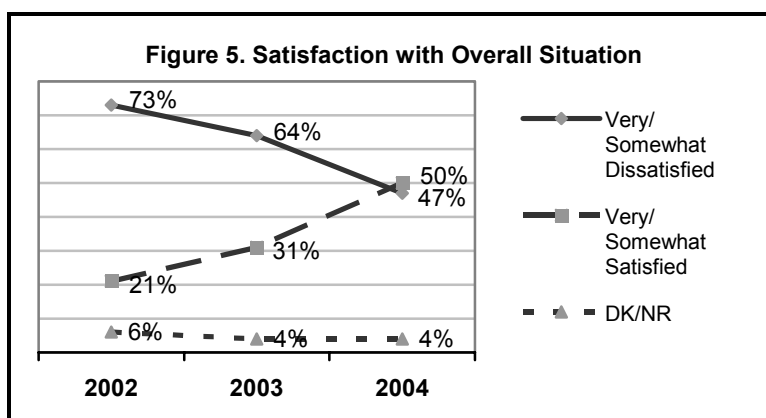
One reason for the greater diffusion of information about local issues may be that Azerbaijanis tend to rely more on non-media than media sources for information about local developments. While 54% of Azerbaijanis say that they use national TV and 19% say they use local TV for information about local developments, informal non-media sources are mentioned more often. Eighty-four percent say they use friends and families to obtain information about local developments, while 60% say they get this information in local public places such as *chaikhanas* and *bazaars*. Local officials (5%) and official notices (2%) are not often used as sources for information about local developments.

³ Question Text: "How much information do you have about developments in [your city (in urban areas) / your village (in rural areas)]?" (n=1620)

II. OPINIONS ABOUT SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY

Comparing the findings of IFES' 2004 survey in Azerbaijan with survey data from 2002 and 2003 indicates that positive opinions of the country's socioeconomic situation have increased significantly over the past three years. However, coupling the survey findings with the focus group discussions indicates that these positive assessments are tenuous and dependent to a large degree on future expectations. Findings from the survey also show that, in addition to the Karabakh situation, a majority think that economic issues—such as unemployment and a low standard of living—are the biggest problems facing Azerbaijan. Even though most think that the government should take steps to develop the non-oil sector, a majority has not heard of any such efforts by the government.

Satisfaction with Overall Situation: Satisfaction with the overall situation in Azerbaijan has more than doubled since IFES' 2002 survey. In 2002, far more Azerbaijanis said they were dissatisfied rather than satisfied with the overall situation in the country. In this year's survey, the situation has reversed, with more Azerbaijanis now saying they are satisfied rather than dissatisfied with the overall situation in the country (Figure 5).⁴



In IFES' 2002 survey, three times as many Azerbaijanis were dissatisfied with the overall situation in the country as were satisfied. In 2003, this ratio had decreased somewhat but twice as many were still likely to be dissatisfied rather than satisfied. Over the course of past year, there has been a gain of 19% in those satisfied with the overall situation in the country and a decrease of 17% in those dissatisfied.

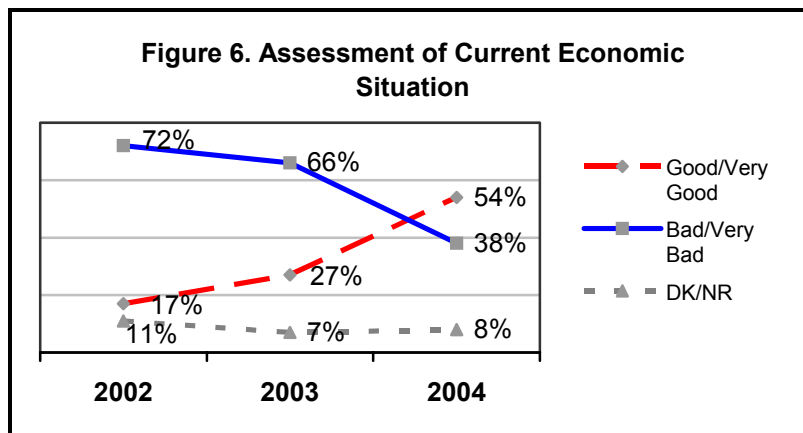
Residents of urban areas are more likely to be satisfied with the overall situation (54%) than those in rural areas (48%). Younger Azerbaijanis, those aged 18-25, are more likely to be satisfied (55%) than their older counterparts (48%).

The level of satisfaction with the overall situation in the country closely parallels opinions about the economic situation in the country in IFES surveys over the past three years. Accompanying the increase in satisfaction levels over the past three years has been an increase in optimism about the current economic situation in Azerbaijan.

Assessment of Economic Situation: In this year's survey, a majority of Azerbaijanis (54%) say that the current economic situation in the country is either good or very good, compared to 38% who say that it is bad or very bad. This is a far different situation than that reflected in IFES' surveys in 2002 and 2003, when a majority of respondents felt the economic situation was bad (72% and 66%, respectively, Figure 6).⁵

⁴ Question Text: "Could you tell me if you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the overall situation in Azerbaijan today?" (n=1620)

⁵ Question Text: "How would you describe the current economic situation in Azerbaijan?" (n=1620)



As mentioned earlier, the trend in opinions about the economic situation closely parallels satisfaction with the overall situation in the country. Among those who think the current economic situation is good or very good, 73% are satisfied with the overall situation in the country and 24% are dissatisfied. Among those who think the current economic is bad or very bad, only 16% are satisfied with the overall situation while the vast majority (81%) are dissatisfied.

Focus group discussions conducted after the survey with respondents from many different areas of Azerbaijan⁶ indicate that while there are some developments in the economic arena—such as the opening of new workplaces—that account for the positive assessments of the economic situation, these positive assessments may also be related to the perceived potential of the economy based on future expectations. When those in the focus groups who said the economic situation is good were next asked why they believe this is so, many pointed to the development of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the expected economic benefits it would provide to Azerbaijan. Some of the focus group participants also mentioned President Ilham Aliyev and the hope that he will bring new leadership to economic issues. Others, however, say that while the economic situation has gotten better since 2003, the benefits from this improvement have gone primarily to those with influence or power and have not trickled down to ordinary Azerbaijanis.

The feeling that ordinary Azerbaijanis are not benefiting from economic improvements is partially confirmed when comparing Azerbaijanis' opinions on the national economic situation with their opinion on their family's economic situation. While a majority of Azerbaijanis rate the current national economic situation as good or very good, they are less sanguine about their own economic situation. A majority of Azerbaijanis (53%) rate their family's economic situation as bad or very bad, while 43% rate their family's economic situation as good or very good. As with opinions about the national economic situation, many more of those who feel that their family's economic situation is bad are dissatisfied with the overall situation in the country (69%) than those who think their family's economic situation is good (20%).

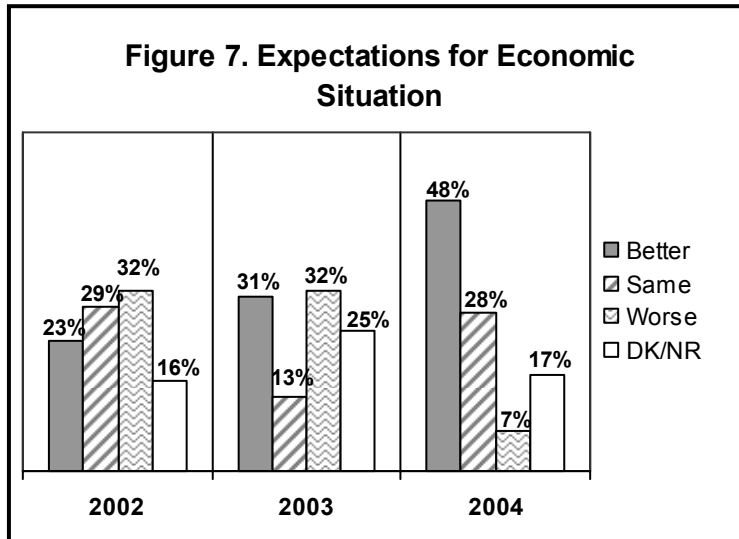
Comparing the responses of those who rated both their family's economic situation and the national economic situation reveals that a majority of Azerbaijanis (57%) rate both equally, while 27% rate the national economic situation higher than their family's economic situation and 17% rate the national economic situation worse than their family's economic situation. Residents of Baku, Ganja, Sheki and Lenkoran are more likely to rate their family's economic situation better than the national economic situation, while those in Mil-Karabakh and Muga-Salyan are more likely to rate the national economic situation higher than their family's economic situation.

Expectations of the Future Economy: As mentioned earlier, future expectations may be a primary reason for the positive assessments of the current economic situation in Azerbaijan. Responses in IFES'

⁶ Please see the introduction for more details about the focus groups.

2004 survey indicate that Azerbaijanis are far more positive about the economic situation in Azerbaijan over the next twelve months than they were in the 2002 and 2003 surveys (Figure 7).⁷

The percentage of Azerbaijanis who think that the national economic situation will be better in one year's time has increased from 23% in 2002 and 31% in 2003 to 48% in this year's survey. Negative outlooks



have declined just as significantly. While 32% in both 2002 and 2003 thought that the economic situation would get worse over the course of the following year, this percentage is only 7% in the 2004 survey. Another way to look at the change in expectations among Azerbaijanis is to compare the net differential in these two attitudes (% better - % worse) over the past three years. In 2002, the net differential was minus 9, in 2004, it was plus 1, and this year it is plus 41. Thus, the net differential has improved by 50 percentage points over the past three year, indicating a far more positive outlook on economic development among Azerbaijanis.

While there is general optimism about the future economic situation in the country, there is a large gap in future expectations among those who think the current economic situation is good and those who think it is bad. Among those who think the economic situation is good, 70% think it will be better in one year, 20% think it will be the same, and only 2% think it will be worse. Thus, 90% of these respondents think the economic situation will remain good or get even better over the next year. By contrast, 16% of those who think the economic situation is bad think the economy will get worse, 40% think it will stay the same and 19% think it will get better. Thus, 56% of these respondents think the economic situation will continue to be bad or will get worse over the next year.

The pattern of responses regarding future expectations for one's family's economic situation is similar to that observed for expectations for the national economic situation. Overall, 40% expect their family's economic situation to improve over the next year, 32% expect it to remain the same, and 11% expect it to get worse. A majority of those who feel their family's economic situation is good are more likely to expect it to stay this way (86% same or better), while a majority of those who think their family's current economic situation is bad expect is to stay this way (57% worse or same).

Biggest Problems Facing Azerbaijan: Despite the generally positive assessments of the economic situation, a majority of Azerbaijanis list economic concerns as some of the biggest problems facing the country. As has been the case in each of the earlier IFES surveys in Azerbaijan, Karabakh is listed by most people as the biggest problem facing Azerbaijan. A variety of economic problems, however, are also listed by a majority of people. Keeping in mind that respondents were allowed to name more than one problem facing Azerbaijan, the most often-mentioned problems are:

- Karabakh (69%)
- Unemployment (40%)
- Low standard of living (13%)
- Corruption (7%)
- General economic problems (6%)
- Improvement of social protections (6%)

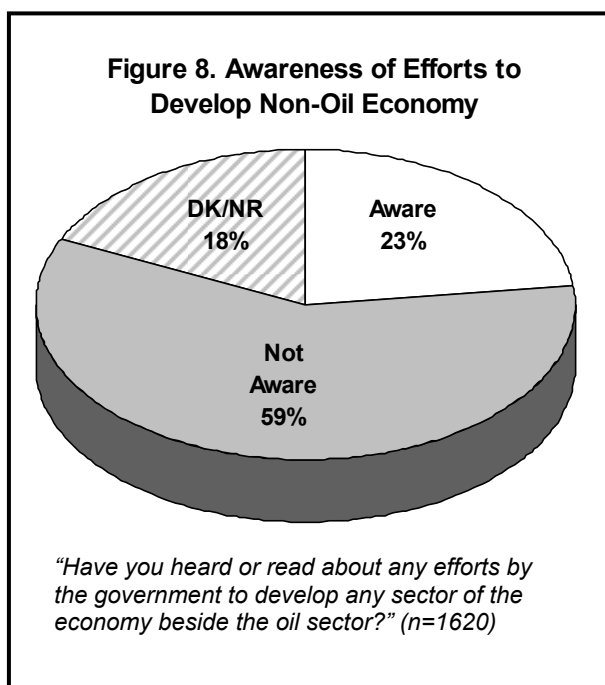
⁷ Question Text: "And twelve months from now, do you expect that the economic situation in Azerbaijan will be better than it is now, will be worse than it is now, or will it be about the same as it is now?" (n=1620)

- Problems with Municipal services (6%)
- Refugee problems (4%)
- Insufficient Education/Health services (2%)

Economic problems such as unemployment and a low standard of living are mentioned by 60% of Azerbaijanis. Those who think that the economic situation in the country is bad are more likely to mention economic problems than those who think the economic situation is good, while those who think the economic situation is good are more likely to mention Karabakh.

The prominence of economic concerns in Azerbaijan, despite the increased positive assessments of the economy, reveals the lingering anxiety among Azerbaijanis about the country's future economic course. [This finding points to the need for the national government to utilize the country's natural resources and other assets to set the course for future economic development in the country. The findings detailed in the next few paragraphs indicate that the majority of Azerbaijanis do not believe this is currently the case.]

Efforts to Develop the Non-Oil Economy: Given Azerbaijan's vast oil and natural gas resources, one of the country's key economic issues is the way in which income from these natural resources can be used to develop the non-oil sectors of the economy such as agriculture and industry. Respondents to the survey were asked whether they had heard or read about any efforts by the government to develop the non-oil economy. A majority say they have not heard of any efforts (Figure 8).



Only 23% say they are aware of efforts by the government to develop the non-oil economy. Those who say they have a great deal or fair amount of information on the economic situation in the country are more likely to say that they are aware of efforts (33%) than those who say they have little or no information (13%). Still, even a majority of those with economic information (52%) have not heard of any government effort to develop the non-oil economy.

When those who say they have heard of government efforts are asked to describe these efforts, they can only provide very general responses. Thirty-six percent of these respondents mention the development of agriculture, 14% the opening of new workplaces, 11% the general development of business, 8% the development of the construction industry, and 7% the development of heavy and light industry. These respondents do not mention any specific government initiative to develop the non-oil sector.

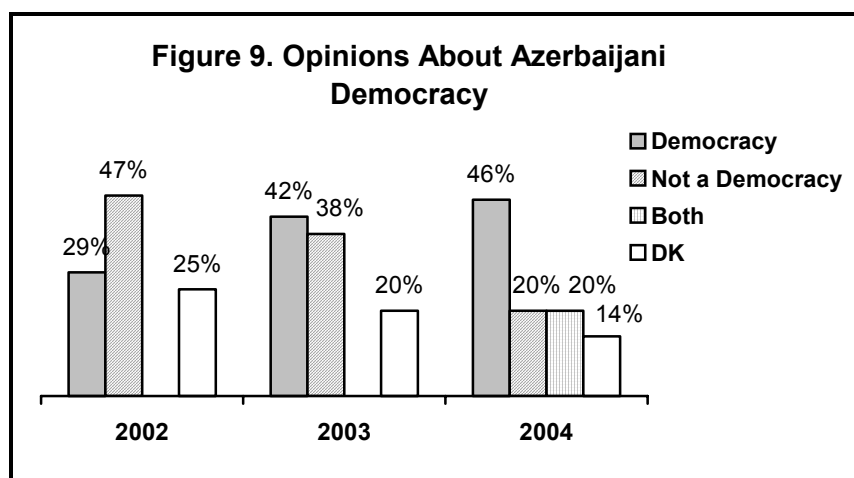
Most of the participants in the focus groups also have not heard of any government efforts to develop the non-oil sector. When asked about the oil fund that has been set aside by the government for development, most focus group participants indicated that the oil fund should be used for development of economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism and industry, but a few also felt that the money in this fund should be used to improve the educational system in the country.

Survey respondents were also asked whether the government should take specific steps to develop the non-oil economy. Many Azerbaijanis stress the importance of developing the agricultural sector (26%) and opening new workplaces (16%).

III. ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY

The year 2003 saw many actions on the part of the Azerbaijani government that infringed on many of the basic tenets of democratic governance, including flawed elections, intimidation and harassment of opposition parties, illegal detentions of opposition leaders, and suppression of some of the basic rights guaranteed to the press and citizens of Azerbaijan.⁸ Yet IFES' 2004 survey shows that the percentage of Azerbaijanis who believe that Azerbaijan is a democracy has increased since 2003. Assessments of the economic situation, as opposed to democratic principles, are the key factors in opinions about Azerbaijani democracy. This is despite the fact the most Azerbaijanis ascribe idealistic rather than instrumental meaning to democracy and do not support the suppression of rights to maintain order. At the same time, many more Azerbaijanis than not lack confidence in one of the most important institutions in a democracy, the judicial system.

Democracy in Azerbaijan: In IFES' 2004 survey, 46% of Azerbaijanis consider Azerbaijan to be primarily a democracy. The percentage of Azerbaijanis who hold this opinion is higher than that in 2002 or 2003 (Figure 9).⁹



The percentage that thinks Azerbaijan is a democracy has increased dramatically from 29% in 2002 to 46% in this year's survey. The percentage that does not think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy has declined from 47% to 20% in this year's survey. (In the 2002 and 2003 surveys, "both" was not accepted as a response but it was accepted as a volunteered response in this year's survey.) Those who reply "don't know" to this question has decreased from 25% in 2002 to 14% in this year's survey, indicating that those making up their minds on this issue over the past two years have tended to believe that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy.

Those who do not think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy were next asked whether it is becoming a democracy. A majority of these respondents (53%) think that Azerbaijan is becoming a democracy while 31% do not believe this is the case. Responses on this question are split according to whether a respondent thinks that Azerbaijan is definitely not a democracy or whether he/she thinks it has hallmarks of both a democracy and a non-democracy. Among those who definitely do not think Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy, 55% do not think it is becoming a democracy and 35% think it is becoming one. Among those who think Azerbaijan has elements of both a democracy and a non-democracy, 71% think it is becoming a democracy and 8% think it is not becoming a democracy.

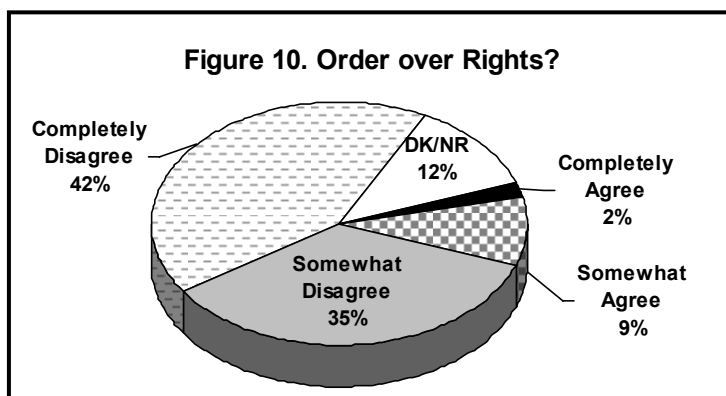
⁸ Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Azerbaijan, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, February 25, 2004 (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27826pf.htm).

⁹ Question Text: "Do you believe that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy today or that it is not primarily a democracy?" (n=1620)

Attitudes Toward Democracy: The plurality opinion that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy stands in contrast to recent events in the country. This opinion also runs counter to the expectations that most Azerbaijanis have from a democracy. When asked what it means to them to live in a democracy, a majority (58%) cite various freedoms, such as freedom of speech, association, movement, etc. Thirteen percent cite the rule of law, equality of all before the law and human rights. Eleven percent cite independence/sovereignty and 8% say that, to them, living in a democracy means development and a high standard of living.

The majority of Azerbaijanis cite freedoms and the rule of law as signifying a democracy, and the state's performance in these areas has been less than satisfactory over the past year. Over this period, the Azerbaijani government has been accused of widespread human rights violations as well as severe curtailing of freedom of the press. Yet a plurality of Azerbaijanis, many of whom cite freedoms and human rights as emblematic of democracy, still perceive Azerbaijan to be a democracy. Further analysis, however, seems to indicate that those who place primacy on human rights and the rule of law are more likely to be critical appraisers of democracy than those who cite freedoms. Respondents to the survey were allowed to give more than one response to indicate what it means to them to live in a democracy. Overall, 20% do not give a response to the question, 59% give only one response, and 21% give more than one response. Examining the first response given by respondents reveals that among those who cite freedoms, 56% think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy and 41% think that it is not primarily a democracy. Among those who cite rule of law or human rights, 33% think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy while a majority (60%) does not think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy.

Despite their possible disagreements about whether Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy, most Azerbaijanis do not see order in society as synonymous with limiting political and civic rights. More than three-quarters of all Azerbaijanis disagree with the statement that in order to establish order and discipline in society, it is necessary to limit the political and civic rights of the people (Figure 10).¹⁰

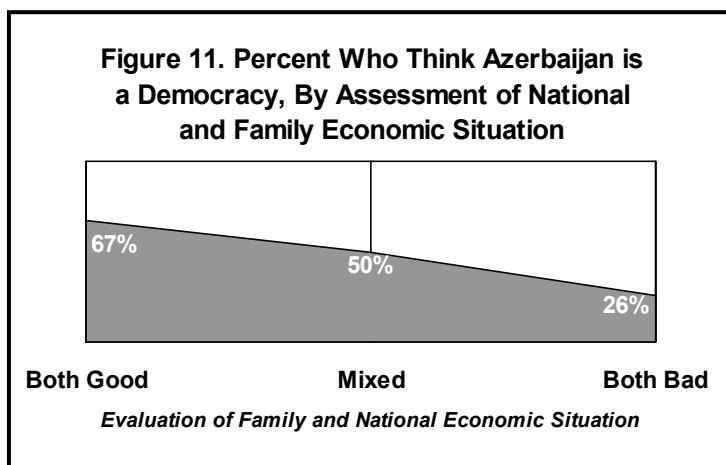


Seventy-seven percent either completely or somewhat disagree with this statement. This was also the case in both the 2002 and 2003 surveys. Agreement or disagreement with this statement, however, does not seem to have an impact on perceptions of Azerbaijani democracy. A plurality in each group thinks that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy.

The vast majority of Azerbaijanis also dismiss the notion that Islam as a religion is incompatible with democratic governance. Sixty-six percent of Azerbaijanis completely or somewhat disagree with the statement that the basic tenets of Islam make it incompatible for an Islamic country to be a democracy. Fifteen percent agree, while 19% do not give an opinion. There are no significant differences of opinion on this question between ethnic Azeris and ethnic Russians or other minority groups.

Economic Situation a Major Factor in Assessing Democracy: The findings above indicate that attitudes toward democracy are not a completely reliable indicator of the perceptions of democracy in Azerbaijan. Further analysis of the survey data indicates that a key factor in assessments of democracy in Azerbaijan is the respondent's evaluation of his or her family's economic situation as well as that of the country as a whole. Those who have positive assessments of the national economic situation and of their family's economic situation are much more likely to say that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy than those who have negative opinions of both, or those who have mixed opinions (Figure 11).

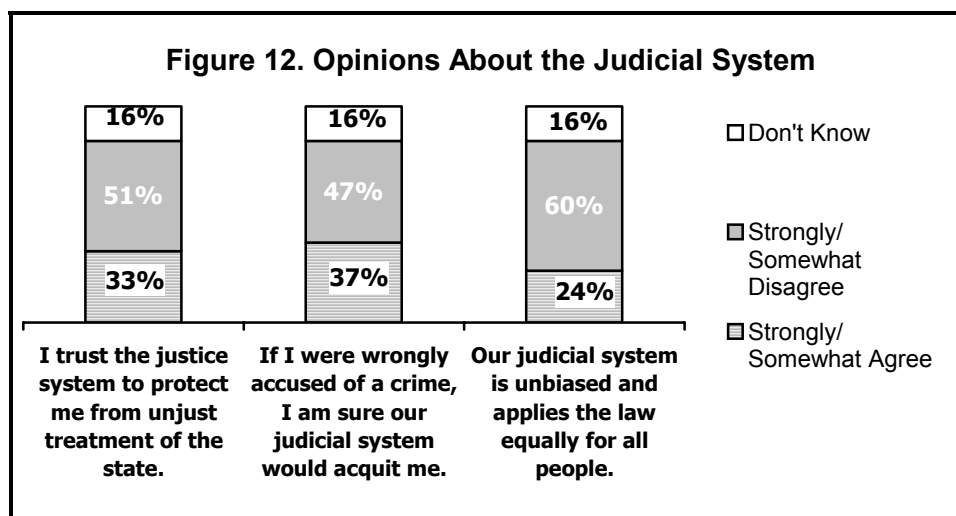
¹⁰ Question Text: "Agree or Disagree: 'In order to establish order and discipline in society, it is necessary to limit the political and civic rights of the people.'" (n=1620)



A majority (67%) of those who think that both the national and their family's economic situation are good also think that Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy (22% do not think Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy). This percentage drops to 50% among those who think either their family's or the national economic situation is good, and it falls to a little more than a quarter (26%) among those who think both their family's and the national economic situation are bad. Conversely, the percentage who think Azerbaijan is not primarily a democracy increases as perceptions of the economic situation deteriorate. This pattern of responses is

relatively robust and does not change significantly when factors such as education, residence, level of information and political participation are controlled. This reliance on economic performance rather than liberal governance to assess the state of democracy in Azerbaijan has been a consistent feature of public opinion as expressed in IFES surveys in Azerbaijan.

Dissatisfaction with the Judicial System: Though not as important a factor as economics, another key factor in determining perceptions of democracy in Azerbaijan is respondents' general outlook on the country's judicial system. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with three statements about the judicial system, and as in IFES' 2002 and 2003 surveys, many more Azerbaijanis are dissatisfied with the judicial system than are satisfied (Figure 12).¹¹



A majority of Azerbaijanis do not think that the judicial system is unbiased (60%) or that it protects them from unjust treatment by the state (51%). A plurality (47%) does not think that if they were wrongly accused of a crime, the judicial system would be sure to acquit them. In each case, 37% or fewer agree with the statements. Combining the responses to all three statements shows that 43% disagree with all

¹¹ Question Text: Agree/Disagree –

"I trust the justice system to protect me from unjust treatment of the state."

"If I were wrongly accused of a crime, I am sure our judicial system would acquit me."

"Our judicial system is unbiased and applies the law equally for all people." (n=1620)

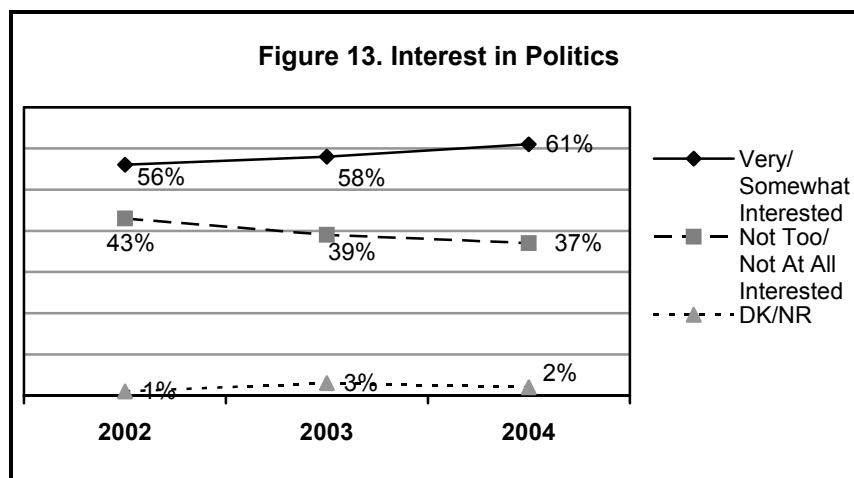
three while 21% agree with all three. These findings reflect a widespread distrust of the judicial system in the country.

As one would expect, the perception that Azerbaijan is a democracy declines the more often respondents disagree with the above statements about the judicial system. Among those who disagree with one of these statements, 51% think Azerbaijan is primarily a democracy, compared with 44% of those who disagree with two, and 32% of those who disagree with all three. However, this relationship is tempered when controlled for evaluations of the economic situation. While perceptions of democracy still decline with increasing dissatisfaction with the judicial system, those who rate their family or national economic situation as good are much more likely to rate Azerbaijan as primarily a democracy than their counterparts who rate their family or national economic situation as bad.

IV. INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

While a majority of Azerbaijanis express interest in politics and governance, they are not likely to take part in sociopolitical activities that require more than a passing level of commitment. Interest and engagement in politics is higher among those with positive assessments of the economy than among those with negative assessments. Those with positive assessments of the economy are also more likely to feel political and voter efficacy than those with negative assessments. A majority of Azerbaijanis report voting in the 1998 and 2003 presidential elections, but only a minority exercise their vote in other types of elections. The survey data indicates that a minority will take part in the upcoming municipal election.

Interest in Politics: Interest in politics has steadily increased in Azerbaijan over the past three years to the present level of 61% who state they are very or somewhat interested in politics and government (Figure 13).¹²



Interest in politics is strongly related to possessing information about political developments in the country. The more likely an Azerbaijani is to be interested in politics, the more likely he or she is to have information on political developments, and vice versa.

While nearly three-quarters of men in Azerbaijan (72%) say that they are interested in politics, significantly fewer women (52%) express interest. Azerbaijanis aged 18-25 are least likely of all age groups to be interested in politics (49%). Fifty-eight percent or more of those 26-35, 36-45, 46-55 and over 56 say they are interested in politics. Interest in politics increases with education. A majority of those with a secondary education or more are interested in politics (65%), while a majority of those with less than a secondary level of education say they are not too or not at all interested in politics (66%). At every age as well as education level, women are less likely to be interested in politics than men.

Those who are interested in politics are more likely than those not interested to watch television for news about politics and government. Overall, 41% of all Azerbaijanis say that they watch television every day for news about politics, and 30% say they watch it a few times a week. Thus, seven in ten Azerbaijanis watch television for political news at least a few times a week. Eighteen percent watch a few times a month or less, and 9% say that they never watch television for political news. Among those who are interested in politics, 95% say they watch television for news about politics at least a few times a week while, among those not interested in politics, only 32% do so.

¹² Question Text: "Please tell me how interested you are in affairs of politics and government?" (n=1620)

Azerbaijanis are far less likely to read newspapers for news on politics. Overall, 13% read newspapers at least a few times a week for news on politics, while 71% say they never read newspapers for this purpose. Even among those interested in politics, only 19% read newspapers for news on politics while 60% say they never do this. Rural residents are far more likely to never read newspapers for news on politics (82%) than urban residents (61%).

Forms of Sociopolitical Participation: The survey data indicates that while the majority of Azerbaijanis take part in informal discussions about national and local development, most do not take part in sociopolitical activities that require a deeper level of commitment. More than 90% of Azerbaijanis report that they have discussed national (91%) and local (92%) developments at least once over the past year. On the other hand, only 7% of Azerbaijanis say that they have signed a petition in the past year and 3% say they have written a letter to a newspaper. One activity that requires a deeper level of commitment, and that a significant percentage of Azerbaijanis have taken part in, is working with others in their communities to address important issues or concerns. Thirty-two percent of Azerbaijanis say that they have taken part in this kind of activity in the past year. Those interested in politics are more likely to have taken part in this type of activity than those not interested (41% versus 20%, respectively).

Political and Voter Efficacy: While a majority of Azerbaijanis say that they are interested in politics and take part in informal sociopolitical activities, many do not think that ordinary Azerbaijanis have influence on political decision making in the country. A majority of Azerbaijanis agree that people like them have little or no influence on the way things are run in Azerbaijan, and a plurality disagree with the statement that voting gives people like them a chance to influence decision making. The survey data also indicates that a person's degree of political efficacy—the belief that one can impact politics—is impacted by his or her financial position. Political efficacy is higher among those who describe their family's economic situation as good than among those who describe it as bad (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Political Efficacy, by Family Economic Situation				
		<i>NATIONAL</i> (n=1620)	<i>Family Economic Situation</i>	
			<i>Good/Very Good</i> (n=702)	<i>Bad/Very Bad</i> (n=866)
<i>“People like me have little or no influence on the way things are run in Azerbaijan.”</i>	Strongly/Somewhat Agree	65%	30%	17%
	Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	23%	56%	73%
<i>“Voting gives people like me a chance to influence decision making in Azerbaijan.”</i>	Strongly/Somewhat Agree	41%	28%	53%
	Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	42%	53%	31%

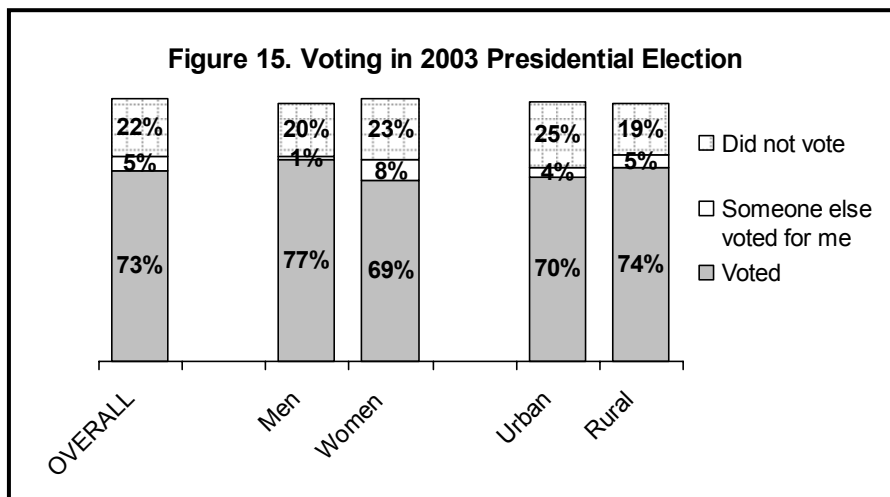
While a majority of both those who say their economic situation is good and those who say it is bad agree that people like them have little or no influence on the way things are run in Azerbaijan, those whose family's economic situation is good are more likely to disagree with this statement than those whose family's economic situation is bad.

The relationship between economic circumstances and political efficacy is more pronounced when Azerbaijanis are asked whether voting gives them influence over decision making. Among those whose family economic situation is good, a majority (53%) agree that voting gives them a change to influence decision making. Among those whose family's economic situation is bad, the same percentage (53%) disagree with this statement.

Voting: Survey respondents were asked whether they had voted in several recent elections in Azerbaijan. Prior to the 2003 presidential election, the only election in which a majority of Azerbaijanis report voting is the presidential election in 1998 (62%). A minority report voting in the 1999 municipal

council election (39%), the 2000 parliamentary elections (46%), and the 2002 referendum (40%). In all these elections, women are less likely to have voted than men, and those in the 18-25 age group (who were eligible to vote) are less likely to have voted than older Azerbaijanis.

A majority of Azerbaijanis report having voted in the 2003 presidential election (Figure 15).¹³



Because of concerns about family voting or other irregular forms of proxy voting in Azerbaijan, respondents were asked whether someone else had voted for them. If they said that no one had voted for them, they were asked whether they voted in the election. Close to three-quarters of Azerbaijanis (73%) indicate that they voted in the election. The reader is cautioned that the turnout reported in post-election surveys generally

tends to be higher than the actual turnout. It will be interesting to see whether the percentage who report voting in the 2003 presidential election declines in surveys in future years. This year's survey also indicates that family voting or other kinds of irregular proxy voting is a significant problem in Azerbaijani elections. Five percent report that someone else voted for them. On another question, 2% report that they voted for someone else in the election. Thus, 7% of Azerbaijanis report irregular proxy voting in the 2003 presidential election.

As Figure 15 indicates, men are more likely to have voted than women, and women are more likely to say that someone else voted for them in the election than men. Interestingly, there is little difference between urban and rural residents in turnout. Those 18-25 are much less likely to have voted in the presidential election (52%) than older Azerbaijanis (78%). One finding of note is that while young men and women are almost equally apathetic about elections, men tend to become more interested over time than women. Among those 18-25, 55% of men report having voted in the election as compared to 50% of women. This gender gap increases in older age groups. Taken together, an average of 84% of men in these older age groups report voting in the 2003 presidential election as compared to 73% of women. This pattern is also present in turnout for previous elections in Azerbaijan.

As would be expected, those interested in politics are more likely to have voted in the 2003 presidential election than those not interested (84% versus 54%). Surprisingly, despite the substantial difference in voting efficacy between those whose family economic situation is good and those whose family economic situation is bad, there is little difference in voting turnout among these groups for the presidential election (74% and 73%, respectively).

Information About Elections: Responses to IFES' 2004 survey point to the critical role information plays in fostering voter turnout. Respondents were asked whether they have enough information about political developments to make wise choices when voting, as well as their level of information about the electoral process in Azerbaijan. In answer to the first question, 13% of Azerbaijanis say they have enough information to make wise choices, 45% say they have some information, 33% say they have very little,

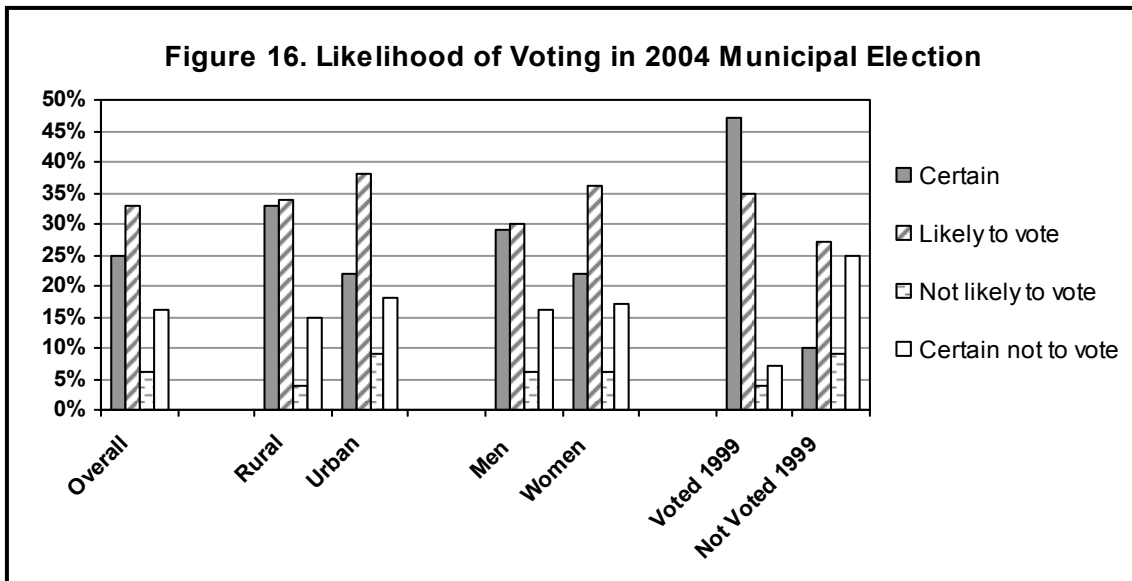
¹³ Question Text: "Now, let's talk about the 15 October, 2003 elections for president. As you may know, sometimes people cast votes for other people in elections. Did someone cast your vote for you in the October 2003 presidential elections? [If No] Did you vote in the 15 October presidential elections?" (n=1620)

and 5% they have no information to help them make a wise choice when voting. On the second question, 9% say they are fully informed about the election process, 45% are somewhat informed, 35% are not too informed, and 10% have no information at all. In both cases, a slight majority takes the position that they are at least somewhat informed while over 40% profess little or no information.

The survey findings further show that the more information a respondent professes on either of these two questions, the more likely he or she is to have voted in the 2003 presidential election. Among those who say they have enough information to make a wise choice when voting, 91% say they voted in the 2003 presidential election. This compares to 82% of those who say they have some information, 61% of those who have little information, and 44% of those who have no information. Similarly, 94% of those who are very informed about the election say they voted, as compared to 84% who are somewhat informed, 64% with not much information, and 47% with no information at all about the election process.

Likelihood of Voting in the 2004 Municipal Elections: When asked how likely they are to vote in the upcoming municipal elections in Azerbaijan, a quarter (25%) say they are certain to vote, 33% are likely to vote, 6% are not likely to vote and 16% are certain not to vote. Eighteen percent don't know how likely they are to vote or do not give an answer to the question. Based on turnout in the 1999 municipal elections, and previous survey data that shows that many of those who say they are likely to vote do not actually turn up to vote, it seems likely that less than half of all Azerbaijanis will participate in the municipal elections.

Figure 16 indicates that rural residents are more likely to vote than urban residents, men are more likely to vote than women, and those who voted in the 1999 municipal elections are much more likely to vote than those who did not.¹⁴



When those who indicate that they are not likely to vote or are certain not to vote are asked why they are not likely to vote, many cite concern about the fairness of the election (35%). Sixteen percent think that their vote will not change anything, and 10% say that the election itself will not change anything. Another 10% are not interested in the election, while 9% say that they will not vote because their municipality does not do anything for its constituents.

Sentiments in the focus groups were similar to those found through the survey. About half of the focus group participants indicated they would vote. This is despite the fact that most of them do not think that much good will result from voting in the municipal elections. Many of these participants said they would

¹⁴ Question Text: "How likely are you to vote in the municipal elections that will take place later this year?" (n=1260)

vote because it is their civic duty, and some feared falsification if they do not vote. Positive reasons for voting were not given in the focus groups. Those who said they would not vote cited the lack of fairness in the process as the primary reason for not voting.

Expected Fairness of Municipal Election: When survey respondents were asked to rate the expected fairness of the municipal elections on a scale of 0 to 6 (where 0 meant not fair at all and 6 meant completely fair), 12% say that the elections will be completely fair, 6% say they will not be fair at all, and 20% take a neutral position (i.e., 3). Another 27% pick positions 4 and 5 indicating that elections will be more fair than unfair, and 13% pick positions 1 and 2 indicating that the election will be more unfair than fair.

This is another question on which opinions differ according to outlook on Azerbaijan. Those who think Azerbaijan is a democracy are much more likely to think that the municipal elections will be more fair than unfair, as compared to those who do not think Azerbaijan is a democracy or those who think that Azerbaijan has elements of both a democracy and a non-democracy. Those who rate the national or their family economic situation positively are more likely to say that the elections are more likely to be fair than unfair, as compared to those who rate the national and their family economic situation negatively.

V. LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Although a majority of Azerbaijanis are aware that their municipality or village has a municipal council, few are aware of its activities or have contacted these bodies. Azerbaijanis are more likely to approach their Executive Authority for help with a problem than their municipal council. NGOs are seen to play an important role in public service activities in Azerbaijan, and because of this, the vast majority of those aware of the activities of NGOs think they are necessary in Azerbaijan. Political parties are also felt to be necessary by a majority of Azerbaijanis despite the fact the most feel that political parties are ineffective in presenting their ideas to the Azerbaijani public.

Opinions About Municipal Councils: Eighty percent of Azerbaijanis are aware that their municipality or village has a municipal council. Awareness of municipal councils is higher in rural areas (91%) than in urban areas (77%). Residents of Baku and Ganja have the lowest level of awareness of municipal councils (63% and 65%, respectively), while awareness is highest in Kuba-Khachmaz (98%).

While the vast majority of Azerbaijanis are aware of municipal councils, most Azerbaijanis do not have sufficient information about these bodies. Overall, 28% say they have enough information about the activities of municipal councils to satisfy their needs. This compares with 40% who say they have enough information about the activities of the national government to satisfy their needs. The lack of information is especially evident in urban areas, where 18% say they have enough information about the activities of municipal councils as compared to 38% of rural residents. The percentage of Azerbaijanis who say they have enough information about the activities of the municipal council has not changed from IFES' 2003 survey.

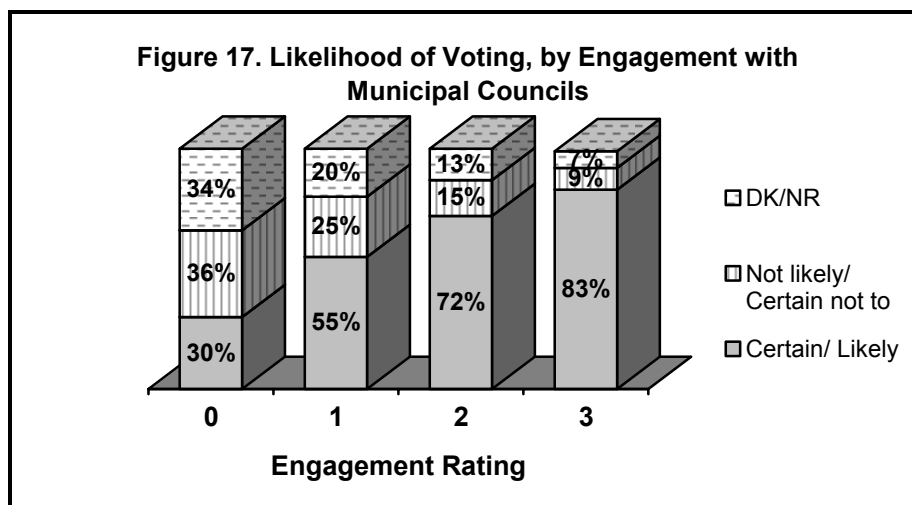
One area related to municipal councils that has evidenced an improvement since the 2003 survey is the percentage of Azerbaijanis who have contacted members of municipal councils. In IFES' 2003 survey, 15% of Azerbaijanis indicated that they had contacted members of their municipal councils in the past to help resolve a problem or address an issue. In this survey, 28% of Azerbaijanis report having contacted members of their municipal councils. As in previous surveys, the level of contact with members of the municipal council is higher in rural areas (41%) than in urban areas (17%). The rate of contact has increased in both rural (from 21% to 41%) and urban areas (from 8% to 17%).

The survey findings indicate that the more engagement Azerbaijanis have with their municipal councils, the more likely they are to vote in the upcoming municipal elections. Engagement in this case can be measured by three factors:

1. Awareness of municipal councils
2. Information about activities of municipal councils
3. Contact with municipal councils

A simple scale to measure engagement with municipal councils was created by assigning each respondent one point for each of the items above if his or her response was positive. Thus, if a respondent is aware that his or her municipality or village has a municipal council, feels he or she has enough information about the activities of the municipal council, but has not contacted the municipal council, this respondent would be given a 2 on the engagement scale. Possible values on this scale range from 0 to 3, with higher values indicating greater engagement. Rating each respondent on this scale shows that 19% have the lowest engagement rating (0), 43% have a rating of 1, 26% have a rating of 2, and 12% have the highest rating (3). In urban areas, 24% have the lowest rating while 4% have the highest rating. By contrast, 14% of those in rural areas have the lowest rating and 19% have the highest rating.

Figure 17 demonstrates that the likelihood of voting in the upcoming municipal elections increases with higher levels of engagement with municipal councils.¹⁵



Those with 0 engagement are not aware that their municipality or village has a municipal council. Among these respondents, 30% are certain or likely to vote in the municipal elections. This compares to 83% who are certain or likely to vote among those with an engagement rating of 3, indicating that these respondents have heard of their municipal councils, have enough information about them and have contacted them.

While increased engagement with municipal councils increases the likelihood that a person will vote in the municipal elections, only a minority of Azerbaijanis have a high level of engagement, which includes contact with municipal councils. Among those who have not contacted municipal councils in the past, a majority (52%) say that there has not been any reason for them to contact municipal councils, but many also cite negative sentiments regarding the municipal councils. Twenty-two percent consider it useless to contact municipal councils, 14% think that municipal councils do not have the power or the resources to help them and 7% do not know enough about the municipal council to approach them.

Many participants in the focus groups echoed the sentiments of survey respondents with regard to contacting municipal councils. Many who had approached their municipal councils in the past reported that they did not receive much help from the councils in addressing their problems. Some reported that their municipal council sent them to their executive authority for help.

Preferred Local Authority: The lack of a clear delineation of responsibilities at the local level between the Executive Authority (the appointed representative of the central government in the regions) and the municipal councils is cited by many as a primary reason why municipal councils have faced difficulty in establishing themselves as viable local entities since their establishment in 1999. Another factor frequently cited is the lack of resources available to the municipal councils (and, conversely, available to the Executive Authority) to address issues in their constituencies. In fact, these factors have been frequently identified by the public in previous IFES surveys in Azerbaijan in 2002 and 2003. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that many more Azerbaijanis would approach their Executive Authority instead of their municipal councils in order to address a local problem or issue.

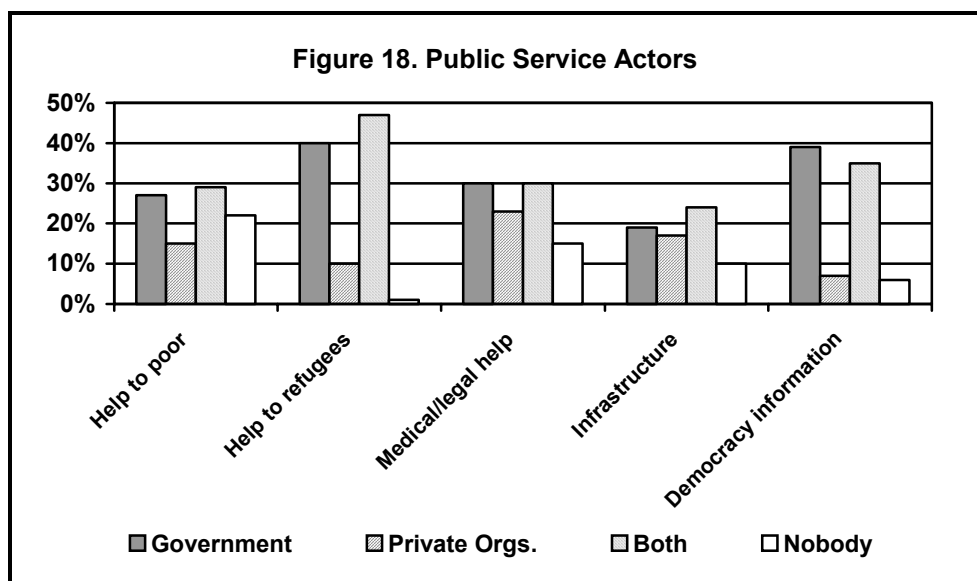
In total, 40% of Azerbaijanis say that they would first approach their Executive Authority to help solve a problem, 11% identify municipal councils, 19% say that they would approach both equally, and 19% say that they would approach neither body. The percentage of those saying they would approach their municipal councils increases as the level of engagement with the municipal councils increases. Among

¹⁵ Question Text: "How likely are you to vote in the municipal elections that will take place later this year?" (n=1620)

those with the highest engagement (a rating of 3), 36% would approach their municipal council first, 20% would approach their Executive Authority, and 36% would be equally likely to approach either.

Only 5% of residents of urban areas say they would first approach their municipal council, as compared to 50% who would approach their Executive Authority. In rural areas, 30% would approach their Executive Authority first whereas 19% would first approach their municipal council.

Responsibility for Public Service Activities: Survey respondents were asked to assess the frequency of public service and charitable activities, such as helping the poor and refugees, offering legal and medical help, etc. Six percent of respondents think that these types of activities are very common in Azerbaijan, 37% think they are somewhat common, 23% believe they are not very common, a quarter (25%) do not believe they are common or that they do not happen at all in Azerbaijan. Urban residents are slightly more likely to think that these types of activities are very or somewhat common (46%) than rural residents (39%), while residents of Nakhichevan (65%), Muga-Salyan (60%), Shirvan and Apsheron (56%) are most likely of all regions to think so. Those who thought that these activities are at least not very common were next asked whether they think that the government, private organizations, or both undertake these types of activities in Azerbaijan. Opinions on these questions are presented in Figure 18 below.¹⁶



While in almost every case more respondents think that the government exclusively undertakes these activities (and not private organizations), many also think that both of these sectors play a role in providing these public service activities to the Azerbaijani public. This indicates that the Azerbaijani public is aware of the role played by private non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing these types of public service activities in Azerbaijan. In fact, 59% of Azerbaijanis say that NGOs play a role either exclusively or in addition to the government in at least one of the activities listed in Figure 2. Thirty percent think that NGOs play this role exclusively.

Awareness and Necessity of NGOs: Respondents who think that public service activities exist in Azerbaijan were informed that the private organizations that carry out these activities are usually called NGOs. They were then asked whether members of their communities are aware of these NGOs. Twelve percent of those asked say that most members of their communities are aware of NGOs, 13% say that

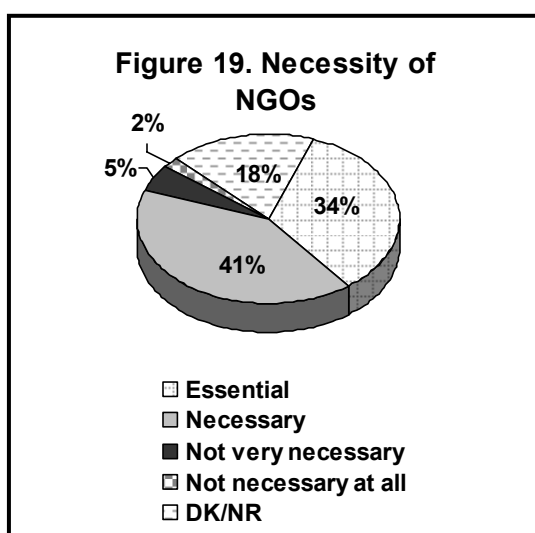
¹⁶ Question Text: "And for each of the following types of activities, what organization do you think undertakes the activity: the government, private organizations, or both?" (n=1057)

some members of their communities are aware of these organizations, 34% say very few are aware, and 27% say that nobody in their community is aware of NGOs. Fourteen percent do not provide a response.

Not surprisingly, 90% of persons displaced as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict say that most in their community are aware of NGOs. This reflects help to refugees that is the focus of many NGOs in Azerbaijan. Community awareness of NGOs is perceived to be much lower in non-refugee communities in Azerbaijan. Among such urban residents, 23% say that most or some of their fellow community members are aware of the work of NGOs. In rural areas, this percentage is 11%. Regionally, 42% of those in Mil-Karabakh say that most people in their communities are aware of NGOs, and 12% say that some are aware.

The most well-known NGOs are the Red Cross (13%), Nijat (9%), UNICEF (3%), Soros Fund (3%) and ADRA (2%).

Those who think that private organizations carry out public service activities were also asked whether these types of organizations (NGOs) are necessary in Azerbaijan. Figure 19 indicates that the majority of those who know of NGO activities think that these organizations are essential or necessary.¹⁷



The survey data shows that the more active NGOs are perceived to be, the more likely respondents are to say that NGOs are essential or necessary in Azerbaijan. Activity of NGOs in this case is measured by the number of activities (in the list in Figure 18) private organizations are thought to undertake. Among those who think that private organizations undertake only one of the activities, 52% think NGOs are essential or necessary. This compares with 67% who have the same opinion among those who think that NGOs are active in two of the sectors, 85% among those who think NGOs are active in three of the sectors, and 89% among those who think NGOs are active in four or five sectors. Among those who think that most in their community are aware of these organizations (99%), almost all perceive a need for NGOs.

Volunteerism: Despite the fact that many Azerbaijanis who are aware of the activity of NGOs think that these organizations are necessary, few are willing to volunteer for NGOs without pay. Among respondents who say NGOs are necessary, 14% say they would be definitely willing to volunteer, 28% say they may volunteer, and 48% say they would not volunteer.

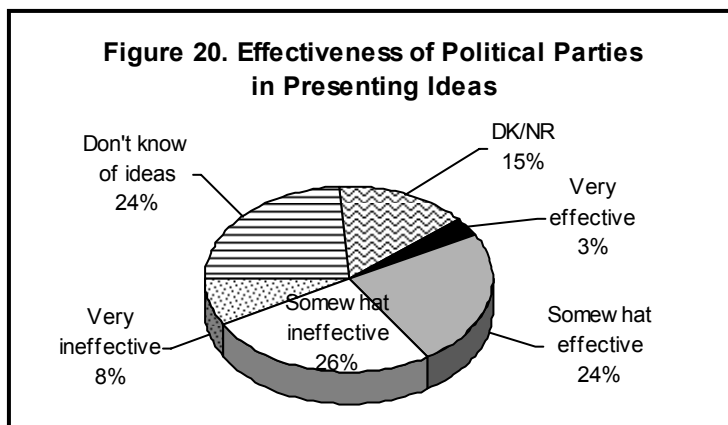
The possibility of volunteering is higher when respondents are asked if they would volunteer for a public institution in their neighborhood, such as a school or hospital. Sixteen percent say they would definitely volunteer, 36% say they may volunteer, and 44% say they would not volunteer.

Attitudes Toward Political Parties: The majority of Azerbaijanis believe that political parties are necessary for democracy in Azerbaijan. A quarter of Azerbaijanis (25%) think that political parties are essential for democracy in Azerbaijan, 38% think they are somewhat necessary, and 23% think they are not very or not at all necessary. The perceived necessity of political parties has not changed significantly since IFES' 2003 survey. Those who think that Azerbaijan is not a democracy are more likely to say that political parties are essential for democracy in Azerbaijan (34%) than those who think that Azerbaijan is a democracy (22%). Possessing information about political developments is also a factor in determining opinions on this question. Those informed about political developments are more likely to think that political parties are essential or necessary for democracy in Azerbaijan (72%) than those not informed

¹⁷ Question Text: "In your opinion, how necessary are non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan?" (n=1057)

(52%). On the other hand, those not informed are more likely to think that political parties are not necessary (28%) than those informed (18%).

In another question, respondents were asked how effective political parties in Azerbaijan are in presenting their ideas to the Azerbaijani public. On the whole, political parties are found to be ineffective in presenting their ideas to the Azerbaijani public (Figure 20).¹⁸



Twenty-seven percent of Azerbaijanis believe that political parties are either very or somewhat effective in presenting their ideas to the public. By contrast, 34% think that political parties are very or somewhat ineffective in presenting their ideas to the public. This may indicate a split in opinion on this question, but one must also take into account the fact that 24% say they do not know of any ideas presented by political parties. This would seem to indicate that 58% of Azerbaijanis do not think that parties are effective in presenting their ideas to the public. In IFES' 2003 survey in Azerbaijan, 22%

believed that political parties were effective in presenting their ideas while 52% either thought parties were ineffective or did not know of any ideas presented by the parties.

The importance of political parties disseminating their ideas is illustrated by the fact that those who think parties are effective in presenting their ideas are much more likely to think that political parties are essential for democracy in Azerbaijan (42%) than those who think parties are ineffective in presenting their ideas (28%), or those who do not know of any ideas presented by political parties (8%).

Focus group participants also discussed this topic, and they were asked whether the ineffectiveness of political parties' communication of their ideas is the result of a general lack of ideas among the parties or a lack of access to media sources to make their ideas known. Most participants stated that it was due to a lack of ideas among many of the political parties in Azerbaijan. Many also felt that there are too many parties that only serve the interest of the leaders without advancing ideas on important issues facing Azerbaijan.

Survey respondents were asked to name a party that best represents the interests and aspirations of people like them. The most often-named party was the governing New Azerbaijan Party (39%), followed by the Musavat party (6%), the Popular Front Party (1%), and the National Independence Party (1%). A plurality of Azerbaijanis (40%) say that none of the parties represents the aspirations of people like them. This opinion is voiced more frequently in rural areas (42%) than in urban areas (35%).

¹⁸ Question Text: "In general, how effective do you think political parties in Azerbaijan are in representing their ideas and principles to the Azerbaijani public?" (n=1620)

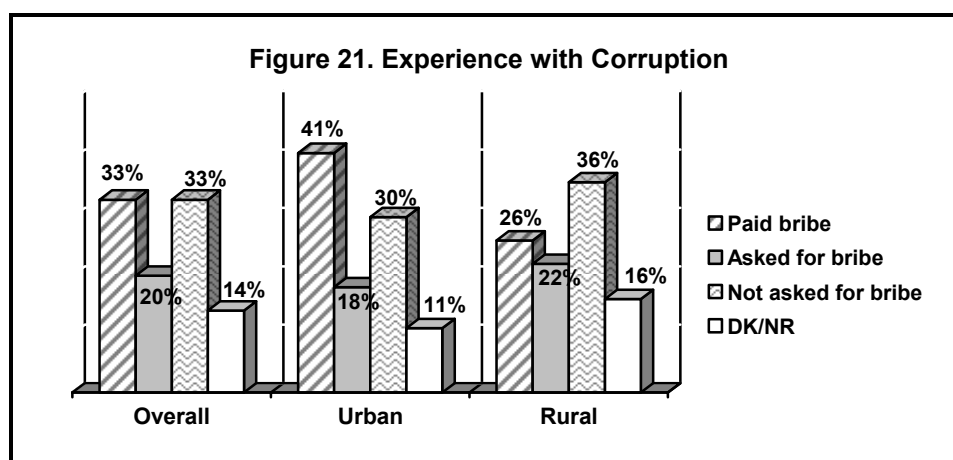
VI. OTHER ISSUES: CORRUPTION AND WOMEN'S STATUS IN AZERBAIJAN

Most Azerbaijanis believe that corruption is common in the country. This is evidenced by the fact that a majority of Azerbaijanis report paying a bribe or being asked for a bribe by a public official, particularly in urban areas. The most common reasons for paying bribes are to obtain health services and better grades for children in educational institutions. The institutionalization of corruption in these two sectors is highlighted by the fact that the majority of Azerbaijanis think it is always or sometimes justified to pay a bribe for health care and close to half feel similarly about obtaining better grades for their children.

While the vast majority of men and women think that women and men have equal rights in Azerbaijan and are treated equally in most areas of life, focus group discussions reveal that this legal guarantee is not realized, and women are deprived of many opportunities due to social mores related to gender roles.

Frequency of Corruption in Azerbaijan: More than three-quarters of Azerbaijanis believe that corruption is very or somewhat common in Azerbaijan. Only 10% think that corruption is very or fairly rare in the country. Corruption is perceived to be very or somewhat common by a majority of most sub-groups in the population, although there are differences in perceived intensity of corruption based on location. Residents of urban areas are much more likely to think that corruption is very common in Azerbaijan (59%) than are residents of rural areas (42%). The opinion that corruption is very common generally increases as does the size of a respondent's community. In communities with populations under 2,000, 40% of residents think that corruption is very common. In communities with populations between 5,000 and 19,999, 55% think corruption is very serious; in Baku, 66% think corruption is very serious. This finding suggests corruption is a more pervasive problem in larger urban areas than in small towns or villages.

This suggestion is borne out by experience with corruption in Azerbaijan. Survey respondents were asked whether they had ever paid a bribe to a public official. If a respondent indicated that he or she had never paid a bribe, he or she was next asked whether he or she was ever asked for a bribe. Combining the responses to these questions provides a cursory glimpse into Azerbaijanis' experiences with corruption and the differences between urban and rural areas in this regard (Figure 21).¹⁹



Overall, 53% say that they have either paid a bribe to a public official in the past or been asked for a bribe by a public official. In urban areas, 59% say that they have paid a bribe or been asked for a bribe, while in

¹⁹ Question Text: "Remembering this is a confidential survey and your responses will never be revealed, can you tell me if you have ever paid a bribe to a public official to obtain a service or avoid a fine?" (n=1620)
"Have you ever been asked for a bribe by a public official?" (n=1075)

rural areas this percentage is 48%. In urban areas, 30% say that they have never been asked for a bribe, and this percentage is 36% in rural areas. Although the percentage who have not been asked for bribes is not substantially different in urban and rural areas, 41% report paying bribes in the past in urban areas while 26% report having done so in rural areas.

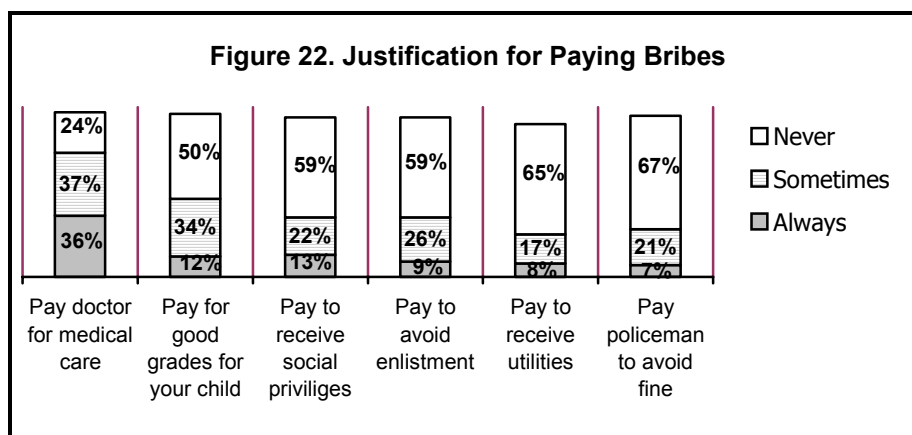
Reasons for Paying Bribes: Those who reported paying a bribe were next asked to name the purpose for which the bribe was paid. Their responses indicate that many of the bribes are paid to obtain basic services that should be universally provided to Azerbaijanis citizens. The particular cases cited were:

- For medical care (12%)
- For grades at school/university (6%)
- For pensions (4%)
- To avoid a traffic fine (3%)
- To obtain work (3%)
- To defer military service (2%)
- To obtain help from police (passport, etc.) (2%)
- Local officials/To obtain services (2%)

The primary reasons for paying bribes were for medical care, education and pensions. Obtaining local services and help from the police were also mentioned. Thus, most of the reasons for paying bribes were linked to activities that should be provided by the Azerbaijani government to its citizens, and point to a widespread problem with corruption in the civil service in Azerbaijan. Bribes for getting out of legal sanctions or obligations (traffic fines, military conscription) were not mentioned as often as bribes for services. Urban residents are much more likely to report having paid bribes for health and education than are rural residents.

These findings are further underscored when those who report paying bribes or being asked for bribes are next asked to name the public agency that employed the public official asking for the bribe. Twenty percent named public health institutions, 11% educational institutions, 5% the pension fund or other social service bodies, and 4% the police and army each.

Justification for Paying Bribes: Azerbaijanis' experience with corruption, particularly in the health care and education sectors, results in their being much more accepting of paying bribes for these two government services than for other services (Figure 22).²⁰



Justifying paying bribes for certain activities is closely related to the frequency with which such bribes are paid in Azerbaijan. Bribes are paid more often for medical care and for grades at schools and universities,

²⁰ Question Text: "I will read to you some actions that may be taken by people in Azerbaijan. Can you tell me if each of these actions are never justified, sometimes justified, or never justified?" (n=1620)

and a large proportion of Azerbaijanis think it is justified to pay bribes for these services. Seventy-three percent of Azerbaijanis think it is always or sometimes justified to pay a bribe for medical care, and 46% feel the same way about paying for good grades for their child. Fewer think it is justified to pay bribes to receive social privileges to which one is not entitled, to avoid enlistment in the armed forces, to receive utilities, and to avoid a police fine. Those who have either paid a bribe or been asked for a bribe in the past are much more likely to say that it is justified to pay a bribe for these actions than those who have never been asked for a bribe. This finding indicates that as more Azerbaijanis are exposed to corruption, the acceptance of corruption, at least for select activities, may in fact increase.

Women's Status in Azerbaijan: In IFES' 2004 survey in Azerbaijan, respondents were asked to assess whether women have the same level of rights as men and whether they are treated equally in Azerbaijan. In both cases, more than three-quarters of Azerbaijanis agree that women have the same rights as men in Azerbaijan (85%) and are treated equally (79%). There is little difference between men and women in their agreement with these statements. This data would seem to indicate that women generally enjoy a status equivalent with men in Azerbaijani society, but discussion in the focus groups revealed that while there is general agreement that women theoretically have the same rights and opportunities as men in Azerbaijani, in reality Azerbaijani society imposes many strictures that limit the opportunities available to women.

As in the survey, the majority of both men and women in the focus groups agreed that women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men in Azerbaijan. But women were more likely to argue that while legally this may be the case, social mores serve to circumscribe opportunities for women in many sectors of society. When focus group participants were asked whether men and women have equal status in business, government and the civil service, most participants felt that women are not very active in government and business but do enjoy some presence in the civil service. Later discussion revealed that participants viewed women's roles even in the civil service as highly defined. Most men and women in the focus groups argued that women should work primarily in the health care and education sectors, two sectors traditionally occupied by women in the former Soviet republics. Few focus group participants felt that women should strive for occupational representation outside these sectors.

For many focus group participants, a woman's role in Azerbaijan is defined primarily by her responsibilities at home and not by her occupational or educational achievements. Many of the focus group participants think that a woman is primarily responsible for maintaining the household and raising children. Even in cases where a woman may work, the general consensus in the focus groups was that the woman would still be responsible for all housework. This responsibility for homemaking is felt to be a factor that limits women's opportunities, as some participants argued that a woman cannot take advantage of her rights because of these duties.

Regarding women's participation in politics, most focus group participants were supportive but again referred to women's roles in the home as a factor limiting women's political participation. When asked whether they would encourage their daughter (if they have one now or in the future) to become involved in politics, most agree that it would be their daughter's decision.

The findings from the focus group discussion point to a fundamental difference between rights and opportunities legally granted to Azerbaijani women and the actual realization of these rights and opportunities. Data from the survey also indicates disparities between men and women that echo the focus group findings:

- Women are significantly less likely to have technical secondary or post-secondary education than men (53% men versus 41% women);
- Women are less likely to be in the workforce (employed or unemployed and looking for a job) than men (79% men versus 45% women); 28% of women are housewives;
- Among those that do work, men are more likely to be professionals or managers than women (25% men versus 17% women); and

- Women are likely to marry earlier than men (24% among 18-25 year olds as compared to 7% of men), thus curtailing educational and occupational opportunities because of their traditional roles as homemakers.

Each of the differences described above are more pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas of Azerbaijan. Given the differences in education, occupation, and marital status between men and women, it is not surprising that the survey data suggests women are less informed about sociopolitical developments and institutions in the country and less likely to participate in politics, including elections. Women are also less likely to be aware of local issues and less likely to contact local authorities to resolve issues. Women are also less likely to feel political efficacy, thus reducing their likelihood of political participation in the future.

The discussion above has identified education, occupation and marital status as structural factors that seem to play a part in limiting women's sociopolitical participation in Azerbaijan. But the focus group discussions point to social mores related to gender roles as a key factor in creating structural disparities between men and women in the country. This finding indicates that until societal expectations of the roles played by both genders are substantially changed, women may find it difficult to enhance the opportunities afforded to them in Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSIONS

This 2004 public opinion survey conducted in Azerbaijan shows Azerbaijanis in a more positive frame of mind with respect to many key issues than was documented in IFES' 2002 or 2003 surveys. Unlike in either of those, in the 2004 survey a majority of Azerbaijanis express satisfaction with the overall situation in the country, and a majority of Azerbaijanis describe the national economic situation as being "good." More Azerbaijanis than not are also optimistic that the economic situation in the country will improve over the next year. And when it comes to democracy, many more Azerbaijanis rate the country as primarily a democracy than in the 2002 survey (46% versus 20%).

Despite these positive developments in public opinion, concerns still abound in both the economic and political arenas. Unemployment and inflation continue to be seen as one of the biggest problems facing the country, most Azerbaijanis do not report seeing evidence of development of the non-oil sector of the economy, there is a lack of confidence in judicial institutions in the country, and official corruption is felt to be rampant. This survey also marks a deepening of a trend noticed in the 2002 and 2003 survey data, the divergence of opinions about the country's situation based on the respondent's circumstances. Basically, Azerbaijani society is marked by key differences in opinions and expectations among the haves and have-nots. Those who are succeeding under the present system are much more likely to be optimistic about the future than those who do not think they are doing well, and the successful are much more likely to feel like they can have influence in the political process. As a result, many of those dissatisfied with the overall situation and with economic conditions are withdrawing from political affairs with the result that their voices are less likely to be heard in the future.

Despite the differences in opinions according to economic circumstance, one area of concern for the vast majority of Azerbaijanis is the existence of widespread official corruption in the country. The survey data shows that not only do more than three-quarters of Azerbaijanis feel that corruption is common, a majority have personally experienced corruption by either having paid a bribe in the past or having been asked for a bribe by a public official. Not only is corruption widespread, it is most common in two key public institutions that provide basic services: education and health care. This institutionalization of corruption is related generally to the low levels of trust expressed in most public institutions, and specifically to the lack of confidence in judicial institutions and the justice system in the country. Focus group respondents also identified corruption as the key reason why they think economic development is hampered in Azerbaijan. For these reasons, addressing and reducing official corruption should be an important part of any strategy to foster political and economic development in Azerbaijan.

As municipal council elections approach, the survey findings indicate that more Azerbaijanis than not prefer to approach their appointed Executive Authority rather than their elected municipal councils for help with issues and problems. Previous IFES surveys and focus groups this year show that municipal councils are not seen to have the power and resources to address many of the problems facing Azerbaijanis at the local level. It is no surprise that less than a majority voted in the first municipal council elections and a similar percentage is likely to vote in this year's election. The viability of these political bodies can only be enhanced if efforts are taken to increase their power and capacity to help Azerbaijanis.

The survey results also show that few Azerbaijanis think that either private or state media are completely objective. The media in Azerbaijan has been increasingly controlled by the state so that even nominally independent TV channels (such as Lider) are largely censored by state authorities. Development of an independent media, particularly a vibrant media, is critical to further political development in Azerbaijan. In the focus groups, ANS is the only media source felt to be consistently objective. Regular users of ANS who do not use government-controlled Az TV regularly are much more likely to be critical of the present situation in Azerbaijan than those who tend to use Az TV or Lider regularly. In an environment where television is the preferred information source for political affairs, newspapers were most often cited by focus group participants as their source for information about parties. But newspapers are unlikely to be trusted by many Azerbaijanis in comparison with broadcast sources. The further development of newspapers is necessary for political party and general political development in Azerbaijan.

This IFES survey (as well as those in 2002 and 2003) highlights the lack of political participation among the vast majority of ordinary Azerbaijanis—beyond voting in presidential elections and informal discussions of politics. This lack of participation is especially acute among young Azerbaijanis (18-25) and women. IFES' surveys in Azerbaijan have consistently shown the 18-25 age group to be far less active, informed and interested in political affairs than older groups. In fact, the latest survey shows that the gap in sociopolitical interest and activity between those 18-25 and other age groups is increasing. Democracy programming must have a focus on young people in order to involve them in the political process and to inform them about the civic and citizenship rights that are available under a democracy. The survey data also shows far less likelihood that members of this group will vote in the municipal elections than will older groups.

Azerbaijani women are consistently less likely to be active, informed and interested in sociopolitical affairs than men. Even though most Azerbaijanis feel that women enjoy the same rights as men in the country, focus group findings show that women are expected to play a limited role in political and vocational life. Men insist that women should continue to occupy traditional roles even in an evolving society. One focus of youth programs could be an emphasis on the broader roles women can play in Azerbaijani society. Civic education programs can help motivate women to become more involved in sociopolitical affairs, and vocational programs may help to open opportunities for women in the business world.