The Status of Policy Research Organizations in Azerbaijan

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This article summarizes findings on the status of Azeri Policy Research Organizations (PROs), both the demand by policy-makers for their analyses and on their structure and capacity for conducting policy research. The findings are based primarily on a series of semi-structured interviews conducted during the November 2005 – February 2006 period. The broad picture that emerges on the sources of policy analysis used by government officials and members of Parliament is one where those interviewed turn most often to their own ministries and other government organizations, followed by international organizations and search the internet. There is little overt hostility to PROs and NGOs; indeed there appears to be significant informal interaction between decision makers and these organizations. However, the PROs are seen more as presenting policy views and not as sources of hard information or analysis. Four PROs were identified, and they exhibit a wide variance in the volume of analytic work they undertake, the extent of their involvement in the policy process, and the “policy clients.”

**Key words:** think tanks, public policy, institutional development, Azerbaijan

1. Introduction

Policy research organizations (PROs), sometimes called think tanks, are widely accepted in western industrialized countries as playing an important role in the policy development process. They are credited with identifying important problems requiring public attention, expanding the range of options defined to address problems, enriching the analysis of problems and potential solutions, and increasing the effectiveness of smaller political parties that cannot afford to generate such research of their own. PROs have developed rapidly in the Eastern Europe over the past 15 years and are now becoming increasingly important in the Commonwealth of Independent States (Rimskii and Sungurov 2004, Struyk 1999, Ohemeng 2005, Stone 2000, 2005, Sandle 2004, Schneider 2002, McGann and Weaver 2002).

This paper outlines the state of development of PROs and their role in support of public policy development in Azerbaijan as of winter 2005–2006. Its objective is twofold: to document the demand for and supply of policy research in the country and to develop a baseline so that changes in the sector can be tracked over time.

The context for this review is important. The following sections review first the overall political environment and the conditions in the NGO sector.

1.1. Political Situation

Azerbaijan is a presidential republic that gained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Abulfaz Elchibey was the first democratically elected president of Azerbaijan. In 1993, Heydar Aliyev, former first secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, seized power through a coup. He stayed in power for ten years and withdrew for health reasons. Ilham Aliyev, Heydar’s son came to power through controversial elections in 2003 for a five year term with a possibility for a second term. Current National Assembly or Milli Mejlis was elected in 2005, also for five years.

The majority of 125 seats in Milli Mejlis belongs to the pro-government Yeni Azerbaijan Party (58 seats). Eight seats belong to Azadliq coalition which consists of opposition parties—Musavat, APF, and DPA. Isa Gambar is a chairman of Musavat. Ali Karimli is a leader of “Reform” faction of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) and Mirmahmud Mirali-Oglu is a leader of the “Classic” faction of APF. Rasul Quliyev is a leader of Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (DPA). The other parties in the National Assembly are Civic Solidarity Party (CSP) (2 seats) with Sabir Rustamkhanly as a leader, Motherland party (2 seats), and Yeni Siyaset (YeS; New Politics) (2 seats). YeS unites less confrontational Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP), the Social-Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, and a few individual politicians.

Opposition parties are weak and oppressed by the govern-
ment. According to the Freedom House Nations in Transit report (2005), Azerbaijan rates 6.00 (7 is the worst score) for national democratic governance, “which reflects the government’s continued reliance on an authoritarian regime and use of force rather than democratic institutions and the rule of law.” Perhaps most discouraging is that deterioration was observed in 4 of the 8 areas rated by Freedom House:

- In the electoral process area because of the government’s dominance of the municipal election campaign, irregularities reported during the registration process, and other problems.
- In the civil society area owing to the government’s refusal to register some NGOs and problems with taxation and funding of these organizations.
- For the judicial framework and independence area because of the judiciary’s continued lack of independence and continuing violations of political rights and civil liberties.
- In the independent media area due to the government’s continued mistreatment of opposition journalists and press after the fall 2003 election and into 2004.

1.2. Civil Society

The involvement of individual citizens in voluntary organizations, trade unions, and other types of civil society activities is also very low, according to a 2005 survey (Mamed-zade et al. 2006). The annual index of Economic Freedom, disseminated by the Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation in early 2006, rated the country as “mostly unfree,” ranking it 123rd and well behind Armenia and Georgia, for example.

Most policy research organizations (PROs) in the region are nonprofit organizations, following the lead of U.S. and Western European policy research entities. Here, too, conditions in Azerbaijan are challenging. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) NGO Sustainability Index for 2004 stood at 4.9 on its 7 point scale (1 being the most favorable situation). The index recorded an decrease between 2003 and 2004, with the overall score falling from 4.1 to 4.9. Among the 29 countries rated, conditions for NGOs are rated as better in Azerbaijan than only in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Belarus (USAID 2005: 274). The report observed that while about 400 NGOs are active and visible, “only a small number are well-established, financially viable, and have reasonably developed organizational capacity” (USAID 2005: 70). Funding difficulties along with registration problems are also noted. Particularly important for the effectiveness of policy research organizations is the report’s observation that several barriers still block civil society organizations from having any real influence over public policy or the legislative process and that the government has yet to create any significant public participation mechanisms.

In this context it is interesting to note that a USAID-sponsored assessment of Azeri civil society recognized these problems but also saw the recent creation of the over 2,600 municipal councils and the election of officials to them as a major opportunity for civil society to revitalize its activities (Russell et al. 2005).

Among Western European democracies, political parties in several countries sponsor their own policy research organizations; often they function as mediating institutions that assess and summarize original research done by other PROs. This pattern is being replicated in some Eastern European countries as well, e.g., Hungary and Bulgaria. But Azeri political parties have not established such entities.

Another attribute of PROs elsewhere in the region is that a number registered as for profit organizations, sometimes because of difficulties with registering as a nonprofit at the time they were created; and they have retained this legal form. Some continue to have the goals and mission of nonprofit organizations; others behave differently depending on the client and topic of analysis. Given the difficulties of nonprofit organizations being registered in Azerbaijan, it is expected that “for-profit—nonprofits” exist there as well.

In light of the foregoing, we undertook our reconnaissance of policy development in Azerbaijan by Azeri organizations expecting to find a nascent and not well-defined policy research community.

2. Approach

The general strategy was to explore both the demand for policy research and its supply through a set of semi-structured interviews.1 On the demand-side, we conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals or small groups of policymakers at government agencies (10 meetings), members of parliament (4 meetings), and one person from the parliamentary secretariat (staff). The objective here was to

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1 The interview guides were patterned on those used in an earlier analysis of think tanks in the region (Struyk 1999). The interview guides are available from Mr. Struyk upon request via email at struyk3@yahoo.com.
understand their degree of interest in and reliance upon locally generated policy research when they address a policy question, including the development of legislation to correct identified problems.

The MPs interviewed were those who had served in the last parliament whether they had been re-elected in the November 2005 election or not. We did not include freshly elected members because of their lack of experience as MPs. As to government officials we tried to interview relatively high-level officials, i.e., those at the minister and deputy minister level, and, when necessary, the department head level. We compiled the lists of those we might interview by asking people at PROs, international donor agencies, and international NGOs for recommendations. This likely gives us a sample of those who are comparatively liberal in outlook and this may affect the sources of information they use for policy deliberations.

On the supply side of the market, we interviewed 18 existing advocacy, policy research, and other organizations about their general operations and their involvement in the policy process that we identified in meetings with international donors and foundations and one report on social science research in Azerbaijan (Faradov, n.d.). We cast our net widely in the hope of not missing a relevant organization. We included for-profit and nonprofit entities. One government research institute was also included, the Center for Economic Reforms, because of its dominant position in conducting economic studies. As a government entity it was not eligible to be classified as a PRO. In the end four organizations were found to be approaching the operational level of PROs at the lower level of development in Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation.

While we talked with numerous individuals and organizations, we cannot claim that our sample is strictly representative. Therefore, the picture we paint should be taken as suggestive rather than definitive.

3. The Demand for Policy Research by Government Agencies

Government ministries and members of parliament constitute critical potential clients for policy research. What sources do these policymakers rely on for information when addressing various issues? In exploring the sources of information used, we sought to distinguish between the respondent’s general view of an information source and specific experiences in using information from a source.

When respondents were asked an initial, general question about where they seek information on a new policy issue, a modest majority of both government officials and MPs said they looked at resources within their organization or other government agencies. The other respondents really do not have a primary source but rely on several. One official stated “... there is something of a stigma attached to looking outside for help, that it may affect the individual’s credibility if he looks outside his organization for information.”

In some CIS countries, notably Russia, ministries have adapted the Soviet era collegia, meetings of high-level ministry officials on specifically defined issues, to include outside experts for policy discussions. Respondents told us that in Azerbaijan the collegia remain closed and largely address administrative issues. However, the Ministry of Social Protection and Labor reported establishing working groups on major policy initiatives in which outside experts and relevant NGOs participate.

Government research institutes were consistently rated as weak or irrelevant with one exception. The Center for Economic Reforms, a Ministry of Economic Development research institute, was cited by four different government respondents as an important source of information.

About half of the government respondents had a generally positive view of policy analytic work done by international organizations, but only one of four parliamentary respondents did. Seventy percent of government respondents and 40 percent of parliamentary respondents cited concrete examples (positive or negative) of instances where they had carefully studied and in some cases used information supplied by international organizations. Still, several respondents commented that these analyses could often be improved by the international analysts having a greater appreciation of Azeri circumstances, working more closely with Azeri counterparts, and better tailoring the analysis and recommendations to local conditions.

With respect to PROs and NGOs, about half of government and parliamentary respondents expressed a broadly positive view of their role in their work. The great majority of respondents participate in PRO- or NGO-organized events; roundtables are particularly popular. On the other hand, only 20 percent of government officials cited particular examples of where work by such organizations was important for policy development; the corresponding figure for parliamentarians was higher at 60 percent. The Azerbaijan Young Lawyers Association was frequently singled out by MPs for providing directly useful assistance.
Where PROs and NGOs received less favorable ratings, one of two factors seemed to be at work. First, these respondents did not see the organizations as relevant, either because they did not produce analysis on the topics of concern to the official or because the quality of the work the interviewee had seen was suspect. Important in this regard is the fact that most ministries lack the authority and budget resources to contract out for research. With PROs dependent on the donor community, it is this community that is setting the agenda.

Second, some believed the organizations to be biased—to place advocacy ahead of analysis. The second point leads to a broader circumstance: PROs are often viewed through the lens of being pro- or anti-government, and this certainly leads to less cooperation between them and government officials than otherwise could be the case. Comments made during several interviews with officials support this idea, as does a recent report on state of civil society in the country (Russell et al. 2005).

The broad picture that emerges is one where there is little overt hostility to PROs and NGOs; indeed there appears to be significant interaction between decision makers and these organizations. The interactions are generally fairly informal, for example, at round table discussions. Most actual policy advice is delivered informally as well. PROs and NGOs are seen more as presenting policy views and not as sources of hard information or analysis. When it comes to seeking solid information, those interviewed turn most often to government organizations, followed by international organizations and searching the internet.

4. The Supply of Policy Research

We conducted interviews with 18 organizations that we believed could be policy research organizations; they are listed in Table 1. In fact, four of these turned out to be interested in actively participating in the policy process, to be conducting research that supports an evidence-based approach to policy development, and to be sufficiently established that they are likely to continue operations (top panel of Table 1).

The other organizations listed in the lower sections of the table fall into two groups. The first is a set of consulting and survey firms. The survey firms work regularly for the World Bank and other donors. All carry out analyses as part of their work programs and at least two expressed interest in expanding the volume of analysis as a complement to their other activities. A couple of these are already modestly active in the policy process but more as informal advisers to certain government officials and Members of Parliament than promoting their conclusions and recommendations more broadly. The second group is more electric but has in common that most have a focus on civil society development. The following examples will illustrate the diversity.

- “Yeni Nasil” organizes seminars and trainings for journalists and seminars for NGOs on working with the media. It has a legal department that analyzes media legislation and lobbies for amendments.
- The Azeri-American Alumni Association’s activities are limited to a convener role, bringing government officials and those interested in civil society issues together for discussions.
- The Azerbaijan Young Lawyers’ Union supports young lawyers through training events and promotes adoption of international civil rights standards in the country by assisting in drafting legislation and working primarily with the parliament but also with the Ministry of Justice.
- The Public Finance Monitoring Center carefully tracks the energy sector revenues and disbursements, the government budget, and loans to the government from international organizations and private sources to report patterns, identify corruption and push for reforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Organizations Interviewed</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Research Organizations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Economic Research Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. International Center for Social Research (ICSR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Center for Regional Development in Azerbaijan (CRDA)</td>
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<td>4. FAR Center for Economic and Political Research</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consulting or Survey Firms</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. SIAR Research and Consulting Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Synergetics-Center for Social Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Trend Information-Analytical Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Research Center for Development and International Collaboration (Sigma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Abacus Consulting Company</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other Organizations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Azerbaijan Young Lawyers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Azerbaijan Community Development Research, Training and Resource Center (ACDRTC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Public Finance Monitoring Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Azeri-American Alumni Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Center for Economic Reforms*</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Azerbaijan Marketing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Association of Social Economic Researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Center for Civil Initiatives</td>
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* Government institute.
The status of policy research organizations in Azerbaijan

The balance of this section concentrates on the four identified PROs. Where appropriate, we add information obtained in the other interviews to broaden or deepen the discussion. The paper begins by summarizing the areas in which these organizations work and how they allocate staff time over major work areas. Then we look at their sources of funds. Next, we examine their participation in the policy development process.

4.1. Founding and key personalities

To initiate the analysis for the four identified PROs we provide some essential background on when and how each organization was founded, the driving personalities behind the PRO's establishment, and current staff.

4.1.1. Economic Research Center

The organization started in 1990 as a group of young economists who were writing analytical articles in the newspapers. At that time, Mr. Ibadoglu was a chief editor in the newspaper “Economics.” In 1995, in the newspaper Mr. Ibadoglu created a separate economic department to publish overviews on various economic issues. Later he created a magazine called “Expert.” In 1999, on the basis of the magazine the Economic Research Center was organized and registered.

Both founders of ICSR have Ph.D. in philosophy and masters degree in psychology from the Moscow State University. Mr. Tair Faradov, Deputy Director of ISCR, also spent a semester as a visiting scholar at Department of Political Sciences, Free University in Brussels, in 2002 and in 1997 as a visiting scholar at the Center for Near Eastern Studies of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Over experts also hold degrees in either psychology or social science. The core group of experts is in their mid to late forties.

4.1.2. International Center for Social Research

The organization started working informally in 1996 and was formally registered in 2000. Started with four specialists, graduates of Moscow State University, who were not satisfied with their work at the state research institutes (mainly with the selection of topics and the professional level of the research). Funding for the state research institutions was also limited and it was easier to receive donor funding through an NGO.

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4.1.3. Center for Regional Development of Azerbaijan

The Center was created in 2004 by Dr. Chingiz N. Ismayilov. Dr. Ismayilov holds a Ph.D. in geography from Baku State University. He teaches at Baku State University at the department of Economics and Social Geography. The rest of the team are young graduates from geography department of the Baku State University.

4.1.4. FAR Center for Economic and Political Research

In 1994, Mr. Bagirov, an economist, Mehkman Aliyev, executive director of the Turan News Agency, Khikmet Khadzhizada, political scientist, and Nadzhaf Nadzhafov, journalist, registered a new company in order to be able to conduct an independent research on economic and political areas. Mr. Bagirov became a president of the Center. Mr. Bagirov is a well-respected economist. During 1992–93, he was President of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic and an advisor to the President of Azerbaijan on the strategic programs. Mr. Bagirov graduated from State Oil Academy in 1974. He defended his dissertation at the Institute of the Problems of Management of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1987. Since his work at the State Oil Company, he has personal connections in the government of Azerbaijan and is well-respected among policy makers. He is also known through a number of analytical articles he wrote.

4.2. Areas of work and allocation of staff resources

Table 2 provides an overview of the main areas in which the four PROs work and gives some examples of their research projects. Combined, the organizations cover a broad range of topical areas, but there is one somewhat unusual common topic: all, either in their defined areas of work or in specific projects, have a manifest interest in civil society topics, ranging from preparing a citizens' guide to government budgets to assessing the extent of economic freedom in the country. This may well reflect funders’ priorities. Macroeconomic issues get relatively little attention compared to
sectoral interests including education, environment, and tourism; analysis of poverty or impacts on it from other policies are also on their agendas.

Table 3 presents the allocation of the time of each organization’s professional staff for 2005 among various tasks. The figures indicate similarity in the time devoted to the core research task; but there is significant diversity in other areas among the four organizations, consistent with other countries for which similar data are available (Struyk 1999, Struyk and Miller 2004). All four report that about one-half of professional staff time is spent on research and analysis. The figure for ICSR is somewhat less since their research figure includes time for writing publications and conducting surveys. With this in mind, it appears that all allocate about the same share of time to writing publications. ICSR has a major training activity; CRDA spends more time on conducting surveys. Importantly, one organization—ICSR—did not indicate that significant time was devoted to policy development, although staff are active in the policy arena (see Section 4.5).

The final row in Table 3 shows the number of full-time and part-time professional staff at these organizations. With 2 and 4 full-time professional staff members, the two smaller organizations would rank in the lower one-third of the staff distribution for PROs in Eastern Europe. The larger two organizations have middle-size professional staffs by regional standards.

These figures indicate that the ICSR and the Economic Research Center have done well in developing a funding base since their creation, in 1996 and 1999, respectively.

4.3. Written Products

We read a sample of the reports produced by three of the four PROs as well as some by other organizations conducting research. (One PRO was very reluctant to share its reports with the team.) A few were official publications of the funding organization, e.g., UNDP, where an international mentor was involved and the sponsoring organization edited the report. In such cases it was impossible to tell how much of the analytical work and final writing was that of the PRO and how much was supplied by others.

The reports were generally logically laid out and addressed...
an issue with a reasonable analytic plan. Many employ data from specially conducted surveys. Most reports were essentially descriptive in content, although certainly presenting valuable information. In a number of instances, little relevant literature was cited. Similarly, relevant comparative data or experience of other regional countries were not presented when it would have helped in interpreting the results for Azerbaijan.

A consistent limitation was the lack of sufficient care in disaggregating survey data (resulting sub-sample sizes being too small to be at all reliable) and the absence of statistical tests for significant differences between sub-populations to support assertions of differences. None exhibited a command of basic statistics or econometrics.

With respect to the policy recommendations presented, in some instances they built directly on the evidence developed by the analysis and were in sufficient detail to be clear on concrete steps to be taken. Most reports, however, did not achieve this standard, with the most common limitation being that recommendations were stated in a highly compressed fashion leaving to the policymaker the task of converting them to specific actions.

Worth noting in this context is that the most frequent response from the leaders of all the organizations interviewed about the problems they face was the lack of highly qualified staff, even more often than funding. The problem of staff qualifications has been cited previously in commentaries on the sector (Bagirov 2001).

4.4. Funding sources

What are the PROs’ funding sources? How uniform are they across organizations? The interviews inquired about sources of funding in 2005.3 Because of the great interest of the international community in the parliamentary elections in that year, the patterns for this year may not be typical. Still, the responses indicate significant consistency across the four organizations.

- Economic Research Center—Oxfam, Open Society Institute (OSI), and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation
- ICSR—USAID, Eurasia Foundation, OSI, and a small grant from the U.S. Embassy
- CRDA—ISDI Center (Estonia) and Medina Institute of Slovenia (for monitoring political activity in the pre-election stage); SAAR POLL for election monitoring
- FAR Center—OSI, Eurasia Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy

The four organizations are heavily dependent on grants from international foundation and bi-lateral donor programs designed to support civil society organizations. Absent are contracts from the World Bank and UNDP, for example, for analytic work in support of other objectives, indicating that this type of contracting is being done with local for-profit firms—a fact confirmed in interviews with multilateral donors.

Indeed when we asked staff at multilaterals to name PROs we should meet, they consistent named for-profit survey and consulting firms listed in Table 1 among others. We received the impression that the for-profits were viewed as being technically stronger than most nonprofit entities.

Also absent from the funding sources of PROs is support from ministries. We were told by two ministries that there is no item in the budget for contracting with private organizations for research and analysis. We only identified two that do contract out for analytic work. While there is a similar practice in some CIS countries, ministries in most Eastern European countries and Russia regularly contract for such studies (one exception is Bosnia and Herzegovina, although even here there are a couple of favored agencies).

4.5. Involvement in the policy process

Clearly, a central question is whether the analysis being done by policy research organizations is getting used in the policy process. From the responses of the government officials reviewed earlier, one would give an answer of “not much.” Nevertheless, it has been our experience that often the views of policymakers and the leaders of policy research organizations differ on this point. In part this is due to the selection of a small number of policymakers for the interviews that may produce a biased or incomplete picture. Also knowledge of the full extent of outside advice is sometimes restricted. For example, in some cases a policymaker who is getting advice from a PRO may not want to tell others about it because he wants credit for the ideas or analysis, or he wants to maintain a monopoly on the advice. In either case, the result is that fewer officials know that PROs are providing useful advice. For these reasons we thought it useful to canvass the leaders of Azeri PROs to get their views on this point.

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3 We did not attempt to get detailed financial information. In similar interviews in other countries we have found that requesting such information often results in guarded responses to outright refusals and generally reduced openness.
In Azerbaijan, as in most other transition countries, there are two avenues for a policy research organization to promote the use of its analytical findings in the policy process—directly by working with government ministries, other government agencies, or members of parliament and indirectly by influencing the positions taken by prominent members of the donor community who in turn may have an impact on Government decisions. The indirect channel appears little employed at the present time in Azerbaijan, consistent with the funding information presented above. Only the Economic Research Center reported briefing the World Bank and others on their research results.

Our interviews with research and advocacy organizations explored their involvement in the policy process through two lines of questioning. One line was in conjunction with asking a series of questions about individual research projects—the topic, the nature of the analysis performed, the client, and how the results were used. The second line asked more general questions about participation in the policy process. The information provided in Table 4 is a distillation of the information from both lines of inquiry.

The four PROs listed in the table constitute two distinct patterns in policy process involvement:

1. ERC and the FAR Center are quite active, working with several ministries and participating in parliamentary commissions.
2. CRDA and ICSR have had little success in influencing policy formulation. ICSR focuses on parliament as the target for its civil society analysis. CRDA, on the other hand, has been active in providing recommendations but its work has not generated a positive response from government officials.

Not surprisingly, the views of the organizations about the interest of government officials and parliamentarians in the results of the PROs’ work varies directly with the extent of success the PROs have had in working with these agencies and individuals. ERC reported that government officials’ interest in its work began with its publication of a budget glossary that officials found extremely helpful. This opened the door to providing reports and summaries that were also useful and this created the basis for an ongoing working relationship. In contrast, CRDA has offered recommendations through its documents to various government offices but has been less successful in building relationships.

The responses from the four PROs and the other organizations interviewed indicate a general perception that MPs and government officials are not very receptive to the inputs from these organizations. The research organizations interviewed were asked

*Do you think that senior Government officials and members of parliament are really willing to accept input from organizations like yours when they are making policy? The answer was requested on a scale from 1 to 5 (5=best).

We received 12 usable responses. Among these, 8 gave a rating of less than 3 on the scale and only 1 respondent gave a score as high as 4. The organization giving the high rating opined that NGOs were not working hard enough to communicate their results to government. In this regard, three of the four PROs’ ratings fall in the first group (see the last row in Table 4). In short, the private analytic community’s perception is that the public sector is not very interested in their analyses and recommendations. That said, one should also note that 3 organizations stated that they thought that receptivity had increased during the past year. So improvement may be in the air.

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Table 4  Involvement of Selected PROs in the Policy Development Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Economic Research Center</th>
<th>ICSR</th>
<th>CRDA</th>
<th>FAR Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall level of involvement</td>
<td>Moderate-to-high</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate-to-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has worked more with govt agencies or parliament on policy issues?</td>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>Active with both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made presentations of findings to international organizations?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating of level of willingness of govt and parliament to accept input from organizations like yours</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\* Rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating great willingness.
\* Specific rating inferred from various remarks in response to the question.

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These briefings are directly to donor staff and are typically associated with a contractor completing an assignment. They exclude presentations at conferences sponsored by the donor.
5. Conclusions

The Azeri policy environment is a difficult one for PROs. The Government is suspicious of NGOs in general and policymakers in both the Executive and the Legislature rely substantially on internal information sources. The formal consultation process is very limited in both branches.

On the positive side, a small number of policy research organizations is emerging in Azerbaijan. By regional standards, their staffs are small to middle size, and their quantitative analytic skills not as developed. They have policy clients among both parliamentarians and government officials. And among the policy makers interviewed there were few that expressed clearly negative views about them. Rather, there appears to be a good deal of informal interactions between senior officials and MPs, on the one hand, and PROs and NGOs, on the other. There is interaction but PROs and NGOs appear to be seen as not working on the right topics or as analytically weak.

PROs confront a number of challenges, many internal. The analysis they are producing is often not terribly rigorous and this puts them at a disadvantage in competing with for-profit survey-and-analysis firms for contracts with major donors. PROs’ reliance on grant funding from international foundations and bi-lateral donors has caused their work agendas to be heavily oriented to civil society topics with comparatively few projects with a significant economic content. Hence, significant expansion of interests and capabilities is in order if Azeri PROs are to more closely resemble their counterparts in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe.

But the burden is certainly not all on the PROs. While there is interaction between policymakers and the PROs and NGOs, there are very few well-defined, formal opportunities for government agencies to solicit input. More opportunities could stimulate PROs to develop more analytically based positions. Additionally, only two of the ministries interviewed have the ability to make grants to NGOs; both have made grants for analytic work.

The overview of the general civil society situation in the country in the introduction led us to expect a comparatively underdeveloped PRO community. This expectation was borne out. At the same time, the government officials interviewed were more positive and accepting of the possible PRO role in contributing to better policy making than we had anticipated.

Acknowledgement

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