

Soft Power Phenomenon in Azerbaijan Foreign Policy: A Study on the Tourism Sector

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Abstract: - The concept of power, which is one of the most common discussion topics in the discipline of international relations, has been examined with many different dimensions, and the soft power dimension has become an important discussion and study area, especially since the Cold War. Physically, power is the efficiency achieved by using available forces. By a behavioral definition, power is the ability to change the behavior of others to achieve desired results.

When we pay attention to the last centuries in the Caucasus, it is possible to say that the situation in the region has been shaped more by the axis of hard policy formation. Azerbaijan has aimed to produce foreign policy strategies by keeping the peaceful aspects in the foreground in the foreign policy formation process from its independence to the present day. While doing this, tourism emerges as a soft power element in foreign policy.

One of the main problems of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after independence has been the Karabakh problem. Azerbaijan's gaining sovereignty after the 44-day war with Armenia in 2020 has led to the emergence of new opportunities. The natural beauties, historical artifacts, and cultural riches, which were liberated from the occupation after the 44-day war in the autumn of 2020, reveal the importance of tourism in Azerbaijan.

Another important problem of the Azerbaijani economy is the country's dependence on oil. Tourism can play the role of an alternative economy for diversifying the economy.

Considering these factors, the present study aims to reveal the soft power tendency in Azerbaijan's foreign policy-making process. In the process of scientific creation of the study, research was made based on the official data of the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan.

Key Words: - Soft Power, Soft Power Phenomenon, Foreign Policy, Tourism Sector, Azerbaijan.

Received: August 17, 2021. Revised: May 29, 2022. Accepted: June 13, 2022. Published: June 24, 2022.

1 Introduction

Military forces are used by states to ensure their security, combat threats, and achieve their objectives. Economic power is frequently a straightforward and time-consuming use of power. However, employing soft power is a tough and time-consuming task that is contingent on the acceptance of the target audience. It is slower, more common, and heavier to use soft power sources than it is to use hard power sources. When soft power is used successfully, however, the benefit is more permanent and long-lasting.

To improve their image favorably in the eyes of target countries, states create economic development support programs and pursue a constructive and active foreign policy approach. Countries that spend in the right way on public diplomacy have a positive image, which increases the likelihood of attaining the intended outcomes.

The history and culture of a state, as well as its soft power, are factors that greatly affect its foreign and domestic policy, its place in the international system, and its prestige.

Tourism is seen as a tool in the study in terms of resolving long-standing conflicts in the region based on peaceful methods. Tourism will play an important role in establishing functional relations and diversifying the economy.

The tourism sector constitutes an important service sector for Azerbaijan. Especially in recent years, the large imbalances in oil and natural gas prices have further strengthened the interest and relevance of the tourism sector in our country.

After the 44-day war in 2020, as soft power, it seems like an alternative to end the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia as quickly as possible and stabilize the region. It is expected that the establishment of the relationship between soft power and tourism based on solid foundations will lead to

an increase in the number of tourists coming to Azerbaijan.

2 Literature Review

Foreign policy analysis, which focuses on the consequences of decision-making processes on foreign policy outcomes, ignores the question of how decision-maker's preferences and behaviors are established during the creation of foreign policy. Emphasizing that decision-making processes are as important as foreign policy outcomes to understand and make sense of international politics, foreign policy analysis examines the processes that affect the behavior of decision-makers, while also focusing on how states use and evaluate their power tools. It is known that in the field of international relations, disputes around the concept of power make up a significant portion of the literature. Many times, the components of the idea of power have been stated, and these components have been divided into "hard" and "soft" power tools. Soft power, which has grown in importance after the Cold War, has been said to be deployed by Western democracies, particularly the United States. From this perspective, it has been argued that these nations can generate consent spontaneously as a result of the appeal of the values they defend, without the necessity for economic or military consequences or the ability to use force [1].

The concept of soft power is a concept that entered the international relations literature in 1990 with Nye's work "Bound to Lead - The Changing Nature of American Power" [2].

However, although the concept is quite new, the discussion of the phenomenon described through the concept in the literature on international relations is not new. The power over these ideas was mentioned in the book titled "The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations", which was written by Carr in the period from the World War I to the World War II and published for the first time in 1939. It was also emphasized that when evaluated for political purposes, it was not less important than military and economic power [3].

As Melissen states, Carr's very old argument was transferred to Nye's recently produced terminology, so that hard power and soft power are inextricably linked, and among the international relations theorists, Carr was the first to grasp and show the strategic importance of soft power in terms of foreign policy [4].

After Carr, theoretical studies that count soft power elements, which Nye would call later, among the power elements, were frequently encountered within the realist school. Morgenthau, in his work titled "International Politics" published in 1948, included qualitative elements such as national character, national morale, and the quality of diplomacy in addition to quantitative elements such as geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military readiness, and population among the elements of national power [5].

Nye defined the concept of soft power by comparing it with the concept of hard power. It is often possible to have others change their utilizing hard power, such as military power and economic might, accompanied by threats. Whereas, soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting the other rather than having the other paid a price [6].

According to Nye, it is possible to talk about three potential soft power sources. The first of these sources is culture. While fields such as literature, art, and education are more important in influencing the elites of the target actor, popular culture focusing on mass entertainment can be considered important in guiding large segments of the public. The second potential source of soft power is political values, and the third is foreign policies. When the three potential sources of power are seen as attractive by the target, accepted as legitimate, and have moral authority, they can turn into real sources of soft power [7].

There are many publications in the literature that classify the sources of soft power by deepening Nye's tripartite distinction on the sources of soft power (culture, political values, and foreign policies). For example, McClory presented culture, management, diplomacy, education, and economic activity/invention as basic soft power categories [8]. Especially as a result of developments in the field of information-communication, the values that states have and represent, their historical and cultural heritages with global appeal, their capacity to produce new cultural elements, and the general sense of acceptance that foreign policy actions are "legitimate" have also gained importance. Soft power, which is very difficult to measure in concrete terms, is based on the ability of the actors in the international system to persuade others, and the actor who intends to use soft power as an international policy tool must be credible in this framework [9].

Soft power is defined as the power to influence the decisions of other countries by persuasion or attraction without any overt threat. The effect of the

attraction created by a country on other countries can appear in the form of voluntary obedience, adoption, inclination, and imitation [10].

3 Methodology

The methodological basis of the study will be the use of a functionalist instrumental approach to solving a specific problem that examines all tools in terms of usability. Soft power instruments are accepted as a tool (means) to attain the objectives in international relations. Due to the originality and complexity of the stated problems, systematic and institutional methods will also be applied during the study. The systems approach provides an opportunity to examine in detail the role and importance of “soft power” instruments in modern Azerbaijani foreign policy.

4 Tourism Activities in Azerbaijan and Digital Review



Fig. 1: Number of foreigners visiting Azerbaijan for tourism

Source: [11]

The number of visits by foreigners to Azerbaijan for the years 2010-2020 is given in Figure 1. As can be seen from the table, the number of tourists visiting the country in 2010 was 1,279.8 thousand. The largest tourist influx in 2010-2020 was recorded in 2019 with 2,863.5 thousand people. In 2020, there were 519.4 thousand people.

Table 1. Number of foreigners visiting Azerbaijan by country

Countries	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	2696745	2849592	3170373	795722
Russian Federation	854 331	880 029	932 984	225 201
Georgia	538 213	610 556	725 465	184228
Iran	363 528	241 124	255 628	72783

Turkey	301 924	291 499	316 628	160 504
Great Britain	31 751	29 417	36 914	7 051
Ukraine	57 818	57 707	59 116	6 953
Kazakhstan	36 360	37 824	47 551	8 498
USA	15 178	17 516	18 787	2 604
Germany	16 319	17 200	20 509	3 531
Uzbekistan	18 795	18 306	23 507	5 283
China	10 274	15 730	25 542	1 532
Israel	15 385	40 158	47 056	4 238
Turkmenistan	17 101	28 305	52 127	8 257
Belarus	13 119	13 024	14 844	6 036
India	14 244	39 051	65 118	12 769
France	6 959	7 903	9 101	1 506
Italy	10 133	11 035	12 259	2 820
Pakistan	17 579	41 307	46 602	7 773
Netherlands	4 703	5 892	6 104	1 143
Qatar	7 896	12 461	10 472	1 567
Tajikistan	2 434	2 246	3 453	1 483
Iraq	62 547	67 514	50 723	5 186
Egypt	2 148	3 711	5 775	1 134
Saudi Arabia	33 312	73 284	107 230	11 945
United Arab Emirates	102 498	94 031	68 346	7 951
Kuwait	16 481	29 803	30 303	7 076
Bahrain	5 628	11 422	8 104	1 746
Other countries	35 594	44 253	40 319	5 431

Source: [11]

As can be seen from Table 1, the number of foreigners and stateless persons visiting Azerbaijan in 2016 was 2,248,773. In 2020, this figure decreased to 795,722 people. So, in 2020, 64.6 percent or 1,453,051 fewer tourists visited Azerbaijan compared to 2016. The highest tourist influx in 2016-2020 was 3,170,373 people in 2019. In 2020, the largest number of 795,722 tourists, that is, 225,201 people or 28.3% of the total number of visitors came from the Russian Federation; 184,228 people or 23.2 percent - the Republic of Georgia; 160,504 people or 20.2 percent - the Republic of Turkey; 72,783 people or 9.2 percent - the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, 16,953 people came from Ukraine, 12,769 people - India, 11,945 people - Saudi Arabia, 8,257 people - Turkmenistan, 8,498 people - Kazakhstan.

Table 2. Division of the purpose of the visits of foreigners and stateless persons to the country

Source: State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number of foreign citizens visiting Azerbaijan	2696,7	2849,6	3170,4	795,7
Total number of foreign citizens visiting Azerbaijan for tourism purposes	2454,0	2605,3	2863,5	519,4
recreation, entertainment tourism	839,3	1042,4	1164,0	164,9
business tourism	834,4	787,4	850,5	177,5
medical tourism	49,1	63,1	63,9	10,4
religious tourism	14,7	15,3	16,6	3,0
visit of relatives, friends	674,9	651,6	719,9	133,2
for other tourism purposes	41,6	45,5	48,6	30,4
for other purposes	242,7	244,3	306,9	276,3

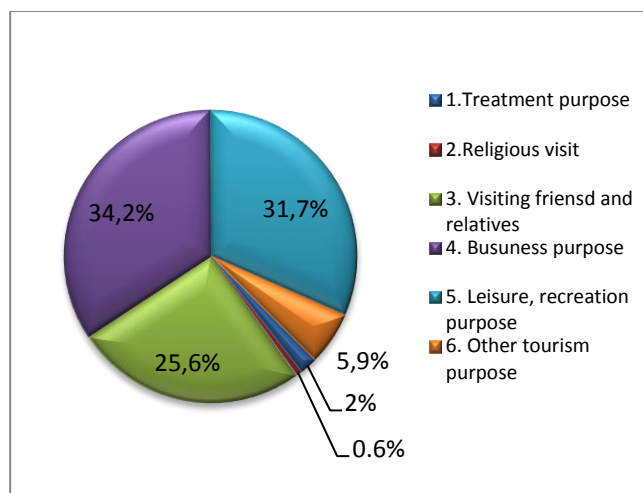


Fig. 2: Division of foreign tourists and stateless persons visiting Azerbaijan in 2020 for visit
Source: [11]

The purpose of visits of foreigners and stateless persons to Azerbaijan for 2014-2020 is shown in figures in Table 2, and in percent in Figure 2. As can be seen from the table, the number of visitors visiting Azerbaijan for touristic purposes was 2,159.7 thousand in 2014. In 2020, it amounted to 519.4 thousand people. So, in 2020, compared to 2014, the number of tourists decreased by 75.9 percent, or 1,640.3 thousand people. According to this indicator, the most tourists came to the country

in 2019 - 2,863.5 thousand people. So, in 2020, the number of tourists coming for recreation and entertainment was 164.9 thousand people. This accounted for 31.7 percent of total arrivals. The number of visitors visiting Azerbaijan for business tourism was 177.5 thousand people or 34.2% of total visitors; for treatment - 10.4 thousand people; for religious tourism - 3.0 thousand people; for visiting relatives and friends - 133.2 thousand people; for other tourism purposes - 30.4 thousand people. As you can see, tourism is mostly based on recreation and entertainment activities, business activities, and people visiting their relatives and friends.

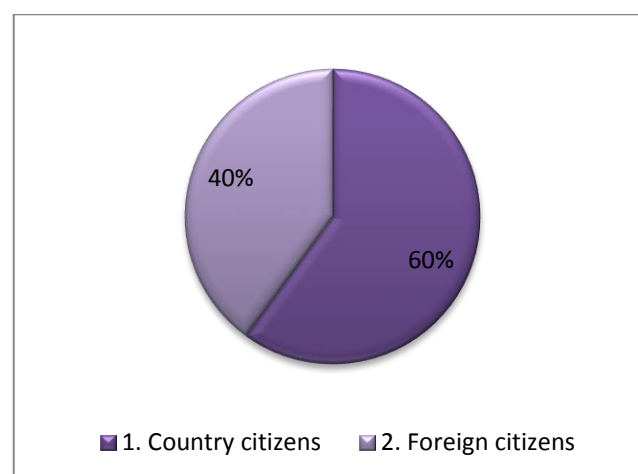


Fig. 3: Structure of persons accommodated in hotels and hotel-type establishments in 2020, in percent
Source: State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan

Figure 3 shows the number of local and foreign tourists staying in hotels in the country in 2020 as a percentage. With the help of figures provided by the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, it is possible to assess and analyze the tourism potential of Azerbaijan in general.

Health Tourism

Among the national natural resources of the country, recreational resources (mineral waters, healing mud, climate, etc.) and infrastructure have economic and social importance. The possibility of using these resources for medical and health tourism purposes is measured by providing the relevant economic factors (finance, production, personnel, etc.). With the use of natural spa-health resources, it is possible to treat chronic diseases, rehabilitate patients after clinical treatment, prevent rehabilitation and health, and take recreational measures. Mineral waters, various mud types, naphthalene oil, iodine-bromine, salt lakes, climate-landscape, and sandy beaches are examples of such natural healing resources [12].

In general, the international promotion of resort tourism products in Azerbaijan, the adjustment of prices to the market for competing countries, their promotion on the online platform, and the implementation of the SMM strategy in this area would have a greater economic impact. In the preparation of package tours especially to Naftalan, Galaalti Hotel & Spa, Yengija, Duzdagh, and Lankaran Springs Wellness Resort, it is important to present short, medium, and long-term products and to promote them internationally. At the same time, increasing the range of Naftalan oil-based cosmetic products and branding them accordingly will increase the demand for these products [12].

Shusha is very popular in our country as a climate treatment center. It is said to be superior to Davos Health Center in Switzerland due to the city's dry and clean air and the healing properties of ultraviolet rays. On the other hand, the natural mineral waters of Shirlan and Turshsu in Shusha and the priceless mountain views have been factors that increase the tourism potential of Shusha [13].

Religious tourism

Religious tourism, one of the oldest forms of tourism, has been associated with people's religious beliefs and encourages them to travel. This area is to meet the religious needs of people of different religions and to encourage them to travel and visit holy places to ensure their comfort. Lankaran district is rich in cultural and historical artifacts. There are also many religious centers. Religious centers in the region are visited by believers during various religious ceremonies and holidays. In particular, the people living in the Lankaran economic region are adherents of religious traditions and customs. The interest of foreign tourists in such places has been proven in international practice. From this point of view, the development of this type of tourism in the region is inevitable [14].

Historical Tourism

The main source of Azerbaijan's historical tourism is its rich historical and cultural heritage. Azerbaijan is one of the ancient human settlements. Azerbaijan's historical heritage and beauty, along with its natural resources, have attracted international attention. This potential country is distinguished by significant infrastructure - roads, economic, and financial opportunities for travel.

A detailed picture of the historical and cultural monuments of Azerbaijan is reflected in the list of real estate historical and cultural monuments on the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan under state protection. More than 6,300 monuments are named

here. Historical and cultural monuments testify to the historical development of the country.

The preparation and analysis of the general chronology of more than 430 historical and cultural monuments of the world and national importance in Azerbaijan demonstrate their dynamics and connection with the historical period. Icher Sheher, together with the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and Maiden's Tower, Gobustan State History and Art Reserve, as well as Khan Palace and the historical center of Shaki, are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Baku-Absheron, Guba-Khachmaz, Shirvan, Sheki-Zagatala, Ganja-Gazakh, Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Javad-Salyan, Lankaran-Astara, as well as the Caspian Sea, can be considered a historical tourist destination of Azerbaijan [15].

Haydar Aliyev Foundation

Moreover, Haydar Aliyev Foundation, which has been operating as a public institution since 2004, continues its multifaceted activities not only in Azerbaijan but also abroad. In recent years, the Foundation has restored the Cathedral in Strasbourg, France, the monuments in the park of the Palace of Versailles in Paris, France, and the tombs of St. Peter and Marcelina in Rome, Italy. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has modernized several educational institutions in the Netherlands, Russia, Pakistan, Georgia, Romania, Egypt, and other countries, supported the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of African countries, and signed dozens of global and advanced projects such as the Gabala International Music Festival. The victory of the Azerbaijani representatives in the Eurovision Song Contest 2011 and the activity of the foundation during the first European Games in Baku were at the forefront. At the same time, the Foundation is active in various fields for the formation of Azerbaijan's image in the international arena [16].

5 Conclusion

The concept of soft power has become a concept that has made a name for itself on academic and political platforms in recent years. It has been frequently encountered that simultaneously having soft power is defined as a criterion of success at the level of international relations. The measurement of a power category, which is used so intensely and presented as a measure of success in the foreign policy of states, has naturally become a subject that is included in international relations studies. In this context, many classifications have been made on the

sources of soft power, and different methodological experiments have been attempted on the measurement of soft power.

To increase the population of Azerbaijan over other countries, the tourism industry can also be used as a soft power tool. To do this, Azerbaijan needs to ensure its national security. Because, first of all, the basic condition for the realization of the tourism event is security. If there are wars, internal conflicts, and political turmoil in a country or region, there is a serious decrease in tourist arrivals to that area. The stability of the number of tourists visiting a country can also give a clue about the security and stability of that country. From this point of view, it is a soft power tool that determines the statistics of the country's tourism data and the perceptions about the security of the country. In other words, tourism activities feed the soft power potential of countries. At the same time, the soft power potentials of countries also feed tourism activities.

The main objective of the study is to emphasize the importance of the small state in terms of diversifying its foreign policy strategies.

With the resolution of the Karabakh problem to a great extent, the possibility of soft power elements to replace hard policies in the region is revealed.

When we examine the data of the Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee, we can see that the number of tourists increased even more in the period before the pandemic.

The geopolitical position of Azerbaijan and its favorable climate show that significant improvements can be made in this sense.

Besides, the tourism sector is important for Azerbaijan in terms of diversifying the economy and the development of the non-oil sector. The tourism sector will play an important role not only in foreign policy but also in reducing the budget's dependence on oil.

It is also possible to state that soft power is a process that should be evaluated by the countries of the region in terms of preventing war and maintaining peace.

It is possible to express the attractiveness factor in foreign policy and to use tourism as a tool in this respect as an important process.

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