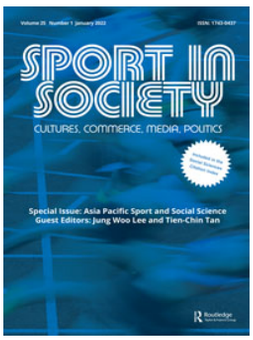

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Sport in Society
Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcss20

From sport-for-development to sports mega-events: conflict, authoritarian modernisation and statecraft in Azerbaijan

Joel Rookwood

To cite this article: Joel Rookwood (2021): From sport-for-development to sports mega-events: conflict, authoritarian modernisation and statecraft in Azerbaijan, Sport in Society, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2021.2019710

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.2019710

Published online: 23 Dec 2021.

SPORT IN SOCIETY
https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.2019710

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

From sport-for-development to sports mega-events: conflict, authoritarian modernisation and statecraft in Azerbaijan

Joel Rookwood

School of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

ABSTRACT

Azerbaijan has considerable energy resources and exports oil across the world. Some of the resultant wealth has been reinvested, primarily centralised in Baku and concentrated on specific projects. This has shaped ambitious nation-building efforts including staging major events. Baku hosted the 2019 men's UEFA Europa League final and four UEFA Euro 2020 matches. This article analyses these sporting events in relation to Azerbaijan's political system, providing a lens through which Azerbaijani statecraft and authoritarian modernisation is examined. It also explores a 2004 sport-for-development project implemented 320 kilometres from Baku. This juxtaposition and frame of reference emphasises some key issues facing Azerbaijan and contextualises the subsequent modernisation and impact of hosting events. Data are examined from interviews conducted in 2004, 2019 and 2021 comprising international aid workers, civilians, translators and event spectators. This longitudinal study investigates Azerbaijan's political context and conflicts, sport-for-development, energy wealth, modernisation projects, sports event hosting and statecraft.

KEYWORDS

Azerbaijan; sports mega-events; statecraft; sport-for-development; authoritarian modernisation

Introduction

The Republic of Azerbaijan is one of six independent Turkic states. It is located in the Caucasus, a geo-political region at the intersection of Europe and Asia, occupying an important geopolitical space as a land buffer between Russia and Iran. Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union but became independent in October 1991, shortly before the dissolution of the USSR. In 1993, Azerbaijan's president Abulfaz Elchibey was overthrown by a military insurrection. His successor Heydar Aliyev promised social order and territorial integrity, ruling the independent state for ten years. Shortly before his death, he appointed his son Ilham as his party's sole presidential candidate, who has served as president since 2003 (Sjoberg 2014). The country has been tainted by fraud, corruption, conflict and inequality (Öge 2014). It has also faced an ongoing nation-building dilemma, in search of a distinct national identity (Garagozov 2012).

CONTACT Joel Rookwood Jrookwood1@uclan.ac.uk

Azerbaijan has also experienced societal problems and ongoing political and militaristic struggles, involving multiple territorial disputes. The established pattern of antagonism between Azerbaijan and neighbouring Armenia in particular has fostered strained relations, notably regarding Nagorno-Karabakh (Cornell 2017). The struggle for the political and military control of this territory which lies within Azerbaijani borders came to define aspects of its national identity and remains heavily disputed (Askerov 2020). Beyond Baku, many Azerbaijani citizens have lived in relative poverty, whilst those residing in and near Nagorno-Karabakh have experienced sustained, fractious instability. Various international agencies have intervened, seeking to protect, relocate and promote the development of Azerbaijan's affected civilians. For instance, in 2004, an international, inter-agency programme was implemented aiming to support a rehoused community of approximately 10,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). I worked on this project, which involved installing a playground facility and implementing a football initiative in a newly constructed IDP camp in Mingachevir, 320 kilometres from the capital.

During this period, the Azerbaijani state also engaged in extensive mining of its energy resources, as an oil boom in Azerbaijan-controlled areas of the Caspian Sea saw a notable upturn in state wealth. The transition to concentrated oil production yielded remarkable economic development. Azerbaijan's GDP growth rose sharply after 2004, reaching 34.6 per cent in 2006 – the highest in the world – before subsiding from 2008 (Kalyoncu, Gürsoy, and Göcen 2013). Whilst this energy wealth fostered dependency on and vulnerability to fluctuating oil prices (demonstrated during their collapse in 2015 and 2016), there has been considerable if selective investment in Azerbaijan since 2005, facilitated by the profits secured from the oil boom (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Under Ilham Aliyev's leadership, Baku commenced a process of grand modernisation and event hosting projects, symbolised by the iconic Flame Towers and the Chrystal Hall, the latter becoming the venue for the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest. Inspired notably by the examples of UAE and Qatar, Azerbaijan has undertaken considerable state sponsorship and investment in sport and related events. Between 2013 and 2015 'Azerbaijan: Land of Fire' (the country's adopted motto) was the shirt sponsor of Spanish football club Atlético Madrid, coinciding with the club securing the 2014 La Liga title. This agreement was financed by Hafiz Mammadov, an Azeri oligarch and founder of the energy, transportation and infrastructure company the Baghlan Group, who has close ties to the Azerbaijani government. The partnership was designed to strengthen the branding of the club and 'promote the image of Azerbaijan' as 'a tool to achieve important goals. In other words, it was about public diplomacy and soft power' (Krzyzaniak 2018, 504).

The co-existence of conflict and poverty within Azerbaijan's interior and the extensive modernising and state building projects and event hosting activities in the capital render this a significant case study of twenty-first century statecraft, and the associated role of sport. This research builds upon the empirical investigations of authoritarian states who have invested significant resources to stage sports events, published in the recent edited collection on 'Sport, Statehood and Transition'. This includes Horák's (2020) study of Turkmenistan, Rodríguez-Díaz's research on Belarus, and particularly Rojo-Labaien (2020) examination of Azerbaijan. This article investigates Azerbaijan's portfolio of hosting sporting events and its state-building initiatives. It also explores the preceding lived experience of an Azeri community subjected to poverty and conflict, providing a juxtaposing frame of reference. 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted (via translators when required)

with international aid workers, civilians and translators during the IDP sport-for-development (SfD) project in 2004. Six further interviews were conducted with spectators who attended men's football events in Baku, namely the 2019 UEFA Europa League (UEL) final between Chelsea and Arsenal, and Wales' Euro 2020 matches against Switzerland and Turkey in 2021. Select extracts are presented here. The remainder of this article is structured around a political contextualisation of Azerbaijan, followed by an overview of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and an examination of the 2004 SfD programme in Mingachevir. The work then addresses Azerbaijan's energy wealth and key modernisation projects, before examining the state's event hosting profile and its use of sport in relation to statecraft.

The political context of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a sovereign Eurasian state bordered by Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Turkey and Iran, with a 713-kilometre Caspian Sea coastline. The territory was under Iranian control until the Russo-Persian War of 1804–1813, before being ruled by the Russian Empire. In 1918 the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic proclaimed its independence, becoming the first secular democratic Muslim-majority state, but was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920 as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The USSR was a centralised state that brought together multiple internal nationalities and ethnic groups under a common culture based on Marxism-Leninism (MacClancy 1996). Until 1991 it covered nearly one-sixth of the world's land surface, as the largest country on earth. More than 100 distinct nationalities lived within its borders, and its population numbered more than 290 million. The Soviet's strategic control of Azerbaijan was partly motivated by Azerbaijan's energy resources, which had seen it become one of the world's largest oil producers and a key provider for imperial Russia and the Soviet Union (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Economic stagnation, calls for reform and growing political unrest helped trigger a legislative conflict between the central Soviet government and several of its constituent republics in 1991, culminating in a declaration that the USSR no longer existed (Rodríguez-Díaz, Rookwood, and Rojo-Labaien 2020).

After the Cold War some former Soviet republics became part of the European Union and joined the NATO military alliance, others retained close links with Russia, forming part of newly formed multilateral organisations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Community, in the interests of military and economic cooperation (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Some post-communist governments focused their national projects according to Western criteria, transferring the power of the state to the market and democratising their political system. Many former Soviet republics also moved to socialise citizens with a specific national identity, as statecraft rooted in society. The 1990s proved a challenging and transitional decade for these governments, attempting to direct their economy towards capitalism and their political system towards democracy (Chatzigianni 2018). For newly formed post-Communist states like Azerbaijan, the first decade following independence was marked by extensive political, social and economic challenges and the absence of established order, giving rise in the twenty-first century to an expansion of 'single pyramid' autarchic power structures (Hale 2012, 127).

In 1993 Azerbaijan's democratically elected president Abulfaz Elchibey was overthrown by a military insurrection and succeeded by Heydar Aliyev. This was the fifth change of leadership in the first two years of the fledgling state – in contrast to the stable albeit troubled political continuity experienced since (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Aliyev promised social order

and territorial integrity, ruling for ten years before being succeeded by his son (Rasizade 2004). This transfer of power became the first top-level succession in the former Soviet Union (Sjoberg 2014). Ilham Aliyev has served as president since 2003, effectively eliminating all forms of pluralism. He was elected for a third term in 2018, allegedly receiving 86 per cent of votes, although Azerbaijan's electoral legitimacy and transparency has been questioned (Doyle 2019). The country has been tainted by various election frauds, rampant corruption, personality cults, ongoing conflict and economic inequality (Öge 2014). It also faces a persistent nation-building dilemma, in search of a national identity, in opposition to Armenia, aligned with Turkey and distinct from the politically articulated construct under the USSR (Garagozov 2012).

Azerbaijan is technically a secular country with a diverse ethnic composition, although approximately 97 per cent of the 10 million population identify as Muslim (Mammadov 2021). It also exports crude oil from the Caspian Sea to countries across the world, notably via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline that connects to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. This 1,768-kilometre pipeline was completed in 2005 and runs via Georgia, rather than the more direct route through Armenia. This reflects the strained relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia (German and Bayramov 2019). The recent history and politics of these states are intricately linked, often centred on the Nagorno-Karabakh region and war which continues to overshadow both countries. Azerbaijan has experienced multiple territorial disputes throughout its short independence. The Azerbaijani Lezghins and Talyshs failed in their respective attempts to create independent countries (Ter-Abrahamian 2005), but the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh defines aspects of Azerbaijan's national identity and international relations. Armenia also gained recognised independence in 1991. Unlike neighbouring Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan however, Armenia is a Christian country, and international divisions are evident on ethno-religious as well as socio-cultural lines. The pattern of antagonism between Azerbaijan and Armenia is shaped by Nagorno-Karabakh, where territorial ethnic violence has caused widespread death and displacement, and political and military control remains heavily disputed (Askerov 2020).

'Descending into the third world': the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and sport-for-development in Azerbaijan

The month before a SfD project was implemented for displaced Azeris from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2004, Rasizade published an article entitled 'Azerbaijan descending into the Third World after a decade of independence'. It references the 'non-petroleum anxieties of downtrodden masses… the pervasive bitterness and growing sense of deprivation that most citizens feel about their deteriorating lives', claiming 'Azerbaijan has been relegated to the category of a Third World nation… most Azeris live below the poverty line' (2004, 191). Azerbaijan's subsequent extensive if concentrated modernisation and its commitment to statecraft and international event hosting require contextualisation beyond beneficiaries in Baku. To that end, this section outlines the conflict, the affected IDP community and the SfD project.

Armenians suffered genocidal violence at the hands of the Ottoman Empire from 1915, with mass murder and ethnic cleansing resulting in approximately one million deaths (Kévorkian 2011), the recognition, impact, reparation and commemoration of which remains contested (Gzoyan and Galustyan 2021). For 36 days in 1918, Armenia and

Azerbaijan formed part of the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. Following its disintegration, Azerbaijan and Armenia both declared independence, laying claim to specific territories. Related disputes led to the Armenian-Azerbaijani War between 1918 and 1920, which concluded when both countries were annexed by the Soviet Union. During the majority of the Soviet period, relations remained generally peaceful (Broers 2021). In 1988, Armenians petitioned for 'miatsum', meaning unification and integration, as Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh voted to secede and join Soviet Armenia. This resulted in pogroms, notably in Baku, Sumgait and Kirovabad (now Ganja). In the early 1990s, independent Armenia changed its stance, claiming the right of self-determination for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (Askerov 2020).

The subsequent conflict escalated into full-scale warfare, producing more than 30,000 casualties and a million refugees and IDPs (Askerov 2020). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan gained internationally recognised territorial control of Nagorno-Karabakh according to the principle of international law known as *uti possidetis juris*, which preserves the boundaries of colonies emerging as independent states. This principle was developed to help avoid territorial disputes by establishing a new state's territorial heritage at the time of independence and transforming existing lines into internationally recognised borders (Shaw 1997). When Azerbaijan gained independence therefore, the boundaries it had within the Soviet Union became international borders. Armenians typically refer to the territory as Artsakh, usually preceded by 'the republic of' to infer its declared (but unrecognised) independence. It is technically an enclave within Azerbaijan, the only overland access to which is via the Lachin Corridor, a five-kilometre-wide mountain pass controlled by Russian peacemakers (Freizer 2014).

Askerov notes that 'Armenia and Azerbaijan have no diplomatic ties and continue to view each other as archenemies. The mediated talks… have not been successful, and many ceasefire violations have occurred in the conflict zone' (2020, 55). Thousands died and tens of thousands were displaced between September and November 2020 alone, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains ongoing at the time of writing (Open Society Foundations Armenia 2021). In 2020, ballistic missiles, drones and other heavy artillery were used, resulting in multiple civilian deaths and injuries. Hospitals, churches, kindergartens and schools were hit during the bombardment and missile attacks, which included the use of internationally banned cluster bombs (Amnesty International 2020). As a result of the intensive bombardment of Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani armed forces, by October 2020 half of the Karabakh population, mainly women, children, and the elderly, had been displaced to Armenia, further exacerbating the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in this region (Kazaryan et al. 2021).

Similarly, during the project in 2004 there were no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh was disputed, despite international mediation efforts. Azerbaijan had therefore begun relocating ethnically Azeri communities, initially in temporary housing situated in existing Azerbaijani settlements. This included the approximately 10,000 IDPs who were moved to Mingachevir, then a city of 95,000 people located 40 kilometres from and equidistant between Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh. An IDP can refer to a person who is forced to leave their home but who remains within their country's borders; technically, they continue under the protection of their government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement. IDPs are sometimes referred to as refugees,

although they do not fall within the legal definition of a refugee as they do not cross international borders (Janmyr 2017).

Various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have provided Azerbaijan's IDPs with humanitarian aid, shelter and social development programmes aiming to stabilise social order (Rookwood 2012). For instance, World Vision constructed 'temporary' IDP housing in Mingachevir in 2004. During this process, staff observed violence between locals and IDPs, partly fuelled by competition for resources. Many IDPs interviewed in 2004 were traumatised by the experience of living in and then being forced to leave Nagorno-Karabakh. One stated: 'We came from war, but it was home. We are desperate here. Azerbaijan is very poor. We have nothing.' World Vision partnered with Samaritan's Purse, who installed a playpark in the IDP camp, collaborating with local and IDP community members. Involving residents in such projects can help upskill those individuals, offering valuable experience, knowledge and an enhanced sense of purpose and confidence (Al Adem et al. 2018). Youth participation was encouraged as such groups can feel marginalised from development initiatives (Sommers 2003). The approach intended to promote social integration and cultural assimilation, although the activities this facility enabled could be framed more as 'play-for-development' (PfD) than SfD (Sterchele and Saint-Blancat 2015, 97). 'Playful' interactions can potentially help young people develop social, physical, cognitive, moral and emotional competencies (Lillard, Pinkham, and Smith 2011). This can positively affect self-esteem, self-worth and social integration, especially for those affected by conflict and discrimination (Hughes 2009). One resident said it was '…great to see children play together… in a park they have helped build. Makes them feel this is home.'

After the construction of the playpark at the IDP camp, a value-driven SfD football project was also implemented in a Mingachevir sports complex. Members of both communities were invited to participate in both initiatives. Cultivating shared and safe spaces can prove significant ingredients of effective SfD provision (Spaaij and Schulenkorf 2014). The local community leaders grouped the football players according to age and gender, but deliberately mixed them in terms of cultural background, in order to promote inter-community interaction (see Rookwood 2012). These community leaders helped oversee the promotion, registration and management of the programme and a subsequently established cross-community football project (Rookwood 2012). One of those interviewed stated: 'Football can bring people together and show these kids that we're all the same.' Numerous scholars have stressed the potential interpersonal benefits of SfD and PfD, such as promoting integration, community orientation and leadership skills (Stidder and Haasner 2007). Importantly, this depends on how such projects are devised, implemented, promoted and engaged in.

Several scholars have also critiqued such initiatives as top-down interventions informed by widespread but uncritical, under-researched ideas about the 'nature' of sport and its positive causal relationship with 'development'. The spectrum of impacts and interpretations of such sporting interactions can range from beneficial, inclusive engagement to potentially harmful activities that promote exclusion (Rookwood and Palmer 2011). The point here is not to overstate or even critique the approach, value and impact of such projects, but to outline that Azerbaijan in 2004 was a nation in which an ongoing conflict had caused deaths and displacement; that interventive humanitarian aid was deemed to be required, and development efforts were encouraged by government agencies. As one aid worker noted: 'Most of Azerbaijan is really poor. Some areas are pretty desperate. Meanwhile, they're

drilling for oil in the Caspian Sea. This country is about to get rich, *really* rich. what happens with the money? Will it benefit Mingachevir, Karabakh? Or will it all just stay in Baku?'

Authoritarian modernisation and the formation of a petro-state

Azerbaijan's petroleum resources have strongly influenced its development. This is particularly the case post-2004, although the state's oil industry has a long history. The world's first oil-drilled well was constructed near Baku in 1848. Following independence in the 1990s, Azerbaijan's political leaders perceived the most viable means of building the economy to involve revitalising the petroleum industry, which had declined during the Soviet period. By the turn of the century, Azerbaijan produced almost half of the world's oil (Heradstveit 2001). The government and the Azerbaijan International Operating Consortium signed the first production-sharing agreement in 1994. By 2009, more than 25 such agreements had been undertaken to develop onshore and offshore oil and gas deposits (Guliyev 2009). The BTC and South Caucasus pipelines facilitated extensive profitability. With all contracts negotiated with the president, many governments and foreign companies afforded the enriched regime considerable legitimacy, allowing public support to be purchased, undermining civil society institutions (Ciarreta and Nasirov 2012). Increased oil production rendered the emerging petro-state one of the world's fastest growing economies by 2009. However, Azerbaijan's overreliance on a single resource highlighted its vulnerability to boom-and-bust cycles of oil prices (Rojo-Labaien 2020).

An influx of foreign capital into enlarged public sectors of an economy can develop state capacities, although with private businesses dependent on government contracts, in Azerbaijan these were distributed to regime collaborators in return for political loyalty and support (Bedford 2014). Crony capitalism flourished, as the system which can involve politicians distributing economic favours to their personal connections (Reinsberg, Kentikelenis, and Stubbs 2021). Azerbaijan's petroleum revenues have been used to undermine its democratic institutions and free market structures, protecting authoritarian rule whilst leading to considerable patronage spending. This system distributes rents from oil exports through a patronage network, ensuring the support of allies and clientelist groups (Guliyev 2009). Leaders of oil-abundant states often use mineral riches to prolong political regimes (Vasilyeva and Libman 2020), and in Azerbaijan: 'Since the parliament has only a marginal political and oversight role, the president faces no constraints in spending the country's national wealth… Personalistic regimes are not the best candidates for democratization' (Guliyev 2009, 4). Revenues were re-invested, primarily funding Baku's extravagant modernisation.

Oil and natural gas resources produced 75 per cent of Azerbaijan's state revenues and 50 per cent of its GDP, but the decline in oil prices from 2014 yielded a 100 per cent currency devaluation in 2015 (Khalilzada 2019). Industrialization was heavily concentrated in oil--related sectors as others remain under-developed. Likewise, with most of the energy-driven modernisation projects concentrated in Baku, much of the country's interior was marginalised in the process (Ibadoghlu 2019a). Various ambitious building projects were undertaken, symbolised by Baku's iconic Flame Towers and the $350 million Chrystal Hall, the latter becoming the venue for the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest. Some projects are yet to be realised, notably Azerbaijan Tower, a visionary skyscraper intended to be the tallest building on earth, at a projected height of 1,051 metres with 189 floors. Azerbaijan has

prioritised sport event hosting, constructing various facilitates. Despite failed bids to host the 2016 and 2020 Olympiads, an 'Olympic Stadium' was constructed in Baku, providing the main venue for the 2015 European Games, and staging UEFA football matches in 2019 and 2021.

Some commentators frame Azerbaijan's stability and continuity as stagnation, others suggest there are signs of political modernisation (De Wall 2019). The president recently promoted a series of younger technocratic figures to his cabinet, and for the first time in twenty-five years, the country now has a prime minister, Ali Asadov. Yet what some consider steps towards progress, others frame as authoritarian modernisation (De Wall 2019). Attacks on democracy and liberty have strengthened Azerbaijan's oppressive political regime. Transparency International ranks the state 120th from 168 countries (Khalilzada 2019). It is also by far Europe's most restrictive country, with access to international broadcasting services strictly controlled. The 2021 Reporters Without Borders annual Press Freedom Index positioned Azerbaijan 167th from 180 countries globally. Kunti (2021) interviewed a Human Rights Watch representative, who stated: 'Almost a decade ago, Azerbaijan had one of the most vibrant civil societies in the region. It is almost completely decimated now. The laws it has adopted make the environment for NGOs restrictive. The country is closed for international scrutiny.' Furthermore: 'Azerbaijan has arrested government critics on various bogus and spurious charges. It has an issue of political prisoners. Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of media, freedom of association – those are all rights that are routinely violated in the country.'

Sports mega-events in Baku

The staging, investment, participation and consumption of sports mega-events (SMEs) have become increasingly significant components of the economic, political and cultural landscape of countries across the world (Rookwood 2021). The specific status of SMEs is often determined by their prominent scale, dramatic character, periodicity and widespread importance (Roche 2003). Global interest and impacts can be conveyed through attendance figures, viewer ratings and lucrative commercial and broadcasting contracts, fuelled by mass media exposure and social media engagements (Rookwood 2019). Depending on existing infrastructure, hosting SMEs can incur extensive investment including sports stadia, training facilities, hotels and transportation networks. Political support for such expenditure can be influenced by popular perceptions of sport and engagement in major events. Hosting SMEs can showcase infrastructure, culture and heritage, promote trade and investment, and shape international perceptions. Often envisioned as vehicles for nation branding, public diplomacy and/or soft power, the unintended negative impacts of contemporary event hosting can instead prove disempowering. The range of such outcomes may depend on how such events are presented, received, engaged in and represented by mass media outlets and on social media (Rookwood and Adeosun 2021).

Increases in national levels of sports participation and elite performance, sustained usage of purpose-built facilities and infrastructural investments and enhanced trade are often emphasised as intended SME legacies (Horák 2020). Quantitative projections of such benefits can underestimate costs whilst overstating potential advantages. Determining the details of investments can also prove challenging, particularly in states that lack reliably transparent accountability mechanisms. According to Rojo-Labaien (2018) Baku's staging

of the inaugural multi-sport European Games in 2015 incurred costs of $10 billion, with the opening and closing ceremonies alone costing a combined $235 million. By comparison, Belarus invested $180 million in hosting the 2019 European Games, for which its president was roundly criticized internationally (Rodríguez-Díaz 2020). Baku's sport facility construction included gymnastics, shooting and water sports centres. Azerbaijan also paid transportation and living expenses for the 6000 international athletes who competed from 50 European states. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Youth and Sports invested a further $1.2 billion hosting the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017 (Rojo-Labaien 2020).

Adopting Roche's framework, it is questionable whether such competitions constitute the status of 'mega-events'. However, Azerbaijan has also invested in high profile SMEs, staging the Formula One Grand Prix from 2016. Baku's Olympic Stadium has also hosted prestigious men's UEFA football events, namely the 2019 UEL final between Chelsea and Arsenal, and four Euro 2020 matches. The latter tournament was delayed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and restrictions were imposed on international visitors and stadium attendances, limiting prospects for impact and income generation. Such limitations affected most of the 11 eventual host cities of the collaboratively staged event, as well as other SMEs, notably the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 (Rookwood and Adeosun 2021). As examined in the next section, some scholars frame Baku's SME hosting profile in relation to statecraft, including attempts to acquire soft power and engage in sport diplomacy. Others highlight Azerbaijan's economic misappropriation, endemic corruption and low transparency and accountability standards; framing these events as attempts to whitewash a tarnished public image under the guise of modernisation by creating connections with global leaders in political, sporting and cultural spheres (Ibadoghlu 2019a). Reports of human rights violations continue to undermine diplomatic endeavours, revealing the absence of democratic processes in Azerbaijan (Rojo-Labaien 2020).

SOCAR (State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic) was a major UEFA sponsor for eight years prior to Euro 2020. Azerbaijan had limited previous exposure in football and SOCAR had no track record of football sponsorship (Kunti 2021). SOCAR secured the UEFA contract in 2013, after the expanded, multi-city, transnational tournament format was announced in 2012. In 2014 Baku was declared one of the successful host city bids (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Under scrutiny from pressure groups, UEFA formalised specific human rights criteria for tournament host nations in 2017, but to be applicable only from Euro 2024 (Kunti 2021). Articles 1 and 2(a) of the UEFA Statutes emphasise UEFA's political and religious neutrality, promoting football in Europe in a 'spirit of peace, understanding and fair play, without any discrimination on account of politics, gender, religion, race or any other reason' (UEFA 2018, 1). Some Azerbaijani clubs and personnel have ignored such stated rules and principles. After September 2020, when a military offensive against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh was launched, war propaganda became a feature of matchdays and the social media output of some football clubs. Following a Europa League game against Legia Warsaw in October 2020, Azerbaijani champions FK Qarabağ posted a photograph of 27 players and staff giving a military salute with the national flag. Qarabağ's head of Public Relations Nurlan Ibrahimov also published a Facebook post calling for Armenian men, women and children to be killed. UEFA issued a warning to Qarabağ and a lifetime ban to Ibrahimov (O'Conner 2021).

Six football supporters were interviewed for this research following UEFA matches in Baku. This comprised four English attendees of the pre-pandemic 2019 UEL final and two

Welsh interviewees who travelled to Azerbaijan for the COVID-19 era Euro 2020 tournament. These were male supporters each with considerable experience of having attended at least 20 away matches in European football competitions and were selected from the author's networks. UEFA's inflexible policy of refusing to relocate finals when domestic rivals qualify drew criticism in the British media in 2019. The stadiums of Arsenal and Chelsea are 13 kilometres apart, but fans had to travel 4,653 kilometres to Baku for the final. However, as one fan said: 'It's happened before when we [Chelsea] played Man United in Moscow, and then Bayern Dortmund in 2013. The Madrid teams in 2014 too. That's a UEFA thing. But loads of preparation and money goes into these events. You can't just switch venues last minute.' Another respondent stated: 'You want finals in places fans can get to.' Criticism directed at UEFA for holding the contest in Baku, a city the same fan labelled as 'a bit isolated', might seem West-Eurocentric. However, of the 60 UEFA men's Champions League and Europa League finals since the rebranding of the European Cup (i.e. from 1992–2021), only five teams from Eastern Europe have reached a final, and nine of these contests have been staged in Eastern Europe.

Before the postponement of Euro 2020 and the replacement of some host cities partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 locations were originally selected to host matches from as many countries. Environmental groups were critical of this organisational model, and the extensive travel involved. A single attendance at all 36 group games would have yielded 13.3 tonnes of CO^2 from travel alone, the equivalent to charging 1.7 million smartphones (Croke 2020). The schedule of the Swiss team ultimately incurred the most travel in the tournament, totalling 21,226 kilometres. UEFA partnered with global sustainability solutions provider South Pole, prioritising smart mobility and flight carbon compensation by pledging to plant 50,000 trees in each host nation to offset the effects of the estimated 280,000 tonnes of CO^2 emitted during the tournament (Croke 2020). When asked about environmental issues in the context of Euro 2020 one fan responded: 'The ones who really have a problem with pollution probably just don't go. We didn't choose Baku, UEFA did… If the whole tournament was in Baku, they'd have built more stadiums which wouldn't be used after, like [2022 World Cup hosts] Qatar… Co-hosting makes sense for smaller countries like Azerbaijan… they could have shared it with Turkey.'

A more central concern for fans at the 2019 UEL final however was the infrastructure and accessibility of international transport. Baku's Heydar Aliyev Airport was declared inadequate to receive the number of visitors expected for major European finals (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Unable to source flights, many supporters returned tickets or declined opportunities to travel. The state of the stadium and pitch was criticised, whilst Arsenal's defeat was compounded by the absence of Henrikh Mkhitaryan, their playmaker and Armenian national team captain, who refused to travel to Baku despite Azerbaijani and UEFA authorities making assurances about his safety (Lawrence and Ingle 2019). As one supporter stated however, with 'Qarabağ, who Chelsea have played in the Champions League, and now Baku getting finals, it's put Azerbaijan on the map… I knew nothing about them before.' Another respondent declared: 'We heard horror stories about human rights and restrictions in Azerbaijan. Maybe they're true, who knows? But the locals were friendly, police were ok. It was Chelsea [fans] you had to watch out for!'

Both interviewees who travelled to Euro 2020 expressed perspectives relating to COVID-19. One participant stated: 'Going to Baku wasn't just the first time to Azerbaijan. It was the first time I'd left Wales in fifteen months… It was surreal. You couldn't really go anywhere

in Baku, but it was great to get away.' Another Welsh supporter stated: 'Beating Turkey in Baku was immense. It was like a home game for them, as Azerbaijan and Turkey are like allies. But it wasn't really hostile, like Istanbul can be for football.' Wales' match against Switzerland had an attendance of 8,782 despite allowances for 31,000 spectators to attend Euro 2020 contests in Baku. The international media representation of the staging of matches in Azerbaijan focused primarily on attendances, accessibility and pandemic protocols. In other host cities coverage was partly consumed by controversies surrounding the Rainbow campaign and Black Lives Matters (BLM) protests. One supporter stated: 'The tournament will be remembered for COVID, but also the protests, and it kind of divided East and West. Fans in Hungary and Russia seemed to oppose the protests. Western Europe mostly supported them. Baku was a bit different.'

Exploring these particular host nations in such contexts yields useful insight into Azerbaijan's case. Russia decriminalised homosexuality in 2012 but passed a law in 2013 forbidding 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships' among minors (Kondakov and Shtorn 2021, 38). Reports of extrajudicial arrests, torture and killings of gay men in Russia's Chechen republic drew international condemnations in 2017 (Scicchitano 2021), and in 2020 voters backed constitutional amendments stating marriage is only between a man and a woman (Kondakov and Shtorn 2021). In Hungary an 'Anti-Paedophilia Act' was passed during Euro 2020 outlawing the promotion of homosexuality to minors, which critics claim conflates homosexuality with paedophilia (März 2021). Rainbow flags and colours have become international symbols of support for discriminated LGBTQIA + communities. UEFA prohibited the Euro 2020 venue in Munich from being floodlit in rainbow colours, declaring that as a 'neutral' organisation it was obliged to decline such a 'political' request (Evans 2021). This inspired various protests from supporters at matches and on social media. Several sponsors utilised rainbow colours at contests in June to coincide with LGBTQIA + Pride Month. Some advertisers discontinued the approach at matches in July, but other companies including UEFA partner Volkswagen continued, in solidarity with affected communities and in light of the emerging opposition. UEFA declared its support for the 'display of such messages of tolerance and respect for diversity' but stated that it 'requires its sponsors to ensure that their artwork is compliant with local legislation' (ESPN 2021, no page). UEFA banned advertising using the LGBTQIA + rainbow colours at the quarter-final matches in Russia and Azerbaijan, citing local laws.

Marketing professionals have long realised the significance and psychology of colour in advertisements, and the rainbow colours effectively served as both a marketing tool and point of cultural divergence at Euro 2020 (see Melton and MacCharles 2021). Partner agreements and regulations are typically established well in advance of SMEs, but such events are usually simplified by confining them to one or two countries, thus imposing a fixed, consistent legal and cultural framework. Given the fluid pandemic context, the final list of eventual host cities was not confirmed until seven weeks before the tournament, which then took place across eleven diverse countries. The currency of Pride Month, the volume of support and opposition for expressions of LGBTQIA + rights, the associated politicisation and controversy, the involvement of multiple national partners, the development of and opposition to related legislation and the adoption of different positions and means of expression rendered this a complex and changeable situation. A supporter who attended matches in Baku stated:

> 'We didn't see or hear any problems. Azerbaijan's a Muslim country. A bit like going to Dubai, you know there's laws on homosexuality. It wasn't really talked about… If Baku had more games and more fans went it might have shined more of a spotlight on them. But all the noise was about Hungary because their fans were so vocal, and with their prime minister passing laws during the tournament, no one was talking about oppression in Azerbaijan.'

Revealing legislative detail and exposing the extent of such 'oppression' in Azerbaijan can prove challenging, especially for outsiders. Azerbaijan's government has waged an 'increasingly vicious crackdown on critics and dissenting voices. The space for independent activism, critical journalism, and opposition political activity has been virtually extinguished by the arrests and convictions of many activists, human rights defenders, and journalists, as well as by laws and regulations restricting the activities of independent groups and their ability to secure funding' (Human Rights Watch 2017, no page). Azerbaijan decriminalized same-sex conduct in 2000, but its police have since conducted a 'violent campaign, arresting and torturing men presumed to be gay or bisexual, as well as transgender women' (ibid). This report referrers to an Internal Affairs ministry spokesman who confirmed that police had detained 83 people 'who do not fit our nation, our state, our mentality', arguing that such responses were justified, citing 'citizens' concerns' and employing public health scare tactics, claiming some detainees tested positive for HIV and that the measures were to 'prevent dangerous contagious diseases from spreading' (ibid).

Euro 2020 also saw support for, disengagement from and opposition to athlete activism through the BLM protests. Some teams adopted a collective, consistent approach, communicating a rationale for players who decided to or refrained from 'taking the knee'. Other teams knelt but only before selected matches and warmups, or if their opponents did, or if they were requested to do so. Some players stood as teammates knelt with some spectacles descending into political incidents. One fan interviewed argued: 'It sent out mixed messages. A bit of a PR mess for some. It kind of diluted it… But you could tell which teams definitely supported [taking the knee] and who definitely weren't going to. The further east you went the less likely they'd kneel. Some fans booed it, especially in Eastern Europe.' England, Wales, Belgium and Denmark knelt before all of their matches. Italy, France, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands and Austria declined to do so or did so selectively. Hungary, Croatia, Russia, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia did not kneel at all. Some of these teams, such as the Czechs, pointed to the UEFA 'Respect' inscription on their shirts instead, communicated as generic support for antidiscrimination. Others were more disparaging of the protests. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said the fight against racism 'has no place on a sports field', claiming 'it is not a solution' to impose a moral and historical 'burden' in a country like Hungary which 'has never been concerned with the slave trade', adding: 'If you are invited to a country, make the effort to understand its culture and do not provoke local residents' (Euronews 2021, no page). In keeping with such 'diplomacy', Hungary fans marched with an anti-kneeling banner and displayed such flags during matches. Some also booed players for kneeling, a response evident in other stadiums.

Wales beat Turkey in a crucial group game in Baku in front of more than 30,000 supporters. Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan are often encapsulated by the term 'two states but one nation' (Beilinson 2019, 137), and a Welsh supporter interviewed stated: 'With so few Wales fans and Turkey being like brothers with Azerbaijan I was worried about it being hostile. But it was great. And both teams took the knee before the match. No sign of any racism like other host cities.' Azerbaijan and Romania were the only countries who

hosted matches yet whose national teams failed to qualify, but as the same respondent argued: 'All the grounds mostly had fans from that country… with so many Azerbaijanis in the ground, they were on show, their attitudes. And they didn't boo the knee, or boo players like [Ethan] Ampadu… If I was black, I'd feel safer watching football in Baku than Budapest.' The extensive range of diverse tournament locations provided frames of reference for supporters and broadcasters, and the controversy surrounding some cities helped deflect criticism that may otherwise have been directed at other states. According to one interviewee: 'For tabloids and even TV, controversy sells. But no one was talking about Azerbaijan's human rights because fans and politicians in other countries were more interested or more against the rainbow and Black Lives Matter. Maybe Azerbaijan got lucky that countries like Hungary and Russia took the heat.'

Whilst this research gives voice to supporters who attended games in Baku, the perspectives of such a limited number of fans could not be considered necessarily representative of or generalisable to broader populations. Such inherent problems with qualitative methodologies can be mitigated to some degree by combining approaches with processes that facilitate a broader examination, namely search engine analysis. There is only space for brief consideration here. However, at the time of writing, Google searches for 'Euro 2020', 'Azerbaijan Euro 2020' and 'Baku Euro 2020' returned 1.8 billion, 60.4 million and 11.5 million hits respectively, reflecting significant tournament and national exposure; whereas such searches for 'Euro 2020 Azerbaijan corruption' and 'Azerbaijan Euro 2020 whitewashing' returned a respective 4.7 million and 312,000 hits. 'Euro 2020 take the knee' produced 119 million hits, whilst 'Euro 2020 Rainbow' and 'Hungary Euro 2020 Rainbow' returned 54.6 million and 7.8 million hits respectively, reflecting the contextual and political focus on the BLM and LGBTQIA + protests and controversies. This may only represent a brief and broad snapshot, but it does indicate the scale and relativity of popular emphasis.

Sport, statecraft and repression in Azerbaijan

For SME host nations, key objectives typically include staging safe, profitable, memorable and innovative events with sustainable outcomes and legacies which promote sport participation and performance, facilitating modernisation, trade, tourism and revenue growth (Rookwood 2021). However, as with the example of Turkmenistan examined by Horák (2020), Azerbaijan is a resource-rich, authoritarian state that focuses on nation-building, identity formation and other concerns of statecraft in this context. It could be argued that Azerbaijan prioritises domestic control and international influence over return on investment or sport development (Rodríguez-Díaz, Rookwood, and Rojo-Labaien 2020). Azerbaijan finished second in the medal table behind Russia at the 2015 European Games and has invested in its sports infrastructure, but is yet to construct a sustained, internationally renowned sporting culture. The global consumption of mass media coverage as well as social media engagements relating to SMEs can also shape international public opinion and acquisitions of soft power through nation branding and public diplomacy initiatives. In practice, rather than serving as neatly distinct constructs such notions can overlap and prove difficult to articulate, differentiate and measure, whilst attempts to use SMEs in such contexts can have different connotations domestically compared with attempts to exert international influence (Rookwood and Adeosun 2021).

The formation of modern political identities in the post-Soviet sphere is often connected to pursuits of global recognition, including hosting international events (Ismayilov 2012a). Internally, sport-related nationalism can elicit patriotism, and the involvement of 16,000 citizens as volunteers at the 2015 European Games can be seen to reflect a degree of social support for such projects (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Hosting mega-events is particularly significant in Azerbaijan in order to shape national identity, foster patriotism and consolidate power (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2016). This reflects the government's commitment to accentuate national culture and political legitimacy internally and internationally (Ismayilov 2012b). Imposed nation-building policies and practices, implemented through the construction of patriotic landmarks and modern architectural developments are intended to convey the power of the state and its authoritarian president. When it was erected in 2010, the 162-metre-tall flagpole bearing the Azerbaijan flag at Baku's National Flag Square was the highest in the world.

Aspects of post-Soviet Azerbaijan's political culture have remained anchored in Soviet-era features of subordination, reinforced by oppressive, authoritarian leadership, a high dependency on the federal centre and a weakened civil society, producing a pervasive climate of fear among citizens (Rojo-Labaien 2020). Ilham Aliyev's cult of personality and 'clientelistic' presidential system have existed for the majority of Azerbaijan's contemporary statehood, with a strictly unidirectional rule imposed to consolidate the power of the regime and stabilise the country (Hale 2012, 75). This has secured the status of a monolithic elite as the dominant actor over the country's considerable energy resources, over which the government exerts complete control (Gel'man 2008). This in turn has helped shape complex and ambitious nation-building projects, pertinently conveyed through Azerbaijan's event hosting profile.

The limitations imposed by pandemic protocols confined the engagement and impact of Euro 2020 in Baku, whilst one-off contests such as the 2019 UEL final limit the timeframe of international exposure for host cities. Despite the profile of these SMEs therefore, their impact on international public perception was restricted in these cases. However, so too therefore were the prospects for negative publicity. The efforts to acquire soft power, engage in public diplomacy and promote nation branding may have been curtailed, but the unintended and unwelcome outcomes of soft disempowerment, weakened diplomatic ties and critically dissenting voices were also less pervasive (see Brannagan and Rookwood 2016). The 2015 European Games provides a useful frame of reference. It lacked the prestige of the UEFA events, but it did afford Azerbaijan full control, concentrating the focus accordingly. The European Games revealed greater insight into the apparatus of oppression in Azerbaijan: Prior to its inception, the widespread repression of dissent saw numerous regime opponents arrested, whilst many of the remaining NGOs located in Baku were forcibly closed; some western journalists were prevented from entering the country to report on the event; various independent media outlets were closed down; and those who remained operational were subject to close surveillance by national security personnel and feared publishing negative reports, as the event was perceived as a project of Azerbaijan's First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva (Rojo-Labaien 2020).

The Aliyev regime exerts rigid control over mass media outlets which remain the principle means of transmitting information to the Azerbaijani population. This also served to restrict the expression of opposition to the state (Pearce 2014). The 1995 constitution formally declares Azerbaijan a democratic country, yet civil liberties have since eroded severely,

shaped by the overriding dogma of stability (Bedford 2014). Azerbaijan's model of governance is presented relative to the perceived position of neighbouring states: 'Call it stability or call it stagnation, but in recent years Azerbaijan has been an island of unchanging continuity as its neighbors, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, and Turkey, have seen tumultuous change' (De Wall 2019, no page).

Conclusion

Azerbaijan is situated at a geopolitical and ethno-cultural intersection. Its Eurasian location shapes a complex range of diverse international influences within and beyond the Caucasus. It borders powerful states such as Russia and Iran, whilst lacking diplomatic relations and open borders with neighbouring Armenia. Azerbaijan's membership to various international political and sporting institutions brings it into contact with numerous entities, whilst its network of partners connected to its lucrative oil industry have helped establish its position on the world stage. The wealth accrued from energy resources has been utilised to consolidate the power and legitimacy of the president and his established monolithic and clientelistic political regime, whilst marking complex and ambitious nation-building projects. The inherited Soviet features of subordination reinforced by oppressive rule have also seen the eradication of pluralism and democratic structures throughout Azerbaijan, whilst the authoritarian modernisation has limited expenditure to Baku.

The concentration of resources and decision-making power has further marginalised those inhabiting the country's interior, where living standards belie the image presented to international audiences through the portfolio of sport sponsorship and event hosting. Some emphasise Azerbaijan's endemic corruption, economic misappropriation and low accountability and transparency standards, framing sport event hosting as attempts to whitewash Azerbaijan's public image under the guise of modernisation by creating connections with international leaders in political and sporting spheres (Ibadoghlu 2019a). The extensive investment in infrastructure and architecture reflect the quest for international recognition, intended to build and transmit Azerbaijan's modernity to the world, and ultimately leverage political influence within and beyond the Caucasus. Two successive but unsuccessful bids to host the Olympic Games testify to the regime's ambition but also the lack of necessary infrastructure and influence. After staging the inaugural European Games, more prestigious sport sponsorships and events were prioritised, notably Formula One and UEFA's 2019 UEL final and Euro 2020 football events. The state was largely spared consequences of soft disempowerment by the racial and sexual inequality controversies that dominated narratives of the latter tournament, primarily centred on other host cities. It remains to be seen whether the return warrants Azerbaijan's considerable investment of state funds and whether subsequent sport event hosting opportunities will be pursued in Baku.

Azerbaijan's wealth has been transformed within the timeframe of this research (2004–2021) which also spans the presidency of Ilham Aliyev. However, relatively little in the way of state resources have been transferred to the general population. The problem is encapsulated by a recent paper by Ibadoghlu (2019b) entitled 'State oil fund of Azerbaijan: huge spending and overwhelming poverty', which states that Azerbaijan spent $100 billion between 2001–2018, and yet the average monthly salary in the country in 2019 was $318. Even in major cities much of the population experience poverty, unemployment and inadequate access to clean water, healthcare, education and transportation systems, and in

remote regions the situation is even worse (Ibadoghlu 2019b). Azerbaijan's often neglected and marginalised interior can be difficult to access. This article gives voice to an admittedly limited number of perspectives of those living in its fifth most populous city expressed in 2004, six months after the appointment of President Ilham Aliyev. This offers a geographical, cultural, conceptual and historical frame of reference. Given the diverse focus of this paper there was limited space available to emphasise details of participant perspectives, but it does give voice to a small number of those impacted by the experience and collective memory of war. It also demonstrates that Azerbaijan was, as recently as 2004, 'descending into the Third World after a decade of independence' (Rasizade 2004, 191); a state that welcomed interventive humanitarian aid and development initiatives in response to what is an ongoing conflict that continues to cause death and displacement.

75 per cent of Azerbaijanis live outside of the capital, and much of the population remains impoverished, alienated by or at least marginalised from the statecraft concerns and grand investment projects in Baku. These co-exist alongside a darker reality, the Azerbaijan of poor and displaced people living in underfunded and even splintered communities. Aside from hosting future sports events, the empowerment of civil society – including the protection of basic human rights and the provision of the minimum standards of wellbeing – may well remain elusive until issues of the dogmatic stabilisation of the state, the oppressive authoritarian political infrastructure, the centralised expenditure of national wealth and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are resolved, all which are firmly entrenched in the contemporary national narrative.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Joel Rookwood http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6510-4519

References

Al Adem, Samar, Paul Childerhouse, Temitope Egbelakin, and Bill Wang. 2018. "International and Local NGO Supply Chain Collaboration: An Investigation of the Syrian Refugee Crises in Jordan." *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management* 8 (3): 295–322. doi:10.1108/JHLSCM-05-2017-0020.

Amnesty International. 2020. "Armenia/Azerbaijan: Civilians must be protected from use of banned cluster bombs." October 5. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/10/armenia-azerbaijan-civilians-must-be-protected-from-use-of-banned-cluster-bombs/.

Askerov, Ali. 2020. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Beginning of the Soviet End." In *Post-Soviet Conflicts: The Thirty Years' Crisis*, edited by Ali Askerov, Stephan Brooks and Lasha Tchantouridzé, 55–82. New York: Lexington Books.

Bedford, Sofie. 2014. "Political Mobilization in Azerbaijan – the January 2013 Protests and Beyond." *Demokratizatsiya* 22 (1): 2–14.

Beilinson, Orel. 2019. "Turkish-Azerbaijani Relations. One Nation – Two States?" *Südosteuropa* 67 (1): 137–139. doi:10.1515/soeu-2019-0009.

Brannagan, Paul, and Joel Rookwood. 2016. "Sports Mega-Events, Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: International Supporters' Perspectives on Qatar's Acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Finals." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 8 (2): 173–188. doi:10.1080/19406940.2016.1150868.

Broers, Lawrence. 2021. *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a Rivalry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Chatzigianni, Efthalia. 2018. "Global Sport Governance: Globalizing the Globalized." *Sport in Society* 21 (9): 1454–1482. doi:10.1080/17430437.2017.1390566.
Ciarreta, Aitor, and Shahriyar Nasirov. 2012. "Development Trends in the Azerbaijan Oil and Gas Sector: Achievements and Challenges." *Energy Policy* 40: 282–292. doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2011.10.002.
Cornell, Svante. 2017. "Turkey's Role: Balancing the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict and Turkish-Armenian Relations." In *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict*, edited by Svante Cornell, 89–105. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Croke, Ruaidhrí. 2020. "Dublin to Baku: What's the cost of Euro 2020 for the planet?" *Irish Times*, January 14. https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/international/dublin-to-baku-what-s-the-cost-of-euro-2020-for-the-planet-1.4138492.
De Wall, Thomas. 2019. "Is Change Afoot in Azerbaijan?" *Carnegie Europe*, November 5. https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/80271.
Doyle, Paul. 2019. "Why did UEFA hand Azerbaijan Hosting Rights for the Europa League final?" *The Guardian*, May 16. https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/may/16/uefa-handed-azerbaijan-europa-league-final-baku-chelsea-arsenal.
ESPN. 2021. "Euro 2020: UEFA bans rainbow advertising at two quarterfinals." *ESPN*, July 3. https://www.espn.com/soccer/uefa-european-championship/story/4425446/euro-2020-uefa-bans-rainbow-advertising-at-two-quarterfinals.
Euronews. 2021. "Europe divided on taking the knee during EURO 2020." *Euronews*, June 11. https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/11/europe-divided-on-taking-the-knee-during-euro-2020-football-tournament.
Evans, Simon. 2021. "UEFA Prohibits 'Rainbow' Protest at Germany vs Hungary Game." *Reuters*, June 23. https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/uefa-turn-down-request-rainbow-lights-munich-2021-06-22/.
Freizer, Sabine. 2014. "Twenty Years after the Nagorny Karabakh Ceasefire: An Opportunity to Move towards More Inclusive Conflict Resolution." *Caucasus Survey* 1 (2): 109–122. doi:10.1080/23761199.2014.11417295.
Garagozov, Rauf. 2012. "Azerbaijani History and Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods: Challenges and Dilemmas." *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 5 (2): 136–142. doi:10.1080/17467586.2012.743030.
Gel'man, Vladimir. 2008. "Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire? Post-Soviet Regime Changes in Comparative Perspectives." *International Political Science Review* 29 (2): 157–180. doi:10.1177/0192512107085610.
German, Tracey, and Agha Bayramov. 2019. "The (Re)-Politicisation of International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space." *East European Politics* 35 (2): 117–121. doi:10.1080/21599165.2019.1614920.
Guliyev, Farid. 2009. "Oil Wealth, Patrimonialism, and the Failure of Democracy in Azerbaijan." *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 2: 2–5. https://ssrn.com/abstract=1329483.
Gzoyan, Edita, and Regina Galustyan. 2021. "Forced Marriages as a Tool of Genocide: The Armenian Case." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25 (10): 1724–1743. doi:10.1080/13642987.2021.1874361.
Hale, Henry. 2012. "Two Decades of Post-Soviet Regime Dynamics." *Demokratizatsiya* 20 (2): 71–77.
Heradstveit, Daniel. 2001. "Democratic Development in Azerbaijan and the Role of the Western Oil Industry." *Central Asian Survey* 20 (3): 261–288. doi:10.1080/02634930120095312.
Horák, Slavomír. 2020. "Sports Politics in Authoritarian Regimes: The Synergies of Sport, Ideology and Personality Cult in Turkmenistan." In *Sport, Statehood and Transition in Europe: Comparative Perspectives from Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist Societies*, edited by Ekain Rojo-Labaien, Álvaro Rodríguez-Díaz, and Joel Rookwood, 250–267. London: Routledge.
Hughes, Fergus P. 2009. *Children, Play and Development*. London: Sage.

Human Rights Watch. 2017. "Azerbaijan – anti-gay crackdown: Gay men, transgender women tortured to extort money, intelligence." *Human Rights Watch*, October 3. https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/03/azerbaijan-anti-gay-crackdown.
Ibadoghlu, Gubad. 2019a. "Corrupt and Flashy Events Disguised as Modernization in Azerbaijan." *Crude Accountability*, September 13. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3489634.
Ibadoghlu, Gubad. 2019b. "State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan: Huge Spending and Overwhelming Poverty." *Social Science Research Network*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3489617.
Ismayilov, Murad. 2012a. "The Impact of Energy Resources on Nation-and State-Building: The Contrasting Cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia." In *Beyond the Resource Curse*, edited by Brenda Shaffer and Taleh Ziyadov, 203–224. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Ismayilov, Murad. 2012b. "State, Identity, and the Politics of Music: Eurovision and Nation-Building in Azerbaijan." *Nationalities Papers* 40 (6): 833–851. doi:10.1080/00905992.2012.742990.
Janmyr, Maja. 2017. "No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 29 (3): 438–465. doi:10.1093/ijrl/eex026.
Kalyoncu, Husyhin, Faruk Gürsoy, and Hasan Göcen. 2013. "Causality Relationship between GDP and Energy Consumption in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia." *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy* 3 (1): 111–117.
Kazaryan, Airazat M., Bjørn Edwin, Ara Darzi, Gevorg N. Tamamyan, Mushegh A. Sahakyan, Davit L. Aghayan, Åsmund A. Fretland, Sheraz Yaqub, and Brice Gayet. 2021. "War in the Time of COVID-19: Humanitarian Catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia." *The Lancet. Global Health* 9 (3): E243–244. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30510-6.
Kévorkian, R. 2011. *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. London: I.B. Taurus.
Khalilzada, Javadbay. 2019. "Modernization and Social Change in Azerbaijan: Assessing the Transformation of Azerbaijan through the Theories of Modernity." *New Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (2): 167–188. doi:10.29311/nmes.v9i2.3274.
Kondakov, Alexander, and Evgeny Shtorn. 2021. "Sex, Alcohol and Soul: Violent Reactions to Coming out after the 'Gay Propaganda' Law in Russia." *The Russian Review* 80 (1): 37–55. doi:10.1111/russ.12297.
Krzyzaniak, John S. 2018. "The Soft Power Strategy of Soccer Sponsorships." *Soccer & Society* 19 (4): 498–515. doi:10.1080/14660970.2016.1199426.
Kunti, Samindra. 2021. "Azerbaijan's sportswashing culminates with Euro 2020 quarterfinal." *Forbes*, July 3. https://www.forbes.com/sites/samindrakunti/2021/07/03/azerbaijans-sportswashing-culminates-with-euro-2020-quarterfinal/?sh=69433fdcc1b1.
Lawrence, Amy, and Sean Ingle. 2019. "Arsenal's Henrikh Mkhitaryan to miss the Europa League final over safety fears." *The Guardian*, May 21. https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/may/21/arsenal-henrikh-khitaryan-miss-europa-league-final-safety-chelsea-baku.
Lillard, Angeline, Ashley M. Pinkham, and Eric Smith. 2011. "Pretend Play and Cognitive Development." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development*, edited by Usha Goswami, 285–311. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.
MacClancy, Jeremy. 1996. *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg.
Makarychev, Andrey, and Alexander Yatsyk. 2016. *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Mammadov, Rashad. 2021. "Political Activist, Citizen's Helper, and Entertainer: A Study of Professional Role Perception of Journalists in Azerbaijan." *Journalism Practice* 15 (7): 911–936. doi:10.1080/17512786.2020.1758189.
März, Julian W. 2021. "Hungary's New Anti-LGBTQ Law: The Medical Profession Must Speak out about the Harm it does to LGBTQ Adolescents' Health." *The Lancet Regional Health. Europe* 8: 100199. doi:10.1016/j.lanepe.2021.100199.
Melton, E. Nicole, and Jeffrey D. MacCharles. 2021. "Examining Sport Marketing through a Rainbow Lens." *Sport Management Review* 24 (3): 421–438. doi:10.1080/14413523.2021.1880742.
O'Conner, Robert. 2021. "Azerbaijan accused of using football as an instrument of war – so should UEFA be taking the Euros there this summer?" *inews*, March 26. https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/euro-2020-fixtures-azerbaijan-uefa-political-concerns-931949.

Öge, Kerem. 2014. "The Limits of Transparency Promotion in Azerbaijan: External Remedies to 'Reverse the Curse." *Europe-Asia Studies* 66 (9): 1482–1500. doi:10.1080/09668136.2014.956448.
Open Society Foundations Armenia. 2021. "Request to revoke Azerbaijan's hosting rights of UEFA Euro 2020 games in Baku." *Open Society Foundations Armenia*, June 10. https://www.osf.am/2021/06/request-to-revoke-azerbaijans-hosting-rights-of-uefa-euro-2020-games-in-baku/.
Pearce, Katy. 2014. "Two Can Play at That Game: Social Media Opportunities in Azerbaijan for Government and Opposition." *Demokratizatsiya* 22: 39–66.
Rasizade, Alec. 2004. "Azerbaijan Descending into the Third World after a Decade of Independence." *Journal of Third World Studies* 21: 191–219.
Reinsberg, Bernhard, Alexander Kentikelenis, and Thomas Stubbs. 2021. "Creating Crony Capitalism: Neoliberal Globalization and the Fuelling of Corruption." *Socio-Economic Review* 19 (2): 607–634. doi:10.1093/ser/mwz039.
Roche, Maurice. 2003. "Mega Events, Time and Modernity: On Time Structures in Global Society." *Time & Society* 12 (1): 99–126. doi:10.1177/0961463X03012001370.
Rodríguez-Díaz, Álvaro, Joel Rookwood, and Ekain Rojo-Labaien. 2020. "Interpreting Sport and Transition in Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist Europe: States, Nations and Markets." In *Sport, Statehood and Transition in Europe: Comparative Perspectives from Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist Societies*, edited by Ekain Rojo-Labaien, Álvaro Rodríguez-Díaz, and Joel Rookwood, 1–8. London: Routledge.
Rodríguez-Díaz, Álvaro. 2020. "Sport in the Political and Economic Transition in Belarus: State Nationalism and Mega Events." In *Sport, Statehood and Transition in Europe: Comparative Perspectives from Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist Societies*, edited by Ekain Rojo-Labaien, Álvaro Rodríguez-Díaz, and Joel Rookwood, 179–197. London: Routledge.
Rojo-Labaien, Ekain. 2018. "The Baku 2015 European Games as a National Milestone of post-Soviet Azerbaijan." *Nationalities Papers* 46 (6): 1101–1117. doi:10.1080/00905992.2018.1488826.
Rojo-Labaien, Ekain. 2020. "Oil-Funded Sports Events as the Embodiment of the Evolution of post-Soviet Azerbaijan." In *Sport, Statehood and Transition in Europe: Comparative Perspectives from Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist Societies*, edited by Ekain Rojo-Labaien, Álvaro Rodríguez-Díaz, and Joel Rookwood, 233–249. London: Routledge.
Rookwood, Joel. 2012. "Constructing Peace and Fostering Social Integration through Sport and Play in Azerbaijan." In *Sports, Governance, Development and Corporate Responsibility*, edited by Barbara Segaert, Merc Theeboom, Christiane Timmerman and Bart Vanreusel, 30–43. New York: Routledge.
Rookwood, Joel. 2019. "Access, Security and Diplomacy: Perceptions of Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Organisational Challenges Facing Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup." *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal* 9 (1): 26–44. doi:10.1108/SBM-02-2018-0016.
Rookwood, Joel. 2021. "Diversifying the Fan Experience and Securitising Crowd Management: A Longitudinal Analysis of Fan Park Facilities at 15 Football Mega Events between 2002 and 2019." *Managing Sport and Leisure* 27: 1–19. doi:10.1080/23750472.2021.1985596.
Rookwood, Joel, and Kola Adeosun. 2021. "Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: Japan's 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020(21) Olympics, a Global Economic Downturn and COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Global Sport Management* 7: 1–21. doi:10.1080/24704067.2021.1871860.
Rookwood, Joel, and Clive Palmer. 2011. "Invasion Games in War-Torn Nations: Can Football Help to Build Peace?" *Soccer & Society* 12 (2): 184–200. doi:10.1080/14660970.2011.548356.
Scicchitano, Dominic. 2021. "The "Real" Chechen Man: Conceptions of Religion, Nature, and Gender and the Persecution of Sexual Minorities in Postwar Chechnya".*Journal of Homosexuality* 68 (9): 1545–1562. doi:10.1080/00918369.2019.1701336.
Shaw, Malcolm N. 1997. "The Heritage of States: The Principle of 'Uti Possidetis Juris' Today." *British Yearbook of International Law* 67: 75–154. doi:10.1093/bybil/67.1.75.
Sjoberg, Fredrik M. 2014. "Autocratic Adaptation: The Strategic Use of Transparency and the Persistence of Election Fraud." *Electoral Studies* 33: 233–245. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2013.08.004.
Sommers, Marc. 2003. *Urbanization, War and Africa's Youth at Risk: Towards Understanding and Addressing Future Challenges*. Washington, D.C: United States Agency for International Development.

Spaaij, Ramon, and Nico Schulenkorf. 2014. "Cultivating Safe Space: Lessons for Sport-for-Development Projects and Events." *Journal of Sport Management* 28 (6): 633–645. doi:10.1123/jsm.2013-0304.

Sterchele, Daniel, and Chantal Saint-Blancat. 2015. "Keeping It Liminal. The Mondiali Antirazzisti (anti-Racist World Cup) as a Multifocal Interaction Ritual." *Leisure Studies* 34 (2): 182–196. doi:10.1080/02614367.2013.855937.

Stidder, Gary, and Adrian Haasner. 2007. "Developing Outdoor and Adventurous Activities for Co-Existence and Reconciliation in Israel: An Anglo-German Approach." *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning* 7 (2): 131–140. doi:10.1080/14729670701731052.

Ter-Abrahamian, Hrant. 2005. "On the Formation of the National Identity of the Talishis in Azerbaijan Republic." *Iran and the Caucasus* 9 (1): 121–144. doi:10.1163/1573384054068132.

UEFA. 2018. *UEFA Statutes, February 2018 Edition. Rules of Procedure of the UEFA Congress*. UEFA.

Vasilyeva, Olga, and Alexander Libman. 2020. "Varieties of Authoritarianism Matter: Elite Fragmentation, Natural Resources and Economic Growth." *European Journal of Political Economy* 63: 101869–101812. doi:10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101869.