IMESS DISSERTATION

Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator (jiri.vykoukal@post.cz)

Please note that IMESS students are <u>not</u> required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Jingjing Xu
Dissertation title:	Can nationalism influence democracy? Analysing the impact of Azerbaijan nationalism

	70+	69-65	64-60	59-55	54-50	<50
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Knowledge *Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.*					X	
Analysis & Interpretation *Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.*					X	
Structure & Argument *Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an argument limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.*						X
Presentation & Documentation *Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.*					X	
Methodology *Understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.*					X	

ECTS Mark:	E	**UCL Mark:**	50	**Marker:**	Seán Hanley
Deducted for late submission:	0			**Signed:**	*[signature]*
Deducted for inadequate referencing:	0			**Date:**	25 August 2024

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+): *Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.*
Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B (UCL mark 65-69):
A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

C (UCL mark 60-61):
Some evidence of critical analysis, knowledgeable interpretation. Wide range of sources used to develop a logic and coherent argument. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the

chosen field of research, the extent of independent research could have improved.

D (UCL mark 59-55):
Employ relevant sources and show ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Little critical analysis of the material. It demonstrate methodological awareness but the standard and rigor of the analysis can improve.

E (UCL mark 54-50):
Mostly descriptive argument. Employ relevant but limited sources. The structure, logic and overall quality of the argument needs improvement.

F (UCL mark less than 50):
Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (*at least 300 words*):

This dissertation takes as its topic if and how different forms of nationalism have contributed to (lack of) democracy in Azerbaijan. It presents a loosely structured and rather eclectic mix of material, some of which seems relevant to this topic, some of which seems irrelevant (or at best tangentially relevant to the topic). The most relevant material presented deals with the distinction between civic and ethnic (inclusionary and exclusionary) nationalism; the empirical description of Azerbaijan's post-1991 political trajectory; and raw Freedom in the World and WVS data, which might be useful to a project on this topic (see my comments below).

The dissertation shows a good knowledge of the political development of Azerbaijan and some, more limited knowledge understanding of theories of democracy, democratisation and nationalism. It establishes that the regime 's leaders have used appeals to exclusionary nationalism and that this - among other factors - may explain lack of democracy and/or the endurance and stability of an autocratic regime.

The dissertation shows evidence that a wide variety of material has been consulted and a familiarity with the basic building blocks of an academic research project (the need for a research question; identification of a research gap if possible; the need for a review literature; need to empirically test propositions etc. It attempts to deliver these but does so poorly.

There are, however, some very, very significant weaknesses and overall, in my judgement, the dissertation is at the very borderline of what could be considered passable. Key weaknesses are:

1. *Inappropriate framing of research question for the case chosen*

The design of the project and research question are misconceived by being framed in terms of democracy. As data clearly shows - including the data presented in the dissertation - after a short period of liberalisation and a limited degree of political competition, post-Soviet Azerbaijan has been consistently and deeply authoritarian since approximately 1992. It would, therefore, make sense to consult the literature on autocratic (authoritarian) regimes and on the autocratisation of already authoritarian regimes. The discussion of literature on democracy seems of little relevance.

It might be possible to frame the question in terms of failed democratisation - arguing that Azerbaijan might have democratised or looking at the struggle between the regime and opposition - but the topic is not justified/ explained to the reader at the start of the dissertation in any way and most the empirical material on nationalism (official speeches) deals with the regime only.

The dissertation states a topic (nationalism and democracy, case study of Azerbaijan) but has no clear research question and does not give a clear reason why Azerbaijan has been chosen as a case study country (why it is a useful focus for

2. *Weak literature reviewing, patchy choice of literature to review*

As noted above, much literature reviewed does not seem to be clear or direct relevance to the topic, while other more important literature is ignored. It is not clear, for example, why we need a discussion of the historical origins of nationalism in (Western) Europe (Gellner, Anderson), but not discussion of the role and positions of nations and nationalism in the USSR and the FSU (about which there is a huge literature). Discussion of literature on nationalism in newly independent states in the developing world would also have been relevant.

The sections reviewing literature often do not clearly explain key concepts (for example, the basic between civic and ethnic nationalism is not clearly explained in the dissertation and is discussed briefly) which are rather briefly and in passing. These sections often consistent of brief remarks on a series of individual articles, which sometimes appear to be related in only the loosest way. The literature review does give an overview of contending ideas and schools of thought; sum up key debates; and pick out which literatures (or ideas) within them are relevant for the topic addressed.

3. Very poor structure

The dissertation is very poorly structured, both overall and in terms of the structure of individual sections. As noted ,there is much irrelevant material. Paragraphs and sections give a series of author-by-author comments, sometimes bringing in authors dealing with different sub-topics (e.g. mix of authors dealingwith democratisation generally, and authors dealing with the specific question of nationalism. And democracy

4. Simple methods not coherently used.

The dissertation uses simple methods - a basic thematic analysis of speeches; presentation (in too much detail) of Freedom House indices (which do not explicitly measure democracy but Freedom in the World) and some World Values Survey item. It is not clear if the WVS items chosen really measure (ethnic, exclusionary) nationalism and the writer of the dissertation should have explained and made a case for these measure.

The dissertation's claims to be using new or innovative approaches are not at all credible. A focus on civil society and the state etc is common and unremarkable, not new or innovative as claimed and in methodological terms

can the approach taken be called a mixed method only in the crudest sense: there is some qualitative and quantitative data included (they are not, however, triangulated or otherwise linked up). Often they seem to deal with distantly related topics (WVS would measure social attitudes, the discussion of speeches is about the elite/regime).

Problems of method and structure appear to stem from a lack of clear idea on the part of the author about what question/puzzle the dissertation is really addressing (see point 1).

5. Presentational issues

The dissertation is written in good academic English, but sections have a GPT-Chat style formulaic and vague quality. There is some repetition of the same or similar points, or passages which come across as vague and unnecessary padding. Direct quotations lack page numbers in the references.

Questions for oral defence

- Please give us succinct explanation into sentences of the difference between civic and ethnic nationalism ?

- Why did you choose Azerbaijan and not another country as a case study for this topic/question?

- Please explain and justify why you chose to discuss democratisation in a country that has experienced a little or no democratisation and has been consistently authoritarian over the past two ? Surely a focus on autocratisation and how forms of nationalism may promote this would be more appropriate?

- Please can you say something about the status of nationalism within the Soviet Union and how the legacies of the Soviet Union and its nationalities policy may have influenced the development of Azeri nationalism ? Alternatively, please can you explain why there is no discussion of this in the dissertation if you believe them to be irrelevant?