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FREEDOM ON THE NET 2025

Azerbaijan

NOT FREE

34
/100

A. <u>Obstacles to Access</u>	12 /25
B. <u>Limits on Content</u>	13 /35
C. <u>Violations of User Rights</u>	9 /40

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

34 /100 **Not Free**

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the methodology and report acknowledgements.

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Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Azerbaijan remained one of the world's most repressive environments for internet freedom. The government routinely throttled internet connections and blocked websites, including media outlets that criticized the government. Between November 2023 and May 2025, the authorities imprisoned 25 journalists, the vast majority of whom worked for online outlets, on trumped-up smuggling and extortion charges. ¹

- In January 2025, users in Imishli reported that the internet was throttled during a protest after a police car hit four children, and residents were reportedly forced to delete their social media posts about the incident (A3 and B2). ²
- The government continued to use regulatory controls to restrict access to critical media coverage. In February 2025, an appellate court in Ganja ordered the blocking of Anaxeber.info, a news site that covered issues related to corruption, at the request of the Media Development Agency. The agency claimed that the site did not register in the appropriate location under a 2022 media law, but the outlet's editor in chief said the case stemmed from his refusal to remove critical articles at the government's request. ³ Separately that month, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs closed an office of the Russian state news service Rossiya Segodnya (Sputnik) and rescinded the accreditations of Voice of America (VOA), Bloomberg News, and the Azerbaijani-language service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (B1 and B6). ⁴
- In March 2025, the Prosecutor General's Office summoned a number of people living in exile, including opposition bloggers and businessmen, who had criticized the government online (B6). ⁵
- Authorities also pursued fabricated criminal cases against journalists. In August 2024, prosecutors filed additional spurious charges—related to the purported smuggling of currency, tax evasion, and money laundering—against a group of journalists from the anticorruption outlet Abzas Media who had been detained between November 2023 and January 2024. ⁶ In

June 2025, after the coverage period, six journalists from Abzas Media and Farid Mehralizada, an economist and journalist working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, were found guilty on all charges and sentenced to between seven and nine years in prison. ⁷ In another case, between December 2024 and March 2025, the government detained nine journalists and freelancers who worked for the online outlet Meydan TV, accusing them of bogus offenses such as collaboration to smuggle currency. In May 2025, officials also detained journalist Ulviyya Ali, who worked for VOA, in connection with the case, though she denied any link to Meydan TV (B6 and C3). ⁸

- Among other criminal cases during the coverage period, in January 2025 a court sentenced Arshad Ibrahimov, who ran the website Dunyaninsesi.az, to eight years in prison on bogus extortion charges, which he said were a reprisal for his coverage of police corruption. ⁹ Also that month, activist Elshan Karimov was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of attempting to overthrow the government because of his social media posts about political prisoners in Azerbaijan. ¹⁰ In February 2025, Matlab Baghirov, the head of online outlets SalamNews and InterAz, was sentenced to 12 years in prison on a range of dubious charges, including that he employed people without the proper contracts and stored extremist religious materials. He was initially arrested in January 2023 and accused of running an Iranian spy network (C3). ¹¹

Political Overview

Power in Azerbaijan's authoritarian regime remains heavily concentrated in the hands of Ilham Aliyev, who has served as president since 2003, and his extended family. Corruption is rampant, and the formal political opposition has been weakened by years of persecution. The authorities have intensified their crackdown on civil liberties in recent years, adding to the ranks of political prisoners and leaving little room for independent expression or activism. In 2023, Azerbaijani forces seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh—an ethnic Armenian enclave that had enjoyed de facto independence since 1994—following a months-long blockade and a two-day military operation; the surrender of local political

leaders and defense forces prompted nearly the entire ethnic Armenian population of the territory to flee to the Republic of Armenia.

Note

Conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh were not examined in the Azerbaijan country report through the 2024 edition of *Freedom on the Net*. As of the 2025 edition, conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh are covered under the country report for Azerbaijan to align with the coverage in *Freedom in the World*. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Related, disputed, or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately from the relevant countries if they meet certain criteria, including distinct conditions for political rights and civil liberties and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

*This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to **ongoing budget constraints**. Please consider making a **donation** to support future editions of this vital resource.*

*For additional background information, see last year’s **full report**.*

A. Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	6/6
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Score Change: The score improved from 5 to 6 because internet penetration rates have increased, according to some measurement sources. **12**

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other	1/3
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reasons?	
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A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	3/6
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A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	2/6
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A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?	0/4
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B. Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	3/6
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B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	2/4
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B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?	1/4
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B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?

1/4

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?

1/4

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?

0/3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

2/4

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?

3/6

C. Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?

1/6

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?

2/4

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?

0/6

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the courts sentenced journalist Matlab Baghirov to 12 years in prison on trumped-up charges, and because others who posted material disfavored by the government received similar sentences.

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?

3/4

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?

1/6

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?

1/6

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?

1/5

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?

0/3

Footnotes

- 1 Arzu Geybullayeva, “Another Courageous Journalist Detained in Azerbaijan,” May 16, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/16/another-courageous-journalist-jaile...>
- 2 “Residents forced to remove posts under duress,” Azerbaijan Internet Watch, January 20, 2025, <https://www.az-netwatch.org/news/residents-forced-to-remove-posts-under....>
- 3 “Medianın İnkişafı Agentliyi daha bir saytın bloklanmasını istəyir [Media Development Agency wants another site blocked],” MeydanTV January 29, 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/medianin-inkisafi-agentliyi-daha-bir-s...>
- 4 “Correspondent accreditation of Voice of America has been revoked in Azerbaijan,” Meydan TV, February 24, 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/correspondent-accreditation-of-voice-o...>; “Azerbaijan orders suspension of BBC News Azerbaijani in Baku,” BBC, February 20, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g7ewd9neoo>; Aytan Farhadova, “Azerbaijan revokes accreditation of Bloomberg,” OC-Media, February 28, 2025, <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijan-revokes-accreditation-of-bloomberg/>
- 5 “Criminal cases launched against exiled bloggers by Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General’s Office,” Meydan TV, March 17, 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/criminal-cases-launched-against-exiled....>

More footnotes



On Azerbaijan

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

See More >

Country Facts

Population

10,140,000

Global Freedom Score

6/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

34/100 Not Free

Freedom in the World Status

Not Free

Networks Restricted

Yes

Social Media Blocked

No

Websites Blocked

Yes

Pro-government Commentators

Yes

Users Arrested

Yes

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