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# Nagorno-Karabakh\*

NOT FREE

**-3**  
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	<b>-3</b> /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	<b>0</b> /60

## LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

**37**/100 **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

*\* Indicates a territory as opposed to an independent country.*



## Status Change

Nagorno-Karabakh's status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to an Azerbaijani blockade and military offensive that culminated in the dissolution of local political, legal, and civic institutions and the departure of nearly all of the civilian population.

## Note

*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. Disputed or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

## Overview

The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, which also called itself the Republic of Artsakh, enjoyed de facto independence from Azerbaijan after a 1994 cease-fire agreement that ended roughly two years of open warfare, though its independence was never recognized by any UN member states. The territory's population consisted mostly of ethnic Armenians, and given its geographic and diplomatic isolation, it was dependent on close political and economic ties with Armenia. In 2023, the local government announced its dissolution following a military operation led by Azerbaijani authorities that resulted in the mass departure of the ethnic Armenian population. At year's end, bilateral peace talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments were ongoing, and the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh remained largely depopulated.

## Key Developments in 2023

- The Lachin transit corridor, the only remaining road linking Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and the rest of the world, was blockaded by Azerbaijani forces through late September. The blockade, which had begun in late 2022, resulted in severe shortages of food, medicine, and other life-sustaining supplies, and UN experts in August assessed the situation as a “dire humanitarian crisis.”

- The Azerbaijani government launched a military operation against Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, aiming to dismantle its political institutions and disarm its military. Vastly outnumbered, ethnic Armenian forces in the territory agreed the following day to a Russian proposal for a cease-fire, under which the local armed forces would disband and disarm, and the area would be ceded to Baku. Local authorities reported dozens of civilian casualties during the short offensive.
- On September 28, President Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree that would dissolve all state institutions by January 1, 2024. He said he issued the decree to safeguard the “physical security and vital interests” of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Presented with the choice of accepting Azerbaijani rule or leaving, nearly the entire ethnic Armenian population fled to Armenia in late September through the Lachin corridor, which Azerbaijani forces opened on September 24 to facilitate the exodus. The territory remained largely depopulated at year’s end.

## Political Rights

### A. Electoral Process

**A1** 0-4 pts

**Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?**

**0/4**

Nagorno-Karabakh’s president was directly elected for up to two five-year terms and served as both head of state and head of government, with authority to appoint and dismiss cabinet members. The most recent presidential election took place in March and April 2020. It was widely acknowledged as the most competitive in Nagorno-Karabakh’s recent history, with an unprecedented 14 candidates and an intense electoral campaign that featured extensive in-person and social media campaign activities. Arayik Harutyunyan, a former prime minister and local businessman, won a majority of votes in the second round. The more democratic campaign followed a political opening in Armenia in 2018, when mass antigovernment protests and elections had forced out an entrenched elite.

In early September 2023, Harutyunyan announced his resignation amid political turmoil fueled by the Lachin corridor blockade and disagreements on how to address the resulting crisis. Prior to his resignation, Harutyunyan had pushed through the parliament a constitutional amendment, applicable under martial law, that allowed the legislature to select an interim president if the incumbent stepped down before the end of their term. After Harutyunyan’s resignation, the parliament elected Samvel Shahramanyan to serve as the new president of Nagorno-Karabakh by a vote of 22 to 1.

Following the cease-fire later that month, Shahramanyan signed a decree that would dissolve “all state institutions and organizations under their departmental authority by January 1, 2024,” and the government was displaced by Azerbaijani authorities. In December, Shahramanyan, having fled to Armenia, announced that the September decree was invalid, though this announcement had no immediate practical effect in Nagorno-Karabakh.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because Nagorno-Karabakh’s lawmakers selected a new chief executive while the territory was under martial law, preventing voters from directly electing him, and because the government later disbanded as part of the surrender to Azerbaijani forces.*

**A2** 0-4 pts

**Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?**

**0/4**

The unicameral National Assembly’s 33 members were elected by party list. The most recent elections took place in 2020 in parallel with the presidential race. Parties campaigned freely in towns and villages and engaged in televised presentations and debates. The Harutyunyan-founded Azat Hayrenik (Free Motherland) party maintained its dominant legislative position, winning 16 seats. The newly formed opposition Miasnakan Hayrenik (United Motherland) party won nine. The remaining seats went to three other parties.

In the wake of the president’s September 2023 dissolution decree and the exodus of nearly the entire population to Armenia, the National Assembly ceased to function.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because the territory's legislature stopped functioning after the president issued a decree dissolving local governing bodies.*

**A3** 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?**

**0/4**

The Azerbaijani government's September 2023 military operation in the territory, and Shahramanyan's decree dissolving all governing bodies and institutions in Nagorno-Karabakh, resulted in the abandonment of previous electoral laws and frameworks in late 2023. Due to the departure of the civilian population, the territory was left with no functioning institution capable of impartially implementing electoral laws.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because the dissolution of local governing institutions effectively nullified the existing constitution, electoral laws, and election management systems.*

## **B. Political Pluralism and Participation**

**B1** 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?**

**0/4**

Prior to September 2023, there were few formal restrictions on party formation and membership, but the political landscape was constrained in practice due to the territory's contested status and increasing insecurity. The 2020 elections were competitive, with politicians openly discussing plans to implement reforms and improve the government's transparency and diversity.

Following the Azerbaijani military operation in September 2023, nearly all of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population fled the territory, rendering local political parties inoperative. Shahramanyan's decree dissolving state institutions similarly left the parties without a legal or practical foundation.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because party officials and members fled to Armenia after the Azerbaijani regime won control of the territory, and the governing bodies in which parties had participated were dissolved by decree.*

**B2** 0-4 pts

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?**

**0/4**

Since 2018, opposition politicians and parties had enjoyed increasing electoral opportunities. A number of prominent politicians refrained from forming coalitions with the ruling elites ahead of the 2020 elections, and instead campaigned independently.

The departure of the population in September 2023 and Shahramanyan's decree dissolving all state institutions effectively left Nagorno-Karabakh with no locally elected governing bodies and no political opposition.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because opposition parties ceased to operate in the territory, and locally elected governing bodies in which they could seek representation were dissolved by decree.*

**B3** 0-4 pts

**Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?**

**0/4**

Politics in Nagorno-Karabakh were heavily influenced by the threat of military aggression, which kept the territory politically and financially dependent on Armenia. This dependence provided leverage for interference by Yerevan in Nagorno-Karabakh's domestic political affairs, but it diminished somewhat after

2020, when a successful Azerbaijani offensive forced Armenia to withdraw troops from the area and end military support to Nagorno-Karabakh as part of a cease-fire agreement. Following the 2020 war, Russian peacekeepers played a significant security role in Nagorno-Karabakh, but did not interfere in local political life.

In September 2023, following the swift surrender of local ethnic Armenian forces to the advancing Azerbaijani military, Shahramanyan issued the decree dissolving state institutions in order to safeguard the “physical security and vital interests” of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani military forces and state agencies subsequently assumed full control over political affairs in the territory.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because Azerbaijani military forces and state agencies assumed control over political affairs after the September offensive and the dissolution of the local government.*

**B4** 0-4 pts

<b>Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?</b>	<b>0 / 4</b>
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The expulsion of ethnic Azerbaijanis in the early 1990s resulted in a predominantly ethnic Armenian population. The last census in 2015 reported a total population of about 151,000, with small minorities of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Yezidis, Georgians, and Syrians. Most or all National Assembly seats and government leadership positions were held by individuals of Armenian ethnicity, and opportunities for members of various ethnic, religious, and other minority groups to represent their interests in politics were limited. Formally, women had equal political rights, but social constraints and a prevailing sense of militarization in local life limited their participation in practice, and they were poorly represented in leadership positions. Societal discrimination limited the political participation of LGBT+ people.

Following Baku’s September 2023 military conquest, the decree dissolving local governing bodies, and the departure of almost the entire population, there was no meaningful opportunity for political participation in the territory.



*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the dissolution of local government bodies and the departure of nearly all of the civilian population.*

## C. Functioning of Government

**C1** 0-4 pts

**Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?**

**0** / 4

Prior to September 2023, the ability of locally elected officials to set and implement government policies was limited in practice by security threats along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani forces, and related warnings from Baku. Although the constitution called for close cooperation with Armenia on political, economic, and military policy, the Armenian state's influence on local governance had sharply decreased after the 2020 war.

On September 28, 2023, Shahramanyan issued a decree to dissolve local government institutions following the surrender of Karabakh Armenian forces to the Azerbaijani military. All elected bodies were effectively disbanded. Several high-ranking local officials were facing prosecution in Azerbaijani courts at year's end.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because locally elected leaders no longer determined government policy in Nagorno-Karabakh.*

**C2** 0-4 pts

**Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?**

**0** / 4

Nagorno-Karabakh's institutions suffered from significant corruption. In February 2023, an official of the Security Council of Nagorno-Karabakh was accused of creating a fraudulent invoice worth more than \$50,000 in collaboration with a commercial organization. The dissolution of local government institutions in late 2023 resulted in the elimination of public anticorruption bodies and other safeguards against official malfeasance.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because local anticorruption safeguards ceased to function following the dissolution of state institutions.*

**C3** 0-4 pts

<b>Does the government operate with openness and transparency?</b>	<b>0/4</b>
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The government operated with limited transparency in practice. For example, Health Minister Samvel Avetisyan resigned in March 2023, saying someone else had been appointed to the position without his knowledge. The local authorities were particularly secretive regarding anything that could be linked to security concerns.

During and after the military offensive that led to the surrender of Karabakh Armenian forces and the dissolution of local institutions, neither local nor Azerbaijani authorities provided the public with adequate or reliable information.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because neither local nor Azerbaijani authorities provided the public with adequate or reliable information surrounding the Azerbaijani military offensive and the subsequent settlement, and because local government bodies no longer functioned at year's end.*

### **Add Q**

<b>Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?</b>	<b>-3</b>
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Tens of thousands of people fled the territory during the 2020 conflict, which featured attacks on civilian targets and atrocities by Azerbaijani troops against ethnic Armenian soldiers. Military attacks and psychological pressure in 2022 led to a new displacement wave: Azerbaijani troops gained control of strategic mountain heights, resulting in increased fears of renewed violence. Azerbaijani forces also organized psychological campaigns against people living near the front lines by using loudspeakers to amplify threats and Islamic music. In March 2022, during a particularly severe winter, the region was left with no gas supply following an apparent attack on the main pipeline by Azerbaijani soldiers.

In December 2022, Azerbaijani activists began blocking the Lachin transit corridor, the only road that connected Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and rest of the world. UN experts said in August 2023 that the prolonged blockade placed the lives of residents, “especially children, persons with disabilities, older persons, pregnant women, and the sick, at significant risk,” calling the situation a “dire humanitarian crisis.” Residents had limited access to essential supplies including food, fuel, and medicine. Azerbaijani military forces established a checkpoint on the road in April, despite the fact that Russian peacekeepers were formally responsible for the corridor’s security.

Ethnic Armenians were permitted to flee the territory through the Lachin corridor after the Azerbaijani regime’s two-day military operation. Presented with the choice of accepting Azerbaijani citizenship and governance or leaving, almost the entire ethnic Armenian population of more than 100,000 evacuated to Armenia. While Azerbaijani authorities pledged to protect the rights of individuals who stayed behind, residents and human rights groups considered these promises to be dubious in light of the severe harms caused by the blockade, past abuses, and the Azerbaijani government’s poor record of respecting political rights and civil liberties in general.

*Score Change: The score declined from -1 to -3 because the ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh fled the territory after an Azerbaijani military offensive and a months-long blockade that deprived residents of basic supplies.*

## Civil Liberties

### D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1** 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	0/4
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Prior to September 2023, the most popular local television station was the government-run Artsakh TV. The station’s editorial policy had changed

significantly since the political opening in Armenia in 2018, and it had in recent years hosted a greater diversity of opinions. Following the 2020 war, local media outlets continued to cover opposition rallies and government critics, but foreign journalists were frequently denied access to Nagorno-Karabakh by Russian peacekeepers.

In April 2022, following the first major Azerbaijani military attack on Nagorno-Karabakh since 2020, then president Harutyunyan signed a decree implementing martial law, citing a need to stop the online spread of “fake news” about events at the front lines. In May 2023, Harutyunyan signed decrees enacting additional martial law restrictions. They included items prohibiting the dissemination of information related to defense, security, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and economic development.

In July 2023, CivilNet journalist Hayk Ghazaryan was attacked in Stepanakert by a group of men he said he believed to be employees of Minister of Internal Affairs Karen Sargsyan. The attack occurred two days after a police officer snatched his phone while he was covering a protest in front of the National Security Service offices.

After the Azerbaijani military operation of September 2023, local journalists fled the territory, and radio and television services stopped broadcasting. Azerbaijani authorities said that Azerbaijani news content was being broadcast in the territory; press freedom in Azerbaijan is highly restricted.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because local journalists fled the territory, their media outlets ceased to function, and the information environment fell under the tight control of Azerbaijani authorities.*

**D2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?</b>	<b>0 / 4</b>
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Nagorno-Karabakh’s constitution guaranteed religious freedom but allowed for restrictions in the name of security, public order, and other state interests. The charter also recognized the Armenian Apostolic Church as the “national church” of the Armenian people. The religious freedom of other groups was limited in

practice. A 2009 law banned religious activity by unregistered groups and proselytism by minority faiths, and made it more difficult for minority groups to register.

Since 2020, the Azerbaijani military has fully or partially destroyed a number of Armenian religious structures. Russian peacekeepers took control of several Armenian monasteries near or within Azerbaijani-controlled territory as a result of the 2020 cease-fire agreement, and after 2021, only small pilgrimage groups escorted by peacekeepers were occasionally allowed to visit.

There were reports of Christian structures being damaged in the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive. Activists mobilized to document the damage, but lack of physical access hampered their efforts. The Azerbaijani regime exercises strict control over religious practice through state-affiliated entities.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the territory's constitution, which guaranteed some level of religious freedom, was effectively nullified, and because the Azerbaijani authorities exercise strict control over religious affairs.*

**D3** 0-4 pts

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?**

**0/4**

In recent years, schools and universities practiced increasing self-censorship on sensitive topics, particularly those related to the territory's status and security. Beginning in December 2022, the blockade of the Lachin corridor resulted in shortages of school supplies, while power outages disrupted online learning programs. The Azerbaijani military operation and the resulting exodus of the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh's population in September 2023 effectively shuttered the local education system.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the exodus of the civilian population under pressure from the Azerbaijani military, which effectively shuttered the local education system, and because academic activity had been disrupted by the preceding blockade.*

**D4** 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?**

0/4

Prior to September 2023, private discussion was generally open and free, though expression of dissent could be inhibited somewhat by the prevailing nationalist sentiment in politics and society. After the 2020 war, locals speculated about possible penetration of the local government and defense forces by spies cooperating with Azerbaijani intelligence services.

The dissolution of local government bodies after September 2023 effectively eliminated legal protections for free expression. Azerbaijani authorities are known to closely monitor private communications without judicial oversight and harshly punish dissent.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because the local government's legal protections for personal expression effectively ended with its dissolution, and because Azerbaijani authorities closely monitor private communications and criminalize dissent.*

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights**

**E1** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom of assembly?**

0/4

Freedom of assembly had been generally respected in recent years. After the 2020 war, Nagorno-Karabakh featured regular protest activity. Beginning in early August 2022, opposition activists organized daily rallies in Stepanakert. Despite occasional reports of ministries calling on their staff to avoid the rallies, many participated, as did a number of senior officials.

Martial law restrictions imposed by then president Harutyunyan in May 2023 prohibited most public gatherings, except those related to self-determination,

holidays, or memorial days, which required government permission.

The dissolution of government bodies after September 2023, following the surrender of Karabakh Armenian forces to the Azerbaijani military, effectively eliminated legal protections for free assembly. Azerbaijani authorities tightly restrict public assemblies under national law and in practice.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because the imposition of new martial law restrictions, the departure of the civilian population, and the Azerbaijani military presence left little scope for free public gatherings.*

**E2** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?**

**0 / 4**

More than 250 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were registered in Nagorno-Karabakh, but most were inactive. Many groups struggled to secure sustainable funding, in part because partnerships with foreign or international NGOs were complicated by Nagorno-Karabakh's disputed status. Civil society groups also faced competition from government-organized entities.

Local civil society organizations were displaced along with the rest of the civilian population in September 2023. Azerbaijani authorities tightly restrict civil society activity under the law and in practice. Some NGOs that relocated to Armenia have continued their activities there.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because local civil society organizations were displaced along with the rest of the population, and because the Azerbaijani government enforces laws that repress civil society.*

**E3** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?**

**0 / 4**

Trade unions were allowed to organize, but in practice they were weak and relatively inactive, with little practical ability to assert workers' interests. Many

labor disputes were resolved through personal connections and family links before they reached local courts.

Local trade union members were displaced along with the rest of the civilian population in September 2023. Azerbaijani authorities tightly restrict independent union activity and labor activism.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because local trade unions were swept up in the broader displacement of the territory's residents, and Azerbaijani authorities generally exercise tight control over union activity.*

## F. Rule of Law

**F1** 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	0/4
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Nagorno-Karabakh's judiciary was not independent in practice. The courts were influenced by the executive branch as well as by powerful political, economic, and criminal groups. In September 2023, after the Azerbaijani military operation, the territory's judiciary was dissolved along with other local government bodies. The Azerbaijani judiciary is corrupt and subservient to the executive.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the territory's judiciary was dissolved along with other local government bodies, and the Azerbaijani judiciary that replaced it is subservient to the executive in practice.*

**F2** 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0/4
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Nagorno-Karabakh's constitution guaranteed basic due process rights, but police and the courts did not always uphold them in practice. Outspoken political dissidents have been subject to harassment by the authorities.



The territorial constitution's due process guarantees were effectively rescinded with the government's dissolution in September 2023. Azerbaijani authorities do not uphold constitutional guarantees of due process.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the territorial constitution's due process guarantees were effectively rescinded with the government's dissolution, and because Azerbaijan's constitutional due process guarantees are not upheld in practice.*

**F3** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?</b>	<b>0 / 4</b>
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During the 2020 war, Azerbaijani forces engaged in indiscriminate violence and targeted atrocities against civilians, utilizing cluster munitions and other heavy weapons. Violence and insecurity continued to affect life in Nagorno-Karabakh after the cease-fire that year. Intensified front-line attacks by Azerbaijani forces began in September 2022; there were 9 deaths and 40 injuries among civilians, and 228 deaths and 604 injuries among combatants on both sides, according to 2022 figures compiled by the International Crisis Group.

Azerbaijani forces launched a new military operation against Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, 2023, aiming to dismantle the region's de facto government and disarm its defense forces. Vastly outnumbered, the ethnic Armenian side agreed to a Russian-proposed cease-fire the following day, under which local forces would disband and the territory would be ceded to Baku. Nagorno-Karabakh's Office of the Human Rights Defender reported that there had been at least 200 fatalities and over 400 people wounded due to the Azerbaijani military operation. Among those killed were 10 civilians, including 5 children; over 40 civilians were injured, according to the office, including 13 children. Azerbaijani authorities said 192 of their soldiers were killed in the fighting. Azerbaijani security forces have long been accused of torture and other forms of abuse, and this record contributed to the decision of most residents to flee the territory.

**F4** 0-4 pts

**Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?**

0/4

Before the Azerbaijani takeover, the constitution banned discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and other categories. Women were underrepresented in the public and private sectors and remained exposed to discrimination in practice.

In September 2023, after the surrender of local armed forces to the Azerbaijani authorities, nearly all of the ethnic Armenian population fled the territory. The Azerbaijani government does not provide effective protections against discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the ethnic Armenian population was compelled to leave the territory, and Azerbaijani laws do not provide effective protections against discrimination.*

## G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

**G1** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?**

0/4

Freedom of movement within Nagorno-Karabakh was hindered by its ambiguous legal and diplomatic status and the instability of cease-fire agreements. Travel in and out of the territory was restricted by Russian peacekeepers and, between December 2022 and September 2023, a blockade of the Lachin transit corridor. The blockade was initiated by individuals who purported to be environmental activists but were widely believed to have links to the Azerbaijani government. It was lifted after the Azerbaijani military operation, which led to the mass exodus of the local Armenian population.

**G2** 0-4 pts

**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?**

**0/4**

Most major economic activity was tightly controlled by the government or a small group of powerful elites with political connections. The property rights of Azerbaijanis displaced in the 1990s and of Armenians displaced since 2020 have not been adequately addressed.

Azerbaijani authorities, who took control of the territory after the September 2023 surrender of Karabakh Armenian forces and the departure of most civilians, have a poor record of upholding property rights. Politically connected elites pose obstacles to ordinary private business activity in Azerbaijan.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the year's military activity and population displacement entailed fresh violations of property rights, and there was no impartial authority to adjudicate disputes.*

**G3** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?**

**0/4**

Men and women had equal legal rights with respect to marriage and divorce, though the constitution defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, precluding same-sex marriage. The local government offered material incentives to encourage couples to have children. Domestic violence was common and not effectively prosecuted.

After government bodies were ordered dissolved in September 2023, the local constitution's guarantees on social freedoms were effectively nullified. Azerbaijani authorities impose some formal restrictions on such freedoms, such as mandatory mediation for divorce that disadvantages those who cannot afford legal counsel. Domestic violence is not frequently prosecuted in Azerbaijan.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because guarantees on social freedoms provided by the local constitution were effectively nullified with the government's dissolution, and the population largely fled the territory after the Azerbaijani offensive.*

**G4** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?**

**0 / 4**

Before the September 2023 attack by Azerbaijani forces, formal employment was mostly confined to the state sector or state-subsidized businesses. Individuals facing unfair dismissal or labor rights violations often encountered difficulties in seeking justice through the courts.

The blockade of the Lachin corridor caused severe economic hardship for much of 2023, and economic activity in Nagorno-Karabakh was virtually nonexistent by year's end due to the mass departure of the ethnic Armenian population. Azerbaijani authorities generally fail to uphold legal safeguards against exploitative working conditions.

*Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the effects of the months-long blockade and the general cessation of economic activity following the mass exodus of the territory's ethnic Armenian population.*

#### **On Nagorno-Karabakh**

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#### **Country Facts**

Global Freedom Score

**-3/100**    **Not Free**

#### **Other Years**

2023

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## ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 296-5101

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[info@freedomhouse.org](mailto:info@freedomhouse.org)

## PRESS & MEDIA

[press@freedomhouse.org](mailto:press@freedomhouse.org)

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