

World Report 2025 - Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani government intensified its crackdown against domestic critics even as it hosted the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP29 in November. In the months before the conference, authorities arrested dozens of individuals, including journalists, human rights defenders, and activists, on politically motivated charges. They continued to interfere with rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, and arbitrarily implemented laws paralyzing civil society. Torture and ill-treatment in custody also persisted.

Snap presidential and parliamentary elections in February and September, respectively, failed to meet standards for a free and fair vote. International observers found them “[marked](#) by the stifling of critical voices” and “[devoid](#) of competition.”

In January, the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly [resolved](#) not to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation, citing the government’s failure to fulfil “major commitments” it undertook when it joined the Council of Europe.

Azerbaijan and Armenia continued talks over a final peace deal, with continued border tensions sporadically [escalating](#) to clashes. Despite its stated commitments, Azerbaijan has not taken meaningful steps to ensure the right to return in safety and dignity for ethnic Armenians who fled Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 or to restore their property rights. A September 2023 Azerbaijani military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh re-established Azerbaijani control over the area.

Prosecution of Government Critics

The authorities targeted high-profile critics in a new arrest wave in 2024, building on similar crackdowns in previous years. They leveled false or spurious charges against political opponents, journalists, and civic activists.

In August and July, authorities [arrested](#) two doctoral students on bogus treason charges. They are, respectively, Bahruz Samadov, an outspoken critic of the Second Karabakh War, and Igbal Abilov, who specializes in Talysh minority studies. Courts sent both to pretrial detention.

In a speech in September 2024, President Aliyev [vilified](#) peace advocates and non-governmental groups involved in peace initiatives.

In April, police arrested [Anar Mammadli](#), head of an election monitoring group, on spurious charges. He remained in pretrial detention at time of writing. Mammadli is a founding member of a new coalition on climate justice, set up ahead of COP29.

Among other government critics arrested throughout the year on an array of bogus charges are former diplomat [Emin Ibrahimov](#), economics commentator [Farid Mehralizade](#), opposition activist [Tofiq Yagublu](#), online parliamentary analysis outlet founder [Imran Aliyev](#), and online critic [Famil Khalilov](#), whom Sweden had deported in 2023 following his unsuccessful asylum application.

All five remained in pretrial custody at the time of writing.

In April, authorities transferred academic Gubad Ibadoglu, arrested in July 2023 on bogus counterfeiting and extremism charges, to house arrest; in May, they transferred him to police supervision and continue to conduct heavy surveillance on him.

The authorities also imposed travel bans on numerous individuals whom they are questioning in ongoing investigations. In August, they prevented independent researcher Javidan Aghayev from leaving the country and questioned him as part of the investigation against Samadov. In August, they barred Samad Shikhi, a journalist, from leaving the country as part of the same investigation.

A May 2024 presidential [pardon](#) did not include any individuals serving sentences on charges widely believed to be politically motivated.

Freedom of Expression and Media

Starting in November 2023, the authorities [targeted](#) at least three independent media platforms, Abzas Media, Toplum TV, and Kanal 13, arresting their reporters and other staff on [spurious smuggling charges](#). At least 12 media professionals and others affiliated with the outlets remain in pretrial detention, including reporters Ulvi Hasanli, Sevinj Abbasova Vagifgizi, Hafiz Babali, Nargiz Absalamova, Muhammad Kekalov, Elnara Gasimova, Shamo Eminov, Mushvig Jabbarov, and Aziz Orujov.

In August 2024, the authorities pressed additional criminal charges against Abzas Media journalists and Mehralizade, including tax evasion, forgery of documents, and money laundering. At the time of writing, all journalists remain in pre-trial detention.

In March, shortly after the presidential election, police [raided](#) the office of Toplum TV, confiscating all of their equipment and sealing the office. They arrested five civic and political activists who shared office space and cooperated with Toplum. They are Akif Gurbanov, Ruslan Izzatli, Ilkin Amrahov, Ramil Babayev, and Alasgar Mammadli. All remained in pretrial custody at time of writing.

In August 2024, a court sentenced a man involved in 2023 environmental protests in Soyudlu on bogus drug possession charges. The man had printed the posters held during the [protests](#).

Torture and Ill-Treatment

The [physical abuse](#) of Fazil Gasimov detailed in court proceedings in 2024 was emblematic of a wider pattern of torture and ill-treatment of detainees. Azerbaijani authorities arrested Gasimov, an academic, in August 2023 immediately after his deportation from Türkiye. He testified in court that police put his head in a toilet and electroshocked him, among other things, to coerce him to incriminate Gubad Ibadoglu. The trial court accepted testimony in which Gasimov stated his incriminating testimony in relation to Ibadoglu had been coerced under duress. At time of writing, Gasimov remained in custody and on trial on spurious currency counterfeiting charges and had been on a hunger strike since June 2024.

On April 19, Imran Aliyev told a court during his custody hearing that police used [electric shocks](#) against him during his arrest to force him to “sign documents.” Five days later, Aliyev [stated](#) in appeals court that police beat him after they returned him from the April 19 hearing. The appeals court upheld his pre-trial custody, where Aliyev remains on a hunger strike at time of writing.

In May 2024, religious leader Taleh Baghirzade, [serving](#) a 20-year sentence, accused authorities of extremely poor conditions in custody, including chronic water shortages.

In July 2024, Abzas Media published a [detailed account](#) of torture allegations by the platform’s imprisoned director, Ulvi Hasanli. Between January and July 2024, Hasanli documented at least 58 cases of alleged torture or ill treatment in the detention center where he is awaiting trial. His family believes that another inmate’s violence and repeated threats of violence against Hasanli were at the behest of the authorities, in retaliation for his exposé.

Nine military personnel received prison sentences ranging from 4 years and 10 months to 13 years following trials held in [June](#) and [October 2024](#), bringing to 18 the [total](#) number of military personnel [sentenced](#) for torturing military officers in the Terter region in 2017. The 18 were convicted on charges including torture and inhumane treatment, serious bodily harm, and abuse of office.

In July 2024, the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CPT](#)) issued a [statement](#) about the Azerbaijani authorities’ “outright refusal to cooperate with the CPT.” The CPT said the authorities’ persistent failure to engage with the committee marked “a fundamental and unprecedented breach” of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture that established the CPT. Citing this failure, the committee unilaterally [published its report](#) on its 2022 ad hoc visit to Azerbaijan. The report described “numerous allegations of severe physical ill-treatment/torture” mainly to coerce a confession, provide information, or “accept additional charges.”

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

For years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Azerbaijan have [faced](#) ill-treatment, extortion, arbitrary detention, and discrimination by state and non-state actors. Media accounts indicate that discrimination leaves some transgender people [struggling](#) to find appropriate

housing and employment, having instead to rely on LGBT rights groups and women's organizations.

The government's escalating crackdown on civil society also affected LGBT rights organizations, which have either suspended or completely halted their work for security reasons. In April the European Court of Human Rights [struck](#) out a complaint filed by 24 people affected by Azerbaijan's 2017 anti-LGBT police campaign because the government admitted authorities had engaged in unspecified violations, and paid compensation. The 2017 [police campaign](#) involved arrests, violence, and torture of men presumed to be gay or bisexual, as well as transgender women. Applicants were "[deeply dissatisfied](#)" with the outcome because the government's acknowledgment "lack[ed] specificity regarding the nature and extent of the violations" and because the government did not commit to investigate or otherwise prevent future violations. They noted that LGBT people [continued](#) to be targeted by police and that the authorities still did not respond to harassment and discrimination against them.