

2025 AZERBAIJAN HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

The Institutionalization of Totalized Control



Email: info@instituteforhumanrights.org, info@irfs.org

Website: <https://www.instituteforhumanrights.org>



IRFS
Institute for Reporters'
Freedom and Safety
1995-2025

Institute for
**HUMAN
RIGHTS**

Prepared by: [Institute for Human Rights & Institute for Reporters` Freedom and Safety](#)

Introduction and Context

The year 2025 marked a definitive and structural shift in the trajectory of human rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan. While previous years were characterized by cyclical waves of repression often followed by periods of relative stagnation, 2025 witnessed the consolidation of a model of governance best described as “totalized control.” This paradigm shift was defined not merely by the suppression of dissent, but by the systematic legislative and judicial liquidation of the remaining infrastructures of independent civil society, media, and political opposition.

This report, prepared for review by United Nations mechanisms, international non-governmental organizations, and policy-makers, documents the comprehensive erosion of fundamental freedoms throughout the reporting period. The analysis draws upon verified case data, legislative reviews, and judicial decisions delivered by both domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2025.

Continuation and Intensification of the 2023–2025 Crackdown

The events of 2025 cannot be viewed in isolation but rather as the apex of a crackdown strategy initiated in late 2023. Following the restoration of full sovereignty over the Karabakh region in September 2023 and the hosting of the COP29 climate conference in November 2024, the Azerbaijani state apparatus pivoted inward. Having secured its primary geopolitical objectives, the executive branch redirected its security and judicial resources toward the eradication of internal “threats” — defined broadly to include investigative journalism, independent legal defense, and unauthorized religious or political organization.

This period saw the normalization of the **“Economic Crime Playbook,”** a strategy whereby political repression is laundered through the criminal justice system as the prosecution of financial misconduct. Charges of currency smuggling, illegal entrepreneurship, and tax evasion became the standard instruments for the incarceration of journalists and civic leaders, effectively stripping their persecution of its political veneer in domestic legal narratives.

Consolidation of Executive Control

A defining feature of 2025 was the administrative restructuring of the state’s coercive apparatus. In late 2025, a critical decree placed the Internal Troops directly under presidential control. This centralization of command removed intermediate layers of oversight, ensuring that the deployment of force against localized social protests or civil unrest would be subject solely to executive discretion. This move was paralleled by the extension of the Prosecutor General’s term, ensuring continuity in the aggressive prosecutorial posture that has defined the state’s engagement with civil society.

The judiciary, already lacking independence, functioned in 2025 as a closed circuit for the validation of executive decisions. As evidenced by multiple ECtHR judgments delivered this year — including *Imanov v. Azerbaijan* and *Rafiyev v. Azerbaijan* — domestic courts systematically failed to provide reasoning for detention orders, ignored exculpatory evidence, and acted in concert with the prosecution to secure convictions.

Liquidation of Independent Spheres

By the close of 2025, the independent media landscape in Azerbaijan had been effectively dismantled. The mass sentencing of the **Abzas Media** team, the extended pre-trial detention of **Meydan TV** journalists, and the raid on **Toplum TV** signaled the state's intent to establish a "monocultural information environment." Simultaneously, the reactivation of the "NGO/USAID case" in March 2025 criminalized the receipt of international funding, labeling the operations of human rights organizations as money laundering mechanisms.

The expansion of security-based narratives provided the ideological cover for this repression. The authorities increasingly characterized independent actors as agents of "foreign influence," "espionage networks," or "destabilizing forces." This narrative was used to justify not only domestic arrests but also an aggressive campaign of **transnational repression**, targeting critics in exile through in-absentia trials and the abuse of international legal cooperation mechanisms^[1].

Political Prisoners and Deprivation of Liberty

The deprivation of liberty on politically motivated grounds reached historic levels in 2025. Credible estimates indicate that the number of political prisoners rose from approximately 250 at the beginning of the year to nearly 400 by December. This statistical surge reflects a widening of the state's target profile, encompassing not just traditional opposition figures but also academics, religious scholars, and labor activists.

Estimated Numbers and Categories

The inmate population in 2025 included distinct categories of prisoners, each targeted through specific legal mechanisms:

Journalists and Media Workers

At least 25 journalists remained imprisoned, a record high^[2]. This includes the entire leadership of Abzas Media and a dozen reporters associated with Meydan TV.

Political Opposition

The leadership of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP) faced a concerted effort at liquidation, culminating in the detention of its chairperson, Ali Karimli.

Academics and Researchers

A new category of "treason" cases emerged, targeting scholars like Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov for their academic work and peace advocacy.

Religious Activists

Members of the Muslim Unity Movement and independent Shia believers constituted the largest single group of prisoners, often charged with drug-related offenses.

Civil Society Leaders

Figures such as Anar Mammadli (Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre) and Akif Gurbanov (co-founder of Toplum TV) remained in detention on smuggling charges.

The “Economic Crime” Playbook and New Arrests

The pattern of arrests in 2025 demonstrated a sophisticated manipulation of the criminal code. The authorities systematically applied Article 206 (Smuggling) and Article 192 (Illegal Entrepreneurship) to criminalize the funding models of independent organizations.

The Abzas Media Verdicts (June 20, 2025)

The sentencing of the Abzas Media team in mid-2025 served as a stark example of this trend. The Baku Court of Grave Crimes handed down severe sentences based on allegations of currency smuggling:

- Ulvi Hasanli (Director) and Sevinj Vagifgizi (Editor-in-Chief): 9 years’ imprisonment each.
- Hafiz Babali (Investigative Journalist) and Farid Mehralizade (Economist): 9 years each.
- Nargiz Absalamova and Elnara Gasimova: 8 years each.
- Mahammad Kekalov: 7.5 years’ imprisonment.

These sentences were predicated on the discovery of foreign currency during searches that the defendants maintain were planted by law enforcement. The courts consistently refused to consider defense evidence regarding the provenance of funds or the lack of criminal intent.

The “Renewed NGO/USAID” Case

In March 2025, the Prosecutor General’s Office revived a dormant investigation into foreign funding, targeting former grantees of USAID and the German Marshall Fund. This led to the in-absentia arrest orders for civic leaders like Subhan Hasanli (Social Rights Centre) and Aytaj Aghazade (AYNA), effectively classifying international human rights grants as the “legalization of criminally obtained property” (money laundering).

Use of Criminal Law to Silence Dissent

The application of criminal law in 2025 was characterized by the convertibility of minor administrative infractions into grave felonies. The ECtHR judgment in Rafiyev v. Azerbaijan (delivered 8 July 2025) highlighted this systemic flaw. In that case, the applicant was detained and fined for holding a religious gathering in a private home — an act the domestic courts treated as an administrative offense but which fits a broader pattern of criminalizing unauthorized assembly.

Similarly, the treason charges brought against researcher Bahruz Samadov, sentenced to 15 years in June 2025, illustrate the expansion of “state security” charges to cover intellectual dissent. Samadov’s academic contact with Armenian counterparts and critical publications were reframed by the prosecution as espionage, setting a dangerous precedent for academic freedom.

Impact on Families and Dependents

The punitive reach of the state extended to the families of the detained. The practice of “**proxy punishment**” — harassing relatives to pressure detainees — was widespread.

Asset Freezing

Families of defendants in the Abzas and Toplum TV cases reported the freezing of personal bank accounts, leaving dependents without financial support.

Physical Hardship

In September 2025, female journalists **Sevinj Vagifgizi**, **Nargiz Absalamova**, and **Elnara Gasimova** were suddenly transferred from Baku to a penal colony in Lankaran, over 250 kilometers from the capital. This transfer was widely interpreted as a punitive measure designed to isolate the women from their families and legal teams, imposing significant logistical and financial burdens on their elderly parents.

Torture and Ill-Treatment

In 2025, torture and inhuman treatment were not merely incidental excesses of law enforcement but systemic tools used to extract confessions, access digital data, and punish non-compliance. The Main Department for Combating Organized Crime (MDCOC), known colloquially as “Bandotdel,” remained the primary locus for these abuses.

Methods of Torture and Physical Abuse

Credible reports from human rights defenders and testimony provided in court hearings detailed specific methods of torture employed throughout the year:

Electric Shocks

Several detainees, including journalist Ahmad Mammadli (arrested May 2025) and academic Fazil Gasimov, reported the use of electric shocks. Mammadli was tortured to force the disclosure of passwords to his digital devices, while Gasimov testified that he was subjected to shocks and “waterboarding-style” asphyxiation to coerce testimony against economist Gubad Ibadoghlu.

Positional Torture

The ECtHR judgment in *Imanov v. Azerbaijan* (October 2025) retrospectively confirmed the state's use of the "crucifix position," where detainees are cuffed hand and foot to a metal pole for days. Reports from 2025 indicate this practice continues, particularly against religious detainees held at Bandotdel.

Severe Beatings

Members of the Muslim Unity Movement detained in 2025 reported severe beatings during the initial hours of detention. Photographs of Subhan Aghayev, who died in custody in February 2025, revealed open head wounds and deep restraint marks on his ankles, consistent with prolonged suspension or shackling.

Denial of Medical Care

The withholding of medical care was utilized as a method of passive torture:

Alasgar Mammadli

The co-founder of Toplum TV was diagnosed with a thyroid nodule requiring biopsy and potential surgery. Throughout 2025, the courts and penitentiary service denied his transfer to a civilian hospital or release to house arrest, despite medical opinions warning of the risk of malignancy.

Hunger Strikes

Detainees resorting to hunger strikes faced punitive neglect. Journalist Nurlan Gahramanli (Libre), who began a hunger strike in January 2025, was reported to be in critical condition by mid-year, with prison authorities refusing to provide adequate nutritional support or independent medical monitoring.

Deaths in Custody

The year witnessed at least two high-profile deaths in state custody, raising serious questions regarding the right to life:

Subhan Aghayev (February 2025)

Died in Prison No. 5. Authorities claimed natural causes, but the visual evidence of trauma suggests death resulting from ill-treatment. No effective investigation was launched.

Elbeyi Kerimli (December 12, 2025)

A 22-year-old activist died in a penitentiary facility. Officially ruled a suicide, his death followed reports of psychological pressure and threats from prison administration. Kerimli had been targeted for a symbolic protest involving a statue of Heydar Aliyev, making his death particularly sensitive politically.

Lack of Effective Investigations

The impunity of law enforcement remains nearly absolute. In the case of *Bayramov v. Azerbaijan* (ECtHR judgment May 6, 2025), the European Court found a violation of Article 8 due to the state's failure to investigate police officers who filmed and mocked a detainee. This judicial finding reflects a broader reality: in 2025, no law enforcement officer was criminally prosecuted for torture, despite hundreds of complaints filed by defense lawyers. Domestic investigative bodies routinely refused to open inquiries into torture allegations, and the few nominal probes resulted in no charges or token disciplinary actions at most.

Right to a Fair Trial

The judicial system in 2025 operated with a complete lack of independence, functioning as a procedural mechanism to validate politically motivated charges.

Lack of Judicial Independence

Analysis of 2025 court proceedings reveals a judiciary entirely captured by the executive. In the *Abzas Media* trial, the presiding judge summarily dismissed all defense motions regarding the inadmissibility of evidence obtained through warrantless searches. The court accepted the prosecution's narrative — which conflated grant receipt with smuggling — without legal scrutiny.

ECtHR judgments delivered in 2025 reinforced this assessment. In *Rafiyev v. Azerbaijan*, the Court found that domestic courts “failed to provide adequate reasons” for convicting a religious believer, merely copying police reports into their verdicts. This pattern of “cut-and-paste” judgments was ubiquitous in the political trials of 2025.

Procedural Unfairness and Fabricated Evidence

The fabrication of evidence has become standardized:

Drug Planting

The case of *Elvin Zeynalov* (arrested January 2025) exemplified the use of narcotics charges against religious activists. Zeynalov was arrested by plainclothes officers who allegedly planted drugs in his pocket in the presence of his family. Courts routinely ignored the lack of forensic evidence (fingerprints, DNA) linking defendants to the drugs.

Secret Witnesses

Trials increasingly relied on anonymous witnesses whose testimony could not be effectively challenged by the defense. This was a key feature in the “treason” trials of academics, where unidentified “secret sources” provided the sole evidence of espionage intent.

Restrictions on Access to Legal Counsel

The defense bar was systematically weakened in 2025. Amendments to the Law on Advocates and Advocate Activity, passed in October 2025, introduced provisions requiring lawyers to “not act against state interests.” This vague clause creates a chilling effect, threatening disbarment for zealous advocacy in political cases.

Furthermore, the ECtHR judgment in *Farhad Mehdiyev v. Azerbaijan* (March 2025) highlighted the arbitrary disbarment of lawyers. This precedent is critical, as 2025 saw continued pressure on the few remaining human rights lawyers, with disciplinary proceedings initiated against those defending activists. The Bar Association, functioning under de facto government control, used internal penalties and suspension threats to intimidate defense counsel, especially in high-profile cases.

Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom

The year 2025 saw the near-total elimination of independent media within Azerbaijan. Through arrests, financial strangulation, and legislative barriers, the state successfully enforced a media blockade.

Arrest and Prosecution of Journalists

The scale of arrests in the media sector was unprecedented. By December 2025, the number of imprisoned journalists stood at 25^[2] – the highest in Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet history. Key developments included:

Meydan TV

The authorities launched a sweeping criminal case against *Meydan TV*, a Berlin-based exile outlet. Twelve contributors remaining in Azerbaijan were arrested on charges of “organized smuggling.” This effectively criminalized freelance journalism for foreign media outlets.

Kanal 11 and Kanal 13

The heads of these YouTube-based outlets, **Teymur Karimov** and **Aziz Orujov**, were imprisoned on charges of extortion and unauthorized construction, respectively. These charges were transparent pretexts to silence their reporting on local corruption.

Legislative Tools of Censorship: The Media Registry

The implementation of the **Media Registry** became a primary tool for censorship. Amendments to the Media Law enforced in 2025 prohibited the operation of any media outlet not listed in the state registry. Since the Media Development Agency (MEDIA) arbitrarily denied registration to independent outlets like *Turan News Agency* and numerous smaller websites, these entities were legally forced to cease operations or face prosecution for “illegal entrepreneurship.” The registry system thus functioned as a selective licensing regime to shut down undesirable media.

Targeting of Journalists in Exile

The state escalated its campaign against journalists operating from abroad, reflecting a determination to silence critical voices beyond its borders:

In Absentia Sentences

In September 2025, exiled blogger **Mahammad Mirzali** (residing in France) was sentenced in absentia to six and a half years in prison on charges of inciting public disorder^[3]. This conviction was delivered without Mirzali’s participation or defense, underscoring the predetermined nature of the proceeding.

International Warrants

In November 2025, the Prosecutor General issued arrest warrants for U.S.-based journalist **Sevinc Osmangizi** and France-based journalist **Ganimat Zahid**, accusing them of “calls for mass disorder” and anti-state propaganda via their YouTube broadcasts^[4]. Both journalists are high-profile asylum holders abroad and prominent critics of the regime.

Smear Campaigns

State television channels broadcast dedicated programs attacking exiled journalists, using private conversations and hacked data to humiliate them^[5]. In **Aytaj Ahmadova v. Azerbaijan** (ECtHR judgment, March 2025), the European Court confirmed the state’s failure to investigate the leaking of intimate footage of a journalist – a tactic that continued unabated throughout 2025^[5]. Rather than curtail such invasions of privacy, authorities leveraged them to discredit dissenting voices, especially women (see §7.2).

Also, in 2025, new information emerged revealing that covert surveillance cameras had been installed inside the private apartment of investigative journalist **Mehman Huseynov** for several years, recording his private life without his knowledge. Following these disclosures, state-controlled television channels intensified a coordinated defamation and smear campaign against Mehman Huseynov and his brother, exiled human rights defender and journalist **Emin Huseynov**. Broadcasts included allegations targeting their family, notably claims concerning their mother’s ethnic origin, aimed at discrediting their work and portraying their criticism of the authorities as illegitimate. Throughout 2025, both Mehman and Emin Huseynov were also subjected to continued

online harassment and death threats, contributing to an environment of intimidation and insecurity for journalists and human rights defenders linked to critical reporting.

Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders

Civic space in Azerbaijan has been legally and practically closed. The “Renewed NGO/USAID case” referenced earlier criminalized the last vestiges of independent civil society activity.

Weaponization of NGO Legislation

On August 1, 2025, new amendments to the Law on NGOs entered into force. These provisions prohibit NGOs from conducting any financial operations unless their grant contracts are registered with the Ministry of Justice. Given the Ministry’s de facto ban on registering foreign grants for human rights work, this legislation forces NGOs into a legal trap: cease operations or operate illegally and face criminal prosecution.

The “Funding Trap”

The state used this legal catch-22 to arrest civil society leaders. **Subhan Hasanli** (Social Rights Centre) and **Aytaj Aghazade** (AYNA) were charged with money laundering because they utilized personal bank accounts to fund their organizations’ activities after their NGO accounts were blocked. This tactic equates the receipt of humanitarian aid or pro-democracy funds with criminal money laundering.

Professional Retaliation

Beyond imprisonment, defenders faced professional ruin. The ECtHR judgment in *Farhad Mehdiyev v. Azerbaijan* exposed the use of bar association proceedings to strip human rights lawyers of their licenses. In 2025, this practice expanded to other professions: teachers and doctors who participated in even mild social media criticism were dismissed from public sector jobs. Universities and schools quietly removed academics seen as sympathetic to the opposition, under the guise of “staff reorganization,” thereby extending the climate of fear well beyond traditional activism.

A notable case is that of Azerbaijani human rights lawyer **Zabil Gahramanov**. Gahramanov, known for defending opposition figures and individuals subject to politically motivated prosecutions, was targeted with disciplinary and criminal actions that closely followed his professional advocacy. In early October 2025, the Azerbaijan Bar Association suspended his lawyer’s license for six months after complaints linked to his public criticism of police abuses. Shortly after, on 25 October 2025, he was detained and placed in three months’ pretrial detention on charges of hooliganism and

fraud — accusations he and his defense reject as fabricated. The Ganja City Court upheld the detention, and an appellate court later extended his pretrial custody. Observers, including international legal protection bodies, have interpreted the case as retaliation for his legal work defending political opponents and exposing abuses.^[1]

Gender-Specific Impacts

The crackdown of 2025 exhibited a distinct gendered dimension, with women journalists and activists subjected to specific forms of intimidation and abuse designed to exploit social taboos.

Targeted Arrests of Women Journalists

Nine women journalists were key targets of the 2025 repression: **Sevinc Vagifgizi, Nargiz Absalamova, Elnara Gasimova, Aynur Elgunesh, Aytaj Tapdig, Aysel Umudova, Khayala Aghayeva, Fatima Movlanli, and Ulviyya Guliyeva (Ali)**^[6]. Their arrests and imprisonment decimated the editorial teams of *Abzas Media* and *Meydan TV*, as most of these women held leadership or key contributor roles in those outlets. The targeting of female journalists served a dual purpose for the authorities: it neutralized prominent voices in independent media and sent a broader message that no segment of society, not even women often perceived as less politically “threatening,” would be spared in the campaign to eliminate dissent.

Gender-Specific Risks in Detention

Threats of Sexual Violence

Multiple detained women reported gender-based threats. For example, journalist **Ulviyya Ali** (Guliyeva), arrested in May 2025, reported that police officers threatened her with rape during her initial interrogation in order to compel her to unlock her phone^[7]. This weaponization of sexual violence is a recurring tactic aimed at breaking the will of female detainees and exploiting societal stigmas around sexual assault.

Stigmatization

State-controlled media frequently deployed gendered slurs and smear campaigns against these women, attacking their morality and family honor. The leak or threat of leaking intimate images (so-called *kompromat*) remains a potent tool used to shame and silence women activists. In several cases, such as those of **Fatima Movlanli** and others, personal photos or correspondence obtained through hacks were disseminated online to discredit them.

Isolation as Psychological Torture

The transfer of the *Abzas Media* women (Vagifgizi, Absalamova, Gasimova) to the remote Lankaran penitentiary in September 2025 was a calculated move to deepen their isolation^[8]. The facility,

located far from their families, lacked basic hygiene supplies tailored for women. By making regular family visits nearly impossible – particularly devastating for detainees who are mothers – the authorities compounded the psychological toll of incarceration.

Freedom of Assembly and Association

The right to freedom of assembly was effectively non-existent in 2025. The state apparatus moved from managing protests to preemptively liquidating the capacity to organize them.

Suppression of Political Association

The Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP), the country's largest opposition party, faced an existential assault. On November 29, 2025, its leader, **Ali Karimli**, was arrested and placed in pre-trial detention on charges of “attempting to violently seize power”^[9]. This arrest followed the systematic detention of district-level party organizers throughout the year in regions such as Yevlakh and Lankaran. By December 2025, the APFP's organizational structure had been paralyzed: virtually all active regional coordinators had either been jailed on fabricated charges or threatened into inactivity. Other opposition groups, including the Musavat Party and various unregistered pro-reform movements, reported increased surveillance and sporadic detentions of their members, contributing to a climate in which formal political opposition was all but incapacitated.

Response to Public Protests

While large-scale rallies were effectively impossible under existing bans and intimidation, localized social protests still erupted – and were met with disproportionate force. In the village of **Soyudlu** (Gadabay district), for example, residents protesting environmental contamination from a gold mining operation faced riot police who deployed chemical irritants against elderly women. In another case, the arrest of young activist **Elbeyi Kerimli** for a symbolic protest (spray-painting a statue) and his subsequent death in custody (see §3.3) sent a chilling message to would-be protesters about the potential cost of even small acts of dissent^[10]. By the end of 2025, any semblance of spontaneous public assembly had been stamped out through a combination of heavy police presence, blanket denial of protest permits in Baku, and pre-emptive detention of known rally organizers.

Digital Rights and Surveillance

In 2025, Azerbaijan established a sophisticated digital surveillance architecture, transitioning from targeted hacking of individuals to mass data consolidation for the entire population.

The MİRAS System

On November 21, 2025, President Aliyev signed a decree establishing the **Centralized Information and Digital Analytics System (MİRAS)**. Controlled by the State Security Service (SSS), MİRAS integrates data from all state bodies — including health records, financial transactions, border crossings, and telecommunications metadata — into a single searchable database. This system provides security services with unfettered, warrantless access to the private lives of all citizens, effectively ending any notion of digital privacy in Azerbaijan^[11]. Officials have touted MİRAS as a “one-stop” tool for ensuring national security; in reality, it grants the authorities an omniscient view of citizens’ personal affairs without judicial oversight, raising grave concerns under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to privacy).

Surveillance of Exiles

The reach of Azerbaijani surveillance is global. Reports in 2025 indicate that the SSS has been deploying phishing attacks and spyware to monitor the communications of government critics residing in Europe^[12]. Activists abroad reported that their email and social media accounts were targeted by sophisticated attacks, with some compromises leading to the exposure of private conversations. Tellingly, content from these illicit interceptions has later surfaced in smear segments on Azerbaijani state television — a clear indication that state surveillance data is being repurposed for propaganda and intimidation. This blending of cyber-espionage with public shaming tactics highlights the regime’s use of **digital transnational repression**, ensuring that exile is no guarantee of safety from Azerbaijani state scrutiny.

Censorship and Internet Control

The regime continued to curb online freedoms inside the country. **Website blocking** persisted without judicial oversight, affecting independent news sites and opposition blogs. Throughout 2025, authorities periodically throttled or outright blocked access to social media platforms during politically sensitive moments. For instance, **TikTok** access was restricted during protests or high-profile trials under the pretext of “preventing disinformation.” The Ministry of Digital Development and Transport utilized Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) technology to slow internet traffic in regions experiencing unrest (such as Imishli in January 2025), effectively isolating local events from national attention^[13]. These actions violate Azerbaijan’s own constitutional guarantees of freedom of information and further illustrate the conflation of “cyber security” with suppression of dissent.

International Obligations and State Response

Azerbaijan's conduct in 2025 demonstrated a blatant disregard for its international human rights obligations, characterized by a confrontational stance toward European institutions and Western governments.

Relations with the Council of Europe

Relations reached a nadir in January 2025, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) took the unprecedented step of voting not to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation due to the country's deteriorating human rights record. The Azerbaijani government responded not with introspection or reform, but with defiant rhetoric, labeling the PACE decision as biased and "Islamophobic." Officials suggested that European criticism was a punishment for Azerbaijan's independent foreign policy and its victory in Karabakh, rather than a response to genuine rights abuses. This defensive posture foreclosed opportunities for dialogue and set the tone for a year in which Baku treated international scrutiny as an affront to sovereignty.

Non-Execution of ECtHR Judgments

Azerbaijan continues to have one of the poorest records in Europe for implementing judgments of the ECtHR. Throughout 2025, the pattern of paying monetary compensation while ignoring **general measures** persisted. In *Imanov v. Azerbaijan* (2025), for example, the ECtHR found that the disbarment of a lawyer in retaliation for reporting torture was a violation of freedom of expression; yet domestic bodies (the Bar Association and prosecutors) took no steps to reinstate the lawyer or hold those responsible to account. By year's end, Azerbaijan maintained the highest rate of non-implementation of ECtHR judgments among Council of Europe member states. The Committee of Ministers' repeated calls for compliance were met with pro forma replies. This non-execution crisis undermines the European human rights system: the regime has calculated that the political cost of defiance is low, as it faces few tangible consequences beyond reputational damage.

International Pressure

Facing mounting criticism, Azerbaijan sought to leverage its strategic importance. In 2025, the U.S. Congress introduced the "Azerbaijan Democracy and Human Rights Act," considering targeted Magnitsky-style sanctions on officials complicit in abuses. The European Parliament issued several resolutions condemning the crackdown. However, the Azerbaijani government banked on its energy partnerships and transit routes to blunt any serious repercussions. Indeed, Baku's narrative to its domestic audience was that Western condemnation is merely geopolitical posturing. High-ranking officials frequently dismissed external reports as "foreign interference" and doubled down on "**sovereignty**" rhetoric, claiming an inherent right to chart an independent course on legal and human rights matters. Consequently, tangible international pressure remained limited to travel

bans on a few officials and increased scrutiny in forums like the OSCE, falling short of the concerted action that human rights groups have advocated.

Transnational Repression

A notable and alarming feature of 2025 was the Azerbaijani government's extension of its repressive tactics beyond its national borders. As domestic dissent was crushed, the authorities intensified efforts to silence exiled journalists and activists living abroad. This campaign of transnational repression manifested through in-absentia prosecutions, attempts to extradite or kidnap exiles, harassment of exiles' families in Azerbaijan, and international smear campaigns. These actions demonstrated that the regime's totalized control model does not stop at Azerbaijan's borders, but seeks to neutralize critics wherever they reside[1].

In-Absentia Trials of Exiled Critics

Throughout 2025, Azerbaijani courts and law enforcement initiated a wave of criminal cases against critics in exile, often resulting in convictions **in absentia** or arrest warrants designed to trigger international enforcement:

High-Profile Sentences

On December 23, 2025, a Baku court sentenced **Ganimat Zahid**, the exiled editor-in-chief of *Azadliq* newspaper (living in France), to 7 years in prison in absentia on charges of calling for the overthrow of the state[14]. Two weeks later, on January 14, 2026, U.S.-based independent journalist **Sevinc Osmanqizi** (Sevinj Mirzayeva) was similarly convicted in absentia and given an 8-year prison term for “public calls for mass unrest”[14]. Both journalists are prominent asylum recipients abroad and have been vocal about Azerbaijani government corruption and rights abuses. They deny the fabricated charges and were tried without any defense present.

Arrest Warrants and Indictments

In addition to formal sentences, dozens of exiled activists were charged in absentia during 2025. In early November, the Prosecutor General's Office publicly announced a list of **wanted exiles**, which included Osmanqizi and Zahid (prior to their verdicts), veteran journalist **Beydulla Manafov**, blogger **Abid Gafarov**, historian **Altay Goyushov**, analyst **Arastun Orujlu**, and YouTube commentator **Vagif Allahverdiyev**[15][16]. They were accused under broad provisions such as Criminal Code Articles 220.2 and 281.2 (“calls for mass disorder” and “public calls against the state”), offenses that Azerbaijan frequently uses to criminalize free expression[17]. In September 2025, the in-absentia sentencing of France-based blogger **Mahammad Mirzali** to 6.5 years – ostensibly for inciting unrest – marked the first such overseas conviction of the year[3]. It was followed by a cascade of similar prosecutions.

Retaliation for Journalism

Those targeted in absentia share a profile of outspoken criticism. Osmanqizi, for instance, runs a YouTube news channel with over 400,000 subscribers and had previously faced threats of “revenge porn” leaks aimed at silencing her[18]. Zahid oversees the *Azerbaijan Saati* online TV program and fled Azerbaijan after a prior prison term and threats to his family[19]. The timing of their charges often corresponded with their most impactful reporting. Human Rights Watch noted that by late 2025, **over 30 exiled Azerbaijani activists and journalists** had been hit with criminal investigations, arrest warrants, or summonses from Baku, in what it described as an “unprecedented crackdown” beyond Azerbaijan’s borders[20]. These include cases like that of **Tural Sadigli**, a blogger based in Europe who was publicly summoned in March and later reportedly tried in absentia for “rioting and subversion”[21].

Lack of Due Process

The in-absentia trials have been devoid of any semblance of fairness. Exiles typically learn about the charges only through Azerbaijani state media announcements or scant Interpol notices[22]. Osmanqizi has described the accusations against her as “totally fabricated” and notes she was never formally summoned or given an opportunity to defend herself in court[23]. Likewise, Zahid has received no official case materials. This practice violates Article 6 of the ECHR (right to fair trial) as defendants are essentially tried and sentenced as fugitives without counsel. It also contravenes Azerbaijan’s own Criminal Procedure Code, which in theory limits trials in absentia to certain circumstances that do not apply to most of these dissident cases.

Extradition Attempts and Cross-Border Abductions

Beyond legal trials in absentia, the Azerbaijani authorities actively sought the **physical return** of exiled critics through extradition requests and, in some cases, extrajudicial abduction:

Detention of Activists Abroad

On November 29, 2025, Turkish police detained **Gültakin Hajibeyli**, an opposition politician and National Council member exiled in Turkey, at Azerbaijan’s behest. She was labeled with a “G-82” code as a *foreign national security threat* and placed under strict surveillance in an Istanbul deportation center[24]. Despite holding a valid residence permit in Turkey and no known legal violations there, a Turkish administrative court – reportedly acting on information from Baku – issued a **deportation order** on December 15, 2025 to expel Hajibeyli to Azerbaijan[25]. Hajibeyli publicly protested that this order was politically motivated and warned that if returned, she would face immediate imprisonment on fabricated charges of “supporting a coup attempt”[26][27]. At the time of reporting, she remained in detention fighting deportation, amid international appeals to Ankara to uphold non-refoulement principles.

Georgia Extradition Case – Afgan Sadigov

In a similar vein, Azerbaijani journalist **Afgan Sadigov** was arrested in Tbilisi, Georgia in August 2024 on the basis of a secret Azerbaijani extradition request. Sadigov, known for running an online news page critical of the Azerbaijani government, had fled to Georgia in late 2023. He spent nearly nine months in a Georgian prison fighting extradition, during which he staged a 161-day hunger strike in protest[28]. In February 2025, the European Court of Human Rights intervened with an emergency

order (Rule 39) **barring Georgia from extraditing Sadigov** until it could review the case[29]. Following this, Georgian authorities had to relent; Sadigov was released on bail in April 2025[30]. However, his ordeal underscored the danger: his wife publicly stated that as long as Sadigov remained accessible abroad, “we know how dangerous Ilham Aliyev is... he can be attacked or even kidnapped [here]. I am very scared”[31]. Indeed, another Azerbaijani dissident journalist, **Afgan Mukhtarli**, was brazenly kidnapped off a Tbilisi street in 2017 and smuggled into Azerbaijan – a case that still casts a shadow over Azerbaijan-Georgia cooperation on dissidents[32]. Sadigov’s freedom remains tenuous; while he avoided extradition, the charges against him in Azerbaijan (reportedly involving fraud and “terrorism” accusations common to exiles[33]) remain outstanding, effectively trapping him in de facto exile with constant vigilance.

Abduction from Third Countries – The Isayev Case

One of the most alarming developments was the **extraordinary rendition** of a minority rights activist, highlighting Azerbaijan’s willingness to flout international law. In early November 2025, **Kamal Isayev**, a Russian citizen of Talysh origin and vocal critic of Baku’s policies toward minorities, traveled to Turkey for medical treatment. He suddenly disappeared on November 7. Days later, Isayev’s family learned he had been **detained in Istanbul and secretly transferred to Baku** – reportedly by operatives of the Azerbaijani State Security Service[34]. Turkish authorities provided no transparent legal process for this transfer, and Isayev surfaced in an Azerbaijani detention center with no explanation. This cross-border kidnapping is reminiscent of past incidents (including the 2018 abduction of journalist Fikrət Hüseynli in Ukraine, which was thwarted at the last moment[35]). The Isayev incident suggests Azerbaijani security services are now directly intervening on foreign soil when they perceive an opportunity, particularly if the dissident is not a citizen of a Western country and thus more vulnerable. It underscores a **new level of transnational repression**, effectively violating the sovereignty of third countries and the basic rights of targeted individuals.

Political Refugees as Bargaining Chips

In multiple instances, Baku attempted to use bilateral relationships to secure the return of exiles. It is believed that Hajibeyli’s detention in Turkey was tied to Azerbaijani pressure following Azerbaijan’s aid to Turkey or mutual political favors[36]. Similarly, in 2025 Azerbaijan renewed extradition requests for exiles in Europe, such as activist **Manaf Jalilzade** in Switzerland; Swiss authorities flatly rejected Baku’s request due to the “**documented risk of torture and lack of fair trial**” that the dissident would face if returned[37]. These rejections by democratic states highlight the stark contrast between Azerbaijan’s assertions (that these exiles are “criminals”) and the international community’s view (that they are likely to be persecuted if sent back). Nonetheless, Azerbaijan’s pursuit of its critics abroad has continued unabated, raising serious concerns under international law, including potential breaches of the prohibition on refoulement (sending a person to a country where they face persecution or torture).

Abuse of Interpol and International Law Enforcement Mechanisms

Azerbaijan in 2025 also leaned on formal international law enforcement channels to extend its reach, notably through the misuse of **Interpol’s Red Notice** system and mutual legal assistance:

Red Notices for Dissidents

Reports indicate that Azerbaijani authorities have **repeatedly sought Interpol Red Notices** against exiled activists and journalists, even when those individuals have refugee status abroad[38]. A Red Notice, intended for genuine criminals, is often treated as an international arrest warrant. Azerbaijan is one of several authoritarian-leaning states accused of abusing this tool to hunt political opponents. In 2024–2025 alone, Baku attempted to flag numerous exiles: names cited by human rights monitors include **Ordukhan Teymurkhan** (Netherlands), **Tural Sadigli** (Germany), **Ordukhan Babirov** (Netherlands), **Gurban and Orkhan Mammadov** (France), **Rafael Piriye**(Germany), **Ali Hasanaliyev**, and **Suleyman Suleymanli**[38]. Most of these individuals are democracy activists or bloggers who fled persecution. Interpol’s constitution prohibits interventions of a political character, and since 2015 it has had a policy (after pressure from NGOs) not to honor Red Notice requests against verified refugees. Yet Azerbaijan often initiates the process before the person’s status is confirmed, or abuses diffusion notices (direct country-to-country alerts outside Interpol’s public list).

Documented Misuse – The Croatia Incident

In July 2025, **Azer Kazimov**, an Azerbaijani asylum-seeker residing in Sweden, was unexpectedly detained by border police in Croatia due to an Azerbaijani-issued Red Notice[39]. Kazimov had fled Azerbaijan earlier fearing repression. Croatian authorities, upon reviewing Azerbaijan’s request and evidence of his asylum claim, ultimately refused to extradite him and released him back to Sweden[39]. This case echoed a pattern seen in other countries: In 2017, for example, Azerbaijani journalist **Fikrat Huseynli** (a Dutch refugee) was arrested in Ukraine on a Red Notice; Azerbaijani embassy officials even showed up during his detention and interrogation in Kyiv[35]. He was only freed after intense pressure from Western diplomats[40]. These incidents reveal how Azerbaijani officials attempt to co-opt Interpol and foreign law enforcement for political ends, at times going so far as to **personally participate on foreign soil** to secure an extradition[41].

Impact on Exiles

Even when unsuccessful, Red Notices and similar requests serve to harass and threaten exiles. Wanted dissidents risk arrest whenever they travel internationally; some have been trapped in transit or jailed for weeks before courts reject the extradition. Exiles often discover they are on an Interpol list only when stopped at an airport. The **psychological pressure** is immense: they must assume they could be detained anywhere outside their new country of residence. This inhibits their activism and movement. Moreover, the Azerbaijani government uses the very existence of these warrants in propaganda to brand exiles as “wanted criminals,” seeking to undermine their credibility.

International Legal Cooperation Abuse

Azerbaijan has also misused mutual legal assistance treaties to press foreign states. In March 2025, prosecutors in Baku took the unusual step of issuing **public summonses** via state media for six prominent exiles (including Mirzali, Sadigli, and others), knowing they would not appear[42]. The intent was to justify later in-absentia prosecutions and bolster any Interpol paperwork by claiming the individuals “ignored official summons.” In some cases, Azerbaijan has even pursued civil

defamation suits in foreign courts against exiled activists or tried to involve foreign police in delivering subpoenas, actions that blur the line between legal process and persecution.

International rights organizations and bodies like the OSCE and the UN special rapporteurs have flagged these practices as a dangerous **“authoritarian reach”** beyond borders. In 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists explicitly called on Interpol member states to scrutinize Baku’s requests, and reminded them that **dozens of Azerbaijan’s exiled critics have been hit with major criminal charges in absentia over the past year**[20]. The brazen misuse of international policing for political ends not only harms the individuals targeted but also undermines the integrity of global law enforcement cooperation.

Pressure on Families and Smear Campaigns

To complement direct action against exiles, the Azerbaijani authorities continued to **punish dissidents by proxy** – targeting their relatives at home – and to wage **information warfare** to destroy their reputations:

Harassment and Detention of Family Members

It has become almost routine for the families of exiled activists to face reprisals. In 2025 this pattern persisted. For example, after abroad-based blogger **Huseyn Abdullayev** spoke out on social media, his mother’s home in Baku was searched and she was interrogated on dubious allegations. Such tactics have a long history in Azerbaijan. In a notorious 2017 case, police detained **12 relatives** of exiled video-blogger **Ordukhon Teymurkhan**, including a two-year-old niece, in an effort to make him stop his anti-corruption protests from abroad[43][44]. During that incident, an officer forced Ordukhon’s distraught sister on the phone to beg him to cease his activism while she wept – a moment Ordukhon recorded and later publicized as evidence of Baku’s coercion[45]. Although most of Ordukhon’s family were released the next day, two male relatives were kept in custody and sentenced to 30 days on spurious charges of disobeying police[46]. This **collective punishment** strategy was not an isolated aberration; human rights monitors have documented numerous similar cases[47]. In June 2015, two nephews and a cousin of journalist Ganimat Zahid were arrested in Baku shortly after Zahid’s exile media work gained prominence; the young men were hit with bogus drug and disobedience charges, leading one to a prison sentence and another to flee the country upon release[48]. Likewise, family members of exiled outlet founder **Emin Milli** were arrested or pressured into publicly disowning him as a “traitor” under duress[49][50]. In 2025, this pattern continued to deter would-be critics: relatives of exiled activists faced travel bans, sudden tax inspections, loss of employment, and the ever-present threat of arrest. The SSS has even reportedly **compelled family members to participate in intimidation** – **Mehman Huseynov**, a blogger who remained in Azerbaijan, revealed in a 2025 interview that SSS agents had taken his relatives to a secure location and shown them secretly recorded intimate videos of Mehman as a warning of what would happen if his activism persisted[51]. This shocking intrusion (a hidden camera had been planted in his home after his 2019 release) exemplifies the regime’s willingness to violate privacy and involve family honor as leverage.

Smear Campaigns and “Character Assassination”

The Azerbaijani government and its affiliated media aggressively use smear tactics to undermine exiled critics' credibility. State television regularly airs segments portraying exiles as enemies of the state, foreign agents, or morally debased individuals. Often these segments are supplemented by **illicitly obtained personal data**. In multiple cases, private phone conversations, emails, or even intimate photos of exiled journalists have been hacked and then selectively broadcast or leaked online to embarrass them[5]. Female critics are especially targeted with gender-based smears (as noted in §7.2). **Sevinc Osmanqizi's** experience is emblematic: in 2019 pro-government outlets threatened to release compromising personal photos of her if she did not cease her YouTube broadcasts[18]. She refused to capitulate; although the explicit images were not ultimately released at that time, the threat alone was intended to tarnish her reputation in a conservative society. In 2024, a member of parliament from the ruling party escalated the rhetoric by publicly calling Osmanqizi a "**legitimate target**" who could be "*neutralized by any means*"[52] – effectively inciting violence against a journalist on national television. For male exiles, the smears often focus on portraying them as criminals or unstable. For instance, state media has accused blogger Mahammad Mirzali (who survived a stabbing in France in 2021) of "*staging attacks on himself to gain asylum*," and has disparaged historian Altay Goyushov's academic credentials with bogus claims. These campaigns serve a dual purpose: to discredit the individuals in the eyes of the Azerbaijani public (making it easier to dismiss their criticism), and to psychologically pressure the exiles themselves. Knowing that one's personal life can be splashed on TV or that one's elderly parent can be paraded to denounce you (as happened in some cases) is deeply distressing for the activists.

Impunity for Violations of Privacy

Despite clear evidence and even ECtHR rulings, Azerbaijani authorities have **never prosecuted those responsible** for smear operations involving privacy breaches. The case of investigative journalist **Khadija Ismayilova** set a precedent: after hidden cameras were used to film her in her bedroom and the footage released in 2012, she won an ECtHR judgment in 2019 finding Azerbaijan in violation of Article 8 for failing to investigate the intrusion[53]. Yet no one was held accountable domestically, and similar tactics have continued. In March 2025, as mentioned, the ECtHR again found Azerbaijan at fault in *Ahmadova v. Azerbaijan* for not investigating the dissemination of a journalist's intimate video[5]. The government's non-response to these judgments effectively signals to security services and pro-government media that such **dirty methods are sanctioned from the top**. The result is a climate of personal vulnerability for government critics: they must assume that any private moment or communication could be weaponized against them.

In sum, Azerbaijan's transnational repression in 2025 was comprehensive and unrelenting. It combined legal maneuvering (abusive trials and Red Notices), covert operations (surveillance and abductions), and psychological warfare (targeting families and reputations). This multi-faceted assault on critics abroad not only violates the rights of those individuals (freedom of expression, right to fair trial, right to family life, etc.), but also undermines international norms of asylum and safe haven. It demands a coordinated response from the international community to ensure that exile remains a refuge for those who have been forced to flee, rather than an extension of the authoritarian state's reach.

Overall Assessment of the 2025 Human Rights Situation

The year 2025 represents a **point of no return** for human rights in Azerbaijan. The state has successfully transitioned from **managing** dissent to **eradicating** it. The structural erosion of the rule of law is complete: the judiciary, the bar association, and the legislature now function as integrated arms of the executive security apparatus.

The long-term institutional damage is profound. The liquidation of independent media means that corruption and abuse will go increasingly unreported. The criminalization of civil society funding ensures that no independent monitoring or advocacy can survive inside the country. The entrenchment of fear, driven by pervasive torture and the high-tech surveillance capabilities of systems like MİRAS, has induced a paralysis of civic engagement among the population.

Azerbaijan's trajectory in 2025 has been toward **consolidated authoritarianism**, where human rights are not merely violated episodically, but are **systematically engineered out of possibility**. In this environment, even the pretense of pluralism or rule of law has been abandoned in favor of openly repressive governance.

Absent a fundamental shift in approach, the international human rights framework will continue to be defied with impunity. It is telling that throughout 2025, the government's response to criticism was denial and escalation rather than any corrective measures. Going forward, only markedly enhanced international pressure – moving from statements of concern to tangible consequences (such as targeted sanctions against officials, or suspension of certain cooperation agreements) – appears capable of denting the regime's confidence.

For the foreseeable future, Azerbaijan's remaining human rights defenders, independent journalists, and opposition activists face the stark choice of silence, imprisonment, or exile. And as documented, even exile may no longer guarantee safety. The necessity for sustained international engagement, creative advocacy strategies, and solidarity with Azerbaijan's embattled civil society has never been more urgent.



Annex 1: Individuals Convicted in 2025 for Journalism or Human Rights Activism

Name	Affiliation/Role	Charges	Sentence
Ulvi Hasanli	Abzas Media (Director)	Smuggling (foreign currency)	9 years
Sevinj Vagifgizi	Abzas Media (Editor-in-Chief)	Smuggling	9 years
Hafiz Babali	Abzas Media (Journalist)	Smuggling	9 years
Farid Mehralizade	Abzas Media (Economist)	Smuggling	9 years
Bahruz Samadov	Political Researcher	Treason (espionage)	15 years
Igbal Abilov	Political Researcher	Treason (espionage)	18 years
Elvin Zeynalov	Religious Activist	Narcotics possession	3.5 years
Tofiq Yagublu	Opposition Politician (NCDF)	Hooliganism / Violence ¹	9 years
Nargiz Absalamova	Abzas Media (Journalist)	Smuggling	8 years
Elnara Gasimova	Abzas Media (Journalist)	Smuggling	8 years
Mahammad Kekalov	Abzas Media (Contributor)	Smuggling	7.5 years

(¹Tofiq Yagublu - Veteran activist convicted for alleged assault in a fabricated 2020 case)

Notes: This list includes select cases illustrative of 2025 convictions on politically motivated charges. Many other activists received shorter sentences (e.g., 30-90 day administrative detentions) not listed here. All charges above are widely considered baseless and aimed at punishing legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Annex 2: Individuals in Pre-Trial Detention in 2025 (Politically Motivated Cases)

Name	Affiliation/Role	Charges	Status (End of 2025)
Ali Karimli	APFP – Opposition Leader	Attempting to seize power violently	In custody (since Nov 2025)
Mammad Ibrahim	APFP – Party Deputy	Organizing to overthrow government	In custody (since Nov 2025)
Ulviyya (Guliyeva) Ali	Independent Journalist (VOA)	Currency smuggling (Meydan TV case)	In custody (since May 2025)
Nurlan Gahramanli (Libre)	Freelance Journalist	Currency smuggling (Meydan TV case)	In custody (since 2024/25)
Fatima Movlanli	Freelance Journalist	Currency smuggling (Meydan TV case)	In custody (since 2024/25)
Shamshad Aghayev	Freelance Journalist	Currency smuggling (Meydan TV case)	In custody (since 2024/25)
Ahmad Mammadli	Independent Blogger/Activist	Illegal entrepreneurship (alleged)	In custody (since May 2025)
Alasgar Mammadli	Toplum TV (Co-founder)	Smuggling / Money laundering	In custody (health concerns)
Anar Mammadli	NGO Leader (EMDS)	Smuggling / Tax evasion	In custody (trial ongoing)
Aytaj Aghazade	NGO Activist (AYNA)	Money laundering (foreign grants)	In custody (since Mar 2025)

Notes: All the above were held in pre-trial detention during 2025 on charges widely assessed as retaliatory. Several (e.g., the Meydan TV group) had their detentions extended repeatedly without trial verdicts by year’s end. Conditions of detention have been marked by reports of abuse (see main text). Others not listed include dozens of rank-and-file opposition party activists and religious believers who were in prolonged pre-trial detention on lesser-publicized cases.

Annex 3: Individuals Prosecuted or Sentenced in Absentia in 2025

Name	Status/Location	Charges (in Absentia)	Outcome/Status
Ganimat Zahid	Journalist – Exile in France	“Calls to overthrow state”	Sentenced 7 years (Sep 2025)
Sevinc Osmanqizi	Journalist – Exile in USA	“Calls for mass disorder/ unrest”	Sentenced 8 years (Jan 2026)
Mahammad Mirzali	Blogger – Exile in France	“Inciting mass unrest”, etc.	Sentenced 6.5 years (Sept 2025)
Tural Sadigli	Blogger – Exile in Europe	“Rioting and subversion”	Wanted – arrest warrant
Afgan Sadigov	Journalist – Exile in Georgia	Fraud, extremism (politicized)	Extradition sought; blocked by ECHR[29]
Gültakin Hajibeyli	Politician – Exile in Turkey	“Appeals to overthrow govt”	Detained in Turkey; facing deportation[25]
Altay Goyushov	Historian – Exile in USA	“Anti-state calls”	Charged in absentia; case open
Abid Gafarov	Blogger – Exile in France	“Public incitement”	Charged in absentia; wanted

Notes: This table highlights key cases of Azerbaijani dissidents abroad targeted by in-absentia legal actions in 2025. “Sentenced” indicates a trial was conducted without the defendant present, resulting in a verdict. “Wanted” signifies an arrest warrant or Interpol notice was issued. Many exiles have asylum or refugee status in their host countries, which view the charges as politically motivated[54]. International human rights organizations have decried these cases as examples of transnational repression.

Annex 4: Chronology of Key Human Rights Events – 2025

January: PACE suspends Azerbaijani delegation credentials due to human rights concerns. Arrest of Shia activist Elvin Zeynalov on dubious drug charges.

February: Death of political prisoner Subhan Aghayev in custody (signs of torture observed). Government orders closure of the USAID office in Baku.

March: Revival of the “NGO/USAID” criminal case targeting NGO leaders. First wave of public summonses and charges in absentia issued against exiled bloggers and activists.

April: European Court of Human Rights issues interim measure stopping Georgia from extraditing journalist Afgan Sadigov to Azerbaijan (Sadigov subsequently released on bail)[29].

May: Arrests of journalists **Ulviyya Ali** and **Ahmad Mammadli** (bringing jailed journalist count to record high)[2]. Credible reports emerge of severe torture of journalist Ahmad Mammadli under detention.

June 20: Mass sentencing of *Abzas Media* leadership (sentences ranging from 7.5 to 9 years for six journalists) on fabricated smuggling charges.

July: Reports that Azerbaijani Red Notice requests led to detention of exile Azer Kazimov in Croatia (he is later freed)[39]. **Tofiq Yagublu**, opposition figure, begins hunger strike after receiving nine-year sentence in a politically charged trial.

August 1: Entry into force of harsh amendments to the Law on NGOs, effectively banning unregistered foreign funding and crippling independent NGOs.

September: Transfer of imprisoned women journalists (*Abzas Media* group) to a remote prison in Lankaran, intensifying their isolation and hardship[8]. In France, a court convicts an Azerbaijani hitman for the 2021 stabbing of blogger Mirzali; the very next day, a Baku court issues another arrest warrant against Mirzali.

October 31: Adoption of amendments to the Law on Advocates, introducing loyalty provisions and further eroding defense lawyers’ independence.

November 21: Presidential decree establishes the **MIRAS** mass surveillance system under State Security Service control, aggregating citizens’ personal data[11]. Prosecutors announce new criminal cases against exiles including Osmanqizi and Zahid; Turkey detains opposition politician G. Hajibeyli for deportation.

November 29: Arrest of APFP leader Ali Karimli and party veteran Mammad Ibrahim on charges of plotting a coup; simultaneously, Turkish authorities detain G. Hajibeyli in Istanbul (purportedly related to the same crackdown)[36].

December 12: Death of youth activist Elbeyi Kerimli in custody, officially ruled a suicide amid allegations of foul play.

December 15: Turkey issues deportation order for G. Hajibeyli, sparking international concern[25]. Azerbaijan courts convict several exiled journalists in absentia around this date (Zahidov on Dec 23; others scheduled). Amnesty International and others call for release of 12 *Meydan TV* journalists still detained without trial.

Annex 5: Selected Emblematic Cases – ECtHR Judgments in 2025

Imanov v. Azerbaijan: The ECtHR ruled that Azerbaijan violated freedom of expression by disbarring a lawyer (Imanov) in retaliation for publicizing torture allegations. The judgment underscored the

“chilling effect” on lawyers who might expose abuse. Despite the ruling, domestic authorities did not reinstate the lawyer, reflecting persistent non-compliance[55][56].

Rafiyev v. Azerbaijan: The Court found that the detention and conviction of a religious believer for holding a home prayer gathering was arbitrary and lacked legal basis. Domestic courts had copy-pasted police accusations without independent scrutiny, violating the right to freedom of religion and assembly[57][58].

Farhad Mehdiyev v. Azerbaijan: The ECtHR held that the disbarment of human rights lawyer Farhad Mehdiyev was unlawful, violating his rights to fair trial and freedom of expression. The case highlighted how Bar Association proceedings were used punitively. No steps were taken in 2025 to remedy the broader issue; in fact, new laws further curtailed lawyers’ independence (see §4.3).

Ahmadova v. Azerbaijan: In a judgment published March 2025, the ECtHR found Azerbaijan in breach of Article 8 (right to privacy) for failing to investigate the covert filming and leaking of journalist Aytaj Ahmadova’s intimate footage. The Court noted this form of harassment aims to silence journalists and called for effective investigations[5]. The government’s ongoing inaction in such cases (multiple women journalists faced similar privacy violations in 2025) speaks to an environment of impunity.

Bayramov v. Azerbaijan: The ECtHR determined that police filming and mocking of a protester in detention, and the lack of any investigation into that misconduct, violated the individual’s privacy and dignitary rights. This case, decided in May 2025, reflects the systemic disregard for detainees’ rights and the absence of accountability mechanisms (see §3.4).

Others: The ECtHR also issued judgments in 2025 on older cases, such as *Yunusova & Yunusov v. Azerbaijan* (regarding the 2014 imprisonment of human rights defenders Arif and Leyla Yunus) and *Mammadli v. Azerbaijan* (on the imprisonment of Election Monitoring Center leader Anar Mammadli). In each, violations were found (unlawful detention, persecution for civic activities). While these judgments concern past events, their non-implementation by 2025 (e.g., refusal to clear the activists’ criminal records or punish those responsible for their treatment) illustrates Azerbaijan’s entrenched resistance to reform.

End of Report

[1] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [21] [55] [56] [57] [58] Azerbaijan Human Rights Report 2025-c.docx

file:///file_0000000031ac722fb120e1ea8e936cfe

[2] Azerbaijan arrests 2 more journalists, increasing crackdown tally to 25 - Committee to Protect Journalists

<https://cpj.org/2025/05/azerbaijan-arrests-two-more-journalists-increasing-crackdown-tally-to-25/>

[14] [18] [19] [20] [22] [23] [52] [54] Azerbaijan sentences exiled journalists to lengthy prison terms in absentia - Committee to Protect Journalists

<https://cpj.org/2026/01/azerbaijan-sentences-exiled-journalists-to-lengthy-prison-terms-in-absentia/>

[15] [16] [17] [33] Azerbaijan Escalates Crackdown on Exiled Critics | Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/26/azerbaijan-escalates-crackdown-on-exiled-critics>

[24] [25] [26] [27] [36] Deportation order issued against Gultakin Hajibayli - MEYDAN.TV

<https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/deportation-order-issued-against-gultakin-hajibayli/>

[28] [29] [30] [31] Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov released from prison after being granted bail

<https://oc-media.org/azerbaijani-journalist-afgan-sadigov-released-from-prison-after-being-granted-bail/>

[32] [35] [40] [41] Revenge by red notice: how Azerbaijan targets its critics abroad | openDemocracy

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/revenge-by-red-notice-how-azerbaijan-targets-its-critics-abroad/>

[34] [37] [38] [39] [42] Azerbaijan's transnational repression against exiled critics - FVC

<https://freevoicescollective.org/azerbaijan-transnational-repression-exiled-critics/>

[43] [44] [45] [46] [47] Azerbaijani Activist's Family Arrested, Harassed | Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/01/azerbaijani-activists-family-arrested-harassed>

[48] [49] [50] Azerbaijan targeting families of activists in exile - The Foreign Policy Centre

<https://fpc.org.uk/azerbaijan-targeting-families-activists-exile/>

[51] [53] "Revenge pornography": Infringement to private life as method of political pressure in Azerbaijan Tribunat

<https://tribunat.info/en/analysis/revenge-pornography-infringement-to-private-life-as-method-of-political-pressure-in-azerbaijan>

Email: info@instituteforhumanrights.org, info@irfs.org

Website: <https://www.instituteforhumanrights.org>

