



Azerbaijan

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In 2025, a study titled 'Licence to Hate' by the local monitoring group QueeRadar analysed hate speech on Facebook and Instagram from January to July, assessing how changes in Meta's content policies affected the Azerbaijani segment of social media. The research documented 100 instances of abusive content, often amplified by influencers, public figures, and semi-public pages, including dehumanising language, moral condemnation, and explicit incitement to violence towards LGBTI people. The study noted that some public commentary welcomed the perceived loosening of moderation rules, further normalising hostility against queer people online.

Public discourse on LGBTI communities included unfounded and stigmatising narratives promoted by professional figures. In May, Zahid Oruc, chair of the Human Rights Committee of Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis, publicly attacked the concept of gender equality in a parliamentary speech, framing it as a threat to national values, the family and the legal order. In July a lawyer publicly claimed that Azerbaijan was undergoing widespread "gayification", linking the shortage of male teachers in schools to children's upbringing and portraying LGBTI identities as a societal problem.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In November, a 19-year-old was stabbed to death in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. According to Azerbaijani Qiy Vaar organisation, the victim had previously moved to Turkey to escape family pressure but was forced to return to Azerbaijan after his residence permit expired. During his stay in Turkey, he was threatened by his cousin and told friends that his family was looking to kill him upon his return to Azerbaijan.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In March, a queer singer performing at a Novruz celebration in a public school in Baku was framed by local media as "controversial" because of their sexual orientation, inviting public judgment and negative reactions.

Later in the year, trans singer Samira Şah became the target of a massive media campaign after

performing at a cultural event attended by schoolchildren. Some outlets published footage and commentary out of context, presenting the performance as "controversial."

In July, the Court of Grave Crimes in Baku sentenced seven independent journalists linked to Abzas Media, an outlet known for investigative reporting on corruption, convicting them on smuggling and related charges. The prosecutions were linked to Azerbaijan's restrictive grant regulations, which have been used to initiate criminal cases against journalists and civil society actors.

In November, authorities issued arrest warrants and summonses against several journalists, activists, and analysts living in exile. The Prosecutor General's Office stated that the Binagadi District Court had authorised warrants in absentia under multiple provisions of the Criminal Code. The factual basis of the charges has not been publicly clarified. Those targeted are known for criticising the government and commenting on human rights issues. Independent civil society commentary consistently describes these measures as a widening and intensifying of tactics used against independent media and human rights actors.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL LIFE

In 2025, several short films in Azerbaijan used personal storytelling to depict LGBTI lives, bringing visibility to experiences that have historically been absent from the country's cinema.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In 2025, protections for LGBTI people in detention in Azerbaijan remained severely limited. Authorities continued to collect and publish no official data on LGBTI prisoners, leaving significant gaps in state oversight and reporting and forcing reliance on documentation by human rights organisations. Based on testimonies, trans women and gay men in detention were frequently placed in isolation and subjected to violence by both other detainees and prison staff. Several accounts reported that prison administrations used sexual contact involving trans detainees as a form of punishment. Although

such isolation was formally justified as being “for protection,” evidence suggests it often facilitated abuse rather than preventing it.

In February, civil society organisations reported that Azerbaijani police have begun using deceptive methods to identify the residential addresses of LGBTI persons. Community members reported receiving phone calls from individuals presenting themselves as representatives of delivery services or companies such as Umico. Callers claimed that a package had arrived, that the recipient had won a gift, or that a free product was available, and requested an address for delivery. According to the reports, once an address was obtained, police officers arrived at the location, transported the individuals to a police station and demanded large sums of money. In addition to these calls, police reportedly continued existing practices of summoning individuals directly by phone to police stations, as well as arranging meetings through Instagram while posing as potential dating partners.

In late December, Azerbaijani police carried out a large-scale raid on a venue in Baku known to be frequented by LGBTI people. According to reports by independent media and local human rights organisations, approximately 100 individuals were detained during the operation. Witness testimonies indicate that those detained were subjected to arbitrary arrest, verbal abuse, and degrading treatment by law enforcement officers. Several detainees reported being questioned about their sexual orientation and gender identity, and described being treated as criminals solely on this basis. While authorities did not provide a clear legal justification for the raid, the operation was widely perceived by the community as a targeted action against queer spaces, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and further restricting the already limited freedom of assembly for LGBTI people in Azerbaijan. At the time of writing, no transparent investigation into the conduct of the police during the raid had been announced, and no official data regarding the detainees or the legal grounds for their detention had been made public.