



Baku facing Caspian Sea
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AZERBAIJAN

November 2021



DLIFLC
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
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Village of Laza, Caucasus Mountains
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Chapter 1 | Geography



Caucasus Mountains
Wikimedia / Vago

Introduction

Azerbaijan is a country with several mountain ranges, a sprawling coastline, and a generally flat central zone; home to lowlands and plains rife with agricultural activity. The Caspian Sea is a major force in the country's economic activity and Baku is a major port connecting Azerbaijan with its maritime neighbors.¹ Technological innovation has helped alleviate the overwhelming threat of flooding posed by the country's two most significant rivers, the Kura and Aras.^{2, 3} The Mingäçevir Reservoir—the largest in the region—absorbs and redistributes waters that would otherwise flood the lowlands and make them essentially uninhabitable. While flooding remains a serious threat, the country's reservoir, canals, and dams have helped prevent catastrophic disasters.⁴ All of the country's natural wonders continue to be threatened by significant pollution—the remnant of the environmentally destructive era of Soviet rule. Today, the country has invested in green initiatives to restore and preserve its natural resources.^{5, 6}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>.
- 2 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kura River," 16 March 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kura-River>
- 3 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Aras River," 15 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Aras-River>
- 4 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mingäçevir," 27 July 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mingacevir>
- 5 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>.
- 6 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

Geographic and Topographic Divisions

Azerbaijan is slightly smaller than Maine and contains a diverse terrain of mountains, lowlands, and plains.⁷ Mountains stretch across almost half of the country. To the north, lies the Greater Caucasus range. In the south and west, the Lesser Caucasus cuts through the terrain.^{8, 9} Azerbaijan's terrain shifts rapidly from highlands to lowlands, and the slopes of the Caucasus ranges are usually covered in sprawling forests and pastures.^{10, 11, 12} The Talysh Mountain range crosses into southeastern Azerbaijan from Iran and runs roughly parallel to the Caspian Sea.^{13, 14, 15}

The Greater Caucasus dominates northern Azerbaijan and is where the country reaches its highest elevations. Mount Bazardüzü, whose peak lies along the Russian-Azerbaijani border, is the nation's highest point at 4,485 m (14,715 ft).¹⁶ Nearby and only slightly lower in elevation are the peaks of Shahdağ at 4,243 m (13,921 ft) and Tufandağ at 4,197 m (13,770 ft).^{17, 18} Many of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains' highest peaks are either within or near the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Naxcivan-Armenia border region is also home to the Zangezur Ridge, the highest point being Kaputjukk at 3,904 m (12,808 ft). The nearby mountain peak Gamigaya rises to 3,726 m (12,224 ft) and is known for its ancient rock drawings.^{19, 20, 21}

In Azerbaijan's northeast are coastal lowlands, situated between the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea. This far northeastern section is the only part of the country that lies within Europe.²² The Lankaran Lowlands stretch between the Talysh Mountains and the Caspian Sea; they ultimately merge with the Aras-Kura Lowlands.²³ Lowlands blanket central Azerbaijan between the Greater and Lesser Caucasus ranges. This area acts as a watershed for the Aras and Kura rivers.^{24, 25}

The Abseron Peninsula extends 60 km (37 mi) into the Caspian Sea, east of the Greater Caucasus Mountains.²⁶ The narrow marine plain of the Abseron is home to both Azerbaijan's capital Baku and Sumqayıt, one of the world's most polluted cities. Southwest of the peninsula is the Gobustan Mountains range, home to mud volcanoes and mineral springs.^{27, 28, 29}

7 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 5.

8 Geographic Names, "Tufandağ: Azerbaijan," 2 February 1999, http://geographic.org/geographic_names/name.php?uni=537932&fid=271&c=azerbaijan

9 Azerbaijan Travel International, "Top 3: The Highest Mountains of Azerbaijan—The Giants of the Caucasus," 30 April 2020, <https://ati.az/blog-3/top-3-the-highest-mountains-of-azerbaijan-the-giants-of-the-caucasus/>

10 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

11 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 7–8.

12 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

13 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

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17 Geographic Names, "Tufandağ: Azerbaijan," 2 February 1999, http://geographic.org/geographic_names/name.php?uni=537932&fid=271&c=azerbaijan

18 Azerbaijan Travel International, "Top 3: The Highest Mountains of Azerbaijan—The Giants of the Caucasus," 30 April 2020, <https://ati.az/blog-3/top-3-the-highest-mountains-of-azerbaijan-the-giants-of-the-caucasus/>

19 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Nagorno-Karabakh," 12 November 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nagorno-Karabakh>

20 GeoNames, "Azerbaijan: Highest Mountains," n.d., <http://www.geonames.org/AZ/highest-mountains-in-azerbaijan.html>

21 Gemiqaya, "Topography of Gamigaya Drawings and a Legend of Nuh," 2004, <http://gemiqaya.nakhchivan.az/gemienglish/efsane.html>

22 William H. Berentsen et al., "Europe: Introduction," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 26 November 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe>

23 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

24 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

25 Your-Vector-Maps.com, "Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.your-vector-maps.com/countries/-azerbaijan/?imagelist=I-azer>

26 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Abşeron Peninsula," 20 July 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Abseron-Peninsula>

27 Nadia Eldemerdash, "Top 10 Most Polluted Cities in the World," Gulf News, 19 April 2013, <https://gulfnews.com/world/oceania/top-10-most-polluted-cities-in-the-world-1.1172409>

28 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

29 Dylan, "Mud Volcanoes of Azerbaijan," Atlas Obscura, n.d., <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/mud-volcanoes-of-azerbaijan>

Climate

Azerbaijan is home to approximately 11 climate zones, most of which are relatively temperate, due in part to the Caucasus Mountains acting as a shield against the Arctic cold. Overall, the country's average temperatures range between 13.8–15°C (57–59°F). Central and eastern Azerbaijan primarily have a dry, subtropical climate with mild winters and hot, dry summers that last 4–5 months. Average summer temperatures vary from lows of 20°C (68°F) to highs of 40°C (104°F). Inland regions experience colder winters than coastal regions; winters in lower elevations average 0–15°C (32–59°F).^{30, 31, 32} In the Greater and Lesser Caucasus ranges, winter snowfalls occasionally close mountain passes for extended periods.^{33, 34}

The overall annual rainfall for Azerbaijan averages 152–154 mm (5.9–6 in). The region that is adjacent to the Caspian Sea experiences slightly more rainfall. The southern forests and humid southeastern region receive the highest annual rainfall, approximately 1,200–1,400 mm (47–55 in). This subtropical region has a climate suitable for crop cultivation such as tea and cotton.^{35, 36, 37}

In mountain elevations above 3,048 m (10,000 ft), the climate is similar to that of a tundra. Mountain foothills experience annual precipitation higher than in the adjacent central and eastern lowlands, with the highest rainfall totals occurring in a strip of foothills running southeast, from the Georgian-Russian border into Azerbaijan.^{38, 39}

The Naxcivan enclave has a more severe climate than mainland Azerbaijan. Its hot summer temperatures often reach 40°C (104°F) while winters commonly see temperatures of -4°C (24.8°F). Naxcivan is generally dry throughout the year, with a mild wet season that runs from late November to mid-June. Early May typically sees the most rainfall, with approximately 22.86 mm (0.9 in).^{40, 41}

30 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/azerbaijan>

31 iExplore, "Azerbaijan—Weather," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/azerbaijan/weather>

32 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 11.

33 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

34 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 12.

35 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 11.

36 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

37 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

38 Edward Allworth et al., "Azerbaijan: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

39 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

40 iExplore, "Azerbaijan—Weather," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/azerbaijan/weather>

41 Weather Spark, "Average Weather in Nakhchivan," n.d., <https://weatherspark.com/y/103760/Average-Weather-in-Nakhchivan-Azerbaijan-Year-Round>

Bodies of Water

Azerbaijan has a diverse array of bodies of water, from its lengthy Caspian Sea coastline to numerous rivers, lakes, and canals that crisscross the land. Approximately 713 km (443 mi) of the country's eastern border forms its maritime boundary with the Caspian Sea. The only major port along the coastline is Baku.^{42, 43} More than 1,000 rivers cut across the Azerbaijani terrain, but two in particular—the Kura and the Aras—dominate its landscape and provide significant support for large-scale irrigation. Canals alleviate flood risks and deliver water to the agricultural regions from manmade sources like the Mingäçevir Reservoir, fed by the upper portion of the Kura.⁴⁴ There are approximately 250 natural lakes in Azerbaijan, all relatively small. Lake Hajikabul, located in the eastern lowlands, is Azerbaijan's largest lake, with an area of 15.5 sq km (5.9 sq mi).⁴⁵

The Caspian Sea

Azerbaijan's eastern border is formed by the Caspian Sea—a vast salt lake and one of the world's largest inland bodies of water.⁴⁶ The Caspian has historically been an important economic resource. At one time, it provided nearly 80% of the world's sturgeon catch; yet sturgeon numbers have shrunk dramatically in recent years—from 105 tons caught in 2013 to just two tons in 2012.^{47, 48, 49} As a result, all 27 sturgeon species in the Caspian are now on the UN's Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) agreement. The goal of CITES is to ensure that relevant governments mitigate international trade in endangered species to lessen threats to their survival.^{50, 51, 52}

Oil and natural gas are also significant resources in the Caspian Sea region. The Caspian provides an important transportation route for many of the region's products by way of the port of Baku. Several products are ferried from other port cities along the Caspian coast before being loaded onto railway cars for transit through Azerbaijan.⁵³ Portions of the coastline suffer from significant pollution, although there are several accessible recreational beaches and coastal hotspots.⁵⁴

42 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

43 Ports.com, "Ports in Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://ports.com/browse/asia/azerbaijan/>

44 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>

45 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 9.

46 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

47 T. DeMeulenaer and C. Raymakers, "Species in Danger: Sturgeons of the Caspian Sea and the International Trade in Caviar," Panda.org, n.d., http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/3_vyyy_sturgeons_of_the_caspian_sea_meulenaar_et_al_int_1.pdf

48 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles: The Republic of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.fao.org/fishery/facp/AZE/en>

49 Ivan Stupachenko, "Caspian States Agree on Fishing Zones, Protection for Sturgeon," Seafood Source, 12 September 2018, <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/caspian-states-agree-on-fishing-zones-protection-for-sturgeon>

50 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "FAO Activities in Relation to CITES and Commercially Exploited Aquatic Species," n.d., <http://www.fao.org/fishery/cites-fisheries/en>

51 Oleg Konstantinovich Leontiev et al., "Caspian Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>

52 Sam Bedford, "The Most Beautiful Beaches in Azerbaijan," Culture Trip, 8 January 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/azerbaijan/articles/the-most-beautiful-beaches-in-azerbaijan/>

53 Oleg Konstantinovich Leontiev et al., "Caspian Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>

54 Sam Bedford, "The Most Beautiful Beaches in Azerbaijan," Culture Trip, 8 January 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/azerbaijan/articles/the-most-beautiful-beaches-in-azerbaijan/>

Kura River

The Kura River is the longest in Azerbaijan. The river originates in northeastern Turkey, and flows 1,364 km (848 mi) through Georgia and Azerbaijan before ultimately emptying into the Caspian Sea near the city of Neftcala.^{55, 56} The river enters Azerbaijan at the point where its border converges with Armenia and Georgia. The river then begins a southeastern path below the Greater Caucasus Mountains. North of Ganja, the Kura contributes to the massive Mingäçevir Reservoir. Adjacent to the reservoir is the Mingäçevir hydroelectric dam, which also receives water from the Kura. Several other reservoirs have been built along the river's banks to provide irrigation, flood control, and generate hydroelectric power.^{57, 58, 59, 60} Recently, decreased water levels in some areas of the river have prompted concerns for agricultural and drinking water needs. Not only is freshwater availability dwindling, but the Caspian Sea's saltwater is flowing upstream, contaminating available fresh water sources.^{61, 62, 63}

Aras River

The Aras River also originates in Turkey and travels eastward towards Azerbaijan, forming its border with Armenia. The river receives runoff along the southern portion of the Lesser Caucasus as it heads northeast. Approximately 121 km (75 mi) from the Caspian Sea, the Aras flows into the Kura River as a tributary. Before this natural junction, the two rivers are connected by the Upper Kabarakh irrigation canal, which is fed with water from the Mingäçevir Reservoir.⁶⁴ Recently, portions of the Aras have become polluted with toxic substances originating from a tributary river—substances also found in the the Kura where the two rivers merge.^{65, 66, 67}

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- 55 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kura River," 16 March 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kura-River>
- 56 FEOW, "Kura—South Caspian Drainages," n.d., https://web.archive.org/web/20111005204044/http://www.feow.org/ecoregion_details.php?eco=434
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- 58 Azerb.com, "Geography of Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-geog.html?i=1>
- 59 Mapy.cz, "Mura River," n.d., <https://en.mapy.cz/zakladni?x=44.9228543&y=41.6504595&z=14&source=osm&id=129999478>
- 60 European Union Water Initiative Plus, "The Kura-Aras River Basin," n.d., <https://www.euwipluseast.eu/en/about/pilot-river-bassin/kura>
- 61 JAM News, "Kura River in Azerbaijan So Shallow that the Bottom Is Visible. Who's to Blame—Farmers or the Gov't?" 2 July 2020, <https://jam-news.net/kura-river-dries-up-irresponsible-farming-in-mingachevir-reservoir-in-azerbaijan/>
- 62 Eurasianet, "Azerbaijan Faces Growing Water Shortage," 21 August 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-faces-growing-water-shortage>
- 63 Portia Kentish, "For Villagers in Azerbaijan's Kura Delta, Fresh Water Is in Short Supply," *Emerging Europe*, 4 September 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/for-villagers-on-the-banks-of-azerbajians-kura-river-fresh-water-is-in-short-supply/>
- 64 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mingäçevir," 27 July 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mingacevir>
- 65 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Aras River," 15 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Aras-River>
- 66 European Union Water Initiative Plus, "The Kura-Aras River Basin," n.d., <https://www.euwipluseast.eu/en/about/pilot-river-bassin/kura>
- 67 Azernews, "Araz River Getting More Toxic, Thanks to Molybdenum Fields in Armenia," 8 December 2020, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/173625.html>

Major Cities

City Name	Population ^{68, 69}
Baku	2,262,600
Sumqayıt	341,300
Gəncə	332,600
Lankaran	226,900
Mingəçevir	104,500
Naxçıvan City	93,700

Baku

Baku is the capital of Azerbaijan and its most populous city, with 2.15 million residents.⁷⁰ It is the largest city in the Caucasus region.⁷¹ It encompasses 2,150 sq km (830 sq mi) and is located on Azerbaijan's eastern coastline, extending into the Caspian Sea. The city is an established site for oil refining. Nearby petroleum fields were first discovered in the eighth century and have been regularly utilized for more than 600 years. The onshore wells are mostly dry now, but oil companies have identified new sources offshore in the Caspian.^{72, 73}

Starting in the 2000s, Baku has been the main focus of an ambitious construction boom fueled by oil revenue.⁷⁴ The city's skyline is dominated by sleek skyscrapers and its renovated waterfront has become a tourist attraction. In 2015, Baku hosted the European Games and the following year, the city inaugurated an annual Formula One Grand Prix circuit.^{75, 76, 77, 78, 79}

Baku's Old City district is the inner, historical walled city and original site of Icheri Sheher—an ancient UNESCO World Heritage site with structures possibly dating back to the seventh century BCE.^{80, 81} Inside the fortress is a maze of narrow cobblestone streets that wind around ancient structures such as the Maiden Tower, which was built sometime in the 12th century.⁸²

68 World Atlas, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

69 The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 1 October 2020, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/?lang=en>

70 World Population Review, "Azerbaijan Population 2020 (Live)," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/azerbaijan-population>

71 World Atlas, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

72 Baku Pages, "Baku City," n.d., http://www.bakupages.com/pages/baku/baku_en.php

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74 Crude Accountability, "State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan: Huge Spending and Overwhelming Poverty," 27 February 2019, <https://crudeaccountability.org/state-oil-fund-of-azerbaijan-huge-spending-and-overwhelming-poverty/>

75 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, "Country Profiles on the Housing Sector: Azerbaijan" (report, 2010), 31, <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/prgm/cph/countries/azerbaijan/cpazerbaijan.full.e.pdf>

76 Aytac Tapdıq and Sevinc Vaqifqızı, "Families Living in Poverty in the Shadow of Azerbaijan's Luxury Sports Stadiums," *Guardian*, 20 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/azerbaijan-european-games-shadow-poverty>

77 Helena Hicks, "F1 and Abject Poverty: The Truth about Baku," Drivetribe, 21 April 2018, https://drivetribe.com/p/f1-and-abject-poverty-the-truth-A_J1cc2qThGe-GlwwiKxgw?iid=AA-04z5USS6RD3fsfsxj0g

78 Formula 1, "Azerbaijan—Baku," n.d., <https://www.formula1.com/en/information.azerbaijan-baku-city-circuit-baku.5KEzWNQG1x2nLSpfg5xBZh.html>

79 AFP, "Poverty, Repression in Shadow of Azerbaijan's Shiny New Skyline," *France 24*, 8 April 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190408-poverty-repression-shadow-azerbaijans-shiny-new-skyline>

80 UNESCO, "Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower," n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/958/>

81 Azerbaijan International, "Newsmakers: UNESCO: Baku's Old City Listed as World Heritage Site," 2000, https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/84_folder/84_articles/84_news_unesco.html

82 Baku Pages, "Baku City," n.d., http://www.bakupages.com/pages/baku/baku_en.php

Sumqayit (Sumgait)

Sumqayit, the second-largest city in Azerbaijan, is located north of Baku on the Abseron Peninsula. Once a small village, Sumqayit was developed by the Soviets during World War II for its industrial potential; the city was formally founded on 22 November 1949. Today, the city is approximately 83 sq km (32 sq mi) in size.^{83, 84, 85} Sumqayit's factories process imported bauxite into aluminum. Other industrial outputs include synthetic rubber, fertilizer, detergents, and petrochemicals.^{86, 87, 88} Due to this industrial activity, the city has become heavily polluted. Although most environmentally hazardous production has virtually ceased and pollution has declined, harmful chemicals remain present in the soil and pose a significant hazard. Birth defects and first-year deaths of children in Sumqayit have long exceeded average, and at one time, Sumqayit had the world's highest infant mortality rate.^{89, 90} Cancer rates in the immediate area continue to be 22–51% higher than in other regions of Azerbaijan.^{91, 92}

Gäncä (Ganja)

Gäncä is Azerbaijan's third-largest city.⁹³ The city covers an area of 12,300 sq km (4,479 sq mi), it lies west of Baku, and adjacent to the Ganja River. Earliest records date the city to the fifth or sixth century C.E. It was once the capital of Azerbaijan and was the center of Caucasian Albanian Christianity in the 11th century.⁹⁴ Under the Soviet regime, Gäncä became a center for industry, although most of the Soviet-era industrial factories have closed. Production continues, however, with smaller companies that produce porcelain, silk, and footwear.⁹⁵ Gäncä once had a strong German influence, but most ethnic Germans left after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The city is also home to thousands of refugees, primarily from Armenia and the surrounding region.^{96, 97, 98}

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- 83 Oishimaya Sen Nag, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 8 November 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>
- 84 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Sumqayit," 27 May 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sumqayit>
- 85 World Population Review, "Azerbaijan Population 2020 (Live)," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/azerbaijan-population>
- 86 David Biello, "World's Top 10 Most Polluted Places," *Scientific American*, 1 August 2012, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/body-worlds-top-10-most-polluted-places/>
- 87 Matthew J. Sagers, "The Aluminum Industry of the Former Soviet Union in 1992," Taylor and Francis Online, 15 May 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10605851.1992.10640915>
- 88 Azerb.com "Sumgait (Sumqayit)," n.d., <http://azerb.com/az-sumgait.html?i=1>
- 89 Azerb.com "Sumgait (Sumqayit)," n.d., <http://azerb.com/az-sumgait.html?i=1>
- 90 Jens Malling, "Sumqayit, an Ecological Armageddon," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 17 April 2014, <https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/sumqayit-an-ecological-armageddon>
- 91 David Biello, "World's Top 10 Most Polluted Places," *Scientific American*, 13 September 2007, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/body-worlds-top-10-most-polluted-places/>
- 92 Pure Earth, "Worst Polluted: Sumqayit, Azerbaijan," 2007, http://www.worstpolluted.org/projects_reports/display/27
- 93 World Population Review, "Azerbaijan Population 2020 (Live)," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/azerbaijan-population>
- 94 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Gäncä," 14 June 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ganca>
- 95 Oishimaya Sen Nag, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 8 November 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>
- 96 Azerb, "Ganca (Gyandzha, Kirovabad, Elisavetspol)," n.d., <http://www.travel-images.com/az-ganja.html>
- 97 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Gäncä," 14 June 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ganca>
- 98 Oishimaya Sen Nag, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 8 November 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

Lankaran

Lankaran is located on the coast of the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan's southeastern corner. In the 18th century, it was the capital of an Iranian khanate, but by 1913 it was under Russian control.⁹⁹ Today, the city is surrounded by a fertile agricultural region that grows subtropical crops like citrus and tea. Industrial activities include brickmaking, furniture production, and timber processing. The city boasts several attractions, including sandy beaches, mineral springs, and ancient ruins. The nearby Hirkan National Park is home to diverse flora and fauna, including the endangered Persian leopard.^{100, 101}

Mingäçevir

Mingäçevir is a central Azerbaijani city approximately 140 sq km (54 sq mi) in size, and is the country's fifth-largest city. Like Sumqayıt, most of the city's development took place after World War II.¹⁰² Archeological discoveries date the earliest occupation of Mingäçevir to at least 5,000 years ago.^{103, 104} Its nickname is the "City of Lights" due to its hydroelectric power plant along the Kura River in the city's center.^{105, 106} The Mingäçevir Reservoir dam, completed in 1953, is the most extensive of its kind in Azerbaijan. The dam's primary functions are flood control, irrigation management, and hydroelectric power production.^{107, 108, 109} The city's industrial sectors—textiles, consumer goods, household items—have utilized the area's abundant hydroelectric power to drive the local economy.^{110, 111, 112, 113}

Naxcivan City

Naxcivan City is the capital of the landlocked enclave of the Naxcivan Autonomous Republic—Azerbaijan's most isolated large city—separated from the mainland by Armenian territory.^{114, 115} Naxcivan City sits on a plateau adjoining the Aras River near the Araz Su Reservoir. Grain, tobacco, cotton, and fruit are the most prominent crops of the region. Naxcivan City's economy has suffered since independence due to a sustained Armenian-enforced blockade that effectively made air transit the only viable means of transportation into and out of the region.¹¹⁶ The city has limited industrial activity consisting of mining, food processing, cotton ginning, and textile production and furniture

99 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Länkärän," 13 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lankaran>

100 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Länkärän," 13 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lankaran>

101 Oishimaya Sen Nag, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 8 November 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

102 Explore the World, "Mingachevitz: A Beautiful City in Azerbaijan," 18 June 2012, <http://worldcities4u.blogspot.com/2012/06/mingachevir-beautiful-city-in.html>

103 *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, "Mingäçevir Reservoir," n.d., http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/mingäçevir_reservoir

104 Azerb, "Mingechaur," n.d., <http://www.travel-images.com/az-mingechaur.html>

105 Ulduz Tourism, "Mingachevir City," n.d., <https://ulduztourism.az/en/azerbaijan/aze-cities/mingachevir-city>

106 Oishimaya Sen Nag, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 8 November 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

107 Earth Observatory, "Mingachevir Reservoir, Azerbaijan," 8 May 2010, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/44186/mingachevir-reservoir-azerbaijan>

108 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mingäçevir," 27 July 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mingacevir>

109 Laman Ismayilova, "Mingachevir: The City of Lights [PHOTO]," MENAFN, 20 July 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100511780/Mingachevir-The-City-of-Lights-PHOTO>

110 Emporis, "Mingachevir," n.d., <https://www.emporis.com/city/107497/mingachevir-azerbaijan>

111 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mingäçevir," 27 July 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mingacevir>

112 Emporis, "Mingachevir," n.d., <https://www.emporis.com/city/107497/mingachevir-azerbaijan>

113 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mingäçevir," 27 July 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mingacevir>

114 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Naxçıvan," 1 June 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Naxcivan-republic-Azerbaijan>

115 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

116 Vusala Abbasova, "Nakhchivan Airport Will Be Expanded Next Month," Caspian News, 7 August 2019, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/nakhchivan-airport-will-be-expanded-next-month-2019-8-6-43/>

manufacturing.^{117, 118} Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's authoritarian post-independence leader and father of the current president, was a native of the region and played a key role in peace negotiations with Armenia over the enclave and the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.¹¹⁹

Environmental Concerns

Environmental hazards are prevalent in Azerbaijan, dating to the extensive pollution produced during the Soviet era that still plagues the region. The country acted as a Soviet industrial hub, with most activity focused along the Caspian Sea and the Abseron Peninsula.¹²⁰ Years of intense exploitation of oil reserves have left portions of land tainted by oil sludge and oil slicks that pollute the coastline.¹²¹ The peninsula is considered the most ecologically damaged region in the world. Air pollution persists, largely from oil plants and refineries, engine exhaust, and environmentally hazardous waste disposal.¹²² Untreated waste from many of the nation's factories has been dumped directly into rivers increasing the salinity of the Caspian Sea, and this has seeped into water tables. Toxic soil pollution is largely the result of a history of oil spills over the years, DDT pesticide usage, and toxic defoliants used in the nation's cotton industry.^{123, 124, 125}

Climate change and the rapid economic growth of the country after independence exacerbated the environmental crisis in Azerbaijan. Efforts have been made to address this crisis—the country has joined several environmental agreements and promotes sustainable economic growth opportunities. The government has recently enacted initiatives targeting improvements in water supplies, forest restoration, and other green efforts.^{126, 127, 128} Laws are also in place to monitor and protect the environment. However, budgetary constraints and allegations that environmental controls are cost-prohibitive threaten the effectiveness of green initiatives.^{129, 130, 131}

117 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Naxçıvan," 8 January 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Naxcivan-Azerbaijan>

118 Azerb, "Naxcivan City (Naxcivan)," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-nakhchivan-city.html>

119 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Heydar Aliyev," 6 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heydar-Aliyev>

120 Andrea Palasciano, "Seals Caviar, and Oil: Caspian Sea Faces Pollution Threat," *Phys Org*, 16 April 2019, <https://phys.org/news/2019-04-caviar-oil-caspian-sea-pollution.html>

121 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 45.

122 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, "Environmental Performance Reviews: Azerbaijan: Second Review Synopsis," 2011, https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/epr/epr_studies/Synopsis/Azerbaijan%20ECE.CEP.158.synopsis%20english.pdf

123 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

124 "Overview: Major Environmental Issues in Azerbaijan," *Azerbaijan International* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1994), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/23_folder/23_articles/23_overview.html

125 UK Essays, "Baku in Azerbaijan: Pollution Levels," November 2018, <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/environmental-sciences/the-pollution-levels-of-baku-in-azerbaijan-environmental-sciences-essay.php>

126 EaPGreen, "Azerbaijan: Recent and Planned Activities," n.d., <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/file/27639/download?token=V5nevBFy>

127 Sustainable Development Goals, "Azerbaijan," 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/azerbaijan>

128 OCHA Services, "Undoing Decades of Environmental Harm in Azerbaijan," ReliefWeb, 26 November 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/azerbaijan/undoing-decades-environmental-harm-azerbaijan>

129 UN Economic Commission for Europe, "Azerbaijan: Second Review" (Environmental Performance Reviews Series No. 31, 2010), 17, <https://shop.un.org/books/enviro-perf-rev-azerbaijan-2nd-35217>

130 Kieran Cooke, "Azerbaijan's Post-Industrial Hangover," BBC News, 1 May 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4498319.stm>

131 Khadija Ismayilova, "Sumgayit Journal: With More Jobs, More Smog," EurasiaNet.org, 26 October 2007, <https://eurasianet.org/sumgayit-journal-with-more-jobs-more-smog>

Natural Hazards

Azerbaijan and the Caucasus region are frequently affected by several natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, and infectious diseases.¹³² Earthquakes have plagued the region throughout history, as Azerbaijan is situated in a seismic zone. The Greater Caucasus Mountains is the most seismically active zone in the region, with two major fault lines that run from the Black Sea to the Caspian. An earthquake rattled the region on 11 June 1859, causing significant destruction.^{133, 134} On 25 November 2000, Baku was rocked by two successive jolts registering 5.9 and 6.3 on the Richter scale. Successive earthquakes struck again on 11 August 2012, rocking the region just nine minutes apart and registering 6.4 and 6.2 in magnitude.^{135, 136} Azerbaijan experienced approximately 363 earthquakes in 2020. The most significant recent earthquake struck on 23 February 2020, reaching a magnitude of 5.8, and originating near Özalp, Turkey.^{137, 138}

Azerbaijan is subject to the threat of seasonal floods and associated landslides.¹³⁹ Floods are the most common natural hazard in the nation, followed by earthquakes. In May 2003, several cities in northern Azerbaijan suffered landslides after intense rainstorms. At the same time, thousands of homes in cities along the Kura River were flooded. Severe flooding struck again in May 2010 and October 2017, forcing evacuations and causing massive damage in southern Azerbaijan.^{140, 141} Flood activity has also compromised the soil in some areas, increasing the risk of landslides.^{142, 143, 144}

Infectious diseases are a significant concern in Azerbaijan. Malaria has plagued the country for decades, and since the late 1990s, the government has implemented large-scale epidemic control measures. In 2013, the transmission of malaria was finally interrupted and the country moved into a prevention strategy. In addition to malaria, several species of birds migrate across Azerbaijan throughout the year, risking the potential for avian influenza outbreaks.^{145, 146}

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- 132 WHO Europe, "Main Hazards and Health Threats in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/from-disaster-preparedness-and-response/country-work/azerbaijan/main-hazards-and-health-threats-in-azerbaijan>
- 133 Jennifer Chu, "Researchers Find Building Seismic Strain in Azerbaijan," MIT News, 14 June 2012, <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2012/caspian-quake-threat-0614.html>
- 134 NOAA, "Significant Earthquake," n.d., https://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/nnndc/struts/results?eq_0=2037&t=101650&s=13&d=22,26,13,12&nd=display
- 135 Earthquake Track, "6.4 Magnitude Earthquake 26 km from Ahar, East Azerbaijan, Iran," 2021, <https://earthquaketrack.com/quakes/2012-08-11-12-23-18-utc-6-4-11>
- 136 Earthquake Track, "6.2 Magnitude Earthquake 26 km from Ahar, East Azerbaijan, Iran," 2021, <https://earthquaketrack.com/quakes/2012-08-11-12-34-35-utc-6-2-12>
- 137 Earthquake Track, "5.8 Magnitude Earthquake 42 km from Özalp, Van, Turkey," 2021, <https://earthquaketrack.com/quakes/2020-02-23-05-53-01-utc-5-8-10>
- 138 OCHA Services, "Preparing for Disasters and Reducing Risk in Azerbaijan," ReliefWeb, 27 June 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/azerbaijan/preparing-disasters-and-reducing-risk-azerbaijan>
- 139 OCHA Services, "Preparing for Disasters and Reducing Risk in Azerbaijan," ReliefWeb, 27 June 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/azerbaijan/preparing-disasters-and-reducing-risk-azerbaijan>
- 140 Earth Observatory, "Flooding in Azerbaijan," 5 May 2003, <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=11490>
- 141 Earth Observatory, "Flooding in Azerbaijan," 14 May 2010, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/43964/flooding-in-azerbaijan>
- 142 Commission of the European Communities, "Commission Decision of Financing of on [sic] the Financing of Humanitarian Actions in South Caucasus from the General Budget of the European Communities (Disaster Risk Reduction/DIPECHO Action Plan)" (report, Brussels, 2009), 4–6, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/opportunities/decision_dipeccho_southcaucasus.pdf
- 143 Radio Free Europe, "Floods Force Evacuations in Southern Azerbaijan," 5 October 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-floods/28776143.html>
- 144 Rashid Shirinov, "Landslide Zones Intensify in Azerbaijan," 5 January 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/125045.html>
- 145 WHO Europe, "Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/vector-borne-and-parasitic-diseases/malaria/country-work/azerbaijan>
- 146 WHO Europe, "Main Hazards and Health Threats in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/from-disaster-preparedness-and-response/country-work/azerbaijan/main-hazards-and-health-threats-in-azerbaijan>

Further, the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic of 2020-21 resulted in hundreds of thousands of infections and more than 3,000 deaths by February 2021.¹⁴⁷ To stem infection rates, hospitalizations, and death the country has implemented quarantine procedures for those infected as well as testing requirements for international arrivals.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Worldometer, "Azerbaijan," 4 February 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/azerbaijan/>

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan, "COVID-19 Information for Azerbaijan," 29 January 2021, <https://az.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information-for-azerbaijan/>

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Geography Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Azerbaijan is approximately the size of Texas. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Azerbaijan has several areas of lowlands and plains. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Central Azerbaijan is primarily occupied by a sprawling desert. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Azerbaijan's fishing industry relies heavily upon the sturgeon native to the Caspian Sea. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Naxcivan is in the enclave separated from Azerbaijan by Armenia. ☐ True ☐ False

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Geography Assessment Answers

1. False:
At 86,000 sq km (33,205 sq mi), Azerbaijan is slightly smaller than Maine.
2. True:
The central lowlands form a significant portion of the country. In the northeast are coastal lowlands that constitute the only part of the country that lies in Europe.
3. False:
Central and eastern Azerbaijan have a primarily dry, subtropical climate with mild winters and hot, dry summers.
4. True:
In the past, Azerbaijan provided up to 80% of the world's sturgeon catch. However, all 27 species native to the Caspian have seen dangerous drops in population, prompting the UN to declare them endangered and ask for a significant reduction in fishing activity.
5. True:
Naxcivan City is the capital of the Naxcivan Autonomous Republic. It sits on a plateau by the Aras River and Araz Su Reservoir.

Chapter 2 | History



Shirvanshah's Palace, Baku
Wikimedia / Sefer azeri

Introduction

Azerbaijan is located in a region rich with historical significance. Prehistory investigations indicate that tens of thousands of years ago, the Caucasus was the site of some of the earliest human activity and occupation. In later history, successive empires conquered and carved up the region; each left their distinct impressions upon the ethnic Azerbaijani people. Azerbaijan's relationship with neighboring Russia has been particularly complex and tragic because differing Russian empires conquered and controlled the region throughout history. Independence arrived briefly in 1918 and permanently in 1991 when the Soviet Union (USSR) crumbled—Azerbaijan was finally able to stand on its own in the modern world. As the country gained its footing on the international stage, ethnic conflicts within disputed regions have hampered its progress, periodically pulling the country into warfare.¹

¹ Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

History

Prehistory

The Caucasus region is believed to be one of the first prehistoric sites of human activity. In nearby Georgia, the largest concentration of *Homo erectus* bones was found in a singular place, making them the oldest undisputed fossils found outside of Africa. Many of these fossils and their associated tools are estimated to be more than 1.7 million years old.² Ancient rock carvings dating to the Stone Age and Iron Age have been found at several sites in Azerbaijan. One of the more prominent sites in the country is Gobustan National Park, located south of Baku along the Caspian coast. Gobustan features petroglyphs of animals, people hunting, constellations, boats, and other imagery. This site is estimated to be around 40,000 years old. In 2007, the park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of three in the country.³

Despite evidence of early human activity in the region, very little is known about societies that occupied the Caucasus before the first millennium BCE. Eventually, various tribes of Caucasian Albanians, Persians, Kurds, and Turkic nomads rose to prominence. Many of these tribes also interacted with nearby Armenians, integrating aspects of their culture. The Caucasus soon developed into a regional force, and over time, several kingdoms arose.⁴ South of the Caucasus, in Mesopotamia, the Assyrian Empire became a particularly dominant force in the region. The Assyrians expanded to control Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and the greater Middle East. Their rule came to an end in the seventh century BCE when tribes near ancient Persia united and defeated the Assyrian forces. This defeat set the stage for the rise of another kingdom—the Median Empire. This empire grew to encompass the southernmost areas of modern Azerbaijan, most notably the Naxcivan region.^{5, 6}

The Median Empire existed for a relatively short period, quickly fading in prominence during the sixth century BCE due to the Persian Achaemenian Dynasty usurping its power. Led by Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great), the Persians forged a vast empire encompassing present-day Azerbaijan.^{7, 8} The Persians brought the Zoroastrian religion to the region. Over time, Zoroastrianism intermingled with other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.^{9, 10, 11}

Around 330 BCE, Alexander the Great's military forces conquered the Achaemenian Empire and destroyed its capital Persepolis. Before Alexander continued his conquests, he installed Persian loyalists called *satraps* (governors) to oversee the former Achaemenian regions. One such ruler was the Persian general Atropates, whose area of control was named in honor of him—Atropatene. This region encompassed the northern portion of modern Iran, which was once Azerbaijani territory. It is thought that the name Azerbaijan derives from the Middle Persian word *Aturpatakan*, a form of the Greek word *Atropatene*.¹²

2 Jeffrey Hays, "Early Caucasus History," Facts and Details, May 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/russia/Minorities/sub9_3d/entry-5090.html

3 UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Heritage Sites in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/az>

4 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

5 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Media," 3 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Media-ancient-region-Iran>

6 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Assyria," n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Assyria>

7 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 28–29.

8 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 18–19.

9 Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "Zoroastrianism," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 November 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zoroastrianism>

10 History.com, "Persian Empire," 6 December 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/persian-empire>

11 *Encyclopædia Iranica*, "Achaemenid Dynasty," n.d., <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/achaemenid-dynasty>

12 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

Tribes in the north of Atropatene—collectively known as Albanians—slowly unified under a single ruler.^{13, 14} At the same time, foreign powers maintained and grew in regional influence. Among these powers were the Seleucid Greeks—the weakened successors to Alexander’s empire—and, later, another Persian dynasty known as the Parthians. In the first century BCE, Romans made several incursions into the region. In the third century CE, the Sasanian Empire annexed the Albanian region and reigned for more than 400 years.^{15, 16, 17}

Islam, the Seljuk Dynasty, and the Mongols

Muslim Arab invaders entered Transcaucasia in the seventh century and largely supplanted the prevailing religious strongholds of Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Thus, Islam became the predominant religion in Azerbaijan despite local resistance. In the ninth century, the non-Muslim Khurramites, led by a commoner named Babak, initiated an uprising consisting of both elites and commoners opposed to Arab rule. This uprising lasted for two decades, but they were ultimately defeated and Babak was executed.^{18, 19, 20}

In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks invaded the region. This invasion resulted in Oghuz Turkic becoming the dominant language in the region; from this, the Azerbaijani language developed. Its literary tradition grew to rival those of other Muslim regions. The Seljuk Turk’s reign continued into the 13th century until the Mongols invaded the region. In the late 14th century, the Turkic conqueror and Barlas tribe member Timur from modern-day Uzbekistan led a bloody and vicious campaign, destroying significant portions of Azerbaijan and its infrastructure.^{21, 22} During the 16th century, divisions between Muslim subgroups began to take hold as Caucasian Shia Muslims formed alliances with nearby Persians in opposition to Sunni Muslim Ottoman Turks.²³

15th Century–Early 20th Century

After Timur died, a series of city-states, or khanates, developed in the region. These khanates remained fragmented, however, due to ongoing feuds. The Persian Safavid dynasty eventually conquered the khanates in the 16th century. The Safavid reign was not without conflict due to the threats posed by Ottoman Turks. From 1580 until the early 1600s, Ottoman armies frequently seized control of Azerbaijani territory. However, the Safavids re-established control of the region in 1612.²⁴ Persistent conflicts and infighting eventually weakened the dynasty; the final blow was delivered by invaders from Afghanistan in 1722, ending the Safavid rule.^{25, 26}

13 *Encyclopædia Iranica*, “Albania,” 29 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/albania-iranian-aran-arm>

14 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 29.

15 *Encyclopædia Iranica*, “Albania,” 29 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/albania-iranian-aran-arm>

16 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 30.

17 Alonso Constenla Cervantes, “Sasanian Empire,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 17 May 2013, https://www.ancient.eu/Sasanian_Empire/

18 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 30–31.

19 Tadeusz Swietochowski and Brian C. Collins, *Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 29–30.

20 Ğ. -H. Yüsofi, “Bābak Kōrrami,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 18 August 2011, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/babak-korrami>

21 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Timur,” 14 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Timur>

22 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 31–33.

23 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., “Azerbaijan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

24 Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2001), 41.

25 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 33–35.

26 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Safavid Dynasty,” 15 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Safavid-dynasty>

The end of the Safavid rule created a power vacuum in the region. In 1723, Russia's Peter the Great invaded and occupied Azerbaijani territory adjacent to the Caspian Sea. In 1735, the Persian leader Nādir Shah expelled the Russians and began a brutal reign over the region. Nādir's reign eventually encompassed the region between the Caucasus region to the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan.^{27, 28} After Nādir's assassination in 1747, Azerbaijan was once again divided into several rival khanates and sultanates.^{29, 30}

The Russian Empire

In 1795, Russian troops captured the Shirvan khanate capital of Shamakhi in the foothills of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, only to be repelled by Persian troops. This was the latest in a series of ongoing conflicts between the two powers. In 1804, the fourth Russo-Persian War broke out and lasted nine years. This conflict left the Russians in control of the region that constitutes modern-day Azerbaijan, except for Naxcivan. In 1826, a fifth and final Russo-Persian War expanded Russian control to include Naxcivan. Then, an 1828 peace treaty split greater Azerbaijan between the two empires. Today, this division still marks Iran's borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan.^{31, 32, 33, 34} Russian annexation encouraged ethnic Armenians to migrate from Persian- and Ottoman-ruled areas, as many felt safer in Russian-controlled areas of Nagorno-Karabakh and modern-day Armenia.^{35, 36, 37}

Under Russian control, Azerbaijan saw increased industrialization. Oil opened a new chapter in Azerbaijani history and the capital, Baku, became the center of an oil boom in 1872. Baku was suddenly the primary source of oil for Russia and quickly shed its identity as a provincial backwater suitable only for political exiles. Consequently, Azerbaijanis were quickly outnumbered as ethnic Armenians flooded into the city for jobs and the new oil wealth.^{38,}

^{39, 40, 41}

A national identity began to form among urban Azerbaijanis in Baku during this period. Because the region had been conquered and divided among several kingdoms throughout history, the indigenous population identified themselves through religious affiliation rather than ethnicity. As a political and economic structure developed in Baku—with Europeans at the top, Russians and Armenians in the middle, and Azerbaijani Muslims at the bottom—ethnic divisions arose and ultimately erupted into bloodshed between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1905 and 1918.^{42, 43}

²⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Nādir Shah," 18 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nadir-Shah>

²⁸ Deryck O. Lodrick, "Indus River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indus-River>

²⁹ Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2001), 41.

³⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Safavid Dynasty," 15 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Safavid-dynasty>

³¹ Azerbaijan Tour, "Shamakhi," n.d., <https://azerbaijantour.com/destination/shamakhi/>

³² Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan: History: Russian Suzerainty," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan/Russian-suzerainty>

³³ World Heritage Encyclopedia, "Russo-Persian Wars," n.d., <http://self.gutenberg.org/article/WHEBN0002782482/Russo-Persian%20Wars>

³⁴ Encyclopedia.com, "Russo-Persian Wars," 12 February 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/russo-persian-wars>

³⁵ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 50.

³⁶ Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2001), 42.

³⁷ Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.

³⁸ David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 20–21.

³⁹ Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.

⁴⁰ Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2001), 42.

⁴¹ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 50.

⁴² Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan: History: Russian Suzerainty," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan/Russian-suzerainty>

⁴³ Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 142–47.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic

A revolutionary opportunity presented itself in the waning days of World War I, in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution as Azerbaijan declared independence from Russia on 28 May 1918.^{44, 45, 46} With the wind-down of Russian troops in the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia formed the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. However, the alliance dissolved within a matter of months.⁴⁷

The global chaos caused by the war created an unfortunate environment for atrocities to occur. The fight for control of Baku also resulted in several massacres. In March 1918, Bolsheviks united with Armenians and temporarily occupied the city, then promptly massacred the Muslim residents. In September 1918, Azerbaijani nationalists allied with Turkish forces to secure Baku. Together they launched a new genocidal campaign against the Armenians.^{48, 49, 50}

As the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic attempted to gain traction in the postwar period, it earned de facto recognition from Allied leaders.⁵¹ In 1920, the newly formed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) invaded Azerbaijan and formally annexed it. From 1922–36, Azerbaijan was part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic until the USSR officially established the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. In its early years, the Soviet Union invested in Azerbaijan's economic and industrial development, particularly on the Abseron Peninsula, home to significant oil resources.⁵²

Soviet Dominance

Throughout most of the 20th century, the USSR dominated the Caucasus, transforming Azerbaijan and its neighbors Georgia and Armenia into economic development and industrialization hubs. Azerbaijan's oil resources proved integral to Soviet efforts during World War II. This importance made Baku a significant target for Nazi Germany, whose advances into the region were halted during the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942–43.⁵³ During the war, Soviet forces occupied the southern portion of Azerbaijan, which briefly spurred a pan-Azerbaijani nationalist movement. After the war, the West pressured the USSR to withdraw from the region, but without effect.^{54, 55}

44 Ruslan Rehimov, "Azerbaijan Marks 28th Anniversary of Independence," Andalou Agency, 18 October 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-marks-28th-anniversary-of-independence-/1618243>

45 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

46 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 147.

47 Georges Mamoulia, "Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic: Historical Reality and Possibility," Taylor & Francis Online, 4 March 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23761199.2020.1712901>

48 Armenpress, "Genocide Watch Considers Azerbaijan to Be at Stage 9—Extermination and Stage 10—Denial," 24 October 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1032592.html>

49 Marshall Moushigian, "The Genocide that Never Ends: Turkey, Azerbaijan Renew Threats to Armenians," Fresno Bee, 31 July 2020, <https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article244616232.html>

50 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 147.

51 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 147.

52 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

53 Raymond Limbach, "Battle of Stalingrad," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Stalingrad>

54 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 25–26.

55 David Wolff, "Stalin's Postwar Border-making Tactics," OpenEdition Journals, 2011, <https://translate.google.com/translate?sl=fr&tl=en&u=https://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/9334>

After World War II, the USSR invested in oil production elsewhere because of Baku's geographic vulnerability and the declining supply of accessible onshore oil resources. Baku's share of Soviet oil production declined from 70% to 2% between 1940 and 1970.⁵⁶ Despite declining oil investment, the Soviets continued to expand industrial development within Azerbaijan. The centerpiece of this investment was Sumgayit Chemical Industrial Park. Canning and textile industries were also expanded to take advantage of Azerbaijan's agricultural output.⁵⁷

Soviet religious oppression significantly impacted Azerbaijan's Muslim population. Religious expression, particularly Islam, was systematically targeted. The Soviets closed most mosques, banned religious education, and imprisoned Muslim clerics.⁵⁸ An estimated that 2,000 mosques actively operated in pre-Soviet Azerbaijan, and by the 1980s, that number had fallen to fewer than 20.⁵⁹

Ethnic Tensions

The 1980s were marked by clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, specifically with the Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region enclave within Azerbaijan. As the Soviet Union spiraled towards dissolution during the late 1980s, Azerbaijan found itself amid an escalating ethnic conflict.⁶⁰ In February 1988, 32 people—primarily Armenians—were killed in an ethnic riot in Sumgayit. The riot broke out after Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh demanded their region be absorbed into the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1989, Soviet Armenia passed a resolution unifying Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. As tension flared, Azerbaijanis fled from Armenia and Armenians left Azerbaijan.^{61, 62}

Baku soon took center stage in the escalating crisis; strong anti-Armenian feelings simmered in the city at the end of 1989. Tensions were further stoked by a faction of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) opposition group. Pogroms against the city's Armenians began on 13 January 1990 and continued for several days. Initially, Soviet security forces did little to stop the violence.^{63, 64} After the Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev declared a state of emergency in Baku, security forces clamped down on anticommunist and anti-Soviet protests led by the PFA. At least 130 citizens died in this crackdown, known to Azerbaijanis as Black January. Gorbachev later described his decision to send troops into Baku as "the biggest mistake in my political life."^{65, 66}

56 Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2001), 45.

57 James Nichol, "Chapter 2: Azerbaijan," in *Azerbaijan: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995), <http://countrystudies.us/azerbaijan/>

58 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 24.

59 James Nichol, "Chapter 2: Azerbaijan," in *Azerbaijan: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995), <http://countrystudies.us/azerbaijan/>

60 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 148–51.

61 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

62 Mansur Mirovalev, "Nagorno-Karabakh: How Did Azerbaijan Triumph over Armenia?" Aljazeera, 22 December 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/22/nagorno-karabakh-how-did-azerbaijan-triumph-over-armenia>

63 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 148–51.

64 Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 87–91.

65 Rufat Ahmedov, "Notes from Baku: Black January," EurasiaNet.org, 15 February 2003, <https://eurasianet.org/notes-from-baku-black-january>

66 Communist Crimes, "Communist Dictatorship in Azerbaijan. The Soviet Occupation (1920-1991)," n.d., <https://communistcrimes.org/en/countries/azerbaijan>

Independence

On 30 August 1991, as the USSR collapsed, Azerbaijan declared independence. However, the newly independent country became burdened by continuous regional conflicts, political instability, and a sagging economy. During the spring and summer of 1991, Soviet troops had joined forces with Azerbaijani militias to disarm Armenian guerilla groups operating near Nagorno-Karabakh. The operation led to the forcible repatriation of many Armenians, sparking a new wave of violence as Armenian militias fought to reclaim villages.⁶⁷ By the spring of 1992, full-scale fighting broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh was established, a controversial move not recognized by most of the international community.⁶⁸ A full-scale conflict that broke out later became known as the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and lasted until a ceasefire in 1994.^{69, 70, 71}

Azerbaijan's Communist Party maintained some power within the country after the fall of the USSR. In 1995, after years of coup attempts and political disarray, the New Azerbaijan Party was elected to power in the country's first multiparty elections. A new constitution was written, and Heydar Aliyev, a prominent communist-era figure, became president. To help revive the country, Aliyev opened up Azerbaijan's oil deposits to an international oil consortium. The effort was successful and made Azerbaijan a significant oil producer.^{72, 73} Aliyev won presidential elections in 1998, after serving five years as acting president.^{74, 75} During his autocratic rule, all forms of dissent were suppressed, and subsequent elections were plagued by claims of manipulation.⁷⁶

67 New East Network, "Post-Soviet World: What You Need to Know about Azerbaijan," *Guardian*, 9 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/09/sp-post-soviet-world-need-to-know-azerbaijan>

68 Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., *Playing the Communal Card: Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 151–53.

69 BBC News, "Nagorno-Karabakh Profile," 18 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18270325>

70 BBC News, "Azerbaijan Profile—Timeline," 2 January 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17047328>

71 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

72 BBC News, "Azerbaijan Profile—Timeline," 2 January 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17047328>

73 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Oil Sector," n.d., <https://en.president.az/azerbaijan/contract>

74 James Nichol, "Chapter 2: Government and Politics: The Coup of 1993," in *Azerbaijan: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995), <http://countrystudies.us/azerbaijan/31.htm>

75 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Heydar Aliyev," 6 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heydar-Aliyev>

76 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

Recent Events

After Aliyev died in 2003, his son Ilham replaced him as president. Ilham was not expected to last long in office since he lacked his father's political acumen; he has had only moderate success in office, most notably in 2008 when he signed an agreement with Armenia seeking a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This effort has stalled, however, due to Ilham's sustainment of his father's autocratic rule. Presidential and parliamentary elections, which Ilham and his allies always win by large margins, are consistently deemed to fall short of democratic standards. Freedom of expression, peaceful protests, and independent journalism are routinely and violently stifled.^{77, 78, 79, 80}

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict flared up again on 27 September 2020. Fighting between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces carried on for approximately six weeks. Turkey supported the Azerbaijanis and Russia provided similar support to the Armenians.⁸¹ Azerbaijan gained the upper hand and seized territory from the Armenians. On 9 November, a ceasefire was signed, which granted Azerbaijan permanent control of the land. It also required Armenian forces to vacate all of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian civilians in the territory seized by Azerbaijan had to leave as well. The fighting caused approximately 150 civilian casualties and 2,783 Azerbaijani military deaths. An estimated 130,000 people have been displaced.^{82, 83, 84}

77 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

78 Stephen Mulvey, "Profile: Ilham Aliyev," BBC News, 16 October 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3194422.stm>

79 BBC News, "Azerbaijan Profile—Timeline," 2 January 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17047328>

80 Amnesty International, "Azerbaijan 2019," 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/report-azerbaijan/>

81 Alexander Gabuev, "Viewpoint: Russia and Turkey—Unlikely Victors of Karabakh Conflict," BBC News, 12 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54903869>

82 BBC News, "Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal," 10 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54882564>

83 Sam Ellis, "The Armenia and Azerbaijan War, Explained," Vox, 3 December 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/12/3/22150110/armenia-azerbaijan-war-russia-nagorno-karabakh-turkey>

84 UNHCR, "Azerbaijan: Pre-Existing Situation and Impact of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 21 December 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/azerbaijan/azerbaijan-pre-existing-situation-and-impact-2020-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-21>

Azerbaijan in Perspective

History Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. After the first millennium BCE, several empires developed in the Caucasus region and the surrounding area. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Seljuk Turks invaded the region in the 11th century. ☐ True ☐ False
3. In the 16th century, Azerbaijan willingly became a subject of the Ottoman Empire, favoring the wealth and development that came with the association. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Azerbaijan declared its independence from Russia in 1918. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Ethnic conflicts pitting Azerbaijan against Armenia have periodically broken out in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. ☐ True ☐ False

Azerbaijan in Perspective

History Assessment Answers

1. True:
Caucasian Albanian, Iranian, Kurdish, and Turkic nomads formed some of the earliest tribal activities in the region. Eventually, kingdoms such as the Assyrian and Median Empires emerged.
2. True:
The Seljuk Turks dramatically changed the culture after conquering the territory. During this time, the Azerbaijani language was created.
3. False:
The Safavid Dynasty conquered the territory in the 16th century and was involved in frequent skirmishes with the Ottoman Turks for control of the Azerbaijani territory.
4. True:
In the waning days of World War I and the wake of the Russian Revolution, Azerbaijan declared its independence and formed the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic with its neighbors.
5. False:
The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has persisted since 1988 and remains unresolved today. The most recent outbreak of violence resulted in Azerbaijan gaining more control of the contested territory.

Chapter 3 | Economy



Baku: old city and new
Flickr / Dan Mason

Introduction

Azerbaijan is a middle-income country with an economy that is heavily dependent on oil and gas production.¹ Industry plays a significant role, although the government is moving to diversify the labor market by promoting initiatives in tourism, sustainable energy, agriculture, and several other sectors. The country also contains vast deposits of minerals, and mining is robust. In recent years, tourism has significantly increased.² Many visitors arrive to visit beaches during the summer and mountain resorts during the winter. Unemployment decreased in 2019 due in part to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the country was projected to be on course for further increases in unemployment, to approximately 5.2%.^{3, 4, 5}

- 1 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, [Azerbaijan - People | Britannica](#)
- 2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 3 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Unemployment Rate: 1991-2019 Data | 2020-2021 Forecast | Historical,"
- 4 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, [Azerbaijan - People | Britannica](#)
- 5 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

Agriculture

Azerbaijan is home to a rich agricultural region, sprawling mountain ranges, and semiarid stretches along its coast. The country's agricultural infrastructure—primarily from the Soviet era—has degraded in certain regions and caused salinization of the soil, requiring significant investment to rectify. Land ownership has also been complicated by incomplete Soviet-era records, requiring substantial reform initiatives in the mid-1990s.^{6, 7, 8}

Approximately 57.6% of the nation's land is suitable for agriculture, and nearly 50% of the total arable land is currently under cultivation. Most farming activity is conducted in the Lankaran region in southern Azerbaijan, the Quba-Xaçmaz region north of Abseron, and the Ganja-Qazax near Armenia and Georgia. The Shirvan Plain and the Mugano-Salyan area in the Mili and Mugan plains are also important agricultural centers.^{9, 10} The country's most prominent crops include common fruits, vegetables, grains, cotton, and wine grapes. Although cotton production has decreased significantly since the 20th century, it remains an important cash crop.^{11, 12, 13} Wine grapes have grown in importance since most Azerbaijan wine production is exported.^{14, 15, 16, 17}

Agriculture accounts for approximately 6.1% of Azerbaijan's total GDP as of 2017 estimates. The GDP's agricultural portion is significantly smaller than it was at independence, despite almost half of the population living in rural areas. Agriculture employs approximately 37% of the nation's labor force.^{18, 19, 20} The agriculture sector has been plagued by low productivity, a lack of modern technology, inefficient land use, and a lack of coordination between producers and processors. Still, new government initiatives designed to increase productivity have fueled rapid growth in the sector.^{21, 22}

- 6 Privacy Shield Framework, "Azerbaijan Country Commercial Guide: Azerbaijan—Agricultural Sector," n.d., <https://www.privacyshield.gov/article?id=Azerbaijan-Agricultural-Sector>
- 7 Consulate General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, "Agriculture," n.d., <https://www.azconsulatela.org/Azerbaijan/Economy/Agriculture>
- 8 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 9 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 10 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Azerbaijan: Agriculture," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 11 Arzu Aghayeva, "Seeds of Change: Transition in Azerbaijan's Agriculture," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/83_folder/83_articles/83_agriculture.html
- 12 Kamran Shikhaliyev, Ogtay Ismayilzada, and Samir Khalilov, "Agricultural Sector of Azerbaijan: Overview and Analysis" (paper, International School of Economics, Tbilisi State University, Georgia, n.d.), <https://docplayer.net/26112181-Agricultural-sector-of-azerbaijan-overview-and-analysis-kamran-shikhaliyev-ogtay-ismayilzada-samir-khalilov.html>
- 13 Azerbaijan, "Agro-Industrial Complex (AIC) in Azerbaijan," 2011, http://www.azerbajians.com/content_718_en.html
- 14 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 15 Kamran Shikhaliyev, Ogtay Ismayilzada, and Samir Khalilov, "Agricultural Sector of Azerbaijan: Overview and Analysis" (paper, International School of Economics, Tbilisi State University, Georgia, n.d.), <https://docplayer.net/26112181-Agricultural-sector-of-azerbaijan-overview-and-analysis-kamran-shikhaliyev-ogtay-ismayilzada-samir-khalilov.html>
- 16 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 40.
- 17 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Azerbaijan: Agriculture," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 18 Global Economy, "Azerbaijan: GDP Share of Agriculture," n.d., https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Azerbaijan/share_of_agriculture/
- 19 Mia Madsen, "Azerbaijan," IFAD, n.d., <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/country/id/azerbaijan>
- 20 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 21 Kamran Shikhaliyev, Ogtay Ismayilzada, and Samir Khalilov, "Agricultural Sector of Azerbaijan: Overview and Analysis" (paper, International School of Economics, Tbilisi State University, Georgia, n.d.), <https://docplayer.net/26112181-Agricultural-sector-of-azerbaijan-overview-and-analysis-kamran-shikhaliyev-ogtay-ismayilzada-samir-khalilov.html>
- 22 Privacy Shield Framework, "Azerbaijan Country Commercial Guide: Azerbaijan—Agricultural Sector," n.d., <https://www.privacyshield.gov/article?id=Azerbaijan-Agricultural-Sector>

While most agricultural activities involve growing food crops, livestock is an increasingly vital component of this sector, showing steady growth in the 21st century. Most livestock ranching is concentrated in mountainous regions, particularly in the Nagorno Shirvan and Kelbecer-Lachin regions. Prominent livestock includes buffalo, cattle, goats, pigs, poultry, and sheep.²³ Despite the increase in livestock numbers, buffalo and pigs have trended in the opposite direction. As of 2018, the country's livestock production met roughly half the country's domestic demands.^{24, 25}

Industry

The industry sector accounts for approximately 53.7% of Azerbaijan's GDP as of 2017, although it employs just 14.3% of the labor force. Industry is dominated by oil and gas production. Hydrocarbon production has existed within Azerbaijan for more than 150 years, making it one of the world's oldest oil-producing countries.²⁶ Azerbaijan's oil and natural gas resources are paramount to its overall economy. Since 1999, the country's oil revenues have been controlled by the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan, which has funded initiatives in education, poverty reduction, and improving rural living standards.^{27, 28} Estimates from 2016 place Azerbaijan's oil reserves at 7 billion barrels, ranking 20th globally with approximately 200 years of oil left.²⁹ Azerbaijan's significant natural gas reserves have made the country a net exporter of natural gas, primarily produced offshore at the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) complex and the Shah Deniz fields.^{30, 31}

Azerbaijan exports a significant amount of its hydrocarbon production through several oil and gas pipelines that traverse the greater region. The majority of the country's oil production comes from the ACG field in the Caspian Sea. The Abseron Peninsula, which is home to Baku and Sumgayit, is the nation's center of industrial activity, followed by the cities of Ganja, Ali Bayramli (Sirvan), and Mingacevir.^{32, 33} Several older fields in the Caspian are managed by the government-owned State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR).^{34, 35}

Mining and manufacturing also compose significant portions of industry. The volume of mining operations has increased more than 50% in the past decade, and manufacturing has roughly doubled in volume in the same time. Food processing accounts for a large share of the manufacturing subsector, approximately 37.8% of production. Additional key subsectors include power production and distribution, light industries (such as textiles), chemical

23 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), "Azerbaijan: The Context," 2018, <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/country/id/azerbaijan>

24 Azerbaijan, "Agro-Industrial Complex (AIC) in Azerbaijan," 2011, http://www.azerbaijans.com/content_718_en.html

25 Uygun Aksoy et al., "Organic Agriculture in Azerbaijan: Current Status and Potentials for Future Development," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/i8318en/i8318EN.pdf>

26 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

27 Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) Institute, "State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan," 2012, <http://www.swfinstitute.org/swfs/state-oil-fund-of-azerbaijan/>

28 International Energy Agency, "Azerbaijan Energy Profile," April 2020, <https://www.iea.org/reports/azerbaijan-energy-profile>

29 Worldometer, "Azerbaijan Oil," n.d., <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/azerbaijan-oil/>

30 Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, "Azerbaijan: Executive Summary," 7 January 2019, https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Azerbaijan/azerbaijan_exe.pdf

31 Central Intelligence Agency, "Country Comparison: Crude Oil—Oil-Proved Reserves," *World Factbook*, 1 January 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/crude-oil-proved-reserves/country-comparison>

32 U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Background Reference: Azerbaijan," 7 January 2019, https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Azerbaijan/azerbaijan_bkgd.pdf

33 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Azerbaijan: Settlement Patterns," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

34 SOCAR, "Economics & Statistics," n.d., <http://www.socar.az/socar/en/economics-and-statistics/economics-and-statistics/oil-production>

35 SOCAR, "About SOCAR," n.d., <http://www.socar.az/socar/en/company/about-socar/discover-socar>

products, and metallurgy.^{36, 37, 38} Sumgayit has developed into a hub for much of this industrial production. Light industrial activity has primarily been centered in Ganja, Mingacevir, and Baku.³⁹

Since the turn of the century, construction has become one of the fastest-growing industrial sectors. It has expanded by approximately 37% and accounts for a significant portion of the GDP, around 11.4% as of 2015. However, construction has trended moderately downward in recent years, compounded by the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. Much of this expansion is centered near the capital of Baku, although infrastructure and housing projects are ongoing throughout the country. Recent major projects include the construction of the Azerbaijan Tower and the stalled Khazar Islands development of artificial islands.^{40, 41, 42, 43}

Energy

Approximately 90% of Azerbaijan's electricity is generated through thermal power plants, generating 26 TWh of electricity each year.⁴⁴ A small amount of electricity is generated by other methods, most notably hydropower plants. State-owned Azerenerji produces the most electricity in the country and operates 13 thermal power plants, 11 hydropower plants, and six small-scale hydropower plants.^{45, 46}

All cities and villages in Azerbaijan are connected to the country's electrical grid, which is paid through a metering system. Production has historically failed to meet domestic demands, particularly in the winter when blackouts are commonplace. In recent years, however, the government and international companies have invested significantly in the country's energy infrastructure, which has helped stabilize availability, reliability, and security.^{47, 48}

Renewable energy has great potential in Azerbaijan, although after peaking at approximately 6.91% of the total energy production in 2010, it has been on a somewhat steady decline.⁴⁹ Hydropower dominates the renewable energy sector, contributing approximately 2% to the total energy production and 8% of the country's electricity supply in 2018.⁵⁰ In 2009, the State Agency on Alternative and Renewable Energy Sources was established to drive renewable energy initiatives. In addition to hydropower, Azerbaijan has significant potential for biomass,

36 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Azerbaijan in Figures," 2017, http://www.iccia.com/sites/default/files/library/files/azfigures-az-2017_1.pdf

37 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Industry: Volume of Industrial Products (Works, Services), at Factual Price, Million Manat," n.d., <https://www.azstat.org/MESearch/details>

38 Azpromo, "Azerbaijan: Agriculture and Food Processing," n.d., <http://www.azpromo.az/uploads/files/pages/ae922f416e12bb0532c55c08667f7ea6.pdf>

39 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

40 Azernews, "Feasibility Study to Be Prepared for New City (Formerly Khazar Islands) Project in Azerbaijan," 18 July 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/business/153703.html>

41 UK Trade and Investment, "Construction Sector in Azerbaijan," 28 January 2012, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ProductionContentBucket/pdf/20120128215638249.pdf>

42 ITE Build & Interiors, "A Guide to Azerbaijan's Construction Industry," 29 May 2015, <http://www.buildingshows.com/market-insights/azerbaijan/a-guide-to-azerbaijan-s-construction-industry/801789255>

43 Leila Steed, "Azerbaijan's Construction Industry to Rebound by 9.1%" *Construction Europe*, 3 March 2021, <https://www.construction-europe.com/news/Azerbaijan-s-construction-industry-to-rebound-by-9.1-/8010691.article>

44 Azerenerji, "Activities," n.d., <http://azerenerji.gov.az/index/page/13?lang=en>

45 E. Ismayilov, "Azerbaijan Ups Electricity Generation," *Trend*, 10 September 2012, <https://en.trend.az/business/energy/2063584.html>

46 Azerenerji, "Activities," n.d., <http://azerenerji.gov.az/index/page/13?lang=en>

47 Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership, "Policy DB Details: Azerbaijan (2012)," 11 October 2013, <https://www.reeep.org/azerbaijan-2012>

48 International Energy Agency, "Azerbaijan Energy Profile," April 2020, <https://www.iea.org/reports/azerbaijan-energy-profile>

49 Hanna Ritchie and Max Roser, "Azerbaijan: Energy Country Profile," *Our World in Data*, n.d., <https://ourworldindata.org/energy/country/azerbaijan?country=~AZE>

50 International Energy Agency, "Azerbaijan Energy Profile," April 2020, <https://www.iea.org/reports/azerbaijan-energy-profile>

geothermal, solar, and wind power sources; however, these resources are largely untapped today. The government has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030.^{51, 52}

Natural Resources

Minerals

Historically, Azerbaijan's mineral resources have not been exploited, thanks in part to the predominance of oil and gas. In 2014, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources estimated that Azerbaijan had approximately 867 industrially significant mineral deposits: 579 of these are suitable for construction materials, 126 are non-ore, 101 are underground water, and 61 contain ore. While mineral production peaked in 2010 when it reached approximately 71.9 million metric tons, it has increased in recent years. In 2018, Azerbaijan saw 54.5 million metric tons of minerals produced.⁵³ In 2020, mining activities contributed USD 1.8 million to Azerbaijan's GDP.^{54, 55, 56}

Iron ore, in particular, has been mined in significant quantities in recent years, derived from three major deposit locations in Damir, Dashkasan, and South Dashkasan. Cumulatively, these iron ore deposits are estimated to be at least 350 million tons, with the potential for about 70–80 years of extraction.⁵⁷ Production numbers are volatile from year to year, with steep drops often observed one year and a significant increase the following year.⁵⁸ Iron ore, which is required to make steel, is heavily utilized by the state-owned Azerbaijan Steel Production Complex. Starting in 2009, gold, silver, and copper extraction began to pick up speed and popularity.^{59, 60}

Trade

Significant goods imported into Azerbaijan include iron, machinery, provisions, and steel; exports include chemicals, machinery, oil and gas, provisions, and various metals.⁶¹ Post-Soviet era Azerbaijan expanded its trade activities beyond Russia and the former Soviet republics to reach European and Asian countries. Azerbaijan maintains free trade agreements with Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.⁶² Today, top import and export partners include the Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, India, and other Asian countries. Approximately 94% of Azerbaijan's exports involve oil and gas, while cotton, machinery, and provisions primarily compose the rest.^{63, 64} In the third quarter of 2020, Azerbaijan had a trade surplus of approximately USD

51 International Energy Agency, "Azerbaijan Energy Profile," April 2020, <https://www.iea.org/reports/azerbaijan-energy-profile>

52 UNECE, "Sustainable Development of Energy in Azerbaijan: Gaps in Energy Efficiency and Ways to Eliminate Them," n.d., https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/project-monitoring/unda/16_17X/A2.1_Implement_Natl_CS/Azerbaijan_SE_e.pdf

53 CEIC, "Azerbaijan Minerals Production," n.d., <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/azerbaijan/minerals-production>

54 This Business Year, "Dig On In: Azerbaijan 2014," n.d., <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/azerbaijan-2014/dig-on-in/review>

55 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan GDP from Mining," 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/gdp-from-mining>

56 Elena Safirova, "2016 Minerals Yearbook: Azerbaijan [Advanced Release]," U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, February 2020, <https://prd-wret.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/atoms/files/myb3-2016-aj.pdf>

57 This Business Year, "Dig On In: Azerbaijan 2014," n.d., <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/azerbaijan-2014/dig-on-in/review>

58 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan GDP from Mining," 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/gdp-from-mining>

59 This Business Year, "Dig On In: Azerbaijan 2014," n.d., <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/azerbaijan-2014/dig-on-in/review>

60 Trend, "Det.AI Limited Won Investment Competition for Sale of Shares of Dashkesen Ore Mining and Processing Enterprises," 11 October 2006, <https://en.trend.az/business/economy/863855.html>

61 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

62 Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Investment Climate Statement: Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/azerbaijan/>

63 WITS, "Azerbaijan Trade Balance, Exports and Imports by Country 2018," n.d., <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/AZE/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>

64 Ashwin Matabadal, "Country Report: Azerbaijan," RaboResearch, February 13, 2014, <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2014/february/country-report-azerbaijan/>

56.5 million. Azerbaijan's balance of trade demonstrated some instability in the 2000s and 2010s, although it is forecasted to stabilize and reach USD 2.1 billion by 2022.⁶⁵

Despite an anticipated trade surplus, several issues affect the stability of Azerbaijan's trade. In 2016, Azerbaijan ranked 102 and 114 out of 136 countries in domestic and foreign market access, respectively. Significant factors adversely affecting imports, exports, and foreign direct investment (FDI) are border corruption, cronyism, burdensome procedures, and limited access to trade finance and potential markets.^{66, 67}

International companies based regionally and further abroad have invested heavily in the country's oil and gas industry by developing drilling and transportation infrastructure. Russia remains the most significant FDI source; both Russia and Azerbaijan are part of a customs union that includes Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In 2019, it was reported that Azerbaijan received approximately USD 1.5 billion in FDI inflows, which primarily focused on the oil and gas sector.^{68, 69} Foreigners are not allowed to own land in Azerbaijan but are authorized to lease land and own real estate. Other FDI investment areas include food and beverage production, media, telecommunications, and hospitality sectors.⁷⁰

Azerbaijan has significantly improved investment opportunities leading to stronger institutional, operational, and regulatory sectors. On an Ease of Doing Business list in 2019, Azerbaijan ranked 25, up from 57 the previous year. However, infrastructure is lacking in the country, and on the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, Azerbaijan ranked 123 out of 167 countries. A major hindrance is the state of roads and railways, often in disrepair and in need of modernization.⁷¹

Although trade has been dominated by oil and gas, Azerbaijan has increased its variety of exports in recent years, explicitly targeting the agricultural sector for expansion. Common imports include machinery and equipment, oil products, provisions, metals, and chemicals. Primary import partners include Russia, Turkey, Germany, the United States, China, France, and Ukraine.^{72, 73, 74}

65 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Balance of Trade," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/balance-of-trade>

66 World Economic Forum, "The Global Enabling Trade Report 2016: Azerbaijan," n.d., http://reports.weforum.org/pdf/eti-2016/WEF_ETI_2016_Profile_AZE.pdf

67 Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Investment Climate Statement: Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/azerbaijan/>

68 UN Conference on Trade and Development, "World Investment Report 2017," 2017, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2017_en.pdf

69 Nordea, "Azerbaijan: Investing in Azerbaijan," Export Enterprises SA, March 2021, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/azerbaijan/investment>

70 Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Investment Climate Statement: Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/azerbaijan/>

71 OECD Library, "Chapter 2. Investment in Sustainable Infrastructure in Azerbaijan," Sustainable Infrastructure for Low-Carbon Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Hotspot Analysis and Needs Assessment, 19 December 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/86850faa-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/86850faa-en>

72 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Azerbaijan in Figures," 2017, http://www.iccia.com/sites/default/files/library/files/azfigures-az-2017_1.pdf

73 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

74 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Foreign Trade Turnover by Commodity Groups in 2018," 2018, http://istmat.info/files/uploads/62737/azerbaijan_in_figures_2019.pdf

Services

The services sector, which comprises industries like finance, hospitality, retail, and transportation, accounts for approximately 40.4% of the GDP as of 2017. During this same year, services-related exports reached 48.7% of the GDP, and imports registered as –42%. With Azerbaijan's significant trade undertakings, its transportation infrastructure is essential to maintaining healthy economic activity levels. Rail and trucks traverse the Azerbaijani terrain, and a major seaport in Baku handles goods that arrive at the port on the Caspian Sea.⁷⁵ In 2014, 48.9% of the labor force was employed in the services sector.⁷⁶

Hospitality

Hotel development in Azerbaijan has ramped up significantly in recent years in response to an increase in tourism. This growth is due primarily to positive media coverage and strategic marketing by the country's tourism agency in the past decade.⁷⁷ Domestic and foreign hotel companies have blossomed in conjunction with significant development initiatives, such as the Baku White City and Crescent Development project, which are home to several midscale and upscale hotels. The development of hotels in Azerbaijan was so rapid that it sparked fears it would quickly reach saturation, although these fears have not come to fruition yet. As of 2019, Azerbaijan had 642 hotels, an increase of 7.7% from the previous year.^{78, 79, 80}

Tourism

Azerbaijan ranks 71 out of 140 countries on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index for 2019, rating 3.8 out of 7. Travel has been steady for at least the last decade. Approximately 3.1 million international tourists arrived in the country in 2019, a rise of 11.4% from the previous year.⁸¹ Thanks to its pleasant climate, historic landmarks, unique cuisine, and affordability, Baku has emerged as a tourism hotspot. The Azerbaijani government has put forth several initiatives to make Baku a popular tourist destination in the region.^{82, 83, 84} During the hotter periods of summer, tourists commonly visit the beach resorts in places such as Lankaran or resort villages in the Caucasus, where the weather is more attractive to visitors. Popular winter tourist destinations include ski resorts on Shahdag or Tufandag on the Caucasus Mountains.^{85, 86, 87}

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- 75 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 76 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Economy," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 77 Hospitality Net, "Horwath HTL Industry Report: Baku, Azerbaijan," 22 March 2019, <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/performance/4092542.html>
- 78 Hospitality Net, "Horwath HTL Industry Report: Baku, Azerbaijan," 22 March 2019, <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/performance/4092542.html>
- 79 Mulayim Mustafayeva, "UNEC SABAH: Azerbaijan State Economic University," The Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan Republic, June 2019, <http://unec.edu.az/application/uploads/2019/07/Mustafayeva-M-layim.pdf>
- 80 Baku Travel Guide, "The Number of Hotels in Azerbaijan Has Increased," n.d., <https://bakutraguide.com/en/the-number-of-hotels-in-azerbaijan-has-increased/>
- 81 Madina Hashimli, "Azerbaijan's Tourism Sector—Opportunities and Obstacles," Centre for Economic and Social Development, 1 August 2019, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3485581
- 82 Yevgeniya Hajiyeva and Arzu Jafarli, "How Competitive Is Azerbaijan's Travel and Tourism Industry?" Impact Azerbaijan, 2013, https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/az/Documents/consumer-business/Travel%20hospitality%20leisure_con.bus.%202014.pdf
- 83 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Tourist Arrivals," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/tourist-arrivals>
- 84 Klaus Schwab et al., "The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019," World Economic Forum, 2019, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2019.pdf
- 85 Sam Bedford, "When Is the Best Time to Visit Azerbaijan?" Culture Trip, 14 March 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/azerbaijan/articles/when-is-the-best-time-to-visit-azerbaijan/>
- 86 World Tourism Forum Institute, "Tourism in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://worldtourismforum.net/tourism-in-azerbaijan/>
- 87 Hospitality Net, "Horwath HTL Industry Report: Baku, Azerbaijan," 22 March 2019, <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/performance/4092542.html>

Azerbaijan has overcome significant factors working against its tourism industry—primarily, a lack of adequate tourism infrastructure, with largely substandard water, gas, electricity, and basic sanitation. Until recent reforms, obtaining a travel visa to Azerbaijan was also a complex process.^{88, 89} Despite these obstacles, the Azerbaijani government has channeled resources into further development of its tourism industry. In 2015, the Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University opened with a mission to train tourism specialists to help guide the developing industry.⁹⁰ The government also established Tourist Information Centers throughout the country and in major cities like Baku and Ganja.^{91, 92} Today, the most significant tourism deterrents are COVID-19 restrictions and the potential for terrorism.^{93, 94, 95}

Banking and Finance

There are approximately 29 banks, 509 bank branches, and 90 nonbank credit organizations in Azerbaijan today. The banks dominate the financial sector by holding approximately 95% of total assets. In 2015, devaluations resulted in several bank closures throughout the country, although positive trends show falling inflation and increased stability. In 2019, bank assets rose 10.9% to USD 19.24 billion, although recent collapses in oil prices have strained the financial sector.^{96, 97, 98, 99}

The Azerbaijani government established the Central Bank of Azerbaijan in 1992, which is responsible for issuing the national currency and supporting the banking system's overall stability. The largest bank in the country is the International Bank of Azerbaijan; the Azerbaijani government is a majority owner. Microfinance services, such as small loans or limited lines of credit for low-income individuals or groups, are considered underdeveloped.^{100, 101, 102}

The new manat (AZN) is the national currency of Azerbaijan.¹⁰³ As of March 2021, USD 1 was equal to approximately AZN 0.83.¹⁰⁴ The obsolete version of the manat, called the old manat (AZM), has an exchange rate of AZM 5,000 to AZN 1. This change was intended to bolster confidence in the AZN because of AZM's

88 iVisa, "Azerbaijan Visa Requirements," 3 January 2021, <https://www.ivisa.com/azerbaijan-blog/azerbaijan-visa-requirements>

89 U.S. Department of State, "Visiting Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://az.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/visiting-azerbaijan/>

90 Ilham Madatov, "Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University," UNWTO, n.d., <https://www.unwto.org/affiliate-member-organization/41730>

91 Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan—Ministry of Culture and Tourism, "Country: Azerbaijan," UN Development Programme, 2012, https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/AZE/AZ_UNDP_Tourism%20Vocational%20School_Pro_Doc_2012.eng.pdf

92 OSCE, "Rapid Tourism Assessment for the Azerbaijan Tourism Sector Development Program," March 2004, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/2/27857.pdf>

93 Vugar Bayramov, Leyla Aliyeva, and Xalid Mikayilov, "CESD Policy Report on Tourism Sector in Azerbaijan" (report, Center for Economic and Social Development, July 2011), <http://cesd.az/new/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/CESD-Tourism-Paper.pdf>

94 Klaus Schwab et al., "The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019," World Economic Forum, 2019, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2019.pdf

95 Bureau of Consular Affairs, "Azerbaijan," U.S. Department of State, 6 August 2020, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Azerbaijan.html>

96 EBF, "Azerbaijan's Banking Sector: Facts & Figures," December 2020, <https://www.ebf.eu/azerbaijan/>

97 ECBS, "Banks in Country Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.ecbs.org/banks/azerbaijan/>

98 International Trade Administration, "Azerbaijan Country Commercial Guide: Banking and Finance," n.d., <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/azerbaijan-banking-and-finance>

99 Joshua Kucera, "Azerbaijan's Banks Showing Signs of Strain," Eurasianet, 28 April 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijans-banks-showing-signs-of-strain>

100 Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "About Us," n.d., <https://www.cbar.az/page-3/about-us>

101 International Trade Administration, "Azerbaijan Country Commercial Guide: Banking and Finance," n.d., <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/azerbaijan-banking-and-finance>

102 Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "History," 2021, <https://www.cbar.az/page-4/history?language=en>

103 Oanda, "Azerbaijan New Manat," n.d., <https://www1.oanda.com/currency/iso-currency-codes/AZN>

104 Oanda, "Currency Converter," 25 February 2021, <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

value compared to USD, but this only made the AZM unattractive for large cash purchases and encouraged the use of USD. Today, the new manat is considered stable.^{105, 106}

The Baku Stock Exchange (BSE) is the only stock exchange in Azerbaijan. It opened in 1997 and began trading in September 2000. It was created to establish a market infrastructure for trade in securities and transactions. Approximately 18 companies are listed on the BSE and are divided into two groups—standard and premium. The BSE's total market capitalization is approximately USD 1.44 billion.^{107, 108, 109}

Standard of Living

Azerbaijan's life expectancy averages 73.88 years total; for men, the average is 70.79 years, and for women, it is 77.15 years. The country ranks 144 out of 227 in terms of life expectancy.¹¹⁰ Education has improved in recent years. A 2015 survey found that 69% of working Azerbaijani citizens had completed high school, with 20% completing higher education. The investment return on education is calculated at 6.1%, below the worldwide average of 8–10%.^{111, 112, 113}

Azerbaijan ranks 88 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), which categorizes countries based on criteria such as economic growth, national policies, and gross national income.^{114, 115, 116} The cost of living in Azerbaijan is USD 544 per person and USD 1,377 for a family of four.¹¹⁷ Approximately 48.6% of the labor force is female, according to 2019 estimates. In 2001, 49% of the population lived below the poverty line. However, by 2018 that number had dropped to 5.1%, with 5.5% of the labor force unemployed.^{118, 119, 120, 121}

- 105 Rovshan Ismayilov, "Azerbaijans Manat Makeover: Good Times Ahead?" EurasiaNet.org, 28 February 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav030106.shtml>
- 106 Joshua Kucera, "Azerbaijan's Banks Showing Signs of Strain," Eurasianet, 28 April 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijans-banks-showing-signs-of-strain>
- 107 Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative, "Baku Stock Exchange," n.d., <https://sseinitiative.org/stock-exchange/bfb/>
- 108 Kiddle Encyclopedia, "Baku Stock Exchange Facts for Kids," 14 March 2021, https://kids.kiddle.co/Baku_Stock_Exchange
- 109 BFB.az, "History of the Baku Stock Exchange," n.d., <https://www.bfb.az/en/history-of-baku-stock-exchange>
- 110 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 111 UN Development Programme, "Human Development Reports: Azerbaijan," 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AZE>
- 112 Vincente Garcia-Moreno and Harry A. Patrinos, "What Are the Returns to Education in Azerbaijan," World Bank, 13 February 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/what-are-returns-education-azerbaijan>
- 113 George Psacharopoulos and Harry Anthony Patrinos, "Returns to Investment in Education: A Decennial Review of the Global Literature," *Education Economics*, 7 June 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09645292.2018.1484426>
- 114 UN Development Programme, "Human Development Reports," n.d., <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/what-does-human-development-index-tell-us>
- 115 UN Development Programme, "Human Development Reports: Azerbaijan," 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AZE>
- 116 Pedro Conceição et al., "Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene," UN Development Programme, 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>
- 117 Livingcost.org, "Cost of Living in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://livingcost.org/cost/azerbaijan>
- 118 UN Development Programme, "Human Development Reports: Azerbaijan," 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AZE>
- 119 International Labour Office, "Decent Work Country Profile: Azerbaijan" (report, ILO, Geneva, Switzerland, 2012), 1, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/publication/wcms_175754.pdf
- 120 World Bank, "Labor Force, Female (% of Total Labor Force)—Azerbaijan," 29 January 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=AZ>
- 121 Asian Development Bank, "Azerbaijan and ADB," April 2020, <https://www.adb.org/countries/azerbaijan/poverty>

Employment

Approximately 50% of the Azerbaijani labor force—totaling 4.8 million in 2020—are employed in service jobs. The next largest employment sector is agriculture, which accounts for just over a third of the labor force.^{122, 123} In 2021, the average monthly salary in Azerbaijan was USD 1,735, with average lows dipping to USD 441 and average highs reaching USD 7,764. The average salary has steadily increased, peaking in early 2020 before trending downward during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{124, 125, 126}

Azerbaijan's unemployment rate hit 5.96% in 2000, increasing from 5.51% in 2019 and 4.9% in 2018.¹²⁷ Unemployment has generally trended downward since 2000 when it reached 11.77%.¹²⁸ However, the government has been accused of not releasing accurate unemployment numbers. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the labor force; it is estimated that the actual unemployment rate could be as high as 16.51%.¹²⁹

Azerbaijani law allows for creating and participating in independent labor unions, except for the military, the police, and managerial positions. The Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (ATUC) represents 1.6 million workers—26% of the workforce—from over 16,000 union organizations across 27 sectors of the economy. Although nominally independent, the ATUC and its member unions are considered closely linked to the government and ineffectual at pursuing collective bargaining agreements and advocating for workers. Laws protecting labor rights are only casually enforced; employers routinely undermine union participation and collective bargaining through practices such as subcontracting and short-term employment agreements.^{130, 131, 132, 133}

122 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan—Labor Force, Total," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/labor-force-total-wb-data.html>

123 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

124 Salary Explorer, "Average Salary in Azerbaijan 2021," n.d., <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=15&loctype=1>

125 CEIC, "Azerbaijan Average Monthly Salary," n.d., <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/azerbaijan/average-monthly-salary-statistical-classification-of-economic-activities-rev-2/average-monthly-salary>

126 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Employed Persons," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/employed-persons>

127 H. Plecher, "Unemployment Rate in Azerbaijan 2020," Statista, 10 November 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/457518/unemployment-rate-in-azerbaijan/>

128 Index Mundi, "Azerbaijan Unemployment Rate," 27 November 2020, https://www.indexmundi.com/azerbaijan/unemployment_rate.html

129 Toghrul Mashali, "Unemployment in Azerbaijan: Official Statistics and Reality," JAM News, 21 January 2021, <https://jam-news.net/unemployment-in-azerbaijan-official-statistics-and-reality/>

130 U.S. Department of State, "Azerbaijan 2018 Human Rights Report," 2018, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AZERBAIJAN-2018-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

131 Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation, "About of Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation," n.d., <http://ahik.org/page/view/ahik-haqqinda-qisa-melumat?language=en>

132 Nordea Trade, "Work Conditions in Azerbaijan," Export Enterprises SA, March 2021, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/azerbaijan/work-conditions>

133 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

Outlook

Azerbaijan's economic outlook is optimistic despite challenges related to several serious matters, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁴ According to the 2020 Index of Economic Freedom, the country is ranked at 69.3 or “moderately free.” Official unemployment numbers reversed the downward trend in 2020 when the pandemic required quarantine and lockdown measures throughout the country.¹³⁵ Oil production is considered stable with some modest growth—in 2018, the energy production sector expanded by 1.4%. Natural gas has fueled the growth of the hydrocarbons sector, which saw a 1.1% growth in the same period; other industries also grew collectively by 1.8%. The overall economy grew by 2.2% in 2019, its most substantial growth since 2014.^{136, 137, 138}

Economic diversification remains an important initiative for Azerbaijan as it seeks to ease its reliance on oil and gas. Significant investments in agriculture, tourism, and technology reflect the desire to diversify and stabilize the economy, yet the country still has much work ahead to improve its standing in the world. Azerbaijan's position on the World Bank's Doing Business index trended downward in 2020, from 25th place to 34. Reforms targeting property registration, credit availability, investments, and the enforcement of contracts seek to create economic success in the near future.¹³⁹

134 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, “U.S. Relations with Azerbaijan,” U.S. Department of State, 7 November 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-azerbaijan/>

135 Heritage Foundation, “Azerbaijan,” 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/azerbaijan>

136 Central Intelligence Agency, “Azerbaijan: Economy,” *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

137 World Bank, “The World Bank in Azerbaijan,” 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/azerbaijan/overview>

138 BNE Intellinews, “Outlook 2021 Azerbaijan,” 25 January 2021, <https://intellinews.com/outlook-2021-azerbaijan-201197/>

139 Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “2020 Investment Climate Statement: Azerbaijan,” n.d., <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/azerbaijan/>

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Economy Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Azerbaijan's rocky, mountainous terrain makes it unsuitable for agricultural use. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Azerbaijan's industry sector is dominated by oil and gas production. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Azerbaijan's political and environmental climates make renewable energy development a near impossibility. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Azerbaijan is highly active in imports and exports regionally and abroad. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The national currency in Azerbaijan is the new manat (AZN). ☐ True ☐ False

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Economy Assessment Answers

1. False:
Approximately 57.6% of the nation's land is suitable for agriculture, and nearly 50% of the total arable land is currently under cultivation.
2. True:
The industry sector accounts for approximately 53.7% of Azerbaijan's GDP and is dominated by oil and gas production. Hydrocarbon production in the region dates back more than 150 years, making Azerbaijan one of the world's oldest oil-producing countries.
3. False:
Renewable energy has great potential in Azerbaijan. Hydropower dominates the country's renewable energy sector, contributing approximately 2% to the total energy and 8% of the country's electricity supply in 2018.
4. True:
Today, Azerbaijan's top import and export partners include the Czech Republic, India, Israel, Italy, and various countries throughout Asia. Approximately 94% of Azerbaijan's exports involve oil and gas; significant imported goods include iron, machinery, provisions, and steel.
5. True:
As of March 2021, USD 1 was equal to approximately AZN 0.83. The obsolete version of the manat, called the old manat (AZM), exchanges as AZM 5,000 to AZN 1.

Chapter 4 | Society



Azerbaijani dance group
Flickr / N. M

Introduction

Azerbaijani society bears the marks of its storied history with influences from the multitude of ethnic groups that have come to call the country home over time. Today, Muslim Azeris are the majority demographic in Azerbaijan; however, Orthodox Christianity still maintains a sizeable presence. The national cuisine is also a testament to the past, bearing the marks of previous and current allies and conquering forces. Women are still subjected to oppressive societal norms that limit their independence, although there are positive signs of potential change. Azerbaijani art includes a long tradition of writers and musicians and features artistic works that are distinctly Azeri. Like many other nations, Azerbaijan also has a rich tradition of sports and recreation, from traditional games passed down through generations to more universal sports such as soccer or martial arts. Azerbaijan retains much of its cultural history while growing and becoming a modernized society.^{1, 2}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>
- 2 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

Ethnic Groups and Languages

The region encompassing Azerbaijan was repeatedly conquered throughout history, resulting in the integration of a diverse range of cultures and ethnic groups. Today, Azerbaijan is home to at least 15 ethnic groups—most prominently, the Azeris comprising 91.6% of the country's more than 10 million citizens.^{3, 4} Other groups include Armenians, Lezghins, Russians, and Talysh. The official language of the country is Azerbaijani, spoken by approximately 92.5% of the population. Russian and Armenian are also spoken by 1.4% and 1.3% of the population, respectively.^{5, 6, 7}

Azeri

Azerbaijan's largest ethnic group is the Azerbaijani or Azeri.^{8, 9} Predominantly Shia Muslim, they speak a dialect of the Azerbaijani language similar to Turkish. Azerbaijan's modern writing system is based on the Latin alphabet, while Cyrillic was used during the Soviet era, and Arabic script was used before that.^{10, 11} Ethnic Azeris trace their presence in the region back to the 11th century, when the newly arrived Turks began integrating with Iranians and other Transcaucasian tribes.^{12, 13, 14, 15}

Today, the Azeri culture is a diverse mixture of Iranian, Turkic, and Caucasian influences. There are approximately 7.5 million Azeris in the country and the surrounding region, and an estimated 15 million Azeris living abroad; roughly 16% of Iran's population is consists of ethnic Azeris.^{16, 17} Many Azeris today identify more closely with the Turkic people than Iranians. Even though Azeris share close religious ties with Shia-dominated Iran, Azerbaijan has better foreign relations with Sunni-dominated Turkey. This closeness underscores a vital aspect of Azeri life—religion is not typically a central component of daily life, being less important than ethnic identification.^{18, 19, 20}

- 3 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>
- 4 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 81.
- 5 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/azerbaijan/>
- 6 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>
- 7 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 8 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>
- 9 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.
- 10 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 11 Abulfazl Bahadori, "Alphabet in the Boiling Pot of Politics," *Azerbaijan International* 1, no. 3 (September 1993), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/13_folder/13_articles/13_alphapolitics.html
- 12 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Azerbaijani," 21 September 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Azerbaijani-people>
- 13 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 14 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>
- 15 Minority Rights Group International, "Azeris," December 2017, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/azeris-2/>
- 16 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Azerbaijani," 21 September 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Azerbaijani-people>
- 17 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>
- 18 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>
- 19 Minority Rights Group International, "Azeris," December 2017, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/azeris-2/>
- 20 Barbara A. West, *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Asia and Oceania* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 68.

Kurds

There are approximately 70,000 Kurds in Azerbaijan, mainly clustered around Kalbajar and Lachin. However, official census records only indicate a population of 6,100. Independent estimates indicate that actual population numbers could be as much as 200,000.²¹ Their language and cultural heritage are distinct from other groups in the country and they are generally followers of Shia Islam.^{22, 23, 24}

The Kurds are spread out across Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. For centuries, they have sought to establish an independent Kurdistan in the Middle East. During the Soviet era, Kurds in the Southern Caucasus were subjected to oppressive measures of control. Their situation changed dramatically in 1988 at the outbreak of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, which displaced many Kurds in the area. The Armenians used the opportunity to ask Moscow to establish autonomous Kurdish zones to end the violence. Moscow ultimately rejected the proposal, which prompted Armenia to invite displaced Kurds to resettle within their borders, a move meant to provoke Azerbaijan's government.^{25, 26}

Kurdish communities in Azerbaijan are making great efforts to maintain their cultural heritage and identity in the face of Azerbaijan's government initiatives to assimilate minorities. The government has historically tried to force assimilation by failing to use or recognize Kurdish as an official language and designating Kurds as Azerbaijanis on census records. The most recent census (2009) shows that 13,000 Kurds live in the country, yet the actual population is believed to be as high as 200,000.^{27, 28, 29}

Lezgins (Dagestani)

The Lezgins are Sunni Muslims and the largest ethnic minority in Azerbaijan. They account for approximately 2% of the population. The Lezgins primarily reside in the country's northeastern region, and many live abroad in the Russian Republic of Dagestan. In the 19th century, a region dubbed Lezgistan was established that extended across the area of both modern-day Dagestan and Azerbaijan. Despite being Azerbaijan's largest minority group, the government has been accused of underrepresenting Lezgins, resulting in claims of feeling pressured to assimilate into Azeri culture.³⁰ Their primary language is Lezgian, although it is common for Lezgins to speak Azerbaijani and Russian as additional languages. Today, their language is written in Cyrillic. During the Soviet era, Latin script was used, while Arabic script was used before that.^{31, 32, 33, 34}

- 21 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Azerbaijan's Kurds Fear Loss of National Identity," 1 July 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_kurds_fear_loss_national_identity/24252317.html
- 22 Azerb.com, "The Kurds," n.d., <http://www.travel-images.com/az-kurd.html>
- 23 Andrew Humphreys and Krista Mits, eds., "Kurds," in *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire* (Tallinn, Estonia: NGO Red Book, 2001), <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/kurds.shtml>
- 24 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan: Kurds: Profile," n.d., <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds/>
- 25 Global Prayer Digest, "Northern Kurds in Azerbaijan," Joshua Project, 20 September 2013, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12877/AJ
- 26 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan: Kurds: Profile," n.d., <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds/>
- 27 Andrew Humphreys and Krista Mits, eds., "Kurds," in *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire* (Tallinn, Estonia: NGO Red Book, 2001), <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/kurds.shtml>
- 28 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan: Kurds: Profile," n.d., <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds/>
- 29 Azerb.com, "The Kurds," n.d., <http://www.travel-images.com/az-kurd.html>
- 30 Minority Rights Group International, "Lezgins," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/lezgins/>
- 31 Behind the Name, "Lezgian," n.d., <https://surnames.behindthename.com/glossary/view/lezgian>
- 32 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>
- 33 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>
- 34 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 82.

Russians

Russians make up less than 1.3% of Azerbaijan's population. They are primarily Orthodox Christian and the second-largest minority group in the country. Russians first arrived in the region during the 19th century in the wake of the Treaty of Turkmenchay and the Russian Empire's expansion.³⁵ For the most part, they settled in the northern Caucasus region. Most Russians speak the Russian language in Azerbaijan, and it is still widely used by many other groups of people throughout the country. Azerbaijan maintains several Russian-language television, print, and internet media outlets.^{36, 37, 38}

Armenians

Ethnic Armenians are mainly Christian, speak Armenian, and once accounted for a much larger portion of the Azerbaijani population. Due to territorial conflicts with Armenia spanning decades, their numbers have significantly dwindled across the country. Today, they represent approximately 1.3% of the country's population, but estimates are unreliable for Armenians living in the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region due to uncorroborated estimates of possibly 30,000 living there.^{39, 40, 41}

Tats

The Tat ethnic group is located mainly in the eastern portion of Azerbaijan; they account for approximately 0.3% of the population. They identify as either Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, and their numbers have decreased in recent years. Regardless of religion, they all speak a language closely related to Farsi.^{42, 43} The Judeo-Tat dialect is spoken by the people referred to as Mountain Jews who inhabit the all-Jewish village of Krasnaya Sloboda located just outside the northern city of Quba.^{44, 45} The Jewish Tats are considered a closed group based on their adherence to a policy of ethnic purity.^{46, 47}

35 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

36 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

37 Rusif Huseynov, "The Russian Language in Azerbaijan: An Outdated Relic?" *New Eastern Europe*, 31 March 2016, https://neweasterneurope.eu/old_site/articles-and-commentary/1937-the-russian-language-in-azerbaijan-an-outdated-relic

38 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>

39 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>

40 Joshua Project, "Azeris in Armenia," n.d., https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10528/AM

41 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/azerbaijan/>

42 Paul M. Lewis, ed., "Languages of Azerbaijan," *Ethnologue*, 2009, <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/AZ>

43 Minority Rights Group International, "Azerbaijan: Minorities and Indigenous Peoples," n.d., <https://minorityrights.org/country/azerbaijan/>

44 Azerb, "Krasnaya Sloboda," n.d., <http://www.azerb.com/az-krasnaya.html>

45 Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2004), 165.

46 Andrew Humphreys and Krista Mits, eds., "The Tat People," in *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire* (Tallinn, Estonia: NGO Red Book, 2001), <http://www.azerb.com/az-tat.html>

47 Global Prayer Digest, "Mussulman Tat in Azerbaijan," Joshua Project, 18 September 2013, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/13896/AJ

Talysh

The Talysh live in southeastern Azerbaijan along the border with Iran and represent approximately 1.3% of the population. It is believed they trace their roots back to the Iranian Indo-Europeans who historically lived in the region. They are mostly Shia Muslim and speak an Iranian-based language. This largely rural group is broadly bilingual, speaking both their native language and Azerbaijani. There is no written language for the Talysh, but Arabic script is used for written communication.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

In 1993, Talysh separatists briefly declared independence as the Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic before government forces intervened. The Talysh continue to claim their right to an autonomous region, although not as aggressively as the Lezgin.^{52, 53}

Religion

Azerbaijan is a secular country—there is no state religion. The constitution guarantees citizens the right to practice any religion or no religion. As of 2009, however, an estimated 96.9% of the Azerbaijani population identified as Muslim. Shia Muslims predominate in the country, while Sunni Muslims form the most significant religious minority. Approximately 85% of Muslims in Azerbaijan identify as Shia and 15% identify as Sunni. Shiites reside primarily in the south, while Sunnis live mostly in the north. In Azerbaijan, these regional affiliations are mainly rooted in culture rather than religion.^{54, 55, 56} About 3% of all Azerbaijanis identify as Orthodox Christian.^{57, 58, 59}

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion and one of the world's largest, which traces its origins back to the seventh century CE on the Arabian Peninsula. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 CE. Muslims consider Muhammad to be the last in a long line of prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. In this way, Muslims share some of the basic elements of the Judaic and Christian traditions. The essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith are encapsulated in the five pillars of Islam.

48 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

49 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Ethnic Groups of Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-azerbaijan.html>

50 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 82.

51 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 87.

52 Andrew Humphreys and Krista Mits, eds., "The Talysh (or the Talishi)," in *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire* (Tallinn, Estonia: NGO Red Book, 2001), <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/talysh.shtml>

53 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 82.

54 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

55 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 74.

56 Paul Goble, "Is Baku Transforming Azerbaijan from a Shiia to a Sunni Muslim Country?" *Eurasia Review*, 28 February 2017, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/28022017-is-baku-transforming-azerbaijan-from-a-shiia-to-a-sunni-muslim-country-oped/>

57 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-azerbaijan.html>

58 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 5 August 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

59 Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, "Azerbaijan," n.d., http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/azerbaijan/#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2020®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016

Shia Islam dominates the Azerbaijan population, making it the second-largest Shia population in the world. Shia and Sunni Islam are the two major Islamic branches, which were formed shortly after the initial spread of Islam in the seventh century CE. The division was the result of a disagreement over the selection process for the successor of the Prophet Muhammad upon his death. Sunni Muslims believed that Muhammad did not choose a successor, so they elected the first caliph from among the leaders of their community. An opposing group, later known as Shia, believed that Muhammad designated his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor. This unresolved issue of rightful succession created a deep divide between the two groups, leading to infighting and the assassination of Ali.⁶⁰ Over time, several additional sects emerged within the two major branches. Today, Sunnis comprise approximately 85% of the global Muslim community.⁶¹

Shiites gained a stronghold in Azerbaijan during the 16th century when the Safavid Dynasty declared it as the official religion.^{62, 63, 64, 65} Azerbaijani Muslims, especially those living in rural mountainous regions, are as likely to visit sacred shrines (*pirs*) and saints' graves as they are to visit mosques.⁶⁶ Salafist Muslim organizations have had some success in promoting a less tolerant form of Islam in the northern and western areas of Azerbaijan.^{67, 68}

Sunnis constitute a substantial majority of Muslims worldwide, and hold majorities in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and North Africa.^{69, 70, 71} Yet despite their regional and worldwide numbers, Sunni Muslims maintain a small presence in Azerbaijan. Found primarily in the northern part of the country, they established their presence in the 16th century, around the same time as the Shia. Despite historical conflicts between Shiites and Sunnis, tensions are significantly lower than in most Muslim majority countries.^{72, 73} The largest mosque in the Caucasus, the Heydar Mosque in Baku, prides itself as a place where any Muslim may worship.⁷⁴

Christianity

Christianity is the third-largest religious group in Azerbaijan, accounting for approximately 3% of the population. Most Christians in the country follow the Eastern Orthodox traditions commonly practiced in the region. Christianity first came to the country after the Russo-Persian War in the early 19th century. The word orthodox, which means "right belief," developed from the Eastern Roman Empire. As in other Christian faiths, Orthodox Christians believe

60 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Islam: Fundamental Practices and Institutions of Islam: The Five Pillars," 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295507/Islam>

61 BBC, "Religions: Islam: Beliefs: Sunni and Shi'a," 19 August 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml

62 Turan News Agency, "Novruz Is Mental Memory," 19 March 2020, <https://www.contact.az/ext/news/2020/3/free/analytics/en/122538.htm>

63 Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (December 2005), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anar_Valiyev/publication/293054146_Azerbaijan_Islam_in_a_Post-Soviet_Republic/links/5aa242d10f7e9badd9a60a59/Azerbaijan-Islam-in-a-Post-Soviet-Republic.pdf

64 Mark Elliot, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2004), 47.

65 Advantour, "Religion in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/azerbaijan/religion.htm>

66 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 76–78.

67 Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan Increasingly Caught between Salafism and Iran," Jamestown Foundation, 24 October 2007, <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-increasingly-caught-between-salafism-and-iran/>

68 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-azerbaijan.html>

69 BBC News, "Sunnis and Shia: Islam's Ancient Schism," 4 January 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16047709>

70 Adam Taylor, "5 Facts about Sunnis and Shias," NZ Herald, 7 January 2016, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=11570384

71 Sayed Hassan Akhlaw, "14 Facts about Sunni and Shia Islam," IslamiCity, 26 August 2020, <https://www.islamicity.org/22247/14-facts-about-sunni-and-shia-islam/>

72 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-azerbaijan.html>

73 Ilia Brondz and Tahmina Aslanova, "Sunni-Shia Issue in Azerbaijan," ResearchGate, March 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331989507_Sunni-Shia_Issue_in_Azerbaijan

74 TRT World, "Sunni and Shia Muslims Pray Together in Azerbaijan's Heydar Mosque," 19 November 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/life/sunni-and-shia-muslims-pray-together-in-azerbaijan-s-heydar-mosque-31473>

in the Holy Trinity and Jesus. The church also recognizes many saints, including Mary, the mother of Jesus.^{75, 76} Today, most Christians in Azerbaijan specifically adhere to the Russian Orthodox or Armenian Apostolic Orthodox traditions.⁷⁷

The veneration of icons and the inclusion of mystical forms of prayer are central to Orthodox religious practices. The church has a strong monastic tradition in which adherents are expected to live according to the teachings of Christ.⁷⁸ During the Soviet era, many Muslims in Azerbaijan were forced to convert to Christianity since Islam was an unauthorized religion and Muslims faced persecution. Many Christians left the country around the end of World War II, coinciding with Russia's development of Siberian oil sources. With independence in 1991, uncertainty about the future caused many of the remaining Christians to leave.⁷⁹ The highest concentration of Azerbaijani Christians today is found in Baku and other urban areas.^{80, 81, 82}

Judaism

Today, approximately 30,000 Jews live in Azerbaijan, with many tracing their roots to the historic Caucasus Jewish communities. In addition to the all-Jewish town of Qirmizi Qasaba in northern Azerbaijan, pockets of Caucasus Jews are also found in the small villages of Oguz and Privolnoe.^{83, 84, 85, 86} Caucasus Jews observe customs somewhat distinct from traditional Judaism, with most speaking Russian as a first language. Only a few speak or read Hebrew, and Azeri is a second language.^{87, 88, 89}

Records indicate that Jews have lived in the Caucasus region since at least the fifth century BCE. They maintained a presence over the centuries as different rulers conquered the land, reaching a high point during medieval times when Mongol rulers established religious tolerance in the region. In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, the Il-Khanid Empire instigated a massacre and forced the conversion of the region's Jews. Migrations in the 18th and 19th centuries led to the formation of the Caucasus Mountain Jews, with concentrations in Dagestan, Kaitag, and Magaramkend.^{90, 91}

75 Glenn E. Curtis, "The Russian Orthodox Church," in *Russia: A Country Study*, (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/russia/38.htm>

76 BBC News, "Eastern Orthodox Church," 11 June 2008, https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml

77 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

78 Glenn E. Curtis, "The Russian Orthodox Church," in *Russia: A Country Study*, (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/russia/38.htm>

79 Gerald Robbins, *Azerbaijan: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 77.

80 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 5 August 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>

81 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Azerbaijan," *World Atlas*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-azerbaijan.html>

82 Association of Religion Data Archives, "Azerbaijan: Major World Religions," n.d., http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_16_2.asp

83 Joanna Sloame, "Azerbaijan," Jewish Virtual Library, n.d., <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Azerbaijan.html>

84 Haruth Communications, "Jewish Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://haruth.com/jw/JewsAzerbaijan.html>

85 Consulate General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, "Religion and Religious Tolerance," n.d., <https://www.azconsulatela.org/Azerbaijan/Religion-and-Religious-Tolerance>

86 Lee Gancman, "A Glimpse into Azerbaijan's Hidden All-Jewish Town," *Times of Israel*, 22 June 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-glimpse-into-azerbaijans-hidden-all-jewish-town/#gs.gi2xdm>

87 Yoav Keren, "The Last Jewish Town in Azerbaijan," *Y Net News*, 22 December 2018, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-5419245.00.html>

88 Sarah Marcus, "Mountain Jews," *Tablet*, 26 August 2010, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/42649/mountain-jews>

89 World Jewish Congress, "Azerbaijan," March 2017, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/AZ>

90 Haruth Communications, "Jewish Azerbaijan," n.d., <http://haruth.com/jw/JewsAzerbaijan.html>

91 Alexander Murinson, "Jews in Azerbaijan: A History Spanning Three Millennia," *Visions of Azerbaijan*, Spring 2008, <http://www.visions.az/en/news/112/504c92fb/>

Other Religions

The Azerbaijan region was an ancient stronghold of Zoroastrianism. This religion interpreted life a struggle between good and evil, taking inspiration from some indigenous beliefs about the region's unique natural phenomenon.⁹² Other Christian denominations have a minor presence in Azerbaijan; the Apostolic, Lutheran, Protestant, and Roman Catholic faiths constitute roughly 1% of the population. Another 1% of the population has no religious preference or beliefs at all.^{94, 95}

Cuisine

Azerbaijan's cuisine is a source of national pride. It reflects influences from Turkey, Iran, the Middle East, Central Asia, and India.⁹⁶ Because of the country's mild climate and fertile soil, Azerbaijani food is famous for its liberal amounts of herbs, spices, and vegetables, including eggplant, sweet peppers, cabbage, spinach, and beets. Mutton, beef, and poultry are typical meat choices. Rice is a common accompaniment for many dishes.^{97, 98} Common spices include saffron, mint, dill, parsley, caraway, fennel, and anise.^{99, 100, 101}

Seventy years of Soviet rule left a distinct culinary imprint on Azerbaijan. Under Soviet control, rice fields in southern Azerbaijan were repurposed for growing cabbage, potatoes, and wheat. Russian and Eastern European dishes such as *borscht* soup, *stolichni* potato salad, and goulash largely replaced many traditional dishes, which came to be reserved for special occasions.^{102, 103} Popular dishes in Azerbaijan today are basmati rice pilaf and *gara* sauce; *lavangi*, a chicken and walnut casserole; *piti*, a mutton and chickpea stew; *shashlyk* kebabs; and plov, a mutton and rice dish made with spices, fruits, and vegetables. A local kebab known as the *lūla* kebab consists of minced lamb mixed with spices and herbs, shaped into balls, and grilled on skewers.^{104, 105} Another popular dish is *dolma*, or stuffed vegetables. Arguably the most popular type of dolma is stuffed eggplant, although sweet peppers, cucumbers, and cabbage leaves are often substituted.^{106, 107} *Dovgha* is a sour milk soup made with eggs, rice, and various herbs and vegetables. In the Naxcivan enclave, it is common to add meatballs to soup.^{108, 109, 110}

92 In Azerbaijan, "Ancient History and Religion: Zoroastrianism," n.d., http://inazerbaijan.co.uk/ancient_history/

93 Joshua J. Mark, "Zoroastrianism," World History Encyclopedia, 12 December 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/zoroastrianism/>

94 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Azerbaijan," World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-azerbaijan.html>

95 Consulate General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, "Religion and Religious Tolerance," n.d., <https://www.azconsulatela.org/Azerbaijan/Religion-and-Religious-Tolerance>

96 iExplore, "Azerbaijan—Food and Restaurants," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/azerbaijan/food-and-restaurants>

97 CultureGrams, "Azerbaijan," 2020, http://online.culturegrams.com.ezproxy.nols.org/world/world_country.php?cid=5

98 ELearn, "Azerbaijan Customs: Eating," n.d., <http://elearn.fiu.edu/e-dev/WorldExplorer/Customs/Asia/Azerbaijan.htm>

99 Advantour, "Azerbaijan Cuisine," n.d., <http://www.advantour.com/azerbaijan/cuisine.htm>

100 BestNM, "Azerbaijan Cuisine," n.d., <https://bestnm.net/gallery-item/azerbaijan-cuisine>

101 Angloinfo, "Food and Drink in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/azerbaijan/lifestyle/food-drink>

102 Pirouz Khanlou, "Forgotten Foods: Comparison of the Cuisines of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan," *Azerbaijan International* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2002, reprinted from Autumn 2000), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai104_folder/104_articles/104_food_north_south.html

103 Tahir Amiraslanov, "From Pilaf to Pizza: A Road Map of Azerbaijani Cuisine," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/83_folder/83_articles/83_amiraslanov.html

104 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 119.

105 Richard Plunkett and Tom Masters, *Lonely Planet: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan*, 2nd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004) 197–98.

106 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 120.

107 Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2004). 21–22.

108 Sam Bedford, "The 20 Best Dishes in Azerbaijan," Culture Trip, 14 January 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/azerbaijan/articles/the-20-best-dishes-in-azerbaijan/>

109 Prepare to Visit, "10 Foods You Must Try in Azerbaijan," 24 October 2018, <https://preparetovisit.com/10-foods-you-must-try-in-azerbaijan/>

110 Nazrin Gadimova, "Here Are Top 10 'Must Try' Dishes When Visiting Azerbaijan," Caspian News, 7 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/here-are-top-10-must-try-dishes-when-visiting-azerbaijan-2017-7-21-39/>

Sweet desserts are popular in Azerbaijan. Favorites include *yayma*, a rice pudding with saffron; *shekerbura*, a pie made with a flavoring of nuts and sugar; *shirin chorek*, a sweet milk bread; *pahlava*, a light pastry baklava layered in a diamond shape; and *badambura*, a flaky pastry with almonds, sugar, and cardamom.^{111, 112, 113} Tea is one of the most popular beverages in Azerbaijan and is generally served unsweetened, with pastries or with meals.^{114, 115, 116, 117}

Traditional Dress

Azerbaijan's distinct traditional clothing styles can be traced to the 16th century. Traditional clothing refined in appearance over time and became a regional form of expression. People continue to dress in traditional clothing during festivals, events, and sometimes on special occasions in rural areas.^{118, 119}

The basic arrangement of traditional Azerbaijani clothing consists of under and outer clothing.¹²⁰ Traditional menswear is loose-fitting, typically consisting of a shirt, an *arkhaluk* outerwear garment, a *chukha* coat, and loose wool trousers. For women, traditional garb commonly includes a collared shirt, *chepkin* overshirt, *arkhaluk*, *lebbade* gown, *ashmek* quilted outerwear, and a *bakhari* coat.¹²¹ Rural women sometimes wear a long pleated skirt, long-sleeved blouse, and a long piece of cloth (*charshab*) wrapped around the skirt. Some Azerbaijani women, mostly younger ones, wear kerchiefs (*orpack*).¹²²

Today, Western dress is typically found throughout Azerbaijan. Full traditional costumes are generally reserved for dances or other folk performances and special occasions such as weddings. Some older men still wear the *papah*, a round wool hat.¹²³ Women may also wear headscarves or other types of head or facial coverings. However, there is an unofficial ban against wearing hijabs in government workplaces. Azerbaijani women have occasionally found themselves in legal battles over their right to wear headscarves, particularly in photos on identity papers.^{124, 125, 126}

111 Generalissimo, "The Hirshon Azerbaijani Shekerbura," Food Dictator, 17 October 2018, <https://www.thefooddictator.com/the-hirshon-azerbaijani-shekerbura-sekerbura/>

112 Mike Benayoun, "Tenbel Pakhlava," 196 Flavors, 20 May 2016, <https://www.196flavors.com/azerbaijan-tenbel-pakhlava/>

113 Tahir Amirasanov, "From Pilaf to Pizza: A Road Map of Azerbaijani Cuisine," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/83_folder/83_articles/83_amiraslanov.html

114 Taste Atlas, "Top 3 Most Popular Azerbaijani Desserts," 16 September 2020, <https://www.tasteatlas.com/most-popular-desserts-in-azerbaijan>

115 Megha Kaimal, "11 Most Delicious Dishes & Drinks of Azerbaijani Cuisine," Explore Holidayme, 24 February 2020, <https://holidayme.com/explore/azerbaijan-dishes-cuisine-food/>

116 Advantour, "Azerbaijan Cuisine," n.d., <http://www.advantour.com/azerbaijan/cuisine.htm>

117 Skyscraper City, "Azerbaijani Cuisine," 21 September 2009, <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=963298>

118 Advantour, "Azerbaijan Traditions," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/azerbaijan/traditions.htm>

119 Sabira Dunyamaliyeva, "Azerbaijani National Costume," Visions of Azerbaijan, Summer 2009, <http://www.visions.az/en/news/62/d475f8f9/>

120 Consulate General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, "National Dress," n.d., <https://www.azconsulatela.org/Azerbaijan/Culture/National-Dress>

121 Advantour, "Azerbaijan: National Clothes," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/azerbaijan/traditions/clothing.htm>

122 CultureGrams, "Azerbaijan," 2021, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

123 CultureGrams, "Azerbaijan," 2021, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

124 Stephen Mulvey, "World: Europe: Azerbaijani Women Celebrate Headscarf Victory," BBC News, 27 June 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/376380.stm>

125 Austin Clayton, "As Hijab Spreads in Azerbaijan, Covered Women Complain They Can't Find Jobs," Eurasianet, 1 May 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/as-hijab-spreads-in-azerbaijan-covered-women-complain-they-cant-find-jobs>

126 Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Hijab Ban in Schools Fuels Debate in Baku on Role of Islam," Eurasianet, 6 January 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62670>

Gender Issues

Women's rights and social status in Azerbaijan are primarily established through cultural norms, although legal protections are intended to guarantee gender equality.^{127, 128} Persistent cultural stereotypes in Azerbaijan depict women as inferior to men. During the Soviet era, women were on equal ground—they enjoyed more significant opportunities in education, health, and politics and were encouraged to enter the workforce. Patriarchal traditions reemerged after independence, relegating women to a secondary role within the family unit and society.^{129, 130} Gender roles are particularly strong in rural areas.¹³¹

Within the household, women perform most chores, including caring for children and the elderly. Many women view marriage as a way of gaining freedom from the restrictions imposed on them as unwed daughters.^{132, 133} Polygamy has risen in popularity since independence, despite being illegal. Today, some men take additional wives through religious wedding ceremonies, known as *nikah*, performed by a mullah; these marriages are not registered with civil authorities.^{134, 135, 136}

Azerbaijan received a low rating on the 2019 Social Institutions and Gender Index. This rating indicates minor levels of gender discrimination within social institutions, but this does not reflect the realities of everyday life for many women in Azerbaijani society. While women are in the workforce, they are primarily employed as teachers or nurses. Societal norms for married women generally expect them to remain at home rearing children and performing domestic chores. Single women commonly reside in their family homes until they are married.^{137, 138, 139}

Domestic violence is a persistent and significant problem in Azerbaijan. Prevailing patriarchal attitudes reinforce the view that domestic violence is a private matter to be sorted out within the family. Women accused of bringing shame to their families risk being disowned or killed in some extreme cases.^{140, 141} While laws against domestic violence exist, their implementation is inadequate or nonexistent. According to a 2014 study, 43% of Azerbaijani women have experienced domestic violence, 29% at their husbands' hands. The leading cause of injury in cases

127 Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Azerbaijan," 2019, <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/AZ.pdf>

128 Culture Crossing, "Azerbaijan: Gender Issues," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=12&CID=15

129 Nayereh Tohid, "Soviet in Public, Azeri in Private: Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, nos. 1/2 (1996): 111, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0277539595000747>

130 Hülya D. Emirdirek, "Azerbaijan: Gender Roles and Statuses," EveryCulture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/A-Bo/Azerbaijan.html>

131 Transparency International Azerbaijan, "TI Azerbaijan Gender Audit Report" (final draft, 8 February 2010), <http://www.transparency.az/genrep/TI-Az%20Gender%20Audit%20Report.pdf>

132 Suzanne Rothman, "Azerbaijan: When Will the Catcalls Stop?" Eurasianet, 10 January 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-when-will-the-catcalls-stop>

133 CultureGrams, "Azerbaijan," 2021, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

134 Gulnur Kazimova, "Domestic Violence and Violence against Women Have Increased in Azerbaijan," OC Media, 5 August 2020, <https://oc-media.org/features/domestic-violence-and-violence-against-women-have-increased-in-azerbaijan/>

135 Elmir Mirzoyev, "Polygamy in Azerbaijan," Meydan.tv, 3 May 2017, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/polygamy-in-azerbaijan/>

136 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Central Asia: Researchers Say Polygamy Harmful to Regional Economies," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2 February 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1057238.html>

137 International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Azerbaijan Gender Profile," 5 March 2007, <https://www.genderindex.org/country/azerbaijan/>

138 Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Azerbaijan," 2019, <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/AZ.pdf>

139 Culture Crossing, "Azerbaijan: Gender Issues," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=12&CID=15

140 Niloofer Osuli, "Feminism in Republic of Azerbaijan in Globalized World," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 9, no. 1 (2011): 45–46, <http://idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr9%281%2911/7.pdf>

141 Nikki Kazimova, *Culture Smart! Azerbaijan: The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (London: Kuperard, 2011), 43–44.

of violence against women is stabbing. Incidents of domestic violence spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine in the first half of 2020.^{142, 143} As of 2019, there were only three functioning shelters for domestic abuse victims in the entire country.^{144, 145, 146}

Despite these social and cultural challenges, Azerbaijani women are leveraging social activism through social media and protests to improve gender equality.^{147, 148} Consequently, more women than ever before hold powerful or high-level positions in politics and society, in part because of male supporters assisting them in acquiring and maintaining these roles.^{149, 150}

Arts

Literature

Azerbaijan has a rich history of poetry, most written in Persian. The golden age of poetry in the region spanned the 12th and early 13th centuries, when Khagani Shirvani, Mehsati Ganjavi, and Nizami Ganjavi practiced their craft. Nizami, who was born and lived in Ganja, is considered the greatest poet of romantic epic poetry written in the Persian language.¹⁵¹ His *Khamsa* epic includes five poems inspired in part by legendary love stories. Today, there are many statues of Nizami throughout the country, the most prominent of which is a monument in Baku.^{152, 153, 154} Four centuries later, 16th-century poet Mehmed bin Suleyman Fuzuli composed portions of the *Khamsa* in Azeri-Turk. This and other poems by Fuzuli are generally considered some of the first significant written works in the Azerbaijani language.^{155, 156}

During the 19th century, following Russia's conquest of the Azerbaijani khanates, Azerbaijani writers began exploring new formats and themes. Notable among this generation of literary talents was Mirza Fatali Akhundov, who wrote some of the first plays in the Azerbaijani language. Akhundov's stage works were comedic social

- 142 Arzu Geybullayeva, "Protesting Domestic Violence, Azerbaijani Women Take to the Streets and Social Networks," Global Voices, 30 October 2019, <https://globalvoices.org/2019/10/30/protesting-domestic-violence-azerbaijani-women-take-to-the-streets-and-social-networks/>
- 143 Suzanne Rothman, "Azerbaijan: When Will the Catcalls Stop?" Eurasianet, 10 January 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-when-will-the-catcalls-stop>
- 144 Gulnur Kazimova, "Domestic Violence and Violence against Women Have Increased in Azerbaijan," OC Media, 5 August 2020, <https://oc-media.org/features/domestic-violence-and-violence-against-women-have-increased-in-azerbaijan/>
- 145 Gular Abbasova, "Living with Fear: Azerbaijan's Domestic Abuse Victims Have Nowhere to Flee," Eurasianet, 4 October 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/living-with-fear-azerbaijans-domestic-abuse-victims-have-nowhere-to-flee>
- 146 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2020: Azerbaijan," 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/azerbaijan/freedom-world/2020>
- 147 Human Rights House Foundation, "Two Decades Empowering Women in Azerbaijan," 31 August 2018, <https://humanrightshouse.org/interviews/two-decades-empowering-women-azerbaijan/>
- 148 CultureGrams, "Azerbaijan," 2020, http://online.culturegrams.com.ezproxy.nols.org/world/world_country.php?cid=5
- 149 Nayereh Tohidi, "Soviet in Public, Azeri in Private: Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, nos. 1/2 (1996): 111, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0277539595000747>
- 150 Hülya D. Emirdirek, "Azerbaijan: Gender Roles and Statuses," EveryCulture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/A-Bo/Azerbaijan.html>
- 151 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Nezāmi," 1 January 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nezami>
- 152 EveryCulture, "Azerbaijani Turks: History and Cultural Relations," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Azerbaijani-Turks-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html>
- 153 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 90–91.
- 154 Teymur Kerimli, "Nizami—Poet for all Humanity," *Visions of Azerbaijan*, March–April 2011, <http://www.visions.az/en/news/271/a3e8bd5c/>
- 155 Turkish Cultural Foundation (TCF), "Muhammed Fuzuli (1498–1556)," 2011, <http://www.turkishculture.org/pages.php?SearchID=634>
- 156 Danielle Systermans and Michael Kohn, *Lonely Planet: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 195.

critiques that compelled some contemporary commentators to compare him with the French playwright Molière.¹⁵⁷ Akhundov played a significant role in lobbying for the adoption of a Latin alphabet for the Azerbaijani language rather than an Arabic script.¹⁵⁸

One of the most renowned works by an Azerbaijani writer of the 20th century is the novel *Ali and Nino*. Similar to *Romeo and Juliet*, it is a story of doomed love set in Baku and other parts of the Caucasus during 1918–20. Originally published in 1937 in German, the book has been translated into 28 languages and is still widely read. The author, known under the pseudonym Kurban Said, is thought to have been Baku-raised Lev Nussimbaum.¹⁵⁹ More recently, the novels and stories of Azerbaijani writer Anar Rzaev are credited with helping break down the narrow literary boundaries of socialist realism from the Soviet era.¹⁶⁰

Music

Mugham is a traditional Azerbaijani musical form that is part poetry and part song and remains popular today. Mugham compositions are typically accompanied by lyrics derived from Persian, Arabic, or Azeri poetry and often featured themes centered on the search for divine love. Improvisation within the musical and lyrical forms is a characteristic element of its performance.^{161, 162, 163} The most common instruments are the *gaval*, a tambourine-like percussive instrument; the *tar*, a long-necked lute-like instrument; and the *kamancha*, a spike fiddle.^{164, 165, 166, 167} One of Azerbaijan's foremost mugham singers is Alim Qasimov, a Baku resident who was named the laureate of the prestigious UNESCO Music Prize in 1999, placing him in the company of past winners such as Leonard Bernstein, Ravi Shankar, Benny Goodman, and Miriam Makeba.^{168, 169, 170, 171, 172}

Ashug is another ancient Azerbaijani musical tradition, and is commonly practiced by traveling minstrels. Ashug music has been compared to mugham, but with several distinctions. Instead of a mugham trio, ashugs are generally soloists, accompanying themselves with a sizeable lute-like instrument called a *saz*. Ashug songs tend to be more rhythmically focused; the lyrics are more improvisational, reflecting an oral, folkloric tradition rather than the more classical, written mugham tradition.^{173, 174}

¹⁵⁷ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 26.

¹⁵⁸ Farid Alakbarov, "Mirza Fatali Akhundov: Alphabet Reformer Before His Time," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2000), http://www.azeri.org/Azeri/az_english/81_folder/81_articles/81_akhundov.html

¹⁵⁹ Elin Suleymanov, "'Ali and Nino' by Kurban Said: Inside the Soul of a Caucasian," *Azerbaijan International* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2004), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai122_folder/122_articles/122_suleymanov_elin.html

¹⁶⁰ Joseph P. Mozur, review of "Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s–1990s" by Nadya L. Peterson, *Slavic Review* 56, no. 4 (1997): 822, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2502169>

¹⁶¹ Jo's Nexus, "Mugam," n.d., <http://www.datacomm.ch/lawless/mugam.htm>

¹⁶² David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 94–95.

¹⁶³ Aida Huseynova, "Azerbaijani Music," World Music Central, 2016, <https://worldmusiccentral.org/world-music-resources/musician-biographies/azerbaijani-music/>

¹⁶⁴ Betty Blair and Priouz Khanlou, "Alim Gasimov: Master of Mugham," *Azerbaijan International* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2001), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/91_folder/91_articles/91_alim.html

¹⁶⁵ Google Arts and Culture, "Azerbaijani Mugham," n.d., <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/azerbaijani-mugham-heydar-aliyev-center/UwKS35r5G6adIA?hl=en>

¹⁶⁶ Mark Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with Excursions to Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Trailblazer Publications, 2004), 56.

¹⁶⁷ Baku Explorer, "Ultimate Guide to Azerbaijani Music," 16 July 2015, <http://www.bakuexplorer.com/guide-azerbaijani-music/>

¹⁶⁸ AKDN, "Alim and Fargana Qasimov: Spiritual Music of Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-trust-culture/akmi/cd-dvd-series/alim-fargana-qasimov>

¹⁶⁹ Atlas of Traditional Music of Azerbaijan, "Musical Instruments: Introduction," n.d., http://atlas.musigi-dunya.az/en/instr_history.html

¹⁷⁰ Folk Cloud, "Traditional/Folk Music of Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://folkcloud.com/folk-music-by-country/azerbaijan>

¹⁷¹ Atlas of Traditional Music of Azerbaijan, "Kamancha," n.d., <http://atlas.musigi-dunya.az/en/kamancha.html>

¹⁷² Kamancha.com, "The Kamancha of Azerbaijan: The History of Kamancha," 2012 <http://www.kamancha.com/>

¹⁷³ AKDN, "Alim and Fargana Qasimov: Spiritual Music of Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-trust-culture/akmi/cd-dvd-series/alim-fargana-qasimov>

¹⁷⁴ Anna Oldfield, "Music of the Bards: So You Want to Become an Ashug..." *Azerbaijan International* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2004), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai124_folder/124_articles/124_ashug_atilla.html

Azerbaijani jazz is a modern musical form popular today. Musical improvisation, an element that is as essential to jazz as with mugham and ashug, makes jazz a natural fit with Azerbaijan's musical scene. Every April, an international jazz festival is held in Baku, attracting world-renowned artists such as the Azerbaijani jazz pianist Aziza Mustafa Zadeh. Zadeh's father Vagiv was famous for fusing mugham and jazz traditions into a uniquely Azerbaijani form in the 1950s–1970s.^{175, 176, 177}

Folk Culture and Folklore

Folktales have long been important worldwide for teaching children valuable cultural lessons, and Azerbaijani tales are no exception. One famous story known to most Azerbaijani children is “Jirtan,” in which a small, weak boy uses his intelligence to defeat a monster.¹⁷⁸ Another traditional story, “How the Dove Became the Bird of Peace,” was published in an Azerbaijani reader for fifth graders in 1994. One theme of the story is the need to consider the consequences of warfare.¹⁷⁹

Between 1906 and 1931, a satirical journal published in Baku titled *Molla Nasreddin* addressed hot-button sociopolitical issues and injustices. This influential journal was named in honor of a well-known character in Azerbaijani folklore. For centuries in Azerbaijan and adjacent regions, Molla Nasreddin has been known as the sometimes foolish, but often sage character, of countless folk stories and anecdotes. From the Mediterranean basin to Central Asia, different cultures have modified or developed their own versions of the Molla Nasreddin stories, which convey morals or traditional wisdom.¹⁸⁰ The magazine was able to survive through a tumultuous quarter-century that featured the Bolshevik Revolution, the founding of the first Azerbaijan Republic, and the republic's subsequent fall to Bolshevik forces.¹⁸¹

Sports and Recreation

Soccer (football) is popular in Azerbaijan and a top spectator sport. According to the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, approximately 9,000 soccer players are registered in the country. Martial arts are also popular, in particular taekwondo and judo.¹⁸² Several traditional sports also remain popular, such as wrestling *gulesh*. Gulesh competitions are held throughout the country and feature ritualistic dancing and gestures from the competitors to signify their readiness to fight. Azerbaijan has also participated in every Summer Olympics since 1996, winning medals in sports such as wrestling, boxing, judo, shooting, taekwondo, and the canoe sprint.^{183, 184, 185}

175 Betty Blair, “Mugham Jam: Vagif Mustafazade: Musical Roots in Baku's Old City,” *Azerbaijan International* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai123_folder/123_articles/123_vagif_mustafazade_eng.html

176 Raul d’Gama Rose, “Aziza Mustafa Zadeh: Body and Soul and Mugam!” *All About Jazz*, 6 March 2004, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=1227>

177 Patrik Salat, “How Azerbaijani Jazz Became Famous—A Photo Story,” *Jam News*, 12 November 2019, <https://jam-news.net/photostory-how-azerbaijani-jazz-became-famous-over-the-world/>

178 Just for Kids, “Children’s Folklore,” *Azerbaijan International* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/43_folder/43_articles/43_children.html

179 Just for Kids, “How the Dove Became the Bird of Peace,” *Azerbaijan International* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1996) http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/43_folder/43_articles/43_peace.html

180 “Molla Nasreddin: Comic Sage of the Ages,” *Azerbaijan International* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/43_folder/43_articles/43_molla.html

181 Jala Garibova, “Molla Nasreddin—The Magazine: Laughter That Pricked the Conscience of a Nation,” *Azerbaijan International* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/43_folder/43_articles/43_mollamag.html

182 Topend Sports, “Sport in Azerbaijan,” n.d., <https://www.topendsports.com/world/countries/azerbaijan.htm>

183 Olympedia, “Azerbaijan (AZE),” n.d., <https://www.olympedia.org/countries/AZE>

184 Mehriban-Aliyeva.az, “Ancient Traditions of the Azerbaijani Sport,” n.d., <https://mehriban-aliyeva.az/en/articles/node/843022>

185 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 108–109.

If Azerbaijan were to pick a national recreational activity, the most likely selection would be *nard*, one of the world's oldest board games and a backgammon variation.^{186, 187} Another popular Azerbaijani board game is chess.¹⁸⁸ Garry Kasparov, considered by many to be the greatest chess champion of all time, is a Baku native.¹⁸⁹ Of the country's active chess players, Teimour Radjabov of Baku and Gashimov Vugar and Shakhriyar Mamedyarov of Sumgayit are ranked among the top 25 players in the world.¹⁹⁰ Eltaj Safarli, another notable Azerbaijani player, is ranked 254th on the International Chess Federation's worldwide ranking.^{191, 192}

Other popular games, especially in rural areas, include Cockfight for boys and Seven Beauties for girls. In Cockfight, two teams face each other in a circle. One team stands on their left legs and the other on their right with hands on their hips. They then try to force each other out of the circle.¹⁹³ In Seven Beauties, seven girls crochet stockings. The winner is the young woman who completes the highest quality stocking in the shortest amount of time.^{194, 195}

186 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 105.

187 Azerbaijanians.com, "National Sports," n.d., https://www.azerbaijans.com/content_667_en.html

188 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 105–6.

189 Fred Waitzkin, "King Kasparov," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 October 1990, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE4D81E3EF934A35753C1A966958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1>

190 World Chess Federation, "Top 100 Players September 2012: Archive," 2012, <http://ratings.fide.com/toparc.phtml?cod=225>

191 World Chess Federation, "Top 100 Juniors September 2012: Archive," 2012, <http://ratings.fide.com/toparc.phtml?cod=227>

192 International Chess Federation, "Profile Info: Safarli, Eltaj," n.d., <https://ratings.fide.com/profile/13402129>

193 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 108.

194 Girl in the Pitlane, "10 Interesting Facts About Azerbaijan," 15 June 2016, <https://girlinthepitlane.wordpress.com/2016/06/15/10-interesting-facts-about-azerbaijan/>

195 David C. King, *Azerbaijan: Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 109.

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Society Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Approximately 96.9% of the Azerbaijani population identify as Muslims. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Many of Azerbaijan's Jewish population trace their roots to Caucasus Jewish communities. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Meat is rarely used in Azerbaijan cuisine and has been virtually erased from its diet. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Social stereotypes have traditionally placed women as inferior to men. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Azerbaijan has never participated in the Olympic Games. ☐ True ☐ False

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Society Assessment Answers

1. True:
Around 85% of Muslims in Azerbaijan are Shia, and 15% are Sunni. The country is secular with no established state religion.
2. True:
Caucasus Jews live in small villages in the Caucasus region and follow distinct religious traditions. Approximately 30,000 Jews live in Azerbaijan.
3. False:
Meat is an important staple of Azerbaijan cuisine. Various types of kebabs and casseroles containing meat are popular dishes.
4. True:
Patriarchal traditions are strong in Azerbaijan, relegating women to a secondary role within the family unit and Azerbaijani society.
5. False:
During the Soviet era, Azerbaijan participated in the Olympics as part of the Soviet Union. Since 1996, Azerbaijan has entered every Summer Olympics and won medals in sports such as wrestling, boxing, judo, shooting, taekwondo, and canoe sprint.

Chapter 5 | Security



Azerbaijani Special Forces on parade in Baku
Wikimedia / WalkerBaku

Introduction

Azerbaijan's two most significant threats are the ongoing conflict with Armenia and the government established by ethnic Armenians within the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Although Azerbaijan and Armenia brokered a peace settlement in 2020, tensions remain high. Relations between Azerbaijan and its Armenian neighbors continue to run hot or cold, depending upon strategic alliances with various regional powers. International accusations of corruption and human rights violations have plagued Azerbaijan's government, showing no significant intention to reform. Currently, Azerbaijan's armed forces remain a powerful force in the region and, with the backing of Turkey, have the upper hand in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted Azerbaijan's economy, but its stable oil production and agricultural sectors indicate good signs of economic security in the immediate future.^{1,2}

1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Geography," World Factbook, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

2 Evgeny Dmitrievich Silaev et al., "Azerbaijan," Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan>

U.S.–Azerbaijan Relations

Azerbaijan and the U.S. have maintained diplomatic relations since Azerbaijan's independence from the Soviet Union (USSR) in December 1991. The two countries are engaged in bilateral energy security efforts, trade investments, and counterterrorism. Several U.S. companies are also involved in the oil sector, heavy machinery, and aircraft exports. The U.S. has supported Azerbaijan's efforts to expand its energy exports to Western markets and has participated in joint offshore drilling initiatives in the Caspian Sea.^{3, 4}

The U.S. plays an active role in promoting Azerbaijan's economic diversity. This cooperation has resulted in a trade relations agreement and a bilateral investment treaty. The United States–Azerbaijan Economic Partnership Commission periodically meets to discuss and review joint trade and investment ventures.⁵ The Generalized System of Preferences program allows for many Azerbaijani products to be exported to the U.S. duty-free and provides incentives for Azerbaijani investors to create products that qualify for duty-free exports to the U.S. Both countries seek to expand their cooperation into agriculture, tourism, telecommunications, and other economic sectors.^{6, 7, 8}

The U.S., France, and Russia are co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, formed in 1994, to find a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Additional countries involved with the group include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Turkey. Yet, despite strong support from the U.S., the conflict persists—most recently through an outbreak of violence in 2020. Recent tensions between the U.S. and Iran have provoked the U.S. to invest heavily in Azerbaijan's border security and customs services, despite Azerbaijan's relatively friendly relations with Iran. The U.S. has also hosted joint military exercises with Azerbaijan's armed forces in recent years. Azerbaijan considers itself a “staunch ally” of the U.S.^{9, 10, 11, 12}

3 U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Azerbaijan,” Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 25 November 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-azerbaijan/>

4 U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan, “U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations: Policy & History,” n.d., <https://az.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>

5 Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America, “Economic Cooperation Between Azerbaijan and the United States,” 2018, <https://washington.mfa.gov.az/en/content/72/economic-cooperation-between-azerbaijan-and-the-united-states>

6 U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Azerbaijan,” Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 25 November 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-azerbaijan/>

7 U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan, “U.S.-Azerbaijan Relations: Policy & History,” n.d., <https://az.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>

8 Wilder Alejandro Sanchez, “US-Azerbaijan Relations: Forging Ahead in a Tough Neighborhood,” Geopolitical Monitor, 26 February 2020, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/us-azerbaijan-relations-forging-ahead-in-a-tough-neighborhood/>

9 U.S. Mission OSCE, “U.S. Statement on the Position of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs on the Nagorno-Karabakh Settlement,” 22 October 2020, <https://osce.usmission.gov/u-s-statement-on-the-position-of-the-minsk-group-co-chairs-on-the-nagorno-karabakh-settlement/>

10 OSCE, “Minsk Group: Who We Are,” n.d., <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/108306>

11 Wilder Alejandro Sanchez, “US-Azerbaijan Relations: Forging Ahead in a Tough Neighborhood,” Geopolitical Monitor, 26 February 2020, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/us-azerbaijan-relations-forging-ahead-in-a-tough-neighborhood/>

12 Consulate General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, “Azerbaijan–US Relations,” n.d., <https://www.azconsulatela.org/Azerbaijan/Azerbaijan-US-Relations>

Relations with Neighbors

Armenia

Azerbaijan has no formal diplomatic relations with Armenia, which it treats as a significant threat to national security. The two countries are technically at war because of the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, leaving their 996 km (619 mi) shared border closed.¹³ The conflict began in 1988 and is the longest-running in post-Soviet Eurasia.^{14, 15, 16} Since independence, Armenia and Azerbaijan have devoted significant time to cultivating relations with their powerful neighbors.^{17, 18, 19} Despite attempts to work out a treaty diplomatically, both sides continue to blame each other for the conflict, which most recently broke out in violence in late 2020. The fighting in 2020 was the latest in several ceasefire violations between the two sides, resulting in Azerbaijan seizing more land in the region.^{20, 21}

Armenia is the only country to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh's autonomy, which has a majority population of ethnic Armenians—up to 95% by some estimates. The rest of the international community recognizes the region as part of Azerbaijan.^{22, 23} The most recent ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia in late 2020 resulted in Azerbaijan seizing control of significant portions of the region.²⁴ Approximately 2,777 Armenians died in the 2020 conflict. In February 2021, Nagorno-Karabakh officials met with Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives for the first time to discuss cooperation. Armenia and Azerbaijan exchanged the remains of citizens dating back to the first outbreak of hostilities in the early 1990s.^{25, 26}

13 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Geography," World Factbook, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

14 BBC News, "Armenia-Azerbaijan: Why Did Nagorno-Karabakh Spark a Conflict?" 12 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54324772>

15 Jane's Information Group, "External Affairs (Azerbaijan)," *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.

16 International Crisis Group, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer," 15 April 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>

17 Oleg Shchedrov, "Russia, Armenia to Stay Close: New Presidents," Reuters, 24 March 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/gc07/idUSL2435859820080324?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

18 Robin Forestier, "Isolated Armenia Leans on Iran," BBC, 24 July 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7514341.stm>

19 Michael Cecire, "Azerbaijan-Armenia Tensions: Regional Risks, Policy Changes," World Politics Review (WPR), 12 June 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12046/azerbaijan-armenia-tensions-regional-risks-policy-challenges>

20 Andrew E. Kramer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: What Sparked War and Will Peace Prevail?" *New York Times*, 29 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/armenian-azerbaijan-conflict.html>

21 *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, "Armenian Forces Kill Five Azeri Soldiers: After Border Infiltration Three Armenian Soldiers Die Repelling Attack," 6 June 2012, <http://www.mirrorspectator.com/2012/06/06/armenian-forces-kill-five-azeri-soldiers-after-border-infiltration-three-armenian-soldiers-die-repelling-attack/>

22 BBC News, "Armenia-Azerbaijan: Why Did Nagorno-Karabakh Spark a Conflict?" 12 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54324772>

23 Kevork Oskanian, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Are Armenia and Azerbaijan Sliding Towards All-out War?" *Conversation*, 29 September 2020, <https://theconversation.com/nagorno-karabakh-are-armenia-and-azerbaijan-sliding-towards-all-out-war-147066>

24 AP News, "Azerbaijani Leader: Cease-fire May Improve Armenia Relations," 21 November 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/baku-azerbaijan-armenia-ilham-aliyev-russia-37f680ef608142dd6d4525f058206017>

25 International Crisis Group, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer," 15 April 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>

26 Global Conflict Tracker, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 15 April 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

Georgia

Georgia and Azerbaijan have stable relations centered around their strategic partnership and shared economic and political interests. The two countries share 428 km (266 mi) of border. A cornerstone of their relationship is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. The BTC pipeline originates in Baku and cuts through Georgia on its way to Turkey's oil terminals on the Mediterranean Sea; a gas pipeline follows the BTC route for a portion of the distance. Georgia plays a crucial role in the transportation of Azerbaijan's oil and gas resources.^{27, 28, 29}

The two countries have maintained a bilateral free trade agreement since 1996 with a balance of trade that favors Azerbaijan.^{30, 31} Popular exports from Georgia to Azerbaijan include automobiles and livestock. Significant imports to Georgia from Azerbaijan include mineral fuels, oils, and distillation products.^{32, 33, 34} In 2020, Azerbaijan exported approximately USD 461.92 million in goods; imports reached USD 73.93 million for the same period.^{35, 36}

Recently, relations have been strained by several factors. Complaints of discrimination by the local ethnic Azeri in the Kvemo Kartli region of southern Georgia have caused concern between the two countries. The Georgian government has opened racial discrimination investigations into the matter.^{37, 38} Another point of concern is the David Gareja monastery complex, which is situated along a conditional border established by the two countries. Both sides have recognized approximately 65% of their shared border and are cooperating to find a satisfactory resolution. Despite these occasional diplomatic conflicts, relations remain relatively strong.^{39, 40}

Iran

Iran and Azerbaijan have maintained cautious relations even though they are both predominantly Shia Muslim nations. The two countries share approximately 689 km (428 mi) of border.⁴¹ During the Soviet era, relations were much warmer; yet today's independent Azerbaijan has established a secular government in contrast to Iran's status as an Islamic Republic.⁴² Iran is home to approximately 12–20 million ethnic Azeri residents, making them the most

- 27 Rauf Mammadov, "An Important First Step in Resetting Azerbaijan-Georgia Relations," *Emerging Europe*, 27 September 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/an-important-first-step-in-resetting-azerbaijan-georgia-relations/>
- 28 Kornely Kakachia, "Azerbaijan-Georgian Relations: The Foundations and Challenges of the Strategic Alliance," 4 June 2013, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292149201_Azerbaijan-Georgian_relations_The_Foundations_and_Challenges_of_the_Strategic_Alliance
- 29 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Geography," *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 30 World Bank, "Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://wits.worldbank.org/GPTAD/PDF/archive/Georgia-Azerbaijan.pdf>
- 31 Svante E. Cornell, "Are Georgia-Azerbaijan Relations at Risk?" *Analytical Articles*, 30 July 2019, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13583-are-georgia-azerbaijan-relations-at-risk?.html>
- 32 Jane's Information Group, "External Affairs (Azerbaijan)," *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.
- 33 Trading Economics, "Georgia Exports to Azerbaijan," April 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/exports/azerbaijan>
- 34 Trading Economics, "Georgia Imports from Azerbaijan," April 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/imports/azerbaijan>
- 35 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Exports to Georgia," April 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/exports/georgia>
- 36 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Imports from Georgia," April 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/imports/georgia>
- 37 OHCHR, "Human Rights Monitoring Group of Ethnic Minorities: Renewal of Toponymy as One of the Real Steps on Reinstatement of Interethnic Dialog in Kvemo-Kartli Region in Georgia," n.d., http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/MRMG_Georgia79.pdf
- 38 Agenda.ge, "State Security Service: Certain People Trying to Incite Rivalry between Georgians, Azerbaijanis," 1 June 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1710>
- 39 Jane's Information Group, "External Affairs (Azerbaijan)," *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.
- 40 Rauf Mammadov, "An Important First Step in Resetting Azerbaijan-Georgia Relations," *Emerging Europe*, 27 September 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/an-important-first-step-in-resetting-azerbaijan-georgia-relations/>
- 41 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Geography," *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>
- 42 Khosrow Mostofi et al., "Iran," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 21 April 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran>

significant minority. Azeris living in Iran are reportedly subject to discrimination; for example, they are banned from using the Azerbaijani language in schools and are likely to experience various forms of harassment and other aggressive acts.^{43, 44}

Periodically, tempers flare. Azerbaijan accuses Iran of spreading Islamic fundamentalism or sponsoring terrorism across the border. In response, Iran objects to Azerbaijan's secular traditions and culture and considers their influence dangerous.⁴⁵ Thus, when the Eurovision contest was held in Baku in 2012, Iran temporarily recalled its ambassador in protest.⁴⁶ The Islamist Party of Azerbaijan has also staged several protests in Azerbaijan, which were viewed as attempts to spread Iranian influence in the country. Periodically, Iran has taken action in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan views as hostile.⁴⁷ In the most recent outbreak of fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Iran officially called for a ceasefire while reportedly providing support to Armenia, strengthening its ties with the country.^{48, 49, 50}

Iran and Azerbaijan have disputed the rights to the Araz-Alov-Sharg oil field in the Caspian Sea for many years. In the 1990s, the two countries signed a production-sharing agreement, but problems persisted. In 2001, this lingering issue culminated in a confrontation between an Iranian warship and an Azerbaijani oil research boat.⁵¹ In 2016, several companies involved in oil production projects in the area backed out, some citing political reasons or undue delays for their exit. The debate over the demarcation of the seabed in the region persists today.^{52, 53, 54, 55}

Russia

Russia and Azerbaijan share approximately 338 km (210 mi) of border and a storied, complex history.⁵⁶ With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Azerbaijan was one of the first of 15 new countries to break away formally. It was the first in Transcaucasia to declare independence, distribute its own currency, and force out Soviet armed forces from its territory. The Azerbaijani written language was converted from the Russian Cyrillic alphabet to a modified Latin script. Azerbaijan's initial push for total separation from Russia was motivated by several causes, such as lingering sentiments from the Bolshevik defeat of the first Azerbaijan Republic in 1920 and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The latter fostering a strong sense of nationalism in Azerbaijan. During this time, Russia itself did not

43 Anar M. Valiyev, "Azerbaijan–Iran Relations: Quo Vadis, Baku?" PONARS Eurasia, September 2012, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/pepm_244_Valiyev_Sept2012.pdf

44 Iran Primer, "Iran Minorities 2: Ethnic Diversity," 3 September 2013, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/sep/03/iran-minorities-2-ethnic-diversity>

45 Eurasianet, "Tensions Growing Between Azerbaijan and Iran?" 14 March 2011, <https://eurasianet.org/tensions-growing-between-azerbaijan-and-iran>

46 Margarita Antidze, "Iran's 'Gay' Eurovision Jibes Strain Azerbaijan Ties," 22 May 2012, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/azerbaijan-iran/irans-gay-eurovision-jibes-strain-azerbaijan-ties-idUSL5E8GM61H20120522>

47 Anar M. Valiyev, "Azerbaijan–Iran Relations: Quo Vadis, Baku?" PONARS Eurasia, September 2012, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/pepm_244_Valiyev_Sept2012.pdf

48 Jane's Information Group, "External Affairs (Iran)," *Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States*, 25 June 2012.

49 Nasib L. Nassibli, "Azerbaijan–Iran Relations: Challenges and Prospects," Harvard Kennedy School, 30 November 1999, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/azerbaijan-iran-relations-challenges-and-prospects>

50 Murat Sofuoglu, "What's Iran's Role in the Armenia–Azerbaijan Clash?" TRT World, 28 September 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/what-s-iran-s-role-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-clash-40114>

51 Associated Press, "Iran Is Accused of Threatening Research Vessel in Caspian Sea," *New York Times*, 25 July 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/25/world/iran-is-accused-of-threatening-research-vessel-in-caspian-sea.html>

52 Prathamesh Karle, "Caspian Agreement: Many Issues Still to Be Settled," ORF, 15 October 2018, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/caspian-agreement-many-issues-still-to-be-settled-44871/>

53 Jane's Information Group, "External Affairs (Azerbaijan)," *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.

54 Publics.bg, "Azerbaijan Drops Disputed Araz-Alov-Sharg Caspian Project," Publics.bg, 22 February 2016, https://www.publics.bg/en/news/13425/Azerbaijan_Drops_Disputed_Araz-Alov-Sharg_Caspian_Project.html

55 Rogtec, "ExxonMobil: Closes Azeri Office Linked to Araz-Alov-Sharg Oilfield Projects Due to Delays," 18 February 2016, <https://rogtecmagazine.com/exxonmobil-closes-azeri-office-linked-araz-alov-sharg-oilfield-projects-due-delays/>

56 Google Arts and Culture, "Azerbaijan–Russia Border," n.d., <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/azerbaijan-russia-border/m0xngbmy?hl=en>

pursue establishing diplomatic relations.⁵⁷ The situation began to improve in 1993 when Heydar Aliyev signaled a shift in attitude and policy. Azerbaijan initially declined to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a Russia-dominated post-Soviet alliance. However, it ultimately relented and joined the CIS in 1993.^{58, 59, 60, 61}

The energy sector was one of the first significant areas of cooperation between the two countries. In 1993 both signed the “Contract of the Century” energy deal, allowing, among other things, Russian companies to operate in the Caspian Sea.⁶² However, the Chechnya–Russia War in the mid-’90s threatened to spoil the goodwill as Russia accused Azerbaijan of aiding Chechnya, a claim Baku has denied. Eventually, Azerbaijan sided with Russia and took action to restrict or deport Chechens.⁶³ Recently, Russia played a prominent role in the cessation of hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, brokering a ceasefire between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan. This ceasefire benefited Azerbaijan.⁶⁴

Today, Russia is one of Azerbaijan’s top trade partners, with cereal grains, iron, steel, and wood products dominating Azerbaijan’s imports from Russia. In the mid-2000s, Russia provided Azerbaijan with a large percentage of its natural gas imports. Since that time, however, Azerbaijan has stopped importing most of its gas from Russia and established the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC). The SGC began operations in late 2020, providing oil and gas to Western European markets.⁶⁵ Russian exports have already shown signs of decline, apparently due to the SGC.^{66, 67, 68, 69}

Turkey

Turkey maintains warm relations with Azerbaijan, a dynamic that appears to counterbalance Russian and Iranian influence in the region. The two countries share extensive cultural, linguistic, and economic connections, even though they share only 17 km (10.5 mi) of border. Although the population of both countries is overwhelmingly Muslim, Turkey’s population is primarily Sunni.⁷⁰ In 1991, Turkey was the first country to formally recognize the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Turkey’s historical feuds with Armenia, a present-day adversary of Azerbaijan, have further strengthened the bond between the two countries.^{71, 72, 73}

57 Araz Aslanli, “Azerbaijan–Russia Relations: Is the Foreign Policy Strategy of Azerbaijan Changing?” Turkish Policy Quarterly, n.d., https://esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol9_no3_araz-aslanli.pdf

58 Insee, “Commonwealth of Independent States / CIS,” 13 October 2016, <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1918>

59 Murat Gül, “Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations After 1989,” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 7, nos. 2, 3 (Summer/Fall 2008): 55–57, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/19512>

60 Araz Aslanli, “Azerbaijan–Russia Relations: Is the Foreign Policy Strategy of Azerbaijan Changing?” Turkish Policy Quarterly, n.d., https://esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol9_no3_araz-aslanli.pdf

61 Central Intelligence Agency, “Azerbaijan: Geography,” *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

62 Robert F. Cekuta, “25 Years After the ‘Contract of the Century’: The Implications for Caspian Energy,” Caspian Policy Center, 26 March 2020, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/25-years-after-the-contract-of-the-century-the-implications-for-caspian-energy/>

63 Araz Aslanli, “Azerbaijan–Russia Relations: Is the Foreign Policy Strategy of Azerbaijan Changing?” Turkish Policy Quarterly, n.d., https://esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol9_no3_araz-aslanli.pdf

64 Stephen Sestanovich, “Has Russia Ended the War Between Armenia and Azerbaijan?” Council on Foreign Relations, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/has-russia-ended-war-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan>

65 Ariel Cohen, “Bad News for Russia, as Gas from Azerbaijan Now Flows to Western Europe,” *Forbes*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2021/01/06/azeri-gas-reaches-europe-through-the-southern-gas-corridor/?sh=3ba0322a40e4>

66 Nordea, “Azerbaijan: Economic and Political Overview,” n.d., <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/azerbaijan/trade-profile>

67 UPI.com, “Russia to Double Azerbaijan Gas Imports,” 25 January 2012, http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2012/01/25/Russia-to-double-Azerbaijan-gas-imports/UPI-40841327491000/

68 Trading Economics, “Azerbaijan Imports to Russia,” April 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/imports/russia>

69 Olesya Astakhova and Vladimir Soldatkin, “New Gas Pipeline Could Heat Up Azeri-Russian Rivalry,” Reuters, 6 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/azerbaijan-russia-gas-int/new-gas-pipeline-could-heat-up-azeri-russian-rivalry-idUSKBN26R27G>

70 Jane’s Information Group, “External Affairs (Azerbaijan),” *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.

71 Jane’s Information Group, “External Affairs (Azerbaijan),” *Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 December 2010.

72 Central Intelligence Agency, “Azerbaijan: Geography,” *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

73 Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Relations Between Turkey and Azerbaijan,” n.d., <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-azerbaijan.en.mfa>

In 2017, the highly anticipated Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway began operations, linking Baku and the Turkish rail system for the first time since the Turkish-Armenian border closure.^{74, 75} Turkey has announced plans to construct a railway connecting to the Naxicvan enclave to boost the BTK's capacity.⁷⁶

Turkey remains an important and significant trading partner with Azerbaijan. Turkish investment in Azerbaijan reached approximately USD 11 billion between 2002–2019. Azerbaijan's investment in Turkey reached approximately USD 19.5 billion for the same period.⁷⁷ Azerbaijan's top exports to Turkey include mineral fuels and oils, cotton, and aluminum. Imports include various types of machinery, iron, steel, and electrical or electronic equipment.^{78, 79}

Police

The Ministry of Internal Affairs administers Azerbaijan's National Police.⁸⁰ Accusations of corruption have plagued the police, including documented incidences of torture and other physical mistreatment, as noted by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture. According to the U.S. State Department, police corruption is systemic and endemic. In addition to accusations of violence, the police force stands accused of accepting bribes and engaging in extortion. Officially, Azerbaijan has due process, but it is not always adhered to or respected. In addition, a formal bail system is in place but has not been consistently recognized by judicial officials. The government has increased its efforts to root out corruption by expanding the capabilities of the responsible oversight agencies, but results have been uneven.⁸¹ Azerbaijan's police force ranks 54 out of 137 countries worldwide in terms of reliability.^{82, 83, 84}

Azerbaijani police have been accused on several occasions of conducting "revenge operations" on activists. In 2020, reports indicated that the National Police summoned citizens to local offices and demanded that they delete social media posts critical of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁵ There are several reports of police harassing and detaining individuals for seemingly political purposes. In politically motivated arrests, the charges are often vague, such as resisting police, tax evasion, or illegal entrepreneurship. International human rights organizations have criticized Azerbaijan's police force for arresting people exercising their rights.^{86, 87}

74 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Geography," *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

75 Panorama.am "Working Group Handling Iran-Armenia Rail Road Construction," 1 August 2008, <http://www.panorama.am/en/economy/2008/08/01/iran/>

76 Ilham Karimli, "Turkey Plans to Build Railway to Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Exclave," *Caspian News*, 13 November 2020, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkey-plans-to-build-railway-to-azerbaijans-nakhchivan-exclave-2020-11-13-51/>

77 Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Economic Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/economic-relations-between-turkey-and-azerbaijan.en.mfa>

78 Trading Economics, "Azerbaijan Exports to Turkey," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/exports/turkey>

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80 OSCE Polis, "Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/azerbaijan>

81 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Human Rights Report: Azerbaijan," 8 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AZERBAIJAN-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

82 World Economic Forum "The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018," n.d., http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GCR_Report_2011-12.pdf

83 Risk and Compliance Portal, "Azerbaijan Corruption Report," July 2020, <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/azerbaijan/>

84 OSAC, "Azerbaijan 2020 Crime and Safety Report," 6 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Azerbaijan/Content/Detail/Report/6c4c0264-f96b-4474-8221-189e2a26a68e>

85 Human Rights House Foundation, "Crackdowns by Azerbaijan Authorities Under the Guise of COVID-19 Response," 15 June 2020, <https://humanrightshouse.org/statements/crackdowns-by-azerbaijan-authorities-under-the-guise-of-covid-19-response/>

86 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Human Rights Report: Azerbaijan," 8 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AZERBAIJAN-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

87 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Azerbaijan Rights Activist Accuses Baku Police of Conducting 'Revenge Operation,'" 8 June 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-rights-activist-accuses-baku-police-of-conducting-revenge-operation-/30659714.html>

Several other police branches operate within Azerbaijan. Border security is handled by the country's State Border Service and the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The State Security Service is responsible for combating terrorism, and the Electronic Security Service handles all cybersecurity matters.⁸⁸

Military

Azerbaijan's armed forces consist of three main branches: the army (Azerbaijani Land Forces), navy (Azerbaijani Navy), and air force (Azerbaijani Air Force). Azerbaijan also maintains the Azerbaijani National Guard and Internal Troops. The country's armed forces are administered by the Ministry of Defense and headquartered in Baku. Recent military expenditures reached USD 2.73 billion, accounting for 5.4% of GDP.^{89, 90}

Azerbaijan has a conscription program that requires military service for males ages 18–35 years old; women may enlist voluntarily. The military service obligation is 18 months, but university graduates can opt for 12 months of service. At 17 years of age, Azerbaijani males are considered active duty and are enrolled in cadet military school. Military service is unpopular, however, and draft evasion is common due to reports of poor living conditions and human rights violations.⁹¹ Current troop strength is estimated at approximately 65,000 personnel: the army has a roster of 55,000, the navy has 2,000 personnel, and the air force has 8,000 members.^{92, 93, 94}

The Azerbaijani Land Forces boast a fleet of vehicles, including infantry fighting vehicles, tank destroyers, personnel carriers, mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, and various amphibious or reconnaissance vehicles. The Azerbaijani Air Force operates several types of helicopters and attack aircraft dedicated to ground attacks, strategic bombings, and other functions. The country has a fleet of approximately 127 aircraft in total. The Azerbaijani Navy operates helicopter and aircraft carriers as well as destroyers, with a fleet of 31 vessels.^{95, 96, 97}

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89 Armedforces.eu, "Azerbaijani Armed Forces," n.d., <https://armedforces.eu/Azerbaijan>

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94 Central Intelligence Agency, "Azerbaijan: Military," *World Factbook*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>

95 Armedforces.eu, "Azerbaijani Armed Forces," n.d., <https://armedforces.eu/Azerbaijan>

96 Al Jazeera, "Infographic: Military Arsenals of Armenia and Azerbaijan," 1 October 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/1/infographic-military-arsenals-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan>

97 Niall McCarthy, "Armenian and Azerbaijani Military Strength Compared," Statista, 29 September 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/23056/estimated-military-strength-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan/>

Cybersecurity

Azerbaijan ranks 79 out of 160 countries on the National Cyber Security Index (NCSI) list, which measures a country's preparedness against cyber threats. The country also maintains a rating of 37.66 out of 100 on the NCSI's comprehensive scale.^{98, 99} The government does not release formal cybercrime statistics, however. Officially and without evidence, it proclaims that attacks are rare and that it maintains high levels of cybersecurity.^{100, 101}

Cybersecurity matters are handled by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies.^{102, 103} Azerbaijan also participates in the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, a cooperative effort in counterterrorism and cyber defense measures.¹⁰⁴ The government reportedly restricts internet freedom and has been accused of conducting cyberattacks on activists within the country. News outlets have experienced attacks that took them temporarily offline.¹⁰⁵ During the most recent outbreak of violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan's government networks were breached by unknown spies who were able to access personally identifiable information for many government officials.¹⁰⁶

Issues that Affect Stability

Nagorno-Karabakh

The standoff between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic remains the most significant threat to Azerbaijan's stability. The conflict broke out in 1988 when Azerbaijan was still under Soviet control, although its roots date back to over a century ago when clashes broke out between Christian Armenians and regional Muslims.¹⁰⁷ As Soviet control weakened before the dissolution of the USSR, long-simmering tensions between ethnic groups in the Nagorno-Karabakh region erupted as officials in Nagorno-Karabakh voted to join Armenia. The initial war lasted until 1994 and resulted in tens of thousands of casualties. In 2020, fighting resumed for approximately six weeks, resulting in Azerbaijan seizing control of new portions of the region and the presence of Russian troops in a peacekeeping role.^{108, 109, 110}

98 National Cyber Security Index, "79. Azerbaijan 37.66," n.d., <https://ncsi.ega.ee/country/az/?pdfReport=1>

99 National Cyber Security Index, "Methodology," n.d., <https://ncsi.ega.ee/methodology/>

100 OSAC, "Azerbaijan 2020 Crime and Safety Report," 6 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Azerbaijan/Content/Detail/Report/6c4c0264-f96b-4474-8221-189e2a26a68e>

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106 Sean Lyngaas, "Spies Hacked Azerbaijan Government Officials as Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Escalated, Researchers Say," CyberScoop, 6 October 2020, <https://www.cyberscoop.com/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-armenia-espionage-talos-hackers/>

107 Global Conflict Tracker, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," n.d., <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

108 BBC News, "Nagorno-Karabakh Profile," 18 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18270325>

109 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Human Rights Report: Azerbaijan," 8 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AZERBAIJAN-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

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Democratic and Business Reforms

Since independence, Azerbaijan's government has developed a reputation for oppressive tactics to maintain order. Many activists and journalists who have criticized elections and policies have been arrested on dubious charges. The United States and other countries have expressed concerns about Azerbaijan's continued tolerance of widespread corruption, human rights violations, and the lack of transparency in various levels of government. There have been some convictions for corruption and other violations in recent years, but Azerbaijan has thus far failed to implement reforms to remedy many of these problems.^{111, 112, 113, 114}

Organized crime groups have become increasingly problematic, both regionally and abroad. Ethnic Azeri groups have operated in Moscow and further abroad for decades. Although most organized crime groups are involved in mostly small-scale operations, drug trafficking, and protection rackets, newer groups have formed along ethnic lines and started operating in recent years. Conflicts between Azerbaijani-based organized crime groups have spilled over borders, causing concern about European Union immigration and security procedures.^{115, 116}

Azerbaijan's pervasive corruption poses a significant risk to the country's economic growth. It is reported that foreign companies have to pay bribes and are disadvantaged by the political clout that domestic companies wield for business purposes. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been unstable in the last couple of decades. While negative flow trends in the mid-2000s seemed to recover steadily until 2016, inflows began another steep decline. By 2019, Azerbaijan's FDI inflow and outflow demonstrated mild increases once again.^{117, 118}

Water Security

Water shortages and droughts are common and pose significant threats in Azerbaijan, which relies on the Kura-Araks river basin, a shared water source between Georgia and Armenia. Another significant water source is the Oguz-Gabala-Baku pipeline, which carries water from the northwest to Baku in the east. Azerbaijan is a signatory to the Convention on Protection and Usage of Transboundary Water Flows and International Lakes; this international policy that seeks to protect transboundary bodies of water. Azerbaijan's own water policy closely aligns with international standards and legislation.^{119, 120}

Water has played a role in the continued conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region since Armenians and Azeri people once shared water sources during Soviet rule. Once the USSR collapsed, Armenia took over primary control of

111 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2020 Human Rights Report: Azerbaijan," 8 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AZERBAIJAN-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

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120 Claudia Palazzo, "The Water Factor in the Karabakh Conflict," Jamestown Foundation, 28 October 2020, <https://jamestown.org/the-water-factor-in-the-karabakh-conflict/>

water in the region.¹²¹ In the rest of the country, the decentralization of agricultural lands necessitated significant land reforms, which overhauled Azerbaijan's irrigation systems. The Water Users' Associations Development Project led recent reforms that helped restore dozens of irrigation and drainage canal networks. Azerbaijan has engaged with UN entities to collaborate on significant water security concerns in the region.^{122, 123, 124}

Outlook

Despite the Russian-brokered ceasefire in 2020, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is regarded as the single greatest threat to Azerbaijan's political stability and a key determining factor in foreign policy and future economic growth. The 2020 outbreak of violence decidedly benefitted Azerbaijan in territorial gains, leaving significant tensions unresolved with Armenia and ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Nagorno-Karabakh is considered a high-risk region as the potential for conflict is considered very high.^{125, 126, 127}

Azerbaijan's economy has shown growth in recent years, thanks in part to its stable oil production and increases in domestic demand. This demand was halted, however, by the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from this will be slow. The nation's economic plans include continuing economic diversification, improving the market structure and investment climate, modernizing transportation infrastructure, and developing human capital, mainly through investments in education. Issues related to economic recovery, environmental protection, climate change, legal reforms, and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continue to present significant challenges for the future.^{128, 129, 130}

121 Claudia Palazzo, "The Water Factor in the Karabakh Conflict," Jamestown Foundation, 28 October 2020, <https://jamestown.org/the-water-factor-in-the-karabakh-conflict/>

122 Oliver Bullough, "Armenian-Azerbaijani Water Politics," GPF, 21 October 2020, <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security-council/dark-side-of-natural-resources/water-in-conflict/49597-armenian-azerbaijani-water-politics.html>

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Azerbaijan in Perspective

Security Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Georgia and Azerbaijan maintain stable diplomatic relations. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Azerbaijan has not maintained any diplomatic relations with Russia since the Soviet era. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Azerbaijan maintains a significant military force. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains the most significant threat to stability in Azerbaijan. ☐ True ☐ False

Azerbaijan in Perspective

Security Assessment Answers

1. False:
Azerbaijan and the U.S. have maintained diplomatic relations since the aftermath of Azerbaijan's independence from the Soviet Union (USSR) in December 1991. The two countries engage in bilateral efforts in energy security, trade investments, and counterterrorism.
2. True:
The two countries share 428 km (266 mi) of border. A cornerstone of their relationship is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline.
3. False:
Today, Russia is one of Azerbaijan's top trade partners, with cereal, iron, steel, and wood products dominating Azerbaijan's imports from Russia. In the mid-2000s, Russia supplied a majority of Azerbaijan's natural gas imports.
4. True:
Azerbaijan's armed forces consist of three main branches: the army (Azerbaijani Land Forces), navy (Azerbaijani Navy), and air forces (Azerbaijani Air Force). Azerbaijan also maintains the Azerbaijani National Guard and Internal Troops.
5. True:
The conflict broke out in 1988 and lasted until 1994, resulting in tens of thousands of casualties. In 2020, fighting resumed for approximately six weeks, concluding with Azerbaijan seizing control of new portions of the region and the presence of Russian troops in a peacekeeping role.

Azerbaijan in Perspective

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Azerbaijan in Perspective

Final Assessment

“To receive a certificate of completion for this course, please complete the final assessment on the DLIFLC website.”