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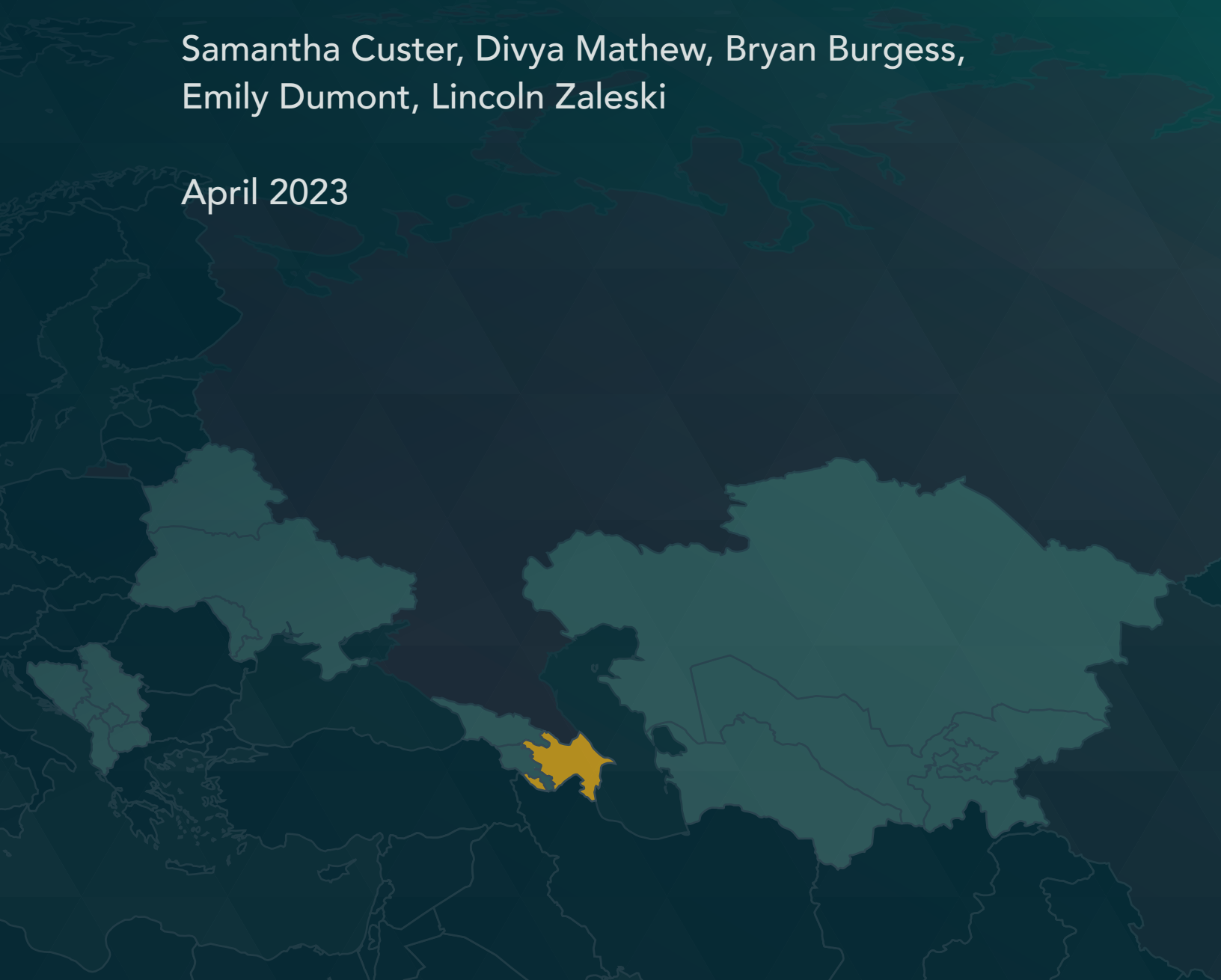
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

**Azerbaijan:** Measuring civic space risk,  
resilience, and Russian influence

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Azerbaijan’s civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin’s influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in Azerbaijan to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions. A companion profile on Nagorno-Karabakh—the longest-running conflict in post-Soviet Eurasia according to the Crisis Group (2023)—provides information on civic space and Kremlin influence in the occupied territory.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Azerbaijan, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Azerbaijani civic space actors were the targets of 592 restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021, including harassment or violence (56 percent), state-backed legal cases (42 percent), and restrictive legislation (2 percent). Twenty-six percent of cases occurred in 2020, coinciding with mass unrest around the February parliamentary elections and the July “Karabakh-action” protests. Political opposition members were most frequently targeted, and the Azerbaijani government was the primary initiator. Foreign governments were involved

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<sup>1</sup> Crisis Group. (2023). The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer. Updated: March 28, 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>

in eight instances of restriction, including Turkey (3), Georgia (2), Belgium (1), and Russia (2).

- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Azerbaijanis reported increasing interest in politics and openness to engaging in political action in future between 2011 and 2018. However, less than one percent of citizens had actually engaged in activities such as strikes, boycotts or demonstrations and a mere 7 percent had joined a petition. Azerbaijanis had low rates of membership in voluntary organizations and were least confident in those they participated in most often: political parties and labor unions. In parallel, Azerbaijanis reported declining charitable donations, volunteerism, and assistance to strangers after 2012. By 2019, less than 10 percent of Azerbaijanis gave to charity or volunteered in organizations.
- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** The Kremlin supported 11 Azerbaijani entities via 9 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Nearly half of the Kremlin's projects in Azerbaijan were oriented towards civic space regulators, rather than building relationships with individual civic actors (e.g., Russian compatriots, Orthodox churches, youth groups), and security cooperation was the most prominent theme. The Russian government routed its engagement in Azerbaijan through six state channels, but Rossotrudnichestvo was most prolific, involved in one-third of identified projects, particularly emphasizing Russian Orthodox ties and the culture of the "Russian World."
- **Russian State-run Media:** Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Azerbaijani civic actors 278 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Political parties were the most frequently mentioned domestic actors and attracted more negative coverage than their peers. Coverage of Azerbaijani actors was sparse (20 percent) and generally neutral. The Kremlin instead oriented more media coverage to external actors, depicting Russian peacekeepers' support to peace and stability in Nagorno-Karabakh positively alongside international actors like the OSCE and Red Cross, while portraying Western nations as unreliable and untrustworthy partners in the peace process.

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Azerbaijan.....	5
2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time.....	5
2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors.....	14
2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Azerbaijan.....	18
2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Azerbaijan’s Civic Space.....	18
2.2.2 Apolitical Participation.....	25
3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Azerbaijan.....	27
3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan’s Civic Space.....	28
3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan’s Civic Space.....	30
3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan's Civic Space.....	32
3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors.....	34
3.2.1 Russian State Media’s Characterization of Domestic Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors.....	34
3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Azerbaijan’s Civic Space...	35
3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Azerbaijan’s Civic Space over Time.....	37
3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms.....	39
4. Conclusion.....	43
5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief.....	44
5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors.....	44
5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space.....	44
5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators.....	48
5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors.....	49

# Figures and Tables

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time.....	3
Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors.....	6
Figure 1. Timeline of Events and Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan.....	7
Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan.....	9
Figure 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Initiator.....	11
Figure 4. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Political or Ideological Affiliation.....	13
Figure 5. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan.....	15
Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan.....	17
Figure 6. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan.....	17
Figure 7. Interest in Politics: Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018.....	19
Figure 8. Political Action: Azerbaijani Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2011 versus 2018.....	20
Figure 9. Political Action: Participation by Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018.	21
Table 4. Azerbaijani Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2018.....	23
Figure 10. Voluntary Organization Membership: Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018.....	24
Table 5. Azerbaijani Confidence in Key Institutions versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018.....	25
Figure 11. Civic Engagement Index: Azerbaijan versus Regional Peers.....	27
Figure 12. Russian Projects Supporting Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors by Type.....	29
Figure 13. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Azerbaijani Civic Space.....	30
Figure 14. Locations of Russian Support to Azerbaijani Civic Space.....	32
Table 6. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Sentiment.....	36
Figure 15. Russian State Media Mentions of Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors.....	38
Table 7. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media.....	39

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## A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Azerbaijan? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Azerbaijan to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>2</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Azerbaijan from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>4</sup> Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Azerbaijani civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes

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<sup>2</sup> The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>3</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>4</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Azerbaijan and the broader E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects. By



taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin’s patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2015–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li>● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li>● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2010–2019*) *Latest year of data available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul>

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Russian state media mentions of civic space actors (January 2015–March 2021)

- Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Azerbaijan by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Azerbaijan by Russian state-owned media
- Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms "democracy" and "West," in Azerbaijan by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms "democracy" and "West," in Azerbaijan by Russian state-owned media

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Azerbaijan's domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Azerbaijan

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (de jure) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (de facto). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Azerbaijan over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Azerbaijanis engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time

Azerbaijani civic space actors experienced 592 known restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (56 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (42 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (2 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly

available information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5).<sup>5</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q 1	Total
Harassment/Violence <sup>6</sup>	38	56	21	37	74	101	5	332
Restrictive Legislation	4	1	2	1	1	3	0	12
State-backed Legal Cases	39	45	37	38	39	50	0	248
Total	81	102	60	76	114	154	5	592

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Azerbaijan, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. The one instance of harassment/violence in Nagorno-Karabakh is not separately broken out. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Instances of restrictions of Azerbaijani civic space actors were unevenly distributed across this time period and peaked in 2020 (Figure 1). Twenty-six percent of cases were recorded in 2020, coinciding with mass unrest following parliamentary elections in February and in July with the “Karabakh-action” protests where thousands took to the streets in Baku in a show of support for the military and demanding a war to liberate the Karabakh region. Members of the political opposition were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, appearing in 47 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by journalists and other members of the media.

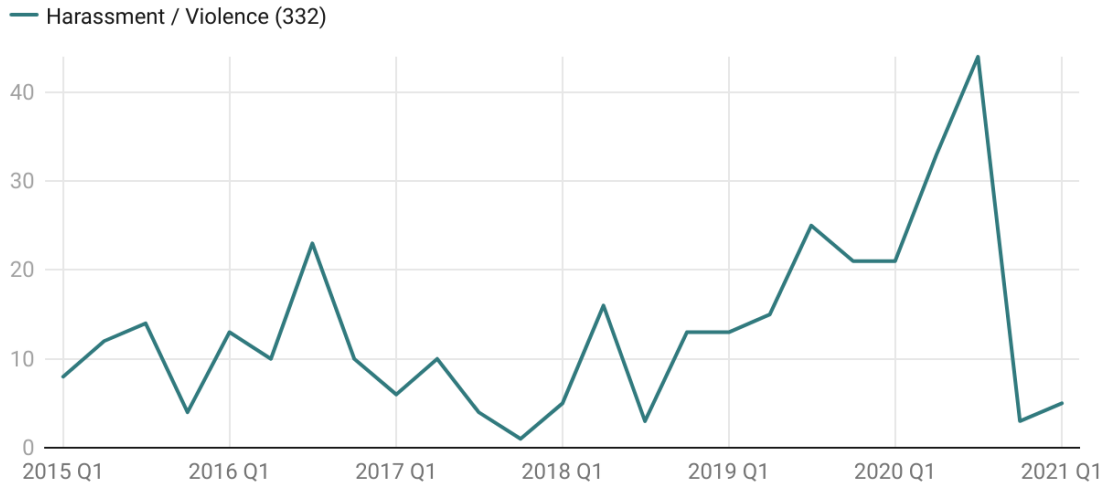
<sup>5</sup> Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

<sup>6</sup> This includes one reference to harassment/violence recorded in Nagorno-Karabakh. In January 2015, Armenia Liberty reported that while traveling to the region, dozens of Founding Parliament members (a civil society initiative) were forcibly prevented from entering by Karabakh security forces and were injured. AidData’s Nagorno-Karabakh profile offers a more in-depth analysis of civic space in the region.

Figure 1. Timeline of Events and Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan

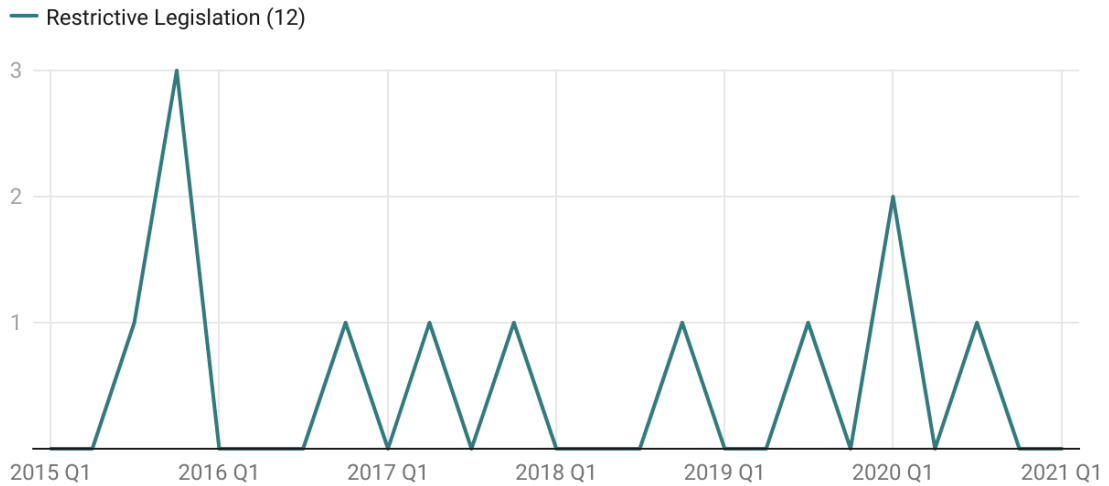
Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



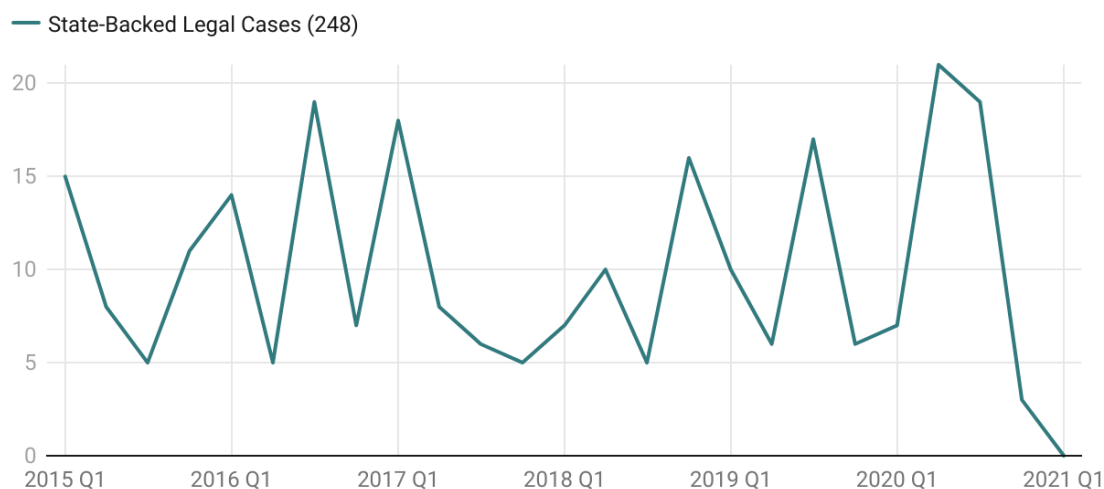
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*Restrictive Legislation*



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## State-backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Azerbaijan

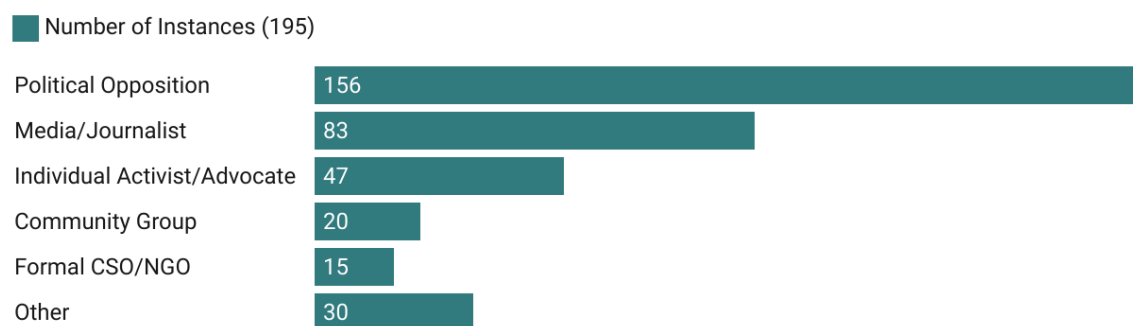
March 2015	Amnesty International reports that dozens of pro-democracy activists, journalists and lawyers were detained by the authorities over the past twelve months to quash dissent.
June 2015	Baku hosts the first European Games. Human rights groups try to draw international attention to violations and silencing of dissent in Azerbaijan.
November 2015	OSCE declines to send observers for parliamentary elections as restrictions make it impossible to observe the election. Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party maintains control.
January 2016	Violent clashes broke out between riot police and thousands of demonstrators who took to the streets in cities across the country to express their discontent against price hikes and unemployment.
April 2016	Increased fighting along the Nagorno-Karabakh border leads to over 300 casualties; weapons sold to both sides by Russia
July 2016	ANS TV station was ordered to stop broadcasting, and was subsequently closed, because its coverage ran counter to "a strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Turkey."
September 2016	Constitutional referendum expands the powers of the president, allowing Aliyev to further limit freedom of speech, target opposition and allowing for further fraud in elections
May 2017	A Baku court upheld the government's decision to block access to the Azeri-language website of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and several independent news websites which a prosecutor argued represented "threats to legitimate interests of the government and society."
September 2017	The government denies reports by a group of international newspapers that it ran a secret slush fund - dubbed the "Azerbaijan Laundromat" - to pay off European politicians and launder money.

November 2017	The EU pledged to deepen ties with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus to counter Russian influence, but warned they had no chance of joining the bloc any time soon.
April 2018	A snap Presidential election in Azerbaijan was boycotted by the opposition. Aliyev wins every district for the next 7-year term.
November 2018	Ali Karimli, head of the Azeri opposition party Popular Front, was detained for leading an unsanctioned procession through Baku's Alley of Martyrs. Dozens of participants were detained by the police.
March 2019	President Aliyev pardoned over 50 imprisoned critics, including journalists, bloggers and opposition political parties' activists, though their convictions remained in force.
October 2019	Police detained scores of protesters, including the leader of the opposition, at the start of a planned rally against low salaries, corruption and a lack of democracy.
February 2020	Parliamentary elections. Police detained opposition leaders and over 100 activists before they held a protest against the results of the election.
July 2020	Thousands protest all night in Baku, in support of the army and demanding a war for the liberation of Karabakh. Dozens of protesters are arrested for their participation.
September 2020	New violence erupts between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.
January 2021	Russian President Vladimir Putin hosts Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts to discuss reopening transport routes paralyzed for nearly three decades amid conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

*Notes: The figure visualizes instances of civic space restrictions in Azerbaijan, categorized as: harassment/violence, restrictive legislation, or state-backed legal cases. Instances are disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Azerbaijan from January 2015 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Azerbaijan, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

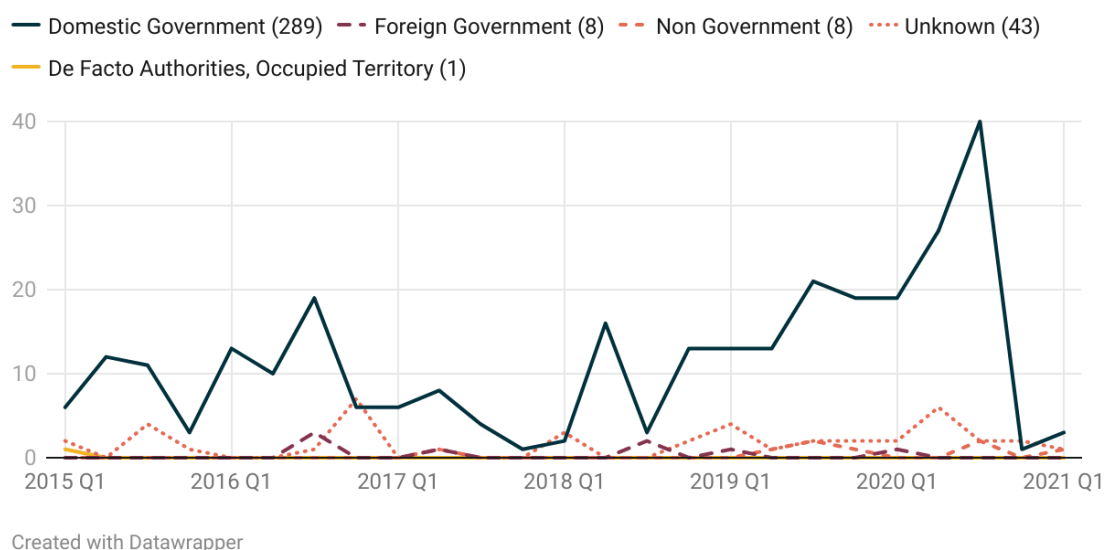
The Azerbaijani government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 289 recorded mentions (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 7 restrictions and there were some incidents involving unidentified assailants (43 mentions). By virtue of the way that the state-backed legal cases indicator was defined, the initiators are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

The category “De Facto Authorities – Occupied Territory” identifies the single recorded restriction initiated by local authorities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region as distinct from the Baku-based Azerbaijani government. Although other instances of violence occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh during the period, these stemmed from militarized conflict, as opposed to a reaction to civic space actors exerting their rights and were thus excluded from this discussion.



Figure 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Initiator

Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: The figure visualizes the number of recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Azerbaijan, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

There were eight recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors during this period involving a foreign government:

- Turkish authorities intervened three times in 2016 to shut down TV channels allegedly connected to the Gulen Movement, with ripple effects impacting media in Azerbaijan. The Erdoğan government blamed Gulenists for an attempted July 15th coup in Turkey.
- In 2017, Afgan Mukhtarli, an Azerbaijani investigative journalist living in exile in Georgia, was kidnapped and brought to Azerbaijan where he was arrested. Similarly, Azer Kazimzade, an Azerbaijani activist critical of the government was detained in Tbilisi in 2018. It is unlikely that these instances took place without tacit or overt support from the Georgian authorities.

- Fuad Akperov, an Azerbaijani political emigrant, was detained by Belgian authorities in March 2020, following a request to Interpol from the Azerbaijani government.
- Russia was involved in two instances of restrictions of Talysh ethnic minority activist, Fahraddin Abbasov, who was detained in Moscow in September 2018 after Azerbaijan placed him on an international wanted list on charges of inciting hatred against the state through his remarks. In February 2019, the Russian government deported him to Baku, despite a plea from Amnesty International against it, and the activist was arrested on arrival.

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.<sup>7</sup> Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 409 times as targets of restriction during this period.<sup>8</sup> Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 324 times as targets of restrictions.<sup>9</sup> There were 4 instances where we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that this classification does not imply that these groups were targeted because of their political ideology or affiliation, merely that they met certain predefined characteristics. In fact, these tags were deliberately defined narrowly such that they focus on only a limited set of attributes about the organizations and individuals in question.

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<sup>7</sup> These tags are deliberately defined narrowly such that they likely understate, rather than overstate, selective targeting of individuals or organizations by virtue of their ideology. Exclusion of an individual or organization from these classifications should not be taken to mean that they hold views that are counter to these positions (i.e., anti-democracy, anti-Western, pro-Kremlin).

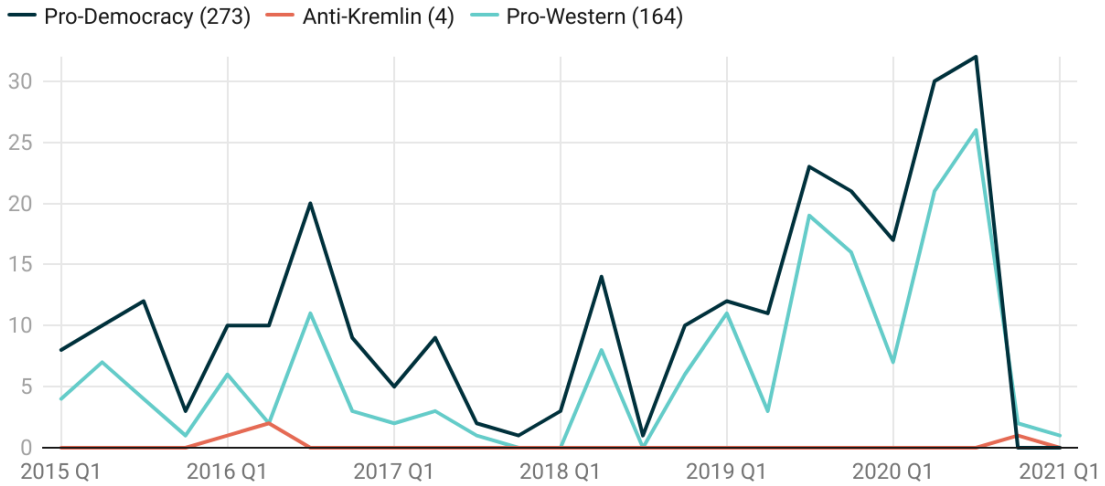
<sup>8</sup> A target organization or individual was only tagged as pro-democratic if they were a member of the political opposition (i.e., thus actively promoting electoral competition) and/or explicitly involved in advancing electoral democracy, narrowly defined.

<sup>9</sup> A tag of pro-Western was applied only when there was a clear and publicly identifiable linkage with the West by virtue of funding or political views that supported EU integration, for example.

<sup>10</sup> The anti-Kremlin tag is only applied in instances where there is a clear connection to opposing actions of the Russian government writ large or involving an organization that explicitly positioned itself as anti-Kremlin in ideology.

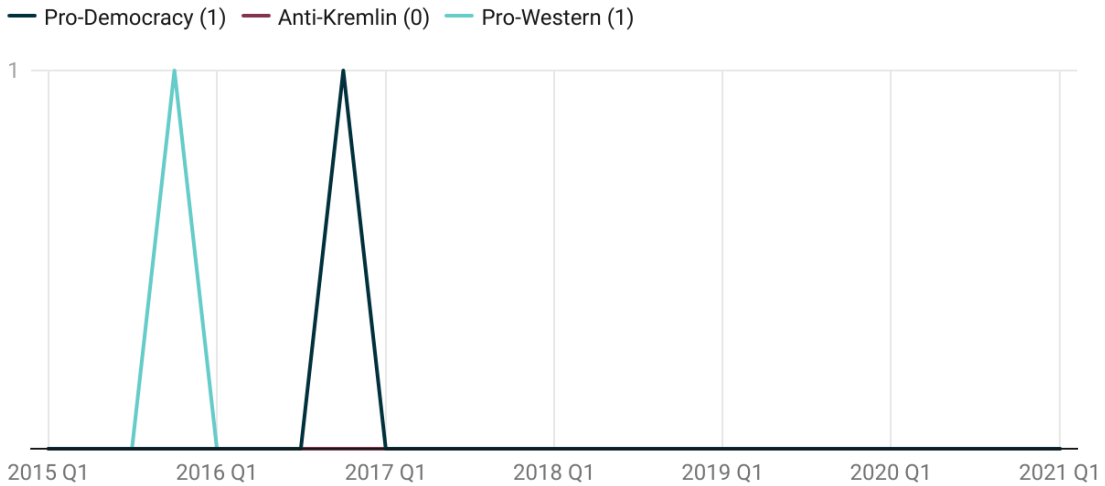
Figure 4. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Political or Ideological Affiliation

Number of Instances Recorded  
*Harassment/Violence*



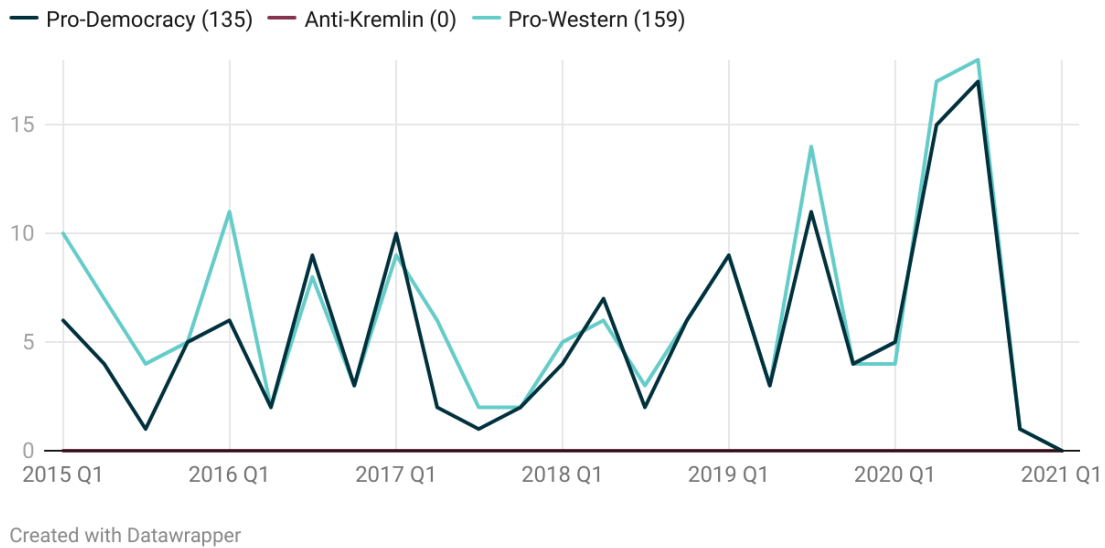
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*Restrictive Legislation*



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## State-backed Legal Cases



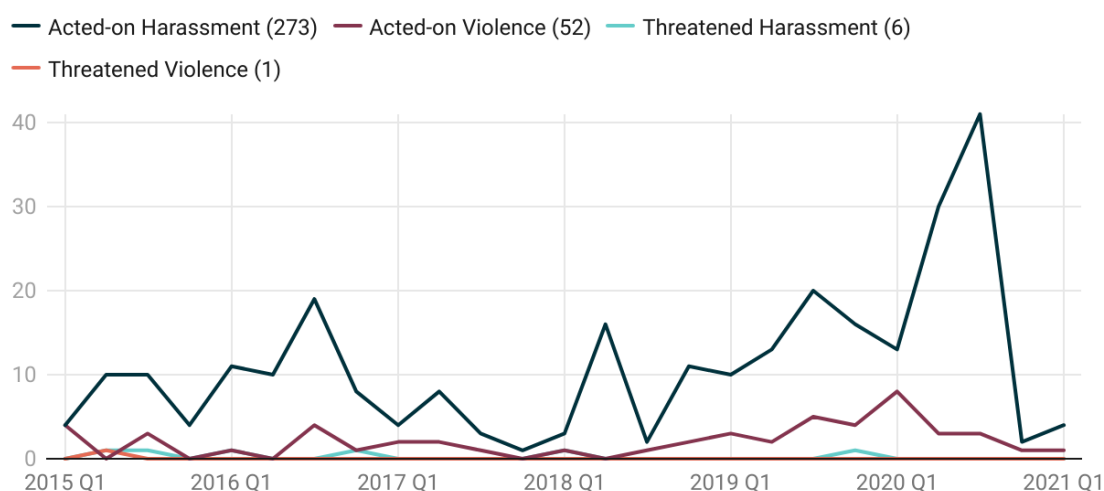
*Notes: This figure visualizes the targets of recorded restrictions of any type initiated against civic space actors in Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, between January 2015 and March 2021. The targets were manually tagged by AidData staff to identify groups or individuals known to be “pro-democracy,” “pro-Western,” or “anti-Kremlin.” Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (6 threatened, 273 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (1 threatened, 52 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (98 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 5). Of the 332 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (82 percent).

Figure 5. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan

Number of Instances Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Azerbaijan categorized by type of harassment or violence and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (12) in Azerbaijan are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

A closer look at instances of restrictive legislation reveals the Azerbaijani government’s use of laws to constrain civic space by (i) curbing the ability of citizens to organize, as well as voice dissent or criticism, online; and (ii)

increasing scrutiny over and regulation of NGOs. A few illustrative examples include:

- In 2015, the Ministry of Communications announced intentions to propose legislation that would increase government control and surveillance over online apps such as WhatsApp and Skype. They also proposed mandates to online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to maintain databases of Azerbaijan-based users, to which the government would have access. Later, in 2018, there was another proposal to tighten the regulation and establish increased control of social networks on the internet.
- In 2016, Azerbaijan's parliament made online defamation of the president a criminal offense, punishable by imprisonment.
- The Bill on Amendments to the Criminal Code was submitted to Milli Majlis, the parliament, in 2017, suggesting an increase in penalties related to articles 147 (libel) and 148 (insult). In 2019 there was another call to toughen the punishment for offenses under the two articles.
- Azerbaijani ministers approved the "Rules of registration of contracts for the provision of services to NGOs, as well as branches and representative offices of foreign NGOs by foreign financial sources and the implementation of work" in October 2015. The bill was adopted with the aim of tightening control over grants from foreign donors. In March 2020, the Law 'On Information, Informatization and Protection of Information' was passed, which created new financial obligations and also increased potential threats to freedom of speech for NGOs.

Civic space actors were the targets of 248 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2015 and March 2021, with the highest volume in 2020. Members of the political opposition were most frequently the defendants (Table 3), often charged with "hooliganism" and disobedience to the police. As shown in Figure 6, charges in these cases were not often directly (33 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). There were more indirect charges (40 percent) such as drug possession or tax evasion, often

used by regimes throughout the E&E region to discredit the reputations of civic space actors. There were a number of instances (77 cases) where we did not find sufficient detail to determine the nature of the charges.

Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan

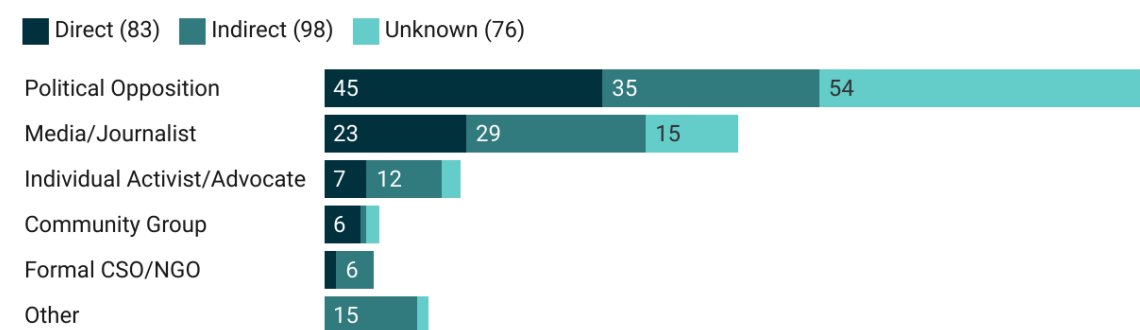
Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	67
Political Opposition	134
Formal CSO/NGO	9
Individual Activist/Advocate	22
Other Community Group	9
Other	18

Notes: Table of state legal cases against civic space actors in Azerbaijan by target group (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO, other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 6. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Azerbaijan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



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Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Azerbaijan, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the

*nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## 2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijanis reported increasing interest in politics and growing openness to engaging in common forms of political action (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, petitions) between 2011 and 2018. Nevertheless, actual political participation remained muted during the period with respondents reporting no increased involvement in most political activities and only modest growth in numbers of those who had signed a petition. Similarly, there was a disconnect between the voluntary organizations which attracted the highest number of Azerbaijanis as members—political parties and labor unions—and the fact that respondents had relatively lower confidence in these institutions as compared to the government. These persistently low levels of civic participation extended to less political forms of engagement, as Azerbaijanis citizens' rates of charitable donations, volunteerism, and provision of assistance to strangers plummeted from an initial high in 2010-2012 to a steady decline through 2019.

These low rates of participation across indicators reflects the reality of a highly constrained environment for civic space under the continued rule of President Aliyev and the New Azerbaijan Party. In this section, we take a closer look at Azerbaijani citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Azerbaijani involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Azerbaijan's Civic Space

In 2011, mere 24 percent of Azerbaijanis expressed interest in politics, compared to 42 percent of survey respondents across the region, according to the World Values Survey (Figure 7). Over 96 percent of Azerbaijanis, meanwhile, reported that they had not participated in civic activities such as petitions, boycotts, demonstrations or strikes (Figure 8). Nor was there much apparent

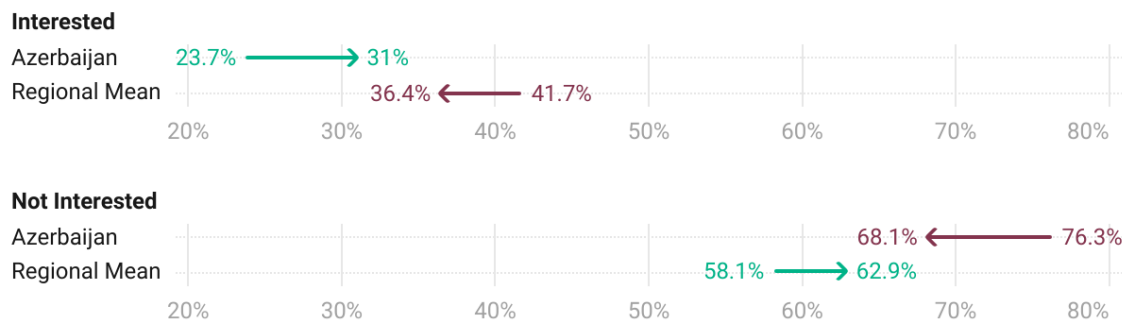


interest in undertaking such actions, as a preponderance of Azerbaijani respondents (over 90 percent) said they were unlikely to sign a petition, participate in a boycott, join a demonstration or participate in a strike in future.

By 2018, Azerbaijanis reported higher interest in politics, but only modest changes in actual behavior. Thirty-one percent of Azerbaijani respondents said they were interested in politics (+7 percentage points). However, despite a marked decline in reported interest in politics across the region since 2011 (-6 percentage points), Azerbaijanis still trailed their regional peers (36 percent) on this measure. There was a 3-percentage point bump in Azerbaijani respondents who reported having signed a petition (from 4 to 7 percent), but no noticeable change to extremely low levels of participation (less than one percent) in three other civic activities—strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations (Figure 9).

Azerbaijanis that year were more open to the possibility of engaging in civic activities in future, even if they had not done so to date. In 2018, 19 percent of Azerbaijani respondents said that they might sign a petition or participate in peaceful demonstrations (+13 percentage points compared to 2011), while 14 percent indicated a willingness to participate in a boycott (+9 percentage points). Fewer Azerbaijanis objected to joining a future demonstration or petition, than strikes or boycotts in both 2011 and 2018. This preference for demonstrations over boycotts is also consistent with other countries in the region.

Figure 7. Interest in Politics: Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

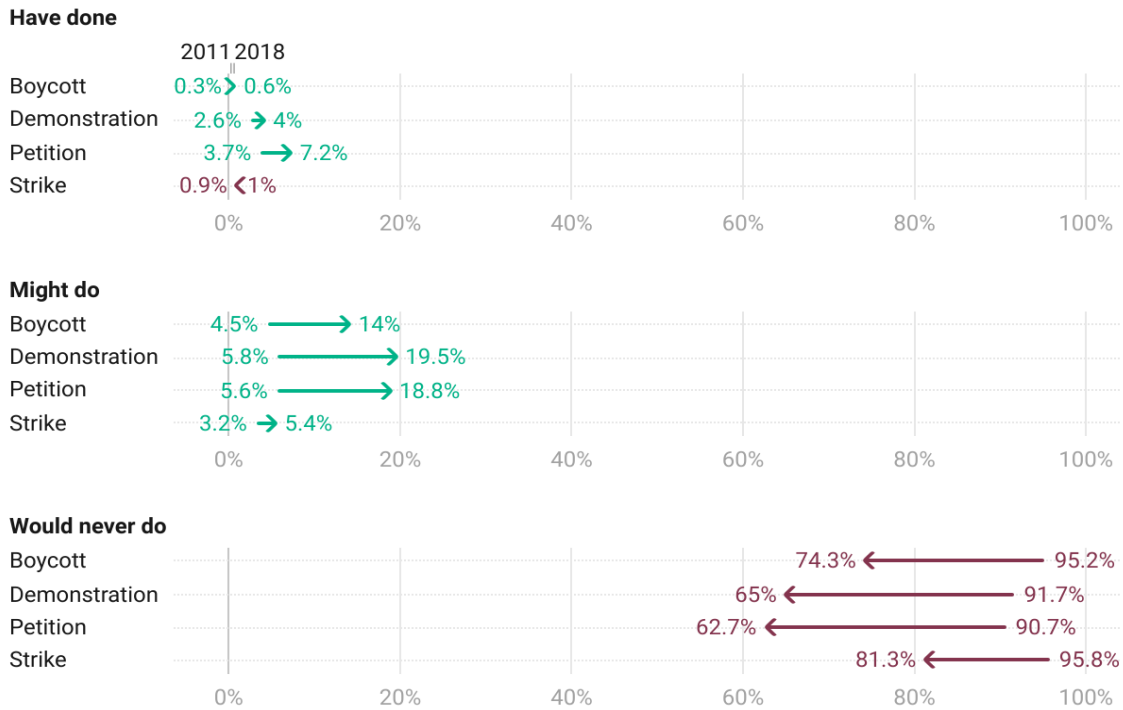


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Azerbaijani respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2011 and 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 8. Political Action: Azerbaijani Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2011 versus 2018

Percentage of Respondents

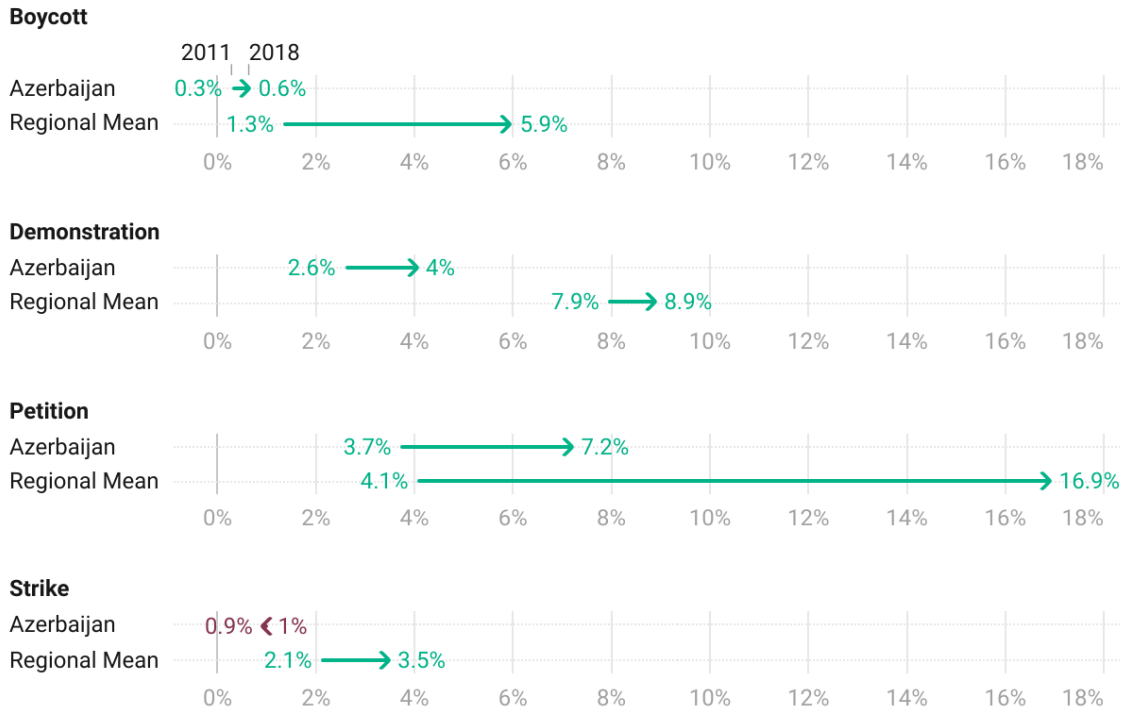


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Azerbaijani respondents reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and strike—and their future willingness to do so in 2011 and 2018. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Political Action: Participation by Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Azerbaijani respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action in 2011 and 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Only 3 percent of Azerbaijani respondents to the 2011 WVS were members of voluntary organizations on average (Table 4), less than half the rate of the regional peers. Political parties were the one exception, as Azerbaijanis reported higher rates of membership (10 percent), surpassing citizens in other E&E countries by 3 percentage points (Figure 10). This high rate of membership in political parties is not an entirely positive indicator for civic space, however, as the President Aliyevs’ New Azerbaijan Party has prevented any opposition from contesting in free and fair elections since 1995.<sup>11</sup> Environmental organizations and consumer groups were the least popular avenues for civic engagement:

<sup>11</sup> Freedom House *Nations in Transit* 2012 - Azerbaijan, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Azerbaijan\\_final.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Azerbaijan_final.pdf)

fewer than one percent of Azerbaijani respondents reported membership in these organizations.

Despite low levels of political activity and organization membership, Azerbaijani citizens' trust in institutions was slightly above average compared to elsewhere in the region 2011 (Table 5). Over half of Azerbaijani respondents to the WVS said they were confident in their country's institutions, on average. Azerbaijan's citizens gave high marks to the military (74 percent), parliament (64 percent) and civil service (63 percent).<sup>12</sup> This concentration of confidence in government bodies diverges from Azerbaijan's Caucus neighbors, who were more confident in religious bodies, and aligns more closely with the Central Asian countries surveyed in the WVS in 2011.<sup>13</sup> Despite comparatively high rates of political party membership, Azerbaijani respondents had relatively lower confidence in political parties (41 percent) which may reflect recognition of the more limited influence of political parties in the country.

Membership levels remained low in 2018, with only 2 percent of Azerbaijanis reporting membership in voluntary organizations on average that year, despite the improved outlook toward political action. In 2018, labor unions narrowly overtook political parties as the most popular type of organization in Azerbaijan, counting 7 and 6 percent of respondents as members respectively. Political parties had the largest drop in reported membership, losing four percentage points between 2011 and 2018, moving from leading the regional average in 2011 to trailing it by two percentage points.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani trust in many institutions improved in 2018 and exceeded the regional average by 18 percentage points. Ninety-two percent of respondents were confident in their military, while police and the civil service were trusted by over 70 percent of citizens. Azerbaijan's religious institutions

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<sup>12</sup> The World Values Survey confidence question includes a general option for "government" in addition to specific branches such as the civil service, courts, parliament, etc. This option led all others in 2011, with over 80 percent of Azerbaijani respondents reporting confidence in the government overall.

<sup>13</sup> Georgia and Armenia both had high confidence in religious organizations (87 and 80 percent, respectively), coupled with low confidence in the general government option (32 and 38 percent, respectively). In Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, however, the general government option led all choices (75 and 89 percent, respectively). All of these nations have confidence in their militaries above 70 percent.

gained the most trust, improving from nearly the country-lowest 46 percent to 70 percent (+24 percentage points).

Political parties and labor unions were two of the four institutions that had declining trust among Azerbaijani respondents between the 2011 and 2018 survey waves (-10 and -2 percentage points, respectively). This is particularly interesting, as those two organization types led the country in membership rates. It is possible that this familiarity backfired, as citizens became more aware of the government's restrictions placed on parties and unions which curbs their ability to wield influence. This dissonance between membership and confidence may also reflect a certain degree of societal pressure to join such institutions, despite low levels of confidence.

Table 4. Azerbaijani Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2018

Voluntary Organization	Membership, 2011	Membership, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	3%	0%	-2.6
Sport or Recreational Organization	2%	1%	-0.9
Art, Music or Educational Organization	2%	1%	-0.8
Labor Union	5%	7%	2.0
Political Party	10%	6%	-4.2
Environmental Organization	1%	1%	0.0
Professional Association	1%	0%	-1.0
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	2%	1%	-1.2
Consumer Organization	1%	0%	-0.5
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	1%	1%	-0.5
Other Organization	1%	0%	-0.3

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Azerbaijani respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2011 and 2020. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

Figure 10. Voluntary Organization Membership: Azerbaijani Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Azerbaijan. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

Table 5. Azerbaijani Confidence in Key Institutions versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018.

Institution	Confidence, 2011	Confidence, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	46%	70%	+23.7
Military	75%	92%	+17.2
Press	51%	53%	+1.4
Labor Unions	45%	42%	-2.5
Police	60%	78%	+17.9
Courts	59%	58%	-1.2
Government	80%	90%	+9.4
Political Parties	41%	31%	-9.7
Parliament	64%	62%	-2.1
Civil Service	63%	72%	+9.3
Environmental Organizations	48%	47%	-1.9

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Azerbaijani respondents that reported confidence in various categories of institutions in 2011 and 2018. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Azerbaijani citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2019.<sup>14</sup> This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>15</sup> Overall, Azerbaijan's civic engagement scores started the period at their highest levels between

<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, given the restrictive environment in Azerbaijan, GWP information is not available for more recent years.

<sup>15</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month? Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a "yes" answer. The country values are then calculated from the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

2010-2012, steadily declining after 2012, falling from a low-moderate score to among the lowest of the 17 E&E region countries.

In 2012, Azerbaijan had a civic engagement score of 30 points, with 17 percent of respondents reporting that they donated to charity, 28 percent volunteered, and 44 percent helped strangers. Yet, in contrast to growing reported interest in politics and willingness to engage in future political action, Azerbaijanis' participation in apolitical forms of civic engagement declined substantially after 2012. By 2019, Azerbaijan's civic engagement score dropped to 17 points, and fewer than 10 percent of Azerbaijani respondents reportedly gave to charity or volunteered that year.<sup>16</sup> Some of this shift in interest from apolitical to political forms of engagement may be a reaction to increased visibility on government corruption and heavy-handedness in containing public protests beginning in 2012. That year, journalist Khadija Ismayilova exposed the Aliyev family's corruption in a series of articles via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty<sup>17</sup> and the government "crushed protests in the lead-up to Eurovision."<sup>18</sup>

Another potential insight into this decline is the fact that Azerbaijanis' Civic Engagement Index is strongly and *negatively* correlated with the nation's GDP.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere in the E&E region, we have found that civic engagement positively correlates with GDP, presumably as citizens feel more secure in committing time and effort to assist their neighbors when they have greater economic security. Although we cannot say for certain, Azerbaijan's divergence from this general trend could reflect a disconnect between the country's oil-based gross domestic product and the standard of living of individual citizens, of which Azerbaijanis may have become more greatly aware in light of growing scandals of government corruption.

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<sup>16</sup> 9.7 percent of Azerbaijanis reported donating to charity, 8.2 percent reported volunteering, while 34.3 percent reported helping strangers.

<sup>17</sup>

[https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan\\_gold-field\\_contract\\_awarded\\_to\\_presidents\\_family/24569192.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_gold-field_contract_awarded_to_presidents_family/24569192.html), [https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan\\_first\\_family\\_build\\_eurovision\\_arena/24575761.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_first_family_build_eurovision_arena/24575761.html)

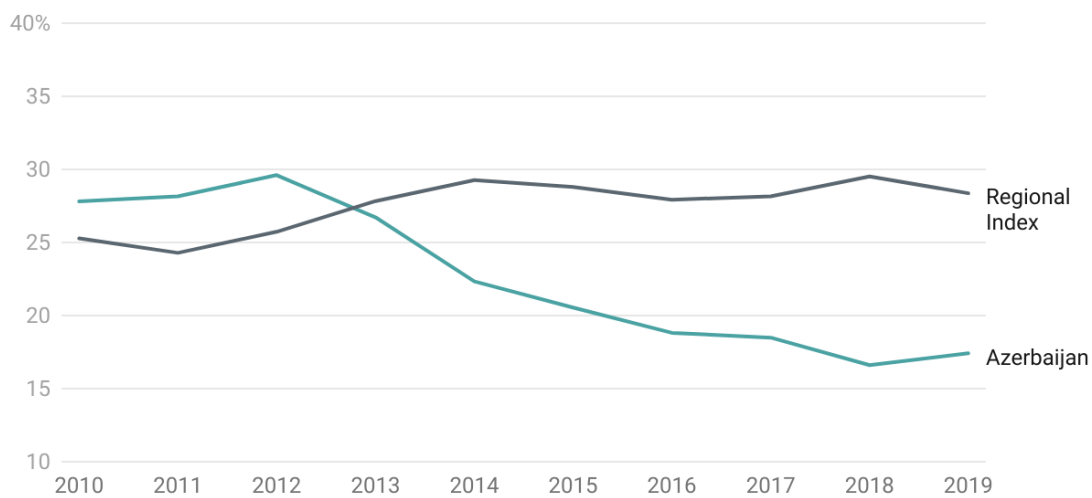
<sup>18</sup> Freedom House *Nations in Transit 2013 - Azerbaijan*, [https://www.refworld.org/topic,50ffbce528c,50ffbce52ef,51c168163e2,0,FREEHOU,ANNUALREPORT,AZE.html#\\_ftn34](https://www.refworld.org/topic,50ffbce528c,50ffbce52ef,51c168163e2,0,FREEHOU,ANNUALREPORT,AZE.html#_ftn34)

<sup>19</sup> The CE Index correlates with GDP (constant Azerbaijani Manat) at -0.920\*\*\*, p = 0.000, charity correlates at -0.956\*\*\*, p = 0.000, while volunteering correlates at -0.778\*, p = 0.010.



One final note is that this apparent downward trajectory for apolitical forms of civic engagement may have reversed following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as has been observed elsewhere in the region; however, we have no data to confirm whether this is the case in Azerbaijan specifically. Although Gallup has not conducted its World Poll in Azerbaijan since November 2019, there was a near universal uptick in civic engagement in 2020 and 2021 evident in other E&E countries in 2020 and 2021. In the face of COVID-19 lockdowns, limitations on public gatherings, and constrained individual and public resources, citizens across the region increased, rather than decreased, their civic contributions on the three measures captured in the GWP: helping strangers, volunteering, and giving to charity.

Figure 11. Civic Engagement Index: Azerbaijan versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This graph shows how scores for Azerbaijan varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2019, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2019. While the poll was conducted in other countries in 2020 and 2021, data was not available for Azerbaijan after 2019.*

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Azerbaijan

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Azerbaijan (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan's Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 11 known Azerbaijani entities via 9 civic space-relevant projects in Azerbaijan during the period of January 2015 to August 2021. This level of engagement is noticeably lower than Moscow's projectized support to civic space actors in many other countries throughout the region. The composition of these activities further underscores differences in the Kremlin's dealings in Azerbaijan: nearly half (44 percent) of its projects invested in broader based institutional development (i.e., the regulatory environment for civic space), as opposed to its preferred modus operandi of building relationships with individual civic actors in other countries. There was an uptick in the number of new projects between 2018 and 2020, though no new activities were identified in 2021 (Figure 12).

## Figure 12. Russian Projects Supporting Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (5)	Institutional Development (4)
2015	1	0
2016	0	0
2017	0	0
2018	1	1
2019	1	3
2020	2	0
2021	0	0

Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. There were no civic space relevant projects meeting our criteria in 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

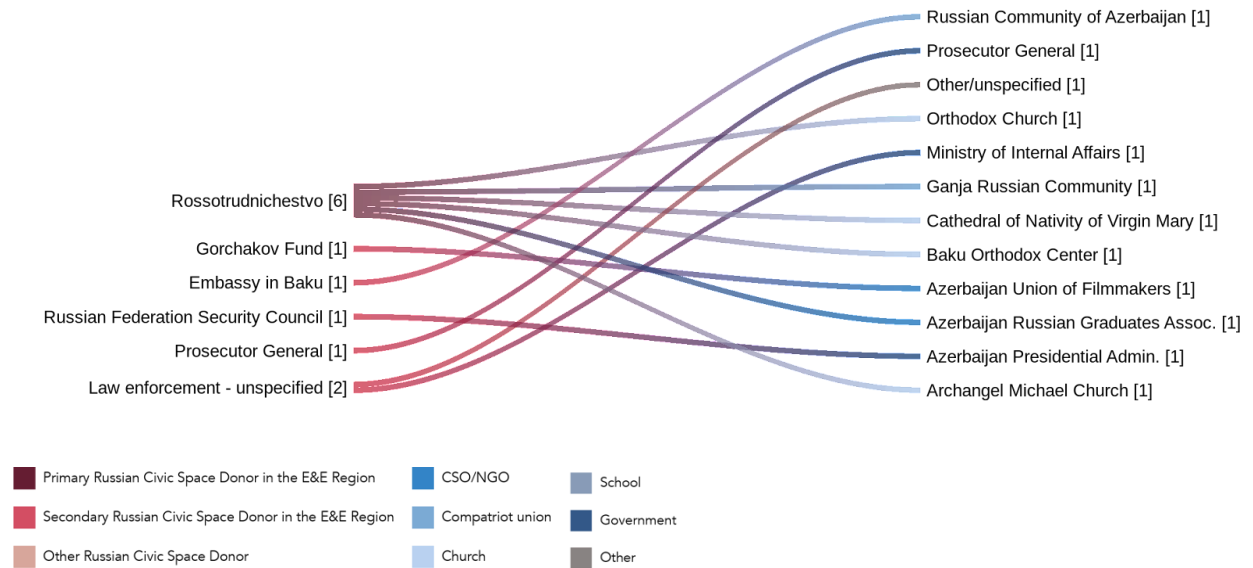
The Kremlin routed its engagement in Azerbaijan through six different state channels (Figure 13), including the Russian embassy in Baku, the security services, the Russian Prosecutor General, Russia’s Security Council, and the Gorchakov Fund, which aims to promote Russian culture abroad and provides projectized support to non-governmental organizations to bolster Russia’s image abroad. Security cooperation was the most prominent theme, with civil society development featuring as a supporting theme rather than the primary purpose of all but one of these entities. However, not all Russian state organs were equally important. The most prolific backer of civic space-relevant projects in Azerbaijan is Rossotrudnichestvo<sup>20</sup>—an autonomous agency under the Ministry

<sup>20</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.

of Foreign Affairs with a mandate to promote political and economic cooperation abroad—associated with one-third of the Kremlin’s overtures to Azerbaijani civic actors or regulators. Rossotrudnichestvo’s projects in Azerbaijan emphasized Russian Orthodox ties and the culture of the “Russian World.”

Figure 13. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Azerbaijani Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects such that thicker lines represent a larger volume of projects and thinner lines a smaller volume. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

### 3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan’s Civic Space

Moscow heavily relies on diaspora or religious ties in Azerbaijan. Four of the nine identified projects in Azerbaijan involved the Russian Embassy or Rossotrudnichestvo donating to Orthodox churches or channeling aid through the informal, likely Russian-organized, “Russian communities” of Baku and Ganja. Regulators of Azerbaijan’s civic space, such as the Ministry of Internal

Affairs, the Prosecutor General, and the Office of the President, also benefited from the Kremlin's attention.

Approximately one-third of the Azerbaijani recipient organizations worked in the education and culture sector (4 organizations), many with an emphasis on Russian language and culture promotion while others facilitate vocational training or patriotic education. Religious groups (i.e., churches) garnered substantial attention from the Russian government, accounting for an additional third of the recipients of projectized support.

Azerbaijan's lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may have diminished Kremlin outreach to Azerbaijani civic actors. The last identified Russian-backed civic space support activity occurred in April 2020, shortly after Azerbaijan began its lockdowns, but before major spikes of infection in the country.<sup>21</sup> This final activity was itself a COVID response, as the Embassy supported the Russian Community compatriot union's efforts to distribute food packages to vulnerable citizens in Baku.<sup>22</sup> This could also reflect a shift in Moscow's attention to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and deploying peacekeepers to the region following the uptick of hostilities in 2021. However, interestingly, we did not find any evidence of Kremlin attempts to channel financial or in-kind support to civic space actors in the occupied territory, as it commonly does in other territories.

Geographically, Russian state-overtures were oriented towards Baku or at least organizations based in the Azerbaijani capital, which received two-thirds of all projects (see Figure 14). Two projects were directed towards unspecified border regions and the remaining project to Ganja, Azerbaijan's second largest city.

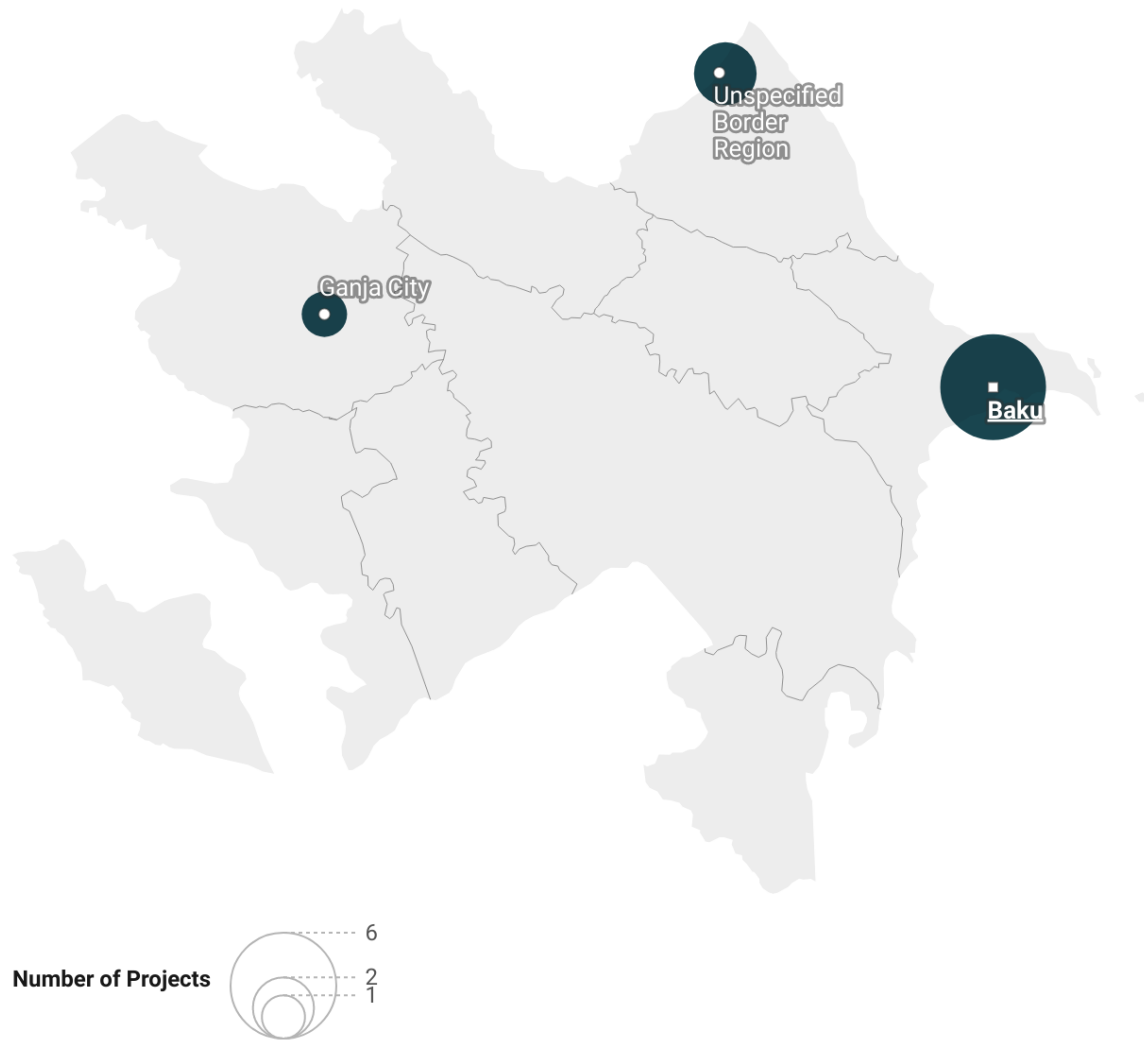
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<sup>21</sup>

<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/azerbaijan/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://turan.az/ext/news/2020/4/free/Social/en/123320.htm/001>

Figure 14. Locations of Russian Support to Azerbaijani Civic Space  
Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Azerbaijan. 2 Russian projects were directed to border cooperation missions, though the exact location of these activities was unspecified. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Azerbaijan's Civic Space

Moscow's engagement with Azerbaijani civic space actors is extremely opaque; however, what little we have been able to glean from examining its

project-specific activities is that the Kremlin typically does not directly transfer money to its beneficiaries. In fact, none of the nine Russian state-backed projects identified between 2015 and 2020 were explicitly coded as providing “funding” to an Azerbaijani counterpart institution. Instead, the Russian government relies on supplying various forms of non-financial “support” such as training, technical assistance, and other in-kind contributions to its Azerbaijani partners. Interestingly, the Kremlin has placed substantially less emphasis on event-related support in Azerbaijan than has been observed in other countries such as Armenia or Moldova.

In a departure from its youth-focused strategy in other countries, Moscow appears to rely more heavily on pre-existing cultural channels to exert influence over Azerbaijani civic space actors. The Orthodox Christian community in Azerbaijan attracted a substantial share of the Kremlin’s attention, despite only counting 2-3 percent of the population among its numbers in a predominantly Muslim nation. Nearly two-thirds of the Orthodox community in Azerbaijan are over 40 years of age and a quarter consider themselves to be pensioners. Other Kremlin-backed activities continued this trend of targeting older populations such as distributing food packages to “veterans of labor and the war, single mothers and pensioners.”<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, there are a few youth-focused activities which buck this general trend such as a script competition and cultural festival for school-aged children.

In addition to direct support to civic actors, the Russian government also funneled support and material to Azerbaijani law enforcement in 2018 and 2019, conducting four projects to increase cross-border cooperation between the two countries (Figure 14). In June 2018, Azerbaijan and Russia conducted joint training operations along their border regions with unspecified “law enforcement bodies.” In June 2019, Russia and Azerbaijan deepened this relationship with an additional round of joint training operations along the border, the signing of a security cooperation plan to facilitate information exchange and consultations between their security services, and the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two countries’ Prosecutor General’s offices. These activities influence both the norms and practical capabilities (i.e.,

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<sup>23</sup> <https://turaz.az/ext/news/2020/4/free/Social/en/123320.htm/001>

surveillance, prosecution, police operations) of those who effectively regulate Azerbaijan's civic space in ways that could have cascading effects.

## 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Azerbaijani civic actors 278 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Twenty percent of these mentions (56 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining 80 percent (222 instances) focused on foreign and intergovernmental actors operating in Azerbaijan's civic space. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Azerbaijani citizens, we also analyzed 185 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with Ukraine: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. In this section, we examine Russian state media coverage of domestic and external civic space actors, how this has evolved over time, and the portrayal of democratic institutions and Western powers to Azerbaijani audiences.

### 3.2.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors

Roughly one-third (18 instances) of the Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Azerbaijan's civic space referred to specific groups by name. Domestic actors, writ large, represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types—from political parties and media outlets to civil society organizations and grassroots community movements. Formal political parties (9 mentions) or looser political movements and activists (5 mentions) accounted for the majority of references to specific Azerbaijani civic space actors. In contrast to what has been observed in other countries such as Armenia and Moldova, there was not much difference between the number of mentions per actor. Most organizations appeared only once, except for the Musavat Party which was referenced twice.

Russian state media mentions of specific Azerbaijani civic space actors by name were most often neutral (67 percent) in tone and the remaining coverage was evenly split (16 percent of instances each) between somewhat negative and positive coverage. Overall, Azerbaijani political parties tended to receive more negative mentions than other types of civic space actors. That said, the intensity



of these views did not appear to be strongly held and most coverage was moderate in tone. There were no “extremely positive” or “extremely negative” mentions of any named civic space actors in the time period.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made thirty-eight more generalized references to domestic non-governmental organizations, protesters, opposition groups, or groups and individuals in Azerbaijan during the same period. Russian state media sentiment towards these unnamed domestic civic space actors was neutral (47 percent) at worst or positive (53 percent) at best. There were far fewer explicit political actors in this group as compared to the named domestic actors.

Only 20 percent of Russian state media’s coverage of the civic space in Azerbaijan pertains to domestic actors. This could reflect Azerbaijan’s highly restrictive environment that makes it difficult for domestic civic space actors to organize and express themselves. However, given that significant events in Azerbaijan’s civic space were not covered by Russian media, it may be that the Kremlin is more interested in shaping the narrative around foreign and intergovernmental actors in Azerbaijan.

### 3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Azerbaijan’s Civic Space

Russian state media devoted a lot of attention to external actors in Azerbaijan’s civic space. We recorded 222 relevant mentions in total, the vast majority referring to actors involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process after renewed hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan broke out in the region in late 2020. It should be noted that we excluded general articles about the conflict and only included a subset of articles most relevant to civic space, including references to peacekeepers and CSOs on the ground preserving the ability of citizens to carry on their daily lives, the role of intergovernmental organizations or CSOs involved in brokering the peace process, as well as provisions to protect journalists’ access and safety to report from the conflict zone.

Most frequently (Table 6), Russian state media referred to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (25 mentions), the United Nations (14 mentions), Russian peacekeepers (88 mentions), International Committee of the Red Cross (13 mentions), and Human Rights Watch (8 mentions). Mentions of external actors were generally neutral (70 percent) or positive (24 percent) in tone; however, there were 12 instances where foreign or intergovernmental actors attracted somewhat or extremely negative coverage from Russian state media.

Negative references were most often oriented towards Western CSOs or intergovernmental organizations associated with the West, though these actors also attracted positive or neutral coverage from Kremlin-affiliated media outlets. Instead, the emphasis of Russian state media coverage tended to orient more energy towards portraying a positive picture of Russian peacekeepers (26 positive mentions) and non-governmental actors in brokering peace and restoring stability to people’s lives.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Azerbaijan by Sentiment

External Civic Actor	Extremely Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Extremely Negative	Grand Total
Russian Peacekeepers	14	12	60	2	0	88
Organization for the Security and Co-operation of Europe (OSCE) / Including Mentions of the Minsk Group and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights	0	8	14	2	1	25
United Nations / Including Mentions of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, UN High Commissioner	0	4	9	1	0	14

for Refugees, UN Human Rights Office, and UNESCO						
International Committee of the Red Cross	0	5	6	0	2	13
Human Rights Watch (HRW)	0	2	6	0	0	8

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Azerbaijan between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Azerbaijan’s Civic Space over Time

In the earlier years of the period of interest, when Nagorno-Karabakh was still a frozen conflict, there were several early spikes in media mentions in 2015 and 2017 that appear to coincide three important episodes in Azerbaijan’s civic space: (i) the June 2015 European Games hosted in Baku, when many international NGOs sought to spotlight the country’s human rights violations; (ii) November 2015 parliamentary elections held amidst an opposition boycott; and (iii) the “Azerbaijan Laundromat” scandal in 2017 sparked by an investigative journalist’s probe into corruption (see Figure 15).

At the outset, in comparing Russian media sentiment in these two pivotal years, it appears that Moscow took a more favorable stance towards Azerbaijan in 2017. This observation is made with the caveat that it is based on very few articles. Azerbaijan and Russia celebrated 25 years of diplomatic ties in 2017 and the frayed relationship between Azerbaijan and Europe over the “Azerbaijan Laundromat” scandal in the same year may have provided Russia with the opportunity to step in and build stronger ties with Baku.

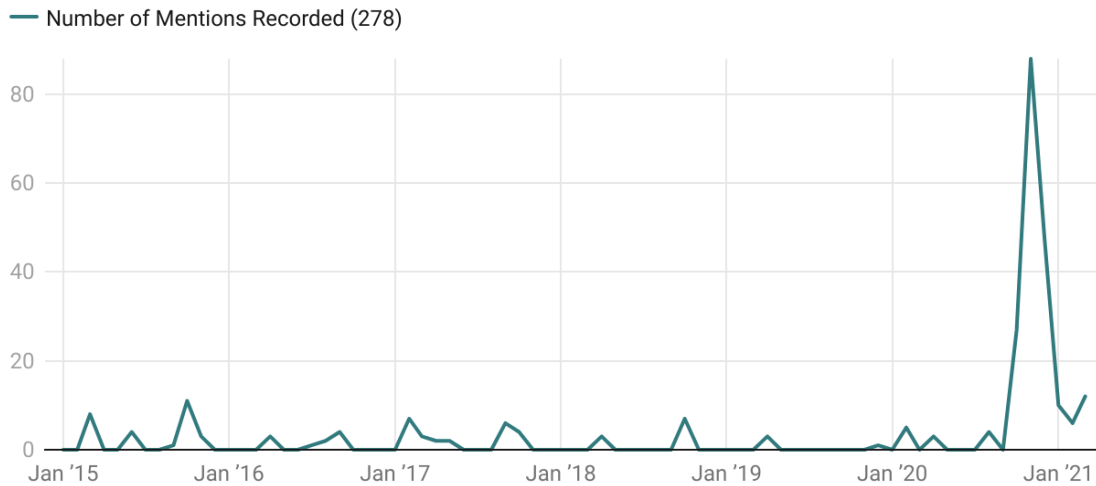
Nevertheless, some significant events in Azeri civic space are conspicuously missing from Russian state media coverage, at least in the case of the two outlets we examined. Notable non-mentions include the mass protests in

opposition to the constitutional amendments in September 2016 and the court-ordered blocking of the websites of Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani Service, Radio Liberty newspaper, Turan TV channel, Times of Azerbaijan TV program and Meydan TV in May 2017.

As stated previously, Russian state media coverage increased exponentially in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021; however, the focus of this coverage sought to positively portray and legitimize the contribution of Russian peacekeepers alongside actors such as the OSCE, UN, Red Cross, and Human Rights Watch for helping to bring peace and stability to the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Figure 15. Russian State Media Mentions of Azerbaijani Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Azerbaijani civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Azerbaijani citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Azerbaijan.<sup>24</sup> Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced all five keywords from January 2015 to March 2021 (Table 7). Russian state media mentioned the United States (132 instances), NATO (24 instances), the “West” (15 instances), the European Union (13 instances), and democracy (1 instance) with reference to Azerbaijan during this period. Nearly one-fifth of these mentions (19 percent) were negative, while the majority (64 percent) were neutral.

Table 7. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Grand Total
NATO	1	5	8	10	24
European Union	1	2	8	2	13
United States	3	12	100	17	132
Democracy	0	1	0	0	1
West	4	7	2	2	15

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, democracy, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Azerbaijan. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants*

Russian state media mentioned the United States most frequently in reference to Azerbaijan. Seventy-six percent of these mentions were neutral, due in large part to the frequency of mentions to the OSCE Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by

<sup>24</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

the United States, France, and Russia.<sup>25</sup> In the remaining coverage, the Kremlin was split between positive (13 percent) and negative (11 percent) mentions of the U.S. The negative stories spiked in the 2015, when the Kremlin published repeating stories claiming that the U.S. was punishing Azerbaijan for not recognizing the Armenian Genocide,<sup>26</sup> and in late November 2020, when Sputnik and TASS pushed out a series of stories claiming that the U.S. wanted to undo a Russian-brokered peace agreement in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>27</sup> This spate of negative coverage came less than two days after the Russian outlets published a series of moderately warm articles quoting the State Department's recognition of Russian involvement in brokering a peace.<sup>28</sup> These articles, as well as some positive coverage of the OSCE Minsk Group, comprised most of the positive coverage of the U.S.

The European Union received generally neutral coverage (62 percent) as well, particularly via a series of articles re-quoting official EU statements on the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>29</sup> Other largely neutral coverage related to Bulgaria holding meetings with the EU and Azerbaijan on gas supplies, though one article included a shot from Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov intimating that the bloc may negotiate in bad faith or walk back a deal:

"Now we need to hold trilateral meetings with everyone, who would like this - with Azerbaijan, with Turkmenistan, with Russia. And a representative of the European Union should attend such meetings, for sure, to avoid receiving a letter from Brussels in the future, banning the project."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/108306>

<sup>26</sup> "West taking revenge on Azerbaijan, Turkey for not joining anti-Russian union - Baku." TASS. Published April 16, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> "West Wants to Derail Karabakh Ceasefire Deal - Russian Foreign Intelligence." Sputnik News Service. Published November 18, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> "US, France Recognize Russia's Role in Karabakh Ceasefire - State Dept. Official." Sputnik News Service. Published November 16, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> "EU Urges Armenia, Azerbaijan to Deescalate Border Confrontation, Resume OSCE Monitoring." Sputnik News Service. July 12, 2020.

"Armenian Foreign Minister Talks Nagorno-Karabakh With EU's Borrell." Sputnik News Service. October 4, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> "Bulgaria Should Hold Trilateral Meetings With EU, Gas Suppliers - Prime Minister." Sputnik News Service. September 5, 2019.

The West received coverage that skewed most negative (73 percent of mentions). The most extreme of these articles were part of a wave of propaganda following the Azerbaijani-Armenian ceasefire in 2018. Similar to the negative coverage of the United States, TASS and Sputnik published stories claiming that the West was working to undo the tenuous peace.<sup>31</sup> The Kremlin also put out media stories seeking to discredit Western nations in the early stages of the conflict and set itself up as a competent and impartial mediator.<sup>32</sup>

In a departure from Kremlin media across the region, NATO attracted primarily positive (42 percent of mentions) and neutral coverage (33 percent of mentions) from Russian state media. The majority of these mentions were connected to the September 2017 and April 2018 meetings between NATO and Russian leadership in Baku.<sup>33</sup> While these articles did not praise NATO's strategic positioning or ideals, they were generally in support of the summits between rival military powers. Unique to Azerbaijan, the Russian media appeared to frequently play on the country's historical ties to NATO-member Turkey, which appeared in 15 percent of the articles that contained one of the five keywords. These articles ranged from the positive, when discussing the normalization of relations between Ankara and Moscow,<sup>34</sup> to the negative, when TASS claimed that the "West" was targeting Turkey and Azerbaijan for continuing to deny the Armenian Genocide.<sup>35</sup>

The term "democracy" received just one negative mention, when TASS quoted Kremlin administration chief Sergei Ivanov's "recommendation" to the U.S. to "think twice before taking any steps to promote democracy in the world."<sup>36</sup> The reference is illustrative of a common theme of Kremlin media coverage

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<sup>31</sup> "West stirring the pot to disrupt Nagorno-Karabakh agreements - Russian official." TASS. November 18, 2020.

"West Wants to Derail Karabakh Ceasefire Deal - Russian Foreign Intelligence." Sputnik News Service. November 18, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> "ANALYSIS: Russia Should Mediate Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Amid U.S. Alienation of Azerbaijan." Sputnik News Service. April 5, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> "Pavel-Gerasimov meeting in Baku demonstrates mutual interest of NATO, Russia to keep military contacts - alliance representatives." TASS. Published September 7, 2017.

"Top Russian, NATO military officials to discuss Syria issue." TASS. Published April 19, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> NATO Leaders Welcome Moscow-Ankara Ties Mending - Turkish Ex-Ambassador." Sputnik News Service. Published July 9, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> "West taking revenge on Azerbaijan, Turkey for not joining the anti-Russian union - Baku." TASS. Published April 16, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> "TASS daytime roundup 08:00-19:00." TASS. June 21, 2015.

throughout the region which attempts to portray American democracy promotion efforts as flawed, untenable, and self-interested, instead of representing a commitment to the self-determination of citizens around the world.

In sum, Russian state media was largely disinterested in domestic actors in Azerbaijan's civic space, demonstrating a revealed preference to orient its media coverage to selecting cover external actors in ways that amplify the Kremlin's preferred narratives. One of those narratives is depicting Russia as a ready and able partner in bringing peace and stability, particularly with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same, Russian state media oriented negative coverage to Western nations in a bid to discredit them as reliable, trustworthy partners in the peace process.



## 4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Azerbaijan and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Azerbaijan and discredit voices wary of its regional ambitions.

The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in mutually reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S., EU, and NATO, as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy. It emphasized security cooperation to build relationships with host government agencies responsible for regulating civic space and cultural programming to emphasize Russian Orthodox ties and the "Russian World." In parallel, Russian state media made a substantial effort to discredit opposition political parties, position Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh as bringing stability to the region, and portray Western nations as unreliable partners in the peace process.

Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org).

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from three primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Azerbaijan; (ii) RefWorld database of documents and news articles pertaining to human rights and interactions with civilian law enforcement in Azerbaijan operated by UNHCR; and (iii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions. Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

Survey data on citizen perceptions of civic space were collected from three sources: the World Values Survey Wave 6, the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021, and the Gallup World Poll (2010-2021). These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the two surveys and the exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 6 in Azerbaijan was conducted during December 2011 with a nationally representative sample of 1002 randomly selected adults

residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>37</sup> The documentation does not specify the language that the survey was conducted in. Research team provided an estimated error rate of 3.2%. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>38</sup> The E&E region countries included in WVS Wave 6, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries.

Regional means for the WVS Wave 6 question "Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes" were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 6 could select whether they were an "Active member," "Inactive member," or "Don't belong." The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the "Other community group" cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in "Art, music or educational organizations," "Environmental organizations," "Professional associations," "Church or other religious organizations," "Consumer

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

organizations," "Sport or recreational associations," "Self-help or mutual aid groups," and "Other organizations."

The confidence indicator uses responses to an WVS Wave 6 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to WVS 6 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," or "None at all." The "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" options were collapsed into a binary "Confident" indicator, while "Not very much" and "None at all" options were collapsed into a "Not confident" indicator.<sup>39</sup>

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 7 in Azerbaijan was conducted in Azerbaijani and Russian between November and December 2018 with a nationally representative sample of 1276 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>40</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable "computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>41</sup>

The E&E region countries included in EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

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<sup>39</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294  
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<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>

<sup>41</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.70110>

Regional means for the EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. We collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to an EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to EVS 5 and WVS 7 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2010-2021, except for the countries that did not complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens' willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: "Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Azerbaijan's country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

### 5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. We also reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where

possible, confirm reports from news sources. While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, many more provided support through in-kind cooperation or technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

## 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Azerbaijan. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news. Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.