

Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
Monthly Human Rights Developments
In Azerbaijan
June 2025

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4. Increased Number of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan

1. Members of Both Main Oppositional Parties Targeted

On June 11, the Bilasuvar District Court sentenced three members of the opposition Musavat Party, **Aladdin Alasgarli**, **Jabir Valiyev** (2 years 3 months) and **Goshar Nurali** (2 years) to prison terms charged with Article 221.2.1 (hooliganism, committed by a group) of the Criminal Code (CC) related to a party event in late 2024, which the party asserts was a politically motivated provocation.¹

Despite medical evidence of Alasgarli's injuries, only the provocateur was fined, while the activists were imprisoned. Separately, on June 24, 2025, **Agshin Abdullayev**, member of Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan's (PFPA) Oghuz branch, received 30 days of administrative detention after being summoned to a police station.² The PFPA claims Abdullayev was 'slandered' due to his criticisms, though specific details remain undisclosed and unconfirmed by official sources.

2. Political Prisoners Face Continued Mistreatment and Threats in Detention

2.1 Imprisoned Trade Unionists Faced Torture and Mistreatment in Detention Facilities

On June 6, Workers Table Unions Confederation (Confederation) reported that its imprisoned chairperson, **Afiaddin Mammadov**, has reportedly faced threats from the management of Penitentiary Facility No.2.³ These threats came after he publicly exposed inhumane detention conditions, including severe overcrowding, unsanitary facilities with rat infestations in kitchen areas, and insufficient access to toilets.⁴ Mammadov's family shared a letter detailing these issues, which subsequently led to threats of transfer to a higher-security prison and psychological pressure. Another imprisoned member, **Elvin Mustafayev**, has reportedly been subjected to torture with special cruelty Penitentiary Facility No.6, where he was transferred and placed in solitary confinement after starting a hunger strike on May 6 with prison officials even petitioning for his transfer to the high-security Gobustan Prison, a move widely perceived as retaliatory.⁵ Allegedly, upon his arrival, the facility head Fariz Aliyev and two regime officers slapped and inflicted severe physical torture, resulting in a ruptured eardrum and loss of consciousness from heavy blows to his head and body, with Mustafayev still suffering from an ear infection and severe pain over a month later.⁶ The Confederation demanded immediate action from the Ombudsman's

¹ Abzas Media, 'On June 11, three members of the Musavat Party were sentenced on charges of hooliganism', (June 2025), <https://abzas.info/az/2025/6/musavatn-3-uzvu-barsind-hok9449f58a-4/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

² Radio Liberty, 'Our Member received 30 days of administrative detention', (June 2025), AXCP: Gənc üzvümüzə 30 sutka verilib <https://www.azadliq.org/a/33454674.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

³ Radio Liberty, 'Afiaddin Mammadov is allegedly threatened in prison', (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/afieddin-mammadov-tecridxanada-durum/33429744.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

⁴ Ibid

⁵ OC Media, 'Convicted union activist faces transfer to stricter prison for 'acting like opposition figure'', (June 2025), <https://oc-media.org/convicted-union-activist-faces-transfer-to-stricter-prison-for-acting-like-opposition-figure/>

⁶ Toplum TV, 'Elvin Mustafayev allegedly faced torture with special cruelty', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pelvin-mustafayev-in-xuumsusi-amansizliqla-zorakiliqa-meruz-qaldigi-deyilirp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

office and the Penitentiary Service for the accountability of the named officials. Both Mammadov (arrested on 14 January 2025) and Mustafayev (arrested 31 January 2024) are serving prison terms on drug-related charges, which both domestic and international watchdogs consider as fabricated to silence the union activists.⁷

2.2 Toplum TV Journalists Protests Deteriorating Health amid Dire Prison Conditions

Journalist **Farid Ismayilov**, detained in the ongoing *Toplum TV* case, has protested his deteriorating health and the difficulties of court transfers, informing the judge on June 23 that low blood sugar and lack of food before sessions cause headaches and blurred vision with his family also reporting negligent IV fluid administration and his suffering from migraines.⁸ Another *Toplum TV* journalist, **Ali Zeynal**, has written an open letter to Justice Minister Farid Ahmadov, detailing dire conditions in Baku Detention Facility, where attempts to address issues with the facility chief have been ignored, with officials readily acting on fabricated complaints against him.⁹ Zeynal and Ismayilov are among 10 individuals arrested in '*Toplum TV*' case on 6 March 2024 and 17 January 2025, respectively, with defendants facing up to 12 years of prison time in criminal cases widely regarded as politically motivated.¹⁰

2.3 Abzas Media Director Ulvi Hasanli on Hunger Strike Amid Allegations of Torture and Deteriorating Health

On July 1, 2025, *Abzas Media* director **Ulvi Hasanli**, informed his lawyer that he has been on a hunger strike since June 26, 2025, and placed in a disciplinary cell at Umbaki prison, leading to significant weight loss and deteriorating health. He reported experiencing torture, pressure, and threats for his hunger strike, asserting that he has been denied clean clothes, medical examination, and family visits.¹¹ Hasanli, who alleges physical assault by prison officers, demands to see his family and protests his transfer to Umbaki prison, vowing to continue his hunger strike until these demands are met. Other *Abzas Media* journalists plan to join his protest if his demands are not met.¹² Hasanli was sentenced to 9 years in prison on June 20, 2025, in the *Abzas Media* case, on charges widely regarded as politically motivated.¹³

2.4 War Veteran and Activist Haji Valiyev Alleges Torture in Solitary Confinement

⁷ Free Anar Mammadov', 'Afiaddin Mammadov', accessed 1 April 2025, <https://free-anar.site/political-prisoners/afiaddin-mammadov/>; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'We Try to Stay Invisible', (October 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/08/we-try-stay-invisible/azerbaijans-escalating-crackdown-critics-and-civil-society>;

⁸ Toplum TV, 'Journalist Farid Ismayilov protests transfer to court due to deteriorating health', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pferid-ismayilov-sehhetine-goumlre-mehkemeye-aporilmasina-etiraz-edirnbspp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

⁹ Toplum TV, 'Ali Zeynal addresses an open letter to Justice Minister', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/olke/peli-zeynal-edliyye-nazirine-accediliq-mektub-yazibp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

¹⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists', 'Azerbaijani police raid Toplum TV, detain journalists over alleged currency smuggling', (January 2025), <https://cpj.org/2024/03/azerbaijani-police-raid-toplum-tv-detain-journalists-over-alleged-currency-smuggling/>

¹¹ Abzas Media, 'Ulvi Hasanli reports torture and solitary confinement after hunger strike in prison', (June 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/6/ulvi-hasanli-reports-torture-af4249da7-f/>

¹² Abzas Media, 'Ulvi Hasanli vows to continue hunger strike, Abzas Media's women journalists in prison to join in solidarity', (June 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/7/ulvi-hasanli-to-continue-hungec29aa8a1-2/>

¹³ Abzas Media, 'European Deputies Call on Ilham Aliyev to Release Political Prisoners', (April 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/4/european-deputies-call-on-ilha9815fce4-d/>

OC Media', 'EU says imprisonment of Azerbaijan's Abzas Media team a 'worrying development'', (June 2025), <https://oc-media.org/eu-says-imprisonment-of-azerbaijans-abzas-media-team-a-worrying-development/>

On June 30, 2025, lawyer Agil Layij reported that **Haji Valiyev**, a veteran and activist, was tortured in solitary confinement from June 23-27, 2025, at Baku Detention Facility, where he was beaten by officers for allegedly refusing to sign a disciplinary violation document, causing head injuries.¹⁴ Valiyev also stated that he has been on a hunger strike since June 21, 2025, protesting his unfair arrest. Haji Valiyev, who is known for highlighting the issues of war victims' families and veterans, was detained on March 31, 2025, and charged under 221.3 (hooliganism with use of weapons) and 186.1 (intentional damage to property causing significant loss) of the CC, following the incident with police.¹⁵ He insists on innocence and states that his arrest is due to his public activism.

3. Politically Sensitive Trials Continued in June

3.1 Abzas Media Journalists Sentenced to Lengthy Jail Terms

In June, two final trials were held in the ongoing *Abzas Media* case. On June 10, only one defendant **Hafiz Babali** delivered his final statement, and defense lawyers presented their legal arguments in the ongoing trial.¹⁶ On June 20, in the Baku Court on Grave Crimes, **Ulvi Hasanli**, **Sevinj Abbasova (Vagifgizi)**, **Hafiz Babali**, and **Farid Mehralizada** each received 9 years, while **Nargiz Absalamova** and **Elnara Gasimova** were sentenced to 8 years, and **Mahammad Kekalov** to 7 years and 6 months charged under Articles 206.4 (smuggling by organized group in prior collusion) and 6 other articles of the CC.¹⁷ The journalists consistently maintained that their prosecution was politically motivated, directly resulting from their corruption investigations involving President Ilham Aliyev and his inner circle. Defendants, domestic and international watchdogs consider the case as politically motivated retaliation for their investigative reporting.¹⁸

3.2 Court Sentences Bahruz Samadov to 15 Years Amid Suicide Attempt and Hunger Strike

On June 23, 2025, Azerbaijani political researcher, peace activist, and PhD student **Bahruz Samadov** was sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Baku Court on Grave Crimes charged under Article 274 (treason) of the CC, despite his lawyer stating the charges were unproven.¹⁹ In protest of the severe verdict, his grandmother reported that he attempted to hang himself and has been on a hunger strike since June 19, 2025, despite requests to cease.²⁰ Samadov, who had been detained on August 21, 2024, on allegations of cooperating with Armenian Intelligence, denied the accusations. Known for his critical writings on the Azerbaijani government and his research on

¹⁴ Toplum TV, 'Haji Valiyev faced torture in solitary confinement cell', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pvekil-haci-veliyeve-karserde-isgence-verilibp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

¹⁵ Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, 'Lawyer: "The court knows well what suffering Haji Valiyev has endured"', (May 2025), <https://www.irfs.org/az/news-feed/lawyer-the-court-knows-well-what-suffering-haji-valiyev-has-endured/>

¹⁶ Abzas Media, 'Lawyers deliver closing arguments in Abzas Media trial', (June 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/6/lawyers-deliver-closing-argume415b0d3d-5/>

¹⁷ Abzas Media, 'Up to 9 years in prison for Abzas journalists: "The verdict came from Ilham Aliyev. He is the 'Reliable Source' behind this case"', (June 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/6/up-to-9-years-in-prison-for-ab904d6071-2/>

¹⁸ Ibid (n13)

OC Media, 'EU says imprisonment of Azerbaijan's Abzas Media team a 'worrying development'', (June 2025), <https://oc-media.org/eu-says-imprisonment-of-azerbaijans-abzas-media-team-a-worrying-development/>

¹⁹ Azerbaijan jails peace activist for 15 years: "This isn't just Bahruz's arrest – it's a portrait of the regime" <https://jam-news.net/azerbaijan-jails-peace-activist-for-15-years-this-isnt-just-bahruzs-arrest-its-a-portrait-of-the-regime/>

²⁰ Meydan TV, 'Imprisoned Activist Attempts Suicide', (June 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/h%C9%99bsd%C9%99-olan-f%C9%99al-intihara-c%C9%99hd-edib/?tzc=1>, [available in Azerbaijani]

the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Samadov asserted that his prosecution stemmed from his writings advocating peace and opposing war.²¹

3.3 Trials Continue in Meclis.info Case

On June 10, the trials continued for **Imran Aliyev**, **Elgiz Gahraman** and **Tamilla Musayeva** all tried in the *Meclis.info* case. During the hearing at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes, the indictment was announced, with defendants pleading not guilty to the charges.²² Initially detained in April 2024 and charged with Article 206.3.2 (smuggling by a group in prior collusion), Imran Aliyev was later re-charged with 7 more severe charges, carrying potential sentences of up to 12 years. Tamilla Musayeva and Elgiz Gahraman were charged in connection with the *Meclis.info* case in February 2025 and placed under police supervision, with local and international human rights advocates asserting that the criminal case against them is politically motivated.²³

3.4 Toplum TV; Indictment Readings Conclude Amidst Protests of Unclear Charges

The reading of the indictment in the *Toplum TV* case concluded on June 23, 2025, at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes, where a total of nine journalists and activists face charges with earlier trial on 2 June. Throughout the proceedings, defendants and their lawyers repeatedly highlighted the indictment's lack of clarity, pointing to inconsistencies in timelines and vague smuggling accusations.²⁴ Defendant **Ruslan Izzatli**'s request for public television to broadcast the trial was denied, whereas demands for clarification from the state prosecutor were ignored. On June 30, 2025, journalist **Farid Ismayilov** formally objected to Judge Elnur Nuriyev, accusing him of issuing politically motivated verdicts in other high-profile cases, an objection supported by the other eight defendants but ultimately denied by the court.²⁵ Initiated in March 2024 and resulting in the arrest of 11 journalists and activists, the case is widely regarded as politically motivated to silence independent journalism within a broader crackdown on media and civil society in Azerbaijan since November 2023.²⁶

3.5 Indictments Heard in the Case of Anar Mammadli

On June 23, the trial of **Anar Mammadli**, the head of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, continued at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes, where his lawyer, Elchin Sadigov, filed motions to exclude certain documents from evidence, arguing they were obtained illegally, lacked verifiable origin or creation details, were unsigned, or involved signatures not belonging to Mammadli.²⁷ The judge, initially postponed the proceedings to 30 June 2025, on which date, the

²¹ Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Release Bahruz Samadov and other government critics targeted during election campaign', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/azerbaijan-release-bahruz-samadov-and-other-government-critics-targeted-during-election-campaign/>

²² Toplum TV, 'Indictment read in Meclis.info case', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pldquomeclisinfo-isirdquo-uumlzre-mehkemedede-ittiham-akti-oxunubnbspp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

²³ Amnesty International, 'Urgent Action; Release Arrested Journalists', (May 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EUR5579462024ENGLISH.pdf>

²⁴ Toplum TV, 'Toplum TV case: "Did we transfer the currency into the country by drone, by swimming across the Kura River, or how?"', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pldquotoplum-tv-isirdquo-ldquobiz-valyutani-oumllikey-dronla-keccedilirmisik-kuumlir-ccedilayi-ile-uumlzerek-keccedilirmisik-yoxsa-nece-keccedilirmisikrdquop>, [available in Azerbaijani]

²⁵ Radio Liberty, 'Alasgar Mammadli; I accuse myself looking at the youngsters in prison', (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/toplum-tv-mehkeme/33460667.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

²⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Azerbaijani police raid Toplum TV, detain journalists over alleged currency smuggling', (January 2025), <https://cpj.org/2024/03/azerbaijani-police-raid-toplum-tv-detain-journalists-over-alleged-currency-smuggling/>

²⁷ Toplum TV, 'Anar Mammadli says the documents presented by the investigation do not belong to him', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/panar-memmedli-istintaqin-teqdim-etdiyi-senedlerin-ona-aid-olmadigini-deyirnbbspp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

court rejected the defense's motions to transfer Mammadli to house arrest and to exclude evidence obtained from his phone and computer from the case materials.²⁸ Mammadli was detained on April 29, 2024 and was subsequently charged with 7 Articles of the CC along with another activist **Anar Abdullayev** maintains his innocence as the case is generally regarded as politically motivated.²⁹

3.6 Azer Gasimli's Trial Held Secretly, Postponed to June 25

On June 18, the initial court hearing for imprisoned politician **Azer Gasimli** was held at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes without informing his family or lawyer. His wife, Samira Gasimli, confirmed this, stating that her lawyer was falsely informed by prosecution that the case had not yet been sent to the court.³⁰ Gasimli had his trial continued on June 25 at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes, where lawyers' request for house arrest was denied, and the next hearing is scheduled for July 2.³¹ He was arrested on December 8, 2024, under Article 182.2.3 (extortion with use of force) of the CC, allegedly for demanding money through threats of violence. The case is widely seen as an attempt to silence a critical voice, with Gasimli maintaining that the charges are fabricated to punish him for his political criticism.³²

3.7 Meydan TV Journalists' Detention Extended Until October 2025

On June 24, the Khatai District Court extended the detention of eleven journalists associated with *Meydan TV* by another three months until October 6, including **Aynur Ganbarova (Elgunash)**, **Aysel Umudova**, **Natiq Javadli**, **Aytaj Ahmadova (Tapdiq)**, **Khayala Aghayeva**, **Ramin Jabrayilzada (Deko)**, **Ulvi Tahirov**, **Fatima Movlamli**, **Nurlan Gahramanli (Libre)**, **Shamshad Aghayev**, and **Ulviyya Ali** despite defense lawyers' protests that there is no substantial evidence for the smuggling charges.³³ Aynur Elgunash criticised the court for extending the period without substantial evidence, asserting that the court should not copy and paste requests by prosecution. Started with arrests on 6 December 2024 and resulting in the arrest of 11 journalists, the *Meydan TV* case is regarded as politically motivated, with defendants facing up to 12 years of jail time if found guilty.

On a separate occasion on 23 June, arrested *Meydan TV* journalist **Aytaj Ahmadova's (Tapdig)** motion to legalize her marriage was denied by the Baku Court of Appeal as both Ahmadova and her fiancé were forcibly removed from the courtroom in the middle of the speech.³⁴ Her family condemned the 'artificial, violent obstacles' to her fundamental right to marry as psychological

²⁸ Meydan TV, 'Trials held in case of Anar Mammadli and Anar Abdullayev', (June 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/anar-m%C9%99mm%C9%99dli-v%C9%99-anar-abdullayev-m%C9%99hk%C9%99m%C9%99si-kecirilib/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

²⁹ EU Neighbors East, 'Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum urgently call for unconditional release of Azerbaijani human rights defender Anar Mammadli', (May 2024), <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eastern-partnership-civil-society-forum-urgently-call-for-unconditional-release-of-azerbaijani-human-rights-defender-anar-mammadli/>;

Amnesty International, 'Urgent Action; Release Arrested Journalists', (May 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EUR5579462024ENGLISH.pdf>;

³⁰ Radio Liberty, 'The trial of Azer Gasimli held without informing family members and lawyers', (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/azer-qasimlinin-mehkemesi-xebersiz-bashlayib/33449094.html>. [available in Azerbaijani]

³¹ Toplum TV, 'Azer Gasimli remains in prison', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pazer-qasimli-hebsde-qaldip>. [available in Azerbaijani]

³² OC Media, 'Former deputy chair of the REAL Party detained in Azerbaijan', (December 2024), <https://oc-media.org/azar-gasimli-was-sentenced-to-four-months-of-pre-trial-detention-after-being-detained-on-charges-of-extortion/>

³³ Toplum TV, 'Aynur Elgunesh: "The court should not perform the function of a notary"', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/paynur-elguumlnes-ldquomehkeme-notarius-funksiyasi-yerine-yetirme-melidirrdquobr-nbspp>. [available in Azerbaijani]

³⁴ Toplum TV, 'Court refuses to legalise motion to marry by journalist', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pmehkeme-aytac-tapdigin-nikaha-girme-telebini-redd-edibp>. [available in Azerbaijani]

violence, demanding an end to the harassment by court staff, emphasizing her illegal detention should not be accompanied by such deprivation of basic rights.

3.8 Human Rights Defender Rufat Safarov's Trial Begins As House Arrest Denied Amid Torture Claims

On June 30, 2025, the trial of **Rufat Safarov**, executive director of the ‘Defense Line’ human rights organization, began at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes. During the preparatory hearing, his lawyer's request for house arrest was denied. Safarov also informed the court that he had been subjected to torture while in detention and maintained that he is being persecuted for his human rights advocacy, including receiving the U.S. secretary of state’s 2024 Human Rights Defender Award.³⁵ The trial is set to proceed on July 14, 2025. Arrested on 3 December 2024 and charged under Articles 178.3.2 (fraud with significant amount), 221.1 (hooliganism), and 127.2.3 (inflicting serious harm to health) of the CC, Safarov has rejected the accusations as rights groups regard the case as politically motivated.³⁶

4. Increased Number of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan

The ‘Release Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan’ Union has released a new list of individuals considered political prisoners in the country, with the number now reaching 375.³⁷ This represents an increase of 18 people compared to the union's latest list presented on February 12, 2025.³⁸ The updated list includes journalist **Ulviyya Ali**, public activist **Ahmad Mammadli**, civil society members **Bashir Suleymanli** and **Mammad Mammadzada (Alpay)**, individuals with religious views, opposition figures, and others. The report categorizes political prisoners into 12 groups, including 29 journalists and bloggers, 6 human rights defenders, 39 socio-political activists, 5 representatives of national minorities, 2 anti-war activists, 5 deported political emigrants, 241 individuals from religious communities, and 12 lifelong convicts.

³⁵ Radio Liberty, ‘Rufat Safarov: How many times can a person be detained?’, (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/rufet-seferov-mehkeme/33459797.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

³⁶ Voice of America, ‘Rights groups, Western governments urge Azerbaijan to release human rights defender’, (December 2024), <https://www.voanews.com/a/global-community-calls-on-azerbaijan-to-release-human-rights-defender/7888986.html>

³⁷ Radio Liberty, ‘Number of Political Prisoners Increases’, (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/siyasi-mehbus-siyahi/33439972.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

³⁸ Institute for Peace and Democracy, ‘Political Prisoners, 12 February 2025’, (February 2025), <https://www.ipd-az.org/political-prisoners-for-12-february-2025/>;