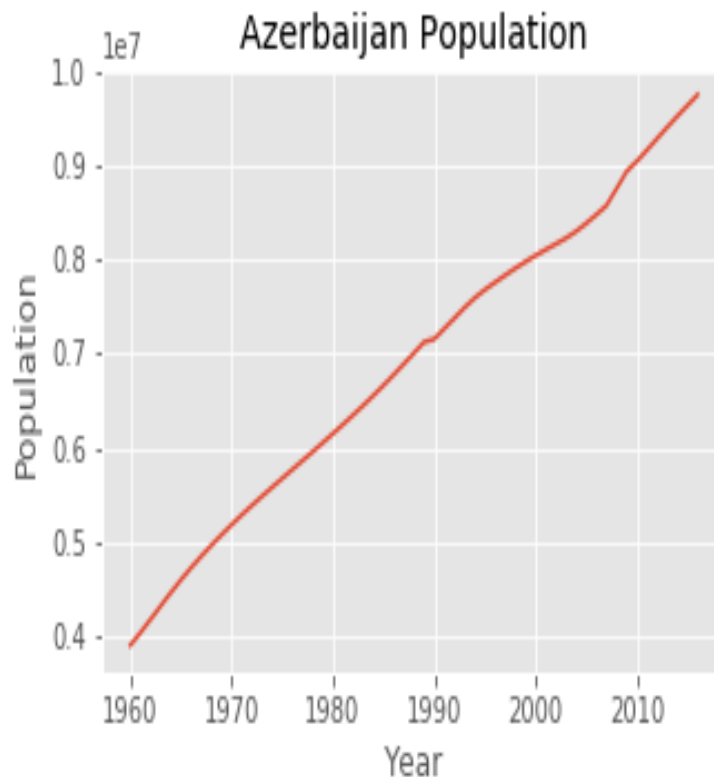


Azerbaijan



Azerbaijan (AZ-**r**-by-JAHN; Azerbaijani: Azərbaycan [azæbʲɑdʲɑn]), officially the Republic of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijani: Azərbaycan Respublikası [azæbʲɑdʲɑn ɾespublikɑsɪ]), is a country in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is bound by the Caspian Sea to the east, Russia to the north, Georgia to the northwest, Armenia to the west and Iran to the south. The exclave of Nakhchivan is bound by Armenia to the north and east, Iran to the south and west, and has an 11 km long border with Turkey in the south west. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic proclaimed its independence in 1918 and became the first democratic state in the Muslim-oriented world. The country was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920 as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The modern Republic of Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence on 30 August 1991, prior to the official dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. In September 1991, the Armenian majority of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region seceded to form the Republic of Artsakh. The region and seven adjacent districts outside it became de facto independent with the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1994. These regions are internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan pending a solution to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh, found through negotiations facilitated by the OSCE. Azerbaijan is a unitary semi-presidential republic. The country is a member state of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. It is one of six independent Turkic states, an active member of the Turkic Council and the TÜRKSOY community. Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with 158 countries and holds membership in 38 international organizations. It is one of the founding members of GUAM, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. A member of the United Nations since 1992 after its independence, Azerbaijan was elected to membership in the newly established Human Rights Council by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 May 2006. Its term of office began on 19 June 2006. Azerbaijan is also a member state of the Non-Aligned Movement, holds observer status in World Trade Organization, and is a correspondent at the International Telecommunication Union. The Constitution of Azerbaijan does not declare an official

religion and all major political forces in the country are secularist. However, the majority of the population are of Muslim background. More than 89% of the population is Shia. Most Azerbaijanis, however, do not actively practice any religion, with 53% stating religion has little to no importance in their lives, according to Pew Research Center and Gallup polls. Alcohol and non-Islamic places are also permitted. Azerbaijan has a high level of human development which ranks on par with most Eastern European countries. It has a high rate of economic development and literacy, as well as a low rate of unemployment. However, the ruling party, the New Azerbaijan Party, has been accused of authoritarianism and human rights abuses.

== Name == According to a modern etymology, the term Azerbaijan derives from that of Atropates, a Persian satrap under the Achaemenid Empire, who was later reinstated as the satrap of Media under Alexander the Great. The original etymology of this name is thought to have its roots in the once-dominant Zoroastrianism. In the Avesta's Frawardin Yasht ("Hymn to the Guardian Angels"), there is a mention of âterepâtahe ashaonô fravashîm ýazamaide, which literally translates from Avestan as "we worship the fravashi of the holy Atropatene." The name "Atropates" itself is the Greek transliteration of an Old Iranian, probably Median, compounded name with the meaning "Protected by the (Holy) Fire" or "The Land of the (Holy) Fire". The Greek name was mentioned by Diodorus Siculus and Strabo. Over the span of millennia, the name evolved to **𐎠𐎼𐎷𐎡𐎴** (Middle Persian), then to **𐎠𐎡𐎴𐎡𐎵**, **𐎠𐎡𐎴𐎡𐎵**, **𐎠𐎡𐎴𐎡𐎵** (New Persian) and present-day Azerbaijan. The name Azerbaijan was first adopted for the area of the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan by the government of Musavat in 1918, after the collapse of the Russian Empire, when the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was established. Until then, the designation had been used exclusively to identify the adjacent region of contemporary northwestern Iran, while the area of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was formerly referred to as Arran and Shirvan. On that basis Iran protested the newly adopted country name. During the Soviet rule, the country was also spelled in English from the Russian transliteration as Azerbaydzhán (Russian: **Азәрба́йджан**). == History ==

=== Antiquity === The earliest evidence of human settlement in the territory of Azerbaijan dates back to the late Stone Age and is related to the Guruchay culture of Azokh Cave. The Upper Paleolithic and late Bronze Age cultures are attested in the caves of Ta**llar**, Damc**ı**, Zar, Yataq-yeri and in the necropolises of Leylatepe and Saraytepe. Early settlements included the Scythians in the 9th century BC. Following the Scythians, Iranian Medes came to dominate the area to the south of the Aras. The Medes forged a vast empire between 900–700 BC, which was integrated into the Achaemenid Empire around 550 BC. The area was conquered by the Achaemenids leading to the spread of Zoroastrianism. Later it became part of Alexander the Great's Empire and its successor, the Seleucid Empire. During this period, Zoroastrianism spread in the Caucasus and Atropatene. Caucasian Albanians, the original inhabitants of northeastern Azerbaijan, ruled that area from around the 4th century BC, and established an independent kingdom. === From the Sasanid period to the Safavid period === The Sasanian Empire turned Caucasian Albania into a vassal state in 252, while King Urnayr officially adopted Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century. Despite Sassanid rule, Albania remained an entity in the region until the 9th century, while fully subordinate to Sassanid Iran, and retained its monarchy. Despite being one of the chief vassals of the Sasanian emperor, the Albanian king had only a semblance of authority, and the Sasanian marzban (military governor) held most civil, religious, and military authority. In the first half of the 7th century, Caucasian Albania, as a vassal of the Sasanians, came under nominal Muslim rule due to the Muslim conquest of Persia. The Umayyad Caliphate repulsed both the Sasanians and Byzantines from Transcaucasia and turned Caucasian Albania into a vassal state after Christian resistance led by King Javanshir, was suppressed in 667. The power vacuum left by the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate was filled by numerous local dynasties such as the Sallarids, Sajids, and Shaddadids. At the beginning of the 11th century, the territory was gradually seized by waves of Oghuz Turks from Central Asia. The first of these Turkic dynasties established was the Seljuk Empire, who entered the area now known as Azerbaijan by 1067. The pre-Turkic population that lived on the territory of modern Azerbaijan spoke several Indo-European and Caucasian languages, among them Armenian and an Iranian language, Old Azeri, which was gradually replaced by a Turkic language, the early precursor of the Azerbaijani language of today. Some linguists have also stated that the Tati dialects of Iranian Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan, like those spoken by the Tats, are descended from Old Azeri. Locally, the possessions of the subsequent Seljuk Empire were ruled by Eldiguzids, technically vassals of the Seljuk sultans, but sometimes de facto rulers themselves. Under the Seljuks, local poets such as Nizami Ganjavi and Khaqani gave rise to a blossoming of Persian literature on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan. The local dynasty of the Shirvanshahs became a vassal state of Timur's

Empire, and assisted him in his war with the ruler of the Golden Horde Tokhtamysh. Following Timur's death, two independent and rival states emerged: Kara Koyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu. The Shirvanshahs returned, maintaining a high degree of autonomy as local rulers and vassals from 861, for numerous centuries to come. In 1501, the Safavid dynasty of Iran subdued the Shirvanshahs, and gained its possessions. In the course of the next century, the Safavids converted the formerly Sunni population to Shia Islam, as they did with the population in what is modern-day Iran. The Safavids allowed the Shirvanshahs to remain in power, under Safavid suzerainty, until 1538, when Safavid king Tahmasp I (r. 1524–1576) completely deposed them, and made the area into the Safavid province of Shirvan. The Sunni Ottomans briefly managed to occupy parts of present-day Azerbaijan as a result of the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578–1590; by the early 17th century, they were ousted by Safavid Iranian ruler Abbas I (r. 1588–1629). In the wake of the demise of the Safavid Empire, Baku and its environs were briefly occupied by the Russians as a consequence of the Russo-Persian War of 1722–1723. Despite brief intermissions such as these by Safavid Iran's neighboring rivals, the land of what is today Azerbaijan remained under Iranian rule from the earliest advent of the Safavids up to the course of the 19th century. === Contemporary history === After the Safavids, the area was ruled by the Iranian Afsharid dynasty. After the death of Nader Shah (r. 1736–1747), many of his former subjects capitalized on the eruption of instability. Numerous self-ruling khanates with various forms of autonomy emerged in the area. The rulers of these khanates were directly related to the ruling dynasties of Iran, and were vassals and subjects of the Iranian shah. The khanates exercised control over their affairs via international trade routes between Central Asia and the West. Thereafter, the area was under the successive rule of the Iranian Zands and Qajars. From the late 18th century, Imperial Russia switched to a more aggressive geo-political stance towards its two neighbors and rivals to the south, namely Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Russia now actively tried to gain possession of the Caucasus region which was, for the most part, in the hands of Iran. In 1804, the Russians invaded and sacked the Iranian town of Ganja, sparking the Russo-Persian War of 1804–1813. The militarily superior Russians ended the Russo-Persian War of 1804–1813 with a victory. Following Qajar Iran's loss in the 1804–1813 war, it was forced to concede suzerainty over most of the khanates, along with Georgia and Dagestan to the Russian Empire, per the Treaty of Gulistan. The area to the north of the river Aras, amongst which territory lies the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan, was Iranian territory until it was occupied by Russia in the 19th century. About a decade later, in violation of the Gulistan treaty, the Russians invaded Iran's Erivan Khanate. This sparked the final bout of hostilities between the two, the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828. The resulting Treaty of Turkmenchay, forced Qajar Iran to cede sovereignty over the Erivan Khanate, the Nakhchivan Khanate and the remainder of the Lankaran Khanate, comprising the last parts of the soil of the contemporary Azerbaijani Republic that were still in Iranian hands. After incorporation of all Caucasian territories from Iran into Russia, the new border between the two was set at the Aras River, which, upon the Soviet Union's disintegration, subsequently became part of the border between Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic. Qajar Iran was forced to cede its Caucasian territories to Russia in the 19th century, which thus included the territory of the modern-day Azerbaijan Republic, while as a result of that cession, the Azerbaijani ethnic group is nowadays parted between two nations: Iran and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran far outnumber those in neighbouring Azerbaijan. After the collapse of the Russian Empire during World War I, the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was declared, constituting the present-day republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. It was followed by the March Days massacres that took place between 30 March and 2 April 1918 in the city of Baku and adjacent areas of the Baku Governorate of the Russian Empire. When the republic dissolved in May 1918, the leading Musavat party declared independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), adopting the name of "Azerbaijan" for the new republic; a name that prior to the proclamation of the ADR was solely used to refer to the adjacent northwestern region of contemporary Iran. The ADR was the first modern parliamentary republic in the Muslim world. Among the important accomplishments of the Parliament was the extension of suffrage to women, making Azerbaijan the first Muslim nation to grant women equal political rights with men. Another important accomplishment of ADR was the establishment of Baku State University, which was the first modern-type university founded in the Muslim East. By March 1920, it was obvious that Soviet Russia would attack Baku. Vladimir Lenin said that the invasion was justified as Soviet Russia could not survive without Baku's oil. Independent Azerbaijan lasted only 23 months until the Bolshevik 11th Soviet Red Army invaded it, establishing the Azerbaijan SSR on 28 April 1920. Although the bulk of the newly formed Azerbaijani army was engaged in putting down an Armenian revolt that had just broken out in Karabakh, Azerbaijanis did not surrender their brief

independence of 1918–20 quickly or easily. As many as 20,000 Azerbaijani soldiers died resisting what was effectively a Russian reconquest. On 13 October 1921, the Soviet republics of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia signed an agreement with Turkey known as the Treaty of Kars. The previously independent Republic of Aras would also become the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Azerbaijan SSR by the treaty of Kars. On the other hand, Armenia was awarded the region of Zangezur and Turkey agreed to return Gyumri (then known as Alexandropol). During World War II, Azerbaijan played a crucial role in the strategic energy policy of the Soviet Union, with 80 percent of the Soviet Union's oil on the Eastern Front being supplied by Baku. By the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in February 1942, the commitment of more than 500 workers and employees of the oil industry of Azerbaijan were awarded orders and medals. Operation Edelweiss carried out by the German Wehrmacht targeted Baku because of its importance as the energy (petroleum) dynamo of the USSR. A fifth of all Azerbaijanis fought in the Second World War from 1941 to 1945. Approximately 681,000 people with over 100,000 of them women went to the front, while the total population of Azerbaijan was 3.4 million at the time. Some 250,000 people from Azerbaijan were killed on the front. More than 130 Azerbaijanis were named Heroes of the Soviet Union. Azerbaijani Major-General Azi Aslanov was twice awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union. === Independence === Following the politics of glasnost, initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, civil unrest and ethnic strife grew in various regions of the Soviet Union, including Nagorno-Karabakh, an autonomous region of the Azerbaijan SSR. The disturbances in Azerbaijan, in response to Moscow's indifference to an already heated conflict, resulted in calls for independence and secession, which culminated in the Black January events in Baku. Later in 1990, the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR dropped the words "Soviet Socialist" from the title, adopted the "Declaration of Sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic" and restored the flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic as the state flag. As a consequence of the failed coup which occurred in August in Moscow, on 18 October 1991, the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted a Declaration of Independence which was affirmed by a nationwide referendum in December 1991, while the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist on 26 December 1991. The early years of independence were overshadowed by the Nagorno-Karabakh war with the ethnic Armenian majority of Nagorno-Karabakh backed by Armenia. By the end of the hostilities in 1994, Armenians controlled up to 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh itself. During the war many atrocities were committed including the massacres at Malibeyli and Gushchular, the Garadaghly massacre, the Agdaban and the Khojaly massacres. Furthermore, an estimated 30,000 people have been killed and more than a million people have been displaced. Four United Nations Security Council Resolutions (822, 853, 874, and 884) demand for "the immediate withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan." Many Russians and Armenians left Azerbaijan during the 1990s. According to the 1970 census, there were 510,000 ethnic Russians and 484,000 Armenians in Azerbaijan. In 1993, democratically elected president Abulfaz Elchibey was overthrown by a military insurrection led by Colonel Surat Huseynov, which resulted in the rise to power of the former leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev. In 1994, Surat Huseynov, by that time the prime minister, attempted another military coup against Heydar Aliyev, but he was arrested and charged with treason. A year later, in 1995, another coup was attempted against Aliyev, this time by the commander of the OMON special unit, Rovshan Javadov. The coup was averted, resulting in the killing of the latter and disbanding of Azerbaijan's OMON units. At the same time, the country was tainted by rampant corruption in the governing bureaucracy. In October 1998, Aliyev was reelected for a second term. Despite the much improved economy, particularly with the exploitation of the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field and Shah Deniz gas field, Aliyev's presidency was criticized due to suspected election frauds and corruption. Ilham Aliyev, Heydar Aliyev's son, became chairman of the New Azerbaijan Party as well as President of Azerbaijan when his father died in 2003. He was reelected to a third term as president in October 2013. == Geography == Geographically Azerbaijan is located in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia, straddling Western Asia and Eastern Europe. It lies between latitudes 38° and 42° N, and longitudes 44° and 51° E. The total length of Azerbaijan's land borders is 2,648 km (1,645 mi), of which 1,007 kilometers are with Armenia, 756 kilometers with Iran, 480 kilometers with Georgia, 390 kilometers with Russia and 15 kilometers with Turkey. The coastline stretches for 800 km (497 mi), and the length of the widest area of the Azerbaijani section of the Caspian Sea is 456 km (283 mi). The territory of Azerbaijan extends 400 km (249 mi) from north to south, and 500 km (311 mi) from west to east. Three physical features dominate Azerbaijan: the Caspian Sea, whose shoreline forms a natural boundary to the east; the Greater Caucasus mountain range to the north; and the extensive flatlands at the country's center. There are also three mountain ranges, the Greater and Lesser Caucasus, and the

Talysh Mountains, together covering approximately 40% of the country. The highest peak of Azerbaijan is Mount Bazardüzü (4,466 m), while the lowest point lies in the Caspian Sea (−28 m). Nearly half of all the mud volcanoes on Earth are concentrated in Azerbaijan, these volcanoes were also among nominees for the New7Wonders of Nature. The main water sources are surface waters. However, only 24 of the 8,350 rivers are greater than 100 km (62 mi) in length. All the rivers drain into the Caspian Sea in the east of the country. The largest lake is Sarysu (67 km²), and the longest river is Kur (1,515 km), which is transboundary with Armenia. Azerbaijan's four main islands in the Caspian Sea have a combined area of over thirty square kilometers. Since the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991, the Azerbaijani government has taken measures to preserve the environment of Azerbaijan. National protection of the environment accelerated after 2001 when the state budget increased due to new revenues provided by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Within four years protected areas doubled and now make up eight percent of the country's territory. Since 2001 the government has set up seven large reserves and almost doubled the sector of the budget earmarked for environmental protection.

=== Landscape === Azerbaijan is home to a vast variety of landscapes. Over half of Azerbaijan's land mass consists of mountain ridges, crests, yailas, and plateaus which rise up to hypsometric levels of 400–1000 meters (including the Middle and Lower lowlands), in some places (Talis, Jeyranchol-Ajinothur and Langabiz-Alat foreranges) up to 100–120 meters, and others from 0–50 meters and up (Qobustan, Absheron). The rest of Azerbaijan's terrain consist of plains and lowlands. Hypsometric marks within the Caucasus region vary from about −28 meters at the Caspian Sea shoreline up to 4,466 meters (Bazardüzü peak). The formation of climate in Azerbaijan is influenced particularly by cold arctic air masses of Scandinavian anticyclone, temperate of Siberian anticyclone, and Central Asian anticyclone. Azerbaijan's diverse landscape affects the ways air masses enter the country. The Greater Caucasus protects the country from direct influences of cold air masses coming from the north. That leads to the formation of subtropical climate on most foothills and plains of the country. Meanwhile, plains and foothills are characterized by high solar radiation rates. 9 out of 11 existing climate zones are present in Azerbaijan. Both the absolute minimum temperature (−33 °C or −27.4 °F) and the absolute maximum temperature (46 °C or 114.8 °F) were observed in Julfa and Ordubad – regions of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The maximum annual precipitation falls in Lankaran (1,600 to 1,800 mm or 63 to 71 in) and the minimum in Absheron (200 to 350 mm or 7.9 to 13.8 in). Rivers and lakes form the principal part of the water systems of Azerbaijan, they were formed over a long geological timeframe and changed significantly throughout that period. This is particularly evidenced by remnants of ancient rivers found throughout the country. The country's water systems are continually changing under the influence of natural forces and human introduced industrial activities. Artificial rivers (canals) and ponds are a part of Azerbaijan's water systems. In terms of water supply, Azerbaijan is below the average in the world with approximately 100,000 cubic metres (3,531,467 cubic feet) per year of water per square kilometer. All big water reservoirs are built on Kur. The hydrography of Azerbaijan basically belongs to the Caspian Sea basin. There are 8,350 rivers of various lengths within Azerbaijan. Only 24 rivers are over 100 kilometers long. The Kura and Aras are the major rivers in Azerbaijan, they run through the Kura-Aras Lowland. The rivers that directly flow into the Caspian Sea, originate mainly from the north-eastern slope of the Major Caucasus and Talysh Mountains and run along the Samur–Devechi and Lankaran lowlands. Yanar Dag, translated as "burning mountain", is a natural gas fire which blazes continuously on a hillside on the Absheron Peninsula on the Caspian Sea near Baku, which itself is known as the "land of fire." Flames jet out into the air from a thin, porous sandstone layer. It is a tourist attraction to visitors to the Baku area.

=== Biodiversity === The first reports on the richness and diversity of animal life in Azerbaijan can be found in travel notes of Eastern travelers. Animal carvings on architectural monuments, ancient rocks and stones survived up to the present times. The first information on the flora and fauna of Azerbaijan was collected during the visits of naturalists to Azerbaijan in the 17th century. There are 106 species of mammals, 97 species of fish, 363 species of birds, 10 species of amphibians and 52 species of reptiles which have been recorded and classified in Azerbaijan. The national animal of Azerbaijan is the Karabakh horse, a mountain-steppe racing and riding horse endemic to Azerbaijan. The Karabakh horse has a reputation for its good temper, speed, elegance and intelligence. It is one of the oldest breeds, with ancestry dating to the ancient world. However, today the horse is an endangered species. Azerbaijan's flora consists of more than 4,500 species of higher plants. Due to the unique climate in Azerbaijan, the flora is much richer in the number of species than the flora of the other republics of the South Caucasus. About 67 percent of the species growing in the whole Caucasus can be found in Azerbaijan.

== Politics == The structural formation of Azerbaijan's political system was completed by the adoption of the new

Constitution on 12 November 1995. According to Article 23 of the Constitution, the state symbols of the Azerbaijan Republic are the flag, the coat of arms, and the national anthem. The state power in Azerbaijan is limited only by law for internal issues, but for international affairs is additionally limited by the provisions of international agreements. The government of Azerbaijan is based on the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The legislative power is held by the unicameral National Assembly and the Supreme National Assembly in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Parliamentary elections are held every five years, on the first Sunday of November. The Yeni Azerbaijan Party, and independents loyal to the ruling government, currently hold almost all of the Parliament's 125 seats. During the 2010 Parliamentary election, the opposition parties, Musavat and Azerbaijani Popular Front Party, failed to win a single seat. European observers found numerous irregularities in the run-up to the election and on election day. The executive power is held by the President, who is elected for a seven-year term by direct elections, and the Prime Minister. The president is authorized to form the Cabinet, a collective executive body, accountable to both the President and the National Assembly. The Cabinet of Azerbaijan consists primarily of the prime minister, his deputies, and ministers. The president does not have the right to dissolve the National Assembly, but has the right to veto its decisions. To override the presidential veto, the parliament must have a majority of 95 votes. The judicial power is vested in the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and the Economic Court. The president nominates the judges in these courts. The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) report refers to the Azerbaijani justice model on the selection of new judges as best practice that reflects the particular features and the course of development towards ensuring the independence and quality of the judiciary in a new democracy. The Security Council is the deliberative body under the president, and he organizes it according to the Constitution. It was established on 10 April 1997. The administrative department is not a part of the president's office but manages the financial, technical and pecuniary activities of both the president and his office. Although Azerbaijan has held several elections since regaining its independence and it has many of the formal institutions of democracy, it remains classified as "not free" (on border with "partly free") by Freedom House. In recent years, large numbers of Azerbaijani journalists, bloggers, lawyers, and human rights activists have been rounded up and jailed for their criticism of President Aliyev and government authorities. A resolution adopted by the European Parliament in September 2015 described Azerbaijan as "having suffered the greatest decline in democratic governance in all of Eurasia over the past ten years," noting as well that its dialogue with the country on human rights has "not made any substantial progress." On 17 March 2016, the President of Azerbaijan signed a decree pardoning more than a dozen of the persons regarded as political prisoners by some NGOs. This decree was welcomed as a positive step by the US State Department. On 16 March 2017 another pardon decree was signed, which led to the release of additional persons regarded as political prisoners. Azerbaijan has been harshly criticized for bribing foreign officials and diplomats in order to promote its causes abroad and legitimize its elections at home, a practice which has been termed as Caviar diplomacy. However, on 6 March 2017, ESISC (European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center) published a report called "The Armenian Connection" where it attacked human rights NGOs and research organisations criticising human rights violations and corruption in Azerbaijan. ESISC in that report asserted that "Caviar diplomacy" report elaborated by ESI aimed to create climate of suspicion based on slander to form a network of MPs that would engage in a political war against Azerbaijan, and that the network composed of European PMs, Armenian officials and some NGOs: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, "Human Rights House Foundation", "Open Dialog, European Stability Initiative, and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, was financed by the Soros Foundation. According to Robert Coalson (Radio Free Europe), ESISC is a part of Baku's lobbying efforts to extend to the use of front think tanks to shift public opinion. Freedom Files Analytical Centre said that "The report is written in the worst traditions of authoritarian propaganda". === Foreign relations === The short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with six countries, sending diplomatic representatives to Germany and Finland. The process of international recognition of Azerbaijan's independence from the collapsing Soviet Union lasted roughly one year. The most recent country to recognize Azerbaijan was Bahrain, on 6 November 1996. Full diplomatic relations, including mutual exchanges of missions, were first established with Turkey, Pakistan, the United States, Iran and Israel. Azerbaijan has placed a particular emphasis on its "special relationship" with Turkey. Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with 158 countries so far and holds membership in 38 international organizations. It holds observer status in the Non-Aligned Movement and World Trade Organization and is a correspondent at the International Telecommunication Union.

On 9 May 2006 Azerbaijan was elected to membership in the newly established Human Rights Council by the United Nations General Assembly. The term of office began on 19 June 2006. Azerbaijan for the first time elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2011 with the support of 155 countries. Foreign policy priorities of Azerbaijan include, first of all, the restoration of its territorial integrity; elimination of the consequences of occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven other regions of Azerbaijan surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh; integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structure; contribution to international security; cooperation with international organizations; regional cooperation and bilateral relations; strengthening of defense capability; promotion of security by domestic policy means; strengthening of democracy; preservation of ethnic and religious tolerance; scientific, educational, and cultural policy and preservation of moral values; economic and social development; enhancing internal and border security; and migration, energy, and transportation security policy. The Azerbaijani government, in late 2007, stated that the long-standing dispute over the Armenian-occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh is almost certain to spark a new war if it remains unresolved. The Government is in the process of increasing its military budget. Azerbaijan is an active member of international coalitions fighting international terrorism. Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to offer support after the September 11 attacks. The country is contributing to peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Azerbaijan is an active member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. It also maintains good relations with the European Union and could potentially one day apply for membership.

=== Administrative divisions === Azerbaijan is divided into 10 economic regions; 66 rayons (rayonlar, singular rayon) and 77 cities (şəhərlər, singular şəhər) of which 12 are under the direct authority of the republic. Moreover, Azerbaijan includes the Autonomous Republic (muxtar respublika) of Nakhchivan. The President of Azerbaijan appoints the governors of these units, while the government of Nakhchivan is elected and approved by the parliament of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Note: The cities under the direct authority of the republic in italics. == Military == The history of the modern Azerbaijan army dates back to Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, when the National Army of the newly formed Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was created on 26 June 1918. When Azerbaijan gained independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan were created according to the Law on the Armed Forces of 9 October 1991. The original date of the establishment of the short-lived National Army is celebrated as Army Day (26 June) in today's Azerbaijan. As of 2002, Azerbaijan had 95,000 active personnel in its armed forces. There are also 17,000 paramilitary troops. The armed forces have three branches: the Land Forces, the Air Forces and the Navy. Additionally the armed forces embrace several military sub-groups that can be involved in state defense when needed. These are the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Border Service, which includes the Coast Guard as well. The Azerbaijan National Guard is a further paramilitary force. It operates as a semi-independent entity of the Special State Protection Service, an agency subordinate to the President. Azerbaijan adheres to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and has signed all major international arms and weapons treaties. Azerbaijan closely cooperates with NATO in programs such as Partnership for Peace and Individual Partnership Action Plan. Azerbaijan has deployed 151 of its Peacekeeping Forces in Iraq and another 184 in Afghanistan. The defense budget of Azerbaijan for 2011 was set at US\$3.1 billion. In addition to that, \$1.36 billion was planned to be used for the needs of the defense industry, which bring up the total military budget to 4.6 billion. Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev said on 26 June 2011 that the defence spending reached \$3.3 billion that year. Azerbaijan's defense budget for 2013 is \$3.7 billion. Azerbaijani defense industry manufactures small arms, artillery systems, tanks, armors and noctovision devices, aviation bombs, pilotless vehicles, various military vehicles and military planes and helicopters. == Economy == After gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan became a member of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The banking system of Azerbaijan consists of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, commercial banks and non-banking credit organizations. The National (now Central) Bank was created in 1992 based on the Azerbaijan State Savings Bank, an affiliate of the former State Savings Bank of the USSR. The Central Bank serves as Azerbaijan's central bank, empowered to issue the national currency, the Azerbaijani manat, and to supervise all commercial banks. Two major commercial banks are UniBank and the state-owned International Bank of Azerbaijan, run by Dr. Jahangir Hacıyev. Pushed up by spending and demand growth, the 2007 Q1 inflation rate reached 16.6%. Nominal incomes and monthly wages climbed 29% and 25% respectively against this figure, but price increases in non-oil industry encouraged inflation. Azerbaijan shows some signs of the so-called "Dutch disease" because of its fast-growing energy

sector, which causes inflation and makes non-energy exports more expensive. In the early 2000s the chronically high inflation was brought under control. This led to the launch of a new currency, the new Azerbaijani manat, on 1 January 2006, to cement the economic reforms and erase the vestiges of an unstable economy. In 2008, Azerbaijan was cited as one of the top 10 reformers by the World Bank's Doing Business Report. Azerbaijan led the world as the top reformer in 2007/08, with improvements on seven out of 10 indicators of regulatory reform. Azerbaijan started operating a one-stop shop in January 2008 that halved the time, cost and number of procedures to start a business. Business registrations increased by 40% in the first six months. Azerbaijan also eliminated the minimum loan cutoff of \$1,100, more than doubling the number of borrowers covered by the credit registry. Also, taxpayers can now file forms and pay their taxes online. Azerbaijan's extensive reforms moved it far up the ranks, from 97 to 33 in the overall ease of doing business. Azerbaijan is also ranked 57th in the Global Competitiveness Report for 2010–2011, above other CIS countries. By 2012 the GDP of Azerbaijan had increased 20-fold from its 1995 level. === Energy === Two-thirds of Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas. The history of the oil industry of Azerbaijan dates back to the ancient period. Arabian historian and traveler Ahmed Al-Belauri mentioned about the economics of Absheron peninsula in the ancient times, oil lands, also, white and black oil in Absheron. The region of the Lesser Caucasus accounts for most of the country's gold, silver, iron, copper, titanium, chromium, manganese, cobalt, molybdenum, complex ore and antimony. In September 1994, a 30-year contract was signed between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and 13 oil companies, among them Amoco, BP, ExxonMobil, Lukoil and Statoil. As Western oil companies are able to tap deepwater oilfields untouched by the Soviet exploitation, Azerbaijan is considered one of the most important spots in the world for oil exploration and development. Meanwhile, the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan was established as an extra-budgetary fund to ensure macroeconomic stability, transparency in the management of oil revenue, and safeguarding of resources for future generations. Azeriqaz, a sub-company of SOCAR, intends to ensure full gasification of the country by 2021. Azerbaijan is one of the sponsors of the East–West and North–South energy transport corridors. Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway line will connect the Caspian region with Turkey, is expected to be completed in July 2017. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) will deliver natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas to Turkey and Europe. Azerbaijan extended the agreement on development of ACG until 2050 according to the amended PSA signed on 14 September 2017 by SOCAR and co-venturers (BP, Chevron, INPEX, Statoil, ExxonMobil, TP, ITOCHU and ONGC Videsh).

=== Agriculture === Azerbaijan has the largest agricultural basin in the region. About 54.9 percent of Azerbaijan is agricultural land. At the beginning of 2007 there were 4,755,100 hectares of utilized agricultural area. In the same year the total wood resources counted 136 million m³. Azerbaijan's agricultural scientific research institutes are focused on meadows and pastures, horticulture and subtropical crops, green vegetables, viticulture and wine-making, cotton growing and medicinal plants. In some areas it is profitable to grow grain, potatoes, sugar beets, cotton and tobacco. Livestock, dairy products, and wine and spirits are also important farm products. The Caspian fishing industry concentrates on the dwindling stocks of sturgeon and beluga. In 2002 the Azerbaijani merchant marine had 54 ships. Some products previously imported from abroad have begun to be produced locally. Among them are Coca-Cola by Coca-Cola Bottlers LTD, beer by Baki-Kastel, parquet by Nehir and oil pipes by EUPEC Pipe Coating Azerbaijan.

=== Tourism === Tourism is an important part of the economy of Azerbaijan. The country was a well-known tourist spot in the 1980s. However, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the Nagorno-Karabakh War during the 1990s, damaged the tourist industry and the image of Azerbaijan as a tourist destination. It was not until the 2000s that the tourism industry began to recover, and the country has since experienced a high rate of growth in the number of tourist visits and overnight stays. In the recent years, Azerbaijan has also become a popular destination for religious, spa, and health care tourism. During winter, the Shahdag Mountain Resort offers skiing with state of the art facilities. The government of Azerbaijan has set the development of Azerbaijan as an elite tourist destination as a top priority. It is a national strategy to make tourism a major, if not the single largest, contributor to the Azerbaijani economy. These activities are regulated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan. There are 63 countries which have visa-free score. E-visa – for a visit of foreigners of visa-required countries to the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 of the World Economic Forum Azerbaijan holds 84th place. Azerbaijan placed among top ten countries due to the strongest growth in visitor exports in years of 2010–2016 according to the report prepared by the World Travel and Tourism Council. As well as, Azerbaijan is at the first place (46.1%) among the countries which have the fastest developing travel

and tourism economies in addition with strong inbound international visitor spending last year. ===

Transportation === The convenient location of Azerbaijan on the crossroad of major international traffic arteries, such as the Silk Road and the south–north corridor, highlights the strategic importance of transportation sector for the country's economy. The transport sector in the country includes roads, railways, aviation, and maritime transport. Azerbaijan is also an important economic hub in the transportation of raw materials. The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) became operational in May 2006 and extends more than 1,774 kilometers through the territories of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The BTC is designed to transport up to 50 million tons of crude oil annually and carries oil from the Caspian Sea oilfields to global markets. The South Caucasus Pipeline, also stretching through the territory of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, became operational at the end of 2006 and offers additional gas supplies to the European market from the Shah Deniz gas field. Shah Deniz is expected to produce up to 296 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. Azerbaijan also plays a major role in the EU-sponsored Silk Road Project. In 2002, the Azerbaijani government established the Ministry of Transport with a broad range of policy and regulatory functions. In the same year, the country became a member of the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic. The highest priority being; upgrading the transport network and transforming transportation services into one of the key comparative advantages of the country, as this would be highly conducive to the development of other sectors of the economy. In 2012, the construction of Kars–Tbilisi–Baku railway expected to provide transportation between Asia and Europe through connecting the railways of China and Kazakhstan in the east with Turkey's Marmaray to the European railway system in the west. Broad-gauge railways in 2010 stretched for 2,918 km (1,813 mi) and electrified railways numbered 1,278 km (794 mi). By 2010, there were 35 airports and one heliport. ===

Science and technology === In the 21st century, a new oil and gas boom helped to improve the situation in Azerbaijan's science and technology sectors, and the government launched a campaign aimed at modernization and innovation. The government estimates that profits from the information technology and communication industry will grow and become comparable with those from oil production. Azerbaijan has a large and steadily growing Internet sector, mostly uninfluenced by the global financial crisis; rapid growth is forecast for at least five more years. The country has also been making progress in developing its telecoms sector. The Ministry of Communications & Information Technologies (MCIT), as well as being an operator through its role in Aztelekom, is both a policy-maker and regulator. Public pay phones are available for local calls and require the purchase of a token from the telephone exchange or some shops and kiosks. Tokens allow a call of indefinite duration. As of 2009, there were 1,397,000 main telephone lines and 1,485,000 internet users. There are four GSM providers: Azercell, Bakcell, Azerfon (Nar Mobile), Nakhtel mobile network operators and one CDMA. In the 21st century a number of prominent Azerbaijani geodynamics and geotectonics scientists, inspired by the fundamental works of Elchin Khalilov and others, designed hundreds of earthquake prediction stations and earthquake-resistant buildings that now constitute the bulk of The Republican Center of Seismic Service. The Azerbaijan National Aerospace Agency launched its first satellite AzerSat 1 into orbit on 7 February 2013 from Guiana Space Centre in French Guiana at orbital positions 46° East. The satellite will cover Europe and significant part of Asian countries and Africa and will have transmission for TV, radio broadcasting and the internet. The launch of its own satellite on orbit is Azerbaijan's first action in realizing prospective projects to turn itself into a country with a space industry. ==

Demographics == From the total population of 9,705,600 people as of the beginning of 2016, nearly 53,1% was urban population, the remaining 46,9% was the rural population. 50,2% of the total population were female. The sex ratio for total population in that year was therefore 0.99 males per female. The 2011 population growth-rate was 0.85%, compared to 1.09% worldwide. A significant factor restricting the population growth is a high level of migration. In 2011 Azerbaijan saw migration of –1.14/1,000 people. The Azerbaijani diaspora is found in 42 countries and in turn there are many centers for ethnic minorities inside Azerbaijan, including the German cultural society "Karekhaus", Slavic cultural center, Azerbaijani-Israeli community, Kurdish cultural center, International Talysh Association, Lezgin national center "Samur", Azerbaijani-Tatar community, Crimean Tatars society, etc. ===

Ethnic groups === The ethnic composition of the population according to the 2009 population census: 91.60% Azerbaijanis, 2.02% Lezgians, 1.35% Armenians (almost all Armenians live in the break-away region of Nagorno-Karabakh), 1.34% Russians, 1.26% Talysh, 0.56% Avars, 0.43% Turks, 0.29% Tatars, 0.28% Tats, 0.24% Ukrainians, 0.14% Tsakhurs, 0.11% Georgians, 0.10% Jews, 0.07% Kurds, other 0.21%. Iranian Azerbaijanis are by far the largest minority in Iran. The number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran furthermore far outnumber those in neighboring Azerbaijan. The CIA World Factbook estimates Iranian Azerbaijanis as comprising at least 16% of Iran's population.

=== Urbanization === In total, Azerbaijan has 78 cities, 63 city districts, and one special legal status city. These are followed by 261 urban-type settlements and 4248 villages. === Languages === The official language is Azerbaijani (Turkic language), which is spoken by approximately 92% of the population as a mother tongue. It belongs to the Turkic language family. Russian and Armenian (only in Nagorno-Karabakh) are also spoken, and each are the mother tongue of around 1.5% of the population respectively. Russian and English play significant roles as second or third languages of education and communication. There are a dozen other minority languages spoken natively in the country. Avar, Budukh, Georgian, Juhuri, Khinalug, Kryts, Lezgian, Rutul, Talysh, Tat, Tsakhur, and Udi are all spoken by small minorities. Some of these language communities are very small and their numbers are decreasing. Armenian is almost exclusively spoken in the break-away Nagorno-Karabakh region. === Religion === Around 97% of the population are Muslims. 90% of the Muslims are Shia Muslims and 10% Sunni Muslims, and the Republic of Azerbaijan has the second highest Shia population percentage in the world. Other faiths are practised by the country's various ethnic groups. Under article 48 of its Constitution, Azerbaijan is a secular state and ensures religious freedom. In a 2006–2008 Gallup poll, only 21% of respondents from Azerbaijan stated that religion is an important part of their daily lives. This makes Azerbaijan the least religious Muslim-majority country in the world. Of the nation's religious minorities, the estimated 280,000 Christians (3.1%) are mostly Russian and Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic (almost all Armenians live in the break-away region of Nagorno-Karabakh). In 2003, there were 250 Roman Catholics. Other Christian denominations as of 2002 include Lutherans, Baptists and Molokans. There is also a small Protestant community. Azerbaijan also has an ancient Jewish population with a 2,000-year history; Jewish organizations estimate that 12,000 Jews remain in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan also is home to members of the Bahá'í, Hare Krishna and Jehovah's Witnesses communities, as well as adherents of the other religious communities. Some religious communities have been unofficially restricted from religious freedom. A U.S. State Department report on the matter mentions detention of members of certain Muslim and Christian groups, and many groups have difficulty registering with the SCWRA. === Education === A relatively high percentage of Azerbaijanis have obtained some form of higher education, most notably in scientific and technical subjects. In the Soviet era, literacy and average education levels rose dramatically from their very low starting point, despite two changes in the standard alphabet, from Perso-Arabic script to Latin in the 1920s and from Roman to Cyrillic in the 1930s. According to Soviet data, 100 percent of males and females (ages nine to forty-nine) were literate in 1970. According to the United Nations Development Program Report 2009, the literacy rate in Azerbaijan is 99.5 percent. Since independence, one of the first laws that Azerbaijan's Parliament passed to disassociate itself from the Soviet Union was to adopt a modified-Latin alphabet to replace Cyrillic. Other than that the Azerbaijani system has undergone little structural change. Initial alterations have included the reestablishment of religious education (banned during the Soviet period) and curriculum changes that have reemphasized the use of the Azerbaijani language and have eliminated ideological content. In addition to elementary schools, the education institutions include thousands of preschools, general secondary schools, and vocational schools, including specialized secondary schools and technical schools. Education through the eighth grade is compulsory. == Culture == The culture of Azerbaijan has developed as a result of many influences. Today, national traditions are well preserved in the country despite Western influences, including globalized consumer culture. Some of the main elements of the Azerbaijani culture are: music, literature, folk dances and art, cuisine, architecture, cinematography and Novruz Bayram. The latter is derived from the traditional celebration of the New Year in the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. Novruz is a family holiday. The profile of Azerbaijan's population consists, as stated above, of Azerbaijanis, as well as other nationalities or ethnic groups, compactly living in various areas of the country. Azerbaijani national and traditional dresses are the Chokha and Papakhi. There are radio broadcasts in Russian, Georgian, Kurdish, Lezgian and Talysh languages, which are financed from the state budget. Some local radio stations in Balakan and Khachmaz organize broadcasts in Avar and Tat. In Baku several newspapers are published in Russian, Kurdish (Dengi Kurd), Lezgian (Samur) and Talysh languages. Jewish society "Sokhnut" publishes the newspaper Aziz. === Music and folk dances === Music of Azerbaijan builds on folk traditions that reach back nearly a thousand years. For centuries Azerbaijani music has evolved under the badge of monody, producing rhythmically diverse melodies. Azerbaijani music has a branchy mode system, where chromaticization of major and minor scales is of great importance. Among national musical instruments there are 14 string instruments, eight percussion instruments and six wind instruments. According to The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, "in terms of ethnicity, culture

and religion the Azerbaijani are musically much closer to Iran than Turkey." Mugham, meykhana and ashig art are among the many musical traditions of Azerbaijan. Mugham is usually a suite with poetry and instrumental interludes. When performing mugham, the singers have to transform their emotions into singing and music. In contrast to the mugham traditions of Central Asian countries, Azerbaijani mugham is more free-form and less rigid; it is often compared to the improvised field of jazz. UNESCO proclaimed the Azerbaijani mugham tradition a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on 7 November 2003. Meykhana is a kind of traditional Azerbaijani distinctive folk unaccompanied song, usually performed by several people improvising on a particular subject. Ashiq combines poetry, storytelling, dance and vocal and instrumental music into a traditional performance art that stands as a symbol of Azerbaijani culture. It is a mystic troubadour or traveling bard who sings and plays the saz. This tradition has its origin in the Shamanistic beliefs of ancient Turkic peoples. Ashiqs' songs are semi-improvised around common bases. Azerbaijan's ashig art was included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO on 30 September 2009. Since the mid-1960s, Western-influenced Azerbaijani pop music, in its various forms, that has been growing in popularity in Azerbaijan, while genres such as rock and hip hop are widely produced and enjoyed. Azerbaijani pop and Azerbaijani folk music arose with the international popularity of performers like Alim Qasimov, Rashid Behbudov, Vagif Mustafazadeh, Muslim Magomayev, Shovkat Alakbarova and Rubaba Muradova. Azerbaijan is an enthusiastic participant in the Eurovision Song Contest. Azerbaijan made its debut appearance at the 2008 Eurovision Song Contest. The country's entry gained third place in 2009 and fifth the following year. Ell and Nikki won the first place at the Eurovision Song Contest 2011 with the song "Running Scared", entitling Azerbaijan to host the contest in 2012, in Baku. They have never missed a Grand Final. There are dozens of Azerbaijani folk dances. They are performed at formal celebrations and the dancers wear national clothes like the Chokha, which is well-preserved within the national dances. Most dances have a very fast rhythm. The national dance shows the characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation. === Literature === Among the medieval authors born within the territorial limits of modern Azerbaijani Republic was Persian poet and philosopher Nizami, called Ganjavi after his place of birth, Ganja, who was the author of the Khamseh ("The Quintuplet"), composed of five romantic poems, including "The Treasure of Mysteries," "Khosrow and Shirin," and "Leyli and Mejnun." The earliest known figure in Azerbaijani literature was Izzeddin Hasanoglu, who composed a divan consisting of Persian and Turkic ghazals. In Persian ghazals he used his pen-name, while his Turkic ghazals were composed under his own name of Hasanoghlu. Classical literature in Azerbaijani was formed in the 14th century based on the various Early Middle Ages dialects of Tabriz and Shirvan. Among the poets of this period were Gazi Burhanaddin, Haqiqi (pen-name of Jahan-shah Qara Qoyunlu), and Habibi. The end of the 14th century was also the period of starting literary activity of Imadaddin Nesimi, one of the greatest Turkic Hurufi mystical poets of the late 14th and early 15th centuries and one of the most prominent early divan masters in Turkic literary history, who also composed poetry in Persian and Arabic. The divan and ghazal styles were further developed by poets Qasim al-Anvar, Fuzuli and Khatai (pen-name of Safavid Shah Ismail I). The Book of Dede Korkut consists of two manuscripts copied in the 16th century, was not written earlier than the 15th century. It is a collection of 12 stories reflecting the oral tradition of Oghuz nomads. The 16th-century poet, Muhammed Fuzuli produced his timeless philosophical and lyrical Qazals in Arabic, Persian, and Azerbaijani. Benefiting immensely from the fine literary traditions of his environment, and building upon the legacy of his predecessors, Fuzuli was destined to become the leading literary figure of his society. His major works include The Divan of Ghazals and The Qasidas. In the same century, Azerbaijani literature further flourished with the development of Ashik (Azerbaijani: Ashiq) poetic genre of bards. During the same period, under the pen-name of Khatun (Arabic: Khatun for sinner) Shah Ismail I wrote about 1400 verses in Azerbaijani, which were later published as his Divan. A unique literary style known as qoshma (Azerbaijani: qoshma for improvisation) was introduced in this period, and developed by Shah Ismail and later by his son and successor, Shah Tahmasp I. In the span of the 17th and 18th centuries, Fuzuli's unique genres as well Ashik poetry were taken up by prominent poets and writers such as Qovsi of Tabriz, Shah Abbas Sani, Agha Mesih Shirvani, Nishat, Molla Vali Vidadi, Molla Panah Vagif, Amani, Zafar and others. Along with Turks, Turkmens and Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis also celebrate the Epic of Koroglu (from Azerbaijani: kor oğlu for blind man's son), a legendary folk hero. Several documented versions of Koroglu epic remain at the Institute for Manuscripts of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. Modern literature in Azerbaijan is based on the Shirvani dialect mainly, while in Iran it is based on the Tabrizi one. The first newspaper in Azerbaijani, Akinchi was published in 1875. In the mid-19th century, it was taught in the schools of Baku, Ganja, Shaki, Tbilisi,

and Yerevan. Since 1845, it has also been taught in the University of Saint Petersburg in Russia. === Folk art === Azerbaijanis have a rich and distinctive culture, a major part of which is decorative and applied art. This form of art is represented by a wide range of handicrafts, such as chasing, jeweler, engraving in metal, carving in wood, stone and bone, carpet-making, lasing, pattern weaving and printing, knitting and embroidery. Each of these types of decorative art, evidence of the endowments of the Azerbaijan nation, is very much in favor here. Many interesting facts pertaining to the development of arts and crafts in Azerbaijan were reported by numerous merchants, travelers and diplomats who had visited these places at different times. The Azerbaijani carpet is a traditional handmade textile of various sizes, with dense texture and a pile or pile-less surface, whose patterns are characteristic of Azerbaijan's many carpet-making regions. In November 2010 the Azerbaijani carpet was proclaimed a Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage by UNESCO. Azerbaijan has been since the ancient times known as a center of a large variety of crafts. The archeological dig on the territory of Azerbaijan testifies to the well developed agriculture, stock raising, metal working, pottery, ceramics, and carpet-weaving that date as far back as to the 2nd millennium BC. Archeological sites in Dashbulaq, Hasansu, Zayamchai, and Tovuzchai uncovered from the BTC pipeline have revealed early Iron Age artifacts. Azerbaijani carpets can be categorized under several large groups and a multitude of subgroups. Scientific research of the Azerbaijani carpet is connected with the name of Latif Kerimov, a prominent scientist and artist. It was his classification that related the four large groups of carpets with the four geographical zones of Azerbaijan, Guba-Shirvan, Ganja-Kazakh, Karabakh and Tabriz. === Cuisine === The traditional cuisine is famous for an abundance of vegetables and greens used seasonally in the dishes. Fresh herbs, including mint, cilantro (coriander), dill, basil, parsley, tarragon, leeks, chives, thyme, marjoram, green onion, and watercress, are very popular and often accompany main dishes on the table. Climatic diversity and fertility of the land are reflected in the national dishes, which are based on fish from the Caspian Sea, local meat (mainly mutton and beef), and an abundance of seasonal vegetables and greens. Saffron-rice plov is the flagship food in Azerbaijan and black tea is the national beverage. Azerbaijanis often use traditional armudu (pear-shaped) glass as they have very strong tea culture. Popular traditional dishes include bozbash (lamb soup that exists in several regional varieties with the addition of different vegetables), qutab (fried turnover with a filling of greens or minced meat) and dushbara (sort of dumplings of dough filled with ground meat and flavor). === Architecture === Azerbaijani architecture typically combines elements of East and West. Azerbaijani architecture has heavy influences from Persian architecture. Many ancient architectural treasures such as the Maiden Tower and Palace of the Shirvanshahs in the Walled City of Baku survive in modern Azerbaijan. Entries submitted on the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list include the Ateshgah of Baku, Momine Khatun Mausoleum, Hirkan National Park, Binagadi National Park, Lökbatan Mud Volcano, Baku Stage Mountain, Caspian Shore Defensive Constructions, Shusha National Reserve, Ordubad National Reserve and the Palace of Shaki Khans. Among other architectural treasures are Quadrangular Castle in Mardakan, Parigala in Yukhary Chardaglar, a number of bridges spanning the Aras River, and several mausoleums. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, little monumental architecture was created, but distinctive residences were built in Baku and elsewhere. Among the most recent architectural monuments, the Baku subways are noted for their lavish decor. The task for modern Azerbaijani architecture is diverse application of modern aesthetics, the search for an architect's own artistic style and inclusion of the existing historico-cultural environment. Major projects such as Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center, Flame Towers, Baku Crystal Hall, Baku White City and SOCAR Tower have transformed the country's skyline and promotes its contemporary identity. === Visual art === Azerbaijani art includes one of the oldest art objects in the world, which were discovered as Gamigaya Petroglyphs in the territory of Ordubad Rayon are dated back to the 1st to 4th centuries BC. About 1500 dislodged and carved rock paintings with images of deer, goats, bulls, dogs, snakes, birds, fantastic beings and also people, carriages and various symbols had been found out on basalt rocks. Norwegian ethnographer and adventurer Thor Heyerdahl was convinced that people from the area went to Scandinavia in about 100 AD and took their boat building skills with them, and transmuted them into the Viking boats in Northern Europe. Over the centuries, Azerbaijani art has gone through many stylistic changes. Azerbaijani painting is traditionally characterized by a warmth of colour and light, as exemplified in the works of Azim Azimzade and Bahruz Kangarli, and a preoccupation with religious figures and cultural motifs. Azerbaijani painting enjoyed preeminence in Caucasus for hundreds of years, from the Romanesque and Ottoman periods, and through the Soviet and Baroque periods, the latter two of which saw fruition in Azerbaijan. Other notable artists who fall within these periods include Sattar Bahlulzade, Togrul Narimanbekov, Tahir Salahov, Alakbar Rezaguliyev, Mirza Gadim Irvani,

Mikayil Abdullayev and Boyukagha Mirzazade. === Cinema === The film industry in Azerbaijan dates back to 1898. In fact, Azerbaijan was among the first countries involved in cinematography. Therefore, it's not surprising that this apparatus soon showed up in Baku – at the start of the 20th century, this bay town on the Caspian was producing more than 50 percent of the world's supply of oil. Just like today, the oil industry attracted foreigners eager to invest and to work. In 1919, during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, a documentary The Celebration of the Anniversary of Azerbaijani Independence was filmed on Azerbaijan's independence day, 27 May, and premiered in June 1919 at several theatres in Baku. After the Soviet power was established in 1920, Nariman Narimanov, Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan, signed a decree nationalizing Azerbaijan's cinema. This also influenced the creation of Azerbaijani animation. In 1991, after Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union, the first Baku International Film Festival East-West was held in Baku. In December 2000, the former President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, signed a decree proclaiming 2 August to be the professional holiday of filmmakers of Azerbaijan. Today Azerbaijani filmmakers are again dealing with issues similar to those faced by cinematographers prior to the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1920. Once again, both choice of content and sponsorship of films are largely left up to the initiative of the filmmaker. === Media and media freedom === There are three state-owned television channels: AzTV, Idman TV and Medeniyyet TV. One public channel and 6 private channels: Aktimai Television, ANS TV, Space TV, Lider TV, Azad Azerbaijan TV, Xazar TV and Region TV. === Human rights in Azerbaijan === The Constitution of Azerbaijan claims to guarantee freedom of speech, but this is denied in practice. After several years of decline in press and media freedom, in 2014 the media environment in Azerbaijan deteriorated rapidly under a governmental campaign to silence any opposition and criticism, even while the country led the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (May–November 2014). Spurious legal charges and impunity in violence against journalists have remained the norm. All foreign broadcasts are banned in the country. According to the 2013 Freedom House Freedom of the Press report, Azerbaijan's press freedom status is "not free," and Azerbaijan ranks 177th out of 196 countries. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America are banned in Azerbaijan. During the last few years, three journalists were killed and several prosecuted in trials described as unfair by international human rights organizations. Azerbaijan has the biggest number of journalists imprisoned in Europe and Central Asia in 2015, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, and is the 5th most censored country in the world, ahead of Iran and China. A report by an Amnesty International researcher in October 2015 points to '...the severe deterioration of human rights in Azerbaijan over the past few years. Sadly Azerbaijan has been allowed to get away with unprecedented levels of repression and in the process almost wipe out its civil society'. Amnesty's 2015/16 annual report on the country stated '... persecution of political dissent continued. Human rights organizations remained unable to resume their work. At least 18 prisoners of conscience remained in detention at the end of the year. Reprisals against independent journalists and activists persisted both in the country and abroad, while their family members also faced harassment and arrests. International human rights monitors were barred and expelled from the country. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment persisted.' The Guardian reported in April 2017 that "Azerbaijan's ruling elite operated a secret \$2.9bn (£2.2bn) scheme to pay prominent Europeans, buy luxury goods and launder money through a network of opaque British companies Leaked data shows that the Azerbaijani leadership, accused of serial human rights abuses, systemic corruption and rigging elections, made more than 16,000 covert payments from 2012 to 2014. Some of this money went to politicians and journalists, as part of an international lobbying operation to deflect criticism of Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, and to promote a positive image of his oil-rich country." There was no suggestion that all recipients were aware of the source of the money as it arrived via a disguised route. === Sports === Freestyle wrestling has been traditionally regarded as Azerbaijan's national sport, in which Azerbaijan won up to fourteen medals, including four golds since joining the National Olympic Committee. Currently, the most popular sports include football and wrestling. Football is the most popular sport in Azerbaijan, and the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan with 9,122 registered players, is the largest sporting association in the country. The national football team of Azerbaijan demonstrates relatively low performance in the international arena compared to the nation football clubs. The most successful Azerbaijani football clubs are Neftchi Baku, Qarabağ, and Gabala. In 2012, Neftchi Baku became the first Azerbaijani team to advance to the group stage of a European competition, beating APOEL of Cyprus 4–2 on aggregate in the play-off round of the 2012-13 UEFA Europa League. In 2014, Qarabağ became the second Azerbaijani club advancing to the group stage of UEFA Europa League. In 2017, after beating Copenhagen 2–2(a) in the play-off round of the UEFA Champions League, Qarabağ

became the first Azerbaijani club to reach the Group stage. Futsal is another popular sport in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijan national futsal team reached fourth place in the 2010 UEFA Futsal Championship, while domestic club Araz Naxçıvan clinched bronze medals at the 2009–10 UEFA Futsal Cup and 2013–14 UEFA Futsal Cup. Azerbaijan was the main sponsor of Spanish football club Atlético de Madrid during seasons 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, a partnership that the club described should 'promote the image of Azerbaijan in the world'. Backgammon also plays a major role in Azerbaijani culture. The game is very popular in Azerbaijan and is widely played among the local public. There are also different variations of backgammon developed and analyzed by Azerbaijani experts. Azerbaijan is one of the leading volleyball countries in the world and its Azerbaijan Women's Volleyball Super League is one of strongest women leagues in world. Its women's national team came fourth at the 2005 European Championship. Over the last years, clubs like Rabita Baku and Azerrail Baku achieved great success at European cups. Azerbaijani volleyball players include likes of Valeriya Korotenko, Oksana Parkhomenko, Inessa Korkmaz, Natalya Mammadova and Alla Hasanova. Other well-known Azerbaijani athletes are Namig Abdullayev, Toghrul Asgarov, Rovshan Bayramov, Sharif Sharifov, Mariya Stadnik and Farid Mansurov in wrestling, Nazim Huseynov, Elnur Mammadli, Elkhan Mammadov and Rustam Orujov in judo, Rafael Aghayev in karate, Magomedrasul Majidov and Aghasi Mammadov in boxing, Nizami Pashayev in Olympic weightlifting, Azad Asgarov in pankration, Eduard Mammadov in kickboxing, and K-1 fighter Zabit Samedov. Azerbaijan has a Formula One race-track and the country hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix on 19 June 2016. Other annual sporting events held in the country are the Baku Cup tennis tournament and the Tour d'Azerbaïdjan cycling race. Azerbaijan hosted several major sport competitions since the late 2000s, including the 2013 F1 Powerboat World Championship, 2012 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup, 2011 AIBA World Boxing Championships, 2010 European Wrestling Championships, 2009 Rhythmic Gymnastics European Championships, 2014 European Taekwondo Championships, 2014 Rhythmic Gymnastics European Championships, 2016 World Chess Olympiad. On 8 December 2012, Baku was selected to host the 2015 European Games, the first to be held in competition's history. Baku is also set to host the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017. == See also == Outline of Azerbaijan Visa policy of Azerbaijan The Congress of World Azerbaijanis Index of Azerbaijan-related articles == Notes == == References == == Further reading == Olukbasi, Suha. Azerbaijan: A Political History. I.B. Tauris (2011). Focus on post-Soviet era. de Waal, Thomas. Black Garden. NYU (2003). ISBN 0-8147-1945-7 Goltz, Thomas. Azerbaijan Diary : A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic. M E Sharpe (1998). ISBN 0-7656-0244-X == External links == General information Azerbaijan International Heydar Aliyev Foundation Azerbaijan at Curlie (based on DMOZ) "Azerbaijan". The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. Azerbaijan at University of Colorado at Boulder Country profile from BBC Key Development Forecasts for Azerbaijan from International Futures Visions of Azerbaijan Journal of The European Azerbaijan Society Geographic data related to Azerbaijan at OpenStreetMap Media related to Azerbaijan at Wikimedia Commons Major government resources President of Azerbaijan website Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee United Nations Office in Azerbaijan Major news media Network NEWS Azerbaijan Azerbaijan Today Azerbaijan Press Agency Trend News Agency News.Az Tourism Azerbaijan Tourism Portal Wikimedia Atlas of Azerbaijan Travel in Azerbaijan in Visions of Azerbaijan Journal