

# TEYMUR KARIMOV



## FACTS

### Personal data:

1. Teymur Karimov (DOB: 24 Fevral 1987) is an Azerbaijani citizen, journalist, media figure and founder/chief editor of the independent broadcaster Kanal 11.
2. Karimov was detained on 11 December 2023 and prosecuted under Articles 182.2.1, 182.2.2, and 182.2.4 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code on extortion-by-threats charges. According to the judgment, the accusations concerned alleged demands for money in connection with the removal or non-publication of critical video materials. On 28 December 2024, the Baku Assize Court sentenced him to 8 years' imprisonment and imposed a 2-year ban on journalistic activity; on 15 May 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal upheld the conviction in substance but reduced the prison term to 7 years.
3. Karimov has denied the charges and maintained that the prosecution is linked to his journalistic work. His case has been publicly described by international press-freedom and human-rights organizations as politically motivated or retaliatory: Amnesty International said his arrest followed a pattern of “spurious charges” against journalists and critical voices in Azerbaijan, while CPJ records him as imprisoned in relation to his work and reports that his lawyer and observers identified multiple signs of fabrication in the case.<sup>1</sup>
4. The allegations against T. Karimov lack credibility and are widely regarded as politically driven and part of a wider crackdown on civil society and independent media launched by the Azerbaijani authorities starting from 2022.<sup>2</sup>

**Date of detention:**

5. On 11.12.2023, Teymur Karimov was detained by law-enforcement authorities as a suspect, and on 12.12.2023, pursuant to a decision of the Narimanov District Court of Baku, a pre-trial detention measure was imposed on him.

**Legal accusations:**

6. Following his detention on 11.12.2023, a criminal case was opened against Teymur Karimov under Article 182 of the Criminal Code (extortion), and by the 12.12.2023 remand hearing before the Narimanov District Court of Baku, he was being held on extortion-related charges. In the subsequent first-instance judgment and appellate decision, the accusation was framed under the following provisions of the Criminal Code:

- Article 182.2.1 – extortion by threats, committed by a group of persons by prior conspiracy;
- Article 182.2.2 – the same acts, committed repeatedly;
- Article 182.2.4 – the same acts, committed with the intent to seize property in a significant amount.

7. His case has been publicly discussed as part of a broader crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan and, more specifically, as part of a pattern in which independent journalists and media workers have been prosecuted on extortion charges. His case is situated alongside contemporaneous prosecutions against Abzas Media, Kanal 13, and later Toplum TV journalists and staff under other criminal allegations.

**Legal status of prisoner:**

8. Teymur Karimov is a convicted prisoner. On 28 December 2024, the Baku Assize Court found him guilty under Articles 182.2.1, 182.2.2 and 182.2.4 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to 8 years' imprisonment, together with a 2-year ban on engaging in journalistic activity. He appealed, and on 15 May 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal amended the first-instance judgment by reducing the custodial sentence to 7 years, leaving the remainder of the judgment unchanged. On 24 December 2025, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan partially upheld the cassation appeal, upheld the conviction, and reduced the prison sentence from 7 years to 5 years, thereby exhausting domestic remedies.

**Legal proceedings:**

9. On 11.12.2023, Teymur Karimov was detained by law-enforcement authorities as a suspect. On 12.12.2023, the Narimanov District Court of Baku imposed a pre-trial detention measure, calculated from 11 December 2023. He remained in custody throughout the trial, and the first-instance court later ordered that the custodial measure remain in force until the judgment entered into legal force.

10. The first-instance trial concluded on 28.12.2024, when the Baku Assize Court found Karimov guilty under Articles 182.2.1, 182.2.2 and 182.2.4 of the Criminal Code, sentenced him to 8 years' imprisonment, and imposed an additional 2-year ban on engaging in journalistic activity. The court also ordered that the custodial measure remain in place until the judgment entered into legal force.
11. Karimov appealed, and on 15.05.2025, the Baku Court of Appeal rejected the defense appeal on the merits but amended the sentence by reducing the custodial term from 8 years to 7 years, leaving the remainder of the judgment unchanged. The appellate decision entered into force immediately. On 24.12.2025, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan partially upheld the cassation appeal and reduced the prison term from 7 years to 5 years.
12. At trial and on appeal, Karimov denied guilt and maintained that the prosecution was politically motivated and linked to his journalistic activity. In the first-instance proceedings, he alleged that he had repeatedly been threatened by senior Ministry of Internal Affairs officials; the appellate submissions further recorded the defense claim that he had been detained by plainclothes officers, questioned about journalism and accused of passing information to bloggers abroad. He also alleged that he had been subjected to torture or other unlawful treatment in custody. The courts did not accept those arguments: the first-instance judgment referred to a 22.01.2024 prosecutorial decision refusing to open a criminal case over his ill-treatment complaint and to a later Narimanov District Court ruling in that matter, while the Court of Appeal described the defense arguments as unsubstantiated and left the conviction intact apart from reducing the sentence

## LEGAL ANALYSIS

### Reasons why Teymur Karimov should be regarded as a political prisoner:

13. Assessment of whether T. Karimov should be regarded as a political prisoner is based on the Resolution 1900 (2012) 'The Definition of Political Prisoner' of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the criteria established in the Resolution (paragraph 3)<sup>3</sup>. The legal proceedings against and conviction of T. Karimov satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph. 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

(a) Teymur's detention and imprisonment violate his fundamental rights under the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly freedom of expression and the right to freedom of association, as well as the right to a fair trial and to liberty and security.

(e) The political motives (ulterior motives) were sole and predominant in pursuing and conducting unfair criminal proceedings against him, which caused preliminary detention and imprisonment.

14. The European Court of Human Rights' jurisprudence on Article 18 of the ECHR, which prohibits restrictions on rights for improper purposes, reinforces this analysis. The following considerations based on quadripartite test should be emphasized in this totality assessment in the general contextual evaluation of a distinct state of affairs (*mutatis mutandis*, *Ibrahimov and Mammadov v. Azerbaijan*, 2020, §§ 113-131):

- 1) The prisoner's public profile;
- 2) The sequence of the events;
- 3) The manner in which the investigations and trial were carried out;
- 4) The authorities' conduct.

**Teymur Karimov's public profile:**

15. The circumstances indicate that Teymur Karimov is an independent Azerbaijani journalist and media figure, rather than a conventional party-political activist, whose public profile derived from critical reporting through Kanal 11 and related outlets. The court materials themselves describe him as the unofficial head of "Kanal 11", while CPJ identifies him as the founder and chief editor of the independent broadcaster and notes that Kanal 11 covered social issues and citizens' complaints on YouTube; CPJ also records that Karimov served as the in-country manager for the exile-based outlets Time TV and Azad Soz. In his trial testimony, Karimov stated that senior Ministry of Internal Affairs officials had repeatedly threatened him over material he broadcast, including reporting concerning military veterans, and that before his arrest he already expected detention because other journalists were being arrested. Public statements issued after his detention likewise linked his case to reporting on corruption and the treatment of veterans.

16. From the outset, Karimov's criminal case has been publicly framed not as an isolated extortion prosecution but as part of the broader crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan. Amnesty International stated that his arrest followed a "disturbing pattern of spurious charges" against journalists and other critical voices, and recorded that, since November 2023, multiple journalists had been placed in pretrial detention on what appeared to be fabricated charges. Subsequent public reporting by Amnesty, Freedom House, and CPJ situated Karimov within the same enforcement wave as other targeted journalists and outlets, including Kanal 13, Abzas Media, Toplum TV. Against that background and given Karimov's consistent position that the accusations were retaliatory and linked to his journalistic work, his prosecution appears consistent with a broader pattern in which visible critical reporting and association with independent or exile-linked media networks are recast as ordinary criminality for deterrent and punitive effect.

## The sequence of events:

17. Teymur Karimov's arrest is part of a larger, coordinated pattern of repression in Azerbaijan, in which opposition-aligned individuals and government critics have been detained on a strikingly repetitive set of allegations, most commonly serious narcotics-related accusations framed as large quantity and/or intent to sell, as well as finance/tax-related crimes and crimes against the state and national security. This uniformity, and the way charges and detention measures have been applied across multiple similar cases, strongly suggests a state-driven strategy to criminalize dissenting political affiliation and criticism rather than a legitimate process aimed at individual wrongdoing. The relevant sequence of events should therefore be assessed synthetically, as a single wave of repression with a clear policy logic and continuity.
18. Already in 2022, a discernible pattern of repression was emerging through a series of arrests that disproportionately affected persons deported/returned from abroad (notably Germany), individuals perceived as affiliated with the PFPA/AXCP, Musavat and certain minority figures. This early hunt functioned as a clear precursor to, and warning sign of, the wider crackdown that would later expand across independent media, NGOs, and other segments of civil society.
19. In December 2022, civic activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was arrested.<sup>4</sup> In June 2023, protests against the gold mine in the village of Soyudlu, Gadabay, and their coverage by informally networked NGOs and critical media (including Toplum TV) accelerated the process of repression. After suppressing these protests, the government imposed a blockade on the village and blamed NGOs and the media for inciting the events.<sup>5</sup>
20. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.<sup>6</sup> In August 2023, pro-government media organised a smear campaign against peace activists protesting military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>7</sup>. In September 2023, four activists were administratively detained for one month. Around the same time, arrests were carried out against Labor Desk (İşçi Masası) activists, who sought to establish the country's only alternative trade union organization.<sup>8</sup>
21. The main follow-up campaign began in November 2023. First, the pro-government media published smear articles targeting almost all NGOs and media outlets. Later, at the end of November 2023, the AbzasMedia arrests began<sup>9</sup>. These arrests continued in early March 2024 with a police raid against the detainee's affiliated organization and the arrest of several individuals represented in those institutions.

22. In April 2024, Imran Aliyev, the head of the Meclis.info portal monitoring the parliament, was detained<sup>10</sup>. In May 2024, Anar Mammadli, the head of Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies (EMDS), was arrested (he had also been arrested in the previous round of repression).<sup>11</sup> These arrests demonstrate that a new wave of repression had already begun. The objective of this wave was to paralyze the activities of post-2014 informally networked NGOs and critical media. But it also expanded beyond NGOs and media into academia and peace advocacy: Igbal Abilov<sup>12</sup>, a Talysh historian/ethnographer, was detained in July 2024 and later sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment in May 2025 on treason-related accusations and political scientist Bahruz Samadov<sup>13</sup> was detained in August 2024 on treason charges similarly and later sentenced to a 15 years' prison term. Both of their arrests are widely condemned as politically motivated.
23. Repression further continued against independent media through the Meydan TV case:<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that the investigation targeted the outlet and that its newsroom staff were held in pre-trial detention from December 2024, with subsequent arrests feeding into a consolidated trial that began in December 2025. Finally, repression widened to formal opposition politics in late 2025, when Ali Karimli<sup>15</sup>, the long-standing leader of the Popular Front Party, was detained (29 November 2025) and remanded into pre-trial custody, amid a broader escalation against the party documented by human rights monitors.
24. This process was preceded by restrictive legislation: the Law on Media (2021)<sup>16</sup> and the Law on Political Parties (2022)<sup>17</sup>. Both laws were criticized by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe for being restrictive. Nevertheless, they remain valid and enforceable. A similar process took place during the repression of 2013–2014: restrictive laws were first adopted, and arrests followed.
25. In this regard, the persons arrested in this process, including the detainee, are victims of the political repression of 2023–2025. The main objective of this campaign of political arrests is to dismantle the informal, networked NGOs and critical media that revived and assumed a new format in the post-2014 era. Political arrests in this context serve an instrumental purpose.

**The manner in which the investigations and trial were carried out:**

26. The manner in which the investigation and trial were conducted in Teymur Karimov's case gives rise to a strong appearance of procedural bad faith. In substance, the case materials suggest that the authorities treated the matter not as a dispute requiring careful differentiation between journalistic activity, publication decisions, and criminal extortion, but as a complaint-driven prosecution in which the incriminating narrative was accepted at speed and then preserved through the later stages of the proceedings. The judgments show that the courts relied heavily on the complainants' applications, witness statements, investigation protocols, and prosecution-generated documentary materials, while subjecting Karimov's coercion and retaliation allegations to only limited and ultimately deferential scrutiny.

27. According to the case narrative reproduced in the judgments, the investigation was triggered by two written applications submitted on 11 December 2023 to the Main Department for Combating Organised Crime of the Ministry of Internal Affairs by Farrukh Alakbarov and Leyla Almaszade, who alleged that Karimov, presenting himself as a journalist and head of Kanal 11, had threatened to disseminate discrediting material and had demanded money in connection with the removal or non-publication of video material. On that same day, a criminal case was opened, Karimov was detained and questioned as a suspect, and on the following day, 12 December 2023, he was formally charged and remanded in custody. The defense later argued on appeal that this compressed sequence was itself procedurally irregular: in particular, counsel contended that, under Article 207.1.2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, preliminary examination should have been conducted before the immediate opening of a criminal case, and that Karimov had been questioned at night without the urgency required by law. That chronology, taken together with the pace at which detention and accusation followed the complainants' applications, substantially narrowed the space for meaningful adversarial testing at the threshold stage.
28. The subsequent evidentiary framework was likewise dominated by police- and prosecution-controlled materials. The first-instance court expressly stated that, alongside oral testimony, it accepted as evidence the investigation and court protocols and other documents in the file, including the original applications to the Department for Combating Organized Crime and related documentary materials. A notable feature of the file is that the prosecution theory effectively transformed publication activity and disputes over the removal of online material into a criminal extortion narrative without any visible effort, in the reasoning reproduced by the courts, to distinguish between unethical journalism, civil/reputational dispute, editorial bargaining, and criminal coercion. The record also contains indications of selective evidentiary recording: one witness stated in court that parts of her explanation and the names of journalists she had called were not written down because investigators told her they did not need those matters, only whether Karimov had demanded money from the complainant. These features support the view that the investigation was structured around a prosecution thesis from the outset and that alternative exculpatory or contextual material was not pursued with equal seriousness.

29. The courts then gave decisive weight to Karimov's and his co-accused's investigation-stage statements to the extent that those statements could be used to support the prosecution's version, notwithstanding their later denials and their allegations of coercion. The first-instance court expressly held that the parts of Karimov's pre-trial statement which confirmed the sequence and mechanism of the alleged offences were consistent with the totality of the evidence and could therefore be relied upon; the appellate court repeated the same logic and treated Karimov's contradictory later statements as attempts to mislead the court and evade responsibility. Yet Karimov told the trial court that he had signed protocols under pressure, that he had been subjected to pressure at the Department for Combating Organized Crime, and that he had been threatened with a fabricated narcotics case: in his account, he was taken to the Department, told he was being held over narcotics, and heard an officer instruct others to place marijuana in his pocket and film it. On the face of the judgments, the domestic courts did not respond to those allegations by excluding the contested statements or applying especially rigorous scrutiny to their evidential value; rather, they preserved the incriminating parts and rejected the rest.
30. Finally, the handling of detention and ill-treatment allegations reinforces the inference that the proceedings were conducted in a highly formalistic, prosecution-protective manner. The first-instance court considered it justified to leave the remand measure unchanged until the judgment entered into legal force, a formulaic approach that did not reflect a genuinely individualized reassessment of the need for continued detention. As to the coercion allegations, the file shows a sequence of refusals and limited institutional responses rather than a robust independent inquiry: on 22 January 2024, the Narimanov prosecutor's office refused to open a criminal case regarding Karimov's complaint of unlawful acts by the Department for Combating Organized Crime officers; although on 8 August 2024 the Narimanov District Court quashed that refusal and ordered continuation of the inquiry, the first-instance court later relied on penitentiary medical information stating that no visible injuries had been recorded upon his entry into detention and on a further communication from the Chief Prosecutor's Service Investigations Department stating that on 17 September 2024 it had again refused to open a criminal case. In these circumstances, the file materials support the conclusion that the investigation and trial were carried out in a manner oriented toward securing and maintaining Karimov's incarceration and conviction, rather than establishing the truth through a fully adversarial process equipped with effective safeguards against coercion and retaliatory prosecution.

**The authorities' conduct:**

31. The conduct of the relevant authorities in Teymur Karimov's case raises serious concerns as to haste, one-sidedness, and the effectiveness of procedural safeguards. The appellate materials record the defense position that Karimov was detained by plainclothes officers on 11 December 2023, taken to the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime, questioned about his journalistic activity and alleged contacts with bloggers abroad, and that, on the same day, a criminal case was opened, he was detained and questioned as a suspect, and, on 12 December 2023, he was formally charged and remanded in custody; the defense further argued that this sequence bypassed the preliminary verification envisaged by Article 207.1.2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and included night-time questioning without lawful urgency, but those objections were not accepted by the appellate court.

#### **Additional considerations:**

32. Finally, international human rights observers such as Amnesty International<sup>18</sup> and Human Rights Watch<sup>19</sup> have denounced the charges against T. Karimov as politically motivated.

#### **CONCLUSION**

33. The personal factors (Teymur Karimov's public profile, absence of convincing evidence, and constant violation of procedural rights) and contextual factors (new wave of political repression) cumulatively indicate reasonable grounds to believe that Teymur Karimov should be considered a political prisoner in light of Resolution 1900 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

34. Based on this conclusion, Teymur Karimov should be released unconditionally and immediately. Furthermore, he should be compensated *restitutio in integrum*.

- <sup>1</sup> See: Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Teymur Karimov' <https://cpj.org/data/people/teymur-karimov/> accessed 14 March 2026; Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Authorities intensifying crackdown on independent media' (12 December 2023) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/azerbaijan-authorities-intensifying-crackdown-on-independent-media/> accessed 14 March 2026.
- <sup>2</sup> European Parliament, 'Resolution on the crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan, notably the case of Abzas Media' (2024) P9\_TA(2024)0074 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0074\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0074_EN.html) accessed 29 May 2025.
- <sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 'Resolution 1900 (2012): The definition of political prisoner' (3 October 2012) <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19150> accessed 29 May 2025.
- <sup>4</sup> Eurasianet, Prominent activist detained following U.S. sanctions on Azerbaijani official <https://eurasianet.org/prominent-activist-detained-following-us-sanctions-on-azerbaijani-official> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>5</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Police prevent coverage of protests about environmental scandal in Azerbaijan <https://rsf.org/en/police-prevent-coverage-protests-about-environmental-scandal-azerbaijan> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, Azerbaijan: Free Academic Facing Bogus Charges <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/23/azerbaijan-free-academic-facing-bogus-charges> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>7</sup> Musavat, "No-Warçılarının dosyesi: onlar harada və necə yetişiblər" [https://musavat.com/news/no-war-cilarin-dosyesi-onlar-harada-ve-necə-yetisibler\\_1001622.html](https://musavat.com/news/no-war-cilarin-dosyesi-onlar-harada-ve-necə-yetisibler_1001622.html) accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>8</sup> Eurasianet, Azerbaijan authorities smash unionization efforts for gig workers <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-authorities-smash-unionization-efforts-for-gig-workers> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, Azerbaijan: Seven journalists sentenced in latest shocking crackdown on free speech <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/azerbaijan-seven-journalists-sentenced-in-latest-shocking-crackdown-on-free-speech/> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>10</sup> Council of Europe, Safety Of Journalists — FOM Alert <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107640886> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>11</sup> Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Azerbaijan: authorities should release imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/azerbaijan-authorities-should-release-imprisoned-human-rights-defenders-journalists-and-civil-society-activists> accessed 28 August 2025
- <sup>12</sup> Scholars at Risk, 'Release academic Iqbal Abilov, wrongfully imprisoned for one year' (22 July 2025) <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2025/07/release-academic-igbal-abilov-wrongfully-imprisoned-for-one-year/> accessed 7 January 2026

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan: Escalating Crackdown on Critics' (30 August 2024) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/30/azerbaijan-escalating-crackdown-critics> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>14</sup> Arzu Geybulla, 'Another Courageous Journalist Jailed in Azerbaijan' (Human Rights Watch, 16 May 2025) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/16/another-courageous-journalist-jailed-azerbaijan> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Arrest of opposition leader is further evidence of consolidation of authoritarian practices' (1 December 2025) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/azerbaijan-arrest-of-opposition-leader-is-further-evidence-of-consolidation-of-authoritarian-practices/> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>16</sup> Venice Commission. 'Opinion on On The Law On Media in Azerbaijan.' Council of Europe, Opinion No. 1078/2022, 2022, available at [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2022\)009-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2022)009-e)

<sup>17</sup> Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR. Joint Opinion On The Law On Political Parties, 2023 available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/543922.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Authorities intensifying crackdown on independent media' (12 December 2023) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/azerbaijan-authorities-intensifying-crackdown-on-independent-media/> accessed 14 March 2026.

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan' (World Report 2023) (2023) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/azerbaijan>> accessed 25 January 2026.

