

# Urban Tourism and a Culture Clash: Understanding Anti-Arab Tourist Sentiment in Baku

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Following the fall in the global oil price and the economic crisis in Azerbaijan in 2015, the government turned to tourism to fill the economic gap, loosening visa restrictions for some Arab countries and welcoming wealthy Arab investors into its tourism, business, and real estate markets. The capital city, Baku, and its leisure attractions have become popular among tourists from Arab countries. Although Arabs make up only 10 percent of all tourists visiting Azerbaijan, their numbers have increased dramatically in recent years, from around 9,000 in 2015 to nearly 260,000 in 2017.<sup>1</sup> The government well understands what appeals to these visitors

and has done its best to cater to them, launching five-star hotels, shopping malls, leisure centers, restaurants, entertainment, and therapy centers across the city. However, it has expended less effort on mitigating the cultural impact of the phenomenon, namely the culture clash between Baku residents and Arab tourists.

Residents of Baku have largely responded negatively to this new tourist wave, expressing their dissatisfaction on social networks and in public spaces. The economic impact of this tourism is indeed marked by a lack of transparency in property and land sales to Arab buyers, which significantly drives up property

prices, increasing inequality and decreasing inclusiveness in Baku's downtown and districts. Social concerns also include rising levels of prostitution; the growing prominence of and demand for the Arabic language in service sectors as well as in public announcements; and the encroachment of religious sectarianism, which threatens the religious balance in the country. A question examining Baku residents' preferences for tourists from different regions found that the most favored tourists were Europeans (65 percent in favor), Turks (45.8 percent), and Russians (44.6 percent), while the view of Arab tourists was the most negative (91.5 percent against) (see below).

This paper explores the cultural and ideological similarities that might unify Arabs and Azerbaijanis, as well as the differences that produce rifts between them. To do so, it examines Baku residents' attitudes toward Arab tourists and businesses, as well as exploring their causal mechanisms and outcomes. In the final section, it makes policy suggestions for curbing tensions between the groups while fostering engagement that will allow Baku to succeed in its tourism branding. Failing to integrate essential el-

ements of local identity into the plans for developing Baku as a tourist destination limits long-term development, social cohesion, equality, and the city's inclusive and sustainable development of services and infrastructure.

## Methods

Pizam and Milman describe tourism as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that has a significant impact on public and individual behaviors, moral systems, collective routines, traditions, ceremony habits, and institutional forms.<sup>2</sup> This process, however, does not just happen when tourists appear in a destination; it depends to some degree on the development of the tourism industry and “tourist–host interactions.”<sup>3</sup> That is, the influence of tourism is not one-sided: both locals and tourists experience diverse influences through interaction. In the case of Baku, it can therefore be expected that both Arab tourists and locals will significantly change their culture and public behavior as this process continues.

Butler's Tourist Area Life Cycle model (TALC) also helps to explain the effects of Arab tourism in Baku.<sup>4</sup> This model predicts that a rise in the number of Arab tourists will fundamentally alter the local community, forcing it to change development trajectories in order to accommodate an influx of tourism. The local community, economy, and infrastructure will become primary suppliers of accommodation, transportation, and other services to support the tourism industry rather than developing in accordance with the needs of residents.

In order to understand how interactions between tourists and locals affect the perceptions and attitudes of Baku's population, I employ a three-fold method: content analysis of news media, a systematic random sampling survey, and in-depth interviews with Baku residents. I use Content Analysis (CA) to examine the discourse of online local and national news media in August and September 2018. In particular, I focus on discourse among public institutional and non-institutional actors regarding ethnic and religious values, mores, and perceptions. This allows me to draw inferences about Arab social and cultural influence (see Appendix 1). The advantage of the CA method is that it is less subjective than direct interviews and allows for the analysis of various aspects of narratives, facts, and texts associated with a given phenomenon.

Along with three other field researchers, I conducted a survey of 200 respondents in September 2018 in the Binagadi, Khatai, Nasimi, Khazar, Sabail, Nizami, Surakhani, Sabunchu, Yasamal, and Narimanov districts of Baku (see Appendix 4). The sampling method of the survey was systematic random sampling, where the sampling interval was every 10,000th respondent as listed on the last election list (before the 2018 presidential election), with the selected starting point being the 20th person on the list. This method significantly diminishes the risk of sampling bias. The refusal rate was 30 percent. I used SPSS software to aggregate all variables by gender. The mean age was 35, with the oldest 83 and the youngest 18. Slightly more than half of the respondents were

married, and nearly half of them had undertaken post-secondary education. The inferential statistical analysis tested how gender, age, and educational level influence people's perceptions of Arab tourists. I employed an independent samples T-test, Pearson's Chi-squared tests, and Pearson Correlation analyses in the testing hypothesis.

Last but not least, I conducted 20 pre-survey and post-survey in-depth interviews to help elucidate the reasons for social opposition to Arab tourists. These semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with residents of Baku in May and October 2018. The interviews consisted of 18 questions (see Appendix 2). A convenience sample of 6 women and 14 men was selected. This sampling method focused on people who regularly visit the downtown area, whether for work or because they own property there: Arab tourists tend to cluster downtown, meaning that people who spend a lot of time there feel the effects of Arab tourism most strongly. A drawback of this sampling method is that the results are non-generalizable and the demographics of people represented in the downtown area create a sampling bias (see Appendix 3).

## The Tourism Sector in Numbers

Since 2012, the number of tourists visiting Azerbaijan has been on a slow upward trajectory. According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the overall number of tourists increased slightly from 2012 to 2017 (see Figure 1).

While this upward trend is modest overall, the proportion of tourists coming from Arabic countries has risen significantly. Whereas in 2015 tourists from Arabic-speaking countries constituted 0.5 percent of all visitors (9,020 total), by 2017 their numbers had risen 28-fold, to 259,299, or 10 percent of the total number of visitors in that year.<sup>5</sup>

other many derogatory terms. Lately, the terms such as “terrorist”, “fundamentalist” and “blood-thirsty” are the terms that are over-ascribed to the Arabs.

However, content analysis of local media in Baku finds that different stereotypes and conceptions of Arabs prevail in

Azerbaijan. Instead of using the tropes of terrorism and fundamentalism, local media in Baku prefer to emphasize the predatory sexual practices of Arab tourists and characterize Arab men as “primeval” or “womanizers.” The religious influence of Arab newcomers and tourists has thus far gone largely unaddressed in local media. Very few media organiza-

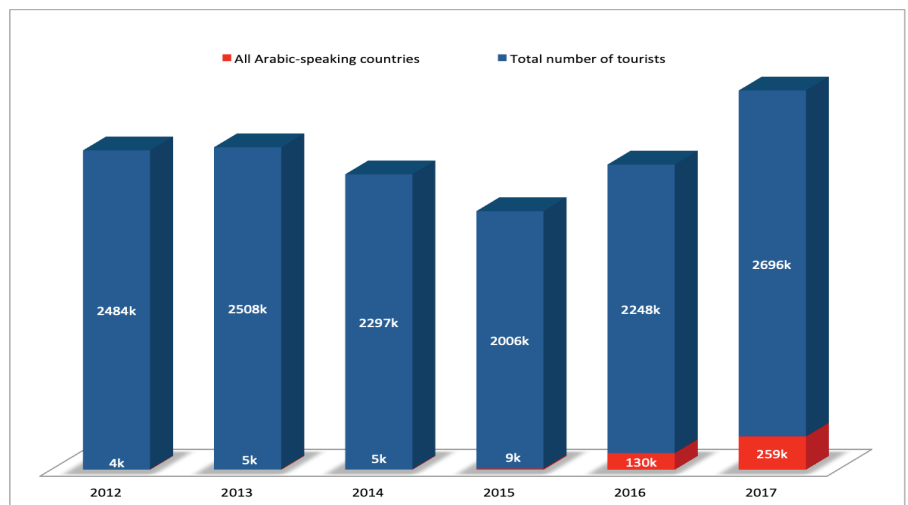
As Figure 2 shows, the vast majority of the increase in Arab tourism to Azerbaijan came from six countries: the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. To take one example, 186 times more UAE citizens visited Azerbaijan in 2017 than in 2012. The share of tourists from other regions of the world did not change anywhere near as dramatically in that period.<sup>6</sup>

**Understanding Media Trends and Perceptions of Arabs**

As Arab tourists have flocked to Azerbaijan over the past three years, Azerbaijani media outlets have significantly misrepresented Arab identity, painting it as monolithic and failing to differentiate between linguistic dialects, religious doctrines, and other identity markers. Riduouani has argued that in international media outlets, Arabs’ national identities are lost; “Arab” has become synonymous with a religious Islamic identity.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to explain that:

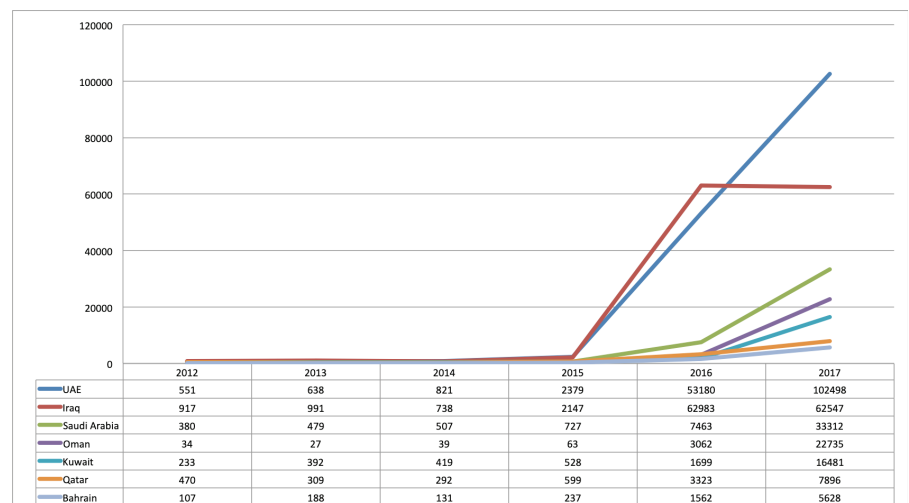
In the past, Arabs were recognized mainly by the media in the West as “erotic,” “primitive,” and “ignorant,” among

**Figure 1. Trends in international tourism: number of arrivals and Arab tourists as a share of the total**



Source: Author’s compilation based on State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan data (2018)

**Figure 2. Number of tourists from select Arabic-speaking countries to visit Azerbaijan between 2012 and 2017**



Source: Author’s compilation based on State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan data (2018)

tions have echoed the discourse of a “terrorist threat” related to the increasing mobility of people from Arab countries. On the contrary, experts who speak to the local media almost uniformly decline to describe Arab tourists as a terrorist threat.<sup>8</sup> Officials from the Caucasus Muslim Board and the State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan have, however, expressed some apprehensions:<sup>9</sup>

Some people who visit Azerbaijan as tourists stay here more than a week and assemble some people around them to promote their *agidah* actively...They pray in our mosques, disseminate their religious materials...and refuse to pray behind local imams during congregation (*jamaat*) praying.

Despite the official’s concerns about the religious aspect of Arab tourism, media outlets generally

do not present Arab people as a source of fundamentalism, terrorism, or radicalization. Furthermore, despite a sudden increase in the number of Arabs in Baku, local media have not presented Arabs as a threat to the city’s ethnic balance. Instead, the prevailing trend is to describe Arabs as bringing with them a public culture that differs significantly from local norms. Figure 3 illustrates the leading discursive trends in local media.

My content analysis revealed that “dirtiness,” “prostitution,” and “investment” are crucial media catchphrases linked to Arab tourism. In my sample, approximately 300 articles (many of them republished) use these words to describe the behavioral discrepancy between Baku residents and Arabs.<sup>10</sup>

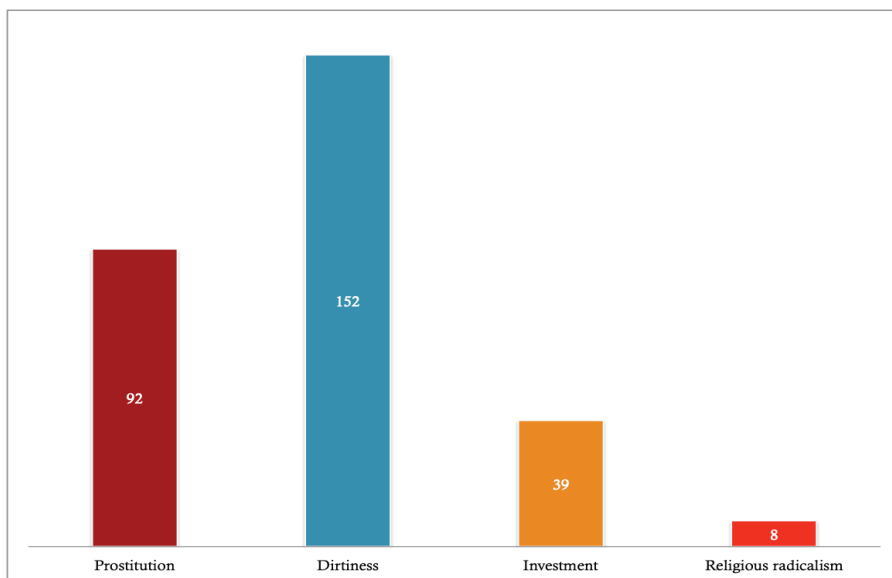
**Baku’s Residents’ Perceptions of Arabs: The Religious and Ethnic Prism**

Although Arab tourists in Azerbaijan are not directly associated with religious influence, religion is perceived as the only symbolic factor that may potentially unite residents of Baku with Arab tourists. In the survey, respondents were asked to find common ground between Arabs and locals. The survey revealed that 55.7 percent of respondents perceive religion to be the principal value shared by locals and Arab visitors. This was also borne out in interviews:

At least religion is worth mentioning as the only common ground that we share with Arab people. I cannot observe any other element that bridges us (Int. 9).

The T-test illustrates that the sense of sharing religious values is common to all age groups. However, gender does appear to have some influence. According to Pearson’s Chi-squared test, men are less likely than women to believe that Azerbaijanis and Arabs share religious values (p-value 0.023, 95 percent confidence level). The magnitude of difference is 15.3 percent, with 2 degrees of freedom. The Chi-squared test (X<sup>2</sup>) also indicates that there is some correlation between an individual’s educational attainment and his or her sense of having common religious values with Arabs (p-value = 0.041). People who have higher education think that they have some level of common religious values with Arabs. The lower an individual’s educational level, meanwhile, the lower his or

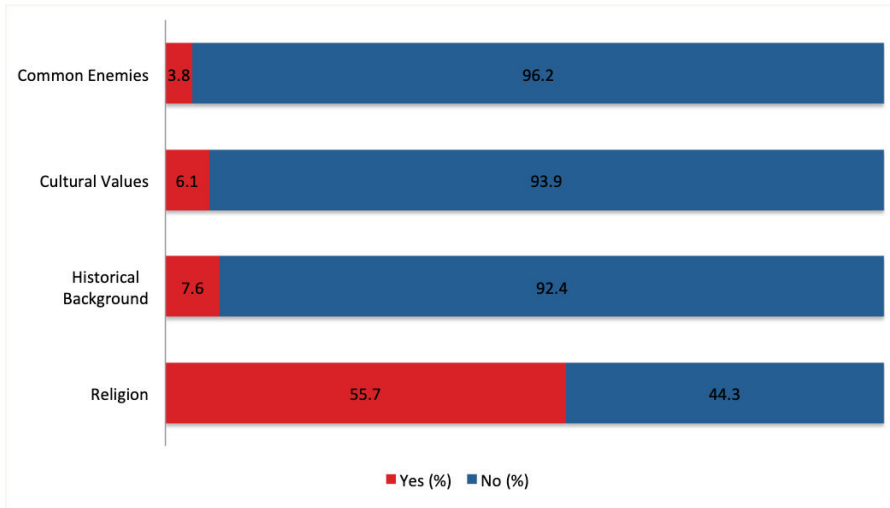
**Figure 3. Discursive framings of Arabs in local media, by frequency of use**



Source: Author’s compilation based on online media sources

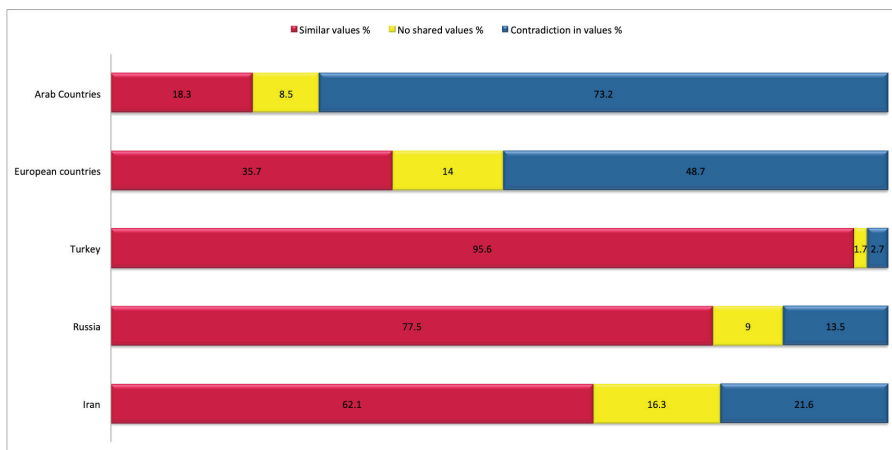


**Figure 4. Could you define the common ground between residents and Arab tourists?**



Source: Author's survey

**Figure 5. Level of perceived shared cultural/moral values with tourists from different countries/regions**



Source: Author's survey

her perception of shared religious values with Arab tourists.

Some interviewees suggested that these perceptions of religious similarity with Arabs are rooted in history. Int. 8 explained:

Thinking about cultural similarities, I can only mention religion—Islam—because Azerbaijan was occupied by the Arabs historically and Islam was literally brought to our lands by them. I believe religion is the most

important unifying factor between them and us. Perhaps Arab people are eager to visit Azerbaijan because of religious similarity, as they do not experience radical reactions to their religious identity...which happens [if they visit] Christian-majority communities.

Returning to the survey, the Pearson Correlation indicates that the association between religion and cultural values may be relatively weak among respondents in Baku, but it is still statistically

significant (-0.177\*\* and p-value=0.001). The survey results about shared moral and cultural values with visitors reveal different attitudes toward tourists from different regions. Residents of Baku consider that they share more moral and cultural values with tourists from neighboring countries such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey than they do with those from European and Arab countries (see Figure 5).

Interviews help us elaborate on the reason for these attitudes, pointing to a shared recent history, ethnic similarity, and sectarian ties. Although Turkish people have the same religious affiliation (Sunni) as Arabs, residents of Baku emphasize the importance of the shared ethnic background (Turkic) over religious attachment. In the case of Russians, who share neither ethnic nor religious background with Azerbaijanis, the focus is on a shared Soviet history. Meanwhile, Iranian tourists, who are mainly ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Iran, enjoy a strong shared ethnic identity and some religious sectarian (Shia) association. Int. 20 emphasized the high number of Azerbaijani Iranians as central to attitudes toward these tourists:

There are 35 million Azerbaijanis in Iran, which puts Iranians in a unique position. I do not feel right calling them tourists. Also, Iranian Azerbaijanis are Shias as we are. That makes us feel extra close to them in comparison to Arabs.

Analysis of local media discourse reveals a similar approach to Iranians. The promotion of ethnic and cultural similarity with Iranians and the positive attitude to-

ward them as tourists is the dominant trend in media articles. One online source explained:<sup>11</sup>

The shared historical and cultural values (Novruz Holiday, language, religion/sect, and ethnicity) of Azerbaijanis and Iranians and their geographical closeness stimulate Iranians to visit Azerbaijan.

This analysis reveals that religion is far from being the only determining factor of a positive or negative reaction. A number of other factors related to history and ethnic links contribute to positive views of some “others.”

It is worth considering how respondents reacted to sectarian—Sunni vs. Shia—differences between locals and Arabs. When survey respondents were asked how they felt sectarian differences affected relationships and communication between Arabs and locals, 65 percent of respondents indicated that such differences were not necessarily an obstacle to establishing relations with Arabs, in comparison to 15.6 percent of respondents who said they did make a difference. A further 19.4 percent said that they were indifferent toward sectarian differences. Int. 3 clearly explained why sectarian differences are not a deal-breaker for people in Baku:

Now modern Azerbaijani people can understand what the fundamentals of the Sunni and Shia struggle were. The war happened as a result of the Western imperial interests to “divide and rule politics,” which aimed to fragment Muslim civilization. So for me—and, I believe, for others like me—it does not matter whether they are Sunni or Shia. It is not a hot topic

anymore.

In an effort to further investigate this topic, we asked residents about their attitudes toward Arabs’ selection of their own imams for congregation prayers. We found that 57.8 percent of respondents had negative feelings about this, compared to 19 percent who saw it positively. The reasons for this negativity about Arabs’ refusal to pray with local imams were clarified during in-depth interviews. Int. 16 emphasized:

If Arabs refuse to pray with local imams, my reaction is negative, because it is a kind of discrimination against other Muslims. There is no need to set yourself apart from others. We have the same religion and sharia for everybody.

Even though there are some differences between the Sunni and Shia schools in terms of their interpretations of Islamic scripture, respondents generally did not see a disparity between the two *tarigats*. However, the Azerbaijani government and Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) officials see it differently, as reported in the local media. Deputy leader of the CMB Salman Musayev stressed, for instance, that:<sup>12</sup>

Arab tourists promote their religious ideology in our mosques. That could be very hazardous for our community. If we fail to take preventive measures, people will suffer.

The deputy head of the State Committee on Religious Associations, Gunduz Ismayilov, has likewise expressed his disapprobation in the media:<sup>13</sup>

According to the information given to our Committee, Arab tourists try to conduct congregation prayer without local imams appointed by CMB [the Caucasus Muslim Board], which is prohibited by law and unacceptable to us.

Despite the government’s concern, sects are not considered by Baku’s residents to be a fundamental threat to religious harmony in the city today. The survey results also highlight that 88.3 percent of respondents do not perceive Arabs to be a hazard to their religious identity.

But another set of questions—looking at attitudes toward intermarriage between Arabs and Azerbaijanis—revealed the prevalence of stereotypes about Arabs. Among survey respondents, 98.3 percent responded negatively to the prospect of intermarriage with Arabs. This negativity stems mainly from the perception that Arabs practice polygamy, which discourages local women from intermarrying. Sharia law allows a man to have up to four wives, but this contradicts Azerbaijani secular and legal views on marriage, which dictate that monogamy is the only acceptable family structure. As Int. 18 put it:

I would not be fond of marrying an Arab. I would never agree to be a third or fourth wife of anybody.

Symptomatically, none of my female interview respondents reacted positively to the prospect of marrying an Arab. This stereotype was also borne out in online media: Mehriban Zeynalova, the head of an NGO called “Temiz Dunya,” told *modern.az* that:<sup>14</sup>

The one specific feature of Arab family structure is polygamy; only old, widowed Azerbaijani women or economically poor ones would agree to marry them....

Along similar lines, local women perceive Arabs as a threat to their secular lifestyle, since female Arab tourists wear very strict religious dress that conflicts with Baku secular urban culture. In general, Azerbaijanis are not considered to be as devout as Arabs in their practice of Islam. The majority of them do not practice *namaz* (prayers) during the day, treat women in a more equal way, and do not abstain from alcohol as textual Islam requires.

Another aspect of Azerbaijanis' reluctance to marry Arabs is their different ethnic backgrounds. Int. 8 explained:

Overall, I am not positive about marrying somebody from another ethnicity. It does not matter whether they are Arabs or anyone else. I am against mixing kinship, which results in future generations losing their ethnic identity.

Mehriban Zeynalova touched on similar themes in her interview with *modern.az*:<sup>15</sup>

I am not against mixed marriage, but we have to think: what kind of citizens will appear after some years?

All in all, religious requirements and the fear of ethnic identity loss discourage locals from marrying Arabs.

**Baku Residents' Perceptions of Arabs: The Urban Behavioral Culture Prism**

If religious and ethnic differences are not seen as significant issues for Baku residents, what is the basis for their negative reaction toward Arab tourists? My survey reveals that this stems from a perceived difference in urban cultural habits. The survey underlines, for instance, that 61.8 percent of respondents were concerned about Arabs' behavior disturbing public order. A significant proportion of media outlets and interviewees likewise cited Arabs' public behavior and their role in rising prostitution as the principal concern surrounding Arab tourists' presence in Baku (see Figure 6).

The in-depth interviews confirmed this perception of a gap in public behavior. Int. 4 explained:

We have some cultural differences with Arabs. Their behavior is different from locals'. We do not throw rubbish everywhere in the city center, but they do.

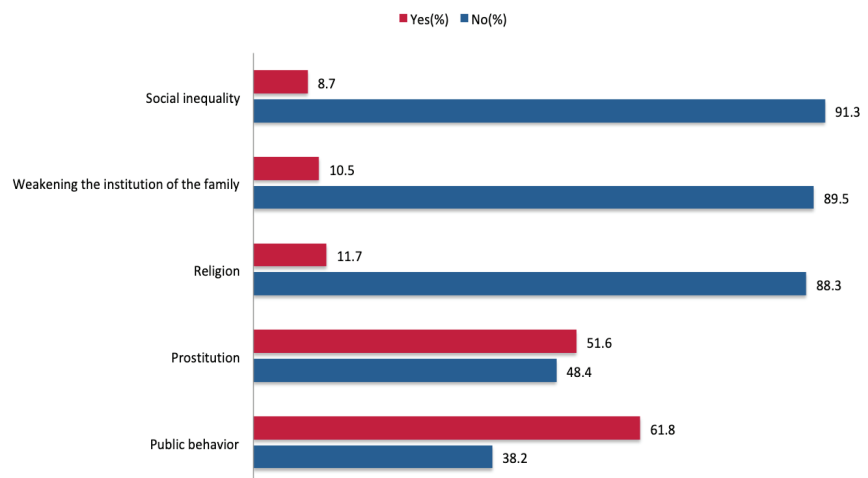
Said Int. 10:

There could be some cultural similarities, but it is hard for me to define any. However, I can easily count a couple of differences, like public behavior or tidiness in the streets. We know how to behave properly...

The perception of Arabs' lack of cleanliness in the downtown area, the most prestigious and historical part of the city, is a pivotal point of contention, fostering negativity on the part of the media and locals. Int. 17 compared the behavior of European tourists to that of their Arab counterparts:

European tourists usually behave and express their respect for our historic heritage. For example, when

**Figure 6. Problems discursively associated with Arab tourists<sup>20</sup>**



Source: Author's survey

they visit Maiden Tower, they try to follow the rules and respect every single piece of art there. Arabs, meanwhile, leave rubbish there or scratch the historical stones with their initials.

Even though the notion of *shehada* (a martyr for religion, God, or the country) is considered to be a sacred symbol of Islam, people negatively assessed Arabs' behavior at Martyrs' Alley:

I have met Arabs at Martyrs' Alley. They acted up in there. They were laughing and shouting at each other and also showed other disrespect to our martyrs, which irritated me. They could at least copy other visitors' [behavior] during their stay in the Alley (Int. 13).

The perception that Arabs lack cleanliness and engage in unacceptable public behavior is the one negative aspect of Arab tourism that has been extensively and intensively presented in local media, even prompting a discussion in parliament. In that discussion, MP Araz Alizadeh indicated that:<sup>16</sup>

Arabs misbehave wherever they go. They are filthy and cannot control themselves in the streets, restaurants, and hotels.

According to the survey, the rise in prostitution in Baku is also associated with Arab tourists' arrival in the downtown area. The Pearson Correlation analysis of the results revealed that there is no statistically significant (p-value = 0.201, 95 percent confidence level) disparity between men and women in terms of their attitudes toward the prostitution problem: both genders point to the alleged

role of Arabs in encouraging prostitution in the city. Int. 18 underlined that this is a new trend:

If prostitution was present in Baku [before Arab tourism], at least it was hidden. Now it has become easily accessible, since the Arabs have increased demand for it.

Int. 7 expressed his concern:

It is getting challenging to go downtown with your spouse or girlfriend. Six out of ten people there are Arabs and they feel no shame at approaching ladies on the street or calling out "*habibi*." That annoys me a lot.

A significant share of local media articles (152 out of 300) were devoted to this problem. One local media article explicated:<sup>17</sup>

I used to see this kind of thing abroad, but now I see the same in Baku. I was deeply shocked when I was in "Torqoviy" (downtown) yesterday. I witnessed an Arab man negotiating with a girl to have sex in a hotel for 100 euro.

Although residents link the arrival of Arabs in Baku to the rise of prostitution (see Figure 6), a sizable minority (48.4 percent) indicate that this rise is due not only to increasing demand from tourists, but also to social and economic problems, which create the background conditions for women's openness to this illegal way of earning money. Int. 1 commented:

The upsurge in prostitution is not directly correlated with the arrival of Arabs. The social and economic decline in residents' quality of life has had a negative impact on it, especially since the decline in the oil price and the devaluation of the manat in

2015. It does not matter if it is an Arab tourist or anybody else, if an individual cannot afford to buy essential things for a family and cannot find a relevant job, then the situation forces them to sell their body for some money.

However, media outlets are less likely to consider local economic factors, laying the blame squarely at the feet of Arab tourists. In one article, a journalist quoted a taxi driver as saying:<sup>18</sup>

Since Arab [tourist] flows to Baku, most of the prostitutes are inclined to have sex with them, as they are more generous than any other [men]. I never knew where nightclubs, massage parlors, or relaxation centers were in this city before Arabs' appearance here.

Symptomatically, my research did not find any articles linking social problems and prostitution. Instead, various opinion polls run in the media showed that respondents considered Arab men the main drivers of prostitution in Baku. Although prostitution is illegal in Azerbaijan, there are now more than five escort websites with phone numbers of prostitutes, a virtually unknown phenomenon before 2016.<sup>19</sup>

### **Baku Residents' Perception of Arab Tourists: The Economic Prism**

The government's recent policy of attracting Arab tourists to the country was designed to improve Azerbaijan's financial stability and reduce the economic impact of the decline in the oil price. It is therefore worth examining how economic factors have increased loyalty to Arabs despite their neg-



ative urban behavior, the rise in prostitution, and religious sectarian and ethnic differences.

The survey highlights that the vast majority of residents (93 percent) are not in favor of having business relations with Arabs. That being said, in-depth interviews reveal that for residents, the financial benefits of such interactions far outweigh the detrimental effect of ethnic, religious, and behavioral disparities between locals and Arabs. Int. 15 stated, for instance, that:

Although I do not like these people as a Muslim and a human being, I would incorporate a business with them for my commercial interests if that person invested in my business.

Int. 4 asked:

If there is a benefit, why not? Arabs are financially wealthy, and that is necessary for any commercial activity, but they are a bit unsystematic in some ways, as I have seen in my experience with them.

Some interviewees indicated that they would prefer to go into business with religiously devout Arabs than with secular Arabs. They suggested that Islam might prevent Arabs from engaging in misconduct in their business dealings. However, the survey indicated that only 15.5 percent of respondents take this view. A further 11.1 percent of surveyed residents would prefer to have secular Arabs as their business partners, while the vast majority (73.3 percent) do not care whether Arabs are secular or religious as long as they have financial means. It should also be noted that respondents generally agreed that they

would rather establish a business partnership with Europeans or Russians than with Arabs.

Another measure of willingness to do business with Arabs was property ownership and selling property to Arabs. Some interviewees shared that they would never sell property to Arabs, no matter the individual buyer's personality or devoutness. However, the vast majority of respondents said that they would sell to whoever was prepared to pay the most, regardless of ethnic or religious background. While interviewees may take an unfavorable view of Arabs' presence in Baku, they are willing to sell property to Arabs if they will pay more for it than locals would. Among my interviewees, only one indicated an unwillingness to sell to Arabs at any price.

The in-depth interviews confirmed that although residents are in favor of attracting Arab counterparts to their entrepreneurship activities, they harbor some concerns regarding Arabs' increasing participation in the economy and the business community. First and foremost, Arabs' spending habits drive up Baku prices for locals. Interviewees indicated that since Arabs began to show an interest in becoming property owners, the prices of houses and apartments in the historic downtown and surrounding areas have shot up. According to Int. 14:

The property prices in Baku keep going up because of Arabs, and this factor affects the purchasing ability of locals. Soon, Baku residents will be the tenants of Arab landlords.

Another concern is that the rise in Arab tourism causes locals to be treated as second-class citizens by service providers such as restaurants, taxis, hotels, and shopping centers. Because Arab tourists are not as restricted in their spending as locals are, the service sector caters to their demands rather than to those of local customers. In downtown Baku, many restaurants have menus and labels in Arabic and Azerbaijani, although this is against current law.

In sum, economic factors encourage people to go into business with Arabs, while cultural, religious, and ethnic factors discourage them from doing so. However, given Azerbaijan's current financial situation, economic factors tend to win out.

## **Conclusion**

Arab tourism has increased 28-fold in the past three years, and this number is expected to continue to rise. However, Arab tourism in Baku is not without side-effects on residents' perception of these newcomers. Islam is the only common ground between locals and Arabs, but the Soviet past and secular lifestyle of Baku residents curtail the potentially unifying power of religion. Locals do not tolerate the idea of Arabs leading prayers and other religious rituals; they view Arabs' demand for Arab imams as discriminating against locals. That being said, religion is not seen as a crucial factor in relationships between Arabs and Baku residents. Notably, local media also does not paint the religious component of Arab tourism as a source of anti-Arab sentiment. Ethnic

differences are apprehended as an obstacle to intermarriage, but not to every form of interaction. Instead, the most disputed component of the Arab presence in Baku is their public behavior, which is considered incompatible with local cultural norms. Arab public behavior is associated with untidiness and a lack of respect toward local history. Yet economic considerations help mediate negative views of Arabs.

All in all, the influx of Arabs is having multifaceted effects on Baku. If the city follows the TALC model, despite its initial adverse reaction to Arab tourists, the community will eventually adapt and modify its attitude.

### **Recommendations**

The issue of Arab tourism in Baku requires governmental and parliamentary engagement. The Ministries of Culture, Economy, and Internal Affairs, as well as the State Tourism Agency, should actively participate in this process wherever their administrative support is necessary. I recommend the following activities in order to improve Baku residents' perception of Arab tourists and increase the benefits of tourism to the population of Azerbaijan at large:

- The tourism sector should be developed not only in Baku but in the country's other regions in order to allow Azerbaijani citizens to benefit more inclusively from the tourism industry. There is a need for vocational education in the tourism sector in regions outside Baku.
- The government should

stimulate investors, including Arab investors, to develop their businesses in various regions of the country, where there are recreational capacities not found in the city.

- The government should provide tax incentives to rent land in other regions of the country. This process will enhance national economic development and reduce the congestion of Arabs in Baku, thus limiting the culture clash and increasing acceptance of newcomers.
- The criminal law regarding prostitution should be amended to fine those who solicit sex. This policy will protect Azerbaijani locals from sexual harassment.
- An "Arab cultural week"—or specific events for different Arabic-speaking countries—should be organized in Azerbaijan in order to enhance cultural awareness of Arab culture.
- The Azerbaijani government should ease the visa procedure for developed countries in the European Union and beyond in order to balance the effects of urban tourism in Baku. If tourism from other countries increases, this will smooth the problems perceived to be created by Arab tourism.
- The media should engage in building cultural bonds between locals and Arabs. It currently behaves very negatively toward Arabs and taints the local perception of Arabs through the dissemination of hate speech and audio-visual materials; this role should be revised and used to build cultural awareness. The following activities could be carried out:
  - Preparing TV and radio programs to raise public

awareness, which will improve dialogue about the cultural and sociological background of tourists;

- Taking a stance against all forms of xenophobia in media broadcasts about Arabs in order to change the current negative public perception of them.

**Appendix 1. List of online media sources used in content analysis**

- [www.azinform.az](http://www.azinform.az)
- [www.azadliq.org](http://www.azadliq.org)
- [www.oxu.az](http://www.oxu.az)
- [www.azadlig.info](http://www.azadlig.info)
- [www.modern.az](http://www.modern.az)
- [www.azvision.az](http://www.azvision.az)
- [www.milli.az](http://www.milli.az)
- [www.sputnik.az](http://www.sputnik.az)
- [www.azxeber.az](http://www.azxeber.az)
- [www.trend.az](http://www.trend.az)
- [www.bbc.com/azeri](http://www.bbc.com/azeri)
- [www.daytube.az](http://www.daytube.az)
- [www.xezerxeber.az](http://www.xezerxeber.az)
- [www.atv.az](http://www.atv.az)
- [www.axar.az](http://www.axar.az)
- [www.aznews.az](http://www.aznews.az)
- [www.olaylar.az](http://www.olaylar.az)
- [www.sonxeber.az](http://www.sonxeber.az)
- [www.virtualaz.org](http://www.virtualaz.org)
- [www.istipress.com](http://www.istipress.com)

**Appendix 2. Interview questions for residents**

- How often and where do you meet with Arab tourists?
- Have you ever heard of Arabs buying property in Baku? Are there any positive or negative features of Arabs' engagement in the property market?
- If a local and an Arab offered the same price for your property, which one you would prefer? If an Arab paid slightly more?
- Would you like to have an Arab business partner? Why? Would you prefer a devout Arab or a secular one?
- Would you prefer a European business partner to an Arab? Why?
- Are there cultural or moral similarities and differences between Arabs and locals?
- How would you react if you had an Arab neighbor? Why?
- Do you think that sectarian differences between you and Arabs might affect your attitude toward Arabs?
- How would you react if Arabs in Baku refused to pray with local imams during congregation praying?
- Would you prefer to have family relations with Arabs, like marrying an Arab man/woman? Why or why not? How would ethnic and religious factors influence your decision?
- How does your attitude toward Arabs from different regions of the world vary?

**Appendix 3. Demographic indicators of interviewees**

<b>ID</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Residency</b>
Interviewee 1	55	Male	Nizami
Interviewee 2	18	Male	Nizami
Interviewee 3	50	Male	Nasimi
Interviewee 4	32	Male	Sabail
Interviewee 5	20	Female	Surakhani
Interviewee 6	28	Female	Surakhani
Interviewee 7	29	Male	Surakhani
Interviewee 8	22	Male	Yasamal
Interviewee 9	19	Male	Sabunchu
Interviewee 10	19	Female	Yasamal
Interviewee 11	20	Male	Narimanov
Interviewee 12	23	Male	Binagadi
Interviewee 13	23	Female	Binagadi
Interviewee 14	23	Male	Binagadi
Interviewee 15	21	Male	Yasamal
Interviewee 16	22	Male	Yasamal
Interviewee 17	36	Male	Sabail
Interviewee 18	22	Female	Binagadi
Interviewee 19	22	Male	Sabail
Interviewee 20	33	Female	Nizami





Appendix 4. Survey Questionnaire

Questionnaire code:
Region \_\_\_\_\_

Name of place \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Good day, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ (interviewer name). I am conducting a sociological survey in different regions of Baku to study the impacts of Arab tourism. I ask you to participate in this survey. Your honest responses will help analyze the contemporary situation of tourism in Azerbaijan. Survey materials will be used in generalized terms, so your first name and last name will not be written anywhere and full confidentiality will be ensured.

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview date: \_\_\_\_\_
day month year

1. What is your attitude toward tourist flow to our country in recent years? Please evaluate on a 5-point scale (from 1- negative to 5 – positive).

Table with 5 columns: I do not like it, It does not matter, I like it, and numerical ratings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

2. Which countries would you prefer for the largest share of tourists to come from?

- a. European countries
b. Arab countries
c. Central Asian countries
d. Iran
e. Turkey
f. Russia and the CIS
g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. How do you think incoming tourists influence local traditions and values? (from 1- negative to 5 – positive)

Table with 5 columns: I think negative, I do not know, Positive, and numerical ratings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

4. You would feel disturbed if tourists from which region settled in your neighborhood?

- a. European countries
b. Arab countries
c. Central Asian countries
d. Iran
e. Turkey
f. Russia and the CIS
g. All
h. None of them
i. Other



5. **With persons from which region would you prefer to engage in business relations?**
- a. European countries
  - b. Arab countries
  - c. Central Asian countries
  - d. Iran
  - e. Turkey
  - f. Russia and the CIS
  - g. All
  - h. None of them
  - i. Other

6. **How do you evaluate the flow of Arab tourists to our country on a 5-point scale? (from 1- negative to 5 – positive)**

<i>I do not like it</i>		<i>It does not matter</i>		<i>I like it</i>
1	2	3	4	5

7. **What kind of problems does the flow of Arab tourists to our country create? (multiple responses can be selected)**
- a. Instability in religious matters
  - b. Disturbance in public behavior rules
  - c. Creation of social inequality among local population
  - d. Weakening of family institution
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. **Do you think that you share religious values with Arab tourists? (from 1- negative to 5 – positive)**

<i>I think</i>		<i>Maybe</i>		<i>I do not think</i>
1	2	3	4	5

9. **Can you evaluate the public behavior of Arab tourists on a 5-point scale? (from 1- negative to 5 – positive)**

<i>I do not like it</i>		<i>I do not know</i>		<i>I like it</i>
1	2	3	4	5

10. **To your mind, what points of commonality does the local population have with Arab tourists? (several points can be selected)**
- a. Common religious values
  - b. Common historical background
  - c. Moral commonalities
  - d. Politically common targets
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_



11. **Can sectarian differences with Arabs create obstacles in communication?** (*from 1- I think to 5 – I do not think*)

<i>I think</i>		<i>It does not matter</i>		<i>I do not think</i>
1	2	3	4	5

12. **How would you react if Arab tourists refused to pray with local imams?**

<i>I would not react positively</i>		<i>It does not matter</i>		<i>I would treat it as normal</i>
1	2	3	4	5

13. **From the list below, with persons from which regions would you react positively to forging marriage ties?**

- a. European countries
- b. Arab countries
- c. Central Asian countries
- d. Iran
- e. Turkey
- f. Russia and the CIS
- g. None of them
- h. It does not matter
- i. Other \_\_\_\_\_

14. **How would you rank the tourists listed below with regard to sharing the same moral values?** (*from 1 – close to 8 – far*)

European countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Arab countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Turkey	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Russia	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
CIS countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Central Asian countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Iran	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8



15. **Sex of respondent:**

- a. Female
- b. Male

16. **Age: .....age**

- a. 18-29 age group;
- b. 30-35 age group;
- c. 36-45 age group;
- d. 46-55 age group;
- e. 56-65 age group;
- f. 66 and above

17. **Marital status:**

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Divorced
- d. Widowed
- e. Refuse to answer

18. **Nationality?**

- a. Azerbaijan
- b. Tatar
- c. Jew
- d. Russian
- e. Lazgin
- f. Tat
- g. Avar
- h. Talish
- i. Other

19. **Education level?**

- a. I did not have any education
- b. Elementary level
- c. Incomplete secondary
- d. Secondary
- e. Vocational education (special secondary)
- f. Incomplete higher
- g. Higher
- h. Scholar

20. **Main occupation?**

- a. Qualified professional (engineer, teacher, doctor, lawyer, computer programmer)
- b. Entrepreneur
- c. Middle or lower-level worker (secretary, nurse, etc.)
- d. Engaged in household production/housewife
- e. Worker
- f. Unemployed retiree
- g. Military or police officer
- h. Individual activities
- i. Farmer
- j. Student
- k. Unemployed
- l. Other (define)\_\_\_\_\_



**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Number of Arrived Tourists By Travel Agencies and Tour Operators By Countries,” 2018, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/> (accessed September 18, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Pizam and Ady Milman, “The Social Impacts of Tourism,” *Industry and Environment* 7, no. 1 (1984): 11-14.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Sharpley, *Tourism, Tourists and Society* (Huntingdon: ELM Publications, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> R.W. Butler, “The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources,” *Canadian Geographer* 24, no. 1 (1980): 5-12.

<sup>5</sup> State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Number of Arrived Tourists.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Driss Ridouani, “The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media,” *RUTA Communication* 3 (2011): 1-15.

<sup>8</sup> A. Rais, “Bakıya gələn ərəblər terror təhlükəsi yarada bilərmimi?” *Azinforum*, 2016, <https://azinforum.az/gundem/bakiya-gelen-erablər-terror-təhlükəsi-yarada-bilərmimi/> (accessed August 15, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> “Bakıya niyə belə çox ərəb turistlər gəlir?” *Azadlıq Radosu*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.azadliq.org/a/ereb-turistler-namaz/28763723.html> (accessed September 1, 2018)

<sup>10</sup> “Ərəblər Azərbaycanca bizim qızlara görə gəlir” —Qara Qura,” YouTube video, 11:46, posted by “Kanal13.az,” August 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYovJsX--Ic&t=422s> (accessed September 3, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> U. Ali, “Nazirlik: İrandan Azərbaycana turist sayı dəfələrlə artıb,” *Oxu.az*, June 26, 2017, <https://oxu.az/economy/137241> (accessed September 2, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> “Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi

ərəb turistlərin nəzarətə alınmasını istəyir,” *Azadlıq.info*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.azadliq.info/203287.html> (accessed August 24, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> G. Raufqizi, “Ərəblər azərbaycanlı qızlarla nikaha girirlər,” *Modern.az*, September 2, 2016, <http://modern.az/az/news/110654#gsc.tab=0> (accessed August 26, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> A. Zahra, “Ərəblər çox pintidirlər, özlərini apara bilmirlər” —Deputat,” *AzVision*, August 3, 2017, <https://azvision.az/news/123160/-erebler-cox-pintidirler,-ozlerini-apara-bilmirlər--deputat.html> (accessed October 16, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> “‘Tarqovı’da RƏZALƏT—Ərəb turistlər azərbaycanlı bar qızları ilə,” *Milli.az*, September 3, 2016, <https://news.milli.az/country/466446.html> (accessed August 23, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> “Fahişəliyin leqallaşdırılması yenidən gündəmə gəldi,” *Sputnik.az*, December 9, 2016, <https://sputnik.az/life/20161209/408027729/yungul-exlaqli-qadin-qiyamet.html> (accessed October 28, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> “Bakıda ərəb turistlərə qız çağırmaq üçün yeni eskort xidmətləri açıldı: ‘Bir zəngə iki qız qapıya gəlir’ (FOTOFAKT),” *Azxeber.com*, March 14, 2017, <http://azxeber.com/az/bakida-ereb-turislere-qiz-cairmaq-ucu-yeni-eskort-agentlikleri-ise-basladi-bir-zenge-iki-qiz-qapiya-gelir-arasdirma-fotolar/> (accessed September 5, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Confidence interval is 95 percent, alpha level set at 0.05 and corresponding Z score is ±1.96. Sample size is 200. The interval estimate of population proportion is ±5 percent.