

Monday, March 11, 2013

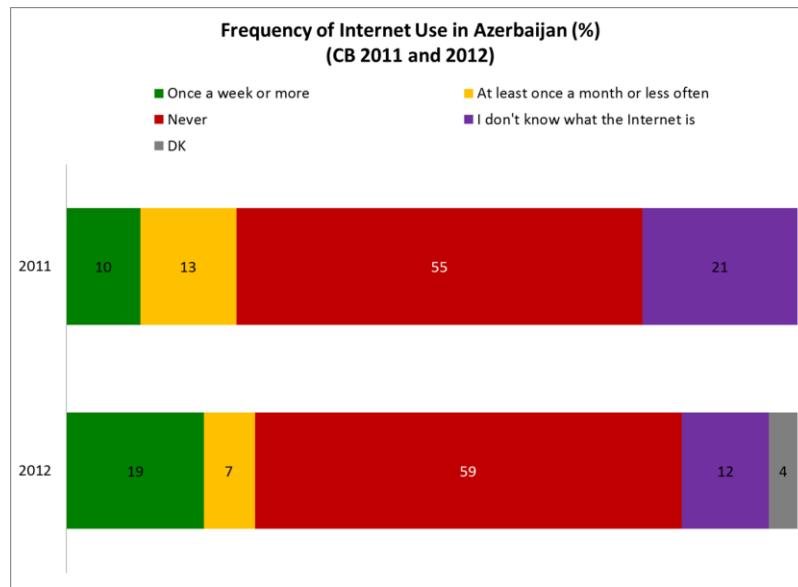
[Internet and Computer Usage in Azerbaijan](#)

The level of computer and Internet usage has become a salient issue in Azerbaijan in recent years, particularly in light of efforts to diversify the country's hydrocarbon-rich economy through the development of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. Taking into consideration a number of bold ICT development initiatives, what do levels of computer and Internet usage actually look like in Azerbaijan? This blog underlines various contradictory statistics and seeks to provide a realistic measure of Internet and computer penetration among Azerbaijanis.

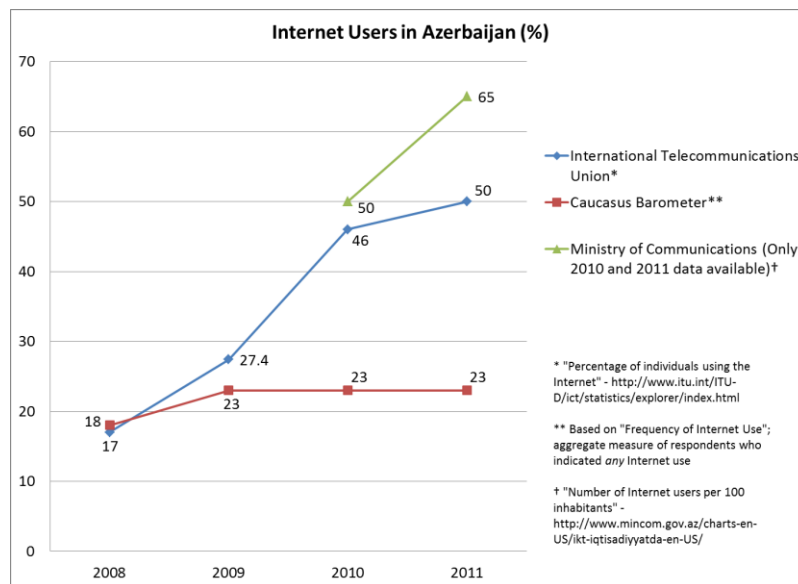
In March 2012, the State Fund for the Development of IT under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies (MCIT) was [created by presidential decree](#). An additional presidential decree in November 2012 called for the establishment of a [High Technology Park](#) in Azerbaijan for the “preparation of new and high technologies, research in the field of energy efficiency, space and telecommunications, information technology and communications.” Concurrently, MCIT [indicates](#) that broadband Internet access has grown significantly since its inception in 2006, while also claiming that Internet access is, at least theoretically, available to all of Azerbaijan’s population given “the fact that mobile penetration in Azerbaijan exceeded 100%”.

Accordingly, MCIT’s Internet penetration statistics for 2011 are quite high. The number of computer users in Azerbaijan stood at 48%, while the figure for Internet users was 65%. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which is a specialized agency of the United Nations, likewise indicated a high Internet penetration rate for 2011 with a reported 50% of Azerbaijanis using the Internet. [ITU’s statistics](#) come from [administrative data sources](#) that compile various data from telecommunications operators, and they indicate that Internet penetration has grown by over 80% since 2009 and by nearly 200% since 2008.

Data from CRRC’s 2012 Caucasus Barometer (CB) suggest lower levels of Internet penetration in Azerbaijan. 59% of Azerbaijanis claimed to “never” use the Internet in 2012, while 12% indicated they did not know what the Internet was. In contrast, 19% of Azerbaijanis stated they used Internet once a week or more, with 7% indicating they used Internet at least once a month or less often. Despite the overall low frequency of Internet usage in 2012, there has been an increase in Internet usage since 2011.



As a whole, CB data from 2011 and 2012 suggest significantly lower levels of Internet penetration in comparison to ITU and MCIT figures.



Regarding computer ownership, data from CRRC’s 2012 [SocialCapital, Media, and Gender Survey](#) (commissioned by SIDA) indicated that 25% of Azerbaijani households owned a personal computer. Out of those individuals who indicated household PC ownership, 73% claimed to have Internet access through a personal computer—roughly 18% of the population. These data are relatively consistent with recent Gallup data on home Internet access. According to Gallup’s 2011 [Worldwide Tracking](#), 15% of Azerbaijanis had access to Internet at home, while 2012 polling indicated that the number had increased to 22%.

Data on Internet penetration and computer usage in Azerbaijan are obviously quite varied. Given that ITU and MCIT data come from similar sources, however, it seems reasonable that actual levels of Internet and computer usage are lower than statistics from official and UN sources.

It is apparent that Azerbaijan would like to develop its ICT sector through the implementation of high-profile, “supply-side” development initiatives. In addition to the State Fund for the Development of IT and the planned High Technology Park, the MCIT could possibly support its goals by encouraging increased computer and Internet penetration at the grassroots level. If more Azerbaijanis were made aware of the benefits of the Internet, it is conceivable that Azerbaijan may be able to develop a more Internet savvy population and in turn create the necessary human capital to support its ICT initiatives.

For more information on Internet and technology in Azerbaijan visit the new 2012 Caucasus Barometer [dataset](#).