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During the reporting period, civil society actors, human rights defenders and journalists faced violence,[596](#) intimidation,[597](#) threats and harassment, including online,[598](#) for criticising public officials and exercising their right to freedom of expression by government authorities.[599](#)

Authorities have increasingly relied on articles of Iraq's Penal Code pertaining to defamation, vandalism and destruction of government buildings to arrest and convict activists and journalists,[600](#) with the aim of silencing criticism of influential political and religious figures.[601](#) Article 226 of the Iraqi Penal Code[602](#) continued to be increasingly used 'as a tool to suppress civil voices', contrary to Article 38 of the Iraqi Constitution which guarantees 'freedom of expression using all means'.[603](#) Women's rights and NGO workers reportedly faced judicial harassment.[604](#) Those who challenged the status quo, particularly women activists, were exposed to increasing threats to their safety and professional livelihoods.[605](#) In parallel, in early August 2025, Iraqi Parliament renewed its discussion regarding a disputed draft law on 'Freedom of expression, peaceful assemblies and demonstrations'[606](#).

In November 2024, a university lecturer was killed by a colleague in a remote area near Basrah. The alleged killer was reportedly the brother of Basrah's governor, prompting suspicions of a cover-up linked to corruption cases the victim may have uncovered.[607](#) In June 2025, PMF-affiliated security forces arrested a prominent lawyer and human rights advocate, Zainab Jawad, after she criticised Iran-backed militias on social media and during a television appearance.[608](#) In July 2025, local authorities in Basrah issued arrest warrants for two activists under Article 226 of the Penal Code for publishing videos criticising government performance and highlighting the water pollution crisis in the city.[609](#)

According to Winthrop Rodgers, legal protections for freedom of speech and political activity exist in principle in the KRI but are not upheld in practice. He reported the existence of informal, unwritten restrictions, with punishments for violations.[610](#) In February 2025, at least 12 social media users in the KRI were arrested under the Prevention of Misuse of Telecommunications Equipment Act for content deemed contrary to public morals.[611](#) In June 2025, KDP security forces detained and beat Sipan Amedi, a Kurdistan Parliament member from the opposition New

Generation party, after he publicly criticised KDP leader Masoud Barzani.[612](#)

In 2024, security forces in central and southern Iraq used excessive force, including water cannons, tear gas and live ammunition, in response to largely peaceful protests over corruption, poor services, economic hardship and lack of accountability.[613](#)

In August and September 2024, clashes occurred in Baghdad between security forces and medical school graduates protesting a lack of job opportunities, resulting in dozens of injuries.[614](#) In October 2024, protests erupted in Nasiriyah (Thi Qar governorate) against mass arrests launched by the new police chief. Protesters accused political parties of conflating criminal suspects with activists linked to the Tishreen movement.[615](#) Police responded with live ammunition and tear gas,[616](#) while sporadic arrests of activists continued until November, with many being released on bail after several days.[617](#) In December, a protester was killed during a protest over water distribution in Wasit governorate by live ammunition used by Rapid Response forces.[618](#)

In the KRI, Winthrop Rodgers stated that protests are legally permitted but, in practice, subject to numerous restrictions. In KDP-controlled areas, protests are almost always suppressed unless directly authorised by the party, while the PUK more often allows protests but may prevent or disperse them if they continue for too long.[619](#) In February 2025, security forces reportedly attacked teachers protesting in Sulaymaniyah.[620](#)

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Article 226 reads: 'Any person who publicly insults the National Assembly or the government or the courts or the armed forces or any other constitutional body or the public authorities or official or 1 semiofficial agencies or departments is punishable by a term of imprisonment not exceeding 7 years or detention or a fine.' Iraq, Iraqi Penal Code (Law No. 111 of 1969), 1969, [url](#), Art. 226

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