

2.4.1 Members of political opposition parties, political and human rights activists, protesters

2.4.1 Members of political opposition parties, political and human rights activists, protesters

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 Code602 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

- 596

  UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2732 (2024) Report of the Secretary-General, 26 November 2024,

- 597

  UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2732 (2024), Report of the Secretary-General, 30 May 2025,

- 598

  UN in Iraq, For Iraq Yearbook 2024, 10 June 2025, url, p. 18; Shafaq News, Iraq's human rights decline, freedoms face clear threats, says rights center, 10 December 2024, url

- 599

  GCHR, GCHR’s periodic report on human rights violations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, 18 March 2025, url

- 600

  AI, Iraq: Lawmakers must ensure that new law does not unduly restrict freedoms of expression and peaceful

- 601

AI, The State’s of World Human Rights, April 2025, url, p. 207

- 602

  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

- 603

  Iraq, Constitution of the Republic of Iraq, 15 October 2005, url, Art. 38; IOHR, published on Linkedin, 12 July 2025, url

- 604

  AI, The State’s of World Human Rights, April 2025, url, p. 207

- 605

  Basnews, Armed Factions Arrest Iraqi Lawyer Over Criticism of PMF, 29 June 2025, url; IOHR, Concerns over reported arrest of prominent lawyer and activist Zainab Jawad, 29 June 2025, url

- 606

  AI, Iraq: Lawmakers must ensure that new law does not unduly restrict freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, 1 August 2025, url

- 607

  GCHR, GCHR’s 35th Periodic Report on Human Rights Violations in Iraq, 15 May 2025, url

- 608

  Basnews, Armed Factions Arrest Iraqi Lawyer Over Criticism of PMF, 29 June 2025, url; IOHR, Concerns over

- 609

  IOHR, published on Linkedin, 12 July 2025, url

- 610

  Rodgers, W., Journalist and researcher expert on Iraq, Interview, 29 October 2024, and email communication, 4 July 2025

- 611

UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2732 (2024), Report of the Secretary-General, 30 May 2025,

- 612

  Winthrop Rodgers, Journalist and Researcher, Expert on Iraq, Interview 28-29 October 2024 and 4 July 2025;

- 613

  AI, The State's of World Human Rights, April 2025, url , pp. 63, 208

- 614

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025, url; AI, Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025, url; AI, The State's of World Human Rights, April 2025, url, p. 208; GCHR, GCHR's 34th Periodic Report on Human RightsViolations in Iraq, 19 November 2024, utl

- 615

  AI, The State's of World Human Rights, April 2025, url, p. 208; Rudaw, Protesters say Dhi Qar police used tear

- 616

  Independent (The), Clashes break out at protests over arrested activists in southern Iraq, 18 October 2024,

- 617

  AI, The State's of World Human Rights, April 2025, url, p. 208

- 618

  +964, Protester killed, two Injured in clashes over water disputes in Wasit, 8 December 2024, url

- 619

  Rodgers, W., Journalist and researcher expert on Iraq, Interview, 29 October 2024, and email communication, 4 July 2025

- 620

  GCHR, GCHR's periodic report on human rights violations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, 18 March 2025, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu