



## 2.9.2 Online expression

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Iraqi authorities reportedly conduct 'mass surveillance' of the online content.<sup>991</sup> Persons accused of sharing inappropriate content were arrested under the article 403 of the Penal Code <sup>992</sup> which bans any material that 'violates public integrity or decency'<sup>993</sup> and imposes fines and prison sentences of up to two years.<sup>994</sup> 2024 saw an increase in prosecutions of creators for 'inappropriate content' online<sup>995</sup> under the said article.<sup>996</sup> Online harassment campaigns have targeted women and LGBTIQ individuals,<sup>997</sup> including in the form of extortion. In this case, men threaten to publish an incriminating photo of a woman unless they do what they want;<sup>998</sup> these photos can also be AI-manipulated.<sup>999</sup> This is often seen not just as a violation against the individual, but rather as an attack on the family honour.<sup>1000</sup> In August 2024, Iraqi authorities arrested TikTok personality Raghad Muhammad Ghali Jabr Al-Janabi, known online as Natalie, for 'promoting indecent content'.<sup>1001</sup> Another two social media influencers were arrested on the same charges in the same month.<sup>1002</sup> Between February and August 2024, some 152 000 complaints were registered on the Ballegh platform.<sup>1003</sup> According to the NGO Freedom House, those accused did not get due process and faced arbitrary penalties.<sup>1004</sup> In March 2025, the government issued regulations for content creators requiring their registration and to pay fees, in a move that has been seen as a continuation of the crackdown on 'indecent content'.<sup>1005</sup> The use of the Ballegh platform reportedly continued into 2025, marking two years of operation.<sup>1006</sup> The existence of the platform has reportedly led to a climate of self-censorship.<sup>1007</sup> In October 2024, a female social media activist, Shayan Ali, died in unknown circumstances in a Baghdad prison after being sentenced to two years in prison by a Kirkuk court.<sup>1008</sup> Ali was known for social media videos where she was criticising gender discrimination and argued with police officers. As of June 2025, Iraqi authorities refused to disclose the cause of her death.<sup>1009</sup> Social media users may also be arrested for religious or atheist speech.<sup>1010</sup> In August 2024, a Yazidi Peshmerga commander from Sinjar was charged with blasphemy and arrested by a court in Ninewa for 'insulting Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Islam, and inciting religious conflict' in a video posted online.<sup>1011</sup>

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