

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1483
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom on the Net 2022 – Iraq
Udgivet:	18. oktober 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	14. december 2022

Freedom on the Net 2022 - Iraq

PARTLY FREE

42

/ 100

A [Obstacles to Access](#) 12 / 25B [Limits on Content](#) 16 / 35C [Violations of User Rights](#) 14 / 40

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

41 / 100 Partly Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the [research methodology](#) and [report acknowledgements](#).

Overview

Internet freedom in Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, is limited. While internet speeds and access have improved due to National Internet Project (NIP)-fostered telecommunications investments, Iraq still has some of the Middle East's weakest telecommunications networks and highest costs. Political parties spent heavily to disseminate sectarian and partisan propaganda during the October 2021 electoral period. While authorities do not block many political or social websites or restrict much online content, security forces use legal and extralegal measures to pressure journalists and activists against discussing certain topics online. Security forces routinely arrest internet users, and physical attacks against journalists, activists, and social media users due to their online activity are common. These violations, which have created an environment of fear, have forced many Iraqis to self-censor. Others—particularly reporters—have left the country.

Iraq holds regular, competitive elections, and the country's various partisan, religious, and ethnic groups generally enjoy representation in the political system. However, democratic governance is impeded in practice by corruption, militias operating outside the bounds of the law, and the weakness of formal institutions. In the Kurdistan region, democratic institutions lack the strength to contain the influence of long-standing power brokers. Increasingly, Iran has been able to influence politics in Baghdad. Civil liberties are generally respected in Iraqi law, but in practice the state has limited capacity to prevent and punish violations, and authorities routinely infringe upon the rights of residents.

Key Developments, June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

- Political actors sought to manipulate the online information environment during the runup to the October 2021 parliamentary elections. Ahead of those polls, Facebook placed requirements on political advertisers while Iraq's Supreme Judiciary Council requested social media companies remove posts that "fuelled sectarianism" or "relied on defamation" during the coverage period (see B2, B5, and B6).
- In May 2022, the parliament passed a law criminalizing any form of "normalization" with Israel; anyone having relations with Israeli counterparts, including via social media, could face the death penalty (see C2).
- Multiple internet users were arrested during the coverage period, including a photojournalist for the Rojnews news site who was sentenced to seven years in prison for his journalism (see C3).
- Internet users remained wary of the government's potential surveillance capabilities. These concerns were validated following reports that several Iraqi journalists and activists were potentially targeted with Pegasus spyware, and after a government committee was created to monitor online outlets and social media activity (see C5).
- Several people were assassinated during the coverage period for their online activity (see C7).

- In April 2022, an Iran-affiliated group known as the al-Tahirah Team claimed responsibility for several distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks targeting websites within Iraq and abroad (see C8).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections? 3 / 6

Telecommunications infrastructure in Iraq is still relatively underdeveloped, and the country's internet penetration rate is one of the lowest in the region.

The Ministry of Communications has made efforts to improve telecommunications services through several projects that include extending fiber-optic cables outside of urban areas, installing new towers, and building the capacity of telecommunications staff.¹

During the coverage period, several projects aimed at improving telecommunications infrastructure, internet access, and speeds were underway. In February 2021, the NIP began providing services to 2,000 homes in the Zayouna area of Baghdad and is expected to deliver high-speed service to 30 additional areas of the country by the end of 2022 (see A3).² As part of the NIP, the Ministry of Communications is working to implement a modern fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) network and has deployed over 100 communication centers across Iraq as of June 2022.³ The project is expected to reach 2.7 million homes by 2023 and will be available in all provinces except the Kurdistan region.⁴

Since 2020, the Kurdish telecommunications company Asiacell has developed 13 data centers throughout Iraq, which has improved the quality of fixed-line and wireless services. In February 2022, Asiacell announced that 7,200 new communication towers were in operation.⁵ In August 2021, the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Communications and Media Commission (CMC), and service providers Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain signed an agreement to provide internet access and Wi-Fi devices to 1,500 schools. An additional 1,500 schools are expected to have internet access by the end of 2022.⁶

Despite these efforts, internet access remains relatively poor. Internet penetration stood at 49.4 percent as of January 2022, and there were an estimated 28.4 million internet users in Iraq. The number of mobile connections stood at 42.6 million, a 4.1 percent increase from January 2021.⁷ As of May 2022, the median mobile download and upload speeds were 46.5 megabits per second (Mbps) and 18.6 Mbps, respectively. The median fixed-line broadband download and upload speeds were 20.3 Mbps and 18.8 Mbps, respectively.⁸

Much of Iraq's mobile infrastructure is based on third-generation (3G) technology.⁹ Service is threatened by constant power outages and a majority of schools and libraries still have no internet access at all. In the Kurdistan region, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) provided no more than 12 hours of electricity per day during the summer months as of July 2021, restricting access to broadband service.¹⁰ Most cafés provide internet access as a free—but poor-quality—customer service.

Due to greater foreign and domestic investment, internet infrastructure in the Kurdistan region is more developed than in the rest of Iraq. 4G service has been available in the region's major cities in since 2015, meaning speeds are considerably faster, although rural areas may have poorer service (see A2). The fixed-line broadband market in the Kurdistan region is also more developed. Newroz Telecom provides such services and operates asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) networks in Erbil and Duhok.¹¹ While the two main mobile providers in Kurdistan, Asiacell and Korek Telecom, provide 4G services, their quality is poorer than ADSL services.¹²

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons? 1 / 3

Iraq's internet costs are among the highest in the region, despite the poor quality of service. Small companies must spend more than \$1,000 a month to secure connections with multiple internet service providers (ISPs) to avoid disruptions and ensure reliable access.¹³

There are no clear pricing policies in Iraq, and neither the Ministry of Communications nor the CMC have set any pricing conditions for ISPs. This has allowed providers to push prices for low-capacity data packages and SIM cards upward.¹⁴

A range of internet packages are available to customers under the NIP, though contracted providers have the right to change their prices at any time.¹⁵ EarthLink and Symphony offer four monthly packages; the least expensive option costs 35,000 Iraqi dinars (\$23.74) for a 15 megabyte (MB)

package, and the most expensive is 100,000 dinars (\$67.82) for a 150 MB package.¹⁶ In terms of mobile service pricing, a monthly 30 gigabyte (GB) 4G long term evolution (LTE) package from Zain costs 30,000 dinars (\$20.34).¹⁷ Korek Telecom offers a monthly 30 GB package for 35,000 dinars (\$23.74),¹⁸ while Asiacell and Zain offer an unlimited subscription for 40,000 dinars (\$27.13).¹⁹

Internet service is relatively better and prices are more affordable in the Kurdistan region.²⁰ A monthly 15 GB package from Newroz Telecom costs 10,000 dinars (\$6.78).²¹ A monthly 40 GB 4G LTE package from FastLink cost 15,000 dinars (\$10.17) in August 2021.²²

Rural areas suffer from particularly poor internet service. Many regions of Iraq are still using 2G technology due to the Ministry of Communications' inability to deliver 3G to these areas. Even in areas that have 3G access, the service quality can be poor.²³ In the Kurdistan region, there is a large gap in access and quality between major cities and rural areas, despite prices remaining the same across the region. According to the Iraqi Digital Media Center, most of what is provided to citizens is a "fake" internet, based on its standards of processing and operation, and it is sold at more than 50 times its actual value.²⁴

Internet smuggling, which occurs when companies illegally transport telecommunications connections across borders, has cost Baghdad billions of dinars in recent years.²⁵ During the coverage period, the Ministry of Communications discovered internet smuggling operations in governorates bordering the Kurdistan region. In June 2021, approximately 4 billion dinars' worth of services were effectively smuggled out of the national budget, according to a ministry spokesperson.²⁶

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for 4 / the purposes of restricting connectivity? 6

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because no internet access restrictions were experienced amid protests during the coverage period, although disruptions still occurred during exams in the Kurdistan region.

The Iraqi government and the KRG exercise control over the internet infrastructure and regularly restrict connectivity during times of protests or unrest. Iraqi authorities have admitted in the past to cutting internet access during national exams, elections, and mass demonstrations.²⁷ The government has historically halted access during elections, though the internet remained accessible during the October 2021 polls.²⁸

Because the Kurdistan region has some ISPs that operate separately from those in the rest of Iraq, it is not necessarily affected by internet disruptions in the south.²⁹ However, the KRG has implemented its own network disruptions. In July 2021, internet access was curtailed for four hours during exams to prevent students from using electronic devices to cheat.³⁰ In September 2021, an internet shutdown was implemented for four hours every day over a 10-day period, coinciding with the second round of exams.³¹ Access for government and businesses was unaffected.

Authorities in the Kurdistan region have disrupted internet access in recent years during protests. In December 2020, thousands of people participated in peaceful protests, demanding payment of their salaries and calling on the government to hold snap parliamentary elections. The demonstrations turned violent as security forces mounted an excessive response. The KRG responded by shutting down an opposition media channel and restricting internet access across the region for about eight hours.³²

In October 2019, antigovernment protests erupted in several Iraqi cities. The government instituted a massive internet disruption to quell the demonstrations, and social media and communications platforms were blocked nationwide aside from the Kurdistan region.³³ Access to social media was not restored for up to 50 days in some places.³⁴

The fiber-optic backbone in Iraq is centralized under the government and the Ministry of Communications rents out fiber-optic infrastructure to private ISPs. The state's Informatics and Telecommunications Public Company (ITPC) is the only entity that has the right to own and operate fiber-optic infrastructure, and no company can plan fiber-optic cables without ITPC approval.³⁵ This policy discourages investment and allows the government to more easily limit access to communications services.

Similarly, in the Kurdistan region, the two ruling parties' ownership of ISPs and the fiber-optic backbone can facilitate government-ordered internet shutdowns. For example, O3 Telecom, which has close ties to the Barzani family and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), is based in Erbil and Duhok and is the only company allowed to import fiber-optic services through Turkey, which it then distributes to smaller companies like Newroz and FastLink. Several major companies in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, such as IQ Group, KurdTel, and Fancy Net, have close ties to or are owned by members of the Talabani family and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).³⁶

The development of the NIP, specifically the Ministry of Communications' management of the fiber-optic network, could further centralize the internet backbone under the government (see A1). The Ministry of Communications has already said that the contracted companies will not bear any responsibility for any service disruptions. [37](#) In November 2021, Nokia announced that EarthLink would use its products for build-out operations under the auspices of the Iraqi National Backbone project.[38](#)

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? **3 / 6**

There are several legal obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers in Iraq. The Ministry of Communications owns and operates much of the telecommunications infrastructure, and the CMC is responsible for regulatory oversight of the sector. The KRG's Ministry of Transport and Communications oversees the telecommunications sector in the Kurdistan region, but the regulatory framework there is more relaxed, and the ministry has sought to promote investment and market diversity.[39](#)

Three major companies—Zain, Asiacell, and Korek Telecom—operate over 90 percent of the mobile tower infrastructure in Iraq.[40](#) EarthLink is the most popular ISP and provides service to 60 percent of Iraqi internet users;[41](#) the government imposes a 20 percent income tax on the company, which delivers connections via the national fiber-optic network.[42](#) Newroz Telecom and FastLink operate solely in the Kurdistan region.[43](#) Many ISPs have close ties to the government and security services. For example, Korek Telecom is owned by KRG military commander Sirwan Barzani.[44](#) While the entry of foreign investments in recent years has helped increase market competition, government-affiliated companies are still dominant.[45](#)

Service providers are often able to operate without any legal cover due to poor regulation and oversight, and some companies provide internet connections without a license. There is currently no telecommunications law in Iraq or its Kurdistan region.[46](#) The Ministry of Communications and the CMC oversee licensing but employ a complicated application process under which ISPs must acquire security approvals from more than one ministry.[47](#) ISPs face legal consequences for contract noncompliance, but the conditions of said contracts remain unknown.

Regulatory obstacles often arise due to the unorganized management of infrastructural resources. The Ministry of Communications owns infrastructure and sells access to ISPs, often for high prices. As a result, some ISPs resell services illegally acquired from the KRG in the rest of Iraq.[48](#)

Many telecommunications companies operating in Iraq and the Kurdistan region are linked to powerful political parties or militias, which provide them with the necessary protection from any legal accountability for disruptions (see A5).[49](#)

Telecommunications companies have faced obstacles due to the arbitrary restrictions and decisions of regulatory bodies.[50](#) For example, after ISPs noted that the speeds of their services in Kirkuk were reduced, they were expelled from the city on the pretext that they did not have licenses from Baghdad.[51](#)

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner? **1 / 4**

The CMC oversees and regulates the Iraqi telecommunications sector, but it fails to work in a fair and independent manner. There is no clear separation of powers between the CMC and the Ministry of Communications and overwhelming political interference limits their independence. These bodies are often subject to requests, such as requests to disrupt internet access, from the government.

There is no legal framework regulating the telecommunications sector in the Kurdistan region, and the Ministry of Transport and Communications oversees the sector in practice. The Barzani family has been criticized in recent years for their control of the sector.[52](#)

An explicit constitutional guarantee protects the independence of any entity tasked with regulating the internet. Article 61/2 of the Iraqi constitution calls for the parliament to supervise the performance of the regulator. Ordinance No. 65 of 2004 defines the functions and powers of the CMC's board of directors.[53](#) Despite these guarantees, board members are not chosen in an independent manner in practice, as the government directly selects them. The body lacks transparency and impartiality in its work, and it is subject to both political and commercial interference.[54](#)

Regulatory decisions are neither fair nor transparent, but rather are subject to political and partisan pressures and government directives.[55](#) The Association for Defending Freedom of the Press in Iraq monitored violations committed by the CMC over 10 years, noting a pattern under successive

governments in which the agency closed satellite channels and media outlets that were considered critical of incumbent political forces. The association's report found that most of the CMC's decisions against the media were based on political interests.[56](#)

Corruption remains a problem for the telecommunications sector. Most directors are appointed by political parties, such as the appointment of politician Ammar al-Hakim's nephew Ali Hussein al-Muayyad as head of the CMC executive in May 2021.[57](#) Additionally, ISPs have been known to bribe the CMC to ensure consumer prices stay high.[58](#) A 2022 report found that telecommunications company Ericsson had a long history of bribery and corruption in Iraq, including giving the Barzani family \$1.2 million for "facilitation to the chairman" to maintain and expand their cellular networks in Iraq.[59](#)

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 5 / 6

Under Saddam Hussein, censorship was extensive and website blocks were common. While the Iraqi information landscape opened after the fall of Hussein's regime in 2003, the Iraqi government occasionally blocks websites and—more frequently—social media sites, usually citing security concerns or the need to maintain stability during times of unrest (see A3).[60](#)

The government rarely blocks political websites, but it has blocked some gambling, video gaming, and pornography sites in the past. In 2019, the parliament banned some video games with significant online play elements, including *Fortnite* and *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, as well as certain pornography sites on the grounds that they had a negative impact on the health, culture, and security of Iraqi society.[61](#) In January 2019, clerics in the Kurdistan region petitioned the Ministry of Transport and Communications to block pornography websites.[62](#)

During the reporting period, reports emerged that the government had attempted to ban TikTok due to its promotion of videos that allegedly offend public values, incited violence, and contained pornographic content.[63](#) The Ministry of Communications denied these reports and as of the end of the coverage period, TikTok was still available in Iraq.[64](#)

In August 2022, after the coverage period, the KRG's Ministry of Transport and Communications issued a directive requiring companies provide "family packages" that would block online content that includes pornography, incites violence, or promotes drug or weapon use. Family packages should also prohibit access to online gambling; weapons sales; the promotion of alcohol and other drug use; child abuse; gender-based violence (GBV); and violence against animals. The KRG vowed to punish companies that do not comply.[65](#)

The Iraqi government and KRG authorities frequently block social media sites during times of unrest. Amid the 2019 antigovernment protests, the central government blocked Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. In some parts of the country these sites remained inaccessible for 50 days (see A3).[66](#) During protests in July 2018, the Iraqi government blocked major social media networks and requested that the KRG do the same. However, some users were able to use virtual private networks (VPNs) to circumvent the blocking.[67](#) Authorities have justified these restrictions by claiming they want to protect citizens from violent imagery.

During the war with Islamic State (IS) militant group, the government stopped internet connectivity in certain regions, blocked social media websites, and instituted restrictions on VPNs as part of their defense strategy (see A3).[68](#) Authorities also banned VPNs in 2014, and while it is still technically illegal to use circumvention tools, the ban is not strongly enforced.[69](#) Iraqi internet users are able to use Psiphon, TunnelBear, and other secure and unsecure VPNs to bypass censorship attempts by the government.

There is little or no formal oversight regarding internet usage, and there is no legislation that requires the blocking of certain websites (see B3).[70](#) Advanced technology to automate censorship is not used outside the banking sector in Iraq.[71](#)

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 1 / 4

Officials often use pressure or harassment to compel journalists who publish articles online to take down content, particularly criticism of the government. During the reporting period, the government, often acting through the CMC, pressured social media companies to remove accounts or delete specific content.

Ahead of the October 2021 elections, the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) asked Facebook to remove posts that “fuelled sectarianism” or “relied on defamation.” Facebook denied these requests. The company also denied accusations that it had removed advertisements from political parties ahead of the vote (see B6).[72](#)

Content that contains commentary on government corruption or Iranian influence in Iraq is often removed. According to Google’s transparency report, the company received requests from the Iraqi government to take down six items between July and December 2021.[73](#) During the IS occupation, many social media pages affiliated with the IS and terrorism were removed.[74](#)

Authorities in Iraq and the Kurdistan region have threatened journalists and have compelled them to use government-approved narratives, and often summon or arrest those who stray from such topics (see C3).[75](#) After posting a tweet about Shiite militias in Iraq, Erbil-based political commentator Emad Bajalan was threatened by members of both the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Baghdad and KDP in Erbil and told to refrain from further discussion (see C7).[76](#) In July 2022, after the coverage period, the KDP forced him to delete his post.[77](#) Also in July 2022, the Facebook pages of Zhyan News were taken down.[78](#) According to an employee, the pages were not removed by Meta but rather by security forces who raided the outlet’s office and gained access to the account through the journalists’ computers.[79](#) In November 2021, members of the Asayish security forces in the Kurdistan region raided the office of Gav News in Duhok. Gav News has made no Facebook or website posts since.[80](#)

There are no laws regulating online content, neither in terms of protecting free speech nor in terms of imposing penalties for those who commit electronic crimes. There is currently no legal liability for third parties or content hosts.[81](#) During the coverage period, several social media accounts that were allegedly used for electronic extortion were removed.[82](#) Similarly, nonconsensual photos that were posted online were removed.[83](#)

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to 1 / the stated aims, or an independent appeals process? 4

Restrictions to online content are not transparent because they often fulfill the interests of the government and contradict the Iraqi constitution (see C1). There is currently no legal framework governing content restriction in either the Kurdistan region or the rest of Iraq.

There is no truly independent oversight body tasked with regulating or making decisions on online content restrictions. The Ministry of Communications and the CMC technically make decisions pertaining to network shutdowns and social media blocking, but they cannot be considered transparent or proportionate. For example, the Ministry of Communications has ordered network shutdowns amid protests (see A3)[84](#) and the CMC has revoked the licenses of online media outlets due to their reporting (see B6).[85](#) Content removal decisions are often linked to the influence of the government or powerful political parties.

Because there is no law governing content restrictions, online censorship is often imposed without accountability.[86](#) While the government sometimes explains why it has restricted content or connectivity, its explanations are not transparent; the justification is usually to control “security chaos and conspiracy against the homeland.” Some politicians, members of the media, and activists assert that the authorities have violated civil liberties by disrupting internet access and blocking social media during protests.[87](#) International organizations have similarly called on the government to refrain from disrupting access during times of civil unrest and to stop interfering in the work of media outlets.[88](#)

In June 2022, after the coverage period, the KRG’s Ministry of Culture issued a statement warning media organizations, including news sites and social media platforms, to abstain from publishing articles criticizing the Kurdistan region or any other content that they believe would incite fear among residents or raise concerns about the Kurdistan region’s stability.[89](#) The ministry also promised to sanction those who do not comply. Also in June, a joint ministerial committee was reported to be drafting media regulation legislation. If passed, television channels and social media pages would no longer be allowed to distribute content deemed to insult “the martyrs and the flag of Kurdistan.”[90](#)

While the state rarely blocks or filters content, few avenues to appeal censorship decisions exist in practice. If the government requests the Ministry of Communications to block or filter online content, the ministry presents a “feasibility study” to the Iraqi parliament, after which a decision is made.[91](#) Someone who wishes to appeal a content removal decision could approach the CMC but this rarely happens in practice.[92](#) In 2014, the KRG issued regulations that it has relied on to block publications or ban “inappropriate” comments.[93](#)

At times, social media companies remove Iraqi content without transparency or proportionality, a byproduct of their poor Arabic-language content moderation capabilities.[94](#)

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? 1 / 4

Self-censorship is prevalent in Iraq, including in the Kurdistan region. Although the constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and expression, factors such as harsh criminal penalties for online content and harassment or intimidation by government authorities, political parties, and armed groups create an environment that encourages self-censorship.

Crimes against the media in Iraq push journalists to pursue self-censorship.[95](#) Iraq remains one of the most dangerous places for journalists, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF); the lack of safety has had a significant impact on online speech.[96](#) Intimidation, arrests, and assassinations of social media users, online activists, and journalists are not uncommon, with social media posts sometimes triggering violent reprisals (see C7).[97](#) This has led users to refrain from publishing critical content or voicing opposition to the government, militias, and party policies online.

Certain topics are known taboos. For example, users avoid commenting on government corruption, criticizing officials, or denouncing armed groups due to a credible fear of reprisals by the government, political parties, ethnic and sectarian forces, terrorist groups, or criminals—especially because the perpetrators of such abuses typically enjoy impunity.[98](#) Journalist Imad al-Shammari, who has been threatened due to his Facebook posts in the past, noted that criticizing officials or talking about corruption may lead to threats of kidnapping aimed at both him and his publisher. In response to these risks, many journalists and news outlets have refrained from discussing public affairs or the political situation (see C7).[99](#)

While there is no law prohibiting the use of social media to express one's opinion, users fear government surveillance on social media platforms, leading them to self-censor (see C5).[100](#) Self-censorship is not only driven by fear of government retaliation, but also by the fear of being targeted by other citizens. According to the Iraqi Center for Supporting Freedom of Expression, some violations against journalists, bloggers, and online commentators are committed by government agencies or their employees, while other "societal" violations are perpetrated by relatives or tribal leaders who persecute content producers and prevent them from carrying out their work.[101](#)

Some journalists continue to pursue their careers in Iraq despite the risks, but dozens have chosen to remain in the Kurdistan region or flee to Turkey or other countries after their colleagues were subjected to various violations or their outlets were shuttered.[102](#) While the Kurdistan region has been considered a relatively safe place for journalists and online activists for years, the KRG has recently cracked down on free speech, leading to more self-censorship.[103](#)

Authorities in both Iraq and the Kurdistan region use a variety of laws to arrest and charge online users, at times to threaten outspoken critics into silence (see C2). According to a May 2021 report from the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq on freedom of expression in the Kurdistan region, "the legal system is being 'instrumentalized' in order to disrupt the activities of these individuals and subject them to pressure which may lead to self-censorship."[104](#)

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or 1 / other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest? 4

Online sources of information are strongly manipulated by powerful actors. The government, political parties, and other influential forces spend large amounts of money to spread false or misleading news online and advance their political agendas.[105](#)

The media environment has a progovernment bias due to political manipulation and a dearth of independent outlets. This is particularly evident around elections, when political parties flood the online sphere with misleading information and propaganda.[106](#) Ahead of the October 2021 elections, supporters of politician Nouri al-Maliki and the Dawa political party opened Facebook pages that linked to the party's website and published false election-related statistics. The account falsely claimed that turnout stood at 58.7 percent, citing a report from an independent organization. Mainstream media outlets then cited the page to report that Dawa won 57 seats, which was false. The organization in question told fact-checkers it had not produced the report, nor did it produce election polling.[107](#) Similarly, in early October 2021, Sabereen News, a pro-Iran outlet, claimed that a UN representative was affiliated with the Mossad, an Israeli intelligence agency. The claim was widely shared on Telegram and was then reported in mainstream media.[108](#)

Inauthentic social media pages impersonated Iraqi news sources during the election period. According to the Digital Media Center, dozens of Facebook pages, often funded by political parties, presented themselves as Iraqi news agencies to influence potential voters. According to one

journalist, the proliferation of these pages and electoral propaganda was a result of weak oversight, especially in areas where political competition is particularly intense.¹⁰⁹

Online content is influenced by public officials who reward positive reporting with bribes including money, land, and other benefits. These rewards are typically given to state-affiliated journalists and outlets, such as members of the progovernment Journalists' Syndicate in the Kurdistan region.¹¹⁰ The traditionally dominant parties in the Kurdistan region, the KDP and the PUK, own dozens of media outlets through which they promote their political narratives.¹¹¹ Online outlets owned by these parties are given prioritized access to public information, putting independent or opposition-aligned outlets at a disadvantage.¹¹²

Self-promoting disinformation posted by powerful politicians on social media is rampant because it is spread by government-affiliated electronic armies.¹¹³ In June 2020, Facebook reported that it had removed 324 pages, 71 accounts, 5 groups, and 31 Instagram accounts that were tied to an inauthentic online network originating in the Kurdistan region. Facebook traced the activity to individuals associated with the Zanyari Agency, the PUK-affiliated intelligence service of the KRG. According to Meta, the network spent around \$270,000 to sponsor accounts that impersonated local politicians, political parties, and news organizations.¹¹⁴ These networks also train people to impersonate opponents, create disinformation, disseminate propaganda, manipulate political discourse, promote their strategies, and amplify political narratives while covering their misdoings.¹¹⁵

Inauthentic accounts impersonate political figures, parties, activists, and news outlets with the intent of spreading false information or defaming opposition forces.¹¹⁶ In June 2021, Facebook reported that it had removed 675 accounts, 16 pages, and 10 Instagram accounts that targeted users and shared support of Iran and various Shiite militias active in Iraq.¹¹⁷ Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an Iranian-affiliated Iraqi news organization was reported to have bought Facebook ads that disseminated pro-Russia disinformation about Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy.¹¹⁸

During the October 2019 protests, an influence campaign on Twitter encouraged support for a revolution, but it was determined that many of these accounts were fabricated with the intent to sow anti-Iranian and pro-Saudi Arabian sentiment; both Tehran and Riyadh have vested geopolitical interests in Iraqi politics. In response, progovernment "electronic flies" joined the debate, spreading propaganda against the protests online.¹¹⁹

The Iraqi Media House, a watchdog group, has reported on the large role of politicized funding in shifting local reporting. Even small local outlets are influenced by the financial largesse of political parties and often promote sectarian discourse in their reporting. In addition, broadcast news outlets and their online presences are often partial and biased toward specific issues at the expense of other, general national issues.¹²⁰

Media institutions that are established by political parties and formed on a sectarian basis work to shape the media landscape by attacking their ideological opponents. For example, certain outlets function as a countercurrent to the women's rights movement, producing content and advertisements that contribute to discrimination and GBV. In some cases, these bodies have become a tool for defamation campaigns that specifically target women journalists and activists (see C7).¹²¹

Authorities have issued gag orders or reporting guidelines in the past, particularly during politically sensitive times. These sorts of directives are a clear attempt to prevent critical coverage of important events and silence debate, particularly when the country is facing security or political crises.¹²²

B6 0-3 pts

**Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to 2 /
publish content online? 3**

Media outlets and service providers with favorable connections to government officials tend to be more economically viable. In many cases these connections extend to the officials' political parties or affiliated armed militias.

Privately owned media face financing obstacles. Patronage systems in Iraq and the Kurdistan region allow outlets that align their reporting with powerful figures to receive funding and advertising revenues that smaller, independent, or opposition-aligned outlets lack.¹²³ Those outlets cannot afford the staff or facilities that government-affiliated outlets enjoy and are consequently uncompetitive against organizations like Rudaw, Kurdistan 24, and KurdsatNews, all of which receive funding from prominent KRG political figures or parties.¹²⁴

There is no law regulating online advertisements or foreign investment.¹²⁵ No special taxes or licensing fees are imposed for the establishment or management of news outlets, blogs, or social media groups. However, owners of websites that provide commercial services may face some fees.¹²⁶ During the coverage period, Iraqi authorities sought to impose regulations, including taxes,

on social media and communications companies. Authorities argued that these companies were “violating the national security of the country.”¹²⁷ The proposed regulations’ status was unclear at the end of the coverage period.

The CMC’s regulations lack criteria for licensing approval, but several international news outlets have had their licenses suspended in recent years.¹²⁸ For example, in April 2020, the CMC suspended Reuters’s license after the news agency published a story suggesting that Iraq had a higher number of COVID-19 cases than was officially reported. The CMC fined Reuters 25 million dinars (\$21,000) and suspended its license for three months, claiming that it had violated media broadcasting rules (see B3).¹²⁹

Ahead of the October 2021 elections, Meta placed restrictions on political advertisers; political advertisements could only appear if they were domestically sourced to prevent external parties from influencing the election. Advertisers had to confirm their official identity issued by the Iraqi government, their political affiliation, as well as the amount spent on advertising; Meta made this information publicly available (see B2).¹³⁰

Website owners or bloggers seeking to obtain an Iraqi domain must submit an application to the CMC or accredited registrars and provide certain identification information (see C4).¹³¹

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability? 2 / 4

Structural obstacles stemming from the country’s history of media suppression have challenged the growth of independent media in Iraq. Partisan ownership of news outlets and lack of political will to encourage independent online media have left the sector without a diversity of voices. Furthermore, outlets with ties to powerful politicians and businesses tend to fare better financially, which has created a media environment that is largely co-opted by political actors (see B6).¹³²

Online misinformation is rampant and has a serious impact on public opinion. A group of platforms and initiatives called the “Checkers” has emerged to combat false news. According to the Checkers, there are at least 291 news outlets in Iraq that share harmful misinformation, including hate speech.¹³³

Independent media outlets struggle to compete with those affiliated with political parties (see B6). For example, many media outlets affiliated with political groups exist solely to improve their image or misrepresent opposing parties. Apart from progovernment media, there are also “civil media” outlets, which are owned by investors and businesspeople but are not necessarily independent. These outlets function as fronts for political parties and powerful authorities to achieve certain goals and sway public opinion on certain topics. Many of these civil media outlets focus on issues of nationalism and sectarianism, and most seek to manipulate the online discussion on religious and sectarian issues (see B5). They have headquarters, channels, newspapers, radio stations, websites, and electronic armies in different parts of Iraq.¹³⁴

People usually rely on Iraqi state-owned websites and Arabic-language television channels to access news, but pan-Arab outlets based abroad, such as Al Jazeera and al-Arabiya, are popular as well. Increasingly, people have turned to social media for their news.¹³⁵

Users sometimes employ VPNs, though not necessarily to bypass censorship, as the government does not block many websites. Instead, users rely on them as a safeguard against surveillance or cyberattacks or to publish content anonymously (see C4, C5, and C8).¹³⁶

Online content related to LGBT+ issues is difficult to access. According to an Iraqi human rights lawyer, because LGBT+ rights are not protected under Iraqi law, websites and blogs avoid publishing content on these issues for fear of retribution.¹³⁷

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users’ ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, 3 / 6 particularly on political and social issues?

Iraqi citizens rely on social media to organize and mobilize protests. However, authorities have blocked certain social media applications or internet access during times of unrest in the past.

During the reporting period, calls to boycott the October 2021 elections were organized online; a group of activists’ calls for a boycott were especially notable.¹³⁸ Before elections in 2018, social media was also instrumental in calls to boycott that vote. However, in this case, authorities responded with localized internet shutdowns (see A3).¹³⁹

Social networking sites played a prominent role in the nationwide antigovernment protests of October 2019. Protesters and activists used social media to organize and plan assemblies, which prompted the government to disrupt internet access and block popular apps (see A3). When security

forces used violence against demonstrators, activists used hashtags on social media to call for peaceful conduct and urge the United Nations and international human rights organizations to pressure Baghdad to abide by the human rights charters it had ratified.¹⁴⁰

In December 2020, thousands of people in the Kurdistan region participated in peaceful protests, demanding payment of their salaries and calling on the government to hold snap parliamentary elections. The protests started on social media, where activists and citizens alike planned sit-ins and demonstrations. The KRG responded by restricting internet access regionwide for about eight hours (see A3).¹⁴¹

Recently, activists have taken to using the audio chat app Clubhouse to discuss and organize around political and social issues. While people have been able to communicate relatively freely on these issues, online trolls affiliated with the electronic armies of political parties and militias have recently started to co-opt these spaces and use the platform to harass activists.¹⁴²

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? 2 / 6

The Iraqi constitution includes protections for the freedoms of expression, association, and communication, including electronic communication.

Article 38 of the constitution guarantees “freedom of expression of opinion by all means, freedom of the press, printing, advertising, media and publication.”¹⁴³ Article 4 of the CMC Law calls for adherence to the international principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, but these provisions are often violated in practice.¹⁴⁴ While the KRG does not have its own constitution, one was drafted in 2009.¹⁴⁵ Some national laws specifically constrain freedom of expression, contradicting the protections offered by the constitution and the CMC Law (see C2).

In the Kurdistan region, the 2007 Press Law protects freedom of expression and press freedoms, though a number of loopholes leave many of the articles open to interpretation.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the region's Law to Prevent Misuse of Communications Equipment (LPMCE) protects the content of electronic communications (see C5 and C6), but vaguely worded articles allow for restrictions, and the law has been used to penalize journalists and activists in the past (see C2).¹⁴⁷

Neither the Iraqi judiciary nor the Kurdistan regional judiciary can be considered independent.¹⁴⁸ Judges and judicial proceedings are controlled by political authorities and external parties. Impartial judges are often manipulated or threatened if they rule against government decisions.¹⁴⁹ In the Kurdistan region, the Cassation Court's 10 judges are sworn in by the KRG's prime minister after being selected by the main parties, undermining the judiciary's independence.¹⁵⁰

At times, Iraqi and KRG courts have ruled against attempts to penalize journalists or activists for their online content. However, those who perpetrate crimes against journalists, bloggers, or online activists rarely face punishment, and armed groups—including Iran-backed militias—often operate with impunity.¹⁵¹

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? 1 / 4

Authorities in Iraq and its Kurdistan region use vaguely worded laws and penal codes to criminalize online activities.

The Iraqi penal code of 1969 includes various defamation-related crimes and is often employed to threaten or punish journalists, publishers, and internet users. Anyone convicted of defamation is subject to detention or a fine. Article 434 of the penal code prohibits newspapers, publications, or any other media outlets—including online media and social media—from disseminating defamatory material, which is considered an aggravating offense.¹⁵² Article 435 criminalizes insulting another person, including in a telephone conversation or a letter, and prescribes punishments of up to six months in prison and fines of no more than 50 dinars (\$0.03).¹⁵³ In addition, the penal code includes broader speech offenses such as insulting the “Arab nation” or any government official.

Although few individuals receive defamation-related prison sentences, the criminal process itself amounts to a form of punishment. Authorities often file charges as a way to intimidate activists and journalists, knowing that cases will eventually be dismissed or end in acquittal.

Articles 210 and 211 of the Iraqi penal code assign criminal liability—including potential imprisonment—to anyone who publishes false news or provocative propaganda, particularly if it destabilizes public security, causes terror among people, or harms the public interest. Those found guilty under these articles can effectively be held criminally responsible for the consequences of the content they publish.¹⁵⁴

In May 2022, the Iraqi parliament unanimously approved a law criminalizing any form of “normalization” with Israel. Under the law, those engaging in any connections with Israeli counterparts, including via social media, could face the death penalty.¹⁵⁵

Iraqi lawmakers proposed draconian cybercrime legislation in 2019; it was ultimately withdrawn in December 2020 following pushback from civil society.¹⁵⁶ The draft law would have provided authorities with the legal backing to prosecute anyone for online posts that were deemed threatening to “governmental, social, or religious interests.” It provided penalties for vague online offenses, and if found guilty, users could be sentenced to life in prison and a fine of roughly \$21,000.¹⁵⁷

Authorities in the Kurdistan region use the regional penal code, the Journalistic Work Law, and the LPMCE to curtail freedom of expression.¹⁵⁸ Criminal proceedings have been directed either under Article 433 of the penal code, which prohibits “defamation,” or under Article 2 of the LPMCE, which prohibits, among other things, the publication of defamation and misinformation, both of which carry fines and prison sentences.

Article 2 of the Kurdistan Press Law (Law No. 35 of 2007) states that a journalist may not be charged with defamation if “he published or wrote about the performance of an official or a person assigned to a public service” and “if what he published does not go beyond the affairs of the profession.” Nevertheless, many journalists and online activists have been charged with criminal offenses under this article, especially when publishing content about corruption.¹⁵⁹ Regional authorities generally ignore the protections in the Press Law, frequently arresting and charging journalists and activists without legal backing (see C3).

Article 2 of the KRG’s LPMCE includes criminal penalties for “misusing cell phones and email to: threaten someone, use profanities, spread misinformation, disclose private conversations or share images counter to the public’s values, or take any other action that might harm someone’s integrity or honor or motivate a crime or an immoral act, or share private information even if it is true.” Those found guilty of these crimes can face steep fines or imprisonment.¹⁶⁰

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected 1 / under international human rights standards? 6

Online journalists and activists are routinely detained and arrested in Iraq and the Kurdistan region, although long prison sentences for online content are rare.

Several online journalists received prison sentences during the coverage period. In June 2021, Iraqi Kurdish photojournalist Qaraman Shukri of Rojnews was sentenced to seven years in prison in a trial where no lawyer was present; Shukri had been charged under the penal code.¹⁶¹ Also in June 2021, journalist Omed Baroshki was sentenced to one year in prison over social media posts that criticized KRG authorities.¹⁶² Baroshki had been previously arrested in Duhok in August 2020 during a crackdown on protests by local KDP-affiliated security forces and was released briefly before his June 2021 arrest.¹⁶³ While Baroshki’s sentence was extended by a year in September 2021, he was released in April 2022, serving 18 months in prison.¹⁶⁴

In October 2021, a Kurdish journalist was sentenced to six months in prison in Duhok Governorate for a social media post about a member of the KRG parliament, Mullah Ehsan, who did not enter quarantine after travelling to the governorate. Following the post, Ehsan sued for defamation.¹⁶⁵ In March 2022, journalist Qusay Shafiq was arrested by security forces and held for over a month after criticizing Baghdad’s economic policies on Facebook.¹⁶⁶ In February 2022, journalist Ahmed al-Fahd was arrested in Anbar on terrorism charges and was accused of managing inauthentic social media pages that defamed a government official. While he was acquitted, authorities refused to release him for over 15 days.¹⁶⁷

During the coverage period, internet users were arrested for their online activism or critical social media posts. In March 2022, political activist Yazid al-Hassoun was given a three-month prison sentence after he was convicted of slander for criticizing a local head of government on social media.¹⁶⁸ Also in March, Ahmed Yahya, a professor at Basra University, was arrested due to his online criticism of organized criminal groups and militia factions in Basra.¹⁶⁹

In February 2021, three independent journalists in the Kurdistan region were sentenced to six years in prison by an Erbil criminal court after being found guilty of “undermining national security.” The three journalists—Sherwan Sherwani, Guhdar Zebari, and Ayaz Karam—had been arrested in

October 2020, shortly after they expressed support for antigovernment protests and criticized government corruption on their social media accounts.¹⁷⁰ In June 2021, the KRG's Court of Appeals upheld the sentences.¹⁷¹

Several online journalists were arrested for their coverage of protests in the Kurdistan region during late 2020. Harem Majed, a reporter for the website Bazianpress, was arrested in As Sulaymaniyah Governorate in December 2020 for covering demonstrations against political corruption and high unemployment rates. Zosk Ballak was arrested a few days later after writing two articles about the protests for Rojnews.¹⁷²

Many other journalists, activists, and ordinary internet users have been arrested and charged with defamation, often for criticizing political parties or the government. In September 2020, journalist Bahroz Jafeer was arrested in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniyah and charged with defaming the president of Iraq. He was arrested after the president's lawyer filed a complaint about an editorial Jafeer published on the Peyser Press website, titled "How long will the president keep going in the wrong direction?" In January 2021, a poet was accused by the KRG of "defamation and inciting violence" in a video clip that included criticism of the government.¹⁷³ Hemin Mamand, a freelance journalist in the Kurdistan region, was arrested in March 2020 and held in detention for 13 days after publishing a Facebook post that called on the KRG to stop withholding the salaries of public servants. A few weeks later, he was arrested again after he posted on Facebook about the previous arrest, stating that he had been detained by officials who did not identify themselves or have an arrest warrant. Mamand was charged with defaming the police and encouraging people to break the COVID-19 lockdown under the penal code and the Kurdistan region's LPMCE.¹⁷⁴

In March 2022, Nayef Kurdistan, a prominent KDP member, was arrested because of a social media post that was deemed offensive to the Iraqi Supreme Religious Authority. In a statement regarding the arrest, the KRG's Ministry of Interior said "freedom of expression does not mean daring to attack religious and national symbols and insulting them, especially the position of the Marjaiya" (see C7).¹⁷⁵

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? 3 / 4

The government generally does not place significant restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption services.¹⁷⁶ While there are some legal limits on anonymity, people in Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, are able to use encryption tools and VPNs in practice.

SIM card registration is required in Iraq, though unregistered SIM cards can easily be found on the informal market.¹⁷⁷ To buy a SIM card users must register with the CMC. Customers must submit information including their name, phone number, address, and other identifying information.¹⁷⁸

As part of the NIP, the Ministry of Communications and the contracted ISPs are building an information base for all subscribers (see A1 and A3). NIP users will have to submit personal information including their official residence address, full name, government identification number, and other identifying information.¹⁷⁹

Online users seeking to obtain an Iraqi domain must submit an application to the CMC or accredited registrars (see B6). If a university, company, government agency, civil body, or civil servant applies for a domain name, they are required to produce civil status identification such as a nationality certificate or a passport, in addition to a residence card.¹⁸⁰

Online users rely on VPNs as a safeguard against surveillance or cyberattacks or to publish content anonymously (see C5 and C8).¹⁸¹ According to the Iraqi Network for Social Media, the use of VPNs is widespread, particularly by activists and journalists who publish content that could be deemed critical of certain political figures and who wish to prevent authorities from discovering their personal information.¹⁸²

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy? 3 / 6

Article 40 of the Iraqi constitution guarantees the freedom to communicate without surveillance or monitoring, "except for legal and security necessity and by a judicial decision." Article 47 of the CMC Law states that telephone calls and private communications may not be monitored, wiretapped, or disclosed except in accordance with the law and a court decision.¹⁸³

Despite this, there have been reports that the government monitors private online communications without appropriate legal authority.¹⁸⁴ The 2021 edition of the US State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* found credible evidence that Iraqi and KRG authorities "monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority."¹⁸⁵

In August 2021, the SJC announced the formation of a committee to monitor online publications. The committee includes SJC members, national security officials, the Security Media Cell, the CMC, the Journalists' Syndicate, and the Artists' Syndicate. The committee will be tasked with monitoring violations and issuing recommendations to investigative courts.¹⁸⁶

Neither the Kurdistan region nor the rest of Iraq has data protection legislation or a cybersecurity authority. As the Iraqi communications landscape lacks oversight or sufficient regulation, technical experts believe that the state may possess the ability to monitor online activities. Militias—specifically Iran-backed groups—are likely able to conduct surveillance of their own.¹⁸⁷ However, Iraqi government departments generally lack modern electronic devices and applications and tend to use rudimentary methods of electronic communication, making it unlikely that they have the technical means to surveil private user activity.¹⁸⁸

There is no legal framework that allows state security agencies to collect, keep, and examine users' personal data. The invasion of privacy—presumably offline and online—is a crime punishable under Article 438 of the Iraqi penal code, which prescribes “imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding 100 dinars (\$0.08) or either of these two penalties.”¹⁸⁹

In July 2021, the *Washington Post* and other outlets reported Iraqi citizens were among those who may have been targeted with Pegasus, spyware produced by the NSO Group of Israel. President Barham Salih's phone number was among those that appeared in a list of potential targets.¹⁹⁰ KRG prime minister Masrour Barzani was also allegedly targeted; people with ties to the United Arab Emirates had reportedly infected Barzani's phone with Pegasus and surveilled him for over a year. Individuals close to the KRG premier, including a security adviser, may also have been targeted.¹⁹¹

Baghdad and foreign governments have reportedly used Pegasus to electronically surveil a large number of public figures.¹⁹² For example, a phone belonging to the secretary of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense was targeted by an Emirati spyware user. Several journalists and activists were believed to have been targeted with Pegasus in recent years. The list of targets includes Faris al-Mahdawi, then an al-Arabiya correspondent. Sayyed Hamid, a correspondent for the Iranian-affiliated Asia satellite channel, was reportedly surveilled by an Emirati user for more than two years.¹⁹³

Authorities may have purchased spyware from vendors outside Israel. According to a former KRG intelligence service member, spyware was purchased from Italy in 2021. Surveillance technology was also purchased from the Chinese company Xiaomi.¹⁹⁴

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology 3 / companies infringe on users' right to privacy? 6

There are no data protection or privacy laws in Iraq or the Kurdistan region. While telecommunications companies do not systematically collect user data, the information they do store may be vulnerable to abuse given the lack of legal safeguards.

While the Iraqi government may not request user data without a judicial order,¹⁹⁵ experts agree authorities may carry out such activities without legal cover due to the lack of data protection or oversight.¹⁹⁶ Some telecommunications companies in Iraq are required to retain user data, including call records, for a period of five years.¹⁹⁷ There are currently no data localization laws in Iraq or the Kurdistan region.¹⁹⁸

ISPs in the Kurdistan region, many of which have close ties to the ruling political parties, may also monitor online activity.¹⁹⁹ According to a local ISP employee, telecommunications companies store and monitor user data and information. Specifically, technicians have been able to access old Facebook accounts belonging to customers and monitor how many times they were logged in and out, how many devices were logged in, and the location of users' devices.²⁰⁰ If presented with a judicial warrant, ISPs are required to send information such as the user's name and location of the device to authorities.

Intelligence services in the Kurdistan region, specifically the Parastin and Zanyari agencies, which are controlled by the KDP and PUK respectively, are known to monitor communications, including the phones of employees. In September 2021, the president of the PUK confirmed that the Zanyari Agency had monitored phone calls in the past. In a press conference, he stated that member of the PUK were afraid to use Asiacell to communicate for fear of surveillance.²⁰¹

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state 0 / authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities? 5

Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, is one of the most dangerous places for online journalists, activists, bloggers, and social media users.

Journalists and activists are frequently harassed and intimidated online, and they are at times subjected to physical violence—including assassinations—by state and nonstate actors in reprisal for the content they post. Those who perpetrate physical attacks and assassinations often go unpunished (see C1). As a result of the violent attacks, journalists have resorted to changing their addresses or in some cases leaving Iraq.

Activists and human rights defenders are frequently threatened or harassed in retaliation for their online content. This was particularly prominent during the 2020 protests; many activists fled to the Kurdistan region. For example, Ali Kadhim, an online activist from Basra, fled for Erbil after militias threatened him.²⁰² Kadhim frequently criticized the Sadrist movement on social media, and had previously been shot in the arm, likely by a militia member, amid demonstrations in Basra in May 2020. After submitting a legal case against the head of the militia, Kadhim's house was burned down and his family members were physically attacked.

Kidnappings and assassinations are not uncommon. In July 2021, journalist Ali al-Makdam was kidnapped and physically assaulted in Baghdad.²⁰³ Before his kidnapping, al-Makdam had shared a Facebook post where he blamed militias for the deaths and disappearances of Iraqi citizens.²⁰⁴ In October 2021, activist Haider Muhammad was found dead under suspicious circumstances. Prior to his death, Muhammad had questioned the integrity of the October 2021 elections on social media. According to local media, his murder was in relation to a specific Facebook post, which depicted supporters of some political parties as sheep, that he had shared a few days before his death.²⁰⁵

Activists who were active in mobilizing 2019 antigovernment protests were killed for their online activism and mobilization efforts. In May 2021, Ihab al-Wazni, an activist who was integral in mobilizing 2019 protests via social media, was killed in retaliation. Al-Wazni was likely killed by members of an Iranian-backed militia who had apparently threatened him.²⁰⁶ Activist Qassem Hussein Obaid al-Hammadi was subjected to several assassination attempts by armed groups in Babil Governorate due to his social media activity during 2019 demonstrations.²⁰⁷

Online intimidation and threats are used as a tool to silence critical voices or certain communities. In November 2021, an Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate member filed a complaint after he was physically threatened by two men who brandished a weapon and warned him to stop "publishing press materials," apparently referring to his recent online reporting.²⁰⁸ In April 2021, journalist Omar al-Janabi received death threats and was physically attacked after using Clubhouse. Al-Janabi had been alerted by militias that they followed his Twitter account and that his social media content must be silenced.²⁰⁹ LGBT+ people receive regular online harassment and often receive death threats.²¹⁰

In March 2022, Nayef Kurdistan, a prominent KDP member who frequently posts in Arabic about national politics, was threatened and later arrested by authorities in response to his Twitter content, specifically a tweet that was deemed offensive to the Iraqi Supreme Religious Authority (see C3).²¹¹ Following the announcement of Kurdistan's arrest, a mob attacked and set fire to a KDP branch in Baghdad.²¹² In May 2021, Erbil-based political commentator Emad Bajalan was told to not talk about Shiite militias in Iraq and was threatened by both the PMF in Baghdad and KDP in Erbil.²¹³ He was later forced to delete his tweets by the KDP (see B2).²¹⁴

In June 2022, after the coverage period, Nabaz Rashad, a reporter at Westga News, was attacked while reporting on a military operation in Erbil.²¹⁵ While livestreaming the operation, security forces physically attacked Rashad and broke his recording equipment, despite his protests that he was a journalist.²¹⁶

Gender-based online violence is common, and women are specifically at risk of offline violence in retaliation for their online content. According to a report from August 2021, between 75 and 80 percent of women have experienced offline domestic violence because of their social media activities.²¹⁷ In March 2022, an activist in the Kurdistan region who provided feminist and human rights information on her social media channels was murdered one day before International Women's Day. Prior to her murder, she received death threats from her followers on the pretext that her work was contrary to local customs and traditions.²¹⁸

Electronic blackmail and extortion have also increased in recent years. An independent journalist was subject to a campaign of defamation and extortion; his personal photos were posted by inauthentic social media pages belonging to political parties in an effort to stop his reporting on government corruption (see B5).²¹⁹

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users 1 / subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? 3

Cyberattacks have been reported in Iraq and the Kurdistan region in the past, and both governmental and nongovernmental websites are vulnerable to cyberattacks of domestic and international origin. Hackers are rarely held accountable for their attacks, and there are no laws

criminalizing these kinds of offenses. Opposition news outlets have been subject to cyberattacks, and activists have had their social media accounts deactivated by hackers.

Independent media organizations reported cyberattacks, with the apparent aim of intimidation, during the reporting period. The local independent news outlet Diplomatic Magazine was hacked in March and June 2022, resulting in the removal of its Facebook page. Both hacks occurred after the outlet published articles relating to high-level official corruption. During the first attack, the hackers posted videos depicting nudity and violence to DM's Facebook page.²²⁰ After the second attack, the outlet's editor in chief accused authorities and security forces of perpetrating the attack, although this has not been corroborated.²²¹ Following the attacks, the US consulate in Erbil met with DM's team to discuss the hacking incidents against it and other media outlets in the Kurdistan region.²²²

During the coverage period, a group with ties to the pro-Iran Sabereen News, the al-Tahirah Team, claimed responsibility for several cyberattacks within Iraq and abroad (see B5). For example, in April 2022, the group deployed DDoS attacks against the websites of two television stations. The attacks are apparently related to Khamis al-Khanjar, the head of a Sunni parliamentary faction who maintains strong ties to the stations.²²³

Iraqi websites and users are also vulnerable to attacks that originate outside the country, often from Iran. In October 2020, Iranian hackers targeted telecommunications and government agencies in Iraq as part of a systematic espionage campaign.²²⁴ During the reporting period, two websites that had posted articles about how an Iran-backed militia was providing false university degrees to militia leaders suffered DDoS attacks.²²⁵

In November 2021, Iraqi intelligence services seized a hacking network that sought to penetrate the databases of state security institutions and sell information belonging to the National Security Agency. The network's members, who are linked to unknown external parties, admitted to having received training courses outside the country.²²⁶

According to the Ministry of Interior, cybercrime has increased dramatically in Iraq as mobile phone and social media use has increased. In 2021, the Ministry of Interior and the Judicial Council documented 1,300 cases of extortion, a majority of which targeted women. ²²⁷

As part of its cybersecurity efforts, the government created the Iraqi Electronic Response Team (CERT) in coordination with the Prime Minister's Office. The CERT aims to develop cybersecurity measures and procedures.²²⁸

Footnotes

- ¹Interview with the spokesman of the Ministry of Communication, March 22, 2022, Baghdad.
- ²"Quick information about the National Internet Project," INSM, February 16, 2021, <https://insm-iq.org/en/archives/327>; Nassar Al-Hajj, "Communications reveals the largest infrastructure modernization process that adopts modern Internet technologies," INA, March 8, 2021, <https://www.ina.iq/131918--.html>.
- ³"Specifications & Quality Standards," Iraq National Backbone, Accessed September 2022, <https://ftth.iq/specifications/>.
- ⁴"Quick information about the National Internet Project," INSM, February 16, 2021, <https://insm-iq.org/en/archives/327>.
- ⁵"Iraqi telecom company Asiacell shortlisted for the Data Centers Development Award," Iraqi News, December 1, 2021, <https://www.iraqinews.com/tech/iraqi-telecom-company-asiacell-shortlist...>
- ⁶"UNESCO And The Communications And Media Commission (CMC) Of Iraq, Together With Telecoms Providers Asiacell, Korek And Zain, Signed For The Provision Of Internet Connectivity And WIFI Devices For 1,500 Schools," India Education Diary, August 30, 2021, <https://indiaeducationdiary.in/unesco-and-the-communications-and-media-...>
- ⁷Simon Kemp, "Iraq," Data Reportal, February 15, 2022, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-iraq>.
- ⁸"Iraq," SpeedTest, Accessed July 2022, <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index/iraq>.
- ⁹"Mobile operators would benefit from 4G infrastructure in Iraq," BuddeComm, May 25, 2020, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/05/25/2038165/0/en/Mobi...>
- ¹⁰"Most of Kurdistan Region's electricity provided by private sector: ministry," Rudaw, July 14, 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/140720213>.
- ¹¹Pete Bell, "Iraq and Roll: Telecoms in Kurdistan," Telegeography, October 16, 2017, <https://blog.telegeography.com/iraq-and-roll-telecoms-in-kurdistan>.
- ¹²Interview with Kurdistan digital expert, August 2022.

- ¹³Salam Zaidan, "The most expensive regionally and the worst globally. The turtle is faster than the Internet of Iraq [in Arabic]," Al Jazeera, August 15, 2019, <https://perma.cc/JP79-KN2H>.
- ¹⁴Interview conducted with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- ¹⁵"Quick information about the National Internet Project," INSM, February 16, 2021, <https://insm-iq.org/en/archives/327>.
- ¹⁶"The National High Speed Internet Project announces the start of its service in 500 homes in Baghdad [in Arabic]," Al Marbd, March 17, 2021, <https://www.almirbad.com/detail/81873>.
- ¹⁷"4G-LTE Internet offers," Zain, Accessed July 2021, <https://www.iq.zain.com/en/4g-offers>.
- ¹⁸"Unlimited internet packages," Korek, Accessed September 2022, <https://www.korektel.com/ar/super-4g-lte/unlimited-data-bundles>.
- ¹⁹"Unlimited Open Internet," Zain, Accessed September 2022, <https://www.iq.zain.com/ar/unlimited-internet>.
- ²⁰Pete Bell, "Iraq and Roll: Telecoms in Kurdistan," Telegeography Blog, October 16, 2017, <https://blog.telegeography.com/iraq-and-roll-telecoms-in-kurdistan>.
- ²¹"Data Services – Newroz 4G," Newroz, Accessed August 2021, <https://www.newroztelecom.com/Newroz-4G>.
- ²²"Scratch Cards – Fastlink," Fastlink, Accessed August 2021, <https://www.fast-link.com/SCRATCHCARDS>.
- ²³Ahmed Al-Dabbagh, "Heavy losses for Iraq due to the failure to activate the fourth generation networks. Who is responsible? [in Arabic]," Noon Post, January 12, 2020, <https://www.noonpost.com/content/39081>.
- ²⁴Shatha Khalil, "Internet in Iraq compared to the world is 50 times slower and 50 times more expensive [in Arabic]," Rawabet Center, July 15, 2019, <https://rawabetcenter.com/archives/92516>.
- ²⁵Basil Shanshool, et al., "Suggested Solutions to Detect and Prevent the Internet Smuggling via the DWDM Network of Iraq," ACM Digital Library, February 2021, <https://dl.acm.org/doi/fullHtml/10.1145/3456146.3456150>; Hassan al-Saidi, "Iraq losing \$3.5mln monthly due to internet smuggling," Al Arabya, January 2, 2019, <https://english.alarabiya.net/business/technology/2019/01/02/Iraq-losin....>.
- ²⁶Interview with the spokesman of the Ministry of Communication, March 22, 2022, Baghdad.
- ²⁷"The Iraqi Prime Minister promises reforms "within days"... and justifies cutting off the Internet [in Arabic]," Al Hurra, November 9, 2019, <https://perma.cc/AT59-KT92>.
- ²⁸"Iraq's elections must not be tainted by internet shutdowns," Access Now, October 6, 2021, <https://www.accessnow.org/iraq-elections-internet-shutdowns/>; "Iraq: Open Letter Calls on Leaders to Keep Internet Open During and After Elections," Freedom House, October 5, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/iraq-open-letter-calls-leaders-keep-in....>.
- ²⁹Martin Chulov, "Internet blackout in Iraq as death toll from violent protests rises," The Guardian, October 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/03/internet-down-across-iraq...>.
- ³⁰"Because of exams... Kurdistan cuts all internet lines [in Arabic]," Shafak News, July 24, 2021, <https://www.shafaq.com> (shafaq.com).
- ³¹"Kurdistan decides to cut off internet service for four hours, starting tomorrow, Monday, for this reason [in Arabic]," Baghdad Today, May 9, 2021, baghdadtoday.news; Kassem Mnejja and Zach Rosson, "Empty promises: more internet shutdowns during exams in MENA," Access Now, August 24, 2022, <https://www.accessnow.org/empty-promises-shutdowns-exams/#:~:text=Syrria...>.
- ³²Dana Taib Menmy, "Iraq: Kurdish security forces kill six protesters," Middle East Eye, December 8, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-kurdish-protesters-killed-secu...>; NetBlocks, @netblocks, "Update: Internet connectivity restored to #Sulaymaniyah region, North #Iraq following overnight information blackout amid labor protests; incident duration ~8 hours," December 8, 2020, <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1336213883053363200?lang=en>.
- ³³Martin Chulov, "Internet blackout in Iraq as death toll from violent protests rises," The Guardian, October 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/03/internet-down-across-iraq...>.
- ³⁴"Internet cuts in Iraq. Activists warn that protesters may be subjected to a massacre [in Arabic]," Al Hurra, November 5, 2019, <https://www.alhurra.com/iraq/2019/11/05/%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84...>; NetBlocks, "Social media partially unblocked in Iraq after 50 days," November 21, 2019, <https://netblocks.org/reports/social-media-partially-unblocked-in-iraq-...>.

- [35](#)"Iraq Business Perspectives (Part 1): Internet Infrastructure & Stock Market Modernisation," Iraq Energy Institute, June 9, 2019, <https://iraqenergy.org/2019/06/09/business-perspectives-part1-internet-...>.
- [36](#)Interview with Kurdistan digital expert, August 2022.
- [37](#)"Quick information about the National Internet Project," INSM, February 16, 2021, <https://insm-iq.org/en/archives/327>.
- [38](#)"Nokia and Earthlink to build Iraqi National Backbone with advanced high-speed IP metro network," Nokia, November 15, 2021, <https://www.nokia.com/about-us/news/releases/2021/11/15/nokia-and-earth-...>.
- [39](#)Pete Bell, "Iraq and Roll: Telecoms in Kurdistan," Telegeography, October 16, 2017, <https://blog.telegeography.com/iraq-and-roll-telecoms-in-kurdistan>.
- [40](#)"Mobile operators would benefit from 4G infrastructure in Iraq," BuddeComm, May 25, 2020, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/05/25/2038165/0/en/Mobi-...>.
- [41](#)"User benefits," EarthLink, Accessed July 2021, <https://earthlink.iq/home-user/#home-user-benefits>.
- [42](#)"The Iraqi National Project," EarthLink, Accessed August 2021, <https://earthlink.iq/blog/the-iraqi-national-project/>.
- [43](#)"Kurdistan Region of Iraq Report," Macropolis, Accessed August 2021, <https://marcopolis.net/telecommunication-companies-in-iraq-a-kurdistan-...>.
- [44](#)Sydney Freedberg, et al., "Leak exposes Ericsson's secret dealings with ISIS amid Iraq corruption spree," ICIJ, February 27, 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/ericsson-list/ericsson-leak-isis-ir-...>.
- [45](#)"Iraq - Country Commercial Guide," Trade.gov, November 2, 2021, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/iraq-telecommunications>.
- [46](#)The World Bank, "Green Paper on Iraq Draft Telecommunications Law," November 2018, <https://www.gsma.com/mena/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Green-Paper-on-Ira-...>.
- [47](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [48](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [49](#)Aktham Seif El Din, "The repercussions of decreasing the Iraqi dinar: Internet companies raise subscription prices and citizens complain of exploitation [in Arabic]," Al Araby, December 25, 2020, <https://perma.cc/VF5F-J892>.
- [50](#)Interview with the spokesman of the Ministry of Communication, March 22, 2022, Baghdad.
- [51](#)interview with a journalist working in the technical field who preferred to remain anonymous, March 26, 2022.
- [52](#)Tom Arnold, "Kuwait's Agility and France's Orange sue directors of Iraq's Korek," Reuters, March 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/pws-orange-korek/kuwaits-agility-and-fr-...>; "Orange battles for control of Iraqi telecoms group," Financial Times, Accessed August 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/d3e3f43a-d5ea-11e8-ab8e-6be0dcf18713>; Sydney Freedberg, et al., "Leak exposes Ericsson's secret dealings with ISIS amid Iraq corruption spree," ICIJ, February 27, 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/ericsson-list/ericsson-leak-isis-ir-...>.
- [53](#)"Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 65," Iraqi Communications and Media Commission, Accessed August 2021, https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/cpa-iraq/regulations/20040320_CPAORD65....
- [54](#)Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.
- [55](#)Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.
- [56](#)"The Media Commission is a permanent sergeant in the service of Iraqi governments [in Arabic]," Al Arab, July 30, 2020, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%...>.
- [57](#)"Parliamentary communications comment on the appointment of the nephew of Al-Hakim as head of the media authority: We had hoped to choose someone to fulfill his ambitions," Iraqnews.info, May 16, 2021, <http://iraqnews.info/blog/archives/43432>.
- [58](#)interview with technical journalists in the Kurdistan region who wished to remain anonymous. Also see: Hala Nasreddine, "The Ericsson Documents: Did the Swedish Firm (Indirectly) Fund ISIS?," DARAJ, February 27, 2022, <https://daraj.com/en/87570/>.
- [59](#)Sydney Freedberg, et al., "Leak exposes Ericsson's secret dealings with ISIS amid Iraq corruption spree," ICIJ, February 27, 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/ericsson-list/ericsson-leak-isis-ir-...>.

- 60Khalid al-Ansary, "Iraqis demonstrate over Web censorship," Reuters, August 14, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-censorship/iraqis-demonstrate-o-...>
- 61"Parliamentary Culture and Media calls on the government to implement the order to ban electronic games and block porn sites, and stresses the rapid response in the coming days [in Arabic]," Ashourland, June 25, 2019, <https://ashourland.net/2019/06/25/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%...>; Ahmed Aboulenein, "Iraq parliament bans online battle games, citing 'negative' influence," Reuters, April 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-videogames/iraq-parliament-bans-...>
- 62"Kurdistan clerics call for government to block pornographic websites," Kurdistan 24, January 24, 2019, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/18680-Kurdistan-clerics-call-for-g-...>
- 63"Tik Tok faces the ban in Iraq... a wide division between supporters and opponents," Sky news, December 11, 2022, <https://perma.cc/ER6P-ZRj8>.
- 64Tawfiq Nasrallah, "Iraqi authorities deny rumors of Tik Tok ban," Gulf News, December 12, 2021, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/iraqi-authorities-deny-rumours-of-tik-t-...>
- 65"KRG ministry obliges internet companies to launch family packages," Rudaw, August 17, 2022, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/17082022>.
- 66Netblocks, "Social media partially unblocked in Iraq after 50 days," November 21, 2019, <https://netblocks.org/reports/social-media-partially-unblocked-in-iraq-...>
- 67Sangar Ali, "Kurdistan indefinitely blocks social media networks at Baghdad's request: Ministry," Kurdistan 24, July 15, 2018, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/16599-Kurdistan-indefinitely-block-...>
- 68"Iraq blocks social media amid rising tension," Alarabiya News, May 20, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/media/digital/2014/06/13/Iraq-suspends-Fa-...->
- 69Timothy Shim, "Are VPNs Legal? 10 Countries Ban VPN [in Arabic]," Web Hosting Secret Revealed, March 15, 2019, <https://www.webhostingsecretrevealed.net/ar/blog/security/are-vpns-lega-...>
- 70"Iraq," Open Net, August 10, 2009, <https://opennet.net/research/profiles/iraq>.
- 71Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- 72"Facebook says not blocking party, candidate ads for Iraqi elections," The New Arab, September 2, 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/facebook-says-not-blocking-iraq-elec-...>
- 73"Iraq," Google Transparency Report, Accessed July 2021, <https://transparencyreport.google.com/government-removals/by-country/IQ>.
- 74Interview with an official in the technical department of the CMC who wished to remain anonymous, March 19, 2022.
- 75Human Rights Watch, "We can call you at any time [in Arabic]," June 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2020/06/15/375258>.
- 76"Asaib Ahl al-Haq threatened the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party [in Arabic]," Iran Intl, May 27, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/202208186309>.
- 77@BangenRe, "Mr. Imad Baglan's tweet, which was never intended by His Eminence Mr. Ammar al-Hakim, has been deleted And that the leadership of the party does not accept offending his Eminence, and it is not from our morals and our upbringing to offend these respected selves or any other individual [in Arabic]," Twitter, July 29, 2022, <https://twitter.com/BangenRe/status/1553005343797567488>; @BangenRe, "Transgression in the literature of democracy is prohibited as a principle And Mr. Imad Baglan is neither a spokesman for the party nor a leader in it However, he was prevented from making any statements as of today [in Arabic]," Twitter, August 17, 2022, <https://twitter.com/BangenRe/status/1559957160926367746>.
- 78@EnglishZhyan, "On July 13, all pages of Zhyan News Network including Zhyan English were mysteriously taken down on Facebook. At least 2 pages were mysteriously reactivated today by the hackers and Zhyan staff is no longer in charge of them," Twitter, July 21, 2021, <https://twitter.com/EnglishZhyan/status/1417887001894965258>.
- 79"Zhyan," CPJ, Accessed August 2022, <https://cpj.org/tags/zhyan/>; Amberin Zaman, "Talabani family feud at center of power struggle in Iraqi Kurdistan party," Kurd Press, July 16, 2021, <https://kurdpress.com/en/news/1158/Talabani-family-feud-at-center-of-po-...>
- 80"Iraqi Kurdish security forces raid, close office of news website Gav news in Duhok," Committee to Protect Journalists, November 16, 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/11/iraqi-kurdish-security-forces-raid-close-office-...>
- 81Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.

- ⁸²Laith al-Katib, "Iraqi security thwarts 6 extortion and 5 cases of domestic violence," Al-Ain Al-Akhbariya, March 11, 2022, <https://al-ain.com/article/extortion-iraq-foil-violence>.
- ⁸³Laith al-Katib, "Threatened to publish his lover's photos. Iraqi security thwarts an attempt to blackmail a woman from her husband," Al-Ain Al-Akhbariya, January 19, 2022, <https://al-ain.com/article/blackmailing-woman-iraq-husband>.
- ⁸⁴Matt Burgess, "How Iraq turned off the internet," Wired, April 7, 2016, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/iraq-internet-blackout-censorship>.
- ⁸⁵"Iraq suspends Reuters for three months over report on coronavirus cases," Reuters, April 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-reuters/iraq-suspends-reuters-f....>
- ⁸⁶Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.
- ⁸⁷Abdul Qadir Al-Janabi, "Blocking the Internet in Iraq... Violation of laws and heavy losses [in Arabic]," Al Arabiya, May 20, 2020, <https://perma.cc/3YWR-6TPD>.
- ⁸⁸"Demonstrations in Iraq: second update [in Arabic]," Human Rights Office United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3rd%20UNAM%20....>
- ⁸⁹Interview with Kurdistan digital expert, August 2022.
- ⁹⁰"وەزارەتی روژنێری رهشوووسی یاسای رێکخستنی کاری میدیایی ناماده دهکات" Rudaw, June 14, 2022, <https://www.rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/1406202214>.
- ⁹¹Interviews with the spokesman of the Ministry of Communication, March 22, 2022, Baghdad.
- ⁹²Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- ⁹³"COVID-19 Vaccine [in Arabic]," Kurdistan Regional Government, Accessed August 2022, <https://gov.krd/mocy/publications/%D8%B1%DB%8E%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%...>
- ⁹⁴Mark Scott, "Arabic social media remains an unchecked Wild West," Politico, July 28, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/social-media-arabic-twitter-facebook-co...>
- ⁹⁵"Safety of journalists," UNESCO, Accessed July 2021, <https://ar.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists>.
- ⁹⁶Reporters Without Borders, "2021 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX," 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking#>.
- ⁹⁷Marwan Al-Jubouri, "Victims of the press in Iraq when the price of the word is high [in Arabic]," Al-Jazeera, December 13, 2018, <https://perma.cc/47LM-3MUV>.
- ⁹⁸Interview with digital expert in Kurdistan, August 2022.
- ⁹⁹Marwan Al-Jubouri, "Victims of the press in Iraq when the price of the word is high [in Arabic]," Al-Jazeera, December 13, 2018, <https://perma.cc/47LM-3MUV>.
- ¹⁰⁰Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.
- ¹⁰¹Marwan Al-Jubouri, "Victims of the press in Iraq when the price of the word is high [in Arabic]," Al-Jazeera, December 13, 2018, <https://perma.cc/47LM-3MUV>.
- ¹⁰²Marwan Al-Jubouri, "Victims of the press in Iraq when the price of the word is high [in Arabic]," Al-Jazeera, December 13, 2018, <https://perma.cc/47LM-3MUV>.
- ¹⁰³Hakeem Dawd Qaradaghi, "Iraq's Kurdish region is not a model for free speech," Al-Jazeera, September 25, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/9/25/iraqs-kurdish-region-is-no...>
- ¹⁰⁴"Freedom of Expression in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, May 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/Freedo...>
- ¹⁰⁵Adnan Abu Zeed, "Iraq takes action against bogus social media posts," Al Monitor, May 19, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/iraq-social-media-fake-acc...>
- ¹⁰⁶Manar Al Zubaidi, "The media in Iraq between the hammer of money and the anvil of authoritarian influence [in Arabic]," IJNet, March 11, 2021, <https://perma.cc/22YP-6QUUD>.
- ¹⁰⁷"INSM Network," Facebook, October 5, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/insmnetwork/photos/4448063695284566>.
- ¹⁰⁸David Patrikarakos, "How Iran won Iraq's election," UnHerd, October 25, 2021, <https://unherd.com/2021/10/iraqs-fake-news-election/>.
- ¹⁰⁹"Iraq: Electronic armies on the electoral propaganda line," Sky News, October 2021, <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1450374-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8...>

- 110“Iraq Human Rights Report 2019,” U.S. State Department, March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IRAQ-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS...>.
- 111Namo Abdulla, “Rattled by Protests, Iraqi Kurdish Leaders Punish Journalists,” Voice of America, September 5, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/rattled-protests-iraqi-kurdish-...>.
- 112“Iraq Human Rights Report 2019,” U.S. State Department, March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IRAQ-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS...>.
- 113Observed by internet users in Iraq as of July 2022.
- 114“Facebook purges 2 vast fake networks in Iraq, Tunisia,” Business Insider, June 5, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.in/tech/news/facebook-purges-2-vast-fake-ne...>; “May 2020 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report,” Facebook, May 2020, <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/May-2020-Detailed-CIB-R...>.
- 115Interview with Kurdistan digital expert, August 2022.
- 116Adnan Abu Zeed, “Iraq takes action against bogus social media posts,” Al Monitor, May 19, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/iraq-social-media-fake-acc...>.
- 117“June 2021 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report,” Facebook, June 2021, <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/June-2021-CIB-Report-Fi...>.
- 118Mark Scott, “Arabic social media remains an unchecked Wild West,” Politico, July 28, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/social-media-arabic-twitter-facebook-co...>.
- 119Hannah Storm and Aida al-Kaisy, “Covid-19 and the dangers of disinformation in the Iraqi media,” Ethical Journalism Network, April 24, 2020, <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/covid-19-and-the-dangers-of-disinf...>.
- 120“The society for the defense of journalists issues a report on monitoring violations of the press in Iraq,” Iraqi Media House, 2020, <https://perma.cc/UB8X-WKXR>.
- 121Manar Al Zubaidi, “The media in Iraq between the hammer of money and the anvil of authoritarian influence [in Arabic],” IJNet, March 11, 2021, <https://perma.cc/7Q64-J5VC>.
- 122Human Rights Watch, “Iraq - New Directives Silence the Media [in Arabic],” July 3, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2014/07/03/254404>.
- 123Namo Abdulla, “Rattled by Protests, Iraqi Kurdish Leaders Punish Journalists,” Voice of America, September 5, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/rattled-protests-iraqi-kurdish-...>.
- 124Interview with Kurdistan digital expert, August 2022.
- 125Interview with legal adviser, Ali Omar, March 2021.
- 126Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- 127Aktham Seif El-Din, “Iraq: Steps to Censorship on Social Media,” Alarby, January 16, 2022, <https://perma.cc/3A92-CVN7>.
- 128Human Rights Watch, “Letter to the Communication and Media Commission of Iraq,” April 12, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/12/letter-communication-and-media-comm...>; The World Bank, “Green Paper on Iraq Draft Telecommunications Law,” November 2018, <https://www.gsma.com/mena/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Green-Paper-on-Ira...>.
- 129“Iraq suspends Reuters for three months over report on coronavirus cases,” Reuters, April 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-reuters/iraq-suspends-reuters-f...>.
- 130“Facebook restricts the activity of electronic armies in Iraq,” Al-Arab, August 12, 2021, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%83-%D9%8A%D9%82%...>.
- 131“Law – Commission Media and Communications [in Arabic],” Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021, <https://perma.cc/4SQK-S7FW>.
- 132Aida al-Kaisy, “A Fragmented Landscape: Barriers to Independent Media in Iraq,” Middle East Center, June 2019, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/100991/1/a_fragmented_landscape.pdf.
- 133According to the Checkers team.
- 134Manar Al Zubaidi, “The media in Iraq between the hammer of money and the anvil of authoritarian influence [in Arabic],” IJNet, March 11, 2021, <https://perma.cc/K2Z9-KAVJ>.
- 135James Deane, “The role of independent media in curbing corruption in fragile settings,” BBC Media Action, Accessed August 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/bri...>.
- 136Bashar Siraj, “Best 9 VPN in Iraq 2021 [in Arabic],” VPN Reviews, May 3, 2020, <https://vpn.3rabreviews.com/iraq-vpn/>.

- 137 "Iraqi Kurdistan. Increase in murders of women by a member of their families," Al Hurra, March 20, 2022, [الحرّة | ازدیاد جرائم قتل النساء على يد أحد أفراد عائلاتهن \(alhurra.com\)](https://alhurra.com/...).
- 138 Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraq's parliamentary vote marred by boycott, voter apathy," AP News, October 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/saddam-hussein-baghdad-middle-east-iraq-gene...>
- 139 Zaid Salem, "The weakness of the Internet in Iraq. Technical or political reason? [in Arabic]," Al Araby, February 19, 2018, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B6%D8%B9%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D...>
- 140 Azhar Al-Rubaie, "Political turmoil and the dangers of Corona did not stop the protests in Iraq [in Arabic]," Alghad, March 23, 2020, <https://alghad.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8...>
- 141 Dana Taib Menmy, "Iraq: Kurdish security forces kill six protesters," Middle East Eye, December 8, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-kurdish-protesters-killed-secur...>; NetBlocks, @netblocks, "Update: Internet connectivity restored to #Sulaymaniyah region, North #Iraq following overnight information blackout amid labor protests; incident duration ~8 hours," December 8, 2020, <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1336213883053363200?lang=en>.
- 142 "Clubhouse in Iraq... Incitement and killing threats to journalists and activists," Ultra Iraq, April 7, 2021, <https://perma.cc/VHY3-46FS>.
- 143 "Iraq," Constitution Project, 2005, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf.
- 144 "Law – Commission Media and Communications [in Arabic]," Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021, <https://perma.cc/QE28-NXXA>.
- 145 Karwan Faidhi Dri, "Kurdistan constitution must be legislation for all citizens: President Barzani," Rudaw, May 18, 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/190520214>.
- 146 Ignacio Miguel Delgado Culebras, "Press freedom on 'brink of extinction' in Iraqi Kurdistan, journalists say," Committee to Protect Journalists, September 9, 2019, <https://cpj.org/2019/09/press-freedom-extinction-iraqi-kurdistan-puk-pd...>; "Freedom of Expression in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, May 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/Freedom-of-Expression-in-t...>
- 147 "Law No. (6) of 2008 Law to Prevent Misuse of Communications Equipment in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq [in Arabic]," Wiki Dorar, Accessed August 2021, <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/21005.html>.
- 148 Kamal Chomani, "Judiciary in Kurdistan Region in Peril," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, January 11, 2019, <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/judiciary-in-kurdistan-region-in-...>
- 149 Michael Knights, "Iraq's Judiciary Weak Link," Washington Institute, June 10, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-judiciary-wea...>
- 150 Kamal Chomani, "Judiciary in Kurdistan Region in Peril," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, January 11, 2019, <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/judiciary-in-kurdistan-region-in-...>
- 151 Ignacio Miguel Delgado Culebras, "Press freedom on 'brink of extinction' in Iraqi Kurdistan, journalists say," Committee to Protect Journalists, September 9, 2019, <https://cpj.org/2019/09/press-freedom-extinction-iraqi-kurdistan-puk-pd...>
- 152 "Regulation for Online Content," Internet Legislations, Accessed July 2021, <https://internetlegislationatlas.org/#/countries/Iraq/frameworks/conten...>
- 153 "Penal Code No. 111," Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021, <https://www.rwi.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-0c03-6a0c-ffff-ffff96be3560/pen...>
- 154 "Penal Code No. 111," Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021, <https://www.rwi.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-0c03-6a0c-ffff-ffff96be3560/pen...>
- 155 Suad al-Salhy, "Iraq's parliament votes to criminalise all forms of normalisation with Israel," Middle East Eye, May 26, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-parliament-unanimously-approves...>
- 156 Kristen Sibbald, "Iraq Parliament Suspends Draconian Cybercrimes Bill," Human Rights Watch, May 7, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/07/iraq-parliament-suspends-draconian-...>
- 157 Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Scrap Bill to Restrict Free Speech," November 25, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/25/iraq-scrap-bill-restrict-free-speech>.

- 158 Human Rights Watch, "We can call you at any time [in Arabic]," June 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2020/06/15/375374>.
- 159 Human Rights Watch, "Iraqi Kurdistan - Attack on Freedom of Expression [in Arabic], March 1, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2013/02/09/248777>.
- 160 Human Rights Watch, "We can call you at any time [in Arabic]," June 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/15/we-might-call-you-any-time/free-s...>
- 161 "Iraqi Kurdish court sentences photojournalist Qaraman Shukri to 7 years in prison in secret trial," CPJ, June 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/06/iraqi-kurdish-court-sentences-photojournalist-q...>.
- 162 "Iraqi Kurdish court sentences freelance journalist Omed Baroshky to one year in prison," June 22, 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/06/iraqi-kurdish-court-sentences-freelance-journal...>
- 163 NRT Digital Media, "Imprisoned journalist Omed Baroshki sentenced to additional year in prison," September 23, 2021, <https://www.nrttv.com/En/detail6/1008>.
- 164 "Iraqi Kurdish journalist Omed Baroshky: Press freedom an illusion in the region," CPJ, April 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/04/iraqi-kurdish-journalist-omed-baroshky-press-fr...>
- 165 "Six months imprisonment for a journalist because of his post on the social networking site Facebook [in Arabic]," NTV, October 20, 2021, <https://www.ntvnews.net/6-shuor-lahfi-bisib-mashur-lah-ala-mawq-tawasil-alajtmaci> | NTV-NEWS (theworldtech.net).
- 166 Interview with journalist Qusay Shafiq, March 21, 2022.
- 167 "Iraq: Renewing the demand for the release of journalist Ahmed Al-Fahd and dropping all legal charges against him," Journalists Support Committee, February 13, 2022, <https://www.journalistsupport.net/article.php?id=377890>.
- 168 "Accused of defaming its governor. Judgment for imprisonment of a civil activist in Salah al-Din," Iraq Post, March 23, 2022, iraqpost.net.
- 169 Iraqi ports and seaports, "because of his criticism of organized crime gangs and militia factions in Basra," Facebook, March 28, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/portsandseaports>.
- 170 Reporters Without Borders, "Three jailed reporters charged with 'undermining national security,'" February 15, 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/news/three-jailed-reporters-charged-undermining-nati...>
- 171 "Iraqi Kurdish court sentences photojournalist Qaraman Shukri to 7 years in prison in secret trial," CPJ, June 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/06/iraqi-kurdish-court-sentences-photojournalist-q...>.
- 172 Reporters Without Borders, "Iraq: Wave of arrests of journalists covering protests in Iraqi Kurdistan," December 16, 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/iraq-wave-arrests-journalists-covering-protests-iraq...>
- 173 Dana Taib Menmy, "Iraq: Kurdish parliament presidency files defamation lawsuit against poet," January 26, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-kurdish-presidency-poet-defamat...>
- 174 Human Rights Watch, "We can call you at any time [in Arabic]," June 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2020/06/15/375258>.
- 175 "Kurdish authorities arrest Nayef Kurdistan," Shafaq, March 28, 2022, <https://shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Kurdish-authorities-arrest-Nayef-Kurdistan...>; "Kurdistan Ministry of Interior announces the arrest of 'Nayef Kurdistan': Freedom of expression does not mean insulting the position of reference," Search 4 Dinar, March 27, 2022, <https://search4dinar.wordpress.com/2022/03/27/kurdistan-ministry-of-int...>
- 176 Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- 177 Privacy International, "Timeline of SIM Card Registration Laws," Accessed August 2021, <https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/3018/timeline-sim-card-regis...>; Samya Kullab, "In Iraq a father faces militia power as he seeks missing son," Associated Press, October 2, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-iraq-iran-archive-3584dcf607d...>
- 178 See: <https://cmc.iq/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D...>
- 179 Interview with digital expert in Iraq, 2022.
- 180 "Law - Commission Media and Communications [in Arabic]," Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021, <https://perma.cc/4SQK-S7FW>.
- 181 Bashar Siraj, "Best 9 VPN in Iraq 2021 [in Arabic]," VPN Reviews, May 3, 2020, <https://vpn.3rabreviews.com/iraq-vpn/>.

- [182](#)Interview with an official in the technical department of the CMC who wished to remain anonymous, March 19, 2022.
- [183](#)"Law – Commission Media and Communications [in Arabic]," Iraqi Parliament Council, Accessed July 2021 <https://perma.cc/SYU6-K6Q2>.
- [184](#)"Iraq Human Rights Report 2019," U.S. State Department, March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IRAQ-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS...>
- [185](#)"2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq," U.S. Department of State, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-prac...>
- [186](#)"The Iraqi judiciary monitors morals on social media," Al-Arab Newspaper, August 14, 2021, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%...>
- [187](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [188](#)Amjad Saeed, "Fears that the Iraqi judiciary will criminalize insults on Facebook [in Arabic]," DW, February 19, 2015, <https://perma.cc/WAQ4-D44K>; "Amal Saqr, "Blackmail in Iraq. Electronic piracy gangs hunt girls [in Arabic]," Al Araby, May 13, 2018, <https://perma.cc/5ZUU-6887>.
- [189](#)"Protection of private life in Iraqi law / Judge Kazem Abdul Jassim Al-Zaidi [in Arabic]," Supreme Judicial Council, February 10, 2014, <https://www.hjc.iq/view.2255/>.
- [190](#)Craig Timberg et al., "On the list: Ten prime ministers, three presidents and a king," The Washington Post, July 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/20/heads-of-state-pegasus-...>
- [191](#)Rami El-Amin, "Pegasus: Providing Saudi and Emirati Eyes in Iraq," DARAj, July 20, 2021, <https://daraj.com/en/76502/>; "Iraqi president on list for potential Pegasus surveillance - Washington Post," Reuters, July 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-president-list-potentia...>; Alex MacDonald, "Pegasus: Which Middle East and North Africa figures are on the target list?," Middle East Eye, July 21, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/pegasus-spyware-middle-east-north-af...>
- [192](#)Rami El-Amin, "Pegasus: Providing Saudi and Emirati Eyes in Iraq," DARAj, July 20, 2021, <https://daraj.com/en/76502/>.
- [193](#)Rami El-Amin, "Pegasus: Providing Saudi and Emirati Eyes in Iraq," DARAj, July 20, 2021, <https://daraj.com/en/76502/>.
- [194](#)TEVDA Press, YouTube Video, 2021, [رێباز گهردی نه‌ددامی پێشوو ی پاراستن](#) - YouTube.
- [195](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [196](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [197](#)Interview with technical expert, Ali Anwar, March 2021.
- [198](#)Interview with the spokesman of the Ministry of Communication, March 22, 2022, Baghdad.
- [199](#)Interview with a former FastLink employee who wished to remain anonymous, Kurdistan region, March 20, 2022.
- [200](#)Interview with Iraqi technical expert, March 2022.
- [201](#)Kurdistan TV, YouTube Video, September 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wehXviN2-q4>; Karwan Faidhi Dri, "PUK's Bafel Talabani denies pressuring rival co-chair to leave Iraq," Rudaw, April 9, 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/04092021>.
- [202](#)Lucente "Iraqi activists are finding refuge in Kurdistan to escape militia threats," The National News, February 6, 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/iraqi-activists-are-finding-...>
- [203](#)"Iraqi security releases kidnapped activist Ali Al-Makdam," Sky News Arabia, July 10, 2021, <https://perma.cc/S4JW-N4FC>.
- [204](#)"Iraqi freelance journalist Ali Al Mikdam abducted and found beaten," CPJ, July 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/07/iraqi-freelance-journalist-ali-al-mikdam-abduct...>
- [205](#)"Anger ignites Iraq after the killing of a young man who criticized the Iraqi elections in mysterious circumstances, and activists accuse Al-Sadr of his assassination," Step News Agency, October 10, 2022, <https://stepagency-sy.net/2021/10/10/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%...>
- [206](#)"Iraq: Activist murder protests called as Iran consulate targeted," Al Jazeera, May 10, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/10/iraqi-activist-murder-protests-...>
- [207](#)Mushtaq Ramadan, "An activist from Babylon, recounts details of assassinations behind which officials were behind: We live in daily terror," Rudaw, February 8, 2022, <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/080220223>.

- [208](#)Committee to Support Journalists, "Iraq: Condemning the threat of journalist Abdullah Attia and calling on the authorities to expose the aggressors and ensure the protection of journalists and media professionals," November 13, 2021, <https://www.journalistsupport.net/article.php?id=377345>.
- [209](#)"Club House" in Iraq... Incitement and "killing" threats to journalists and activists," Ultra Iraq, April 27, 2021, "القتل للصحفيين والنشطاء" في العراق.. تحريض وتهديدات بـ "القتل" للصحفيين والنشطاء (ultrasawt.com).
- [210](#)Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Kurdish transgender woman shot by brother had been hiding from family," The Guardian, February 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/feb/21/kurdish-trans-...>; "‘Everyone Wants Me Dead,’ Killings, Abductions, Torture, and Sexual Violence Against LGBT People by Armed Groups in Iraq," Human Rights Watch, March 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/03/23/everyone-wants-me-dead/killings-a-...>.
- [211](#)"Kurdistan Ministry of Interior announces the arrest of "Nayef Kurdistan": Freedom of expression does not mean insulting the position of reference," Search 4 Dinar, March 27, 2022, <https://search4dinar.wordpress.com/2022/03/27/kurdistan-ministry-of-int-...>.
- [212](#)"KDP OFFICE IN BAGHDAD ATTACKED AFTER TWEET SETS OFF FIRESTORM," NRT TV, March 28, 2022, <https://nrttv.com/en/detail6/2956>.
- [213](#)"Asaib Ahl al-Haq threatened the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party," Iran Intl, May 27, 2021, <https://www.iranintl.com/202208186309>.
- [214](#)@BangenRe, "Mr. Imad Baglan's tweet, which was never intended by His Eminence Mr. Ammar al-Hakim, has been deleted And that the leadership of the party does not accept offending his Eminence, and it is not from our morals and our upbringing to offend these respected selves or any other individual [in Arabic]," Twitter, July 29, 2022, <https://twitter.com/BangenRe/status/1553005343797567488>; @BangenRe, "Transgression in the literature of democracy is prohibited as a principle And Mr. Imad Baglan is neither a spokesman for the party nor a leader in it However, he was prevented from making any statements as of today [in Arabic]," Twitter, August 17, 2022, <https://twitter.com/BangenRe/status/1559957160926367746>.
- [215](#)"Iraqi Kurdish security forces prevent media outlets from covering drone strike in Erbil, detain journalist," CPJ, June 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/06/iraqi-kurdish-security-forces-prevent-media-out-...>.
- [216](#)See post from Westga News, Facebook, June 8, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/WestgaNewswebsite/videos/1221316285288877/>.
- [217](#)"Claims in the Kurdistan Region for a "New" Directorate to Combat Extortion and Online Harassment," Wissam Al-Bazi, August 14, 2021, "مطالبات في إقليم كردستان بمديرية "جديدة" لمكافحة الابتزاز والتحرش" (7al.net).
- [218](#)Saman Daoud, "About Maria the Kurdish... A feminist's story killed by the clan and the patriarchy," DARAJ, March 11, 2022, "عن ماري الكردية... حكاية نسوية قتلها العشيرة والأبوية" | Daraj.
- [219](#)Interview with an independent journalist who wished to remain anonymous, 2022.
- [220](#)See: Hemn Baqir Abdul, Facebook, March 17, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/hemnbaqirabdul/posts/pfbid09Y9xqQj8dxPCoGg5wvd...>.
- [221](#)See video: Standard Kurd, Facebook, March 29, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=297902899090594&external_1...; See: Diplomatic, Facebook, June 11, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Diplomaticmg/videos/1050508142539964>.
- [222](#)See: U.S. Consulate General Erbil, Facebook, June 13, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/USCGErbil/posts/pfbid0SoinY5QEiXwC1znZijUoVP7T...>.
- [223](#)Crispin Smith and Hamdi Malik, "Muqawama Cyber-Surge (Part 1): Chronology of Recent Attacks," The Washington Institute, April 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muqawama-cyber-surg-...>.
- [224](#)"Significant Cyber Incidents," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Accessed August 2021, <https://www.csis.org/programs/strategic-technologies-program/significan-...>.
- [225](#)The two websites that were attacked were Eurotimes and Europress Arabia. Europress Arabia was unavailable as of August 2021, see, <https://euro-times.com/> and <https://www.europressarabia.com/>.
- [226](#)"Iraq: Dismantling the most dangerous spy network linked to external parties," Petra Media Agency, November 24, 2021, <https://petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=196188&lang=ar&name=news>.
- [227](#)Alhurra Iraq, "بالعراقي - الابتزاز الإلكتروني في العراق," March 16, 2022, <https://youtu.be/LhLy3qKvIZo>.
- [228](#)"Iraqi Cybersecurity Strategy," ITU, Accessed August 2022, https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/National_Strategie-....

ecoi.net summary:

Report on digital media
and internet freedom

(reporting period June 2021 -
May 2022)

**Country:**

Iraq

Source:

[Freedom House](#)

Original link:

[https://freedomhouse.org/cou
ntry/iraq/freedom-net/2022](https://freedomhouse.org/country/iraq/freedom-net/2022)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

18 October 2022

Document ID:

2081803

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

