

Understanding & Analyzing

TACTICS & NARRATIVES

of TFGBV during the Iraqi Parliament Elections November 2025

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation / Acronym	Full Name / Meaning
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
INSM	Iraqi Network for social media
JOSA	Jordan Open-Source Association
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MP / MPs	Member(s) of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OGBV	Online Gender-Based Violence
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SAFA	Safer Access for All (Arabic: صفا — “Clarity”)
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
VAW	Violence Against Women

Abbreviation / Acronym	Full Name / Meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation

Glossary of Terms Table

Term	Definition / Meaning in Report Context
Annotation	The analytical process of tagging digital content to identify specific discourse categories, such as harassment, neutral commentary, or gender-based hate speech.
Boycott narrative	Strategic messaging or coordinated campaigns designed to discourage electoral participation and undermine voter turnout.
Classification framework	A structured analytical system used to organize social media content into specific typologies based on the nature of the speech.
Deepfake	Synthetic media created or manipulated via AI to realistically misrepresent an individual, frequently deployed to propagate false narratives.
Disinformation	Verifiably false or misleading information that is intentionally produced and disseminated to deceive public perception.
Electoral cycle	The comprehensive timeline of an election, including pre-election campaigning, polling activities, and the post-announcement results phase.
Electoral silence	The legally mandated period immediately preceding a vote during which all formal campaigning and political mobilization must cease.
Framing	The specific construction of a message or narrative used to influence audience interpretation and emotional response.
Incitement	Digital content that encourages or provokes acts of violence, hostility, or discrimination against a targeted individual or group.

Term	Definition / Meaning in Report Context
Misogyny	Deeply ingrained prejudice, hostility, or systemic contempt directed toward women.
Mixed-methods approach	A research methodology integrating qualitative narrative analysis with quantitative data measurement to provide a holistic view of online discourse.
Moral shaming	The deployment of societal norms regarding "appropriate" behaviour to publicly discredit, humiliate, or delegitimize women.
Muhasasa	The informal ethno-sectarian power-sharing arrangement in Iraq that allocates government offices and authority among major religious and ethnic blocs.
Objectification	The reduction of an individual to their physical appearance, disregarding their professional agency, capabilities, or basic humanity.
Quota mechanism	A legal or constitutional provision reserving a minimum percentage of legislative seats for women to ensure their formal political representation.
Qualitative analysis	An interpretative method focused on examining the context, meaning, and narrative structures within specific examples of digital discourse.
Quantitative analysis	A research method focused on measuring the frequency, scale, and statistical trends across a high volume of digital content.
Sexualized disinformation	The use of fabricated sexual accusations or manipulated imagery to publicly humiliate and delegitimize women candidates.
Smear campaign	A coordinated effort designed to damage an individual's reputation through the dissemination of false or verifiably misleading allegations.
Special voting	Designated polling sessions held prior to the general vote for specific demographics, such as members of the security forces and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

About the project

This report is an output of the SAFA project (Safer Access for All, Arabic: صفا – “Clarity”), an initiative designed to address and counter technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in Iraq through evidence-based research and digital monitoring.

The project utilizes advanced AI-based social media monitoring technologies tailored to the Iraqi context to analyse online discourse and generate evidence on the prevalence and patterns of TFGBV, particularly during key democratic moments such as elections. The insights produced aim to raise public awareness about online gender-based violence and support efforts to challenge harmful gender norms.

SAFA also integrates legal analysis to inform policy recommendations and advocacy actions targeting Iraqi decision-makers, with the goal of strengthening legal protections against digital violence. In addition, the project collaborates with journalists and media actors to address discriminatory media coverage and promote responsible reporting that counters online gender-based violence.

The project is implemented through a collaboration between Democracy Reporting International (DRI), the Jordan Open-Source Association (JOSA), and the Iraqi Network for social media (INSM).

About the Partner Organizations

- [Democracy Reporting International \(DRI\)](#)
Democracy Reporting International is a non-governmental organization working globally to support democratic governance, rule of law, and inclusive political participation through research, monitoring, and policy engagement.
- [Iraqi Network for social media \(INSM\)](#)
The Iraqi Network for social media is an Iraqi civil society organization working on digital rights, online safety, and combating disinformation and harmful online content through research, monitoring, and public awareness initiatives.
- [Jordan Open-Source Association \(JOSA\)](#)
The Jordan Open-Source Association is a member-based, not-for-profit organization that promotes openness in technology and defends the rights of technology users in Jordan.

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Executive Summary

Despite the increased participation of women in Iraqi elections, online spaces remain highly hostile environments for women candidates.¹ Digital platforms have become significant in the negotiation of political legitimacy, gender norms, and social expectations. Women candidates are frequently subjected to coordinated harassment, sexualized disinformation, moral shaming, and narratives questioning their competence or legitimacy.

The following report examines patterns of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) targeting women candidates during the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections. The analysis focuses on how harmful narratives against women in politics emerge and evolve across different stages of the electoral cycle, including the campaign period, voting day, and post-election discussions.

The findings in this report were derived using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative digital monitoring and quantitative narrative analysis of publicly available social media content. Monitoring covered 160 social media pages across Arabic and Kurdish contexts between October 2025 and January 2026, including political accounts, media outlet accounts, accounts of electoral candidates, satirical accounts, and accounts linked to tribal and religious actors.

The research team identified 137 Arabic language posts and 83 Kurdish language posts which targeted women candidates. In addition, the team analysed approximately 33,000 user comments (15,933 in Arabic and 17,452 in Kurdish) to understand how online audiences engage with election-related discussions about women candidates and how gender-based hostility appears within public digital discourse.

The findings reveal that TFGBV against women in Iraqi politics functions as a continuous process that intensifies throughout the electoral cycle. Women candidates were repeatedly targeted through narratives centered on morality, appearance, honour, accusations of corruption, and claims of quota manipulation, while their political programs and qualifications received limited attention.

The analysis also reveals significant differences between the types of TFGBV in Arabic and Kurdish contexts. While Arabic content revealed higher levels of harassment and sexualized insults, Kurdish content demonstrated increased usage of discriminatory narratives, including accusations of treason and dehumanizing discourse. Although violent speech appears in a relatively small percentage of comments, when it does, it is severe and includes incitement to violence and/or sexual threats.

The report also finds that digital hostility is amplifying structural vulnerabilities within Iraq's political system. While the women's quota increases numerical representation, party practices can at times limit the political agency of women, making them more vulnerable to online attacks and delegitimization narratives.

Addressing TFGBV is therefore essential to enhancing digital safety as well as to protecting democratic participation and ensuring that women can engage in political life without fear of harassment or intimidation.

¹ London School of Economics and Political Science, (2024, March 5), 'From the House to the Fire': The Gender Quota and Women's Substantive Representation in Iraq <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2024/03/05/from-the-house-to-the-fire-the-gender-quota-and-womens-substantive-representation-in-iraq/>

The report concludes with a set of national and regional recommendations aimed at strengthening responses to online hate speech and gender-based violence, including actions that can be taken by governments, political parties, technology platforms, and civil society organizations.

Main Insights and Key Findings

Quantitative Insights

- Neutral discourse remains dominant but is gradually declining. Neutral content still represents the largest share of online discussions; however, its share declined over the monitoring period from 57% to 50% in the Arabic dataset, indicating a shift toward more confrontational and harmful discourse as the elections progressed.
- Patterns of harmful speech differ across language contexts. The Arabic-language dataset shows higher levels of harassment (18.5%), primarily driven by political harassment and sexual insults. In contrast, the Kurdish-language dataset shows lower harassment (4.3%) but higher levels of discriminatory narratives (17%), particularly accusations of treason (10.4%) and dehumanizing language (5.1%).
- Gendered and sexualized narratives appear across multiple forms of harmful speech. Sexual insults constitute a large share of harassment in both language contexts, accounting for 83% of harassment cases in Kurdish content and 48% in Arabic content, indicating the persistent gendered nature of electoral hostility toward women candidates.
- Violent discourse remains limited but highly severe. Although violence accounts for only 1.2% of Arabic content and 0.7% of Kurdish content, it largely involves the most extreme forms of online harm, including incitement to kill (84% in Arabic) and sexual violence discourse (66% in Kurdish).
- Hostile narratives intensified as the elections progressed. Across both language datasets, disagreement, insults, and discriminatory narratives increased over time while neutral discourse declined, suggesting that the electoral context contributed to escalating hostile online behaviour.
- Electoral discourse is largely driven by official political actors. Political figures and media accounts dominate the conversation across platforms, while influencers and content creators account for 3% or less of the activity, indicating limited organic participation in election-related discussions online.

Interpretation of Findings

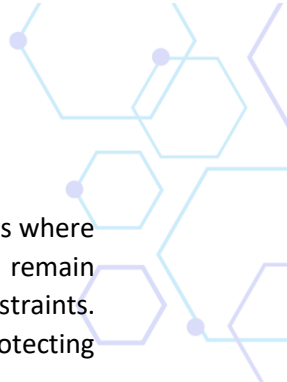
The findings show that TFGBV against women in Iraqi politics operated as a continuous process that evolved across the electoral cycle. Women candidates were repeatedly targeted through narratives centered on morality, appearance, honour, accusations of corruption, and claims of quota manipulation. Political competence and policy agendas received limited attention. Boycott discourse and moral condemnation were frequently used to frame women's participation as illegitimate, futile, or socially unacceptable.

A central finding of the report is that online violence towards women is being informed and enabled through the existing systemic governance frameworks and structures in Iraq. Narratives and discourse used by perpetrators of TFGBV amplified vulnerabilities created by party practices and the quota system. While the 25% mandatory constitutional quota has increased women's numerical representation in Parliament, entrenched patriarchal norms means that, in practice, women are often included as symbolic candidates with limited support or autonomy.² In this context, online attacks work to silence women, discredit them and intimidate them into withdrawal from public and political life.

The report further finds that the announcement of election results did not mark an end to digital hostility. Instead, women candidates who lost in the elections were subjected to renewed mockery and ridicule, with electoral defeat framed as confirmation of women's unsuitability for political leadership. Post-election discourse reinforced the continuity of TFGBV across all stages of the electoral cycle.

Women who withdrew from the electoral race before the official voting period were also under attack. Withdrawal would often trigger additional misogyny and hate speech, with online commentary framing disengagement as proof of moral failure, corruption, or political incompetence rather than as a legitimate decision.

² Jummar, (2025, October 23), Iraq's women in the electoral race: lost opportunities and marginalisation: <https://jummar.media/en/10299#:~:text=Between%20quota%20and%20genuine%20empowerment,partners%20in%20shaping%20public%20policy>



Overall, the report demonstrates that, in Iraq, digital spaces function as active political arenas where legitimacy, power, and participation are negotiated. For women candidates, these spaces remain deeply unequal, shaped by gendered hostility that intersects with structural political constraints. Addressing TFGBV is therefore not only a matter of digital and women's rights, but about protecting democratic participation and advancing political equality in Iraq.

INSM and DRI strongly recommend the following suggestions to create safer online spaces to enable the equitable participation of women in political processes:

- The Iraqi government and electoral bodies should adopt and enforce clear guidelines and a rapid response mechanism to deter and sanction TFGBV, AI-generated and manipulated content, disinformation and hate speech campaigns against women candidates across Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI).
- Political parties and parliamentary bodies should treat the quota as a basic requirement for women's inclusion not a ceiling. Parties must go beyond minimal thresholds by actively advancing women into attainable positions on candidate lists, meaningful roles on key committees, and genuine pathways to party leadership, underpinned by transparent regularly published data on women's representation.
- Platforms and media should implement robust, context-aware moderation policies and gender-sensitive editorial standards in Arabic and Kurdish to enable the swift identification of account impersonation, AI-generated and manipulated content, and honour-based abuse or sexualised attacks on women who participate in politics.
- Civil society and candidates should provide specialized support, training, and coordinated rapid-response mechanisms to help women candidates withstand and challenge online abuse, fostering solidarity and reframing attacks not as personal but as deliberate assaults on democratic participation itself.

Content Warning: This report contains examples of harmful, offensive, and discriminatory language collected for research and documentation purposes. Such content is presented solely to illustrate patterns of online abuse and should not be understood as an endorsement of the views expressed.

Introduction

Context of the Iraqi Parliamentary elections in November 2025

Iraq held its sixth parliamentary elections since 2003 on November 11, 2025, to elect 329 members to the Council of Representatives. This report examines hate speech and TFGBV directed at women candidates during Iraq's 2025 elections, situating these dynamics within the broader landscape of women's participation and their representation in the resulting parliament. In the November 2025 elections 2,248 women ran for office, representing 30% of all candidates, the highest proportion in Iraq's electoral history. However, only 84 women secured parliamentary seats, representing 25.5% of the total, which was just one seat above the constitutional minimum quota of 83 seats. Of these 84 women, only 25 secured their positions through direct electoral votes, while the remaining 59 entered parliament through the quota mechanism. This marks a significant decline from the 2021 parliament, where women held 96 seats (29% of the chamber), with 53 winning through direct electoral votes.³

In Iraq's post-2003 political system, a longstanding power-sharing agreement emerged between the country's major ethno-sectarian groups, known locally as *muhasasa*.⁴ Under this informal agreement, the largely ceremonial presidency is reserved for a Kurdish politician, the premiership falls to the Shia Arab bloc, while the speakership of parliament is allocated to a Sunni Arab politician.⁵ Although this arrangement is not explicitly mandated by the Iraqi Constitution, it has been reaffirmed by successive government formation processes since 2005 and is widely observed as a mechanism to balance political authority among the country's main communities.

Electoral competition has been largely shaped by established parties and alliances operating within Iraq's power-sharing framework. Prominent Shia-led blocs include the State of Law Coalition, the Fatah Alliance, and actors associated with the Coordination Framework. On the Sunni side, competition features parties and alliances such as the Taqaddum Party, the Azm Alliance, and other regional Sunni lists. Kurdish political representation has remained dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), alongside smaller Kurdish parties. Together, these actors' structure electoral competition largely along ethno-sectarian and bloc-based lines, limiting spaces for new or non-traditional political entities. New or alternative political actors have faced structural and procedural constraints in entering the electoral arena. Of particular note is the women-led Al-Mawada Feminist Party formally established on 26 July 2025.⁶ Though its founding generated considerable political and digital attention, the party was unable to participate in the elections, having been established too close to the electoral deadlines to meet registration requirements.

³ The New Arab. (2025, December 11). Iraq's women MPs hold more seats but little sway. <https://perma.cc/Z5TB-T3RU>; Alhurra. (2025, December 1). Why Did Women's Seats Decline in the Iraqi Parliament? <https://perma.cc/R4NX-72G5>

⁴ The *muhasasa* or ethno-sectarian quota system epitomises this. It is predicated on pigeonholing people into sectarian categories: Sunni, Shi'a, or Kurdish, and so forth. Campaign posters feature religious, tribal and ethnic symbols rather than detailed policy platforms to spur people to vote. Thus, citizens are hailed by the parties' propaganda to protect their share of power rather than selecting the righteous candidates into the right place. This procedure of manipulating the voters reproduces the very system that fragments the wounded nation. <https://www.researchgate.net/topic/Elections>

⁵ The Arab Weekly. (2025, December 30). *Iraqi parliament elects new speaker in first step towards picking country's leadership* [Web page]. The Arab Weekly. <https://perma.cc/53HP-6KLZ>

⁶ INSM for Digital Rights. (2025). كيف تعاطى الفضاء الرقمي في العراق مع تأسيس حزب نسوي. [Web page]. INSM for Digital Rights. <https://insm-iq.org/?p=2044>

The Electoral Cycle

Throughout this monitoring period, electoral campaigning was characterised by emotionally driven narratives rather than substantive policy debate. Political messaging frequently centered on religious legitimacy, moral authority, protection of social and cultural values, resistance to perceived external or foreign influence, and expressions of loyalty to sectarian, tribal, or political leadership. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in the Iraqi context, where political credibility is more often negotiated through identity, religious authority, and communal belonging than through detailed legislative platforms or policy programs.

For women candidates, these campaigning dynamics produced distinct and gendered effects. Across the monitored content, women candidates were consistently framed through moral and cultural lenses. Their appearance, personal behaviour, family roles, and perceptions of their conformity to social norms were foregrounded at the expense of their political qualifications, legislative agendas, or professional experience which were largely absent from the public discourse. This pattern reflects deeper structural dynamics in Iraq, where women's participation in public and political life remains contingent on demonstrating moral respectability and securing social approval, rendering their political engagement conditional rather than recognised as an autonomous right.

In the digital sphere, campaigning tactics relied heavily on audiovisual material, including short video clips, screenshots from live broadcasts, selectively edited content, and provocative or misleading titles designed to maximize engagement. In several documented cases, content was decontextualized or reframed to provoke moral judgment, ridicule, or suspicion. These practices proved particularly effective in the Iraqi digital environment, where visual content carries considerable perceived authority and circulates rapidly across interconnected networks of political, media, and community pages that shape public discourse.

Boycott narratives

Polarized boycott discourse, compounded by competitive mobilization efforts, intensified social and political pressure by framing electoral participation as a moral position rather than a civic choice, publicly stigmatising those who stood as candidates, and lending implicit legitimacy to attacks against candidates. Women candidates bore a disproportionate share, with their decision to stand framed through gendered and moral lenses.

This boycott environment was further shaped by the public call of Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the National Shiite Movement (formerly known as the Sadrist Movement) urging his supporters to fully boycott the elections.⁷ The call was unprecedented in its potential consequences for Iraq's political landscape, given the scale and mobilization capacity of the Sadrist base. Al-Sadr's position lent considerable weight to narratives of disengagement and boycott, deepening an atmosphere of political contestation around the elections.

Three days before the elections, the religious figure Sayyed Rashid Al Hussein released a series of videos in which he strongly criticised several members of parliament, including a number of women candidates, for opposing amendments to the Jaafari Personal Status Law.⁸ In the videos, he openly encouraged voters not to support the targeted candidates, describing them as "cowards," "unworthy

⁷ BBC Arabic. (2025, October 18). العراق يستعد لانتخابات برلمانية وسط مقاطعة التيار الصدري وتحديات سياسية [Web page]. BBC Arabic. <https://perma.cc/L9YR-BQ6T>

⁸ رشيد الحسيني، رشيد. (2025, November 8). Boycott statement [Facebook post]. Facebook. <http://archive.today/PBpai>

of representing citizens,” and “enemies of the sect”. The statements quickly gained traction online, with multiple accounts reposting the videos thereby amplifying their reach.

The framing of such messages was designed to provoke fear, anger, and rejection of women’s political agency. By presenting feminist or gender equality positions as existential threats to religion and society, what might constitute legitimate political disagreement was transformed into moral and sectarian confrontation. Voters were pressured to oppose women candidates not based on their political programs or legislative records, but through gendered stereotypes and moral accusations.

Electoral silence – 8 November 2025

Iraq entered the electoral silence period on Saturday morning, 8 November 2025, at 7:00 a.m., as declared by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).⁹ During this phase, all campaigning and electoral activities by candidates and political parties are meant to be suspended. The purpose of electoral silence is to afford citizens with a period of calm deliberation, free from the pressure of active political messaging or last-minute campaigning.

Special Voting – 9 November 2025

Special voting took place on Saturday, 9 November 2025, under the supervision of the Independent High Electoral Commission and covered two principal categories of voter: members of the security forces and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This phase is designed to enable eligible voters unable to participate on the main polling day to exercise their voting rights in advance.

According to IHEC, nearly 1.1 million out of 1.3 million registered security forces personnel voted, resulting in a turnout rate of 82.5 percent across the polling stations assigned to military and security institutions.¹⁰ In the case of IDPs, 20,527 voters cast their ballots out of 26,538 registered voters, representing a turnout rate of 77 percent across designated polling centres in multiple governorates. By the end of the special voting process, the total number of voters reached 1,104,816, corresponding to an overall participation rate of 82.42 percent among all eligible special voters. Of this total, 1,082,052 voters were men and 22,764 were women, as shown in Figure 1.

This pronounced gender imbalance reflects the composition of groups eligible for special voting, particularly the security and military sectors, which are male dominated in Iraq. As a result, women’s participation in special voting was structurally limited, highlighting how institutional factors shape gender representation even in phases of the electoral process that appear to be formally inclusive.

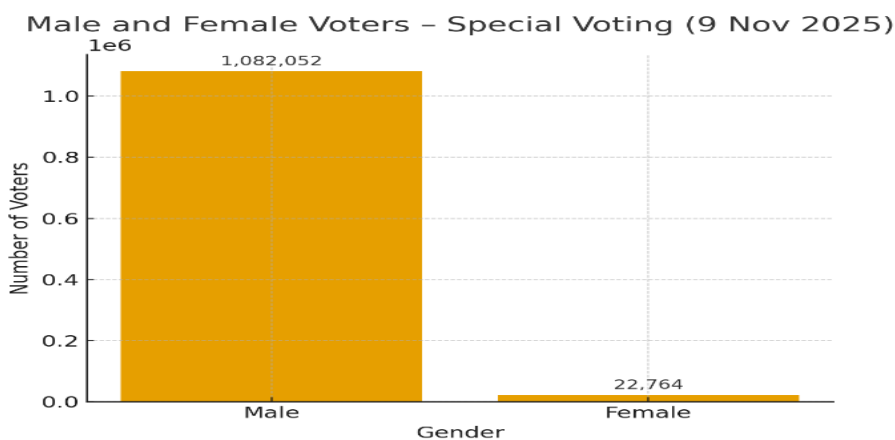


Figure 1:

Male and Female voters during special voting

⁹ المفوضية العليا المستقلة للانتخابات. (2025, November 7). Electoral silence [Facebook post]. Facebook.

<http://archive.today/DVhv2>

¹⁰ Independent High Electoral Commission. (2025, November). تقرير الغلق لانتخابات مجلس النواب العراقي / التصويت الخاص [Web page]. Independent High Electoral Commission. <https://ihec.iq/40823/2025/11/>

General Voting – 11 November 2025

General voting for the Iraqi parliamentary elections took place on 11 November 2025, across all governorates, under tight security restrictions and close coordination between IHEC and security forces. According to preliminary figures, 10.9 million of 20 million registered voters cast their ballot, resulting in a turnout of over 54.3 percent in the general vote. When combined with the special voting conducted earlier, the total number of voters across both days reached approximately 12,009,453 out of 21,404,291 registered voters. Based on the latest update released on the IHEC official Facebook page on 12 November (no data was available on their website), the overall participation rate surpassed 56 percent nationwide.¹¹

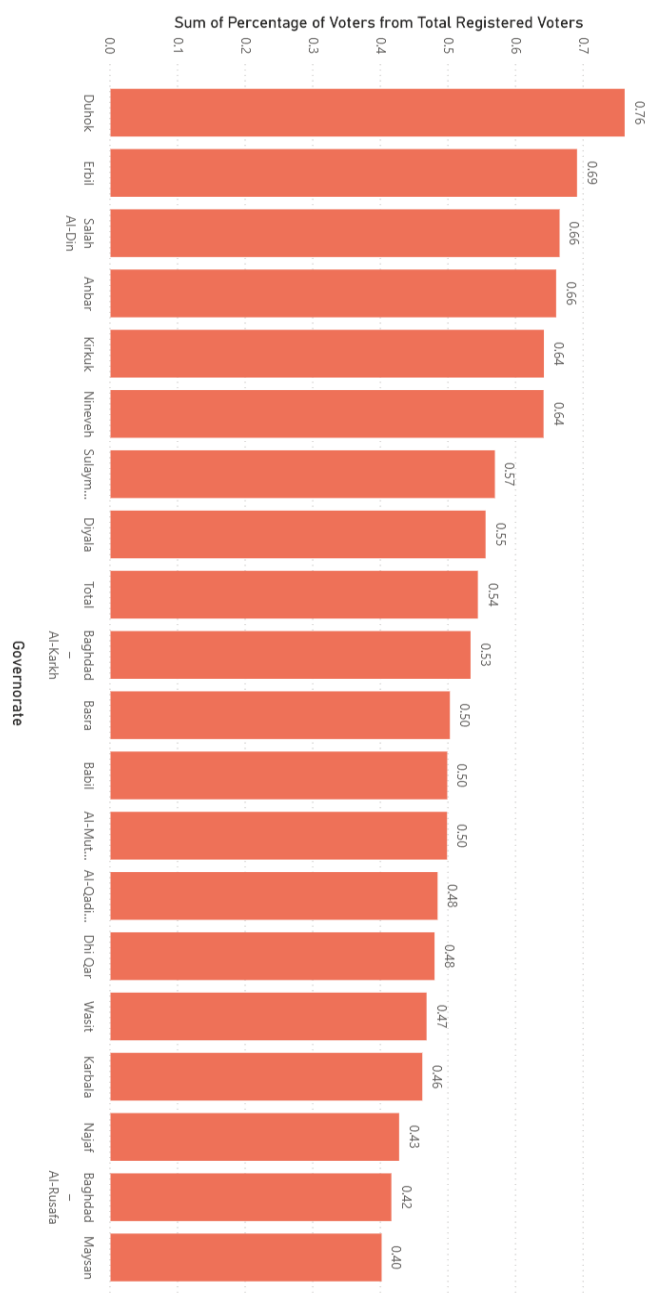


Figure 2: The participation percentage in the general voting for each governorate

¹¹ 2025 نسب وأعداد التصويت لانتخابات مجلس النواب العراقي لسنة (2025, November 12). المفوضية العليا المستقلة للانتخابات [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/6EQ3-TNNC>

Electoral Results: Women's Representation in the Sixth Parliamentary Cycle

The November elections resulted in 84 women winning seats in the 329-member Council of Representatives, representing 25.5% of the legislature. Critically, only 25 of these 84 women secured their seats based on their own vote totals, while the remaining 59 entered parliament through the quota allocation mechanism.¹²

Category	Number of Seats	Percentage	Mechanism
Total women MPs	84	25.5%	Combined
Women elected by direct vote	25	7.6%	Competitive
Women entering via quota	59	17.9%	Quota allocation
Constitutional quota minimum	83	25.0%	Mandated

Table 1: Women's representation in the 2025 Iraqi Parliament

Comparison with Previous Elections

The 2025 results represent a significant decline in women's representation compared to the previous parliamentary cycle (**Table 2**). In the October 2021 elections, women secured 96 seats (29% of the chamber), with 53 winning through direct votes and 40 via the quota system.¹³ The 2025 parliament now has 12 fewer women overall and 28 fewer women who won through competitive voting.

Election Year	Total Women MPs	Direct Vote Winners	Quota Recipients
2025	84	25	59
2021	96 (97 in some sources)	53 (57 in some sources)	40
2018	84	Mixed	Mixed
2014	83	22	61
2010	83	Data not available	Data not available
2005	70	Data not available	Data not available

Table 2: Historical trends in women's parliamentary representation in Iraq (2005-2025)

This decline is striking given that women represented a record 30% of all candidates, suggesting that greater numerical presence did not translate into stronger electoral performance. The difficulty that women faced winning seats through direct competition in 2025 compared to 2021 may reflect a number of factors including changes to the electoral system, shifts in voter preferences, reduced mobilization of women voters, party nomination strategies that marginalise women, and the continued dominance of dominant male-led political blocs.¹⁴

¹² Kirkuk Now. (2025, November 21); Women Occupy 13 Fewer Seats in Iraqi parliament.
<https://perma.cc/YS99-CLU2>

¹³ Kirkuk Now. (2025, October 6). Women Make up 30% of Candidates for Iraqi Parliament.
<https://perma.cc/4NZH-XTP2>

¹⁴ The New Arab. (2025, December 11). Iraq's women MPs hold more seats but little sway.
<https://perma.cc/YQ2A-TQKZ>

The Quota Mechanism and Seat Allocation

Under Iraqi electoral law, at least 25% of parliamentary seats must be held by women.¹⁵ This quota operates at the governorate level. In each province, seats are first allocated to women on the basis of their vote total. When direct competition yields insufficient numbers of women to meet the 25% threshold, additional women with the next-highest vote totals are added until the quota is satisfied in every province.¹⁶

For example, in Baghdad, 17 of the 69 seats (approximately 25%) are reserved for women. If fewer than 17 women win seats through standard seat allocation, the quota is completed by adding the highest-polling women candidates from various lists until 17 women hold seats.¹⁷

This mechanism ensures a floor for women's representation but does not guarantee that women win seats through competitive strength. The 2025 data show 70% of women MPs (59 of 84) entering via the quota rather than direct victory and illustrates that the quota functions primarily as a compensatory mechanism rather than a reflection of voter preference for women candidates.¹⁸

Regional Variations

Comprehensive seat-by-seat breakdowns by name and party affiliation are not readily available in accessible English-language sources. However, provincial results point to regional variations in women's representation:

Baghdad: 17 women among 69 total seats (24.6%), including quota seats.¹⁹

In the KRI, women's electoral participation in the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections was notably strong, particularly in Duhok, where women constituted 47.3% of all voters, casting nearly 296,000 ballots and recording the highest female participation rate in Iraq. Across the KRI, overall turnout was also high, with 77.61% of eligible voters participating in Duhok, 71.82 % in Erbil, and 60.47%, shown in **Table 3**.²⁰

Nineveh: The KDP secured five seats, including quota allocations. The province's diverse ethnic and religious composition is reflected in the allocation of both minority and women's quota seats.²¹

¹⁵ United Nations Iraq. (n.d.). Elections for Iraq's Council of Representatives FACT Sheet. <https://perma.cc/437Z-YRSP>

¹⁶ Next Century Foundation. (2025, November 6). 2025 Iraq Parliamentary Election: Between Representation and Control. <https://perma.cc/BA5D-W7MJ>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The New Arab. (2025, December 11). Iraq's women MPs hold more seats but little sway. <https://perma.cc/JQD3-5K8C>

¹⁹ Next Century Foundation. (2025, November 6). 2025 Iraq Parliamentary Election: Between Representation and Control. <https://perma.cc/8L8Y-QZHS>

²⁰ Rudaw English. (2025, November 18). Women Voting in Iraqi Parliamentary Election. <https://x.com/rudawenglish/status/1990818431688389049>

²¹ Kurdistan 24. (2025, November 16). Iraq's Electoral Commission Announces Final Parliamentary Election Results. <https://perma.cc/YK9W-J8HW>

Table 3: Regional variations of women's representation

Rank	Governorate	Percentage
1	Duhok	47.3%
2	Kirkuk	44.9%
3	Muthanna	44.4%
4	Erbil	44.2%
5	Sulaimani	43.9%
6	Nineveh	42.1%
7	Wasit	42.0%
8	Diyala	41.9%
9	Diwaniyah	41.6%
10	Salahuddin	40.5%
11	Najaf	40.4%
12	Babil	40.3%
13	Basra	40.0%
14	Dhi Qar	40.0%
15	Karbala	39.9%
16	Baghdad	39.7%
17	Anbar	39.2%
18	Maysan	38.7%
Quick Summary		
Highest percentage	Duhok	47.3%
Lowest percentage	Maysan	38.7%
Difference	Highest - Lowest	8.6%
Average	All governorates	41.7%

Pre-elections and candidacy rates

General candidates' participation rates

In total, 7743 candidates competed for 329 seats of membership of the Council of the Representatives.²² On Oct. 2nd, 2025, the total number of candidates registered for the 2025 parliamentary elections reached 1,047 candidates. Of these, 759 were men, and 288 were women, meaning that women represented 27.51 percent of all candidates.²³ The electoral competition included candidates affiliated with 11 political parties, 10 electoral alliances, and 14 independent candidates. These figures reflect numerical participation rather than guaranteed political influence, particularly relevant in light of the structural and social barriers discussed throughout this report.

Women Candidate Participation Rates

The 2025 parliamentary elections saw unprecedented levels of women's participation as candidates (Table 4). According to IHEC, women constituted 2,248 of the 7,768 total candidates, approximately 30% of all those seeking parliamentary seats.^{24, 25} This represents the highest proportion of women candidates since Iraq began holding parliamentary elections in the post-2003 era.²⁶

The surge in women's candidacies reflects both the structural incentives of the quota system, which incentivizes parties to nominate women, and growing political mobilization among women's organizations and civil society groups. Twelve women headed electoral lists, including four in the Kurdistan Region, marking a notable advancement in visibility and leadership roles within party structures.^{27, 28}

Table 4: Women's candidacy trends in Iraqi parliamentary elections

Election Cycle	Total Candidates	Women Candidates (%)
2025	7,768	2,248 (30%)
2021	3,249	951 (92.3%)
2018	6,990	2,011 (28.8%)

²² Independent High Electoral Commission. (2025, October 2). أسماء المرشحين المصادق عليهم لانتخابات مجلس النواب العراقي. [Web page]. Independent High Electoral Commission. <https://ihec.iq/candidates-names-3/>

²³ INSM for Digital Rights. (2025). أنفوغرافيك – 2025 – انتخابات مجلس النواب العراقي. [Web page]. INSM for Digital Rights. <https://insm-iq.org/?p=1979>

²⁴ The New Arab. (2025, December 11). Iraq's women MPs hold more seats but little sway. <https://perma.cc/P679-WQHZ>

²⁵ Kirkuk Now. (2025, October 6). Women Make up 30% of Candidates for Iraqi Parliament. <https://perma.cc/SX4S-ACR6>

²⁶ The New Arab. (2025, December 11). Iraq's women MPs hold more seats but little sway. <https://perma.cc/PKV3-WVTL>

²⁷ Rudaw. (2025, October 9). Iraq sees a surge in women-led electoral lists. <http://archive.today/2peAa>

²⁸ <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/IQ/IQ-LC01/election/IQ-LC01-E20211010/>

Purpose of the Report

This report was prepared with contributions from the **Iraqi Network for social media (INSM)** and examines the main gendered narratives and TFGBV targeting women candidates during the **2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections**.

The report aims to:

- **Examine public discourse on social media surrounding women candidates** during different stages of the electoral cycle, including the pre-election nomination period, campaigning period, polling day, and post-election.
- **Track the digital presence of women candidates across social media platforms in Iraq**, documenting how they are represented, discussed, and targeted in online public spaces.
- **Analyse patterns of TFGBV and hate speech** directed at women candidates, identifying the tactics, techniques, and narrative framing of these attacks.
- **Identify the dominant narratives used to undermine women's political participation**, including moral shaming, defamation, misogynistic harassment and abuse, sexualized disinformation, and delegitimization of women's leadership.
- **Provide evidence-based national and regional recommendations** to address misogynistic and gendered hate speech and online gender-based violence, and to strengthen protections for women's political participation in digital spaces.

Methodology and Data Approaches

This report adopts a **mixed-methods approach** combining qualitative digital monitoring and quantitative analysis of social media comments related to the **2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections**.

Monitoring focused on the three technology platforms that shape digital political conversations in Iraq and the KRI: **Facebook, X, and TikTok**.

The monitoring period covered **October 2025 to January 2026**, allowing the analysis to capture online discourse through the electoral cycle. Previous work by INSM saw the creation of an AI-based social media monitoring technology tailored to the Iraqi context that aimed to generate evidence on the prevalence of TFGBV particularly during key democratic events, such as elections. The project developed a machine learning model in Arabic and Kurdish to detect online gender hate speech in Iraqi and Kurdish language which classified textual comments on social media network posts. The model classification followed different categories of TFGBV drawing on international norms and language. The current Safa project applied this approach and methodology to gather data and analysis from across the period of the Iraqi elections in 2025.

Qualitative Dataset

Beginning in October 2025, the monitoring team identified **160 social media accounts for observation**, including:

- **76 Arabic-language accounts**
- **84 Kurdish-language accounts**

These pages represented a diverse sample including:

- women candidates' accounts
- political actor accounts news and media outlet accounts
- satire and commentary pages
- community and tribal pages

The aim was to capture the **broader ecosystem of online discourse** surrounding women candidates rather than focusing on one stakeholder group or account typology.

From this monitored dataset, the research team identified posts containing **technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and hate speech targeting women candidates**.

The qualitative dataset included:

- **137 posts from the Arabic-language context**
- **83 posts from the Kurdish-language context**

These posts were analyzed using a **custom classification framework developed by the Safa Project**, which categorizes different forms of online gender-based violence, ranging from incitement and harassment to neutral discourse. (see table 5)

In addition, the report includes a **case study on the narratives surrounding candidate withdrawals**. For this component:

- **16 accounts were monitored**
- **17 posts related to the withdrawal of women candidates from the electoral process were analysed from these pages**

Although withdrawal from electoral competition is a legal right, posts frequently manipulated the act of withdrawal, using it as a pretext for **harassment, ridicule, defamation, and the delegitimization of women candidates**.

Quantitative Dataset

Alongside the qualitative monitoring of pages and posts, the report analyzed **public engagement with election-related posts** through a large dataset of social media comments.

This component examined **community reactions to political content featuring women candidates**, allowing the research to trace how harmful narratives are reproduced and amplified in public discussions.

The dataset includes:

Arabic Context: 62 posts, collected from 42 different accounts, generating 15,933 comments in Iraqi Arabic

Kurdish Context: 58 posts, collected from 23 different accounts, generating 17,453 comments in Kurdish

This produced a total dataset of **33,386 comments**.

Each comment was manually annotated by the research team using a **classification scheme developed by the Safa Project** to identify different forms of online gender-based violence including violence and abusive discourse. (see table 5)

The quantitative analysis was conducted separately from the qualitative analysis with the aim of mapping broader **public attitudes and patterns of engagement within election-related online discussions**.

Accounts list selection:

Account selection was guided by a clear set of pre-established inclusion criteria designed to ensure relevance, reach, and public influence. Pages were selected on the basis of their level of political activity, including the regularity with which they published content relating to elections, government performance, policy, or public debate, and their engagement in political advocacy, criticism, or mobilisation. High engagement was a key criterion, assessed through reactions, comments, and shares relative to follower count, as well as the presence of active comment threads and rapid content circulation. Pages were further evaluated for their capacity to shape narratives, generate trending discussions, or be cited by other pages, media outlets, or public figures.

The sample encompassed official or widely recognised candidate pages, party and coalition pages used for political communication and mobilisation, and media outlet pages belonging to television channels, radio stations, news websites, and journalists. The analysis also incorporated satire and political commentary pages, which shape public opinion through humour, mockery, and critical framing, as well as pages affiliated with tribal and religious actors, whose social and religious authority enables them to mobilise audiences and influence political attitudes.

Social media monitoring covered 103 Facebook pages, six X accounts, and 51 TikTok accounts, reflecting the central role of these platforms in Iraq's political communication ecosystem. The analysis was supported by the Meta Content Library, which assisted in identifying, contextualising, and verifying political content and engagement patterns related to the elections.

Data Collection

The monitoring process of comments and posts was guided by the keywords listed below. The search was conducted in Arabic and in Kurdish, ensuring that the analysis remains focused, consistent, and aligned with the core themes. Searches were conducted using terms such as: Iraqi Elections, Independent High Electoral Commission, IHEC, Iraqi Parliament Elections, Provincial Council Elections, Early Elections, Election Campaign Iraq, Iraqi Candidates, Voting Centres, Ballot Boxes, Election Observers, Voter Turnout, Electoral Fraud, Vote Buying, Political Blocs, Iraqi Political Parties, Shiite Parties, Sunni Parties, Kurdish Parties, Independent Candidates, Government Formation, Parliamentary Majority, Opposition Bloc, Quota System, Women Quota, Youth Candidates, and Election Results Iraq.

Data Sample Description

Comments were annotated in Label Studio following a tailored classification process developed specifically to capture the different forms of TFGBV that happened in discussions around the Iraqi Parliamentary election in 2025. A shared data annotation process was developed in collaboration with Jordan Open-Source Association (JOSA), the technical partner on this project. This shared framework is also intended to underpin the development of a machine learning tool to automate such type of classification work in the future. For validation purposes, each comment was reviewed manually by a local researcher and assigned a primary label from a 13-category scheme. The scheme covers neutral content, disagreement/rejection, and a range of tactics and techniques relevant to TFGBV including threats and incitement, sexualised and gendered abuse, misinformation and defamation. The analysis provides a snapshot of how frequently these patterns appear and highlights the principal conversations and dominant themes in which they are embedded, with an emphasis on recurring language and framing rather than the behaviour of individual users in order to identify emerging patterns and trends.

Table 5: Annotation guidelines, classifications and definitions

Intensity	Category	Description	Sub category	Description	Examples
High	Violence	Violence in general refers to the intentional or unintentional use of force, whether physical or psychological, threatened or actual, against an individual, oneself, or against a group of people, a community, or a government. ²	Death Threat / Threat of harm	Death Threat: Where the commenter directly or indirectly expresses their intent or capability to kill a woman or a specific group of women. It explicitly communicates a desire or plan to cause the death of the female target(s).	"راح اذبحج، لا تفكرين تعيشين براحتج بعد" - "ایامج صارت محسوبة" - "والله ما تعبرين هالاسوع" - "عندي سورج وفیدیوهاج، وراح أنشهرن" "راح أفضحج عند أهلیج، وشوفین شراح یصیر" - "أعرف بیتج زین، وراح أوصلج" "تره بالی علیج، وین ما تروحین الحکج" -
				Threat of Harm: Where the commenter expresses their intent or capability to inflict non-lethal physical, emotional, psychological, or reputational harm on a woman or a specific group of women.	سهرت دهبرم، چیتیر بیر له ژانی ئاسووده بی مه کهوه" "زورت نه ماوه رۆژه کانت بژمیره" "سویند به خوا ئه م هه فته به تینا په رینیت"
			Incitement to kill /cause harm	Incitement to kill A severe form of incitement to harm, where online comments explicitly or implicitly encourage, prompt, or persuade others to end the life of a woman or a specific group of women. These messages may glorify femicide or portray it as justified. Incitement to Inflict Harm Any written or visual message within a comment section that encourages, urges, or persuades others to inflict physical, emotional, or psychological harm on a woman or a group of women. This includes calls for violence, harassment, or abuse targeting	- وین أهله من سوالفها؟ واحد یبلغهم حتی یعرفون " "!شنو تسوی تره لو أنتو رجال، جان سویتوا اللازم ورییتوا " - "هالسا قطة" "لازم حملة نفضحها بیها ونخلیها عبرة" - لازم أحد یبلغ أهله علی تصرفاتها، شکلهما ما " "متریبة" های الصحفیه الی دتجی عن هذ الموضوع ؟ زودتها، منو یتبرع یخلینا نسکتها بطریقته ----- تویتری خیرانه که ی به م چیرۆکانه ی نه زانن ؟ " "!که سیک پێیان بلێ تا بزانی چی ده کات ئه گهر پیاو بوونایه ئه وه ی پێویست بوو ده یانکرد و " "ئه م قحبه یه تان پهروه رده ده کرد پێویستمان به هه لمه تیکه بۆ ئه وه ی ناشکرای " "بکه ین و بیکه ینه غیرهت

				women based on their gender.	
			Sexual Violence	It refers to any comment that directly or indirectly constitutes, promotes, or facilitates a sexual act without consent, or aims to control/degrade someone sexually. It's often intertwined with threats and coercion.	"راح أغتصبج، وتشوفين شلون تتأدين" - "با بتگیم، و نه و کات نه دهبت ددهم"
High	Harassment	Harassment is unwanted behaviour which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment usually occurs when an individual or group of individuals are repeatedly and deliberately abused, threatened and/or humiliated, but in most serious cases if a behavior happens only once it can still be harassment. ⁴	Sexual Harassment	Unwanted, unwelcome, or offensive sexual comments or behavior that creates a hostile environment.	أحلف راح تطلعین تخبلین بدون حجاب "صوتج بدوخ، تخيلتج وانت تحجین بهالنعومة"
			Political harassment and Intimidation	Targeting women with hostile or threatening language based on their political beliefs, affiliations, or activism. It aims to silence, shame, or scare women into withdrawing from public discourse.	واضح من لبسها شنو هدفها، مو وطن بس تحب " "تطلع ترند هاي مو نائبة هاي طالعة بس حتى تتعرف " " عالمسؤولين و تنام وياهم
			Sexual Insults	Sexual Insults are a specific type of offensive comment that uses sexually explicit, vulgar, or derogatory language to demean, degrade, or humiliate an individual or a group. Unlike "Sexual Harassment," which often involves repeated unwelcome advances, sexual insults are primarily about the verbal act of shaming and humiliating using sexualized language. They don't typically involve direct threats	بین من جسمج شنو هدفج، مو محتاجة تحجین" - "ما بیاوعلها غیر الی یدور شی ثانی" - "انتي رخیصة، الكل یعرف شنو تسوین بالخفاء" سکتوا هاي التافهة، ما صارت مشهورة إلا لما " "إعرضت جسمها، ما تستحي تهنها نه وانه ی بهدوای شتیکی تردا دهگه رین " "سهیری دهگهن میژووهکی پیسی ههیه، خوی وهک چالاکوان " "إنیشان دهدات

				of sexual acts but use sexual slurs to attack.	
Moderate	Discrimination	Discrimination refers to the unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, or disability, rather than their individual merit. It often manifests through biased attitudes or practices that lead to unequal opportunities and outcomes. In the realm of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), ⁵	Dehumanization and Demonization	Comments that strip Women of their human qualities, portraying them as subhuman, non-human, or inherently evil, monstrous, or demonic. This aims to deny their dignity, invalidate their rights, and make them seem unworthy of empathy, thereby justifying hostility, violence, or severe discrimination against them.	"القيميسسات ذني سبب الخراب، لازم يسكتن" - ذني مثل الفايروس، ينشرن الخراب وين ما " - "يروحن" "هاي مو بشر، مجرد سلعة تمشي" - "ذني شياطين، يشتغلن ضد قيمنا وتقاليدنا" - تسكت لو ما تسكت، مثل البهيمه تركض ورا أي " - "شي"
			Accusation, Treasonous Labelling	Definition: Comments that directly or indirectly accuse an individual or group of wrongdoing, disloyalty, or moral failings. This category includes remarks that belittle or diminish someone's worth, intelligence, or integrity, or brand them as traitors, infiltrators, or enemies of the community/nation. The aim is to damage their reputation, isolate them, or delegitimize their voice and actions.	هاي ممولة" / "تخدم أجندة خارجية" / "هاي" - "من جماعة السفارة" / "مو وطنية، بايعة بلدها"
			Demeaning Bullying	Comments that combine aggressive, often persistent or systematic behaviours with language specifically designed to belittle, humiliate, and undermine a woman's worth, intelligence, capabilities, or character. This type of online abuse aims to degrade the target and make her feel inferior, incompetent, or socially unacceptable, often through repeated negative remarks, severe mockery, or targeted personal attacks.	والله بس ضحككي الناس، تره كل حرف منج يبين " - "جهلج" "حرام تطلعين ببرنامج، لا أسلوب ولا عقل" - باش خوئت كرده گالته جاري خه لك. هه ر " - "وشه يه ك كه ده يلتييت نه زانيت نيشان دهدات" نه نكييه له بهرنامه ده كه ویت، نه ئيسلوبت هه يه " - "نه عقل"
			Gender-based	Comments that ascribe specific attributes,	مکانج المطبخ، مو بالشاشه ولا بالسوشال ميديا

			Stereotyping	characteristics, or roles to an individual (or group) solely based on their gender, rather than their individual merits, abilities, or choices. These stereotypes often perpetuate harmful generalizations about what women "should" be or do, limiting their freedoms and opportunities. It is a form of discrimination.	النسوان ما يفتهمن، كلهن حساسيات وما يعرفن - يتصرفن زنان تیناگەن، ھەموویان ھەستیارن و نازانن چۆن "مامەئە بکەن"
Low	Insult	any comment that is deliberately offensive, disrespectful, or derogatory, aiming to belittle, scorn, or show contempt towards women. Its primary goal is to cause offense and diminish the target's perceived worth or character. Unlike other categories that might have a specific type of harm (like sexual or physical), an insult is a direct verbal attack on someone's general standing or character.	Offensive Language and Cursing	Comments that use vulgar, derogatory, explicit, or highly offensive terms to directly insult, curse at, or demean women. This category focuses on the use of crude, obscene, or overtly disrespectful words, often employing profanity or slurs.	"عساج ما تتهنين" "سافلة، عديمة التربية" "تفو علیج" ولي منا تەنھا ئەوانەى بەدوای شتیکی تردا دەگەرین "سەیری دەکەن "کۆیلەى، بێتەریت" "تفووو" "دەبرۆ وەلبە"
Not Hate speech	Disagreement / Rejection	Disagreement : an argument or a situation in which people do not have the same opinion ⁶ / Rejection : the act of refusing to accept , use, or believe someone or something ⁷	Disagreement / Rejection	Harsh disapproval without intent to cause significant harm. These comments typically express negative opinion or harsh judgment.	"!محد مهتم برأیج" "!ما أعرف شلون چان عندج الجراً تشرین هیج" ! حجیج بفشل "كەس بايەخ بەرای تۆ نادات" نازانم چۆن بوئری ئەوەت ھەبوو شتیکی لەم "!شێوەیە پۆست بکەیت "قسەت شەرمەزارهینە"
Not Hate speech	Neutral	not expressing strong opinions or feelings ⁸	Neutral	Comments that do not contribute to harassment or violence. They are benign and non-confrontational.	ھای الحلقة تصورت بالزوراء ئەم ئەلقەھە لە زەورا وئینە گیراوه

Each comment was classified into one of six main categories: Neutral, Disagreement/Rejection, Harassment, Insult (Offensive Language and Profanity), Discrimination, and Violence, with subcategory breakdowns to capture the more specific nature of harmful speech (**Figure 3**).

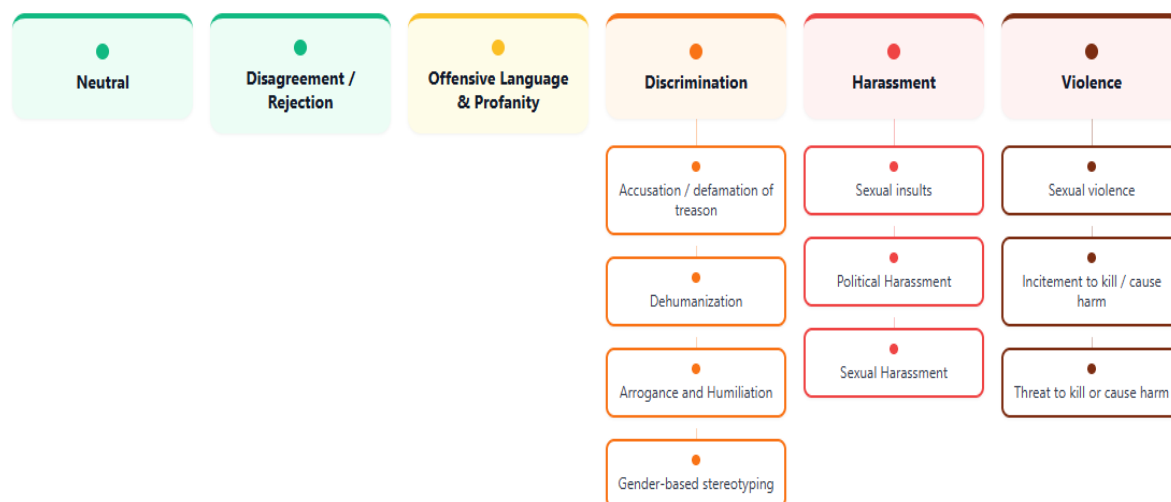


Figure (3). Six main categories for annotation

The dataset consists of **33,716 social media comments** collected during the election period, analysed across two languages: **Arabic (16,238 comments, 48.2%)** and **Kurdish (17,478 comments, 51.8%)** see **Table 6**. The comments were attached to and taken from posts published by monitored accounts across multiple platforms. In Arabic, **76 accounts** were monitored — 47 on Facebook, 23 on TikTok, and 6 on X (formerly Twitter) — spanning political figures, media outlets, political parties, public pages, and influencers. In Kurdish, **84 accounts** were tracked — 56 on Facebook and 28 on TikTok — with the presence of female candidates on social media more noticeable (23 Facebook accounts), in addition to public pages, and media outlets.

main	Arabic	Kurdish	Total
Disagreement/Rejection	3297	4690	7987
Discrimination	1561	2974	4535
Harassment	3001	756	3757
Insult (Offensive language and profanity)	1723	3918	5641
Neutral	6463	5018	11481
Violence	193	122	315
Total	16238	17478	33716

Table 6: Data sample analysis breakdown of Arabic and Kurdish social media comments

FINDINGS



Findings

I. Qualitative Case Study: Main Trends and Narrative Techniques of Online Gender-based violence during different stages of the Iraqi Parliamentary electoral cycle in 2025

Dominant narratives during the pre-election period (August - November 2025 | 3 months before the election)

Several overarching narratives shaped the digital and political environment in the lead up to the elections. These narratives were identified through qualitative analysis of the monitored social media dataset described in the methodology section, including account-level content, high-engagement posts, and associated comment sections across Arabic and Kurdish platforms. The findings below reflect recurring patterns observed across the monitored sample and do not purport to represent the totality of political discourse surrounding the elections. Narrative 1: Morality and social harm

First, women's political participation was repeatedly framed as a moral or social issue rather than a political one. This was evident in the persistent focus of posts and comments on women candidates' appearance, personal behaviour, family roles, and perceived conformity to social norms, while references to political competence, legislative experience, or policy positions were largely absent. Across the monitored content, women's participation was presented as conditional and subject to public moral approval, reflecting broader social expectations surrounding women's presence in public life in Iraq.

Narrative 2: Corruption and competence accusations of corruption, financial opportunism, and quota manipulation were widely circulated in relation to women candidates. These narratives appeared consistently across posts and comments that portrayed women as beneficiaries of backroom deals or symbolic candidates included to fulfil quota requirements rather than as independent political actors. The recurrence of these accusations across different pages and platforms points to a systematic pattern of delegitimization rather than isolated commentary, serving to reinforce broader distrust of women's leadership and political agency.

Narrative 3: Anti-gender narratives

Feminist agendas and gender equality positions were framed as threats to cultural or religious values. Women candidates associated with reformist discourse or feminist language were frequently portrayed as hostile to societal norms or religious principles. This framing was documented through posts and visual content that linked women's political positions to moral danger or social disruption, and which provided rhetorical cover for exclusionary and abusive content.

Narrative 4: Election boycott narratives

Pressure generated by boycott narratives was normalized as a feature of political competition. Analysis of the monitored dataset shows that calls for disengagement were frequently accompanied by moral condemnation of candidates who chose to participate. In several documented cases, women candidates explicitly cited Muqtada al-Sadr's calls for electoral disengagement as a factor in their decision to withdraw. Participation was reframed as a moral failure rather than a legitimate political choice, intensifying pressure on women whose political presence was already subject to contestation.

Summary of Online Tactics and Narratives Targeting Women Candidates

Table 7 consolidates all identified tactics and narratives used against women candidates across federal Iraq and the KRI. Each row summarizes one tactic, its underlying logic, and the corresponding examples and figures, enabling identification of how distinct cases reflect a common pattern while keeping individual examples numbered and easily traceable.

No.	Tactic (short label)	Core narrative / how it works	Examples	Figures
1	Content Recycling	Candidates described as having “sold their honour” or lacking morals; old or neutral footage is reframed to question their chastity and community acceptance, triggering moral outrage and harassment.	Case 1: Clipped TikTok live labelled “she sold her honour”; Case 2: Swimming-pool video of Noor Riyadh used to question her morals Case 3: Manipulated clip of Rawaa Al-Fehdawi merged with unrelated audio: “even nightclub girls are running in the elections”. Case 4: Video + audio alleging powerful businessman will waive service fees for those who vote for candidate Kawe (no evidence).	Fig. 4a, 4B, 5, 6
2	Manipulating content	Posts imply sexual relations between a woman candidate and a male influencer, using suggestive language and unrelated imagery to frame her as morally compromised and politically dependent.	Case 5: Post implying relationship with PUK influencer using sexualized symbolism	Fig. 7
3	Amplification and coordination	Religious or political actors publish lists of women candidates as “hostile” to religion or family law, urging voters not to support them and portraying feminist positions as dangerous.	Case 6: Sayyed Rashid Al-Husseini videos naming nine women; Case 7: pages listing “hostile” candidates to Jaafari law	Fig. 8-9
4	Framing gender ideology as a threat	Feminism and women’s organizations are portrayed as a foreign-backed plot infiltrating parliament; male candidates are framed as a necessary “defensive barrier” against this threat.	Case 8: Post describing feminist candidates as externally funded “infiltration” across lists	Fig. 10
5	Body-shaming & sexualized degradation	Women candidates reduced to their bodies, cosmetic procedures, and “plasticity”; vulgar insults and emojis frame them as artificial, immoral, or “for sale”, encouraging mass mockery in comments.	Case 9: Taqaddum women compared to beauty salon; Case 10: candidate called “silicone bitch” with comments like “whore”, “cheap woman”; Case 11: campaign stage video where women are sexualized and insulted	Fig. 11, 13, 14, 15
6	Misogynistic abuse	Posts rank women by beauty, filters, age or emojis, suggesting that attractiveness determines political worth, while older or less “attractive” women are mocked.	Case 12: Mocking Taqaddum women as “bloggers” or influencers rather than real political candidates, using sarcastic text/emojis Case 13: “Most beautiful candidate” captions; Case 14: “Truth speakers of PUK with filters” post comparing filtered vs unfiltered photos, implying visual and political deception. Case 15: “apple vs owl” comparison;	Fig. 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19

			Case 16: “If someone wants to vote for a woman, they should vote for pretty one” with side-by-side images; Case 17: “without Photoshop / Photoshop” and “old woman” insults	
7	AI-Generated deep fakes/sexualised disinformation	Deepfakes or AI-edited videos/images place women in dancing, intimate or compromising scenes with men; no disclosure of manipulation, so viewers assume the content is real and judge their morality.	Case 18: Fake dancing video attributed to Alia Nsaif; Case 19: AI TikTok deepfakes showing inappropriate scenes; Case 20: AI-edited clip of Nisan Al-Zaer “selling fish”; Case 21: movie scene with faces inserted to mock a conference	Fig. 20, 21, 22, 23
8	AI-generated and manipulated media	AI is used to create fictional “candidates” or edited photos that exaggerate features, place women in absurd scenarios, or present them as animals / puppets controlled by men, stripping them of dignity.	Case 22: image of political leader walking “dogs” with candidates’ faces on them	Fig. 24
9	Hacking and content recycling	Old personal photos or social images (e.g., hijab vs no hijab, earlier appearance) are reposted during the campaign to question values, morality, or “change”, instead of addressing political work.	Case 23: Ayat Al-Shekh with and without hijab; Case 24: old 2012 photo of Amtar Al-Miyahi compared to 2025 image to mock cosmetic changes	Fig. 25, 26
10	Recycled old content taking out of context to attack women candidates	Old political videos are reposted during elections without dates, making it seem like they are current messages, used to suggest hypocrisy or controversial positions in the present.	Case 25: old general political video reframed as current campaign;	Fig. 27
11	Targeting and harassment	Dedicated accounts or pages repeatedly mock one-woman candidate (appearance, speech, gestures) to build a sustained harassment narrative around her instead of engaging with policies.	Case 26: “Don’t sell your vote” page targeting Rawaa Al-Fehdawi with serial mocking posts	Fig. 28
12	Narrative laundering	Pages that present as supportive but selectively repost polarizing content on a woman candidate, attracting both praise and harassment and keeping her at the centre of moral debate.	Case 27: TikTok page dedicated to supporting Rawaa Al-Fehdawi while posting clips that trigger intense reactions	Fig. 29

Table 7: Overview of online tactics and narratives targeting women candidates during Iraq’s 2025 elections

Content Warning: This report contains examples of harmful, offensive, and discriminatory language collected for research and documentation purposes. Such content is presented solely to illustrate patterns of online abuse and should not be understood as an endorsement of the views expressed.

Narrative 1: Morality and social harm

This narrative was operationalised through several distinct but mutually reinforcing tactics.

Tactic: content recycling

A viral TikTok clip (**Figure 4A**) was repeatedly reposted to accuse the women candidates in Iraq of “selling their honour” to win the elections. The original video was a legitimate campaign live broadcast, but attackers clipped a short segment and circulated it rapidly across TikTok shares with accusation-based framing to provoke outrage and normalize moral harassment. This tactic shifted public focus from political programmes to honour-based judgment, fuelling cyberbullying and discouraging women’s participation in political leadership.²⁹

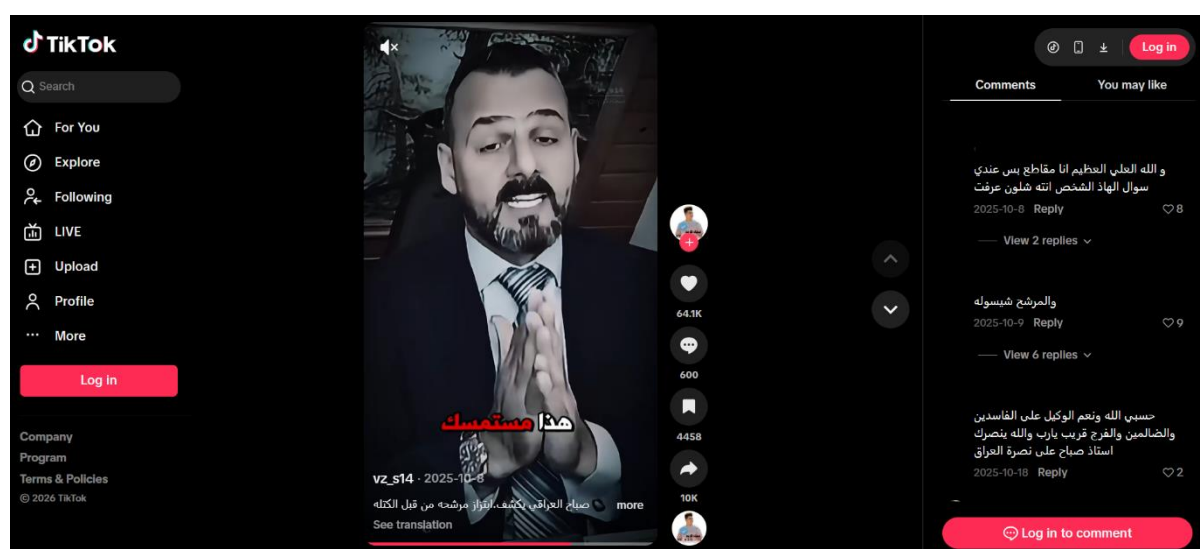


Figure 4A: Viral TikTok clip repurposed to accuse women candidates of moral misconduct and incite online harassment

A page on Instagram (**Figure 4B**) used old videos of women candidates taken from normal social settings to publicly shame them. One example was an old video of a woman candidate, Noor Riyadh, at a public swimming pool that was reposted with a caption implying “this is the morals of the candidate”.³⁰ The video had no connection to her political work but was reposted to provoke judgment and reinforce gender stereotypes. By taking personal footage out of context and attaching a moral message, the page encouraged viewers to question her integrity and suitability for public office on grounds unrelated to her campaign.

²⁹ vz_s14. (2025, October 18). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/7DTD-396X>

³⁰ من طي*. (2025, August 25). *Main tactics and trends* [Instagram post]. Instagram. <https://perma.cc/V4XD-6EBZ>



Figure 4B: Old social videos reposted to publicly shame a woman candidate and question her morals

Another post (**Figure 5**) selectively clipped a segment from a public statement by candidate Rawaa Al-Fehdawi regarding her campaign advertisements in Sadr City.³¹ The clip is then merged with a separate audio statement in which another person says, “even nightclub girls are running in the elections”. This deliberate tactic content manipulation creates a false association between the candidate and stigmatized groups, despite the two statements being unrelated.



Figure 5: Manipulated video merging a candidate’s statement with unrelated audio to create a false association

³¹ Iraq Love Q. (2025, October 30). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/3DA3-HRJS>

A further post (**Figure 6**) circulated a viral video accompanied by a voice message claiming that a powerful businessman had promised to exempt anyone who voted for candidate Kawe from paying service fees for one month. No evidence was presented to support this claim. The content relied on fabricated audio narration and false attribution of influence, aiming to portray the candidate as a beneficiary of illicit deals.³²

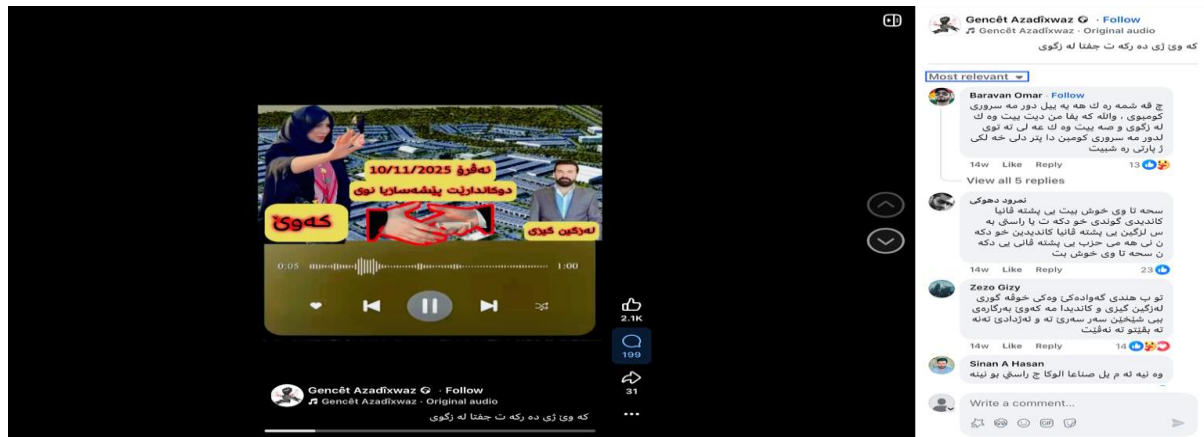


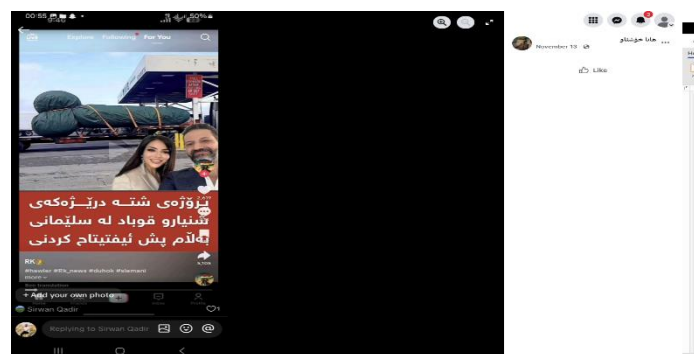
Figure 6: shows a fabricated audio claim of influential endorsement and vote-buying for Kawe

Manipulating content and deceptive labelling: Sexual insinuation & guilt by association

The post (**Figure 7**) republished a screenshot of content implying an affiliation or personal relationship between a women candidate and a well-known political influencer associated with the PUK in Sulaymaniyah.³³ The accompanying text used ambiguous and sexually suggestive language without presenting any evidence, while the visual background of the post included an image containing sexualised or phallic symbolism entirely unrelated to the Iraqi political context. By combining vague sexual implication, misleading visual cues, and an unsubstantiated claim of political affiliation, the post framed the candidate as engaged in inappropriate personal or political relationships, relying on sexual insinuation and guilt by association rather than verifiable information. This constitutes sexualised disinformation and character assassination, targeting a woman candidate through implied immorality and false political affiliation.

Figure 7:

shows sexualized disinformation implying misconduct and false political ties to discredit a woman candidate



³² Gencet Azadixwaz. (2025, November 10). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/BGE6-P7XE>

³³ خوشناو، هانا. (2025, November 13). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/R79F-YW9M>

Hate speech: Body Shaming and Sexualized Degradation

Rather than engaging with individual policies or actions, several posts attacked women candidates collectively, reducing them to their physical appearance, bodies and perceived cosmetic choices.

The post (**Figure 11**) targets women candidates from Taqaddum Party by attacking their physical appearance using vulgar and degrading language.³⁴ The post likened the party to a beauty salon rather than a political organization and describes the candidates using derogatory terms related to cosmetic procedures, such as fillers and body sculpting.³⁵ The language is intentionally humiliating and framed to provoke ridicule rather than discussion of political positions or qualifications.



Figure 11: Post using degrading language to attack women candidates' appearance

³⁴ أبو صابرين. (2025, October 1). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/KG9E-ZS8W>

³⁵ أبو صابرين. (2025, October 25). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/6MD2-L4VU>

Another post (Figure 12) uses sarcastic language and emojis, questioning whether the women featured are political candidates or bloggers, dismissing them as social media influencers rather than legitimate political figures.³⁶

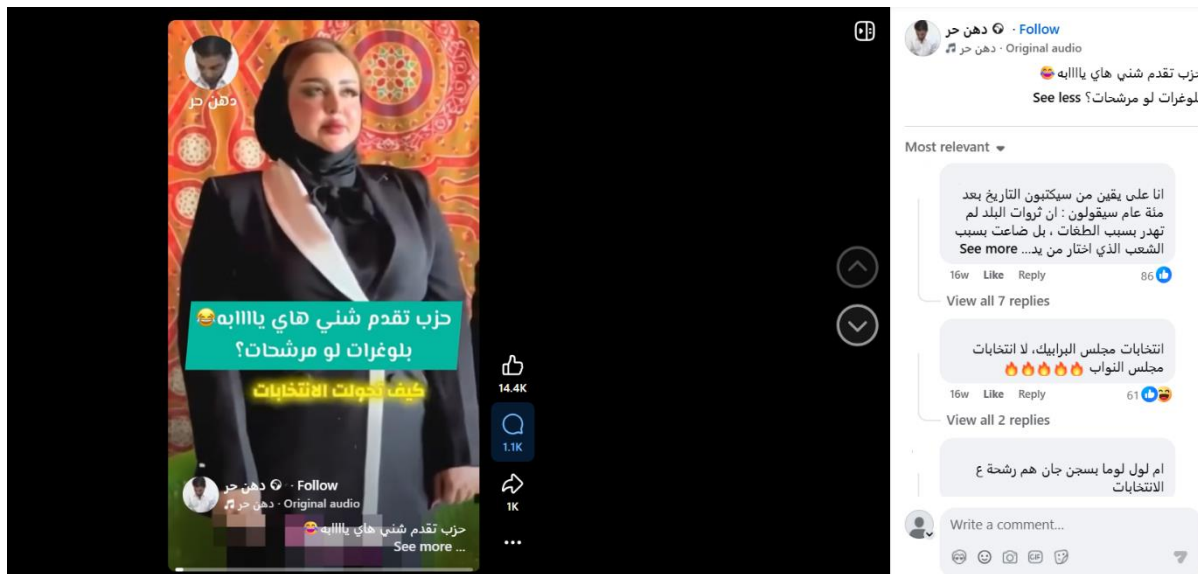


Figure 12: Post mocking Taqaddum Party by ridiculing its women candidates as social media influencers rather than political figures

Some posts (Figure 13) framed the women primarily in terms of physical appearance by describing her as “the most beautiful candidate”. While superficially presented as praise, this framing shifted attention away from qualifications while at the same time normalizing appearance-based evaluation of women in politics, inviting polarization and harassment in comments.

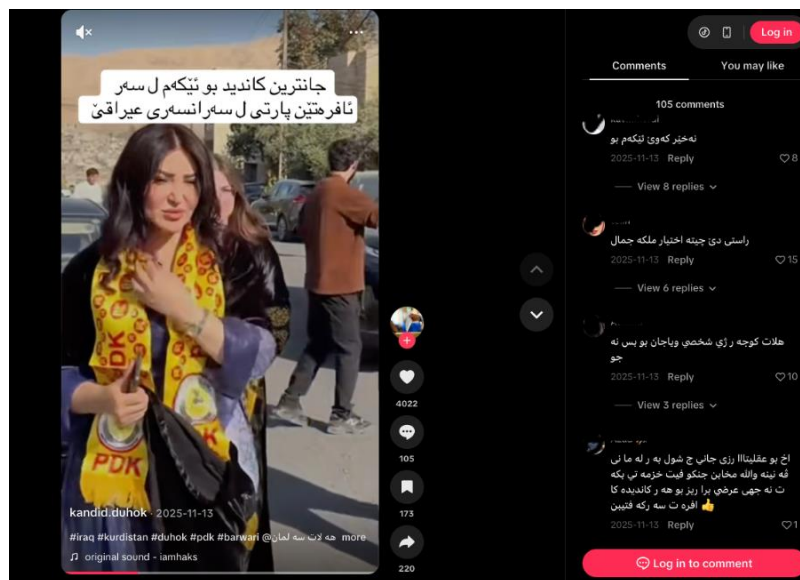


Figure 13: shows a post reducing a woman candidate to appearance, reinforcing gendered objectification

³⁶ دهن حر (2025, October 12). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/WQE7-WCPW>

A post targeting another candidate (**Figure 14**) accused her of having cosmetic procedures (fillers and Botox) and labelled her with degrading and dehumanizing language.³⁷ The original post refers to her as a “silicone bitch,” reducing her political identity to her physical appearance and portraying her as artificial and morally inferior.

The comments section escalated into explicit hate speech with users employing terms such as “silicone,” “whore,” “cheap woman,” “body seller,” “disgrace,” and “shameless,” alongside commands like “go eat shit”, religious condemnations and direct attacks on her honor. Several comments directly attack her honour, accuse her of prostitution, or frame her as unworthy of political representation due to her appearance.

This constitutes gendered hate speech combining body-shaming, sexual humiliation, and moral degradation, amplified through mass participation in the comments, with the intent of delegitimizing the candidate and intimidating women in public life.



Figure 14: shows appearance-based hate speech and sexualized insults used to intimidate a woman candidate

³⁷ زانیاری میدیا. (2025, Oct 22). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/AK9N-HA7H>

A further post (**Figure 15**) in which a women candidate gathered young people on an open campaign stage framed the presence of women as controversial and inappropriate, shifting attention from political activity to the women's bodies and morality.³⁸ The accompanying narrative frames the video as “surprising,” not because of the campaign idea itself, but because young women are visible in the scene. The comments section escalated into explicit gendered hate speech, with commenters sexualizing, dehumanising, and insulting the women involved, framing their participation as immoral, dishonourable, or sexually inappropriate.

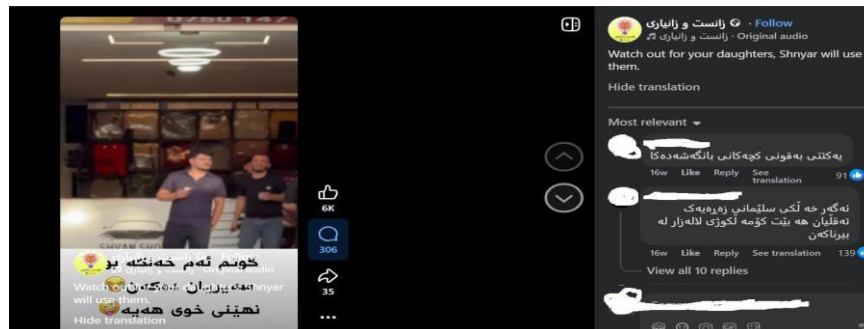


Figure 15: shows women’s campaign participation framed as “shocking,” sparking sexualized, honour-based harassment.

Misogynistic abuse: Appearance ranking and objectification

Several posts reduced women candidates to their physical appearance through ranking and comparison. A post (**Figure 16**) titled “The truth speakers of Yaketi with filters” mocked women candidates by presenting side-by-side images comparing their appearance with and without photo filters, framing the use of social media filters as evidence of deception and dishonesty, thereby equating aesthetic choices with moral or political untruthfulness.³⁹

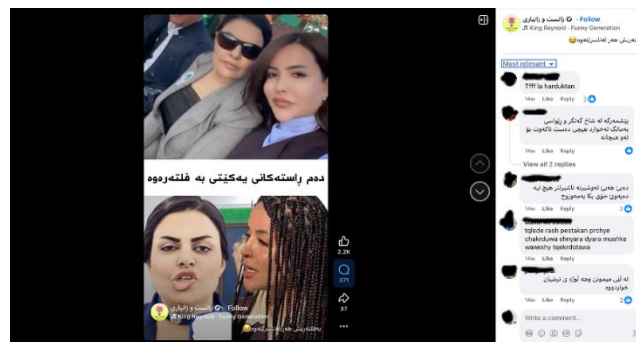


Figure 16: shows women candidates mocked for filtered photos to question their credibility

³⁸ زانست و زانیاری. (2025, October 22). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/3KYK-HQUF>

³⁹ زانست و زانیاری. (2025, November 8). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/2GQX-Q52T>

A post (**Figure 17**) compares two candidates from the same political party using side-by-side images and culturally loaded emojis: an apple (🍏), connoting beauty and freshness in the Kurdish context, and an owl (🦉), a derogatory insult implying unattractiveness or misfortune.⁴⁰ The post reinforced gendered stereotypes using culturally accepted metaphors to legitimise ridicule and exclusion.



Figure 17: Ranks two women candidates by looks using “apple” praise and “owl” insult emojis

A further post (**Figure 18**) placed two candidates' images side by side with the caption, "If someone wants to vote for a woman, they should vote for a pretty one," normalising beauty as a criterion for political legitimacy.⁴¹ The tactic relies on ironic or sarcastic framing, where appearance-based judgment is normalized under the guise of commentary. By reducing women candidates to appearance and encouraging voters to assess them visually, the post reinforces gendered stereotypes and shifts political evaluation away from qualifications, experience, or policy positions.

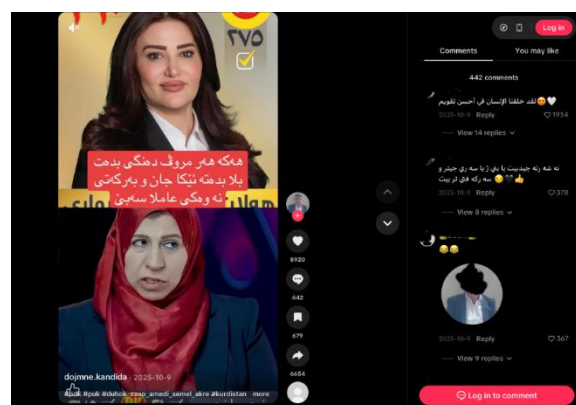


Figure 18: compares two women candidates to normalize judging political legitimacy by attractiveness.

⁴⁰ dojmne.kandida. (2025, October 26). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/4EQZ-DUHQ>

⁴¹ dojmne.kandida. (2025, October 9). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/B28K-5N3N>

A related post (**Figure 19**) labelled two images of the same candidate as “without Photoshop” and “Photoshop” warning that the candidate deceives voters through appearance, makeup, or visual enhancement.⁴² The post also uses “old woman” as a slur, layering an ageist and gendered insult onto the attack, reflecting the intersectional nature of gendered and misogynistic abuse.

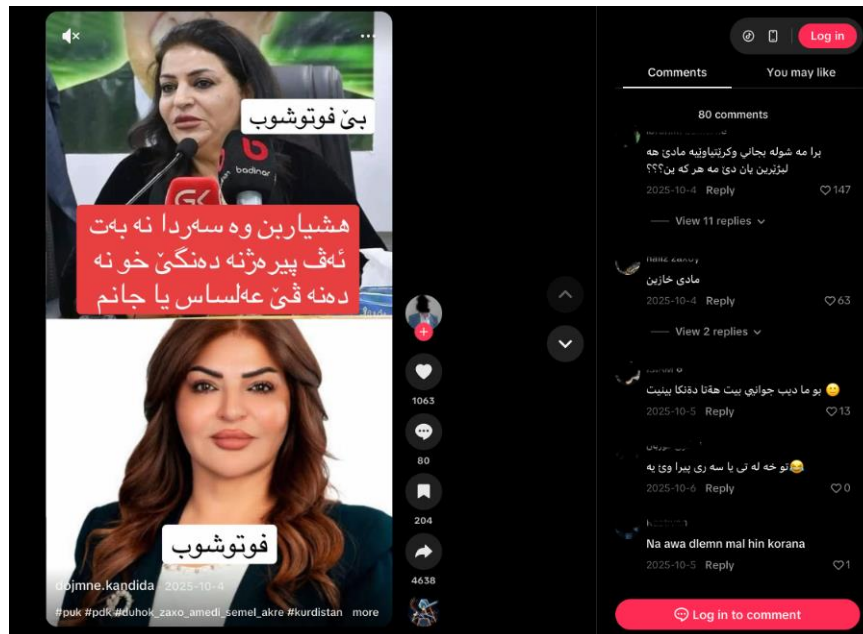


Figure 19: accuses a woman candidate of deceiving voters through Photoshop, using gendered ageist shaming

⁴² dojmne.kandida. (2025, October 4). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/EN25-YW5D>

Content recycling

Some pages also posted old and recent photos of women candidates to mock their appearance or suggest inappropriate change. A Facebook page shared a photo of a woman candidate, Ayat Al-Shekh, wearing a hijab (**Figure 25**) in a previous election and compared it to her current photo without a hijab, using the comparison to provoke judgment, and reinforce harmful stereotypes about women's personal choices.⁴³

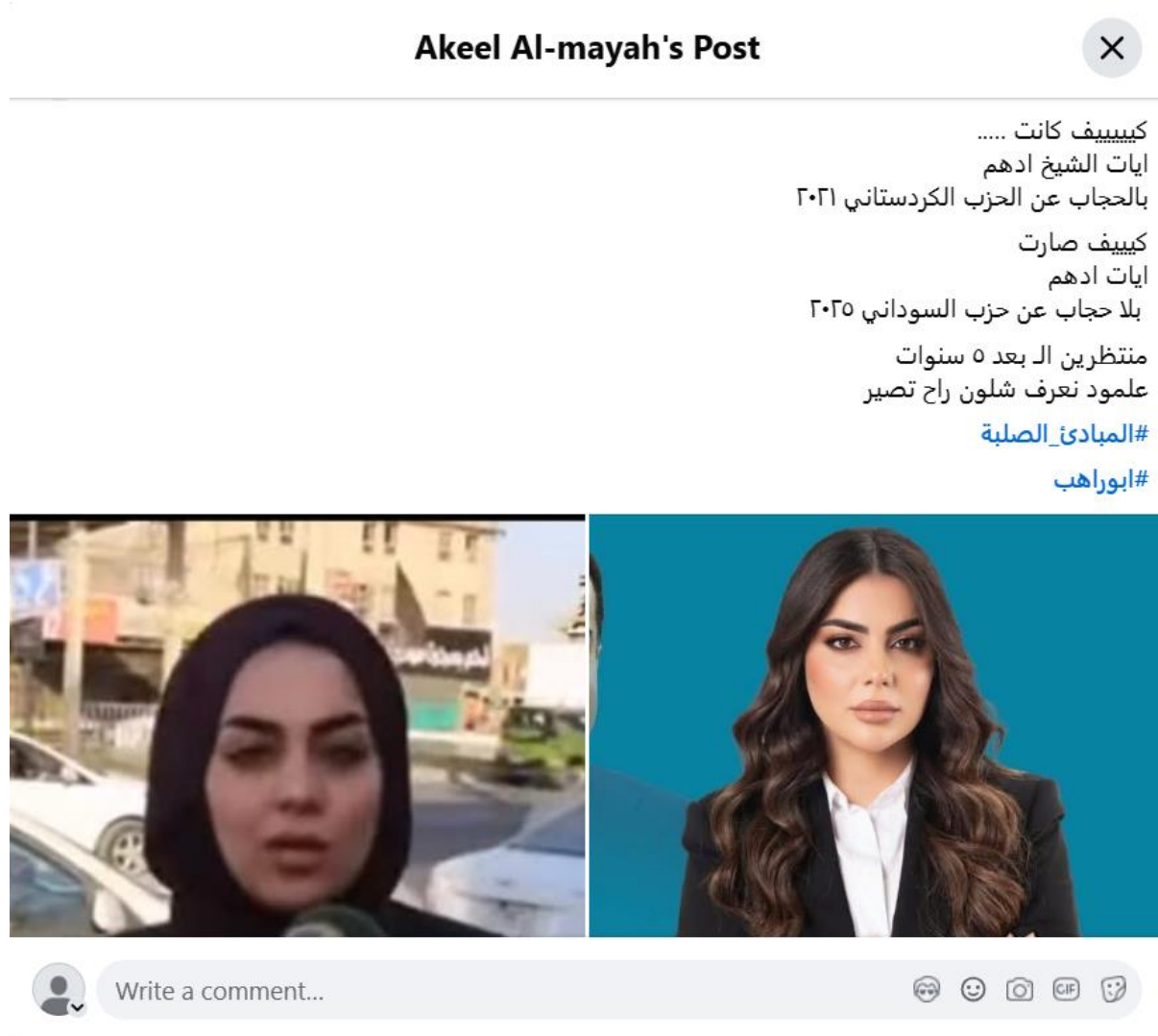


Figure 25: Posts comparing old and recent photos to judge women candidates' appearance and personal choices

⁴³ Al-mayah, Akeel. (2025, October 12). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/100002487442987/posts/24822996037366634/?mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=jvPebNbdTKnXYsgs>

Another post (**Figure 26**) compared an old photo of the candidate Amtar Al-Miyahi from 2012 with a more recent photo from 2025 and states that it is difficult to tell which image is the older one.⁴⁴ The comparison is framed as a reference to cosmetic procedures rather than her political work or campaign.

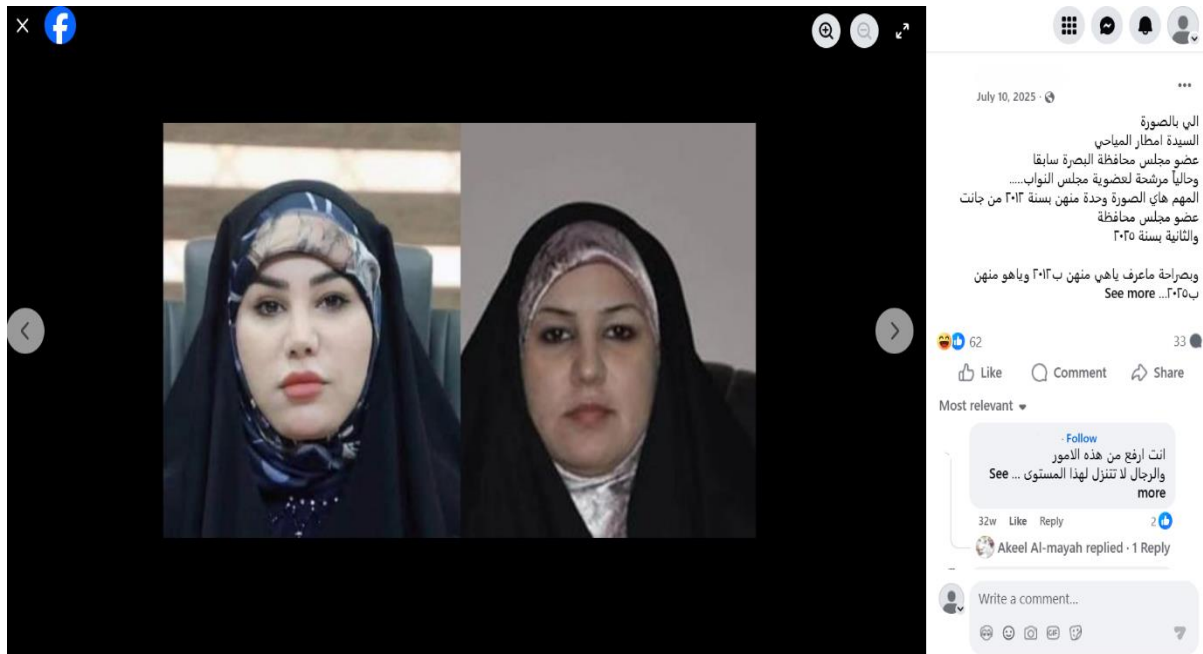


Figure 26: Post comparing old and recent photos to mock a woman candidate's appearance rather than her political work

A further post (**Figure 27**) reposted an old video in which a candidate discussed broader political developments unrelated to the current election, without indicating that the footage was outdated, creating the false impression of a recent campaign statement, thereby misleading contextualization through deliberate temporal manipulation.⁴⁵



Figure 27: reposts old footage to falsely present a candidate's past remarks as current campaign messaging

⁴⁴ Al-mayah, Akeel. (2025, July 10). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1B1eU5zzK4/>

⁴⁵ هاشم خيلاني، (2025, October 22). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/hashm.khylany/videos/1276339621174776/>

Amplification and coordination

A page called **لاتبيع صوتك** was dedicated to targeting Rawaa Al-Fahdawai (**Figure 28**) repeatedly sharing mocking posts focused on her appearance, manner of speaking, or public expressions, rather than her political positions.⁴⁶ The content often included screenshots, short video clips, edited images, and sarcastic captions, constituting a sustained harassment campaign.

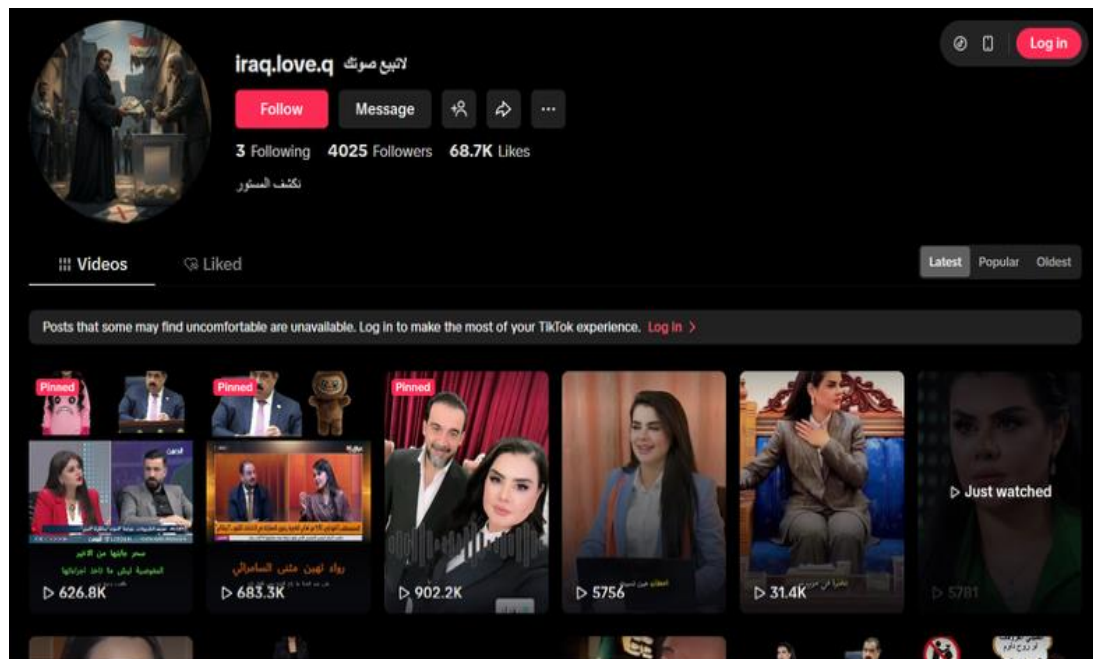


Figure 28: Page dedicated to mocking a woman candidate through appearance-based and personal attacks

On the other hand, another page (**Figure 29**) was dedicated to supporting the same candidate on the same platform (TikTok).⁴⁷

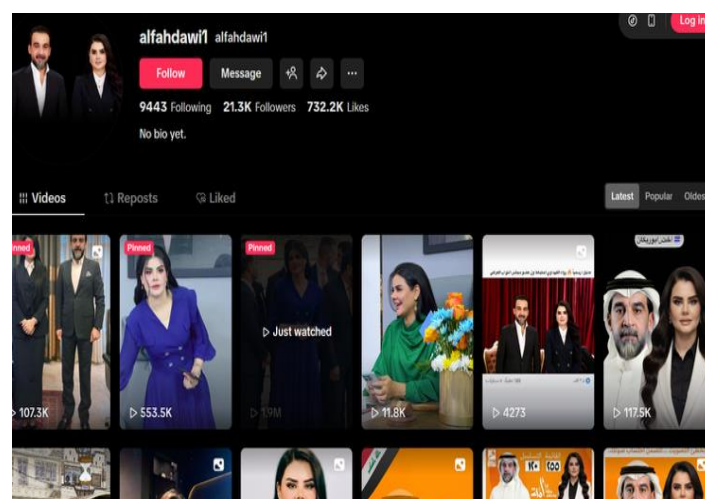


Figure 29: TikTok page dedicated to supporting the same woman candidate

⁴⁶ iraq.love.q. (n.d.). **لاتبيع صوتك** [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/X6PA-YZ4W>

⁴⁷ Alfahdawi1. (n.d.). **Main tactics and trends** [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/3SQN-3HME>

Narrative 2: Corruption and Competency

AI-Manipulated Content

Several posts deployed AI-generated or manipulated content to construct false realities around women candidates, targeting their reputations through fabrication rather than engagement with their political records.

An account on X called فكر حر reposted a short clip taken from a TikTok live stream, claiming it showed a women candidate عالية نصيف dancing (**Figure 20**).⁴⁸ According to the Checker, INSM's fact-checking initiative, the video depicted a Ukrainian belly dancer and AI plus deepfake tools had been used to falsely attribute the footage. The post relied on false identification and misleading framing to damage her image and spread disinformation.

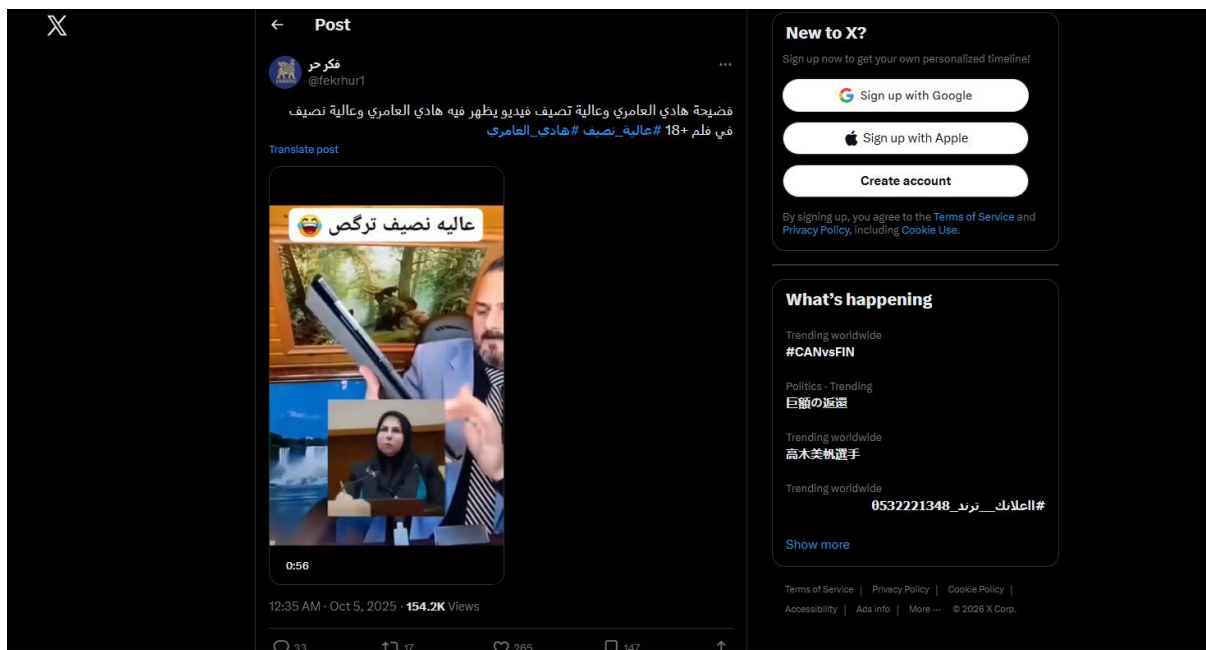


Figure 20: Misleading post using an unrelated video to falsely accuse a woman candidate and damage her reputation

⁴⁸ fekrhur1. (2025, October 5). *Main tactics and trends* [X post]. X. <https://perma.cc/23HG-RE5P>

Another post featured an AI-edited image depicting a person associated with the account “Sayyad Al-Ghazlan,” previously referenced, appearing to take a selfie with a woman candidate (**Figure 21**).⁴⁹ The woman was shown with exaggerated physical features and portrayed as distributing aid, with the candidate's name fabricated — confirmed by cross-referencing with the official candidates list — representing visual manipulation to misrepresent a real individual.



Figure 21: AI-edited image using a fabricated candidate identity and visual manipulation to misrepresent a woman candidate

An AI-edited video targeting the candidate Nisan Al-Zaer, in which her image is manipulated to show her selling fish (**Figure 22**).⁵⁰ The video is accompanied by the caption سبحان مغير الاحوال framing the visual in a sarcastic and mocking manner. The content relied on digital manipulation to present a degrading and misleading portrayal of the candidate with no reference to her political activities or campaign. The account was subsequently deleted.



Figure 22

AI-edited video mocking a woman candidate by digitally portraying her in a degrading, non-political role.

⁴⁹ يوميات الحق على الباطل (2025, October 9). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BgocNU9sf/>

⁵⁰ shyk_aln. (2025, November 7). *Main tactics and trends* [TikTok post]. TikTok. <https://perma.cc/HUB7-ANQP>

Another post (Figure 23) used a clip from an Egyptian film, digitally inserting the faces of a party leader and a women candidate into the scene to mock the candidate's election. ⁵¹



Figure 23: Edited video using film footage and face insertion to mock a woman candidate's election conference

A digitally enhanced image depicted a political leader walking several dogs on leashes (Figure 24). ⁵² The faces of political figures, including a woman candidate, are edited onto the bodies of the dogs, while a senior male political figure is shown holding the leashes and controlling them. By portraying candidates as animals under male control, the image stripped them of human agency and dignity, reinforcing gendered stereotypes portraying women in politics as controlled, dependent, and lacking autonomy. This constitutes dehumanising hate speech and gendered disinformation, using manipulated visuals to delegitimise candidates and portray them as subservient.



Figure 24: shows a manipulated image dehumanizing candidate as leashed dogs controlled by a male leader

⁵¹ دهن حر (2025, Nov 5). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1DHKCU7fZk/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

⁵² زانست و زانباري (2025, December 15). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2205501269950313>

Narrative 3: Anti-gender narratives

Amplifications and Coordination

Publishing Lists of Women Candidates Framed as a “Threat”

Three days before the elections, religious figure Sayyed Rashid Al Hussein published a series of video statements criticizing several members of parliament, including nine women candidates (**Figure 8**).⁵³ Claims were that they were opposing proposed amendments to the Jaafari Personal Status Law.⁵⁴ He called on voters to withhold support from the named candidates, describing them as lacking legitimacy, unfit for representation, and acting against sectarian interests.⁵⁵ The videos circulated widely across social media, with multiple pages reposting the content and publishing lists identifying the targeted candidates. This amplification intensified hostility toward the named women and contributed to heightened moral and social pressure on voters to reject them.

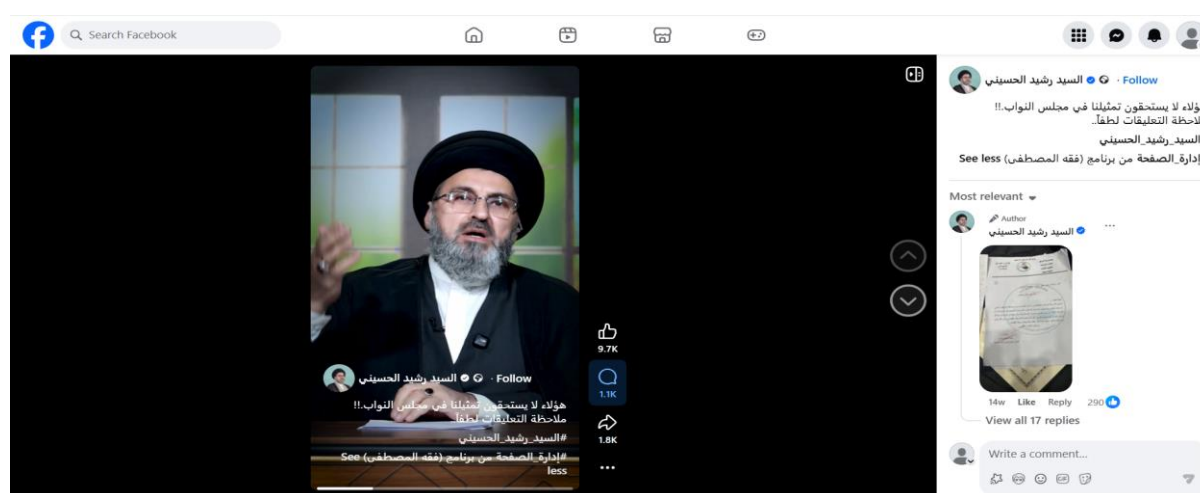


Figure 8: Videos by a religious figure calling on voters to reject parliamentary candidates opposing amendments to the Jaafari Personal Status Law

⁵³ السيد رشيد الحسيني، (2025, November 8). Boycott statement [Facebook post]. Facebook. <http://archive.today/PBpai>

⁵⁴ Supreme Judicial Council, (2025, October 27), Jaafari Personal Status Law. <https://www.sjc.iq/qview.3633/>

⁵⁵ Ministry Of Justice, (2025, October 9), Jaafari Personal Status Law. <https://www.moj.gov.iq/view.9778/>

A separate page published a long list of candidates labelled as “hostile”⁵⁶ to the Jafari personal status law (Figure 9).⁵⁷ The post accused them of promoting a “dangerous feminist agenda” and called on voters not to give them a single vote.⁵⁸

The framing was designed to encourage fear, anger, and rejection of women’s participation in political decision-making, portraying feminist and gender equality positions as a threat to society, and pressurising voters to oppose women candidates based on gendered stereotypes rather than political programs.⁵⁹



Figure 9: Pages sharing a list of parliamentary candidates calling for rejecting them as they did not pass the Jaffari law

⁵⁶ مصطفیٰ عماد. (2025, November 9). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/TJ8J-7C3G>

⁵⁷ تم اهدتیت. (2025, Nov.10). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/HK2Z-956Z>

⁵⁸ تم اهدتیت. (2025, October 15). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/N9AM-GQQK>

⁵⁹ الجبوري، سجاد. (2025, November 9). *Main tactics and trends* [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/6LPE-B9YE>

Framing Gender Ideology as a Threat

A post (Figure 10) presented women candidates and feminist actors not as political participants but as part of a coordinated "infiltration" of parliament, portraying feminism as a dangerous, foreign-backed conspiracy spanning Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish political lists.⁶⁰ The narrative claimed that feminist movements and women's organisations were externally funded and strategically designed to undermine society, culture, and family structures. In contrast, male candidates were promoted as a necessary "defensive barrier" against this alleged threat, with voters explicitly urged to support them in order to prevent feminist influence. By depicting feminism as a hostile force rather than a set of policy positions, the post legitimised fear, urgency, and exclusion, framing women candidates collectively as security risks rather than individuals with political programmes.

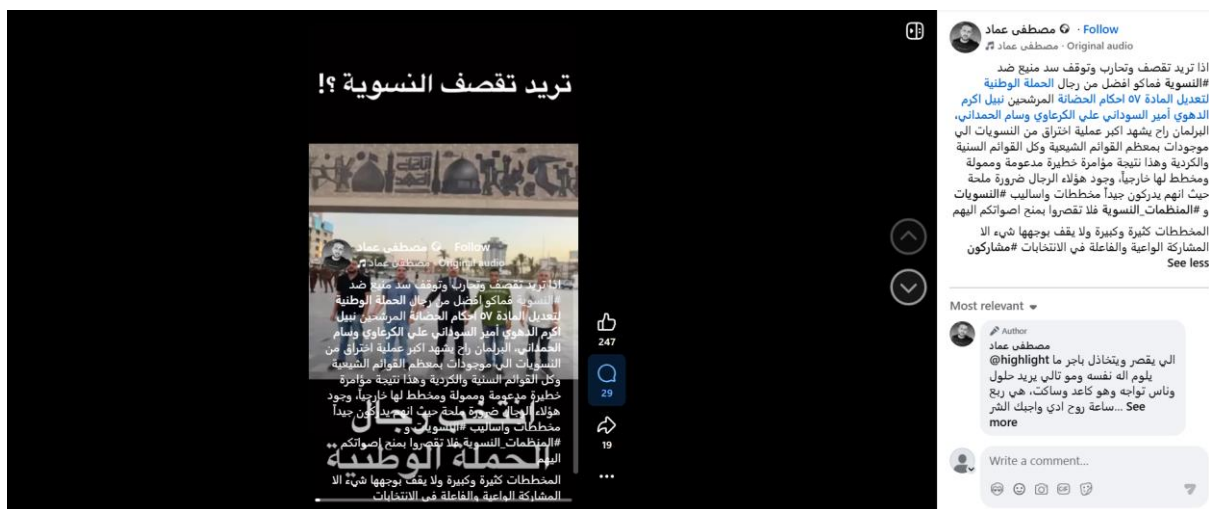


Figure 10: Narrative portraying women candidates and feminists as a foreign-backed threat, while urging voters to support male candidates as a defence.

⁶⁰ عماد، مصطفى (2025, October 10). Main tactics and trends [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://perma.cc/T9JL-YH8F>

Narrative 4: Electoral Boycott

Case study: Pressure-Induced Withdrawal of Female Candidates

The monitoring identified seventeen female candidate accounts whose withdrawal from the electoral race became focal points of high-engagement online discourse. Stated reasons for withdrawal included commitment to fair competition and rejection of electoral crowding, personal considerations in a hostile political climate, adherence to party or ideological leadership guidance, loss of confidence in party integrity, weak internal party management and lack of support, rejection of symbolic or non-substantive candidacy, political repositioning within the quota-based system, and boycott of elections perceived as corrupt or lacking legitimacy. These decisions were rarely treated online as legitimate political judgments. Instead, withdrawal triggered coordinated patterns of gendered hostility that framed disengagement as confirmation of women's unsuitability for political life.

Analysis of a sample of comments from the monitored posts identified five categories of response: Objectification and Appearance-Based Mockery, Financial Corruption and Opportunism Accusations, Moral and Religious Ridicule, Delegitimization and Cynicism toward Female Participation, Political Infantilization and Dismissive Humour as follows:

Objectification and Appearance-Based Mockery

Comments in this category reduced women's value to their looks, clothing, or physical traits rather than engaging with their political decision to withdraw (**Figure 30**). **Examples:**

- شكك قبضتي ونسحبتي يا حلوه — How much did you get paid before you withdrew, pretty one?
- أهتمي بأصافرج هاي الشغلة متفید — Focus on your nails; politics is not for you.
- حرامات تنسحب حلوه هاي — Shame that such a pretty one withdrew.
- لا يمعوده اهم شي خدود مصطنعه لا تزعلين — Girl, your fake cheeks are fine; don't be upset.
- إذا هو إنتي حاطة المكياج مال نساء كركوك كله بوجهج بعد ياهو إلی ینتخبج — You've got all Kirkuk women's makeup on your face; who would vote for you?



Figure 30:

Sample of hate speech comments

Such comments reinforce the view that women in politics are decorative rather than competent, contributing to the normalisation of gendered dismissal in online political discourse.

Financial Corruption and Opportunism Accusations

A second category framed withdrawal as evidence of financial manipulation, portraying women candidates as having accepted bribes or political deals before stepping aside (Figure 31).

Examples:

- بعد ما أخذو الفلوس انسحبو — They took the money and then withdrew.
- اخذتله تاهو و 100 مليون تعرف نفسه ما أحد ينتخبه — She got a Tahoe and 100 million; she knew no one would vote for her.
- ستلمتيهن وانسحبتني مانسحبتني قبل شهر — You took the money and withdrew — why didn't you withdraw a month ago



Figure 31: Sample of hate speech comments

This framing denies women political agency and links their decisions to corruption, suggesting that female participation in politics is driven by personal gain rather than civic responsibility.

Moral Ridicule:

Where candidates cited moral or religious motivations for their withdrawal — expressing a desire to avoid unethical competition or corruption — they were met with mockery and accusations of hypocrisy rather than engagement with their stated reasoning. (Figure 32).

Examples:

- وهذا أيمانج العميق شعجب هسه يله نبع عن قناعتج الراسخه!!!!!! السياسه لادين لها — Now suddenly your deep faith made you withdraw? Politics has no religion.
- اذا صبيحه انسحبت العراق راح ايضيع يمعود رجعتها — If Sabiha withdrew, Iraq is doomed — bring her back!



Figure 32: Sample of hate speech comments

These comments illustrate the double standards women face as principled decisions are dismissed as performative and strategic decisions are condemned as manipulation

Delegitimization and Cynicism toward Female Participation

A further category captured direct rejection of women's political participation, reflecting deeply entrenched cultural attitudes that politics is a male domain (Figure 33).

Examples:

- مانطوكم شي لازم — They didn't give you anything anyway.
- طبعا تدري ماتحصل اكثر شيء على ١٠ أصوات زين سوت — Of course she knew she would only get ten votes — good that she withdrew.

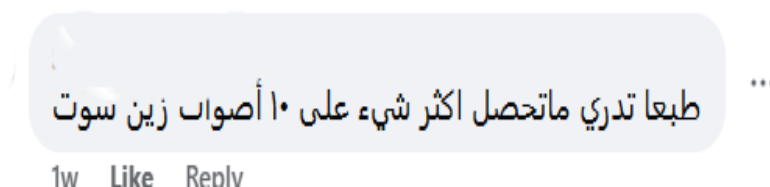


Figure 33: Sample of hate speech comments

Such statements frame women's involvement in politics as inherently pointless or unnatural, reinforcing the view that women are outsiders in political life and helping to explain the normalisation of hate speech against women candidates.

Political Infantilization and Dismissive Humour

Finally, humour and sarcasm were used to trivialise women's decisions and render their experiences as entertainment rather than political acts. Comments obscure aggression behind a veneer of politeness, making harassment harder to identify and easier to justify. (Figure 34).

Examples:

- لازم دعم نوره احسن من دعم برهان — Better to support Nawras than Burhan.
- موقف يحسب لها . جزاها الله الف خير . — A commendable stance; may God reward her. (used sarcastically)



Figure 34: Sample of hate speech comments

Public commentary also reflected widespread scepticism about strategic quota repositioning. For example, remarks such as “تعرف روعة راح تخسر نسحبت بترتيب” (“She knew she would lose and withdrew strategically”) indicate that many online users view such shifts as backroom deals rather than legitimate political strategies. This perception deepens existing distrust of the quota system, portraying women as instruments of party manoeuvring rather than independent political actors.

The overlap between these structural inequalities and the digital harassment women face creates a dual barrier: women must navigate both an online environment that undermines their credibility and a political system that limits their autonomy.

To restore the intent of the quota system, there is a need for greater transparency in how parties select and promote women candidates. Representation should not be treated as a procedural requirement but as a genuine commitment to inclusion, where women exercise genuine political agency.

Quantitative Dataset Analysis



II. Quantitative Dataset Analysis

Batch Analysis

Chart 1 - Main Categories breakdown for Arabic

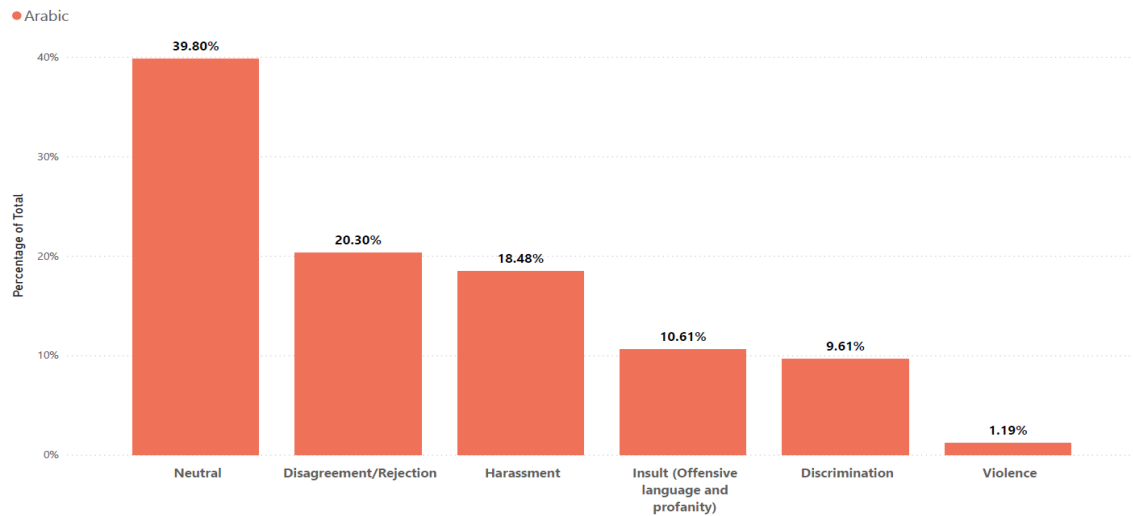


Chart 1 reveals that Neutral content accounts for the largest share of Arabic data at about 40%, followed by Disagreement/Rejection and Harassment at around 20% and 18%, respectively. Violence is the lesser observed main category in Chart 1, with Insult and Discrimination falling in the middle range.

Chart 2- Main Categories breakdown for Kurdish

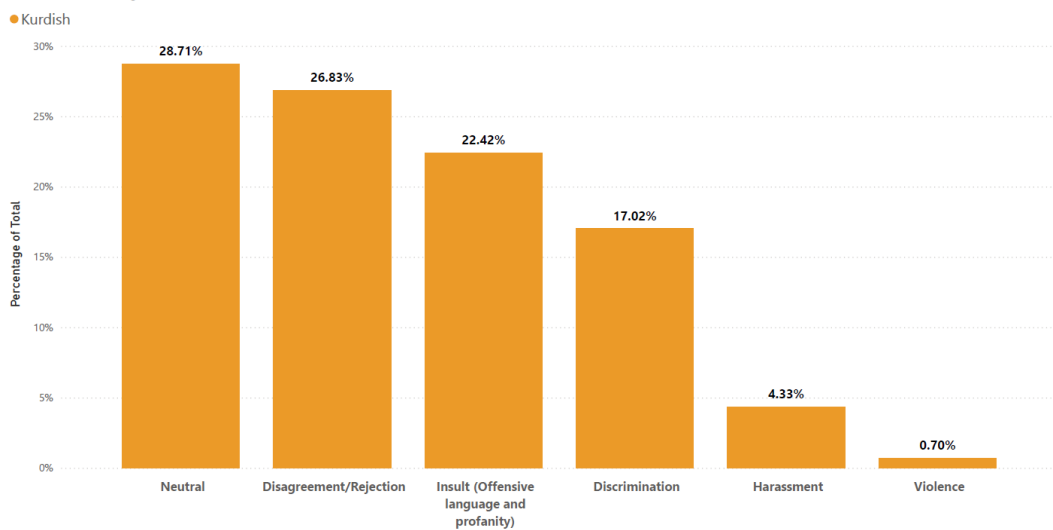


Chart 2 shows that Neutral, Disagreement/Rejection, and Insult categories dominate Kurdish content, each accounting for roughly 22–29% of the total. Violence and Harassment are least frequent in Chart 2, together making up less than 6% of instances.

Chart 3 - Arabic Main and Sub Categories

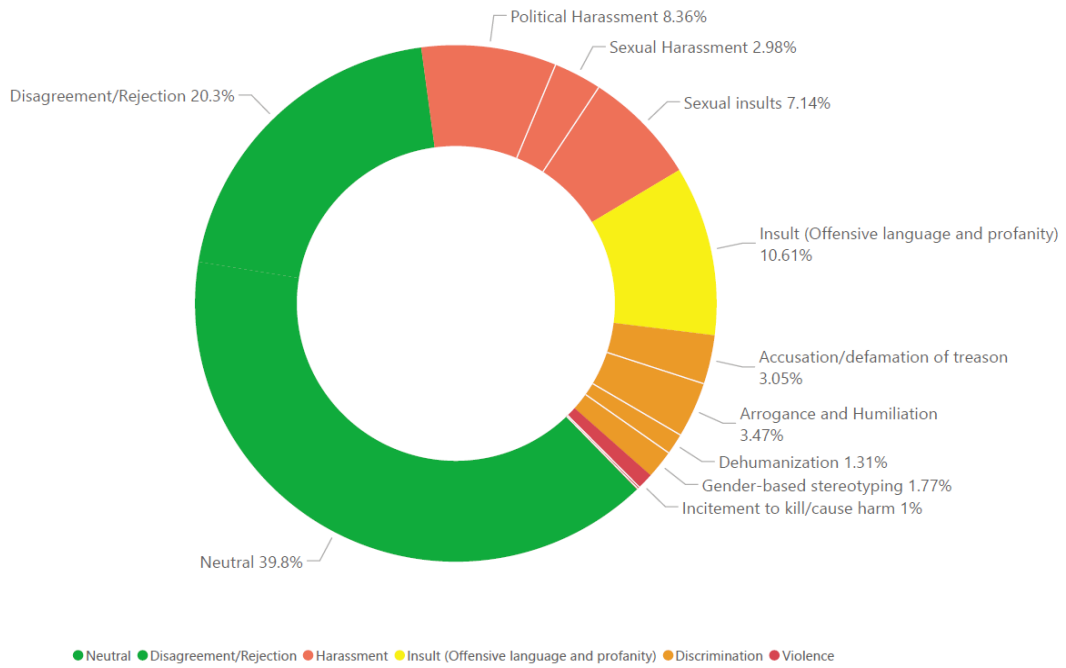


Chart 3 shows that Neutral and Disagreement/Rejection command the largest share in the Arabic categories, while Harassment and Insult contribute notable but smaller shares. Within harmful content, political and sexual harassment, sexual insults, and accusations of treason appear alongside dehumanization, gender-based stereotyping, and incitement to harm.

Chart 4 - Kurdish Main and Sub Categories

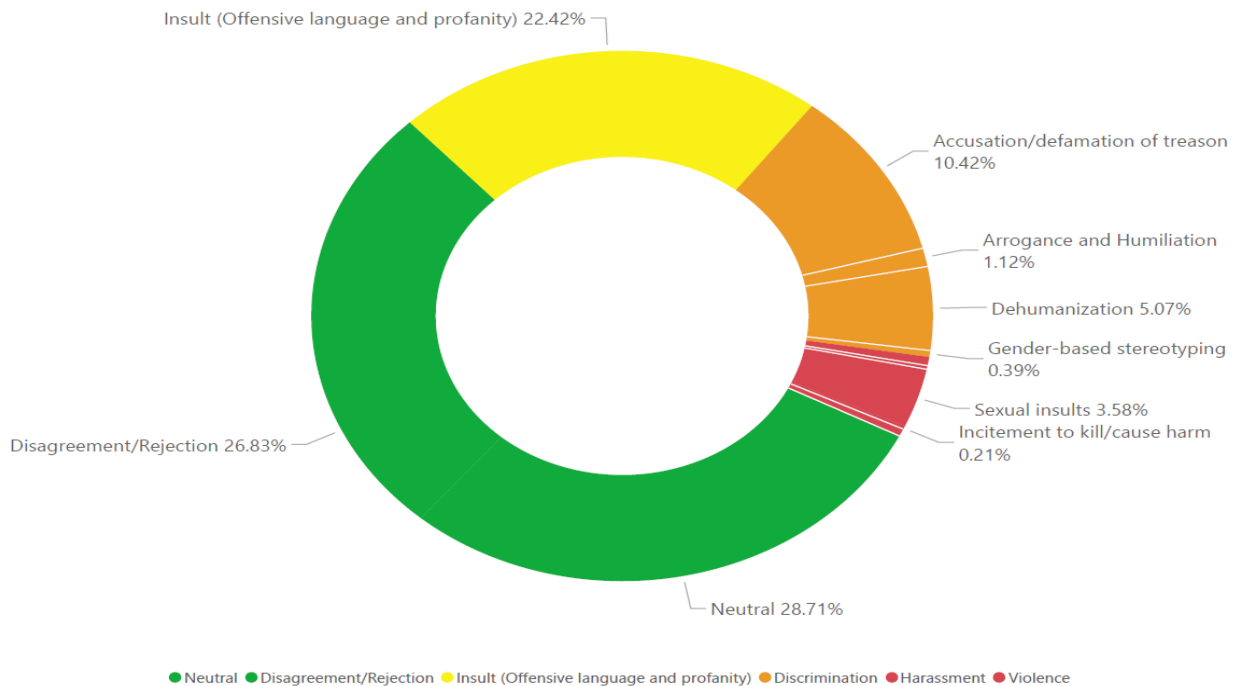


Chart 4 shows that Kurdish content is mainly Neutral or Disagreement/Rejection, together representing just over half of all instances, with Insult also forming a substantial share. Within harmful Kurdish content, accusations of treason and dehumanization are the largest subcategories, while gender-based stereotyping, sexual insults, and incitement to harm remain relatively rare.

Chart 5 - Harassment sub-categories for Kurdish

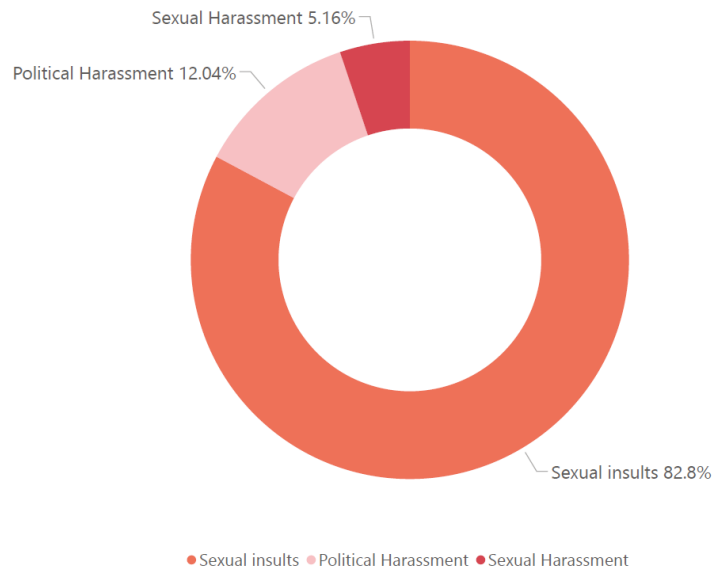


Chart 5 shows that harassment in Kurdish content is overwhelmingly driven by sexual insults, which make up more than four-fifths of all harassment cases. Political harassment and sexual harassment form much smaller portions in Chart 5, together accounting for less than one-fifth of the total.

Chart 6 - Harassment sub-categories for Arabic

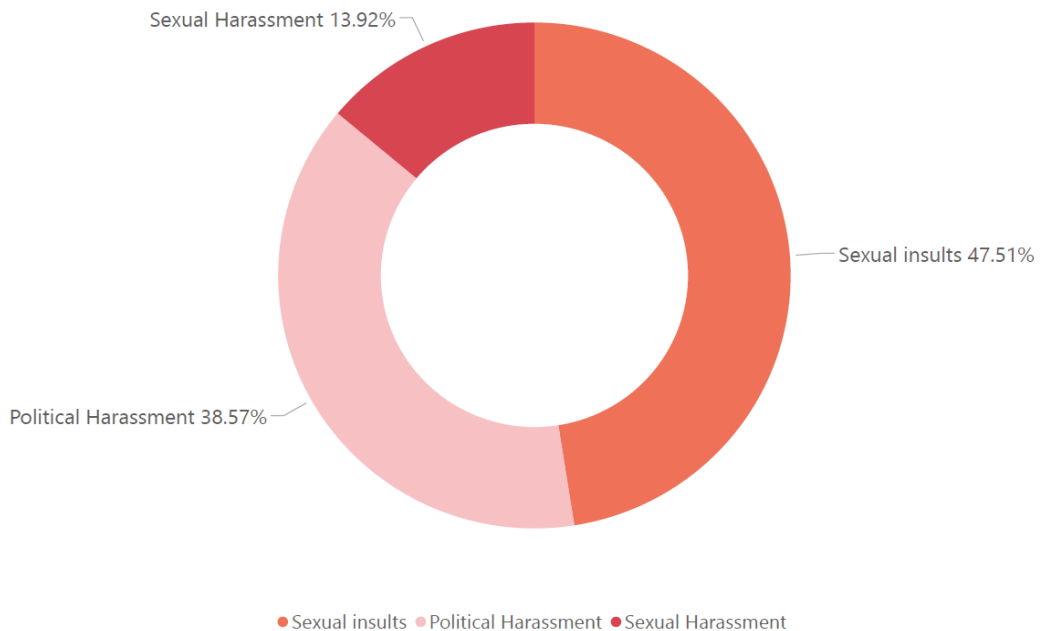


Chart 6 shows that harassment in Arabic content is more evenly split, with sexual insults making up just under half of cases and political harassment accounting for almost two-fifths. Sexual harassment represents a smaller but notable share in Chart 6, contributing about one-seventh of the harassment incidents.

Chart 7- Discrimination Sub. Categories - Arabic

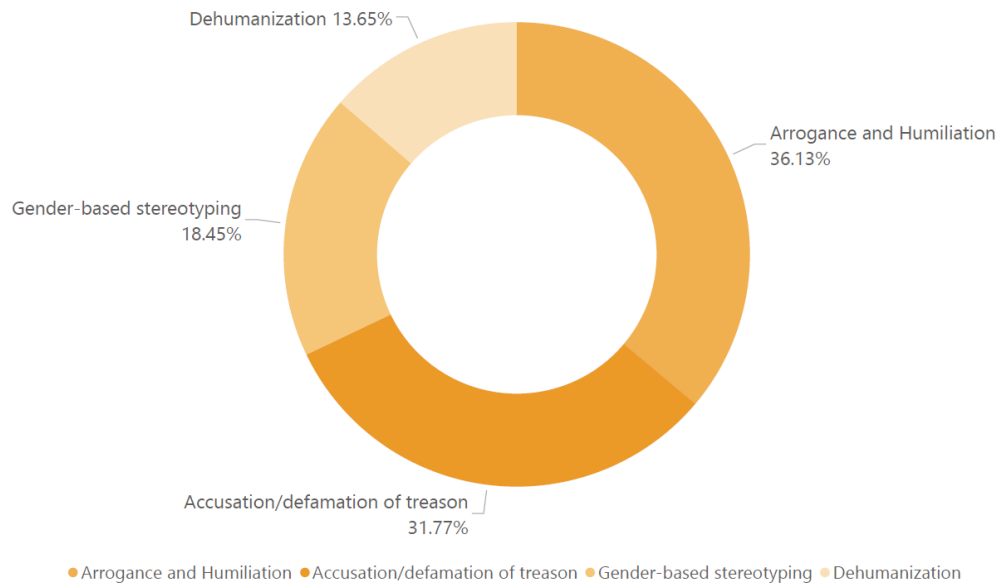


Chart 7 shows that discrimination in Arabic-language content is largely driven by personal humiliation (36.13%) and political delegitimization through treason accusations (31.77%), together accounting for over two-thirds of all discriminatory content. Identity-based forms of discrimination, including gender stereotyping (18.45%) and dehumanization (13.65%), further indicate that harmful content targets individuals both socially and politically.

Chart 8- Discrimination Sub. Categories - kurdish

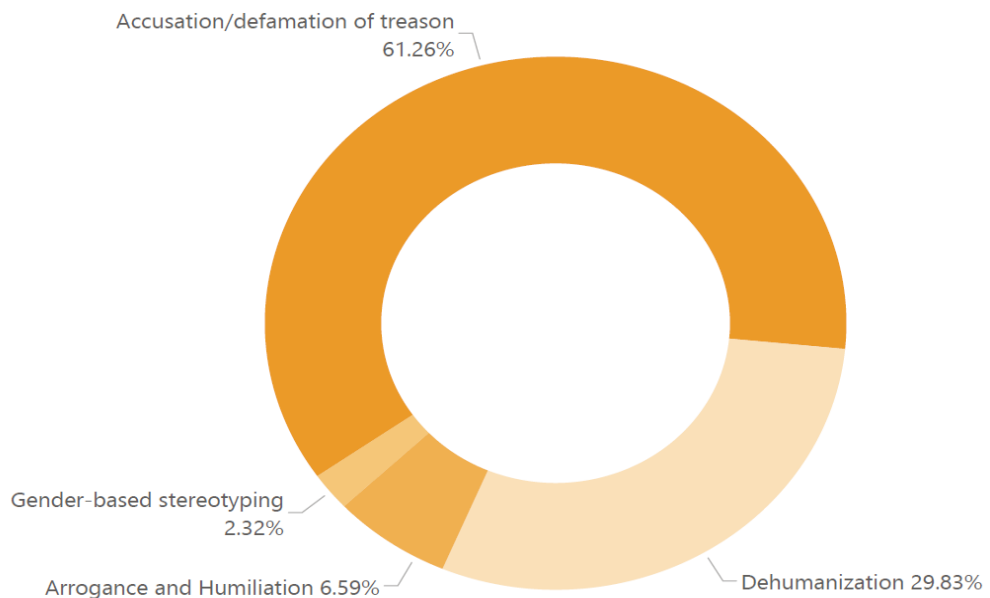


Chart 8 shows that most discriminatory Kurdish content centres on accusations or defamation of treason, which account for more than three-fifths of all discrimination cases. Dehumanization is the second largest subcategory in Chart 8, while arrogance, humiliation, and gender-based stereotyping occur far less frequently.

Chart 9- Violence - Arabic

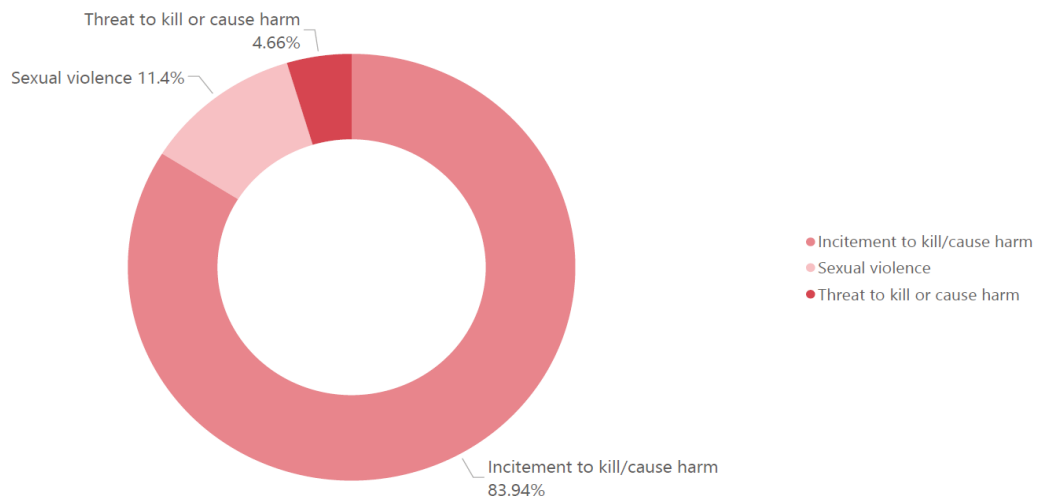


Chart 9 shows that Arabic violent content is dominated by incitement to kill or cause harm, which represents nearly 84% of all violence cases. Sexual violence and explicit threats to kill or cause harm to make up the remaining share in Chart 9, together accounting for about 16% of incidents.

Chart 10 - Violence - Kurdish

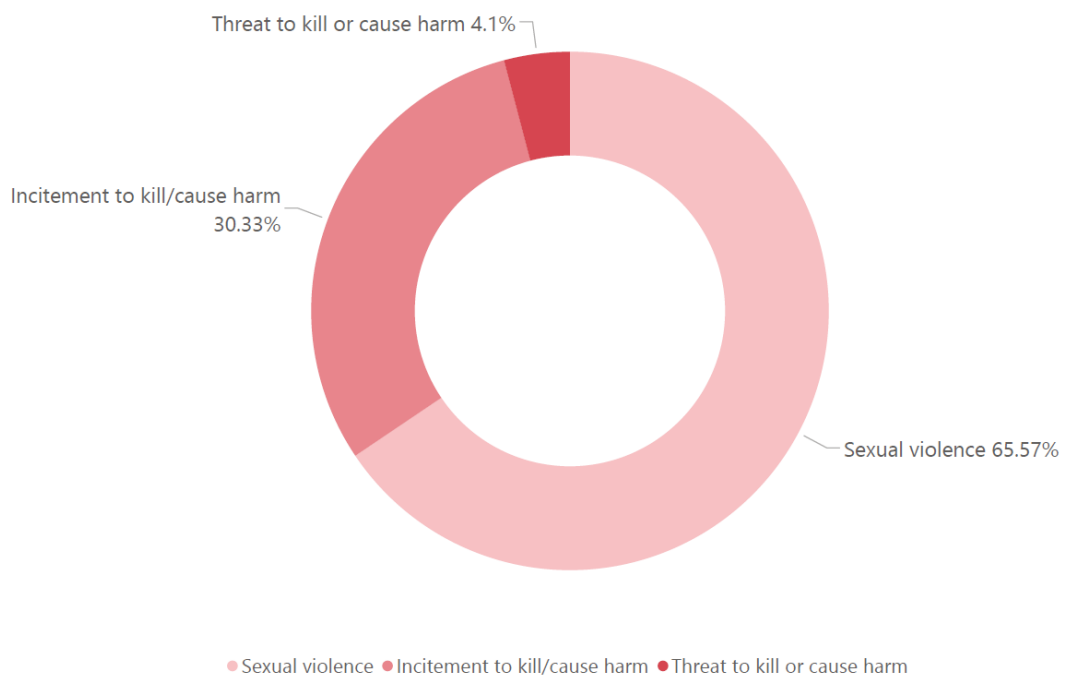


Chart 10 shows that Kurdish violent content is dominated by sexual violence, which accounts for nearly two-thirds of all violence cases. Incitement to kill or cause harm forms a substantial secondary share in Chart 10, while explicit threats to kill or cause harm to remain relatively rare.

Chart 11 - Categories breakdown for Arabic

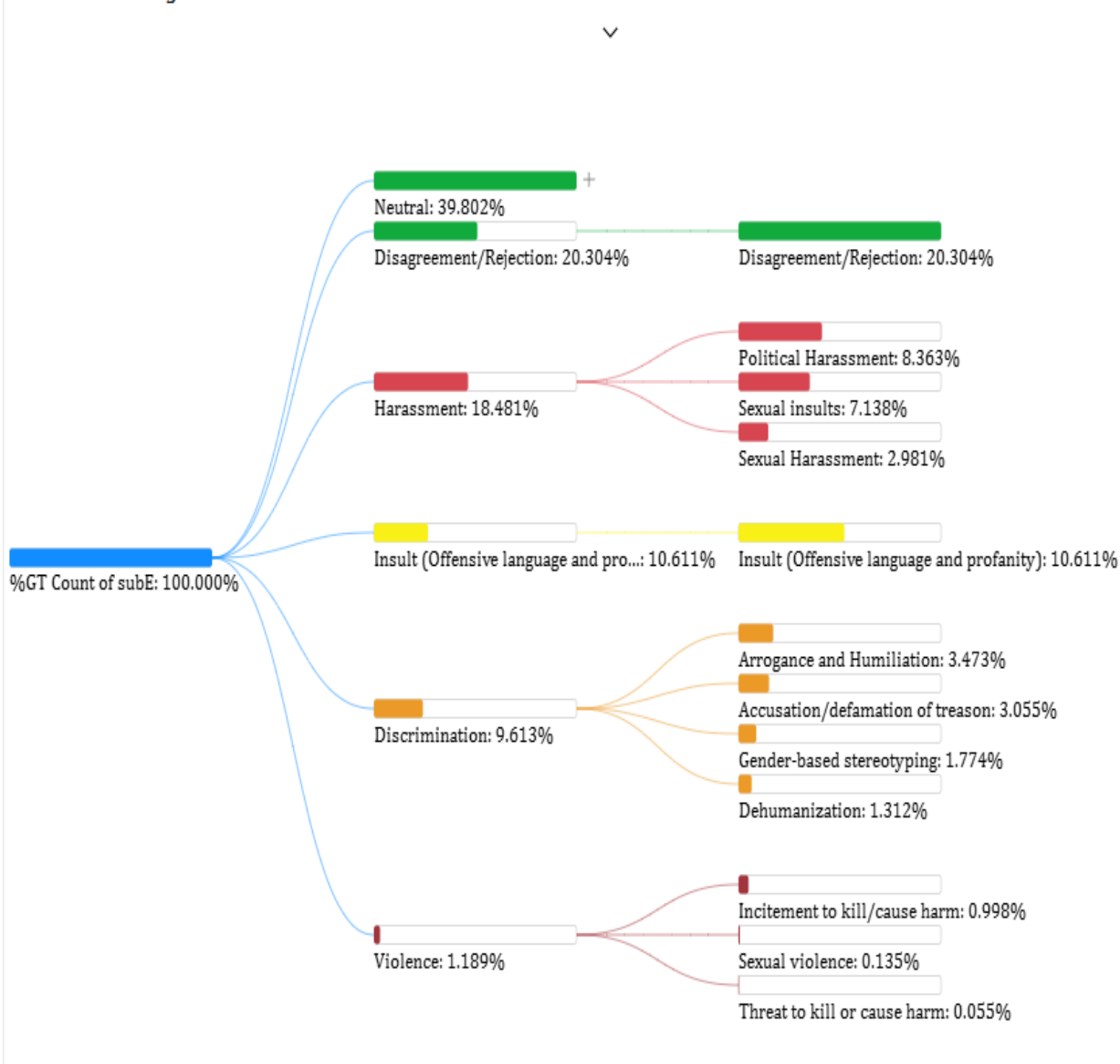


Chart 11 reveals that the majority of Arabic-language content is neutral (39.80%), yet a significant portion carries harmful undertones, with harassment (18.48%) being the most prevalent harmful category, driven primarily by political harassment (8.36%) and sexual insults (7.14%). Offensive language and insults account for 10.61% of content, while discrimination (9.61%) manifests mainly through arrogance and humiliation (3.47%) and treason accusations (3.06%). Violence-related content, though the least frequent at 1.19%, remains concerning given its direct incitement to harm nature (0.998%).

Chart 12 - Categories breakdown for Kurdish

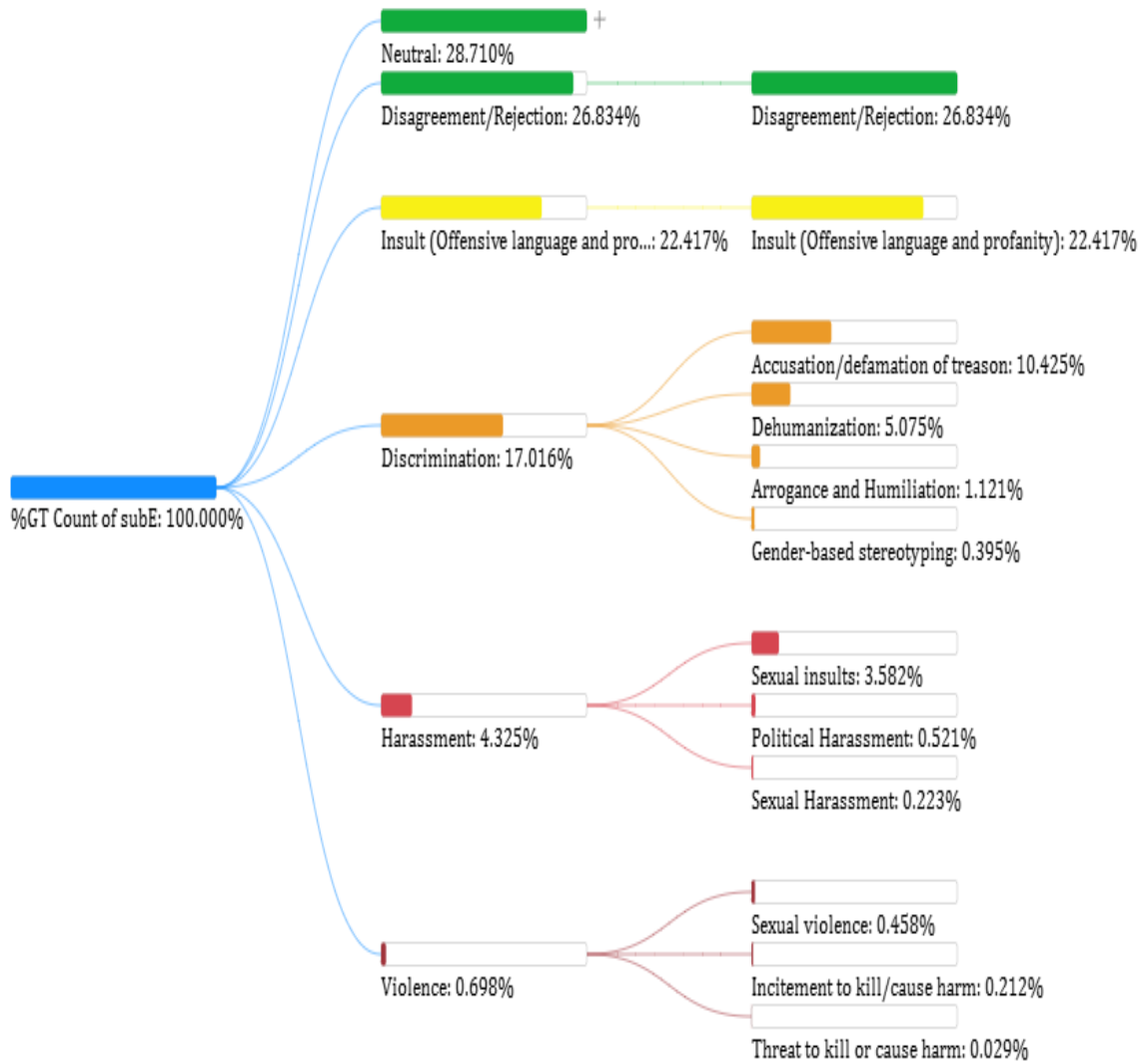


Chart 12 shows the overall Kurdish distribution, with Neutral, Disagreement/Rejection, and Insult as the three largest categories, followed by Discrimination, Harassment, and a very small share of Violence. Within harmful Arabic content, accusations of treason and dehumanization dominate discrimination, while sexual insults are the main harassment subtype and sexual violence, incitement, and threats comprise a small fraction of overall violence.

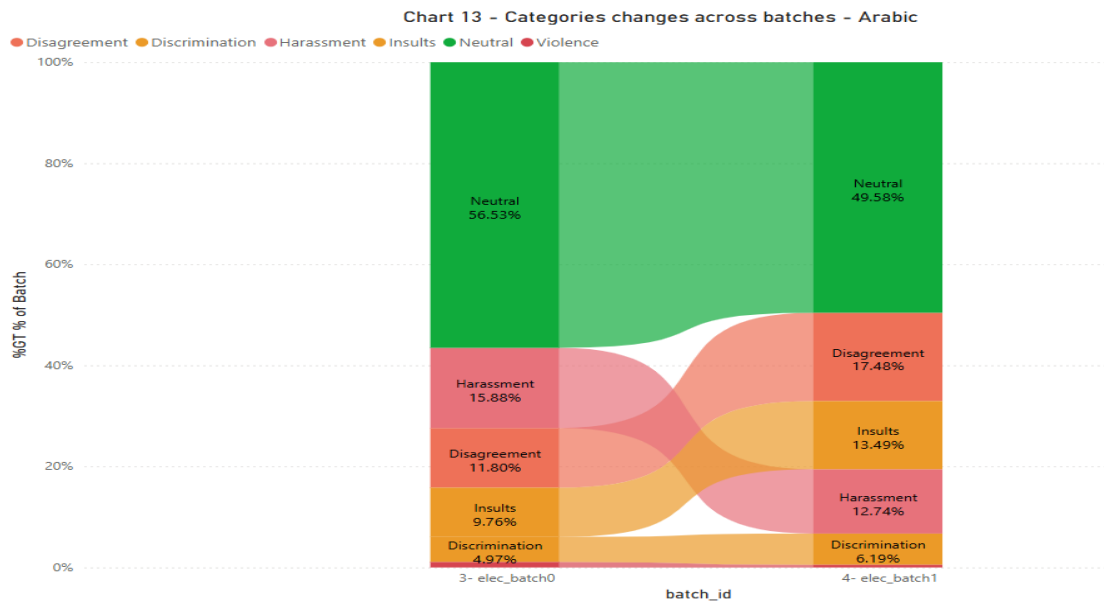


Chart 13 shows that neutral content declined between the two electoral batches, dropping from 56.53% in batch 0 to 49.58% in batch 1, indicating a gradual shift toward more harmful discourse over time. Disagreement surged notably from 11.80% to 17.48%, while insults also rose from 9.76% to 13.49%, suggesting an escalation in confrontational and offensive language as the electoral period progressed. Harassment and discrimination, remained persistent across both batches, pointing to an entrenched pattern of targeted harmful content throughout the monitoring period

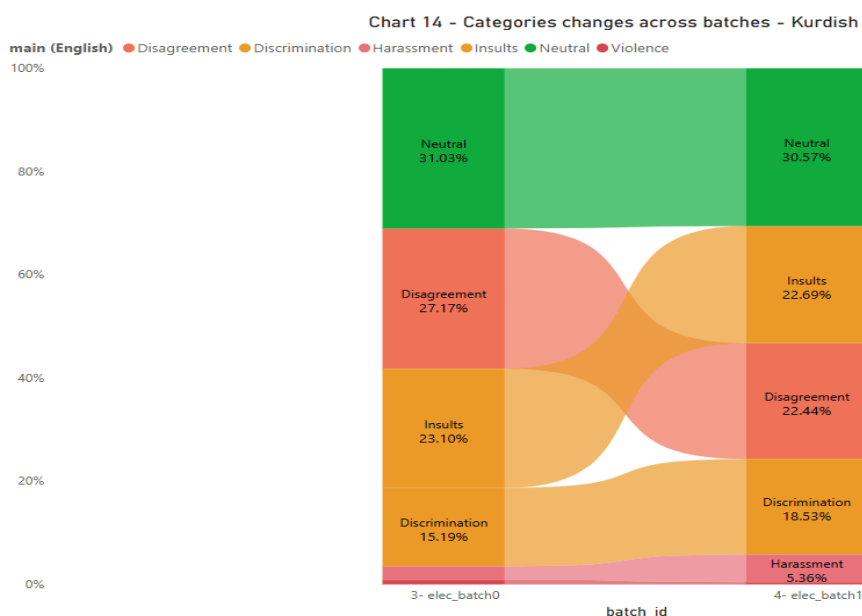
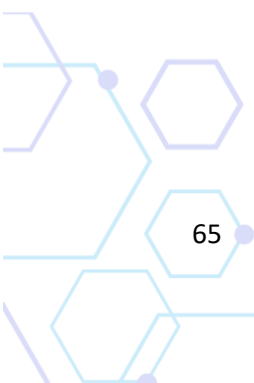
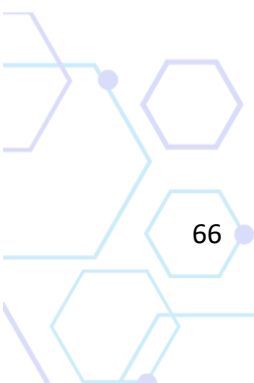


Chart 14 shows that Kurdish-language content remained extremely harmful across both batches, with neutral content barely exceeding 30% — significantly lower than Arabic. Insults and disagreement dominate the harmful categories, while discrimination saw a notable rise from 15.19% to 18.53%, signalling an escalation in identity-based attacks as the electoral period progressed.



65



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Chart 17 - Kurdish Accounts Breakdown

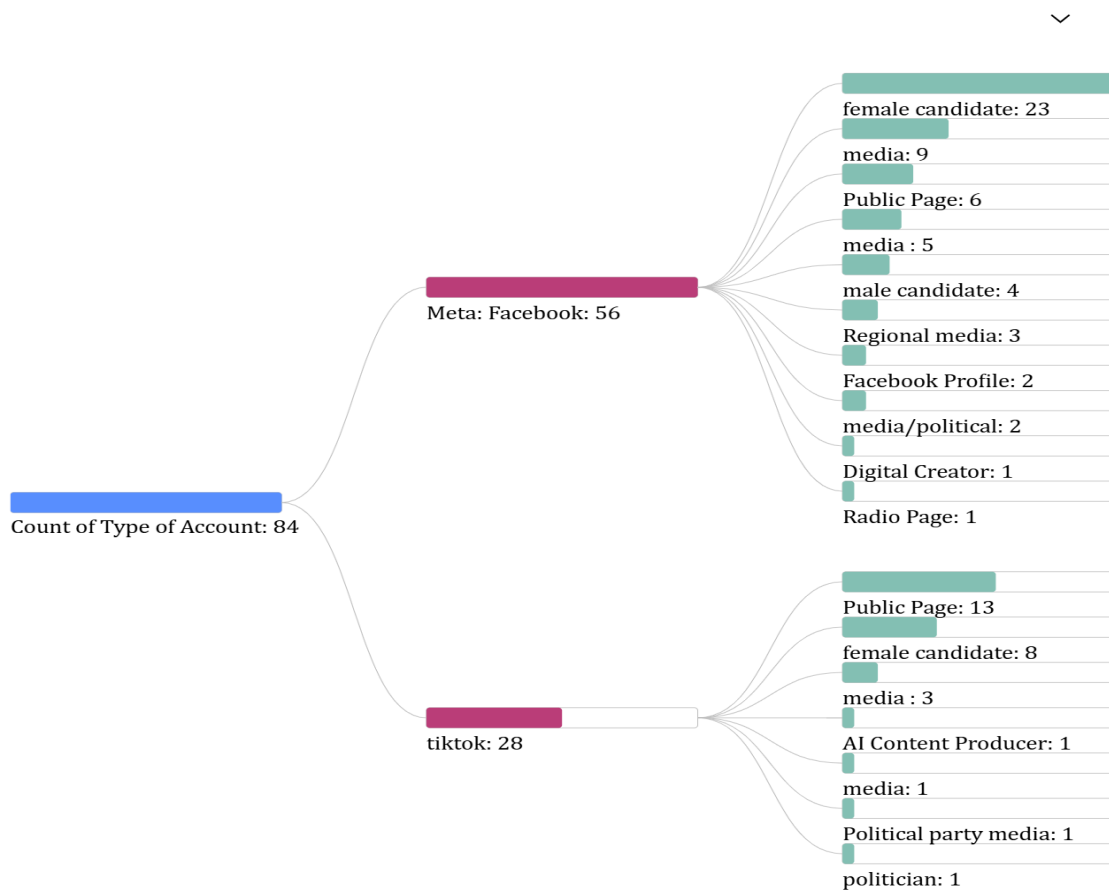


Chart 17 – Kurdish Accounts Breakdown: The Kurdish dataset is heavily concentrated in Facebook and TikTok, with no presence on X, suggesting that Kurdish political narrative during this period was primarily driven through these two platforms. Female candidates are the single largest account category — particularly dominant on Facebook — which may reflect the use of stronger digital campaign strategies among female Kurdish candidates or could reflect the nature of sampling.

Chart 18 – Arabic Accounts Breakdown

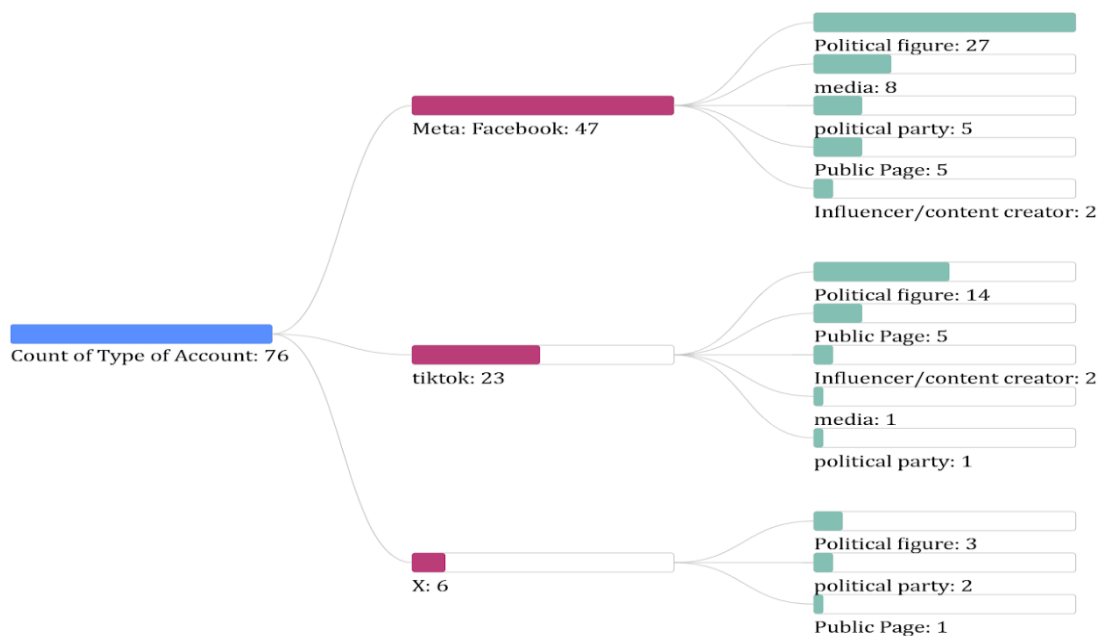


Chart 18 – Arabic Accounts Breakdown: Driven by political figures, who dominate both Facebook and TikTok, this indicates that Arabic-language election content is more personality-driven and centralized around individual politicians rather than media accounts. Unlike the Kurdish, Arabic accounts do have a small presence on X, though it remains marginal. The relatively low representation of media and public pages may suggest that traditional or independent media played a lesser role in shaping Arabic-language online election narrative compared to direct political speech.



CONCLUSION



Conclusion

This report examines women's political participation in the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections with a particular focus on how digital environments shape opportunities, risks, and outcomes for women candidates across the entire electoral cycle. It traces the evolution of women's political engagement over the course of the electoral cycle, the operation and manipulation of the quota system, and detailed patterns of TFGBV targeting women before, during, and after the vote. Together, these sections show that while women's numerical representation has improved over time, their substantive participation and safety remain constrained by intersecting structural, social, and digital barriers.

The 2025 elections combined record-high women candidacy, equating to 30 percent of all candidates, alongside a decline in women's parliamentary representation compared to 2021, and a heavy reliance on the quota mechanism rather than direct electoral victory. Only 25 of 84 women MPs won through direct votes, with 59 entered via quota allocation, indicating that the quota currently functions more as a compensatory floor than as recognition of electoral strength. This pattern suggests that women are increasingly present on ballots but remain disadvantaged in competitive races, shaped by party nomination strategies, boycott dynamics, and entrenched gender norms in voter behaviour.

The report's core empirical chapters document how digital spaces have become central arenas where women's political participation is undermined through coordinated harassment, hate speech, and gendered disinformation. Across Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and X, women candidates were subjected to objectification, financial corruption accusations, moral shaming, religiously framed defamation, delegitimization, political infantilization, and explicit dehumanization. These attacks frequently relied on visual manipulation (including AI-generated or manipulated content), mis-contextualized videos, rumour-based narratives, and symbolic imagery to question women's morality, honour, and legitimacy rather than their policy positions. Digital hostility did not subside with the close of polling. In the post-results period, women's electoral losses were seized upon as vindication, cited as proof of their supposed unfitness for public office rather than as an outcome shaped by the structural and discursive barriers this report has documented.

INSM observations suggest that some high-reach pages may amplify hostility through provocative framing to drive engagement, leading to repetitive cycles of insults and sexualized abuse. INSM also noted that election-related threads often leaned more toward general distrust and criticism of parties and elites, while still enabling targeted bullying of women candidates.

The report also demonstrates how digital hate campaigns intersected with structural and political dynamics - including boycott calls, quota-driven party strategies, and weak institutional safeguards - to influence women's decisions to withdraw from races. The withdrawal statements of many women candidates referenced "fair competition," personal considerations, loyalty to political leadership, and disillusionment with party integrity or management. Online reactions overwhelmingly interpreted these decisions through gendered stereotypes of lack of competency, weakness, opportunism, or moral failure. In this sense, the digital sphere not only mirrors societal misogyny, but actively amplifies and normalizes it, turning women's participation into a site of public policing and symbolic punishment.

The analysis of 33,000 annotated social media comments (17,452 Kurdish and 15,933 Arabic) adds quantitative confirmation that election-related online discourse contained a large volume of general political commentary and rejection, alongside a substantial layer of harmful engagement that targeted women through gendered and sexualized abuse. The analysis of this annotated social media comments adds further validation to the report's finding that election-related online discourse contains a large volume of general political commentary and rejection, alongside a substantial layer



of harmful engagement that targets women through gendered and sexualized abuse. In the Kurdish-language sample, the largest categories are Neutral and Different/Reject, but harmful content remains significant through offensive language and stigmatizing/dehumanizing frames, including accusations such as betrayal/treason. In the Arabic-language sample, harassment is a central feature of the environment, with high levels of political harassment and sexualized insults/harassment, alongside bullying, gender stereotyping, and a smaller yet visible presence of incitement to harm. The topic distribution further suggests that harmful narratives are often embedded within broader political debate (including party discourse and mobilization content), while women and gender also emerge as a significant thematic cluster in Arabic conversations highlighting that the legitimacy of women candidates is contested, not only politically, through their very gender itself.

• Recommendation



Recommendations

1. Social media platforms (Facebook, TikTok, X)

- Develop and implement context-sensitive moderation pathways for gendered hate speech and sexualized disinformation targeting women in politics, with robust coverage of Iraqi Arabic and Kurdish dialects and clear escalation channels for candidates and public figures.
- Platforms should ensure the deployment of **human Arabic and Kurdish language moderators** with contextual knowledge of the region. In addition, they should **reconfigure their algorithms to reduce the amplification of dehumanizing language** and harmful content that targets individuals or groups.
- Introduce verified “candidate” or “election actor” labels with fast-track reporting tools for impersonation, deepfakes, and manipulated content involving women candidates, with expedited review during election periods.
- Expand structured partnerships with local fact-checking and digital-rights organizations to flag and downrank content that recycles old material, misattributes videos, or relies on insinuation-based sexualized rumours against women candidates. And ensure rapid removal of flagged content before it escalates or becomes harmful
- Formalize cooperation frameworks with electoral authorities and cyber-crime units (federal and KRG) so that coordinated harassment, AI-generated sexualised content, and honour-based slander against women in politics trigger rapid removal and, where appropriate, referral to law-enforcement.

2. Government and electoral bodies

- Develop and publicize electoral regulations and sanctions that explicitly address TFGBV, deepfakes, and smear campaigns against candidates, with defined complaints mechanisms, evidentiary standards, and enforcement timelines. Also strengthen electoral integrity and legal frameworks including establishing a monitoring unit in IHEC who can work with civil society and digital rights orgs
- Create an election-time rapid response unit that coordinates between the electoral commission, cyber-crime units, security agencies, and social media companies to monitor high-impact online violations, especially those targeting women candidates or escalating into offline threats and forced withdrawals.
- Institutionalize existing cyber-protection mechanisms for female candidates at the national level and extend them formally to the KRI, ensuring Kurdish and Arab women candidates benefit from the same reporting channels, technical support, and referrals.
- Adjust quota design and party-list regulations to discourage symbolic or instrumental nomination of women, for example by linking public funding or incentives to demonstrable internal party support, fair competition practices, and leadership opportunities for women.

3. Political parties and parliaments

- Treat the 25% quota as a floor, not a ceiling, by adopting party-level targets for Kurdish and Arab women to head lists and win seats through direct votes, not only through quota mechanisms.
- Ensure women MPs, both Kurdish and Arab, are appointed to influential committees (legal, finance, security, digital transformation), so they can directly shape reforms on GBV, cyber-crimes, and electoral law rather than being confined to “women and family” portfolios.
- Require parties to publicly report how many women they nominate, how many head lists, and how many hold executive positions, making visible whether women are treated as genuine political actors or as quota fillers.
- Encourage party leaders to issue clear, public statements during campaigns that condemn online and offline violence against women in politics and commit to internal disciplinary measures when perpetrators are party members.

4. Civil society and NGOs

- Establish specialized support units and hotlines that provide digital security assistance, psychosocial support, and legal referral services for women candidates and activists experiencing online harassment during the electoral cycle.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns that frame online attacks on women in politics as forms of gender-based violence and as threats to democratic participation, using locally resonant narratives and examples in both Arabic and Kurdish.
- expand media and digital literacy and programme to include identifying gendered disinformation and abuse
- Develop targeted training programmes for women candidates on digital campaigning, narrative framing, and strategic responses to smear campaigns, including safe engagement practices and systematic documentation of abuse for evidence and advocacy.
- Partner with media, platforms, and electoral authorities to monitor and publicly report patterns of TFGBV, feeding evidence into advocacy for stronger regulation and platform standards.
- develop early warning systems to identify emerging campaigns and support the development of counter narratives

5. Media and information ecosystem

- Adopt a unified, gender-sensitive code of conduct for media coverage of women in politics at federal and KRI levels, prohibiting honour-shaming, sexualised insinuations, and unverified personal attacks in both Kurdish- and Arabic-language content.
- Media institutions and journalists should maintain **rigorous fact-checking and verification processes** before publishing or amplifying information, particularly during sensitive periods such as elections, in order to prevent the spread of misinformation and ensure accurate and responsible reporting.
- Provide mandatory training for journalists, talk-show hosts, and party media teams on ethical reporting and moderation of debates involving women candidates, including how to avoid amplifying misogynistic hashtags or legitimizing hate speech as “normal criticism.”
- Support independent monitoring initiatives to track hate speech and gendered disinformation against women candidates across television, online outlets, and social media, and require regulators to issue periodic public reports and corrective directives.
- Actively feature women, as experts and list-leaders on core policy issues (economy, security, governance) to counter stereotypes that frame them primarily through family or “honour” narratives that can be weaponised online.

6. Candidates and public figures

- Build collective response protocols among women candidates (joint statements, shared legal complaints, coordinated media responses) to avoid isolation and signal that attacks on one woman are political attacks on all women in public life.
- Proactively integrate clear messaging on digital violence and women’s rights into campaign narratives, explicitly linking personal attacks to wider questions of governance, rule of law, and electoral integrity to frame harassment as a systemic issue.
- Encourage alliances between women and supportive male candidates who publicly challenge sexist or honour-based attacks, increasing the political cost of targeting women and shifting the burden away from individual victims.

7. Researchers and monitoring teams

- Expand longitudinal, multilingual monitoring of electoral discourse that connects quantitative keyword trends with qualitative narrative analysis, with specific attention to gendered content and AI-enabled manipulation targeting women in politics across Iraq and the KRI.
- Develop standardized coding frameworks and typologies for online gender-based political violence (e.g., appearance-based attacks, honour-shaming, dehumanisation, deepfakes) to enable comparability across elections, regions, and platforms and inform evidence-based policy and platform standards.
- Share findings regularly with electoral bodies, platforms, parties, and CSOs through policy briefs and closed-door briefings so that emerging tactics can be addressed in near real-time rather than only in post-election reports.

Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Limitation	Mitigation Measure
Some posts and accounts were deleted after data collection: A number of Facebook pages, TikTok accounts, and individual posts were removed or emptied after INSM had already saved the data. This made it harder to trace some content later on.	INSM saved screenshots and records of all content at the time of collection, before any deletions took place. This means the evidence used in the report is preserved, even if the original posts are no longer online.
It was not always possible to determine why content was removed: Content may have been taken down for different reasons, for example, due to mass reporting by political groups, personal safety concerns, or attempts to clean up a public image after the election. The exact reason in each case cannot be confirmed.	INSM noted the timing of deletions and compared them with known political events where possible. These observations are treated as background context, not as confirmed facts, so the report's conclusions remain accurate.
Very little relevant content was found on X (formerly Twitter): During the monitoring period, X had very few posts related to Iraqi and Kurdish political discussions. This limited the ability to compare findings across platforms.	INSM focused on Facebook and TikTok, which are the platforms most widely used by Iraqi users and political figures. The low activity on X is itself noted as a finding it reflects where political conversations in Iraq are taking place.
Only public content could be monitored: The research is based on posts and pages that are publicly visible. Private messages, closed groups, and encrypted conversations were not included, which means some harmful content may not have been captured.	Focusing on public content is both practical and appropriate; it allows INSM to document OGBV that is visible and verifiable. In-depth case studies were used alongside the data to provide a fuller picture of what is happening online.
Some local slang and coded language may have been missed: The research covered Arabic and Kurdish dialects used in Iraq. However, some informal expressions, slang, or hidden meanings may not have been fully picked up by keyword searches.	INSM's research team included annotators and data collectors who are native Arabic and Kurdish speakers familiar with local dialects. Keyword lists were regularly updated throughout the monitoring period to capture new terms and expressions as they appeared.

Platform tools and search systems had limitations: Changes to how platforms organise and display content, as well as automatic filters, may have affected what INSM was able to find and collect.	INSM used several different methods to collect data, keyword searches, direct monitoring of specific pages, and the Meta Content Library. Using multiple methods helped reduce the risk of missing important content.
It was often difficult to identify who was behind harmful content: Many accounts use fake names, copy other people's identities, or are created using AI. This made it hard to connect abusive content to specific individuals or organised groups.	Rather than trying to identify individuals, INSM focused on patterns of behaviour and types of content. This approach is safer for the research team and still allows the report to show how OGBV is organised and carried out.
Safety and ethical rules limited what data could be collected: To protect both victims and researchers, INSM did not directly contact some accounts or collect personal information about the people involved.	INSM followed its own ethical guidelines and international standards for digital research. All victim information was kept anonymous, and overall trends and patterns were used rather than individual-level details.
The report only covers the 2025 election period: INSM's monitoring focused on a specific window of time around the elections. Trends that existed before or developed after this period including long-term effects on women's political careers are not covered.	The findings are placed in the context of INSM's previous work monitoring Iraqi elections, which allows for comparison over time. The report's recommendations are designed to inform future monitoring efforts and ongoing advocacy.
Some pages used provocative content to attract attention, which inflated the volume of hate comments: Certain pages deliberately posted controversial content about women candidates to get more reactions. This may make the level of abuse appear higher than it would be in normal everyday discussions.	INSM examined the data both in terms of volume and in terms of content and context. This helped separate genuine hostility from reactions driven by provocative posting, giving a more accurate picture of the situation.

Some harassment used coded or indirect language that was hard to identify: In Iraq, some forms of sexual harassment and abuse use indirect expressions or local references that are not easy to detect through standard keyword searches. Comment threads also sometimes move away from the original topic, which affects how comments should be understood.	INSM developed a detailed guide for identifying harmful language that included Iraqi-specific expressions and cultural references. This guide was updated regularly, and the research team took into account the full context of each comment thread, not just individual comments.
The data came from different types of content, so direct comparisons are not always possible: The level and type of harmful speech varied depending on the content, for example, general posts versus posts specifically about the elections. This makes it difficult to compare different parts of the dataset directly.	INSM separated the data by content type and by election phase (before, during, and after the vote). This allowed for fair comparisons within each group. The variation between groups is also treated as a meaningful finding in itself.
The total number of women candidates was reported differently across sources: Different official and unofficial sources gave slightly different numbers, ranging from 2,235 to 2,250 women candidates. This made it difficult to rely on one exact figure with full confidence.	INSM checked multiple sources, including official electoral commission records and civil society data. The most commonly reported figure (2,248 women candidates) was used, and the report clearly notes that small differences exist across sources.

Annexes

Annex 1- Provides the full list of monitored accounts and collected data.⁶¹ To access the complete dataset, please visit [link ↗](#).

Annex 2 – Provide the full List of Women MPs: Availability of Names and Party Affiliations. ⁶² To access the complete dataset please visit [link ↗](#).

⁶¹ Independent High Electoral Commission in Iraq, (2025, October 2), Names of approved candidates for the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.

<https://ihec.iq/candidates-names-3/>

⁶² Iraq Parliament (2025, Dec 22); List of MPs names; webpage: <https://iq.parliament.iq/blog/اسماء-المرشحين-الفائزين-في-الانتخابات/>