

Social Listening Report Iraq:

Social Media, Sectarianism, and the Erosion of Political Legitimacy



November 2025

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*“The next revolution
will not begin in a square
but on a screen.”*

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OVERVIEW

Over the past two decades, Iraq's political landscape has been defined by violence, corruption, sectarian rivalry, and institutional paralysis eroding citizens' confidence in the government and its leaders. The intersection of patronage, foreign interference, and elite self-enrichment has transformed governance into a transactional system that prioritizes survival over service. As Iraq approaches its 2025 Parliamentary elections, public sentiment reflects distrust and voter fatigue due to political violence, foreign influence, and heightened social media scrutiny that manifests not through protests but millions of digital interactions that reveal a population increasingly alienated from politics.

In the last two weeks alone, one Sunni parliamentary candidate was assassinated by a car bomb and another shot in Baghdad. Both incidents were attributed to Iran-backed Shiite militias. These attacks, following months of rising tension between Acting Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, a Sunni Muslim, and Deputy Speaker Muhsin al-Mandalawi, a Shi'a Muslim have intensified sectarian fault lines. Each event magnifies the perception that Iraq's government is unwilling or unable to restrain the armed factions that dictate its security landscape. Public sentiment, which is already inflamed by high unemployment, corruption scandals, economic stagnation, and the lack of reliable infrastructure is reaching a critical threshold.

Meanwhile, Iraqi officials' recent trip to Tehran and their decision to fully implement the 2023 Bilateral Security Agreement highlights its pivot from U.S. influence and Baghdad's further alignment with Iran. The accord includes provisions to disarm Kurdish anti-Iran groups operating in the north, which further strain relations between Baghdad and Erbil. Many Kurds interpret this as a betrayal as al-Mandalawi's Shiite-aligned coalition alienates Feyli Kurds and the only cross-sectarian reform movement capable of challenging the Coordination Framework's dominance.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the final installment in ENODO Global's four-part Social Listening series leading up to Iraq's 2025 Parliamentary elections. Building upon the analysis from previous studies, this report examines how social media has evolved from a communications medium into the central arena to measure political legitimacy. Prior reports exposed similar underlying dynamics: citizens' disillusionment with entrenched political elites and the inability of traditional political, religious, and militia groups to adapt to a generation that defines credibility online rather than through sectarian or tribal identity.

The analysis reveals a deeply disillusioned society poised for structural change. It illustrates how sectarian rhetoric that once mobilized a loyal base has lost its influence and how social media now functions as Iraq's primary accountability mechanism, replacing traditional oversight with public exposure. Iraq's youth wield smartphones as political instruments. Viral TikTok and Telegram videos, sarcastic memes, and citizen commentaries have become instruments of judgment more powerful than parliamentary inquiries or judicial proceedings. Religious institutions, once immune to such scrutiny are now contested spaces where credibility must be earned in the digital domain.

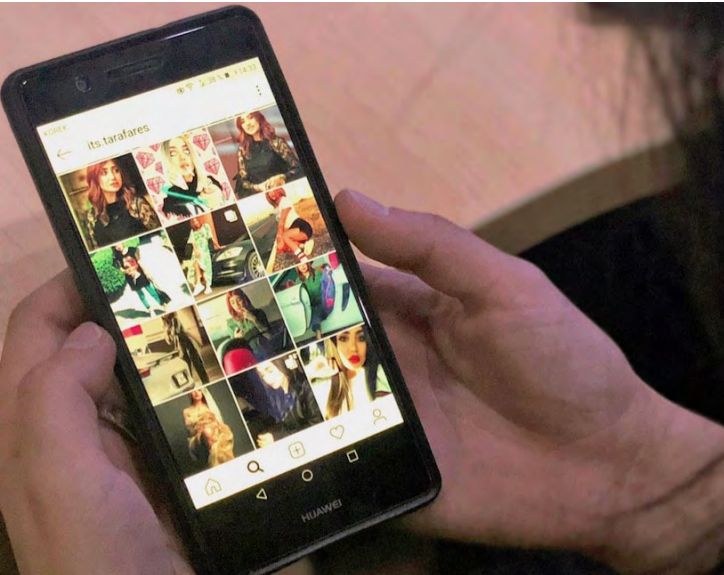
The report also examines al-Mandalawi's attempts to influence the religious institutions of Karbala and Najaf as a case study in elite overreach. It illustrates how political theater, once a hallmark of authority, now accelerates reputational collapse in the digital era. His orchestrated visits to religious shrines, public praise of clerical bodies, and budgetary promises to holy cities were designed to project piety and consolidate support among religious constituencies, but instead triggered online backlash that exposed these gestures as performative and self-serving amplifying narratives of hypocrisy, corruption, and foreign alignment. What was intended as an image campaign became a catalyst for viral criticism that helped transform al-Mandalawi from a powerful insider into a symbol of elite excess and moral decay.

Collectively, the four-reports portray a nation in need of systemic change. Sectarian narratives that once mobilized loyalty are losing resonance, while demographic shifts and digital activism are eroding the foundations of patronage politics. Iraq's youth are connected, disenchanted, and outspoken. They are redefining what legitimacy means. Whether this transformation yields reform or unrest remains uncertain, however, the trajectory is unmistakable. Iraq's legitimacy crisis is no longer confined to parliament, and its political authority is being negotiated in real time. Social media, not the ballot box will ultimately determine the fate of Iraq's future.



KEY FINDINGS

1. Social media has become Iraq's dominant space for political discourse and public accountability
 - ▷ TikTok and YouTube now shape public sentiment regarding legitimacy, replacing parliament, clergy, and print media as arbitrators of influence
2. Sectarian ideology, once the cornerstone of political mobilization, is rapidly losing relevance in the face of a digitally connected, politically aware Iraq youth
 - ▷ Sectarian content represents less than 15% of political discussion—down 30 points since 2020
 - ▷ Iraqis prioritize anti-corruption, nationalism, and social justice over sectarian loyalty
3. The absence of the Sadrist Movement from the 2025 elections removes one of Iraq's most influential grassroots forces, reducing competition among major blocs
4. The Government's Legitimacy Crisis Is Worsening Amid Political Violence and Militia Impunity
 - ▷ Voter participation will decline sharply, reinforcing public skepticism toward the electoral process and deepening Iraq's legitimacy crisis.
5. Iranian influence remains a central source of public discontent
6. Religious symbolism no longer shields political figures from public scrutiny



“Social media has become the country’s moral barometer—measuring anger, amplifying disillusionment, and mobilizing outrage faster than any state institution.”

SECTION 1 - INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

ENODO’s analysis of Iraqi social media reveals a pattern of rising hostility toward the political class, waning religious influence, and a growing belief that social media offers the only form of justice in Iraq. It is the platform where legitimacy is contested, corruption exposed, and collective frustration voiced. Traditional political campaign rallies attract hundreds of supporters while TikTok videos draw millions. Between August and October 2025, more than 1.9 million Arabic-language posts that included 145,000 high-engagement videos discussed themes of corruption, elite hypocrisy, and foreign interference, which outpaced sectarian or ideological content by a ratio of 5:1.

Iraq’s social media environment functions as both mirror and megaphone. It reflects the decay of state institutions while amplifying a parallel ecosystem of civic expression. Politicians and coalitions have failed to adapt, relying on staged media appearances and state-funded networks that lack imagination and credibility. Their inability to engage authentically online widens the gap between rulers and ruled, reinforcing a new reality: digital engagement is now the primary measure of relevance.

Videos circulating across social media criticize politicians like al-Mandalawi regarding topics pertaining to community representation, parliamentary mismanagement, legal overreach, and corruption. Both video commentary and the comments section demonstrate an informed populace that is disillusioned with Iraq and see the country as failing both politically and socially. Most of these videos fall into the category of being critical or hostile, mocking or satirical, or disapproving and concerned.

TIKTOK

TikTok has emerged as the heartbeat of Iraq’s political consciousness. Short videos mocking politicians in luxury cars or exposing bribe exchanges in government offices reach audiences that exceed television news networks. Iraqi social media users deploy satire as political weapons. Memes of parliamentary officials asleep during sessions or influencers parodying official statements routinely generate more engagement than government press releases. The emotional tone is overwhelmingly negative, characterized by anger, sarcasm, and despair. The “*digital parliament*” that Iraqis have built is not bound by sect or geography. Young Shi’a in Basra share grievances identical to Sunni youth in Anbar or Kurdish students in Sulaymaniyah. Across these demographics, citizens articulate the same message: “*The system is rigged, but the screen is ours.*”

TikTok is Iraq’s most dynamic social media platform for political expression and mobilization. Its algorithm prioritizes interaction over popularity, allowing users with modest followings to generate viral reach through engagement rather than influence. The platform’s short-form, emotionally charged videos align with the human attention economy, making them far more effective than televised debates or long-form commentary to shape public sentiment. TikTok’s rapid, visual, and participatory design has transformed it into the country’s digital amplifier of dissent, where satire, frustration, and protest merge into a continuous stream of civic discourse.



SECTION 1 - INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A clear example comes from a [video](#) posted by a user with 35.4K followers showing young men gathered outside al-Mandalawi’s office calling for an election boycott. The clip amassed 7,294 likes, 375 comments, 242 saves, and 1,075 shares, propelled by hashtags such as #Boycotting_the_upcoming_elections and #fyp, which broadened its reach across Iraq’s algorithm networks. The tone of the video was raw and defiant, capturing a shared frustration with political stagnation and corruption. Once a viewer interacts with such content, TikTok’s algorithm ensures that similar videos populate their feed creating echo chambers of political discontent that reinforce anti-establishment sentiment.



ENODO’s analysis illustrates how viral boycott videos like this represent more than momentary outrage; they reflect a digitally connected populace rejecting the electoral system as a source of legitimacy. In this sense, TikTok functions not merely as entertainment but as a mobilizing mechanism linking localized grievances into a national chorus of disillusionment. Each post, comment, and share contributes to a broader social current: a society poised for political and structural transformation.

In another example, a now-deleted TikTok video showed young men inside an office accepting money in exchange for votes for al-Mandalawi. The participants mocked the situation, captioning their clip: “Followers of Mohsen al-Mandalawi, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, sold their votes for 150,000” followed by a laughing emoji. The humor underscores the cynicism with which Iraqis



“We will boycott what cannot be changed through the ballot box.”

ENODO’s review of public reactions revealed that clips like this spread virally within hours, saturating feeds with messages equating politics with bribery and deceit. Each like, comment, or share reinforces the circulation of similar content, creating feedback loops of outrage and exposure that outpace official responses.

These examples illustrate how social media has supplanted formal oversight in Iraq’s information ecosystem. What was buried in bureaucratic denials now becomes part of a digital footprint that defines political identity and legitimacy. The viral mockery of al-Mandalawi’s alleged vote-buying scandal encapsulates another core finding: in the digital era, perception equals accountability, and Iraq’s leaders can no longer hide behind institutions when the people control the narrative.

“Vote-buying doesn’t build a nation, it sacrifices our future for power’s minions”

SECTION 1 - INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the past, print and video journalists were at the forefront of criticizing politicians, amplifying the grievances of the people, and swaying public thought. On TikTok, influencers take this role. Everyday people build a large following on social media and market an idea. Influencers such as [Haidar Al-Feyli](#) enter the political and social justice landscape. A Kurdish advocate, al-Feyli is TikTok's leading critic of al-Mandalawi. Haidar al-Feyli began posting in September 2023, sometimes posting several videos per day. With 1.6 million followers, his videos garner high viewership, ranging from the five figures to over a million and a total amount of likes upwards of 76 million. Al-Feyli's videos get hundreds of comments thousands of shares and saves.

In a [video](#) posted on May 16th, al-Feyli mocks al-Mandalawi, accusing him of buying his way into politics. His sentiments followed the pattern of disillusionment, with him lamenting *"This is why Iraq fails politically and socially."* Both the accusation of corruption and the rhetoric of Iraq failing politically and socially is in line with the concept of al-Mandalawi being a symbol of a failing Iraq. This video yielded approximately 154,100 likes, 10,700 saves, 13,800 shares, and 4,780 comments.



SECTION 1 - INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

YOUTUBE

While TikTok dominates Iraq’s social-media landscape in reach and virality, YouTube occupies a distinct role as the country’s new broadcast channel for legitimacy and accountability. YouTube videos typically generate higher view counts but lower direct engagement in the form of likes and comments. Their tone is more formal and often include edited news segments, political talk-show excerpts, or documentary-style investigations that merge traditional journalism with digital distribution. As social media continues to replace cable television and print outlets as Iraq’s principal vehicle for government accountability, state and private news networks have adapted by republishing full broadcasts or clipped highlights on YouTube to reach younger, mobile audiences. Iraqi outlets such as Al-Sumaria TV, Rudaw, Utv Iraq, and Al-Mada now curate YouTube channels that dissect parliamentary scandals, expose corruption cases, and provide instant commentary on militia activity or foreign influence.

The platform’s algorithmic longevity enables videos to remain discoverable for months rather than hours, transforming it into Iraq’s digital archive of dissent. For many Iraqis, particularly those outside urban centers or without access to satellite television, YouTube has become the de facto evening news, blending citizen journalism, influencer commentary, and mainstream reporting into a continuous feedback loop that shapes public perception and sustains narrative pressure on political elites. The following examples illustrate how Iraqi broadcasters and digital journalists use YouTube to amplify public debate and extend their reach beyond traditional media audiences.

A clear example of YouTube’s expanding role in shaping political discourse is a recent broadcast by [One News](#), an Iraqi outlet known for its populist commentary on corruption and elite misconduct.

In this clip, the anchor reports on al-Mandalawi’s attempt to sue a popular influencer, Amal al-Maliki, after she released a satirical video announcing the fictitious opening of a “new office” allegedly on his behalf. The segment captures a growing tension between Iraq’s political class and its digital critics—an environment where humor and satire have become instruments of dissent. The anchor’s tone is openly confrontational, imploring, “*Why are they doing this... enough pressure... this shouldn’t be a lesson,*” as he frames al-Mandalawi’s lawsuit as a symbol of the state’s thin-skinned intolerance toward public ridicule.

ENODO’s data analytics confirm that the broadcast resonated with broader public frustration over legal intimidation and political overreach. The video’s 14,000 views, 283 likes, and 31 comments reveals moderate visibility but intense emotional response. Comment sections are saturated with irony and disillusionment, typified by one viewer’s remark calling Iraq’s leadership an “*amusement park government.*” This digital backlash underscores a larger societal pattern: Iraqis increasingly interpret attempts at censorship or legal retribution as confirmation of elite insecurity and corruption. The One News clip does more than report on a legal dispute, it exemplifies how YouTube has evolved into a civic forum where satire, journalism, and citizen outrage intersect to hold power to account.



SECTION 1 - INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Another example of YouTube's role in amplifying Iraq's political unrest comes from a broadcast by [3 News](#), which dissected a public altercation between Acting Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani and Deputy Speaker Muhsin al-Mandalawi over parliamentary procedure and national identity. The dispute began when al-Mashhadani declared that *"Iraq has no identity,"* a remark that provoked outrage among members of the Coordination Framework, of which al-Mandalawi is a prominent member. The confrontation, captured and circulated through televised debate and rebroadcast on YouTube, quickly evolved into a symbol of institutional dysfunction and sectarian fragility. In the segment, the anchor's tone is openly accusatory, holding al-Mandalawi responsible for escalating tensions and lamenting the paralysis that has come to define Iraq's legislature.

The segment reflects deepening public frustration with political gridlock, one of the recurring themes identified in ENODO's social-listening data. Viewers perceive parliamentary disputes not as ideological contests but as performances detached from citizens' realities—rituals of power devoid of purpose. The video accumulated 31,595 views, 310 likes, and 96 comments, demonstrating the reach and resonance of televised outrage in Iraq's digital ecosystem. Comment sections reveal raw anger and despair, exemplified by one lengthy response that reads: *"Backwardness is rooted in the foundations of Iraq. Here is ignorance, here are the scum rulers... Here is injustice, its door is wide open, here the truth is doomed to be closed."*

This emotional outpouring encapsulates the erosion of faith in parliamentary institutions and the perception that political elites perpetuate conflict to preserve influence. As a digital artifact, the 3 News broadcast mirrors the national mood of cynicism, polarized, and fatigued by dysfunction underscoring ENODO's broader finding that Iraq's political theater has migrated online. Citizens no longer observe in silence but participate in shaping the narrative of accountability.



"We no longer trust those who claim to carry the mantle of religion and ask for our support."

SECTION 2 - DECLINE OF SECTARIAN POLITICS

Iraq's post-2003 government was founded on sectarian quotas implemented through the muhasasa system to distribute power along religious and ethnic lines. For nearly two decades, this architecture sustained elites while fragmenting society. But social media has unraveled that formula. ENODO's analysis reveals that sectarian content now constitutes less than 15% of Iraq's political conversation, a 30-point decline since 2020.

Instead, citizens across different demographics engage with anti-corruption and nationalist narratives. Hashtags such as #نريد_وطن *"We Want a Nation"*, #لا_لمحاصصة *"No to Quota Politics"*, and ثورة_الجيل *"Generation's Revolution"* dominate trending topics. These online campaigns transcend sectarian boundaries, uniting Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish youth under shared grievances rather than divided identities.

Attempts by establishment figures to revive sectarian fearmongering such as Nouri al-Maliki's recent warnings of *"Sunni conspiracies"* or militia-aligned influencers invoking threats to Shia holy sites have backfired. They are met with ridicule and hashtags labeling such rhetoric *"old lies for new elections."* The generational shift is unmistakable: 73% of Iraqis aged 18–30 now self-identify as *"Iraqi citizens"* before any sectarian or ethnic identity, according to ENODO's sentiment sampling.

A recent example of this decline can be seen in a billboard displayed in a Shi'a-majority district of Baghdad, depicting ISIS militants as shadowy, looming figures in the background and a US soldier in the foreground. The visual message is unmistakable: citizens must unite behind sectarian defenders to prevent the return of chaos. Such imagery reflects the old political playbook that invokes fear to rally support for Shia-aligned parties and justify militia influence in governance.



*"We want a nation,
not quota patronage."*

SECTION 2 - DECLINE OF SECTARIAN POLITICS

ENODO's analysis of social-media commentary surrounding the billboard reveals a stark disconnect between the intended narrative and public reception. Rather than evoking loyalty, the imagery was met with sarcasm, fatigue, and rejection, especially among younger Iraqis who see these appeals as manipulative relics of the post-ISIS era. Comments on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) dismissed the billboard as “fear marketing,” mocking its attempt to exploit trauma for votes.

The example encapsulates a broader shift in Iraq's social consciousness. The country's youth have grown up after the sectarian wars and communicate daily across digital platforms. The notion that security or identity must be tied to a particular sect no longer carries moral or emotional weight. Instead, Iraq's new generation prioritizes employment, dignity, and freedom from corruption over sectarian loyalty. This transformation underscores ENODO's core finding: sectarian ideology, once the cornerstone of political mobilization, is rapidly losing relevance in the face of a digitally connected, politically aware citizenry that rejects fear-based governance.

While sectarian ideology continues to wane, ethnic and regional grievances remain deeply embedded, particularly among Iraq's Kurdish population. A viral video posted by Haider al-Feyli, a Kurdish social media influencer, captures this disillusionment vividly. In the [clip](#), al-Feyli condemns al-Mandalawi for abandoning his Feyli Kurdish identity and aligning himself politically with Shi'a power brokers in Baghdad. His criticism resonated widely garnering 32,500 likes, 847 comments, 1,637 saves, and 726 shares, which reignited debate about loyalty, representation, and betrayal within Iraq's political order. The timing was significant: as Iraq is preparing for the 2025 elections, Kurdish communities are still reeling from the 2024 parliamentary boycott and the recent decision by Baghdad and Tehran to fully implement the 2023 Bilateral Security Agreement, which mandates the disarmament of Kurdish anti-Iran groups.

ENODO's sentiment analysis found that responses to the video were overwhelmingly sympathetic, interpreting al-Feyli's message as a reflection of a broader Kurdish disenchantment with Baghdad's centralization of power. The post illustrates a critical paradox in Iraq's evolving political culture how sectarian loyalty is fading, but feelings of marginalization persist. For many Kurds, the issue is no longer framed as Sunni versus Shi'a, but as center versus periphery, with the government viewed as perpetuating economic neglect and political exclusion. The popularity of al-Feyli's video underscores how ethnic and regional frustrations, though less sectarian, remain potent drivers of alienation that could challenge Iraq's fragile unity in the 2025 Parliamentary elections.

This erosion of sectarian influence is compounded by the demographic reality of a digitally native society. Iraq's median age is 21, and 72% of the population uses at least one social-media platform daily. For this generation, sectarian narratives no longer confer legitimacy—they signal manipulation. The loss of faith in clerical and political intermediaries has created both opportunity and danger: opportunity for cross-sectarian reform movements, but danger in the absence of trusted alternatives. The vacuum left by discredited institutions is increasingly filled by influencers, activists, and decentralized online movements that lack structure but command emotional allegiance.

“Everyone has the right to criticize politicians who have done nothing for their country. Mr. Muhsin al-Mandalawi wants to run again, and he comes to Najaf pretending to represent the people.”

SECTION 3 - AL_MANDALAWI’S RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Muhsin al-Mandalawi’s engagement with Iraq’s shrine institutions in Karbala and Najaf illustrates how political elites attempt to appropriate sacred legitimacy in a period of eroding trust. ENODO’s combined social-listening, open-source, and field-validated data between 2022 and 2025 demonstrate that while al-Mandalawi cultivated visible relationships with clerical authorities, however, there is no verifiable evidence of administrative control, contractual ties, or financial entanglement with the shrine networks. His conduct instead reflects a pattern of symbolic politics that leverages proximity to faith for electoral gain.

Al-Mandalawi’s first significant engagement occurred on 6 February 2023, when, as First Deputy Speaker, he met Sheikh Abdul-Mahdi al-Karbalai, Ayatollah Sistani’s representative and legal custodian of the Imam Hussein Shrine. Official records confirm that he toured the Imam Hussein and Aba al-Fadl al-Abbas shrines, reviewed operational needs and pledged to raise them with parliament. Access to Sistani’s emissary represented a rare intersection between political authority and the marja’iyya’s inner circle. ENODO’s sentiment analysis shows that online commentary treated the meeting not as cooperation but as an intrusion—portraying it as an opportunistic attempt by a wealthy politician to sanctify a corrupted image.

During the 2025 election campaign, al-Mandalawi staged a series of appearances in Najaf al-Ashraf, branding the city “a fundamental pillar of Iraq’s political and intellectual history.” His speeches promised service-sector investment and development “*befitting its sanctity*.” He also met Governor Youssef Kinawi and Judge Hassan Soudi, President of the Najaf Court of Appeals, to discuss “*judicial cooperation*.” While these activities lacked direct clerical engagement, state media and his own Facebook account framed them as reverent pilgrimages, reinforcing the perception that he sought to fuse political messaging with religious symbolism.



Between 2023 and 2025 al-Mandalawi repeatedly posted statements praising the holy ‘atabāt, Hussaini processions, and Arbaeen service providers. His August 14, 2025, press release lauded security forces during the Arbaeen pilgrimage, and his near-identical Facebook posts in April and August, formed part of a sustained narrative portraying himself as protector of religious heritage. While benign in form, these messages reached an electorate conditioned by decades of political manipulation through piety. Social-media reaction was overwhelmingly negative. TikTok creators juxtaposed his posts with footage of infrastructure collapse and unemployment, captioning them “*faith for sale*.”

The irony deepened when social-media users uncovered contradictions between his devotional imagery and his documented conflicts of interest as chairman of a private university and hospital, and owner of multiple currency-exchange companies implicated in Iraq’s 2024 budget scandal. Hashtags such as #تاجر_الدين (“merchant of religion”) and #ملياردير_البرلمان (billionaire of parliament) trended for weeks, amplifying ridicule and delegitimizing his religious overtures.

SECTION 3 - AL_MANDALAWI'S RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Al-Mandalawi's most concrete institutional lever was fiscal. During the 2023 budget session he publicly endorsed increased allocations for *"holy governorates"*—Karbala and Najaf—arguing that millions of annual pilgrims justified expanded infrastructure spending. While framed as economic support, analysis with parliamentary records indicates that the proposal primarily benefited contractors aligned with the Shiite Coordination Framework, the Iran-linked bloc to which he belongs. The move blurred boundaries between religious service, electoral patronage, and geopolitical loyalty. Analysts note that shrine secretaries-general Haj Hassan Rashid al-ʿAbayji at Imam Hussein Shrine and Sayed Mustafa Murtadha Dhia al-Din at Abbas Shrine were appointed in 2022 before al-Mandalawi's acting-speakership, yet the coincidence in timing fed speculation of indirect coordination between political and clerical patronage systems.

Despite speculation, there is no evidence linking al-Mandalawi to shrine boards of trustees, administrative secretariats, or charitable endowments. There are no public contracts between his enterprises—Al-Farahidi University, the International Hospital for Specialized Surgery, or his exchange companies and shrine institutions. The institutions themselves remain under Ayatollah Sistani's supervision, and Najaf's religious establishment has, since 2022, consciously re-asserted independence from Iranian and political interference. As such, al-Mandalawi's influence operates through association and imagery, not institutional control. His Coordination Framework affiliation provides indirect access to shrine-adjacent networks such as Ansar al-Marjiyah, the Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) unit historically aligned with Karbala's custodianship—a Shi'a militia outside the control of the Iranian-aligned Shi'a militias. Even these links are political rather than administrative. In essence, al-Mandalawi is a broker, not a governor who leverages symbolism and legislative privilege to signal alignment with faith while maintaining deniability of control.



What distinguishes al-Mandalawi's case is the velocity with which digital audiences dismantled his narrative. ENODO logged over 70 viral videos between May and October 2025 mocking his pious imagery. One clip by Kurdish influencer Haidar al-Feyli accusing him of *"buying his way into heaven"* generated 154,000 likes and 13,800 shares within 48 hours. Another, from satirist Amal al-Maliki, portraying a faux *"office of faith and finance,"* garnered 14,000 views and spurred dozens of derivative memes. These interactions transformed al-Mandalawi's shrine outreach from political theater into a cautionary tale about digital exposure. For the public, his actions confirmed a broader conviction: religion has become a stageprop for corruption. The outrage reflects Iraq's evolving civic maturity and an electorate capable of distinguishing genuine devotion from instrumental piety. Religious institutions themselves, aware of this scrutiny, have largely distanced from political sponsorships, preferring silence to complicity.

***"What have you actually done?
It's unbelievable—everywhere we go, we
see your picture. You hold the most powerful
legislative position, yet you've done nothing."***

CONCLUSION

Iraq is in a period of heightened Social Risk defined by public anger, economic hardship, and political decay. The intersection of corruption, militia dominance, and Iranian foreign influence has fractured the country's social fabric. Iraq's instability now operates through information dynamics as much as politics. Social media acts as a real-time barometer of legitimacy that exposes wrongdoing, amplifies outrage, and shapes narratives before the government can respond. Each viral post further erodes institutional trust and accelerates a shift from passive frustration to active digital resistance.

The 2025 Parliamentary elections will not resolve these tensions and will continue to expose them. With high unemployment, corruption, and voter fatigue, Iraqis are increasingly unwilling to believe that change will come from the ballot box. Instead, the risk of a single trigger event recorded on a smartphone, shared online, and propelled by algorithmic virality could ignite unrest reminiscent of the Arab Spring. In that scenario, social media would not simply document revolution; it would create it.

Looking ahead, ENODO forecasts that Iraq's long-term stability will depend on its leaders' ability to accept three realities: legitimacy cannot be bought, religious symbolism no longer shields corruption, and governance in the digital age demands transparency over control. Should Iraq's ruling elite ignore these truths, the next transformation in Baghdad's history will be shaped not by parliament or militias but by the population itself.



“Between those who view boycott as protest, those who wager on participation as a limited chance for change, and those who hesitate ... this reveals the depth of Iraq’s political crisis.”





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