ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Gender-informed analysis of Hybrid Threat Financial and Operational Networks in Iraq

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WPS Women, Peace & Security Helpdesk

The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham, Researchers Without Borders and The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Reform, was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk.

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Abbreviations

AAH	Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq
AI	Artificial intelligence
AISSOT	Al-Iraqia Shipping Services and Oil Trading
AML	Anti-money laundering
ANND	Arab NGO Network for Development
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBI	Central Bank of Iraq
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CMC	Communications and Media Commission
COI	Country of Origin Information
CSO	Civil society organisation
CTC	Combating Terrorism Center
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
EPIC	Enabling Peace in Iraq Center
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GAPS	Gender Action for Peace and Security
GBV	Gender-based violence
GHRD	Global Human Rights Defence
GIWPS	Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
HMG	His Majesty's Government
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IAMG	Iranian-aligned militia group
ICCT	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
INAP	Iraq National Action Plan

INSM	Iraqi Network for Social Media
IOL	Investigator Organization for the Rule of Law
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
ISF	Integrated Security Fund
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JOSA	Jordan Open Source Association
KH	Kata'ib Hezbollah
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MENAFATF	Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NGOWG	NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control
OFSI	Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PFM	Public financial management
PMA	Popular Mobilisation Authority
PMF	Popular Mobilisation Forces
PSVI	Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative
SSR	Security sector reform
TFGBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States
USCIRF	United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WAAR	Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
XCEPT	Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends

Abstract

This study examines how gender shapes the ways hybrid actors in Iraq—particularly Iranian-aligned militia groups—generate, sustain, conceal and legitimise revenue and operational networks. Drawing on a desk-based review of open-source literature in English, Arabic and, to a limited extent, Kurdish, it analyses how gender affects access to financial resources, household and welfare dependency, institutional accountability, community legitimacy, digital coercion and civic space. The study finds that gender norms and inequalities influence how resources are controlled, how loyalty and compliance are maintained, and why reporting and oversight often fail. This matters because policies and programmes that overlook these dynamics may miss important financial flows, mechanisms of influence and opportunities for disruption. The study also identifies key evidence gaps for further research.

Introduction

The objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive, gender-informed analysis of how hybrid actors in Iraq generate, sustain, conceal, and legitimise revenue and operational networks, and how gender norms, roles, and inequalities shape:

- Participation in, facilitation of, or resistance to these networks
- Institutional vulnerabilities and safeguarding gaps
- Community level legitimacy, coercion, and compliance mechanisms
- The effectiveness of state and non-state responses.

For the purposes of this study, hybrid actors are groups that simultaneously operate within and alongside formal state structures — using legitimate political participation, public employment, and state resource allocation alongside coercion, illicit finance, and where relevant, violence to generate and protect their power. What makes them hybrid is the deliberate blurring of state and non-state, licit and illicit, formal and informal — occupying institutional positions that grant legal cover while operating outside state accountability.

Gender refers to the socially constructed norms, roles and expectations that differ for men, women, boys and girls within a social and cultural context. These roles are shaped by power relations, which influence who has access to resources, whose voices are heard and how insecurity is experienced. Gender considers the impacts of these different norms on all gender groups. Gender directly impacts the ways people experience insecurity **and is also a consistent factor in driving this insecurity**, and in shaping the actors and institutions engaged in it.

The report begins with an overview of the methodology for the study, setting out the scope, approach and limitations of the research. Following this the report establishes a conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding the gendered dynamics of hybrid threat networks and provides an overview of the political economy, institutional landscape and financial ecosystems in Iraq. The report then moves to the desk-based analysis of six thematic areas:

i. Gendered Political Economy of Hybrid Threats in Iraq;
ii. Financial and Operational Networks;
iii. Institutions, Accountability, and Safeguarding;
iv. Community Trust, Security, and Social Fabric;
v. Digital Frontiers and Diaspora; and
vi. the Co-optation of Civic and Women's Rights Movements.

Methodology

This study is a desk-based, open-source literature review and context analysis; no new primary data collection was undertaken. The analysis draws on Iraq-specific empirical and policy literature, theoretical frameworks spanning feminist political economy, hybrid threat theory, and WPS, and evidence from analogous contexts including Afghanistan, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria where transferability to Iraq's political economy and institutional landscape is clearly established and where regional dynamics shape the security situation in Iraq.

The analysis applies an intersectional feminist lens, attending to how ethnicity, religion, sect, and displacement status shape differentiated gendered experiences across Iraqi communities. It is conducted with conflict sensitivity throughout, ensuring that findings do not inadvertently reinforce harmful dynamics or expose individuals or organisations to risk.

Scope

Defining the scope of the research upfront ensures analytical focus and transparency about what the study covers, where it draws on external evidence, and the time period it reflects.

Geographic focus: Iraq, with attention to the governorates where Iranian-aligned militia group (IAMG) financial networks are best documented, such as, Basra and the south, Diyala, Kirkuk, Nineveh, and the Iran-Iraq border corridor, where oil diversion, smuggling, and border-economy control are concentrated (Knights, 2025a).[1] Regional dynamics (Iran, Lebanon, Syria) are drawn on only where a mechanism documented elsewhere helps explain Iraq's own hybrid networks, under the transferability test set out in the Methodology; comparative evidence comes principally from movements of the Iranian "Axis of Resistance," which share the PMF factions' sponsor, ideology, and gendered repertoire.

Thematic focus: Six thematic areas structure the research: the gendered political economy of hybrid threats in Iraq; the gendered composition and functioning of financial and operational networks; institutions, accountability, and safeguarding; community trust, social fabric, and cultural dynamics; digital frontiers and diaspora; and the co-optation of civic and women's rights movements by hybrid actors. These thematic areas were identified thorough a mapping of the literature and key emerging themes.

Temporal scope: Literature from 2003 onwards, with primary weight on post-2019 sources reflecting the post-protest political economy and the post-2021 Iraqi Security Forces-Popular Mobilisation Forces [al-Hashd al-Sha'bi] (ISF-PMF) institutional consolidation. Sources pre-dating these inflection points are used where they provide foundational theoretical grounding or unreplicated empirical documentation.

Sources and Confidence Criteria

The study draws on academic literature, policy and practitioner research, grey literature from credible institutional sources and open-source reporting. Sources are reviewed in both English and Arabic, enabling direct engagement with Arabic-language academic, policy, and investigative material that do not appear in English-language databases. Limited literature in the Kurdish-language is accessed only via translation tools. The information from all language sources were used to triangulate findings, no analytically meaningful difference was identified between the information or findings across different language sources. The majority of the academic, multilateral, and INGO/NGO literature was in English and Arabic. A small number of Kurdish-language sources were reviewed via translation tools and drawn on where the Kurdistan Region intersects directly with the study's subject — specifically the Region-origin people-smuggling economy and the contested control of the disputed territories. A full reference list is provided at the end of the report.

Sources are assessed against three criteria before inclusion: credibility of the producing institution or author; methodological transparency; and direct relevance to the research questions. Priority is given to sources that address the gendered dimensions of hybrid networks in Iraq or closely analogous contexts and provide empirical or theoretical grounding relevant to the analysis. Where evidence from analogous contexts is used, transferability to Iraq's specific political economy and institutional landscape is explicitly assessed and justified. Sources that are unattributed, unverifiable, or without applicability to Iraq's specific context are excluded.

All substantive claims are triangulated across at least two independent source types before being presented as findings. The following confidence levels are applied throughout:

- **Established**: supported by multiple independent sources with direct Iraq-specific evidence, or robust comparative evidence with well-documented applicability to the Iraqi context.
- **Inferred**: well-evidenced in analogous contexts; mechanism is theoretically consistent with Iraq's documented political economy, but direct Iraq-specific evidence is limited. Primary research is recommended to confirm.
- **Indicative**: analytically plausible and consistent with available evidence but empirical support is thin. Presented as a hypothesis for future research, not a basis for programme design.

Equally important to quality assurance is the research team's own geographic and subject matter expertise. The research team brings direct prior knowledge of Iraq and the wider region. This is grounded in field-based research, institutional engagement, and professional networks across the MENA civil society, policy, and security landscape, and is used throughout to sense-check findings, identify gaps, and validate analytical conclusions. Where the literature is thin or a finding is uncertain, the team draws on trusted professional networks for informal validation before reaching conclusions. Where the literature does not yet support a finding, this is stated explicitly together with a specification of what primary research would be needed to close the gap.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that readers should bear in mind when interpreting findings and recommendations.

The primary limitation is its desk-based scope. Findings on mechanisms that are by design invisible to open-source scrutiny carry inherently lower confidence, and community-level dynamics cannot be fully captured without primary fieldwork. The literature also reflects a systemic publication bias: the most sensitive dimensions of hybrid network finance are the least documented, meaning the gendered micro-level mechanisms most relevant to this research are precisely those least well evidenced in open-source material.

Language coverage presents a further constraint. While the research draws on sources in both English and Arabic, Kurdish-language material is accessed only via translation tools,[1] which may result in loss of nuance and underrepresentation of KRI-specific institutional documentation and civil society analysis. Sources in other languages spoken in Iraq — including Assyrian, Turkmen, and Yazidi — are not covered, meaning community-level perspectives from minority groups may be thin from the literature regardless of search effort. However, the experiences of minority communities are captured in some English, Arabic and Kurdish sources, meaning the exclusion of minority languages from the data collection does not necessarily result in the exclusion of minority communities experience. Because the factions under study operate primarily in Arabic, minority-language exclusion mainly limits community-internal perspective on minority women (Theme 4), not coverage of the core subject."

Finally, the rapidly evolving political and security context in Iraq means that some published literature may not reflect current network structures, particularly given recent shifts in PMF political positioning. Where sources are time-sensitive, this is noted and the confidence level assigned to findings reflects the currency of the underlying evidence.

Use of AI

In line with the WPS Helpdesk Research Protocol, the use of AI tools in this research is disclosed. AI assistance was used selectively to support the editing and readability of the researchers' own drafted text, including shortening, restructuring, and improving clarity.

All AI-assisted edits were reviewed and revised by the researcher. The analysis, argumentation, and all recommendations in this report are entirely the product of human authorship.

[1] Kurdish-language material was reviewed via translation tools and drawn on at the two points where the Kurdistan Region intersects most directly with the study's subject: the Region-origin people-smuggling economy and the contested control of the disputed territories.

Iraq’s political economy, institutional landscape and financial ecosystems

The formal structural conditions in Iraq do not merely provide the backdrop against which hybrid networks operate — they are the conditions that make hybrid network finance possible. Understanding these conditions through a gender lens is necessary to give a clear contextual grounding to the study.

Iraq is a rentier state in which the oil sector accounts for roughly 90 per cent of government revenue and remains overwhelmingly dominant in the country’s exports (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026).[2] This concentration produces a specific political economy: the state's primary function is not to extract value from its population through taxation but to distribute oil rents through public employment, welfare provision, and subsidised services. The consequences of this model for governance, accountability, and gender are structural and mutually reinforcing. A third of Iraqis assess corruption as the most important challenge facing the country, with governance weaknesses penetrating tax, customs, procurement, banking oversight, and extractive industries — particularly oil and electricity — facilitating rent-seeking at every level of the state (IMF, 2025).[3] When oil revenues are high, the state can absorb the costs of inflated public payrolls and patronage networks without fiscal crisis, removing political incentives for reform. When revenues fall, austerity targets public investment rather than the security sector wage bill, which consumed more than 60 per cent of the 2024 federal budget (Knights and Malik, 2025).[4] Currently, the regional context is contributing to sharp volatility in oil prices and disruptions to Iraq’s oil production and exports, increasing the country’s economic and fiscal vulnerability (World Bank, 2026).[5] These pressures are likely to affect women disproportionately, particularly those responsible for managing household welfare in a context of chronic under-provision of state services, as they absorb the effects of service deterioration and austerity in ways that are economically significant but often poorly captured in conventional fiscal analysis.

The *Muhasasa* system — Iraq's post-2003 informal sectarian quota arrangement allocating government positions and state resources among Shia Arab, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish communities — translates this rentier dynamic into a governance architecture that is structurally resistant to accountability (Palani, 2026; EPIC, 2025).[6] [7] The 2025 elections produced a familiar outcome: a fragmented parliament where the same political elite that has dominated since 2005 spent months negotiating a government of national consensus, dividing ministries and resources as quotas among dominant ethno-sectarian blocs and treating powerful portfolios as personal fiefdoms (EPIC, 2025).[8] The *Muhasasa* system is not merely a governance failure — it is, for hybrid actors, a governance opportunity. PMF-aligned factions have used the logic of communal apportionment to secure ministerial positions, security service appointments, and provincial council control that give them simultaneous access to state revenue, procurement contracts, and the regulatory bodies nominally responsible for overseeing them. The gender dimension of this institutional architecture is direct: the bodies formally responsible for registering women's civil society organisations, enforcing GBV protections, and implementing gender

equality policy are allocated through the same system that distributes institutional power to PMF-aligned actors with structural incentives to obstruct those functions.

Iraq's financial ecosystem reflects and amplifies these political economy dynamics. The banking sector is structurally oriented toward informal value transfer and sanctions evasion rather than financial intermediation for households and small enterprises. Of Iraq's 44 private banks, 34 are under US sanctions, leaving only ten lenders with full access to the dollar system, while regional analysts estimate that Iraq facilitates approximately $300 million of Iranian capital per day, with many lenders handling the payroll, supplies, and financial transactions of Iran-backed paramilitary groups (Roubanis and Khalkhali, 2025).[9] The Central Bank of Iraq's daily dollar auction — through which commercial banks access hard currency — has been the primary mechanism through which Iran sources dollars to circumvent sanctions, generating a serial US-led crackdown that has banned banks in successive waves since 2023 without resolving the underlying architecture of exchange houses, front companies, and informal networks through which sanctioned flows continue to move.

For women, the practical consequence of this banking landscape is near-total exclusion from formal financial services. As of 2024, women's account ownership at a financial institution or through a mobile-money-service provider stood at approximately 19 per cent in Iraq—less than one-fifth of the female adult population—compared with approximately 41 per cent for men (World Bank Global Findex, 2024),[2] with the gender gap widening rather than closing as digitalisation proceeds[10] (Norris and Sharma, 2026).[11] For the majority of Iraqi women, *Hawala* — an informal money transfer system that operates through networks of brokers rather than formal banks — and informal transfer systems are not an illicit alternative to formal banking but the primary means through which households access and move money. This structural informality — a direct product of the banking sector's political capture — is simultaneously a condition of women's economic marginalisation and a concealment environment for hybrid financial flows, as documented in the conceptual framework above.

[2] Digitalisation has not closed the gap because Iraq's account growth was driven almost entirely by pension payments that reached men far more than women — women's account ownership rose just four points against men's nineteen.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding how hybrid actors in Iraq — primarily, though not exclusively, Iranian-aligned militia groups operating within and through the PMF framework — generate, move, and conceal money, and how gender shapes all of that, requires more than mapping transactions and designated entities. The financial and operational networks this study examines are deliberately structured to be invisible to conventional analysis: they operate through traditionally perceived female domains such as households, welfare systems, community institutions, and captured state bodies, not only through the formal financial flows that sanctions and counter-threat finance tools are designed to detect. Getting the analysis right requires analytical tools calibrated to that reality.

The three frameworks set out below — drawn from hybrid threat finance, feminist political economy, and Women, Peace and Security scholarship — provide the analytical architecture for that tracing. Taken together, they allow the study to see what a purely security-focused or financial intelligence approach would miss. Each framework is chosen not for theoretical completeness but because it answers a specific question that the research cannot answer without it, and each builds on the one before it.

1

Hybrid Threat Finance and Institutional Capture

This theoretical framework focuses on **hybrid threat finance and institutional capture** concepts. Hybrid threat finance and institutional governance, examined through a gendered lens, answers the question: how do hybrid actors generate, protect, and legitimise revenue — and, as above, how does gender shape who participates in, benefits from, and is made vulnerable by that financial architecture?

Applied to Iraq's PMF-aligned networks, hybrid threat finance theory reveals a financial architecture in which the boundaries between licit and illicit, state and non-state, formal and informal are deliberately blurred — and in which gender shapes who bears the costs and risks of that blurring.

State

The most visible layer of PMF finance — and the one most amenable to conventional counter-threat finance tools — is state budget capture. The PMF's official force size surged by 95 per cent in the 2023 budget, from 122,000 to 238,000 personnel—slots that are almost certainly partly fictitious—inflating its payroll so that its budget surpassed $3.4 billion in 2024 (Knights and Malik, 2025).[12] Salaries are disbursed through the state bank Rafidain, creating household-level financial flows that function as patronage instruments and generate dependency that, over time, narrows the practical ability of

affiliated families to exit the network without significant financial cost. This is not always experienced as coercion; for many households with limited alternatives, PMF employment is a rational economic choice. But it is a choice made within a system deliberately designed to foreclose alternatives (Knights & Malik, 2025).[13] Salaries are disbursed through the state bank Rafidain, creating household-level financial flows that function as patronage instruments — generating dependency that, over time, narrows the practical ability of affiliated families to exit the network without significant financial cost. This is not always experienced as coercion; for many households with limited alternatives, PMF employment is a rational economic choice. But it is a choice made within a system deliberately designed to foreclose alternatives.

Commercial level

Alongside state budget capture, PMF-aligned factions have built a parallel commercial economy. *Kata'ib Hezbollah* established *Muhandis General Company* as the PMF's economic conglomerate, using sub-contracting to divert Iraqi government contract revenues to militia operations (U.S. Treasury, 2025a);[14] *Baladna Agricultural Investments* was sanctioned as a commercial front for *Muhandis General Company*, used to mask illicit financial and logistical support for Iran-backed militias — both designated by US Treasury OFAC in October 2025.

The gendered dimension of this commercial layer remains underdocumented in the open-source literature. The broader comparative literature on armed non-state actors establishes that women's participation in clandestine, logistical, and support roles is a structural feature of rebel organisations across ideological traditions, and recognises that much of the work of women in such organisations is unaccounted for as it is either deliberately hidden or overlooked (Loken and Matfess, 2024).[15] The strategic logic behind this pattern — that groups deliberately deploy women in these roles because gendered assumptions render them less credible as threats to enforcement bodies — is documented across contexts including Palestinian, Indonesian, and Pakistani groups (Alexander, 2019).[16] Whether this structural dynamic operates within PMF-linked networks in Iraq — where women's welfare and charity roles provide similar operational cover — is a primary research question this study identifies but cannot confirm from open-source evidence alone.

Informal level

Iraq's political economy establishes the structural conditions within which PMF-aligned networks financial architecture operates. Female labour force participation stood at 10.8 per cent in 2024 — against a global average of 51.13 per cent, one of the lowest rates in the world — with domestic labour, housekeeping, and caregiving continuing to be seen as exclusively women's responsibility regardless of employment status (World Bank/ILO, 2024; UNDP/IMPACT, 2022). [17] [18] The household and community economies sustained by women's labour — caregiving, welfare management, community maintenance — are central to Iraq's economic life, not peripheral to it. Hybrid actors have deliberately embedded themselves within these economies precisely because they are where life is sustained and where people are most dependent on whoever controls access to resources and services.

Mansour's (2021)[19] fieldwork across central and southern Iraq found that most residents, whether supportive or critical of the PMF, acknowledged its networks as key to accessing public services and

resolving everyday problems — through welfare provision, employment patronage, service delivery, and religious networks. This embeddedness has deepened since 2021: the PMF secured 101 of 285 seats in the December 2023 provincial elections, giving it control over governorate councils with extensive budgets and influence over local services (Alaaldin, 2025),[20] while the absence of financial accountability - across the whole system, not specific to PMF - has allowed its factions to establish patronage networks that have significantly influenced electoral outcomes and sustained political power (Hasan and Ahmad, 2025).[21] *Hawala* and other informal value transfer systems are not an illicit alternative to legitimate banking in Iraq but the primary means through which large segments of the population — particularly women, who are disproportionately excluded from the formal financial sector — access and move money. This structural informality creates a concealment environment in which PMF-linked flows are genuinely difficult to distinguish from legitimate household and community activity without community-level intelligence. For example, FATF/MENAFATF[22] mutual evaluation found that Iraq did not have sufficient understanding of how funds are moved and how sectoral vulnerabilities were being exploited in relation to terrorist financing risks beyond ISIL.

It is at this intersection of informal finance, welfare provision, and household economies — where hybrid actors have deliberately cultivated dependency and where coercive compliance is most effectively enforced without visibility — that conventional counter-threat finance tools are blind by design: sanctions designations, beneficial ownership analysis, and transaction monitoring are calibrated to detect formal financial flows, registered entities, and identifiable transactions, not the economic activity that flows through women's labour, households, and community institutions.

Institutional capture

Institutional capture deepens all of these dynamics simultaneously and adds a specifically gendered accountability deficit. Although the Finance Ministry publishes monthly expenditure reports covering other state institutions, PMF spending remains notably absent, with no accurate personnel records and no effective auditing — an opacity that is structural and deliberate. This absence of financial accountability has allowed PMF factions to establish extensive patronage networks that have significantly influenced electoral outcomes and sustained political power.

The institutions formally responsible for financial oversight, GBV accountability, and women's civil society regulation are themselves penetrated by actors with structural incentives to obstruct those functions. The result is a financial architecture that is simultaneously sustained by gendered dependency, concealed by gendered informality, and shielded from accountability by the institutional capture of the bodies that would otherwise make it visible.

A further gendered dimension of institutional capture operates through employment patronage. Women in Iraq are concentrated in public-sector education and services, which PMF groups have partly captured for patronage, raising the possibility that women may become disproportionately dependent on PMF-controlled hiring (IOM, 2024; Mansour, 2021). [23] [24] Whether this creates specifically gendered patterns of dependency remains a primary research question that this study identifies but cannot resolve from open-source evidence alone. It is, however, analytically consistent with Iraq's structural conditions.

2

Feminist Political Economy and Social Reproduction

This theoretical framework focuses on **feminist political economy and social reproduction** concepts. The hybrid threat finance framework above, establishes what the hybrid actors' financial architecture potentially looks like from the outside; what it cannot explain is why a significant layer of that architecture remains structurally invisible to the conventional tools designed to detect it, nor does it provide the analytical instruments to map that layer.

Feminist political economy and social reproduction theory answers the question: what analytical tools do we need to map the gendered layer of hybrid finance that conventional approaches cannot reach? The problem is not that women perform domestic and care roles — many do so by choice and with dignity. The problem is that hybrid actors deliberately exploit those roles as financial and operational resources, while coercive governance structures deny women the economic independence, legal protection, and institutional recourse that would make that exploitation visible and resistible. Welfare distribution, household finance management, charitable logistics, and care obligations sit within this exploitable space.

Theoretical approaches

Feminist political economy challenges conventional economic analysis by insisting that markets, institutions, and financial flows cannot be understood without attending to how gender structures access to resources, labour, and power (Rai and Waylen, 2014; Elias and Rai, 2019). [25] [26] It does so by ensuring analysis moves beyond only engaging with formally measured, market-based economic and insisting that the unpaid, informal, and community-based work that sustains households, communities, and social institutions is itself economically constitutive and structural (Mezzadri, Newman and Stevano, 2022; Rai and Waylen, 2014).[27] [28] Feminist analysis enables engagement with the cultural gendered dynamics of the context as central components shaping the political economy. Applied here, this means that the invisibility of a significant layer of PMF financial activity to conventional counter-threat finance tools is not a gap in intelligence coverage that better data collection could fill — it is a structural feature of how those tools are designed.

Social reproduction theory is chosen because the networks examined here operate deliberately within exactly this layer — the household, care, and community economies — so a framework built to treat that sphere as economically constitutive is what makes their activity visible. Social reproduction encompasses the full range of practices sustaining life and labour: unpaid household production, caregiving, biological reproduction, the maintenance of community relationships, and the continuum of paid and unpaid work that co-constitutes everyday economic life (Elias and Rai, 2019; Mezzadri, Newman & Stevano, 2022).[29] [30] The PMF's deep roots in local household and community economies are what allow it to extract money, enforce loyalty, and hide its activities from formal oversight. Social reproduction work is overwhelmingly performed by women in Iraq, is largely invisible to formal economic measurement, and is precisely the kind of activity that hybrid actors can exploit without it appearing in

financial intelligence. When a woman runs logistics for a PMF-linked charity, manages household finances that include a fighter's salary, or acts as a conduit for welfare payments to affiliated families, she is performing labour with real financial value to the network — labour that the integrated feminist political economy and social reproduction lens makes visible as an economic and security phenomenon precisely because it looks, to conventional analysis, like nothing more than ordinary domestic life.

Social reproduction theory provides the specific analytical tools to make this visible as an economic and security phenomenon: tracing how hybrid actors extract value from unpaid and informal labour without consent or recognition; how economic dependency — created through welfare capture and denial of independent opportunity — is weaponised to enforce compliance; and how household economies are used as financial resources and concealment strategies by exploiting the structural invisibility that coercive governance imposes on women's economic activity. Without this framework, identifying what hybrid networks extract from gendered social structures — and therefore what disrupting those networks would actually require — is not possible.

This theoretical approach enables the visibility of a dynamic that is fully operational in Iraq but absent from existing counter-threat finance analysis: the social reproductive labour of women — in PMF-affiliated households, in displaced communities, in welfare-dependent networks — is simultaneously a financial resource, a compliance mechanism, and a concealment strategy. It is financial because it subsidises network operations at no formal cost. It is a compliance mechanism because women's economic dependency on PMF-linked welfare and employment makes exit from the network financially catastrophic. And it is a concealment strategy because the patriarchal coding of this labour as domestic and non-economic renders it invisible to the sanctions' designations, transaction monitoring, and beneficial ownership analysis on which conventional counter-threat finance tools depend.

Feminist political economy and social reproduction in practice

Returning to the hybrid architecture mapped above, the feminist political economy lens makes visible what the earlier analysis could only note in passing: that the welfare and patronage systems through which PMF networks generate household dependency are likely to operate significantly through women. As primary managers of household welfare in a context of chronic under-provision of state services, many women are likely to be among the first points of contact with PMF-linked charities, food-distribution networks and religious welfare systems, and may therefore be drawn into the dependency relationships those systems generate (Mansour, 2021). [31] This is not incidental. It is the mechanism through which PMF networks embed financial dependency most deeply and most invisibly, precisely because it operates through women's socially coded domestic roles rather than through formal employment or commercial relationships that would be legible to conventional financial oversight.

Two dynamics from adjacent contexts sharpen this analysis for the Iraqi case. Abdi's (2025)[32] study of Iran under sanctions shows how, under conditions of economic crisis, the state simultaneously mobilises and makes invisible women's reproductive and productive labour — exploiting feminised informality as a governance and survival resource while reinforcing patriarchal ideologies that code that labour as domestic and non-economic, rendering it structurally invisible to formal economic

measurement and policy.[3] Gopal and Lupo's (2025)[33] research with *Rohingya* refugees in India and Syrian refugees in Turkey shows that that in conflict and displacement settings, the everyday work of sustaining life — feeding families, maintaining community bonds, managing household survival, which falls overwhelmingly on women — becomes a site of control. State and non-state actors simultaneously rely on it, exploit it, and obstruct it as a way of consolidating power over displaced communities - they are precisely the layer of economic life that hawala-linked financial networks, people-smuggling systems, and coercive militia reach, penetrate, and exploit. This is particularly relevant to the case of Iraq given the continued displacement of *Yazidi* and other minority communities within the country, with women and children identified as priority groups in efforts towards sustainable, voluntary and dignified return. Many displaced *Yazidis* and Christians nevertheless remain unable or reluctant to return to *Sinjar*, *Mosul* and the *Nineveh* Plains because of insecurity, militia intimidation and continuing PMF-linked pressure (OHCHR, 2026;[34] USCIRF, 2025).[35] *Hawala*-linked people-smuggling networks operating from the Kurdistan Region through Turkey and into Europe are documented and operational — the UK government's July 2025 sanctions under its new people-smuggling regime targeted Iraqi hawala operators specifically facilitating these transnational financial flows (FCDO, 2025).[36]

The institutional-capture layer of the hybrid architecture also carries a specifically gendered dimension. The same opacity that shields PMF financial flows from audit may also shield PMF-aligned actors from accountability for the gendered coercion through which those networks are sustained. The suppression of women who resist network dependency, the targeting of female activists and journalists who document abuses, and the obstruction of GBV reporting mechanisms and women's civil society activity are therefore not merely parallel governance failures; they may also help preserve the institutional conditions in which opaque financial networks operate (GIWPS , 2026a; HRW, 2025b). [37] [38] Financial concealment and the suppression of women's accountability mechanisms are mutually constitutive: each sustains the other. Without the feminist political economy lens, this connection — between institutional capture as a financial strategy and the gendered coercion it depends upon — remains invisible to counter-threat finance analysis.

3

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework

This theoretical framework focuses on **Women, Peace and Security** concepts. Addressing how hybrid actors' revenue and operational networks interact with gender requires a conceptual framework that examines gender both as a driver of insecurity and as a factor shaping its impacts: gender roles shape power relations, how insecurity is experienced and whose voices are heard in security decisions.

[3] Given the well-documented ideological and organisational links between Iran's revolutionary governance architecture and PMF factions, the dynamics identified by Abdi in Iran offer an analytically relevant, though not directly equivalent, lens for examining how feminised informality may operate within Iraq's hybrid network economy.

The WPS agenda, established through a series of UN Security Council resolutions recognising the disproportionate effects of conflict and insecurity on women and girls, as well as women's roles in preventing and responding to conflict, encourages an understanding of security landscapes centred on human and gender security.

Women, Peace and Security frameworks answer the question: how do hybrid actors actively exploit and suppress gender-equality agendas. WPS frameworks are not only a normative translation layer; they also provide conceptual and analytical tools for examining the role of gender in such networks. This includes analysing how hybrid actors co-opt women's organisations, instrumentalise gender narratives for legitimacy and recruitment, and systematically obstruct gender-equality and GBV accountability mechanisms that might otherwise generate pressure against their networks. This is analytically distinct from mapping financial flows or social reproduction: it addresses the deliberate weaponisation of gender as a governance strategy.

Human security challenges narrow, state-centred and militarised understandings of security by broadening attention to whose security is at stake and by placing individuals and communities, rather than only the state, among the principal referents of security (Hudson, 2009).[39] Feminist security approaches extend this analysis by examining how gendered power relations shape experiences of security and insecurity, and by drawing attention to perspectives and everyday experiences that conventional security frameworks often overlook (Wibben, 2011; Enloe, 2014).[40] [41] Such approaches therefore help reveal how apparently ordinary social and institutional arrangements may reproduce gendered inequalities and forms of insecurity.

A human- and gender-security lens reframes how hybrid actors engage with gender-equality agendas, exposing dynamics that traditional security or governance frameworks may overlook. It reveals how gender equality can become a political resource, helps identify who shapes gendered experiences of security beyond the state, and explains why hybrid actors may instrumentalise gender and how their behaviour is shaped by local power bargains, legitimacy needs and communities' experiences of security and insecurity. WPS-informed approaches provide normative frameworks that centre the safety of women, men, girls and boys as an objective in itself. They help protect rights and equality that may be sidelined in state-centred models of security but that ultimately contribute to both human and state security, as explored throughout this report.

A starting point for this framework is the UK and Iraq's WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), which set out both countries' understandings of and approaches to Women, Peace and Security. As established in the introduction to this report, the UK WPS NAP 2023–2027 recognises the role of gender in transnational threats through Strategic Objective 5 (FCDO and MOD, 2023)[42] recognises the role of gender in transnational threats through Strategic Objective 5. Although the NAP does not explicitly name hybrid actors or illicit networks, its increased emphasis on transnational threats, hostile actors and non-state actors operating in digital and physical spaces and across governance boundaries provides a basis for understanding gendered harms as emerging within a complex, networked political order.

The Iraq WPS NAP (2025-2030) (Iraq Women Empowerment Directorate, 2025)[43] directly incorporates the institutions that constitute Iraq's hybrid security order, including the Popular Mobilisation Authority (PMA), as responsible for the implementation of the NAP, formally embedding hybrid security actors into WPS governance and recognising the role they play in shaping women's (in)security. The NAP recognises the function of illicit financial and operational networks, addressing their effects indirectly through topics such as counter-extremism and early warning without explicitly naming them, indicating the political sensitivities of explicitly engaging with such networks that play a significant role in Iraq's economy. The NAP explicitly recognises the disproportionate and unequal impact of conflicts on women and girls compared to men and acknowledges the unique experiences and capabilities of women as active agents in achieving peace and preventing armed conflicts and recognises the role of civil society as key partners in implementing Iraq's WPS NAP.

This approach provides analytical tools for examining how hybrid actors co-opt women's organisations, instrumentalise gender narratives for legitimacy and recruitment, use gender inequality as a source of destabilisation and conditionality, and obstruct gender-equality and GBV accountability mechanisms that might otherwise generate pressure against their networks. PMF-aligned militias have monitored and harassed activists on social media within Iraq through disinformation, direct threats and other forms of intimidation, while activists who have fled the country have reported continuing threats against themselves and their families (United States Department of State, 2025; Freedom House, 2024). [44] [45] This digital harassment has a specifically gendered character: women activists may be targeted through the circulation of personal information and photographs, alongside threats of sexual violence, reputational harm and assassination—a form of coercion that functions simultaneously as a silencing mechanism and a means of restricting women's public participation (EUAA, 2024).[46]

Both the UK and Iraq recognise the role gender plays in relation to the operations of hybrid networks, and identify GBV, participation and civil society as key areas of WPS implementation - gendered violence in Iraq is shaped not only by social norms but by the authority exercised by hybrid actors, women's participation has the potential to be both a strategic response to countering illicit networks activities and a strategy used by said networks to operate with impunity, and civil society plays a central role when formal state institutions cannot regulate hybrid actors or disrupt illicit actors alone, yet are also used as a cover for such actors' activities. Taking a human and gender security analytical lens will enable an exploration of the complex layers of security at the individual, community, state and regional level, and how they interact, in order to make visible the gendered components driving hybrid actors' activities through illicit financial and operational networks, and their gendered impacts.

Findings

The findings below are organised by theme. Together, the six themes trace how household political economy, institutions, community relationships, digital ecosystems, and civic space interact to sustain or constrain hybrid actors. Throughout, the analysis distinguishes between established evidence, analytical inference, and evidence gaps requiring further research.

1

Gendered Political Economy of Hybrid Threats in Iraq

This theme covers how gender shapes the money that sustains hybrid actors in Iraq — principally the PMF factions. The findings of the theme are premised on the reality that economic dependency operates not only at the level of individuals but also at the level of households as PMF salaries and martyr-family welfare are paid through and controlled by men. Because the whole household's security rests on a man's continued affiliation, the cost of leaving falls on everyone, including those who never chose membership and cannot end it. This is termed here as a household lock-in: economic dependency that makes militia-linked patronage far harder to exit than an ordinary wage would be, and that gives armed actors a low-cost way to keep support networks loyal and convert state resources into political influence. The findings trace how this lock-in is built, layer by layer, through exclusion, dependency, to coercion. Together, these findings establish the household-level financial architecture on which the institutional, community, and digital dynamics examined in Themes 2–5 are built. The practical implication is that women's financial inclusion in Iraq is a counter-illicit-finance and stabilisation interest, not simply a WPS add-on: every point where women gain independent access to money — accounts, property, entitlements — is a point where the lock-in loosens and informal flows become more visible.

Two cautions apply throughout. First, how money is actually managed inside PMF-affiliated households is not yet directly evidenced in Iraqi field data. Second, the mechanism is convenient for militia-linked actors whether or not any law or payment system was designed to produce it—the findings point to structural convenience rather than coordinated intent.

1.1 Women's exclusion from formal banking contributes to the invisibility of informal financial flows

- Women's account ownership stood at roughly 19% in 2024 against 41% for men; the gap more than tripled, from 7 to 22 percentage points, as government payments — principally pensions — were digitised without proportionate inclusion of women (Norris and Sharma, 2026).[47] (Established)

- Female labour-force participation is around 11%, among the lowest globally; female unemployment is 30%, more than twice the male rate (World Bank, 2025).[48] (Established)
- The formal sector also faces structural constraints. Thirty-four of Iraq's 44 private banks are under US sanctions, and the Central Bank dollar auction has channelled Iranian capital flows of roughly US$300 million per day (Roubanis and Kha;khali, 2025).[49] (Established)
- Because many women rely on informal financial channels, PMF-linked financial flows moving through the same mechanisms—including welfare payments, salaries, and donations—become difficult to distinguish from legitimate household transactions without community-level intelligence. (Inferred – analytical implication of convergent structural evidence)
- The Central Bank of Iraq (CBI)'s National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2025–2029) identifies women as a priority group and aims to increase women's account ownership to 50% (CBI, 2025). [50] (Established)

1.2 PMF salaries flow primarily to men, creating a household 'lock-in' that reinforces dependency, compliance, and financial exclusion

- PMF pay runs through the Qi Card system via state-owned Rafidain and Rasheed banks, almost entirely into male-held accounts; women's account ownership rose only 4 percentage points against men's 19 during salary domiciliation (Mansour, 2021;[51] Norris and Sharma, 2026).[52] (Established)
- Women access these flows only as mediated cash in households where men control financial decisions (World Vision Iraq, 2022). [53] (Established at country level; household financial dynamics within PMF-affiliated families remain unevidenced)
- The 2025 salary freeze demonstrated the lock-in: the cost of disaffiliation falls on whole households, including members who never chose affiliation and cannot end it. In June 2025, US Treasury warnings led Qi Card and Rafidain Bank to halt disbursement, leaving over 200,000 PMF personnel — and their households — without pay for two weeks, the first such disruption since the force's formal recognition in 2016. The institutional response was a move toward less traceable channels: payroll shifted to Al-Nahrain Bank, and senior PMF figures publicly urged reversion to manual cash disbursement (The New Arab, 2025; The New Region, 2025). [54] [55] (Established at institutional level; household-level effects unevidenced)
- The martyr-welfare apparatus funded from the same federal budget is a documented diversion channel: over US$760 million siphoned from the Martyrs Foundation's Anbar office (Amwaj.media, 2024).[56] (Established)
- The PMF's unaudited US$3.4 billion budget covers some 238,000 positions without verifiable state records, up 95% in one budget cycle, some almost certainly fictitious (Mansour, 2025; Malik & Knights, 2025) [57] [58]. (Established)
- Household dependency may extend to political behaviour, folding women's votes into male-brokered blocs (Al Majalla, 2025).[59] (Indicative)

- Anti-money laundering measures and sanctions-driven de-risking restricts access for higher-risk clients (U.S. Treasury, 2023);[60] The June 2025 salary freeze suggests that these pressures can displace household and welfare payments into less traceable channels. Whether this also increases the likelihood that financially excluded women are used as intermediaries or nominees remains untested. (Inferred)

1.3 The 2025 family-law changes convert women's dependency from social condition into legal structure

- The February 2025 Personal Status Law amendment enabled sect-specific regimes; the Ja'afari Personal Status Code was approved 27 August 2025 and published in the Official Gazette on 6 October 2025. (Established — verified against Iraq's Ministry of Justice's Official Gazette No. 4843, 2025)[61]
- At the point of marriage, a couple may choose whether the 1959 Personal Status Law or the sect-specific Ja'afari Code governs their marriage, divorce, children, and inheritance; this choice cannot later be reversed (HRW, 2025b).[62] (Established)
- Separately, a husband may convert an existing marriage to the Ja'afari Code without his wife's consent or knowledge (HRW, 2026).[63] (Established)
- Article 314 bars a wife from inheriting her husband's land — " either in kind or in value" — and limits her to assessed cash value for fixtures, which heirs may discharge in cash; Article 307 sets her share at one-eighth with children, one-quarter without — half the husband's reciprocal share. (Established — primary statute)
- The effect is to concentrate immovable, collateralisable assets in male-controlled structures and to close one of the few legal exits from the dependency described in Finding 1.2 (Equality Now, 2026).[64] The gender asymmetry is explicit in the legislation; its interaction with PMF-linked dependency structures is an analytical inference rather than evidence of coordination. (Established legal effect; Inferred relationship to household dependency)
- The reform was driven by Shia Islamist blocs within the Coordination Framework, which also contains the PMF's electoral wing; the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has warned that enabling Article 41 of the Constitution is inconsistent with Iraq's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Republic of Iraq, 2024).[65] (Established)

1.4 Border and port economies rely on family coercion, with an inferred gendered dimension

- PMF factions control the border-crossing economy at Umm Qasr, Khor al-Zubayr and the Iran–Iraq corridor; bribery and extortion are routine, and forces threaten the families of non-compliant port workers, including the state-employed '*Mukhalles'*, middlemen employed by the state to oversee import and export activities. Bribing and extorting Mukhalles and other customs officials removes practically all official barriers to criminal actors' operations, allowing them to forge

documents, hold up shipments, and smuggle contraband with near impunity (Sudetic and Dempsey, 2021).[66] (Established)

- The Al-Iraqia Shipping Services & Oil Trading (AISSOT) scheme at Khor al-Zubayr generated an estimated annual loss of US$250 million to the state. Officials who challenged the scheme reportedly received death threats from AAH, and the system expanded again from 2022 (Knights, 2025a).[67] (Established)
- U.S. Treasury designations (2025a; 2026) [68] [69] confirm the oil-blending and smuggling network, naming VS Oil Terminal (Salim Ahmed Said), a Deputy Oil Minister, and senior AAH and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada figures. These networks operate through kinship and tribal structures in which compliance is enforced at the level of the family; in Iraq's honour-based context, that coercion draws particular force from the vulnerability of female relatives, making women a pressure-point of the enforcement mechanism even where they play no operational role (Finding 1.4). (Gendered coercion mechanism Inferred)
- Smuggling extends beyond oil. Iraq's Interior Ministry reports that members of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (Nujaba), and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) use PMF identity cards and PMF-marked vehicles to move Captagon through official Syria–Iraq crossings; factions charge passage fees by shipment size, and checkpoint control makes the border economy a key conduit for the Captagon and methamphetamine trades (UNODC 2024; Sims, Ruiz and Krohley, 2024).[70] [71] Because these flows run on the same family and tribal networks, reducing women's exposure to family-directed coercion — and building reporting and protection channels women can actually use — targets the compliance mechanism the smuggling relies on, a gendered entry point conventional counter-threat-finance misses. Whether women also participate as couriers or nominees is undocumented and a priority research gap (Evidence Gap 3B). (Established for narcotics facilitation; scale estimates and gendered participation Indicative) Arms smuggling and human trafficking with PMF-linked facilitation are also reported (Adal and Fares, 2023).[72] (Established for facilitation of narcotics flows; scale estimates Indicative)
- The border economy runs on kinship and tribal networks, with militia checkpoints as de facto tax points; most lost oil revenue reaches PMF-aligned, Iran-backed militias (Adal and Fares, 2023; The National, 2026).[73] [74] (Established)
- Within Iraq's honour-based social context, threats directed at families plausibly derive additional coercive force from the vulnerability of female family members, consistent with documented honour-based coercion (Abed, 2020).[75] Whether this mechanism operates within border economies, or whether women participate as couriers, nominees, or intermediaries, remains undocumented. (Inferred)
- This same inference extends to the contested border and checkpoint economies of the disputed territories, where PMF-linked and Kurdish forces compete for control of oil, customs, and smuggling revenue; the honour-based coercion mechanism would operate there on the same logic, though it is equally undocumented in that setting (Kurdistan Islamic Union, 2017).[76]

1.5 Care obligations become mechanisms of attachment within the state–PMF welfare architecture, drawing on a model associated with Hezbollah

- The Martyrs' Foundation provides pensions, housing, tax benefits, scholarships and welfare; under PMF Law No. 57 (2016)[77] PMF fighters killed in action are state martyrs, so their families — overwhelmingly managed by women — receive this welfare. (Established — official sources)
- Martyr families, including PMF martyr families, hold a statutory 15% quota of public-sector job grades, applied provincially and conditional on Foundation documentation (Karbala Governorate, 2025).[78] (Established)
- The quota attaches to the fighter's status rather than the recipient's, but it extends household dependency by linking widows' and mothers' access to employment opportunities to the continued recognition of the fighter's affiliation, broadening financial dependency into longer-term social and economic attachment. (Inferred)
- The architecture resembles Iranian-origin welfare systems associated with Hezbollah, whose Women's Organisations Unit (Al-Annan, 2022)[79] runs ideological education, welfare and fundraising by its own account (Alaadin, 2024).[80] (Established for the comparator)
- No equivalent women's welfare or mobilisation structure has been documented within PMF factions such as AAH, KH, or Badr in either the English- or Arabic-language open-source literature reviewed. This remains an evidence gap rather than evidence of absence.

2

Financial and Operational Networks

Building on the household lock-in identified in above, this theme examines a narrower question than the money-flow architecture: within the financial and operational networks that sustain hybrid actors in Iraq—principally the PMF and its affiliated factions—what roles do women actually occupy? Building on the household lock-in established in Theme 1, this theme asks whether women are visible inside the wider networks sustained by that dependency, or whether their roles remain obscured by the way existing evidence is produced.[81]

Two largely disconnected bodies of literature address the issue from different directions. Research on gender documents women's participation across Iraqi political, religious, welfare, and community, and even economic life; but rarely examines hybrid finance. Conversely, threat-finance and security literature maps PMF financial and operational networks in considerable detail but is almost entirely gender-blind. Bringing these literatures together it is possible to identify the principal implication that hybrid resilience depends not only on financial transactions but also on the social, welfare, and community relationships that sustain legitimacy and discourage scrutiny. The principle implication is that intervention should therefore look beyond known financial actors to the wider social environment, however women's involvement in community and welfare activities should be assumed legitimate unless evidenced otherwise and any possible links to illicit finance should be treated as information gaps that need further research, not assumptions. The feminist political economy perspective presented here is used as an analytical framework for identifying possible mechanisms of support, legitimacy, and compliance, not as proof that women knowingly participate in illicit financial networks.

2.1 Women's documented participation is in community, welfare, religious, and electoral-political life; their roles within hybrid financial and operational networks are unexamined in the literature

- The PMF operates as a networked security actor formally incorporated into the Iraqi state since 2016, while maintaining overlapping political, military, and economic structures that continue to evolve (Mansour, 2021).[82] (Established — context)
- A six-month AFP investigation — drawing on Iraqi customs officials, importers, and then-Finance Minister Ali Allawi — describes political parties and paramilitary groups dividing control of Iraq's land and sea crossings and diverting most customs revenue from the state (AFP, 2021).[83] (Established)
- US enforcement has targeted the same networks, from a 2020 designation of an Umm Qasr shipping company used to evade inspection to subsequent oil-sector sanctions. These designations were issued within the declared maximum-pressure campaign and therefore establish that sanctions were imposed rather than proving the underlying conduct (U.S. Treasury, 2026).[84] (Established that designations occurred; underlying conduct alleged, not adjudicated)

- Analysts extend the PMF's financial footprint beyond customs to border tolls, oil-field control, and protection arrangements (Al-Aloosy, 2022).[85] (Established — characterisation)
- No women are identified among the publicly documented operators of PMF-linked financial networks. The available evidence therefore shows that documented operators are overwhelmingly male, without supporting the stronger conclusion that these networks are exclusively male. (Established)
- The gender literature documents women's participation in three fields adjacent to the PMF's social base:
    - electoral and political life—including candidacy, voter mobilisation, party politics, and civil-society activity (UNAMI, ESCWA and Iraq Foundation, 2021);[86]
    - Shiʿi devotional life—including vowing feasts, *majālis* - religious gatherings, and religious readings, a long-documented domain of women's gathering, although contemporary PMF-era equivalents remain under-researched (Fernea and Bezirgan, 2005);[87]
    - civil-society and community organising across Baghdad, Najaf-Kufa, Karbala, and southern Iraq (Ali, 2018),[88] including reporting on organisations such as the Baghdad Women's Association (MERIP, 2023; Al-Ali, 2023). [89] [90]
    - In all cases, participation is documented within Iraqi public life generally rather than within PMF-linked structures. (Established for general participation; PMF linkage not established)
- Comparative literature on armed non-state actors shows that women often perform clandestine, logistical, and support roles that remain under-documented because they are overlooked (Loken and Matfess, 2024).[91] Some groups also use gendered assumptions to reduce suspicion around women's movement or activity, a pattern documented in Palestinian, Indonesian, and Pakistani cases (Alexander, 2019).[92] Whether this applies to PMF-linked networks, including through welfare or charity roles, remains unconfirmed in the Iraqi open-source record. (Established for the general pattern; its PMF application an open question)
- A feminist political economy perspective suggests that welfare, charity, kinship mediation, and community engagement may contribute to the legitimacy and social embeddedness of hybrid actors, even where the women involved have no role in illicit finance. Whether these activities make any operational contribution within PMF-linked networks remains undocumented in the Iraqi evidence base. (Inferred)

2.2 The PMF self-documents women in welfare, media, and social-services roles as part of its legitimacy-building; independent evidence of their participation in welfare, patronage, and operational networks is absent[93]

- Welfare provision, martyr-family benefits, and employment entitlements form part of a broader state–PMF welfare architecture that reinforces legitimacy, dependency, and social attachment (see Finding 1.5) (Aljabiri, 2025; Alzobaidee, 2015). [94] [95] (Established/Inferred)

- The relationship between welfare, patronage, and political loyalty is well documented in the literature on Hezbollah, where welfare institutions—including health, education, reconstruction, martyr-support foundations, and affiliated women's organisations—have long been shown to convert social provision into legitimacy, resilience, and dependency (see Finding 1.5). (Established for the Hezbollah comparator)
- While the Iraqi PMF shares ideological and political foundations with Hezbollah, it appears less institutionally developed, particularly regarding women's networks and politically affiliated charitable activities. This comparison is offered as context rather than evidence that the PMF possesses an equivalent women-led welfare apparatus (Christou, 2024).[96] (Analytical — not independently sourced)
- PMF media visibly presents women's participation as part of its legitimacy-building, including the Thabita Women's Forum held by the General Media Directorate in June 2026 as part of the annual activities of its Women's Section (Al-Masadir Al-Arabiya News Platform, 2026).[97] (Established as self-presentation; no independent evidence of scale or impact).
- PMF media also portrays women in institutional welfare and social-service roles, including the women's section (Popular Mobilization Authority, 2024),[98] the Directorate of Relations and Social Services, martyrs' family support, cultural and scouting programmes, and the Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis Rehabilitation Medical Complex (Popular Mobilization Authority, 2026).[99] These roles are documented only through PMF self-reporting and carry no independent confirmation of their scale, function, or financial significance. (Established as institutional self-presentation; independent verification absent)
- Beyond this self-documented activity, women's participation in the PMF's welfare, patronage, and operational networks is not established in the open-source record. Whether women mediate household–welfare relations, hold substantive roles in faction-run charities, or participate in associated financial flows remains undocumented. This is an evidence gap rather than evidence of either involvement or non-involvement.

2.3 Women's autonomy within the PMF's base is constrained by informal honour norms and codified sect-based family law; deliberate use of either to control women around hybrid-finance remains undocumented

- In Iraq, honour and family reputation are borne disproportionately by women, whose conduct is widely understood to affirm or forfeit the honour of their male relatives and family (Naser and Midhin, 2024; Shafaq News, 2025).[100] [101] (Established).
- "Protection" framed around that honour — guardianship, safeguarding a family's reputation — functions simultaneously as care and as control, restricting women's mobility, association, and public role; contemporary practice includes adult women unable to check into hotels alone, obstacles to living or renting independently, and civil-documentation rules routing women's legal identity through a male relative (HRW, 2023).[102] These norms operate through the social fabric and are reproduced by women as well as men, with restrictions often framed as guidance or

care, including in Kurdish and Arab communities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Hussain, 2025).[103] (Established)

- Since 2003, ruling elites have ceded increasing latitude to tribal and Islamist authorities to regulate and discipline women through the *Muhasasa* system - the post-2003 ethno-sectarian power-sharing system, militia influence, and the erosion of the rule of law (Mustafa, 2023).[104] (Established — federal Iraq)
- This trajectory culminated in the 2025 amendment to the Personal Status Law (the *"Ja'fari Code"*), which entrenches male authority over the domains that structure household welfare and financial autonomy: women can lose maintenance if they leave home without permission, travel independently, or refuse sex; a husband can convert the governing law without his wife's consent or knowledge; wives are barred from inheriting real estate; divorced women can lose the marital home, maintenance, and dowry; and maternal custody is curtailed (HRW, 2025c; Equality Now, 2026).[105] [106] (Established)
- The Code was advanced by the Coordination Framework, whose members include the political wings of major PMF factions, including Badr, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq's (AAH) Sadiqoun bloc, and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) (Alrahim, 2025; Bobseine, 2022).[107] [108] The PMF's political wing therefore participated in the coalition that enacted these reforms, although the legislation represents a broader sectarian-political project rather than a PMF initiative, and the Shia political field itself remains internally divided. (Established; Inferred on PMF implications)
- The informal honour system and the Ja'fari Code reinforce one another through the same domains—custody, inheritance, and maintenance—that also underpin martyr-family welfare entitlements (see Finding 1.5; Martyrs' Foundation Law No. 2 of 2016). Whether this interaction affects martyr households in practice, or is deliberately exploited by hybrid actors, remains undocumented. (Inferred)

3

Institutions, Accountability, and Safeguarding

This theme covers how Iraq's institutional environment—its security, justice, and oversight bodies, together with the informal structures that operate alongside them—shapes, and is shaped by, the gendered dynamics through which hybrid actors sustain themselves. Across these questions, the central analytical insight is that accountability in Iraq is dispersed rather than absent, and that this dispersal is gendered. Authority operates through overlapping state, tribal, political, religious, and security institutions rather than a single hierarchy, allowing disputes, grievances, and accountability claims to be channelled into whichever forum offers the least resistance. For women, this frequently means navigating multiple systems in which safeguarding, protection, and access to justice differ markedly. The result is not simply fragmented accountability, but fragmented protection. The findings establish that captured and fragmented institutions fail women and constrain reporting; they do not establish the converse—that gender dynamics themselves make institutions more vulnerable to institutional capture. The available evidence documents the gendered consequences of institutional vulnerability rather than its gendered causes. The findings show that institutional fragmentation is not merely an administrative characteristic of Iraq's governance landscape but an environment within which hybrid actors can operate with reduced scrutiny while women experience the greatest barriers to protection and reporting. The principal implication is that strengthening accountability requires engagement with the full institutional landscape rather than formal state institutions alone.

Two cautions apply throughout. First, the degree of PMF penetration into Iraq's judicial and accountability institutions remains contested in the literature. Accordingly, the findings adopt the more conservative interpretation of a hybrid governance environment in which formal and informal systems coexist and are constructed to remain valid even if stronger claims of judicial capture are set aside. Second, the argument that this architecture contributes to the under-reporting of gender-based violence is presented as an effect of institutional fragmentation rather than the deliberate design of any single actor.

3.1 Parallel centres of authority disperse accountability in ways that disproportionately disadvantage women

- Iraq's governance operates through overlapping state, tribal, political, religious and security authorities rather than a single institutional hierarchy, creating dispersed accountability (Kathem, 2020; Dodge, 2024; Palani, 2025; Mansour, 2021; Rached and Mistaffa, 2025).[109] [110] [111] [112] [113] (Established)
- Since 2016, the PMF has become formally embedded within the state while retaining autonomous command structures, further blurring the distinction between formal and informal authority (Mansour, 2021; Rached and Mistaffa, 2025).[114] [115] (Established)

- Tribal justice remains a primary mechanism for resolving disputes across criminal, family and land disputes, operating alongside rather than outside state institutions (EUAA, 2023;[116] Genat, 2021)[117]. (Established)
- The coexistence of multiple dispute-resolution systems allows responsibility to be dispersed across institutions with differing standards of oversight and transparency (Mansour, 2021; EUAA, 2023). (Established)
- Iraq still lacks a federal domestic violence law despite repeated reform efforts, leaving national strategies without legislative backing (HRW, 2025a; BBC Monitoring, 2021; Alkhudary, 2023; Kaya, 2026).[118] [119] [120] [121] (Established)
- Tribal and personal-status systems continue to regulate many forms of gender-based harm through mechanisms that structurally disadvantage women, including honour-based practices and *Fusliya* - whereby women are transferred or married to settle tribal disputes - (EUAA, 2023; HRW, 2025a). [122] [123] (Established)
- Women seeking protection may be channelled into whichever authority structure offers them the least protection, while institutional fragmentation can reduce accountability for politically or militarily connected actors; the ways in which this may be deliberately exploited around revenue networks are examined in Finding 3.4 (EUAA, 2023; Knights, Malik and Smith, 2023; Mansour, 2021).[124] [125] [126] (Inferred)

3.2 Iraq's anti-corruption reporting architecture is legally narrow and inaccessible to women, leaving no protected channel for the gendered dimensions of illicit finance

- Iraq's whistleblower legislation protects reporting only in limited criminal and terrorism-related cases and provides little protection against retaliation in broader corruption reporting (Iraqi Council of Representatives, 2017; IOL, 2025). [127] [128] (Established)
- Existing integrity hotlines address corruption and conflicts of interest but do not cover wider forms of coercion, harassment, or gender-based abuse linked to reporting (IOL, 2025).[129] (Established)
- Corruption is embedded within broader patronage systems in which reporting may expose politically powerful actors controlling state institutions (Dodge and Mansour, 2021).[130] (Established)
- Women face additional barriers to reporting, including restrictions on mobility, dependency on male relatives for documentation, and the risk of family or tribal retaliation (U.S. State Department, 2023; EUAA, 2023).[131] [132] (Established)
- Survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence continue to face barriers in accessing justice, and some have themselves been prosecuted rather than protected (HRW, 2024).[133] (Established)
- Taken together, these legal and structural constraints mean that women who witness, experience, or are coerced into activities associated with hybrid financial or operational networks have no reporting mechanism that simultaneously protects them from corruption-related retaliation and gender-based harm. (Inferred)

4

Community Trust, Security, and Social Fabric

This theme examines how gender shapes the relationship between community legitimacy, coercion, and accountability within Iraq's hybrid security environment. It addresses four interconnected questions: how gendered experiences of security, justice, and service provision influence trust in state institutions and hybrid actors; how intimidation, reputational violence, and social sanctions constrain civic oversight; how Iraq's diverse sectarian, tribal, and regional contexts create differentiated patterns of vulnerability; and how governance interventions—including restrictions on the language of gender—shape civic space and accountability.

Drawing on comparative literature from Lebanon and Yemen, and limited evidence from Iraq, analysis finds that community legitimacy and community control are not separate systems but interconnected expressions of the same social infrastructure. The gendered norms, religious narratives, welfare institutions, honour systems, and community relationships that generate legitimacy can also regulate behaviour, discourage dissent, and facilitate extraction. Whether these mechanisms operate through voluntary participation or coercion depends not on the underlying cultural repertoire, which remains remarkably consistent, but on how it is mobilised, by whom, and under what conditions. The principal implication is that community-level legitimacy and coercion are produced by the same social infrastructure, so interventions cannot strengthen one without engaging the other: the reputational sanctions, welfare relationships, and honour norms that hybrid actors rely on to enforce compliance and extraction operate largely outside formal oversight, leaving no financial or institutional trace. Countering them therefore depends less on formal accountability mechanisms than on protecting the community-level conditions — women's civic participation, safe reporting, and independent social authority — that make coercion visible and resistible.

4.1 Women's religious and social labour can legitimise and enforce hybrid networks elsewhere; Iraq's PMF-linked women's formations' role in doing so is an evidence gap

- Applying (Hedström, 2020)134 concept of militarised social reproduction as an analytical lens, comparative evidence indicates that across movements within the Iranian "Axis of Resistance", the same cultural repertoire—religious duty, piety, women's moral authority, the symbolism of Sayyida Zaynab, and the mobilisation of sons for a sacred cause—can generate legitimacy voluntarily or enforce compliance coercively. These should therefore be understood as different expressions of the same underlying mechanism rather than separate phenomena. (Inferred from comparative evidence)
- Research on Hezbollah documents women voluntarily sustaining welfare, education, fundraising and martyr-family support, while their visible public participation actively contributes to the movement's organisational legitimacy (Deeb, 2009; Nilsson, 2020).135 136 (Established)

- Comparative evidence from Yemen shows the same repertoire being used coercively through surveillance, contribution collection, intimidation and mobilisation, illustrating how legitimacy and extraction can operate through identical gendered mechanisms (Mohammed, 2025).[137] (Established)
- Iraq's major Shi'a shrine institutions maintain extensive cross-governorate systems for women's religious education,[138] volunteering, welfare, cultural activities and community participation, demonstrating substantial institutional investment in organised female participation (Alkafeel, 2026; Imam Hussain Holy Shrine, 2026; Al-Zahra University).[139] [140] [141] (Established)
- This demonstrates that organised female participation within the broader religious environment from which the PMF derives legitimacy and recruits support is substantial and institutionalised in Iraq (Imam Hussain Holy Shrine, Women's Relations Division, 2026),[142] complementing the welfare architecture discussed in Finding 1.5. (Established)
- These structures operate alongside the PMF's martyr-family welfare system, suggesting that mothers and widows may occupy legitimacy-building roles comparable to those documented in Lebanon, although this remains analytically inferred rather than directly evidenced. (Inferred)
- Whether any part of this infrastructure also performs coercive functions—such as surveillance, piety-based intimidation, contribution enforcement or mobilisation—remains unconfirmed. Consequently, whether women's labour primarily lowers the costs of sustaining hybrid networks through legitimacy or raises revenues through coercion remains the central Iraqi evidence gap identified in this theme.

4.2 Women in shrine and PMF-linked security functions: documented presence, undocumented financial and operational significance

- Women's security roles are documented primarily within the shrine institutions associated with the PMF's broader social environment rather than within the PMF itself. The evidence is limited, uneven, and in several cases dates back almost a decade, indicating that women's security roles have not been systematically examined in Iraq. (Established)
- Within the Imam Hussain Holy Shrine's Women's Relations Division, women undertake crowd management, screening, public-order functions, and the enforcement of behavioural and dress standards during major pilgrimages such as *Arbaeen* – the annual Shia commemoration marking the fortieth day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, attracting millions of pilgrims to Karbala each year. (Established)
- This security labour protects the physical infrastructure through which pilgrimage donations, shrine services, and associated commercial activities operate (Imam Hussain Holy Shrine, 2026).[143] Because women can search and supervise female pilgrims in spaces inaccessible to male security personnel, their voluntary labour extends the institution's security perimeter while reducing staffing costs, complementing the legitimacy-building functions discussed in Finding 4.1. (Inferred)
- Whether shrine security personnel overlap in recruitment, training, command structures, or operational support with PMF factions remains undocumented. Given the shared religious,

institutional, and recruitment environment, this is a plausible hypothesis but not an established finding. (Inferred)

- Women are also documented within PMF factions themselves. During the anti-ISIS mobilisation, Arabic-language reporting indicated that more than 3,000 women joined the Hashd al-Shaabi, primarily in medical, media, and service roles, with limited combat participation (Shafaq News, 2021).[144] However, these figures have not been independently corroborated or updated since approximately 2016. The case of Wahida Mohamed al-Jumaily (Um Hanadi) demonstrates that women have held command roles within PMF-associated structures, but it remains unclear whether this represents an isolated case or a wider pattern (Daycard and Castelier, 2017).[145] (Established but dated)
- The financial and operational significance of women's participation within PMF factions remain undocumented. Current evidence neither establishes their functions, numbers, remuneration, nor whether they contribute to protecting or accessing financial resources. This remains an evidence gap rather than evidence of either involvement or non-involvement. (Undocumented – Evidence Gap)
- Within Iraq's formal security sector, women remain concentrated in medical, media, and administrative positions and account for approximately 1% of Ministry of Defence personnel, with very limited representation in operational commands (Al-Sakkaf, Ismaeel and Aldehaimy, 2025).[146] This documents the formal security sector rather than PMF factions, highlighting the contrast between what is known about women's participation in state institutions and what remains unknown within hybrid armed formations. (Established)

4.3 Gendered reputational sanctions operate as a community-level enforcement/self-policing mechanism for hybrid financial networks

- Iraq's honour economy creates a coercive resource that can operate without violence, payment, or a traceable act. Because honour is disproportionately borne through women's conduct, the threat of reputational harm to a woman or her family can discipline behaviour without direct intervention by the network itself (EUAA, 2023;[147] see findings 3.1 and 4.1). (Established / Inferred)
- This matters financially because women are likely to sit at the household and community edges of welfare, charity, martyr-family entitlements, documentation, and informal financial intermediation. Where such women might refuse, withdraw, or report, reputational sanction — rumour, accusation, exposure, or claims of immodesty — can secure silence more cheaply and invisibly than payment or physical coercion. Because these sanctions are socially delivered and deniable, they leave little evidentiary trace for integrity, anti-corruption, or oversight mechanisms to detect. (Inferred)
- The sanction is powerful precisely because it is socially delivered and deniable. It leaves no financial transaction, formal order, or evidentiary trail, making it largely invisible to integrity, anti-corruption, and oversight mechanisms designed to detect network activity. (Inferred)
- The same mechanism is documented in civic space. Women who challenged disinformation around the anti-"gender" campaign were subjected to organised reputational attack, contributing to silence

even among women legislators on the relevant parliamentary committee (Alkhudary, 2023; Kaya, 2026).[148] [149] (Established)

- The mechanism therefore operates at two scales: at the household edge of financial and welfare networks, it can deter refusal or reporting; in public life, it produces self-censorship and narrows civic oversight. This community-level enforcement complements the digital coercion examined in Finding 5.1. (Inferred).
- This finding is distinct from finding 3.1 which concerns forum routing through plural authority structures and finding 3.4 which examines concealment through institutional fragmentation. Here, enforcement is communal and reputational: it operates through the social fabric itself rather than formal institutions, making it especially resistant to institutional remedies.

4.4 Different groups of women experience distinct markets of extraction shaped by unequal access to protection, documentation, and justice

- Women with perceived ISIS affiliation face the most severe documentary exclusion. Building on the fragmented authority structures discussed in Finding 3.1, security clearance requirements, combined with dependence on male-headed civil documentation, restrict access to identity documents, movement, housing, employment, salaries, and public services, creating prolonged dependence on security gatekeepers (UNDP, 2022; Amnesty International, 2018; HRW, 2023).[150] [151] [152] (Established)
- Displaced women, particularly those with perceived ISIS links, have been documented exchanging sexual compliance for access to aid, protection, security clearances, and civil documentation. The persistence of these abuses after the closure of federal camps indicates that exploitation is rooted in systems of access rather than the camp environment itself (Amnesty International, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2024b). [153] [154] (Established)
- Yazidi survivors benefit from the only dedicated legal reparations framework for survivors of ISIS crimes through the Yazidi Female Survivors Law.[155] However, implementation remains constrained by documentary and evidentiary requirements, many survivors remain displaced, and significant barriers continue to limit effective access to reparations (OHCHR 2026; Ceasefire Centre, 2021; GHRD, 2026; ICCT, 2024).[156] [157] [158] [159] (Established)
- For Sunni Arab women with perceived ISIS ties in federal Iraq, no comparable channel exists at all; they face documentary denial, return blocked by tribal, local, or PMF actors (UNDP, 2022).[160] (Established)
- Across these groups, PMF-linked actors, alongside other security actors and local gatekeepers, have also been documented engaging in extortion, arbitrary detention, ransom demands, and the selective enforcement of movement and residency restrictions, turning documentation, return, release, and public services into commodities that can be exchanged for money, sexual exploitation, or continued dependency (U.S. State Department, 2024a; U.S. State Department, 2025).[161] [162] (Established)

- These patterns demonstrate that women's vulnerability is differentiated by the intersection of gender with sectarian identity, perceived political affiliation, displacement, and access to documentation rather than by gender considered in isolation. Where formal protection is weakest, opportunities for informal extraction are greatest. (Inferred)
- The financial implication is that unequal access to protection creates differentiated markets of access, in which documentation, security clearance, return, release, and public services become resources that can be exchanged for money, sexual exploitation, or continued dependency. (Inferred)

5

Digital Frontiers and Diaspora

This theme examines Iraq's digital-physical nexus as an integral component of hybrid governance rather than a separate online sphere. It addresses four interconnected questions: how digital infrastructure enables hybrid actors to extend coercion across physical and digital spaces; how digital platforms are used to enforce gendered compliance, suppress civic organisation, and project influence into diaspora communities; how online ecosystems reinforce honour-based coercion and silence dissent; and how efforts to disrupt informal financial networks—illustrated by the United Kingdom's July 2025 sanctions on Iraqi hawala-linked people-smuggling networks—relate to, but should not be conflated with, PMF hybrid finance. Across these questions, the central analytical insight is that the digital-physical nexus amplifies rather than replaces Iraq's existing social and political power structures. The same hybrid actors that compete for authority, legitimacy, and resources through welfare, patronage, and coercion in physical space also operate through telecommunications infrastructure, media regulation, and digital platforms. Digital technologies therefore extend existing mechanisms of surveillance, reputational sanction, and political control across greater distances and beyond Iraq's borders, while remaining rooted in the same social norms, institutional arrangements, and hybrid governance structures examined in earlier themes. The principal implication is that rather than constituting a separate domain of governance, the digital environment should therefore be understood as extending the same hybrid relationships of authority, legitimacy, coercion, and financial control examined throughout the preceding themes.

Two cautions apply throughout this theme. First, much of the available evidence on digital coercion and infrastructure originates from enforcement agencies, sanctions regimes, or security-focused reporting produced within declared policy agendas. These sources are therefore treated as evidence of documented investigations, designations, and allegations rather than judicially established fact. Second, the Iraqi evidence specifically linking digital control to gendered financial surveillance remains limited.

5.1 The digital-physical nexus enables gendered compliance by extending honour-based reputational sanction into digital spaces

- The digital-physical nexus is constitutive of hybrid governance in Iraq rather than separate from it. Since the 2019 Tishreen protests, state and PMF-aligned actors have used internet shutdowns, social-media surveillance, account compromise, and coordinated disinformation campaigns as instruments of political control. Networks associated with armed factions ("electronic armies") have been documented compromising activists' devices and accounts, extracting communications, and facilitating the identification and detention of organisers (Abdulrazaq, 2021; Ahmed, 2025). [163] [164] (Established)

- Women journalists, activists, and protest leaders have been specifically targeted through gendered digital attacks, including fabricated material, manipulated images, and campaigns questioning their morality, honour, and religious commitment (INSM, DRI, JOSA, 2026).[165] (Established)
- These attacks have extended beyond online harassment. Women activists were subjected to kidnapping and assassination, including the killing of Reham Yacoub in Basra in 2020, demonstrating that digital and physical coercion operate as interconnected rather than separate domains (Ali, 2023; Kaufman, 2021).[166] [167] (Established)
- AI-assisted monitoring of the 2025 parliamentary elections found women candidates systematically targeted through narratives centred on morality, appearance, honour, corruption, and alleged quota manipulation, while their policies and qualifications received comparatively little attention (INSM, DRI, JOSA, 2026).[168] (Established)
- These gendered narratives derive their coercive force from Iraq's honour norms (see findings 3.1, 4.1 and 4.3). Digital smear campaigns therefore function not simply as online abuse but as the digital extension of community-level reputational sanctions capable of silencing women and discouraging wider civic participation. (Inferred)
- The documented effect extends beyond individual victims. By increasing the anticipated social cost of public engagement, digital reputational attacks deter women from civic and political participation. Whether this also reduces scrutiny of the patronage, welfare, and contracting networks examined elsewhere in this report remains an analytical inference rather than a direct finding of the monitoring evidence. (Inferred)
- The digital-physical nexus is not one-sided. During and after Tishreen, domestic and diaspora activists used the same platforms to document abuses, counter disinformation, and sustain feminist organising against PMF-affiliated media ecosystems. Iraqi researchers also caution that disinformation is employed by multiple political actors rather than exclusively by one side (Kadhum, 2023; Al-Kaisy, 2021; Mustafa, 2023). [169] [170] [171] (Established)

5.2 Militia capture of Iraq's telecommunications and regulatory infrastructure underpins the digital-physical nexus

- The digital-physical nexus described in Finding 5.1 depends on control of telecommunications infrastructure. PMF-linked and Coordination Framework actors have progressively expanded influence over Iraq's telecommunications sector to strengthen threat-finance activities and enhance population-scale surveillance, following patterns previously documented in Iran, Hezbollah, and the Houthi movement (Knights , 2025b).[172] (Established)
- This strategy combines institutional and technical control through the Ministry of Communications, state operators, the Communications and Media Commission (CMC), telecommunications licensing, fibre-optic infrastructure, and surveillance technologies capable of monitoring users, devices, and encrypted communications. (Established)
- Institutional capture underpins this capability. Key communications institutions have been staffed by Coordination Framework affiliates; major telecommunications contracts have been awarded to

militia-linked entities, including the Muhandis General Company; and 5G licensing has reportedly favoured militia-linked business interests (Knights , 2025b).[173] This extends into the digital sphere the institutional capture examined in Finding 3.1. (Established / Inferred)

- The CMC demonstrates how infrastructure control can translate into gendered governance. In August 2023 it instructed media outlets and licensed telecommunications companies to stop using the terms "gender" and "homosexuality", framing the decision as protecting public morality. At the same time, the directive constrained the vocabulary available to women's rights and gender-based violence advocacy (Amnesty International, 2023; Ali, 2023).[174] [175] (Established)
- Control of telecommunications infrastructure creates the capacity for population-scale surveillance that can be directed against women activists, journalists, and civic organisations, extending the digital coercion documented in Finding 5.1. (Inferred)
- Current evidence does not establish that PMF-linked actors control Iraq's digital payment systems, welfare-disbursement platforms, or mobile money infrastructure. The available evidence concerns telecommunications and data networks rather than financial transaction systems. Whether these surveillance capabilities extend to women's financial monitoring therefore remains an evidence gap.

5.3 The digital-physical nexus extends coercive reach into the diaspora, but exposure differs by position

- The Iraqi diaspora is not homogeneous. A secular activist challenging PMF-aligned narratives, a Shi'a woman engaged through PMF-affiliated community organisations, and a Yazidi survivor in exile occupy structurally different positions, with different exposure to coercion and different capacity for independent civic action. Ethnicity, religion, gender, and political affiliation therefore shape diaspora vulnerability rather than diaspora status alone (Kadhum, 2019).[176] (Established)
- Scholarship on gender-based digital transnational repression shows how authoritarian and state-affiliated actors extend coercion across borders through surveillance, monitoring, defamation, and gendered or honour-based harassment targeting women in exile (Aljizawi et al., 2024; Michaelsen and Anstis, 2025).[177] [178] Iraq is not among the documented case studies, so this provides a comparative analytical framework rather than direct evidence of PMF-linked coercion against Iraqi women in the diaspora. (Established framework; Iraqi application remains an evidence gap)
- Extending the contested digital environment described in Finding 5.1, diaspora activists—including women academics, journalists, and civil society actors—used digital platforms to amplify the Tishreen movement, produce counter-narratives, and support independent media, while PMF-affiliated media increasingly sought to influence and contest these same audiences (Kadhum 2023).[179] (Established)
- The United Kingdom's sizeable Iraqi diaspora gives this issue a domestic safeguarding dimension. If similar patterns of gendered digital transnational repression affect Iraqi women living in the UK, the UK is not merely an observer of events in Iraq but also a jurisdiction in which women journalists, activists, researchers, and civil society actors may experience surveillance, intimidation, or deterrence linked to their work on Iraq. This reinforces Finding 5.4's distinction that diaspora

communities and diaspora-linked financial networks should not be treated as homogeneous. (Inferred – safeguarding implication)

5.4 2025 UK hawala sanctions on Iraq-linked people-smuggling networks should not be conflated with PMF hybrid finance networks

- In July 2025, the United Kingdom imposed its first sanctions under the Global Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Persons regime, including designations against Iraqi-linked individuals involved in hawala-facilitated people-smuggling networks operating between the Kurdistan Region, Turkey, and Europe (FCDO, 2025; UK Parliament, 2025; Karim, 2025) .[180] [181] [182]
- These sanctions demonstrate both the role of *hawala* as financial infrastructure for criminal migration networks and the technical feasibility of targeting informal value-transfer systems. Because many Iraqi women continue to rely on informal financial channels owing to limited access to formal banking (see Finding 1.1), measures targeting hawala may also have unintended gendered consequences for legitimate household financial activity. (Established / Inferred)
- However, these networks are distinct from PMF hybrid finance. They are Kurdish migration-for-profit networks rather than Axis of Resistance- or PMF-linked financial structures, and conflating the two would mischaracterise Iraq's hybrid threat landscape. (Established)
- A more appropriate comparator for PMF hybrid finance is the October 2025 US designation of the Muhandis General Company, associated commercial entities, and Iraqi bank executives accused of facilitating financial flows for Iran-aligned militias through government contracting and the formal banking sector (U.S. Treasury, 2025b).[183] This also reinforces finding 5.2, where the Muhandis General Company featured in the capture of telecommunications infrastructure. (Established; underlying conduct alleged rather than confirmed)
- Taken together, the UK and US measures illustrate two distinct counter-finance tracks: the UK action targets informal hawala-based criminal migration networks, whereas the US action addresses formal-sector capture within PMF-linked hybrid finance (Home Office and Border Security Command, 2024).[184] Maintaining this distinction is essential for selecting appropriate analytical, policy, and enforcement responses. Both sets of designations are treated as documented government allegations rather than judicial findings.

6

Civic and Women's Rights Movements

This theme examines the relationship between gender backlash, shrinking civic space, and the consolidation of hybrid governance in Iraq. It addresses four interconnected questions: how restrictions on gender discourse and women's rights activism affect civic participation and accountability; how intimidation, surveillance, reputational attacks, and violence constrain the ability of civil society actors to challenge power holders; how anti-Western narratives are used to legitimise the repression of women's rights organisations and independent civil society; and how hybrid actors simultaneously restrict, co-opt, and instrumentalise civil society structures to build legitimacy, shape public discourse, maintain social control, and potentially facilitate financial exploitation. Across these questions, the central analytical insight is that civic space represents an important arena of contestation between independent social actors and hybrid power structures. The principal implication is that gender backlash and restrictions on civic space should be understood not only as human rights concerns but also as governance and resilience issues.

A key caution applies to this theme, evidence linking Iraqi civil society organisations to illicit finance associated with hybrid actors remains limited. While international research and terrorism financing assessments demonstrate that charitable and non-profit structures can be vulnerable to exploitation, the available evidence does not allow robust conclusions regarding the scale of such activity in Iraq, the specific role of women within these arrangements, or the extent to which women's participation reflects agency, coercion, or routine involvement in legitimate community and welfare activities. Potential links should therefore be treated as intelligence gaps requiring further research rather than assumptions.

6.1 Increased gender backlash and shrinking civic space supports influence of hybrid actors and weakens key forms of societal resistance and accountability

- Civil society and CSOs are a key component of democracy in Iraq, helping to balance state authority with the interests and needs of society. They promote democratic participation, social cohesion, human rights, transparency, and accountability, while also supporting peacebuilding, service delivery, mediation, and public engagement. By linking communities with authorities, CSOs contribute to the rule of law and stronger institutions (Un Ponte Per, 2024).[185] (Established)
- Iraq is following global patterns of backlash against gender equality efforts, challenging progress in women's legal, political, social and economic rights, and making civil society action and activism on women and girls rights increasingly challenging (Kaya, 2026).[186] In August 2023 the use of the terms 'gender' and 'homosexuality' was banned and the Department of NGOs required all civil society organisations to sign a document stating they will not use the concept 'gender' and otherwise face possible closure. This led to a purging of organisations, and cancellation of projects and funding (Kaya, 2026).[187] In line with growing state control and shrinking civic space, the WPS

agenda has, over the course of Iraq's three NAPs, moved farther and farther from civil society (Kvinna, 2025).[188] In 2026, Iraq was added to a CIVICUS watchlist of countries which have seen a rapid decline in fundamental democratic freedom and was classified as 'repressed' by the CIVICUS civic space monitor (CIVICUS, 2026).[189] (Established)

- This institutional attack on gender and civil society has been compounded by organised and well-funded misinformation campaigns against 'gender', based on moral, religious and nationalistic arguments of threats to society (Mustafa 2025).[190] Evidence indicates these campaigns are driven by conservative military and/or armed factions and political actors (Makki, 2026; Kaya, 2026),[191] [192] e.g. Shi'a clerics political party Fadhilla (virtue) Party, and their militia factions (Kaya, 2026).[193] Although state and militia authorities frame gender backlash and regression of rights as protecting religious and national values, there is evidence they are aimed at reducing the momentum and effectiveness of the feminist movement sparked by the 2019 Tishreen demonstrations (Pax, 2025; Makki, 2026).[194] [195] Armed groups and militias have been subsumed into political parties, retaining their weapons and using the threat of violence as a political tool (Kvinna, 2025).[196] (Established)
- This anti-gender backlash is fuelling growing threats of harassment and violence toward women activists and journalists on and offline, including assassination (HRW, 2026b),[197] restriction and targeting of women-led organisations (NGOWG on WPS, 2025; GIWPS, 2026b)[198] [199]and state surveillance of activists and organisations, restricting their ability to operate (Elbarlament, 2025).[200] This campaign of intimidation deters women and civil society organisations from engaging in activism for fear of violence against themselves or their families, contributing to the increasing closure of civic space in Iraq. Militia state capture also promotes the institutionalisation of intimidation and violence, and the emergence of unwritten 'codes of silence'. Those who are brave enough to protest or expose wrongdoings often end up dead, reinforcing social norms conducive to the power of militias (Firmian, 2024).[201] (Established)

6.2 Pushback against women's rights activists and civil society is explicitly framed through anti-western discourse

- Counter-intervention forces view civil society as a Western-backed threat to their ideological and political agendas, framing them as agents of foreign intervention and legitimising their suppression (Ibrahimi et al. 2025, focusing on Afghanistan and Iraq).[202] Backlash actors bolster their anti-gender rhetoric by pairing it with anti-Westernism. The instrumentalisation of women's rights in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the invading forces strengthened the already existing anti-Western rhetoric and led to an association between progressive gender norms and Western interests (Kaya, 2026).[203] Evidence suggests that entities led by, or affiliated with, armed factions operating within formal state frameworks – often with the tacit knowledge of official government bodies – have carried out systematic campaigns of disinformation, defamation, and accusations of foreign collaboration against civil society organisations (Makki, 2026; Ibrahimi et al. 2025). [204] [205] (Established)
- This repression and pushback, alongside the legal and administrative barriers affecting women-led organisations, has reduced civil society's ability to participate in policy processes and access resources (Elbarlament, 2025),[206] therefore limiting the ability of civic space, human rights

defenders or women activists to challenge or influence the existing balance of power (Kvinna, 2025).[207] Evidence in Iraq and beyond suggests that advocacy and claim-making components of civil society that challenge government and power holders are the primary targets of securitisation and repression (Chaudhry 2022; Ibrahimi et al. 2025),[208] [209] and that militia violence, including against peaceful protesters calling for political reforms in 2019 and 2020, has negatively affected Iraq's democracy (Firmian, 2024).[210] (Established)

- Within this challenging internal context, cuts to civil society funding from international donors, particularly to women's rights organisations and democratic initiatives palace Iraq's civil society in existential danger (Medeni, 2024).[211] The sudden closure or drastic reduction of humanitarian, development, and human rights assistance programs, as has been the case in Iraq, carries deep structural implications for the future of civic space, where in a political environment characterised by restriction and fragmentation, the contraction of civic space risks reproducing authoritarian patterns that marginalises civic participation and re-concentrate power in the hands of traditional political actors (Makki, 2026).[212] (Inferred)
- As well as restricting and challenging civil society, particularly advocacy focused or claim making organisations and movements, hybrid actors also use civil society, particularly service delivery focused organisations, as a front for controlling the population (Ibrahimi et al. 2025).[213] Hybrid actors in Iraq use civil society organisations and civic engagement strategies to engage with broad segments of the population, providing them support, goods and services as a mechanism to build a sense of legitimacy and relationships of reliance, as well as establish opportunities to shape the discourse and ideology of the population, and impose repressive narratives (Makki, 2026, Kvinna, 2025, Medeni, 2024).[214] [215] [216] Research indicates, for example, that an important element of Hezbollah's long-term strategy in Lebanon concerned the provision of goods and services to Shia communities, including food, farming and medical supplies, education, healthcare and housing, protection from other armed groups, and jobs (Firmian, 2024).[217] Civil society organisation either supported, influenced or fronted by hybrid actors therefore creates a key opportunity for engaging and shaping the population. (Inferred)
- Reflecting on the closing civic space in Iraq, Medeni (2024) argues "the few remaining independent NGOs will be restructured by political parties and their main figures to implement their agendas" (Medeni, 2024).[218] Broader research on civic space and authoritarian regimes supports the understanding that regimes may develop quasi-governmental organisations and co-opt CSOs into welfare and service delivery systems to strengthen governance, improve public services and build ties with less political organisations, while also using service provision to mobilise support, promote regime-aligned narratives and reinforce conservative values (Toepler at al. 2020).[219] It should however be noted that much of this research is focused on non-comparable contexts such as Russia and China, and does not explore the specific interaction between hybrid groups and civil society, however it indicates the potential co-optation of civil society for non-democratic means. (Inferred)

6.3 Hybrid actors use civil society as a front for controlling the population and financial gain

- Evidence indicates that Iranian-aligned groups may use charitable organisations, including specifically women-fronted organisations, to create profits, distribute illicit finance, and for international money laundering (Firmian, 2024).[220] Although not related to Iranian-aligned hybrid actors, understanding the potential risks of co-operation and misuse in Iraq, provides an indication of the avenues of exploitation available to such actors. Assessment undertaken on ISIL's engagement of CSOs concludes that terrorist organisations active in Iraq have misused not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) through a variety of means, including the exploitation of funds received by some organisations, exploiting the areas designated for spending these funds, the channels used to receive and disburse funds, and the organisation's staff and officials. Investigations conducted by law enforcement authorities following 2018 led to the judicial dissolution of 12 NPOs, and the suspension of the operations of 441 others due to NPOs being abused for terrorist financing (Middle East North Africa Financial Action Task Force, 2024).[221] (Inferred)
- The evidence suggests that hybrid actors in Iraq consolidate and sustain their influence through a combination of political capture, ideological legitimacy, intimidation, the restriction of civic space, and the strategic co-optation of civil society. Alongside using anti-Western and anti-gender narratives to portray civil society as a threat, hybrid actors also engage with broad segments of the population through civil society organisations or civic engagement, using these channels to build legitimacy, cultivate relationships of dependence, shape public discourse and reinforce regime-aligned narratives. This creates a context in which constrains the ability of civil society to contribute to peacebuilding, democratic governance and social change, reducing societal resistance and creating conditions that allow hybrid actors to operate with greater legitimacy and reduced accountability (Ibrahimi et al., 2025; Heurlin, 2010; Lorch and Bunk, 2017).[222] (Established)
- It can be inferred form evidence that charitable and non-profit organisations may create opportunities for financial exploitation, including illicit financing and money laundering, highlighting how civic and humanitarian spaces can be instrumentalised for political, economic and security objectives. The evidence base does not provide sufficient detail to assess the scale of women's participation, the extent of their agency within these arrangements, or the ways in which gender norms influence resistance to, or safeguarding against, such exploitation. (Inferred)

Evidence Gaps

The review identifies substantial evidence gaps across the six thematic areas. While existing evidence documents many aspects of PMF-linked structures, patronage networks, welfare provision, accountability systems, and digital influence, there remains limited understanding of how these systems operate through gendered mechanisms, particularly at the household and community levels. Existing evidence is often indirect or only provides the potential for inferred conclusions. Further research is required to enable a better understanding of the role of gender in hybrid operational and financial networks. A priority for further research is primary research, including gender-disaggregated mapping, organisational analysis, household-level interviews, ethnographic work, and field studies, to establish with increased certainty how gender actually shapes the operation of hybrid power, legitimacy, coercion, and financial control in Iraq.

Evidence gaps identified that provide opportunities for future research are:

Gendered Political Economy of Hybrid Threats in Iraq

- ***PMF-specific women's welfare and mobilisation apparatus***. This is the link that would distinguish deliberate factional instrumentalisation from ordinary state welfare reaching these households.
- ***Household-level financial management in PMF-affiliated households.*** No open-source evidence documents how salaries and welfare are managed within the household, who controls them, or what exit costs are.
- ***Gendered family coercion in border and port economies.*** While threats against workers' families are documented, no evidence currently demonstrates whether coercive pressure is directed disproportionately through women or whether female relatives are perceived as particularly effective leverage points.
- ***Women's intermediary roles in border smuggling networks***. No evidence currently documents whether women act as intermediaries, couriers, nominees, facilitators or financial fronts within border and smuggling economies.
- ***Gendered employment dependency in PMF-controlled public-sector hiring.*** The Mansour (2021) Brigade-56 finding is not gender-disaggregated; CEDAW 2026 appointment data is aggregate.

Financial and Operational Networks

- ***Women's roles within illicit financial and sanctions-evasion networks.*** No reliable open-source evidence documents women's participation in PMF-linked oil diversion, sanctions evasion, hawala facilitation, procurement fraud, or currency-smuggling systems.

- ***Household-level interaction between welfare provision and political compliance.*** Existing evidence establishes welfare dependency and patronage relationships but provides limited insight into how these dynamics operate within households and influence political behaviour.
- ***Women's roles in PMF-affiliated welfare, charitable, religious, and security structures***. No systematic, gender-disaggregated analysis maps these organisations — leadership, funding, staffing, beneficiary registration, intermediary and disbursement roles, and faction links — or establishes whether women occupy leadership, liaison, welfare-delivery, community-engagement, or security functions within them.
- Deliberate use of honour, protection, or family-law authority by PMF-linked actors to suppress oversight of network finance. The societal honour/protection mechanism and the codified constraints of the 2025 Ja'fari Code are documented (finding 2.3); what is undocumented is whether PMF-linked actors specifically rely on, invoke, or benefit from these to restrict women's access to reporting-relevant roles around welfare, charity, and household-finance flows. Required: participant-protected qualitative research in PMF-affiliated communities on how guardianship, protection norms, and personal-status adjudication mediate women's access to these roles, and whether that mediation functions as a non-reporting mechanism.
- Application of the 2025 Ja'fari Code to the martyr-welfare architecture. The Code curtails maternal custody and bars wives from inheriting real estate; PMF martyr-welfare (pensions, housing grants, children's entitlements) flows substantially through widows and children (finding 2.3; finding 1.5). Whether the Code is being applied to martyr-affiliated households in ways that alter widows' control of these entitlements is undocumented. Required: legal-case and field research on personal-status adjudication in martyr-affiliated households, disaggregated by governorate and faction affiliation.

Institutions, Accountability, and Safeguarding

- ***Gendered navigation of hybrid accountability systems.*** Little direct evidence exists on how women engage these parallel systems in practice — which pathways they use, which actors they trust, how forum selection is exercised against them, and how outcomes differ from those experienced by men.
- ***Gendered causes of institutional vulnerability to capture***. The theme documents how captured and fragmented institutions fail women; it does not establish whether gender dynamics — such as the exclusion of women from oversight and integrity roles, or the gendering of patronage networks — themselves make institutions more vulnerable to capture, corruption, or intimidation (the first ToR line of enquiry). Required: institutional research on the relationship between gendered staffing and oversight composition and susceptibility to capture.

Community Trust, Security, and Social Fabric

- ***The function and institutional location of Iraq's PMF-linked Zainabiyat across the consent–coercion spectrum.*** The consensual, institutional pole of women's religious participation is now well evidenced in Iraq, and it is substantial: a formalised apparatus that recruits, trains, educates, and mobilises women across governorates under the shrine establishments from which PMF factions draw legitimacy and recruits. What that evidence cannot yet establish is: 1) Institutional location: Whether a formation bearing the Zainabiyat name sits within the shrine wing, the Iran-aligned wing, or straddles both is undocumented, as is the relationship between the shrine apparatus and any PMF faction operating under the same symbolic repertoire; 2) Function across the spectrum: Whether PMF-linked women's formations bearing the Zainabiyat name operate solely as agentive legitimacy-and-welfare actors, or also as coercive instruments performing surveillance, intimidation, and forced contributions on Iraqi women across sectarian lines; or, most likely, a combination varying by locality and faction.
- ***Women's security and armed-faction roles.*** Women's participation in security and armed functions in and around the PMF has not been systematically examined, and the evidence that exists is thin, uneven, and in key respects nearly a decade old. Three areas should be explored further 1.) Shrine-security to armed-network link: Whether shrine security formations overlap in personnel, training, or command with PMF factions, such that women's unpaid security labour feeds armed-network capacity rather than only protecting the shrine economy. 2.) Current status and scale in the armed factions: Whether the women reported in 2016 (and commanders such as Um Hanadi) remain, in what numbers, and in what roles — open-source reporting effectively stops in 2017. 3.) Financial implications in the armed factions specifically: Their functions, costs, salaries, and any resource-access role, which are entirely undocumented.
- ***Reputational sanction around the financial nodes of hybrid networks.*** Direct observation of reputational sanction operating around the financial nodes of hybrid networks at household and community level — including whether it is deliberately activated by network actors or operates autonomously to their benefit — is absent and is a priority for primary research.
- ***The PMF-attribution share of the documentation-and-clearance extraction economy.*** The conversion of documentary exclusion into sexual and financial exploitation is documented and its persistence across camp closure shows it is attached to the clearance system rather than any setting. What the sources do not resolve is the share captured by PMF-linked actors specifically, as distinct from other security, military, and camp-management officials, to whom the exploitation is attributed broadly. This is not a marginal refinement: it is the difference between a generalised governance-corruption problem and a hybrid-actor revenue stream, and it determines both whether the mechanism belongs in the hybrid-finance picture at all and which actors a counter-extraction response would have to target.
- ***Capture or coercion at the gendered receipt-and-documentation node.*** Across findings women sit at the household-facing end of welfare and reparations flows. What is not examined is whether that gendered position is itself a point of capture or coercion. E.g. Whether a widow's pension or a survivor's entitlement is collected by, or surrendered to, someone other than the

beneficiary; whether access is mediated by an actor who controls the woman's civil documentation or security clearance, converting that control into leverage.

Digital Frontiers and Diaspora

- ***Gendered use of digital financial infrastructure by PMF-linked actors.*** It is not evidenced whether PMF-linked entities control or can monitor the mobile-money, digital-wallet, and welfare-disbursement rails which women use – converting the surveillance capability into a financial-control and dependency mechanism continuous with the male-routed welfare architecture of the core mechanism and informal financial flows.
- **Iraq-specific gender-based digital transnational repression.** The gender-based digital-transnational-repression framework is robust in general but not built on Iraqi cases. Whether, how, and by which actors PMF-aligned networks conduct gendered digital repression against UK-resident and other diaspora Iraqi women – tactics used, the relationship to homeland coercion, the effect on diaspora civic and journalistic activity – is undocumented for Iraq.
- **The financial consequences of diaspora-facing intimidation.** Diaspora counter-mobilisation and the growing diaspora reach of PMF-aligned media are both documented, but the link from intimidation to financial outcome is not.
- ***The gendered division of labour inside militia digital-media operations.*** The "electronic armies" and PMF-aligned media units are documented as producers of the honour-based smear repertoire but their internal gendered composition is not.
- ***Regulatory suppression of women's civic content beyond the single documented directive***

  It is established that the captured regulator can reach into the vocabulary of women's-rights advocacy. What is not documented is whether that licensing and content-control power is used systematically against women's-rights and anti-violence organisations — through licence threats, takedown demands, de-platforming, or pressure on the language permissible in their public communications and funding proposals — as opposed to the single 2023 instance.

Civic and Women's Rights Movements

- ***Direct attribution of anti-gender and anti-civil society campaigns, including anti-western narratives to hybrid actors.*** Although there is a clear indication of the association of hybrid actors to these campaigns, and hybrid actors use of associated discourses, there is limited direct evidence of which actors may be responsible for specific campaigns, and if such campaigns are strategically directed by hybrid actors.
- ***Co-optation, capture and financial exploitation of civil society.*** Evidence exists that hybrid actors use civil society organisations and civic engagement, particularly through service delivery, to build legitimacy and community dependence. But there is insufficient research on the extent to which this tactic is used, the mechanisms through which organisations are

captured or influenced, and the role of women within such organisations. Further, evidence from other contexts (e.g. ISIL in Iraq) demonstrate the potential for civil society to be exploited for illicit finance, money laundering and resource distribution, however, there is no evidence currently demonstrating Iraq hybrid actors' use of civil society for financial purposes.

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