



Framing Political Discourse in Post-2003 Iraq of Media Narratives

Hussam Aldeen Nidhal Hadi*

Engineering Technical college of Najaf, 31001, Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University, Iraq
Email: hussam.aldeen475@atu.edu.iq

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Abstract

This study deploys Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing theory to investigate how meaning is constructed in presidential speeches news media social media and militant messaging drawing upon a corpus of fifty presidential addresses supplemented by monitoring reports and extant research. The analysis shows a clear evolution away from the ethno religious authoritarian nationalism of the Ba’thist regime with its closed spaces and framing of internal enemies toward more pluralist democratic formulations in the post-2003 period. Leaders like Jalal Talabani Fuad Masum and Barham Salih slowly reconstructed Iraqi nationalism to embrace ethno-religious diversity integrated Islamic iconography to connect with faith based citizens and adapted their discourse in response to evolving national concerns from democratic consolidation to counterterrorism reform from regional diplomacy. With these developments the discourse increasingly becomes peppered with tensions. Sectarian and identity based mobilization continues to emerge as political groups prepare for the 2025 parliamentary elections with monitoring organizations witnessing increased exclusionary rhetoric. The proliferation of traditional and digital media created a more diverse public sphere but also a more fractured one where misinformation can spread exponentially and trust in institutions has withered. Armed groups utilize complex communication methods to legitimize their positions and external actors particularly Iran exert influence via hard and soft power. In this contested context Iraqi political communication becomes a competitive field where state and non state actors traditional and digital media as well as sectarian and cross sectarian imaginaries compete for discursive supremacy. The findings echo previous arguments that processes of “desectarianization” operate within a context of continued access to identity based mobilization particularly in electoral cycles. The study suggests that implementing electoral codes for incitement regulating digital platforms supporting media literacy and independent journalism and fostering cross sectarian dialogue should be on agenda.

Keywords: Framing Political Discourse Critical Discourse Analysis Sectarianism Media Narratives Presidential Rhetoric Identity Politics Post-Conflict Reconstruction.

1. Introduction

The toppling of the Ba’athist regime following its military defeat in 2003 represents a turning point in modern Iraq’s history ushering in drastic changes across the political landscape social life and media scene. In the twenty years that have followed Iraq has seen remarkable geopolitical shifts the rising role of non-state actors changing sectarian balances and an explosion of advanced media campaigns by various actors trying to create their narratives and influence public perception (Taha 2019; Haddad 2024). The political conversations of that period spoke volumes about the language and legitimacy narratives surrounding civil society use of power citizenship identity and sovereignty.

The analysis of framing as it pertains to political discourse evaluates how language symbols and narratives are strategically used to create specific constructions of reality by defining problems diagnosing causes making moral judgments and suggesting remedies (Entman 1993). Such framing only gained importance in Iraq after 2003 as a myriad of political actors media organizations and armed groups have battled for the heart of the Iraqi public sphere trying to make their narrative dominant. According to Peterson (2024) authoritative news media texts indicate overt and subtle meaning through the language of presumption narrative framing and ideological positioning associated with individuals and collectives featured in discussion surrounding the transformation in Iraq.

Indeed scholarship on the Arabic discourses of Iraqi politics and society has steadily expanded over time but there remains much to learn in regards to how media narratives have developed throughout the post-2003 experience (including their usage by various political actors in service of different frame strategies) as well as how such narratives interact with wider trajectories of identity construction legitimation and contestation. Previous literature has looked into the nature of particular elements in the Iraqi narrative past research focuses on various strands like the rise of non-state armed groups (Taha 2019) Iran's strategic mobilization (Zabihi 2025) sectarianism variance (Haddad 2024) as well as visual communication for extremism (Günther 2014)—yet no holistic scrutiny exists to bring them together through rapid multi-layer analysis.

This article fills this gap by systematically analysing the type of framing strategies employed in post-2003 Iraqi political discourse employing frameworks from CDA (Fairclough 1995) and framing theory (Entman 1993) to analyze how narratives within the media construct entrench and undermine specific ideological positions. The study synthesizes evidence from a literature review with analysis of presidential speeches media coverage and political rhetoric during the post-2003 period. Its aim is to shed light on the changing nature of contemporary Iraq's discursive space at the intersection of internal societal mechanisms external regional foreign actors and emerging media technologies.

This study is significant because it contributes to understanding how political discourse functions in an environment of deep transition and struggle. Organizing a comparative analysis based on how framing tactics evolved within different administrations and media outlets this research provides insights into the dynamics of political communication that adapted over time in relation to ideologies vis-a-vis or against each other with new discursive formations emerging. These insights offer practical lessons for policymakers journalists and civil society actors working to navigate Iraq's complex media landscape and foster better health-informed public debate.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Theoretical Foundations: Framing and CDA

According to Entman (1993) the elementary definition of framing states that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text”. This is done by promoting specific problem definitions causal interpretations moral evaluations and treatment recommendations. In a similar approach Balasubramanian (2005) used framing theory in an analysis of newspaper coverage to investigate the 2003 conflict as seen through eyes of the New York Times London Times and Toronto Star during Operation Iraqi Freedom establishing that there were marked similarities in presentation and interpretation between these three newspapers which may be representative of cultural framing that is to say that although different cultures present the same reality or event they interpret it differently.

CDA formulated more recently by Fairclough (1995) van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (2001) gives a complementary approach to analyzing how language constructs reflects legitimises reproduces or contests power relations and ideological beliefs in the socio-political realm. Fairclough's model of discourse (Fairclough 1995) which consists of three dimensions namely text (the properties of written texts or spoken language applying to certain linguistic features) discursive practice (i.e. how a given text is produced) and social practice (which ties individual micro-level linguistic features to broader macro-level social structures and power relations) provides an organized framework for linking linguistic analysis at a micro level with socio-political perspectives on the macro level. The socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk focuses on mental representations facilitating the connection between discourse and society whereas Wodak's discourse-historical approach emphasizes taking historical context into account regarding discursive strategies.

2.2. Sectarianism and Identity-Based Framing

Sectarian identity has been a central focus of scholarly inquiry into Iraqi political discourse. Haddad (2024) analyzes the tides of 21st century Sunni-Shi'a sectarianism in the Middle East postulating that it rose more than ever before from 2003-2011 before entering a notable recession from outside powers from 2015-2017 onward. That invasion in 2003 is seen as a key catalyst of the earlier “sectarian wave that destabilized the region and empowered sectarian actors.” But Haddad argues that a powerful “desectarianization” has taken place since 2017 fueled by shifts in elite incentives generational change declining existential anxiety and favorable security circumstances.

The academic work on sectarian framing in Iraqi media indicates that identity-based rhetoric is used strategically by a range of actors. One study of the narratives in the media coverage across Iraq and neighboring states reveals that both the pro-government Iraqi media as well as Iranian media characterize ISIS as ‘inhuman terrorists’ but Arab and Turkish outlets portray it as a reflection of anti-government ideology and sentiments within Iraqi society. In the regional power struggle sparked by the changing Middle East Iran vs. Saudi Arabia vs. Turkey media outlets pay attention to their side's victimhood and serve up sectarian discourses that justify rights claims and demonize rivals. Every side maintains that it is the “we” who seek the togetherness of society while the “they” discriminate and exclude.

Recent monitoring by the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights (2025) shows a worrying increase in identity-based rhetoric ahead of Iraq's parliamentary elections in 2025. This exclusionary rhetoric no longer exists only on extremist fringes but has born its way into unofficial campaign materials political messaging and mainstream media programming. Candidates at times increasingly rely on subnational identities sectarian ethnic religious and regional as mobilization tools sharpening historic grievances and appealing to identity-based allegiances rather than introducing policy agendas.

2.3. Non-State Actors and Armed Group Narratives

The rise and consolidation of non-state armed militia has become one of the most prominent characteristics of Iraq after 2003 including significant repercussions on political discourse. Taha (2019) provides a bottom-up account of JAM (the Mahdi Army) that dismisses top-down models arguing instead criticism demobilization crisis in Iraq after 2003 as the genesis of the rise of JAM. This crisis left behind a reservoir of ex-fighters amenable to be mobilized by non-state actors such as the Sadrist movement. Taha goes on to analyze Sadriyat (Sadrist music videos) as expressing a search for agency and identity tracking a gradual consolidation of an acceptable Sadrist identity for JAM's vast ex-combatant community toward "JAM-centric" songs that foreground fighters' agency over Sadr's leadership.

Shamsaenia (2023) examines some strategies of media portrayal regarding armed groups this time in the context of supportive and critical counter-discourses surrounding Iraq's Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces). The study details four strategies employed by the counter-discourse media: dependence on Iran fear of the rise in Shiite sectarianism unification of Arab reactionary governments against the Hashd and production of parallel movements to the Hashd. On the other hand media discourse of resistance have developed strategies of "layers-by-layers analysis explanation" and "against-the-flow production confrontation" aimed at Hashd effect on providing Iraq's national interests & synergy with resistance groups.

2.4. External Actors and Transnational Framing

The external role played by actors particularly Iran in shaping Iraqi political discourse is among the most studied topics. Through an analysis of Iranian activism in Iraq's geopolitics Zabihi (2025) proposes three patterns passive interactive and soft-power/economic relations that explain how Iran attempts to defend its national interests. Targeted and issue-based soft power activism alongside cultural social and economic relations remain the most effective tools for Iranian soft power in Iraq as these commonalities draw on shared historical linguistic religious-ethnic heritage (for e.g. the Arbaeen ritual creating a "Shia geoculture") and Iraqi reliance of Iranian energies.

The discursive landscape is complicated further by transnational media flows. Satellite television stations such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya in addition to social media networks have been indispensable for cross-border dissemination of Islamic political rhetoric providing the modern Islamist intellectual and activist with broad platforms that affect public opinion (Lynch 2006). This transnational dimension means that Iraqi political discourse must also be understood as traversing the regional media ecologies and geopolitical agendas that compete for Iraq's attention.

2.5. Media Transformation and the Digital Sphere

The post-2003 media environment in Iraq has undergone a radical transformation. The collapse of state-controlled media under the Ba'athist regime freed space for a proliferation of new outlets but this pluralism has come with fragmentation polarization and misinformation. Khalaf (2025) trend analysis of TikTok and its impact on Iraqi public attitudes towards the government. The results reveal that Iraqi citizens are active devotees of what is happening in the government where 88.5% said they are interested in watching government news directed at people by their requirements and complaints.

The new influencers and voice on social media platforms have emerged alongside the rapid erosion of trust in traditional institutions. As Rassan (2025) points out many Iraqis today more get their news and viewpoint from Facebook TikTok and YouTube rather than newspapers or channels. These outlets reward the rapidity of submission over the accuracy of publication turning information itself into a kind of collective property that is sculpted as much by rumor and conjecture as it is by inquiry or evidence. The uproar over specific incidents exposes a chasm in Iraq's system of trust where the judiciary might prevail but public opinion does not stay ordered because digital platforms concoct alternate versions of events that feed passion rather than honor truth.

2.6. Presidential Rhetoric and Legitimation Strategies

Researchers have studied how leaders in post-2003 Iraq use rhetorical tropes to craft legitimacy articulate national identity and manage political crises. Al-Ali (2014) examined the religious and nationalist rhetoric used in speeches by Iraqi leaders to build political support and legitimize power. (2013) Detailed analysis of how US policy directly shaped Iraq's ensuing social and political development claiming that the state institutions were destroyed (in 2003) to create a power vacuum facilitating sectarianism and disintegrating Iraq as an ordered way of life.

The ways in which Iraqi presidents have responded linguistically and rhetorically to the changing context of history has altered over the years. In the aftermath of 2003 early rhetoric was concerned with rebuilding and ensuring legitimacy for this new democratic order using terms like "democracy" "freedom" "human rights" and "development". With security deteriorating and sectarian violence surging the presidential vocabulary turned first to "national unity" "reconciliation" and combating "terrorism" and "extremism." More recently the language has been about "reform" "good governance" and "regional cooperation" mentioning ongoing political and economic issues.

2.7. Gap in the Literature

While much valuable scholarship has been produced there are still significant gaps that remain. This latter point is neglected because few studies have systematically traced the evolution of framing strategies over time for the entirety of the post-2003 period from early after the invasion through to now. Secondly existing research has also

been limited in multidisciplinary; theoretical integration between CDA framing theory and discourse theory—has until now largely remained dormant. Third focusing on specific actors (presidents militias media outlets) or themes (sectarianism external clout visual communication) previous studies have fallen short of a more holistic perspective that integrates these separate strands into a coherent whole. Fourth insufficient attention has been paid to the implications of these framing dynamics for policy and practice. This study seeks to fill these gaps in the existing literature by offering a multi-dimensional analysis that integrates findings across different domains and follows continuities and changes of Iraqi political discourse over a time-span of two decades.

3. Methodology

This research utilizes qualitative research design based on CDA and framing theory. A qualitative approach is preferred as it offers a robust and nuanced understanding of a complex behavior in this case an important political discourse where language functions to create power and negotiate ideology.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The study introduces an integration between two complementary theoretical dimensions. First Fairclough (1995) offers a three-dimensional model of CDA covering three interrelated levels at which analysis can be conducted: the level of text (an examination of the linguistic and rhetorical features) the level discourse practice (an investigation into the production distribution and consumption of texts) and social practice (the relationship between discourse and broader socio-political context). Second Entman's (1993) framing theory guides analysis of the way media narratives highlight certain aspects of reality rendering these features prominent in order to foster specific problem definitions interpretations and evaluations.

3.2. Data Sources

The corpus for this study is constructed from different parts of the data in order to widen and triangulate it. Primary sources include:

- 1) Official presidential speeches given by the Iraqi presidents following 2003; Ghazi al-Yawer (2004–2005) Jalal Talabani (2005–2014) Fuad Masum (2014–2018) Barham Salih (2018–2022) and Latif Rashid (2022–present). About 50 speeches covered topics of significance during national events policy announcements and international relations.
- 2) Print news media articles selected from the years 2003–2025 using approaches similar to those adopted by Peterson (2024) who examined hundreds of articles for frames of representations in this presentation of authoritative discourse on the America's war in Iraq.
- 3) Reports by monitoring organizations such as the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights and Asber Center for Information Auditors about identity-based rhetoric and media trends.
- 4) Academic studies of Iraqi media and political talk such as the narratives of armed groups (Shamsaeinia 2023) or the role of social media (Khalaf 2025).

3.3. Analytical Procedures

The analysis of data took place in multiple steps. First was a textual analysis of the political phrasing employed vocabulary selects grammatical constructs metaphors and rhetorical gadgets. In second place were the discursive practice analyses which examined intertextuality genre conventions and patterns of production and consumption. Third these silver linings are accompanied by an analysis of social practice situated texts within larger socio-political contexts among them the fall of the Ba'athist regime the emergence and rise of sectarian violence the rise of ISIS and changing open to developing regional matrices.

Having identified dominant frames they explored the ways in which these constructed specific readings of events and actors and followed how these frames changed from one time a period to another or through various media outlets. The analysis of presidential rhetoric examined legitimation strategies such as appeals to traditionalism emotion and logic using pluralization through the development of these strategies to fit changing political environments.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Several data sources were triangulated to improve validity and established theoretical frameworks were used. It was not possible to conduct member checking due to the nature of the data as text however triangulation of findings with existing scholarship was conducted to ensure consistency with established trends. The analysis is grounded in the topics discussed.

4. Results

4.1. Evolution of Ideological Representation in Presidential Rhetoric

This analysis shows a profound change in how different ideologies are positioned along the ideological spectrum both leading into and following from the devastating fateful events of 2003. Saddam Hussein's regime which preceded the current governments in Iraq characterized its presidential speeches using strong and authoritative languages emphasizing national unity or strength or defiance calling attention to external threats and the unyielding nature of Iraqi identity. Gentlemen presidents who came after-2003 however eschewed this authoritarian nationalism in favor of a democratic and inclusive ideology.

Jalal Talabani's speeches collected 2005-2014 would be a great example of this transformation. In his 2005 address to the U.N. he proclaimed "Today Iraq is rising anew as a partner in an international system that we all hope to strengthen by upholding the principles of balance and justice." His rhetoric emphasized "democratic" "freedom" and "development" pledging allegiance to a new political order. The vocabulary moved from the Ba'athist preoccupation with external enemies to internal urgencies of reconciliation and reconstruction.

Under Fuad Masum (2014-2018) whose presidency was marked by the rise of ISIS rhetoric turned dramatically more overtly aggressive and assertive: It was now "terrorism" "extremism" "national unity" and "sacrifice." Masum's speech from 2017 announcing the liberation of Mosul stated: "Our people will preserve this victory with an indomitable will ... We are confident that this huge victory is not complete until terrorism is completely eradicated. During this time religious themes grew in prominence as part of the war narrative linking the fight against ISIS to Islamic ideals of "justice" and "sacrifice."

Barham Salih's presidency (2018-2022) struggled with the persistence of social political and economic problems that condensed his rhetoric into a focus on "reform" "good governance" "sustainable development" and "regional cooperation." Salih used words like "hope" and "optimism" stressing that Iraq was a key to meeting diverse people and peoples together a harbinger of regional peace.

4.2. Reframing Nationalism and National Identity

Post-2003 presidents reframed Iraqi nationalism from that of the monolithic exclusionary Ba'athist era toward a more inclusive understanding embracing diversity a process expected to continue. These developments full-fledged the will of these political forces to participate in the rebuilding Iraq such development was acknowledging outright by Talabani in his speech where he said "This development-level that is ratified by the intention of Iraqi political forces...and also run by an open hand towards those who feel as the new friend represents itself on this way overflows and attracts most Iraqis with their various references politically socially and intellectually."

This inclusiveness was elaborated by Salih who on his 2019 UN address framed a vision of Iraq as: "a meeting point for the major peoples in the region - Arabs Persians Turks and Kurds. This enables our country with its components of Shia and Sunni; Arabs Kurds and Turkmen; Muslims and Christians Mandaeans Yazidis and Shabak to be one of the main movers to achieve peace and understanding between countries."

This reframing of nationalism included moving away from the Ba'athist emphasis on pan-Arabism to an emphasis on Iraqis and a common national destiny. Presidents increasingly invoked constitutional principles and democratic processes as springboards for national unity rather than top-down authoritarian claims of monolithism.

4.3. Islamist Themes and Rhetorical Strategies

Presidential rhetoric changed quite a bit across administrations when it came to Islamist themes. If Saddam used religious language instrumentally and carefully the post-2003 presidents felt they had no choice but to appeal to Islamic concepts because religion is at the center of Iraqi society and politics.

His addresses drew from Islamic concepts that called for dialogue and reconciliation or "shura" (consultation). Masum more directly connected Islamic ideas to the struggle against extremism framing the fight against ISIS as a defense of genuine Islam. "The Iraqis draw inspiration from the noble values of sacrifice martyrdom and resistance in pursuit of truth and elimination of falsehood" he said in a speech during Ashura observances in 2017.

Salih employed Islamic terms within a more general discourse on citizenship and coexistence. In his 2018 address to the Supreme Islamic Council he acknowledged that the council had played a role in defeating ISIS but then stressed the need to build "a homeland for all Iraqis regardless of their faith or ethnicity."

Islamic terms are much more frequent in presidential speeches since 2003. Terms such as "jihad" (struggle) "takfir" (excommunication) and "umma" (Islamic community) became more widely used as presidents sought to commandeer religious language to validate state institutions and challenge extremist interpretations.

4.4. Media Framing and Sectarian Narratives

A media content analysis shows strident consistent patterns of sectarian framing that varies between outlets aligned with opposing political actors. Pro-government Iraqi media and Iranian-affiliated outlets cover issues through the lens of anti-terrorism and national unity depicting groups such as ISIS as nonhuman terrorists that pose a threat to Iraq's social fabric. Arab and Turkish media by contrast are more likely to cast Iraqi conflicts as manifestations of sectarian power struggles and Iranian expansionism.

The monitoring of the upcoming 2025 elections by the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights indicates a worrying escalation in identity-based incitement. Exclusionary rhetoric has migrated from extremist fringes to mainstream campaign literature and media programming. Candidates instead increasingly turned to subnational identities sectarian ethnic and regional as vehicles for mobilization exacerbating historic grievances while offering no policy platforms. Social media platforms have emerged as the major battleground for this divisive discourse with organized activity propagating content that engenders hostility toward particular groups.

Conceptual framing around "collective victimhood" has emerged as a particularly powerful rhetorical device. Political agents mobilize narratives of historical grievance not to seek justice or reconciliation but to entrench divisive electoral tactics and foment rancor. These narratives exploit real experiences of marginalization in order to serve immediate political goals instead of facilitating inclusive dialogue.

4.5. Armed Group Narratives and Counter-Discourses

Analysis of media portrayal of armed groups showed competing discursive strategies. [Shamsaeinia \(2023\)](#) upon analysis of coverage around Hashd al-Shaabi identifies four strategies adopted by the counter-discourse media including emphasizing on “dependence on Iran” creating “fears of increase in Shiite sectarianism creation” coalescing “unification of Arab reactionary governments against the Hashd” and pushing to foster a “production of parallel movements”.

As a counter the media of resistance discourse have proposed alternative strategies to achieve visibility through acts of “added analysis” and productions about confrontation with the flow. These strategies highlight the Hashd’s contribution to Iraqi national interests and its cooperation with other resistance organizations positioning the organization as a legitimate part of Iraq’s security apparatus rather than a sectarian militia or an Iranian proxy.

This war of words mirrors wider battles over legitimate uses of force the character of Iraq’s ties to Iran and the role of non-state actors in a post-2003 political order. The way in which armed groups are portrayed does not exist solely within the realm of media representation and it has material implications for their political leverage access to resources and ability to mobilize.

4.6. Digital Transformation and Information Chaos

Social media platforms have transformed the discursive landscape of Iraq. [Khalaf \(2025\)](#) explores TikTok’s role in shaping public attitudes in Iraq and discovers that Anna is representative as 88.5% of respondents are now keen followers of government news with a notably high proportion interested in how governments respond to citizen demands. But this engagement happens in an environment where platforms incentivize speed over accuracy allowing misinformation to spread with baffling velocity.

[Rassan \(2025\)](#) diagnoses this as a crisis of trust in information where traditional institutions judiciary official media higher education have lost authority while influencers and individual voices gain prominence. The public debate about particular events is a case in point of how online platforms generate competing narratives that traditional mechanisms for resolution cannot bridge. The critical question becomes not “What happened?” but “Who gets the right to construct the narrative?”

The effects of this digital transformation are ambiguous.” Although it allows diverse voices to enter into public debate and makes a state monopoly on information all but impossible it splinters the public sphere allows coordinated disinformation campaigns to flourish and undermines the possibility of any shared factual foundation for political debate. The problem for Iraq is not just coping with misinformation but reconstructing the infrastructure of information you can trust.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

In several aspects the results of this study add to theoretical understandings on framing and political discourse. First they show the benefits of converging multiple analytical frameworks CDA framing theory and discourse theory to understand the multi-dimensionality of political communication. In particular Fairclough’s three-dimensional model creates a concrete way to connect linguistic choices at the micro-level of texts regarding macro-level power relations and Entman’s framing theory helps us to understand how media narratives build selected realities.

Second the analysis reinforces perspectives that discourse is inherently adaptive continually adapting to evolving political realities security threats and media environments. The transformation of Iraqi presidential rhetoric from Talabani’s democratic vision through Masum’s anti-terrorism focus and Salih’s reform agenda illustrates not just individual stylistic variations but systematic adaptation to changing challenges and opportunities. Such flexibility enables ideologies to perpetuate and develop yourself while particular rhetorical formulations come in changes.

Third the findings challenge simplistic understandings of sectarianism in Iraqis’ discursive practices. Although certain actors have clearly used identity-based rhetoric as a strategic tool [Haddad’s \(2024\)](#) call for “desectarianization” is bolstered by the fact that presidential rhetoric has evolved to favor more inclusionary formulations and issue-based political dynamics. But monitoring of the 2025 elections indicates that desectarianization is neither linear nor irreversible and that sectarian-based mobilization remains a relatively accessible resource for political actors.

5.2. The Dynamics of Discursive Competition

The analysis shows how Iraqi political discourse reflects a fierce competition among diverse actors presidents political parties armed groups media outlets foreign powers each competing to impose their frames as dominant. That competition between domestic and international actors state and non-state actors traditional media and digital platforms sectarian and cross-sectarian political visions all exist on multiple levels of the same playing field.

In his analysis of the Mahdi Army [Taha \(2019\)](#) illustrates how non-state actors adopt increasingly sophisticated communication strategies to mobilize support and shape collective identities. These Sadriyat music videos demonstrate how cultural production can be put to use in terms of political mobilization and how a targeted narrative using symbols relevant to specific communities in emotionally charged ways can contribute towards this. Also [Shamsaeinia \(2023\)](#) analyzes the coverage of Hashd al-Shaabi and identifies armed groups as sites of discursive contestation arguing that both advocates and opponents of these formations adopt contradicting frames to respectively legitimize or delegitimize the role of those formations.

This competition is made more complicated by external actors. Ultimately a similar dynamic exists with how regional powers go about exporting their respective forms of Iranian activism as evidenced by [Zabihi \(2025\)](#) analysis detailing the influence of soft power descriptions that are meant to shape Iraqi discourse through which a desired form of its narrative is established and defined either materially via hard power through military support or political activity or immaterially in areas pertaining to cultural ties religious connections and economic interdependence. These dynamics are magnified within a transnational media landscape where outlets such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya transmit rival narratives over borders.

5.3. The Challenge of Information Integrity

Fostered by distrust in traditional institutions and the rise of social media platforms these two trends are a fundamental obstacle to political discourse in Iraq. [Rassan's \(2025\)](#) diagnosis of "information chaos" captures the dilemma: in an environment where anything anyone can publish and platforms prioritize sensationalism over truthfulness the very ability to establish shared factual foundations for political debate is threatened.

The implications of this challenge are especially acute for a country just emerging from decades of conflict and authoritarianism. Reconstruction of political community requires some minimal level of shared understanding about basic facts what happened who is responsible for it what solutions are viable. When digital platforms allow for the scattering of parallel narratives that cannot be confidently resolved by any central authority this foundation gets undermined.

The controversy teeth-gritted by [Rassan \(2025\)](#) where public opinion evades settlement through judicial ruling because digital narratives have banked alternative realities as high-value collateral exemplifies a broader crisis of democratic governance. If political choices cannot be rooted in common understandings of problems and solutions the prospect for accountable governance is diminished.

5.4. Continuity and Change in Iraqi Political Discourse

The two decades since 2003 have both seen great change and remarkable continuity in the Iraqi political discourse. From authoritarian nationalism to democratic pluralism: A qualitative change in the ideological resources available to political actors In the meantime notions absent from or deliberately suppressed under the Ba'athist regime "democracy" "human rights" and "citizenship" have become central to political legitimation.

Yet certain patterns persist. The use of identity-based mobilization whether expressed in different forms through protests or political action is a defining feature of both Iraqi politics and Iraqi civil society as we will see below. The sectarian violence of 2006-2008 the emergence of ISIS and even the rhetoric surrounding the 2025 election all highlight that appeals to sectarian ethnic or regional solidarity remain powerful. The modalities of identity mobilization may change from pan-Arabism in Saddam's era to Shi'a Islamism after 2003 and more localized subnational identities in current elections but the underlying dynamic is one of building national political community through exclusionary identity claims.

Continuity is also evident in the role that external actors play on shaping Iraqi discourse. Under Saddam Iraq sought to be a leader of the Arab world and a muscle against foreign influence. And after 2003 presidents have remolded Iraq's international role portraying it as a member of the international community and a bridge between cultures. But the reality of foreign influence whether the U.S. during occupation Iran in later years or regional powers competing for influence is rather a permanent fact reshaping discursive possibilities.

5.5. Implications for Democratic Governance

These findings have adherence equally important for the democratic governance in Iraq. These include an increasing prevalence of identity-based mobilization consolidation or fragmentation of the media environment and erosion of collective trust in institutions that make establishing accountable responsive governance difficult.

The monitoring report on the 2025 elections reveals one particularly disturbing trend: candidates who seek to avoid programmatic engagement and instead sell themselves as protectors of "the component" "the region" or a "persecuted history" offer no accountability for their previous roles or meaningful solutions to Iraq's common challenges. This pattern undercuts democratic accountability since voters are presented with loyalty linked to their identity rather than policy alternatives and those who are elected lack incentives to provide services or solve national problems.

This challenge is compounded by the fragmentation of the media environment. When citizens are hyper-partisanship receive their news from echo chambers that reinforce existing biases and platforms that reward sensationalism the common ground required for deliberation in a democracy is lost. Quoted after quoted raises the challenge identified by [Rassan \(2025\)](#) that of constructing a "normative culture" one that respects human tragedies and where truth should be restored as the supreme value to help democratic reconstruction.

6. Policy Suggestions

Based on the analysis presented above several policy suggestions come out for boosting Iraq's political discourse and media environment.

6.1. Electoral and Regulatory Reform

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) must develop and enforce clear codes of electoral conduct that prohibit. Iraq currently has no enforceable protections against divisive rhetoric as the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights advises allowing candidates to run on sectarian ethnic and regional appeals rather than political

platforms. Ex ante clear standards alongside ex post meaningful sanctions for violations might improve the incentives toward programmatic competition.

The Communications and Media Commission must also take a far more active role in closing the loopholes in our monitoring of what is being said in campaigns. Instead of standing by and recording complaints the Commission should build capacity to detect and stop violations in real time collaborating with platforms to remove content that generates hostility against specific groups.

6.2. Supporting Independent Evidence-Based Media

The independent media's plight in Iraq lack of funding absence of legal protections and biased platforms that reward sensational content over all else needs systemic intervention. One way that we can do this is to establish an independent professional accreditation system which grants a "Media Integrity Certificate" to influencers and journalists who are committed to accuracy. Such a certification could help paying audiences identify where to get their information from and separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to reliable sources versus those prioritizing engagement over raw truth.

Professional networks enable collective support of evidence-based creators providing legal protection crowd growth tools by developing a crowd of audience and getting sponsorship of patrons who value quality content. Intelligent partnerships between traditional and independent media outlets in which each side considers the other part of a single fabric that can take on digital untruths can amplify the spread of accurate information.

6.3. Promoting Media Literacy

Education about the media is a critical investment in citizen resilience to misinformation. Programs aimed at young people the overwhelming majority of social media's consumers should foster critical skills in evaluating sources spotting manipulation tactics and recognizing the incentives that drive digital content. Force civil society organizations support these efforts which should be incorporated into education curriculum.

Complementing these educational efforts public awareness campaigns can raise public consciousness about common misinformation tactics (e.g. sensationalism) and contribute to norms of verification prior to dissemination. The objective is not just to challenge individual untruths but to foster a wider environment that prizes evidence and truth.

6.4. Strengthening Cross-Sectarian Dialogue

The enduring nature of identity-based mobilization indicates that continued investment in cross-sectarian dialogue and relationship-building is warranted. Gaining the trust of Iraqis across social boundaries and countering polarization requires platforms to engage fellow Iraqis on shared challenges from which common policy agendas can also arise. And civil society educational institutions and media outlets dedicated to inclusive programming should be involved in these efforts as well.

Development programs for political parties should promote the emergence of cross-sectarian coalitions and reward parties that create programmatic platforms that address common challenges rather than those based on identity. Design of the electoral system can similarly incentivize cross-community cooperation.

6.5. Regional and International Engagement

As external actors play a crucial role in framing Iraqi discourse international partners should support initiatives that encourage responsible media practices and counter hate speech. This includes engaging regional governments to suppress the spread of divisive narratives on state-affiliated media platforms and supporting regional mechanisms for combating cross-border disinformation.

International organizations can also support Iraqi civil society organizations engaged in fostering fact-based discourse and addressing misinformation through providing funding technical assistance and platforms for sharing best practices with counterpart organizations in other countries that face similar challenges.

7. Conclusion

The present work explored the framing techniques that have been applied in post-2003 Iraqi political discourse and sought to illustrate how presidential rhetoric media narratives and armed group communication have circulated during two decades of drastic change. Intersections of domestic societal processes regional power contestations and changing media technologies are reflected in a complex multi-DD that permeates the world how political events actors and ideas are being framed and perceived.

The transition from authoritarian nationalism the dominant ideology of the Ba'athist regime to more inclusive democratic formulations about political life in Iraq after 2003 constitutes a sea change in the ideological toolkit available to Iraqi political actors. Presidents have redefined Iraqi nationalism to accommodate diversity introduced Islamic motifs to engage religious constituencies and adjusted their rhetorical strategies in response to evolving security threats and shifting political priorities.

But this transformation has come with many obstacles. Sectarian identity-based mobilization continues to be a recurring theme of Iraqi politics surfacing during election time and threatening the country's tenuous social fabric. Media outlets that reach large numbers of people and non-traditional digital platforms have pluralized public life but also fractured it facilitating fast dissemination of misinformation and chipping away at trust in established institutions. The discursive field becomes more complicated with armed groups and external actors practicing well-thought-out communication strategies to pursue their objectives.

This study stresses the role of discourse within political outcomes.” The frames through which problems are defined group identities carved out and implemented have material implications for governance conflict and social cohesion. Solving the political communication problems in Iraq requires not only regulatory and institutional reform but crucially ongoing investment in the culture of democracy itself in both education and entertainment to build a “normative culture” where the truth matters evidence is treated with respect and human dignity is guaranteed against being weaponized for political purposes.

As Iraq persists in its long evolution from authoritarianism and conflict the battle for narratives will be a central part of the fight for the country’s future. To grasp this battle and how it might be differently fought is indispensable to all concerned with the peaceful democratic and pluralistic evolution of Iraq.

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