

Women's Rights Perceptions in Syria: Between Reality and the Tests of Violence in the Transitional Phase

An Analytical Report on Women's Rights in Citizenship and the Social Contract

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Introduction:

Syria is currently undergoing profound structural transformations in both the architecture of power and the fabric of society. These shifts are unfolding within a complex socio-political context, many aspects of which are moving toward the re-entrenchment of patriarchal authority and the shrinking of the public space that Syrian women were able to access during the years of conflict.

This is taking place amid a new political phase marked by a religious framing, in which the relationship between the state and society is being redefined outside a structured transitional framework that could lead toward stability. These developments are also occurring in the absence of strong institutional carriers capable of managing and regulating this transition.

At the same time, this transformation is shaped by a continued state of institutional, economic, and security collapse, further deepening the fragility of the public sphere and leaving its formation vulnerable to significant imbalances in power—almost always at the expense of women, their rights, and the gains they have achieved across various roles, including supporting local communities, building solidarity networks, and advocating for justice and political participation, despite the limited nature of such participation.

This presence has been achieved in environments characterized by constant threats of exclusion and the marginalization of women's issues, often treated as secondary concerns that can be postponed in favor of what are framed as more urgent political and security priorities—a logic that continues to prevail widely.

At the same time, concerns are growing due to attempts to reshape the public sphere based on singular visions, as well as increasing security, social, and cultural pressures. Yet the Syrian

experience clearly demonstrates that what is often considered “personal” in women’s lives is deeply intertwined with political, legal, and social structures. Women’s daily realities intersect directly with issues of security, justice, economy, and political representation.

This analytical report is grounded in this critical moment in Syria and seeks to understand how women perceive the concept of citizenship—one that is steadily eroding—and the possibilities for participating in rebuilding the social contract under these conditions.

The report draws on the outcomes of a series of community dialogue sessions held across several Syrian governorates. These discussions revealed that women’s relationship with citizenship is not shaped by a single factor, but rather by the intersection of multiple structural dynamics that influence their daily lives and their ability to engage and exert influence in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the marginalization of women is not produced solely through direct exclusion, but also through the accumulation of structural factors that reproduce a form of “conditional citizenship”—one that is granted and withdrawn depending on power dynamics, societal balances, and institutional weakness.

Building on this, the report analyzes five key dimensions that shape women’s relationship with citizenship and their ability to actively participate in building an inclusive social contract:

- **The security dimension**, as the primary threshold for participation, including fear, violence, abduction, restrictions on movement, lack of protection from violations, and social stigma.
- **The political dimension**, related to the nature of power, monopolization of decision-making positions, and the gap between formal recognition and actual participation.
- **The economic dimension**, where women bear the burden of sustaining livelihoods and services in the context of a fragile state, limiting their independence and public engagement.
- **The social dimension**, encompassing restrictive norms, stigma, and control over women’s bodies and behavior, making participation a “risk.”
- **The legal dimension**, which undermines equality not only through discriminatory laws but also through selective enforcement, interpretation, and lack of accountability mechanisms.

These dimensions demonstrate how security, political, economic, social, and legal factors intersect to shape women’s position in Syrian society today.

The report aims to highlight the barriers to achieving equal citizenship and to provide a set of recommendations that move participation beyond rhetorical recognition toward meaningful engagement. Citizenship, in this context, should not be measured by general formulations, slogans, or symbolic presence, but by the protection of women from daily violence and fear, and by their empowerment as a structural component of any new social contract in Syria—one that rebalances rights, protections, and responsibilities.

Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative analysis of the outcomes of a series of community dialogue sessions conducted across six Syrian governorates: Aleppo, Al-Hasakah (Qamishli), Tartous, Homs, Damascus, and As-Suwayda.

The process included twelve local dialogue sessions (two in each governorate), aimed at exploring participants' perceptions of citizenship and the social contract based on their lived experiences.

These were complemented by three cross-regional dialogue sessions bringing together participants from different areas (Aleppo–Qamishli, Tartous–Damascus, Homs–As-Suwayda), allowing for comparative insights and identification of shared patterns, in addition to a national-level dialogue session that focused on discussing preliminary findings and expanding the debate on common issues.

Approximately 120 participants took part in these sessions, with women representing around 55%. Participant selection ensured diversity in religious, ethnic, cultural, educational, and political backgrounds, as well as representation from both rural and urban areas, residents and internally displaced persons, and inclusion of persons with disabilities—reflecting the diversity of Syrian society.

This methodology does not aim to produce statistically representative results, but rather to provide an in-depth analytical understanding of women's experiences and perceptions across different contexts.

Accordingly, the paper focuses on analyzing the structural factors shaping women's relationship with equal citizenship and their ability to participate in building a social contract, through five key dimensions: security, political, economic, social, and legal. These form the analytical framework for the report's recommendations.

Factors Shaping Women's Relationship with Society and the State within the Framework of Equal Citizenship and Social Contract Building

First: The Security Dimension – Safety as a Precondition for Citizenship and Participation

Discussions across different governorates reveal that the security dimension is the most sensitive entry point in redefining women's relationship with citizenship and their ability to participate in any future social contract.

For many participants, discussions of rights, representation, or political participation do not begin with constitutional texts or legal frameworks, but with a more immediate and existential question: *Are there safe spaces that allow women to live, move, and speak without fear?*

In this sense, safety is not a sectoral or temporary demand, but a foundational condition for meaningful citizenship. When basic physical and social protection is absent, citizenship shifts from being a right to becoming a threat, and public participation becomes a high-risk personal and social choice.

Thus, safety is not merely a surrounding condition of citizenship—it is its primary threshold, preceding all other rights and forms of participation.

In several governorates, this sense of insecurity was linked to direct experiences of violence and violations. In Homs and Tartous, discussions repeatedly connected public participation with fears of kidnapping, targeting, or social stigma.

As a result, many women began to redefine citizenship not as a political right or the ability to influence public affairs, but as the ability to survive daily violations—often along sectarian

lines. This has led to a noticeable withdrawal from the public sphere, driven by both direct security constraints and increasing social pressures that limit women's mobility and visibility.

Fear has not only restricted political participation but has also reduced broader social engagement, including civil society work and community activities.

In Tartous, an additional layer emerged around fears of abduction and violations against women, including reports of kidnappings accompanied by physical violence and severe abuse. These realities have reinforced the perception that women's bodies may become sites of violence during periods of security breakdown.

This has contributed to a growing sense that the public sphere is inherently unsafe—not only due to direct violence but also because of social permissiveness, silence, or even implicit complicity in some local contexts. As a result, many women withdraw from public participation out of fear of similar consequences.

In As-Suwayda, the security dimension took on a more complex form due to the intersection of direct violence and social stigma. Discussions highlighted the profound impact of the July incursion and the accompanying massacre and violations, including abductions, sexual violence, and physical abuse targeting women.

These experiences embedded a collective memory of violence that continues to shape women's perception of safety.

The issue of abducted women, including cases of enforced disappearance, further deepened fear and anxiety within the community, particularly for women traveling outside the governorate during periods of siege.

Forced displacement and its humanitarian and social consequences have intensified feelings of fragility and insecurity. Many participants expressed fears of renewed incursions and a repetition of violence cycles.

Discussions also highlighted how sexual violence, beyond being a grave violation, imposes additional burdens on women. Survivors often face double victimization: first through the

violation itself, and then through social punishment, including stigma, exclusion, or even violence under the pretext of “honor.”

This reality underscores that physical protection and recognition of violations are essential preconditions for any discussion of justice or a social contract. Safety, therefore, emerges as an existential issue that precedes all other rights and participation debates.

In Damascus, the security dimension manifested differently, with safety linked to women’s ability to express themselves and claim rights without fear of political or social repercussions.

Here, the issue extends beyond direct violence to include a broader climate of caution, surveillance, and fear of stigma or targeting, which restricts public space and conditions women’s participation on silence or excessive self-restraint.

In Aleppo, safety emerged as a prerequisite for transitioning from social participation to political participation. While women have played visible roles in rebuilding social ties and fostering community cohesion, their engagement at higher political levels remains limited due to fears of targeting, defamation, or harassment—particularly in digital spaces and social media, where public participation can quickly become a threat to personal safety or reputation.

In Northeast Syria, particularly in Qamishli and Kurdish-majority areas, the security dimension intersects with broader ethnic and political dynamics.

Participants from Kurdish communities expressed a dual sense of vulnerability: one rooted in a long history of ethnic marginalization, and another linked to recent political and security shifts, including the weakening of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the expansion of central authority in areas such as Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Al-Hasakah.

In this context, safety is not understood solely as individual protection, but as a collective guarantee that previously achieved gains—particularly regarding women’s participation in public life—will not be reversed.

For many women, the sense of safety is therefore closely tied to the stability of existing political arrangements and the ability of any future authority to preserve, rather than undermine, these hard-won rights.

When these contexts are considered together, it becomes clear that the security factor does not operate in isolation from the other structural factors. Rather, it intersects with sectarian and ethnic affiliations, with social and cultural structures, and with the nature of the existing political authority. Yet the common thread across the different governorates is women's recognition that safety is the first threshold of citizenship. When the state or society is unable to guarantee protection from violence, stigma, and targeting, citizenship becomes fragile and conditional, and discussion of participation in shaping the social contract is postponed. Accordingly, any serious path toward rebuilding citizenship in Syria cannot ignore the security dimension in women's lives, because women's ability to live and move without fear remains the clearest and most legitimate indicator of the credibility of any new social contract.

Second: The Political Factor – Between Symbolic Representation and Real Empowerment

Discussions across the various governorates showed that the relationship between women and the political sphere is marked by a clear contradiction between rhetorical recognition of women's role and the limited reality of their presence in decision-making positions. As some participants repeatedly expressed, the problem is not the absence of discourse about women's participation or political equality, but rather the gap between discourse and practice. Women's presence is often invoked as an indicator of progress or openness, while the actual mechanisms of decision-making remain confined to narrow circles dominated by men. As a result, women's representation frequently becomes more symbolic than substantive, amounting to visibility without genuine partnership in shaping or directing public policy.

In Aleppo, this concern was directly linked to the question of drafting the social contract itself. Discussions revealed a clear fear that the rules governing the relationship between state and society would be rewritten without women's meaningful participation, thereby reproducing a political system that excludes women even if its formal texts employ the language of equality. For many participants, the fairness of any social contract is not measured by the existence of provisions that mention equality, but by the degree to which women participate in drafting it from the outset and by the extent to which that participation influences its substance and implementation mechanisms.

In Qamishli, a somewhat different paradox emerged. There is broader recognition of women's role in the public sphere compared with other Syrian regions, and some existing political frameworks adopt more progressive provisions regarding gender equality. However, discussions showed that this textual progress does not always translate into real

empowerment at critical moments of decision-making. While women appear in public discourse as symbols of change or progress, their actual ability to shape policies and strategic decisions remains questionable, particularly in light of the political and security transformations taking place in the region and the resulting rearrangement of power balances.

In Damascus, in addition to what appeared in other governorates, the political factor was also linked to the nature of the organizational and political environment in which civil society operates, as this remains one of the spaces in which women continue to be active. Participants noted that the restrictions imposed on organizations and civil initiatives limit the possibility of transforming these spaces into a genuine avenue for practicing citizenship or for building women's political leadership. Administrative and regulatory pressures, interference in programs, and oversight of activities make civil work itself confined within narrow limits, reducing women's ability to turn their community participation into broader political influence.

In governorates such as Tartous and Homs, the political sphere appeared even more closed. There, the political factor intersects with the security and social factors in ways that render political participation costly or practically inaccessible. In these contexts, the issue of women's political representation is not framed as an immediate priority as much as the more basic issue of women's ability to appear in the public sphere without fear or targeting. This reality has led many women to withdraw from political engagement or to confine their participation to social and civil roles with limited influence.

Taken together, these contexts show that the core challenge does not lie in the absence of tools such as quotas or numerical representation, but rather in the nature of the political structures themselves. When centers of decision-making remain concentrated in narrow, monopolistic, and opaque frameworks controlled by the interim authority, women's presence in institutions or elected bodies has limited effect. For this reason, many participants believe that achieving equal political citizenship requires more than simply including women in representative positions; it requires reconsidering the very rules of political life, so that women participate as partners in decision-making rather than as symbolic figures or formal evidence of plurality. In this sense, the issue of women's political empowerment is directly linked to the nature of the political system itself, and to the extent of its openness to meaningful participation and the distribution of power, rather than to rhetorical acknowledgment of equality alone.

Third: The Economic Factor – A Double Burden and an Imbalanced Citizenship

The dialogues across the various governorates showed that the economic factor is one of the most influential determinants of women's ability to exercise their citizenship in a meaningful

way. Economic conditions are not related only to levels of income or access to employment opportunities; they are deeply intertwined with the structure of social roles, the weakness of social protection, and the declining capacity of the state to provide basic services. In this context, women bear a double burden: on the one hand, they shoulder increasing economic responsibilities within the family as living conditions deteriorate; on the other, their economic role continues to be treated as secondary or insufficiently recognized within public policy and official economic frameworks.

In governorates such as Damascus, Tartous, and Homs, daily economic pressures emerged as a direct factor reshaping women's lives and constraining the space for their public participation. Sharp increases in living costs and the deterioration of public services have shifted a large share of economic adaptation into the household, where women assume additional responsibilities related to securing basic needs, managing limited resources, and caring for children and the elderly. As the state's capacity to provide adequate educational, health, and social services declines, women effectively become the first line of defense against the livelihood crisis, which limits their ability to engage in public life or political work and confines their energy to managing daily crises.

This burden is not confined to immediate subsistence concerns. It also intersects with social and legal factors that undermine women's economic independence. In many cases, women face difficulties in accessing stable or safe employment, whether due to social restrictions linked to gender roles or due to the fragility of the labor market itself, where informal and unprotected work is increasingly prevalent. The weakness of legal protections and social guarantees also makes women's labor more vulnerable to exploitation and instability, limiting its potential to become a genuine source of economic empowerment.

In As-Suwayda, the economic dimension appeared in a different but equally significant form. Women played a pivotal role in community initiatives that sought to compensate for the state's absence in the provision of basic services. Many women participated in organizing community support initiatives, managing shelters, providing assistance to affected families, and engaging in local solidarity networks to alleviate the effects of the blockade imposed on the governorate by the transitional authority. Yet these roles, important as they are, simultaneously reflect a profound imbalance in the contractual relationship between state and society, whereby women assume responsibilities that should fall within the mandate of public institutions, without corresponding institutional recognition or economic and social guarantees.

The economic factor also intersects with the security factor in a number of contexts, where the absence of stability or fear related to movement and work in certain areas limits women's opportunities to work outside the home or to participate in economic activity. In some cases, this reality reinforces patterns of economic dependence within the household, increasing

women's vulnerability and reducing their ability to make independent decisions in their personal and public lives.

In Qamishli, these challenges are compounded by another dimension related to the instability of economic and administrative arrangements amid ongoing political and security transformations. Changes in political and administrative control, in addition to the broader weakness of the economic structure, make employment opportunities and services more fragile, which directly and disproportionately affects women, who often bear the heaviest burden of these disruptions.

Overall, these dynamics reflect a clear imbalance in the relationship between rights and responsibilities in the economic sphere. While women assume growing roles in managing livelihood crises and supporting family and community stability, there are no corresponding economic or social policies that provide them with protection or strengthen their independence. Rather than functioning as a pathway to enhanced citizenship and public participation, work and economic activity often become an additional burden that limits women's capacity to engage in the public sphere. Unless this imbalance is addressed through more just and gender-sensitive economic and social policies, the economic dimension will continue to reproduce inequalities in citizenship rather than help remedy them.

Fourth: The Social Factor – Stigma, Surveillance, and the Reproduction of Exclusion

The dialogues across the various governorates revealed that the social factor is one of the most complex determinants of women's boundaries of participation in public life. Its influence is not limited to cultural values or traditional norms, but intersects with political, security, and economic factors that reproduce multiple forms of surveillance and exclusion. In many local contexts, women face constraints not only from state institutions but from society itself, where social norms, reputation, and fear of stigma become effective tools for regulating women's behavior and defining the limits of their public presence.

In several governorates, social stigma emerged as a central factor affecting women's relationship with society and citizenship. In Homs and As-Suwayda, this stigma was directly tied to the violence and violations women experienced over the past year. Discussions revealed that the nature of abduction and sexual violence in social environments shaped by cultures of shame and stigma places victims in a deeply vulnerable position within the community. These cases are often accompanied by pity, caution, or indirect suspicion, creating social isolation and silence, and adding a social burden that exceeds the violation itself. As a result, some women found themselves exposed to a double form of violence: the direct violence of the violation, and the social violence of stigma, isolation, or suspicion. In this context, women's bodies become sites for the reassertion of notions of honor and

reputation, limiting women's ability to restore their place within the community and making public participation socially costly and risky.

In Tartous, the social factor appeared from a different angle, related to the existence of a strict system of social surveillance that determines what movement and behavior are acceptable for women, and which has become more pronounced under the current transitional authority. Dialogues indicated that many women face social pressure related to appearance, dress, and presence in public space, creating a form of informal surveillance that may be even more powerful than direct legal restrictions. This surveillance is not exercised by any single actor, but rather emerges from a broad web of social expectations shaped by the current authority and redefining what is considered "acceptable" or "unacceptable" for women, thereby shrinking the space for movement and participation.

In Damascus, the social factor was also linked to a broader climate of suspicion and accusation that may accompany women's participation in public or civil work. Discussions showed that women engaged in civil or rights-based activities may face campaigns of suspicion or discredit, whether in public settings or through social media. This atmosphere creates a socially pressurized environment in which women's public participation carries a high moral and social cost, as personal reputation can become a tool of violence and character assassination. This is especially visible in the digital sphere, which has become one of the most prominent challenges facing women's participation in public life in Syria. With the expansion of social media use, these platforms have often turned into spaces for incitement against women, exposing them to defamation, bullying, moral accusations, the publication of personal information, or direct threats. The impact of these practices extends beyond psychological and moral harm to undermining women's presence in public affairs, as political or civil participation becomes a personal risk that may trigger organized campaigns of distortion and targeting. This has restricted the participation of many women or pushed some to withdraw entirely from the public sphere, making digital violence a significant factor in reproducing exclusion and unequal opportunities for public engagement across Syria.

In Aleppo, a somewhat different picture emerged. Women maintained a noticeable social presence in community initiatives and civil society work, particularly in areas related to community support and the rebuilding of social ties. Yet this presence largely remained confined to spaces considered "socially safe," meaning those that did not directly challenge existing political or social balances. Women's participation thus remained possible so long as it was contained within community or humanitarian work, while moving into higher levels of political or leadership influence remained far more complex.

In Qamishli, the social factor intersects with ethnic and cultural dimensions, where women's participation is intertwined with broader debates over identity and communal representation. Despite women's actual presence in the public sphere, including as fighters and leaders within the local structures of the Autonomous Administration—which has opened wider

participation spaces compared with other Syrian regions—discussions revealed the persistence of social reservations and anxieties in some circles. These anxieties are tied to the rapid shifts in gender roles during the years of conflict and political transformation, alongside clear fears that integration into the institutions of the interim authority could lead to the rollback or loss of the gains women have made in political and military representation.

More broadly, these patterns show that society itself can become a partner in reproducing marginalization by imposing normalized restrictions on women's presence in the public sphere. While laws or political discourse may formally invoke equality—often in language directed outward—social norms, stigma, and surveillance continue to set the real boundaries of women's participation, especially under the current authority, which confines women's role to stereotypical frameworks. This is not simply the result of social norms alone; it is reinforced by the authority's own practices and internal discourse, which promote traditional and conservative views of women's roles. In practice, this narrows and regulates the public sphere for women, restricting their participation to limited functions subordinated to patriarchal thinking and aligned with the authority's ideologically religious vision, which it seeks to institutionalize in the public domain.

Fifth: The Legal Factor – The Gap Between Text and Practice

The dialogues across the various governorates showed that the legal factor constitutes one of the central axes in reshaping women's relationship with citizenship and with the possibility of participating in the construction of a more just social contract. However, the challenge that emerged in most contexts is not limited to the lack of legal provisions supportive of equality, but lies primarily in the deep gap between law and implementation, the selectivity in interpretation and enforcement, and the continued existence of discriminatory laws in vital areas that directly affect women's lives—such as personal status laws, nationality, labor, and protection from violence—as well as circulars and regulatory decisions issued by some local authorities that impose rules affecting and restricting personal appearance in public spaces and public institutions.

In many discussions, participants expressed a clear awareness that laws may sometimes include general principles referring to equality or rights, yet these principles remain of limited effect when they are not translated into clear implementation mechanisms or institutions capable of ensuring their enforcement. For many women, the law is not measured by the existence of texts, but by its capacity to provide actual protection in daily life. When such protection is absent, or when laws are applied selectively, the law shifts from being an instrument for guaranteeing rights into a formal framework that does not truly alter the balance of power within society.

In Qamishli, discussions highlighted the tension between relatively progressive legal texts and the reality of their implementation on the ground. A number of participants pointed to legal or regulatory frameworks introduced in recent years that include important principles related to gender equality and women's participation in public life. Yet despite their symbolic and political significance, these texts still face major challenges in implementation, whether because of the limited institutional capacity to enforce them or because of the persistence of social norms that resist such change. The existence of progressive texts alone is therefore not sufficient to guarantee a real transformation in women's position within society unless they are accompanied by institutional structures capable of enforcing the law equally.

In As-Suwayda, the legal debate emerged more directly in relation to the link between religion and legislation. Some participants stressed that protecting women's rights requires a clear civil legal framework grounded in the principle of equality before the law, away from religious or sectarian interpretations that may be used to justify discrimination.

In this context, participants called for a comprehensive civil law regulating rights and obligations on the basis of citizenship, in a way that ensures women's rights are not subject to shifting interpretations linked to religious or social authorities.

In governorates such as Damascus, Homs, and Tartous, discussions focused more heavily on the continued existence of a legal framework that still contains discriminatory provisions, especially in the fields of personal status and nationality. These laws directly affect women's ability to make independent decisions concerning their family or legal lives, and also limit their economic and social autonomy. In addition, participants highlighted the weakness of legal protection mechanisms in responding to violence or violations, whether because of the complexity of legal procedures or because of the lack of trust in the institutions responsible for enforcing the law.

In Aleppo, the issue of the relationship between law and accountability also emerged, as discussions showed that the absence of effective oversight mechanisms or independent judicial institutions makes it difficult to translate legal rights into real guarantees. In many cases, women may be aware of their legal rights, but the lack of effective pathways to claim these rights makes access to justice a complex or risky process.

When these contexts are considered together, it becomes clear that the legal challenge regarding equal citizenship for women does not lie solely in drafting new laws, but in rebuilding the relationship between law, institutions, and society. Law does not derive its meaning from texts alone, but from the ability of institutions to apply it fairly and equally, and from citizens' trust in their ability to rely on it to protect their rights. Without independent judicial institutions, transparent accountability mechanisms, and a legal system that guarantees genuine equality before the law, discussions of equal citizenship for women will remain limited in impact. Therefore, any pathway toward rebuilding the social contract in Syria requires a structural legal reform that goes beyond amending texts to building an

integrated legal system that ensures fair implementation and protects women's rights as full citizens.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this paper are based on the outcomes of community dialogue sessions held across different governorates, as well as on the analysis of the five key factors shaping women's relationship with equal citizenship and their ability to participate effectively in building a new social contract. These recommendations reflect priorities and lived experiences expressed by women across diverse local contexts, where the challenges they face emerged as the result of the intersection of these factors rather than any single isolated cause.

Although some of these recommendations may appear ambitious in light of the current authority and the Syrian context—with its institutional fragility, political challenges, severe economic collapse, and limited resources—they nevertheless represent essential conditions for any serious effort to rebuild a more balanced relationship between women, the state, and society. Without addressing these structural factors, women's presence in the public sphere will remain vulnerable to restriction or regression, and equal citizenship will continue to exist as an incomplete theoretical framework. These recommendations are therefore not presented as ideal solutions, but as necessary requirements to ensure women's participation as key actors in shaping Syria's political and social future.

First: Recommendations at the National Level

1. Security Factor: Integrating “Gendered Safety” as a Foundational شرط of Citizenship

- Adopt a national policy on gendered safety that defines gender-based violence as a direct threat to citizenship, and links women's protection to reform of the security sector—not to ideological or purely humanitarian discourse.
- Establish safe reporting and protection pathways (hotlines, referral points, protection units) that ensure confidentiality and protection from retaliation, managed by trained personnel with clear protocols for handling survivors/reporting individuals.
- Regulate weapons and both formal and informal actors through a gradual national plan that reduces the ability of any party to use violence as a tool of social or political control, as the normalization of violence as a governance tool effectively undermines citizenship—particularly for women—and turns participation into a risk.
- Link security to accountability: sustainable protection cannot exist without clear accountability for violations, including those that generate fear, stigma, and restrict women's movement and public presence.

2. Political Factor: From Symbolic Representation to Real Empowerment

- Ensure women's participation in any constitutional or contractual process with real authority—not merely numerical presence, but decision-making roles in committees, access to information, the right to object, and voting/approval mechanisms that prevent women's voices from being overridden.
- Protect civic space as a driver of participation by easing administrative and security restrictions on organization and public engagement, since confining women's roles to "safe spaces" (civil/service sectors) without opening political space reinforces the gap between participation and influence.
- Establish a transparent system for appointments and representation at local and national levels that limits decision-making monopolies within narrow circles and prevents women from being reduced to a symbolic "front" while power is exercised behind the scenes.

3. Economic Factor: Rebalancing Rights and Responsibilities

- Introduce a national social protection package targeting women as economic actors, including targeted financial/service support, basic health insurance, and safe transportation enabling women to access work and public services without exposure to violence, exploitation, or social restrictions—since unpaid care burdens are a key driver of imbalanced citizenship.
- Implement labor policies that create decent and safe opportunities, including combating exploitation, protecting against workplace harassment, and facilitating access to the labor market through training and linking skills to real opportunities.
- Restore public services as a contractual obligation: electricity, water, health, and education are not technical issues, but conditions for independence and public participation; their absence forces women to compensate for the state without guarantees.

4. Social Factor: Dismantling Systems of Stigma and Surveillance that Exclude Women from Public Space

- Criminalize stigma, incitement, and hate speech targeting women (especially survivors), and link this to clear enforcement measures, as "reputation" has become a tool of social and political control in multiple contexts.
- Launch a national program for social and behavioral change through schools, media, and local/religious/community leadership, focusing on: the dignity of survivors, rejection of "shame" narratives, and expanding acceptance of women's participation beyond traditional roles.
- Support safe public spaces for women (community centers, clubs, local platforms) that enable visibility and expression without accusation or oppressive social surveillance.

5. Legal Factor: Structural Reform to Close the Gap Between Text and Practice

- Conduct a comprehensive review of discriminatory laws in personal status, nationality, and labor, and link legal reform to an implementation plan (executive regulations, judicial training, monitoring mechanisms) so that rights are not merely written but effective.
 - Strengthen judicial independence and complaint mechanisms by establishing accessible grievance systems, protecting witnesses and complainants, and monitoring enforcement of decisions.
 - Integrate women's issues into transitional justice through recognition, reparations, and judicial/non-judicial pathways, while addressing the specific nature and social consequences of gender-based violence in a way that ensures justice for survivors without stigma.
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Second: Recommendations at the Local Level (Context-Specific)

Aleppo: Transitional Context and Sensitivity to Reproducing Exclusion

- Integrate women from the outset in drafting new local/political frameworks (committees, councils, consultation mechanisms) to prevent the reproduction of a “male-dominated contract” in new forms.
- Protect women's transition from civil to political participation through legal and security guarantees against targeting and defamation, and expand public space beyond “safe zones.”
- Link local economic recovery to women's empowerment through safe employment opportunities and care services that facilitate women's entry into the labor market and public life.

Al-Hasakah/Qamishli: Progressive Texts vs. Fragile Implementation and Shifting Control

- Focus on enforcement and accountability mechanisms to translate written principles into measurable public policies (protection, services, real representation, complaint pathways).
- Protect women at the intersection of gender and ethnic identity through guarantees against exclusion, retaliation, or discrimination amid political and security changes.
- Strengthen women-led civil society networks capable of negotiating service and rights priorities beyond symbolic roles.

Tartous: Fragile Security, Social Surveillance, and Political Withdrawal

- Prioritize guarantees against sectarian-based targeting through clear measures to reduce fear, address violations, and ensure safe channels for expression without repercussions.
- Create safe spaces for women beyond state and social surveillance, including community initiatives and psychosocial/legal support services.
- Ensure fairness in employment and service access, as economic fragility reinforces withdrawal and turns livelihoods into tools of control, with women as the most affected.

Homs: Security/Social Complexity and Fear of Instability

- Ensure protection of women's movement and public presence through controlling security breakdowns, establishing reporting/protection pathways, and engaging local actors within a legal—not customary—framework.
- Prevent mediation practices from replacing the law by supporting community dispute mechanisms that uphold women's rights rather than reproduce silence or coercion.
- Promote a local economy that supports cohesion by linking recovery to essential services and employment opportunities, as economic pressure increases domestic violence and limits participation.

Damascus: Restrictions on Civil Society and Narrowing Public Space

- Reform the regulatory environment for civil society to allow women independent public space and reduce risks of suspicion or politicization.
- Establish transparent institutional participation channels (public consultations, sectoral committees, neighborhood councils) ensuring participation is continuous and not selective.
- Link legal protection to freedom of expression, as safety also depends on the ability to claim rights without punishment or threat.

As-Suwayda: Deep Trauma, Stigma Against Survivors, and the Need for Recognition

- Establish a clear local/national justice pathway including recognition, reparations, and accountability as prerequisites for rebuilding trust and citizenship.
- Restore essential services (transport, education, exams, access to universities/services), as disrupted daily life under siege intensifies pressures on women.
- Implement programs to dismantle “honor” culture and social punishment by protecting survivors, preventing concealment or family-based violence, and ensuring community and legal support that prioritizes dignity over silence.

