INTERSECTION
ASSOCIATION

Beyond Prison Walls:

Testimonies of Women Victims of Political Repression

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Testimonies of Women Victims of Political Repression

Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms

جمعية تقاطع من أجل الحقوق والحريات

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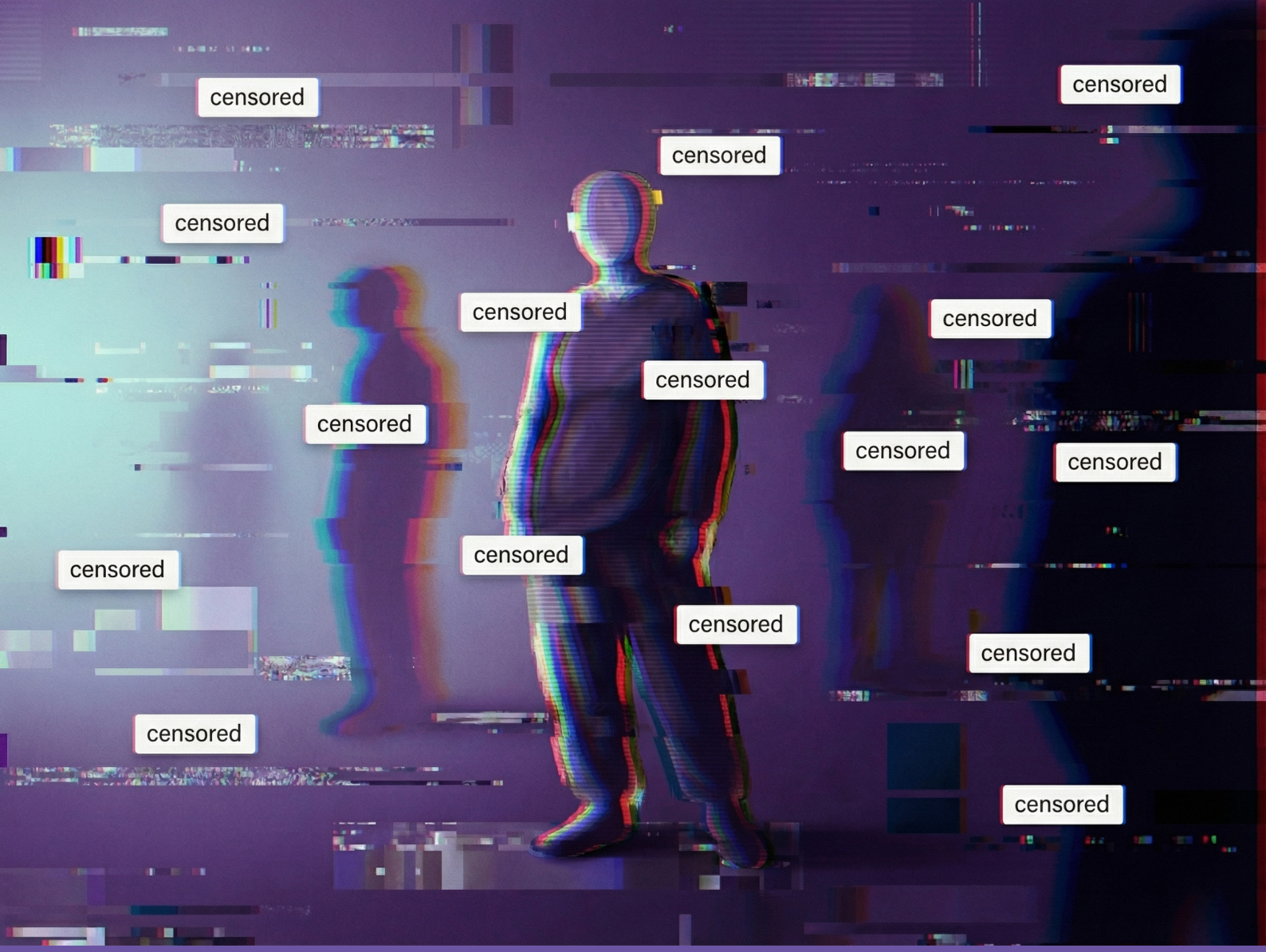


Executive Summary

This study, conducted between 2025 and 2026, examines the reality of digital violence and political targeting experienced by women active in the public sphere in Tunisia. It adopts an intersectional feminist approach based on direct interviews and phone conversations used to collect testimonies from nine women. These participants include human rights defenders, political activists, trans feminists, four women from the families of political prisoners, and two activists living in exile as a result of political pressure, prosecution, and the absence of fair judicial proceedings.

The study begins by analysing the patterns of targeting affecting these women, revealing how digital violence operates in a non neutral manner, where gender intersects with political positions or family affiliation. Through this intersection, mechanisms of defamation, stigmatization, and hate speech are used to legitimize

sham trials and to exclude women from both the public and digital spheres.

During the interviews, participants were asked to reproduce the derogatory and stigmatizing words and expressions directed at them exactly as they were used. This method was adopted intentionally, not only to document violations but also to reveal the shocking nature of abusive discourse and to show how such language is used to weaken and exclude women from public and digital participation. In doing so, the study reflects the concrete reality of the psychological and social violence faced by women in Tunisia.

The analysis also shows that the digital violence experienced by women actors and their families in the public sphere does not constitute an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it represents a direct extension and a reconfiguration of violence that occurs in the physical and material sphere. The study identifies thirteen forms of digital violence as emerging patterns that reproduce four main forms of violence previously documented in offline contexts.

Within this framework, the study seeks to analyse the mechanisms through which this violence is produced in both judicial and digital spaces, while highlighting its psychological, familial, social, and political consequences. These consequences include withdrawal from the public sphere, self censorship, and the cautious reshaping of digital presence, developments that threaten the continuity of women's participation and weaken the political and human rights presence of women.

The study also presents a counter narrative to the official narratives used to justify accusations and sham prosecutions. It concludes by proposing legal, societal, and technological protection pathways aimed at ensuring women's right to free and safe participation in public life.

Introduction

The expanding role of women in society and the growing scope of their influence have placed them at the centre of confrontation with dominant patriarchal structures. Their increasing participation in social, academic, and political life has become a source of concern for systems based on inherited forms of domination. In this context, digital violence has emerged as one of the most significant contemporary challenges facing women in the public sphere. The virtual space is no longer merely a platform for communication or expression, but has become a space of unequal power relations in which multiple forms of systematic violations are carried out. These practices include smear campaigns, hate speech, direct threats, unlawful surveillance, hacking, and extortion. They do not target only women active in public

affairs, but extend to all women regardless of their roles, and even reach their families, in an attempt to silence their voices and restrict their social and political presence. In this way, digital violence intersects with traditional mechanisms of control, reproducing exclusion through tools that are faster, more widespread, and more influential.

Digital violence intensifies when it is directed at women active in public life, as their names become targeted within contexts linked to their visibility, activism, and public roles. The digital space becomes a site for harassment and violations affecting their lives on multiple levels including personal, familial, and academic. This occurs in a context where effective deterrent frameworks for such practices remain absent, and where governments fail to establish adequate rights based protection systems that ensure safety and accountability, instead favouring systems of control and guardianship.

In the Tunisian context, women have emerged as key actors in public debate and in social and political movements. They have contributed to shaping a rights based and democratic discourse that has continued to evolve and interact with its intellectual and cultural environment, particularly with the expansion of internet use and social media after the revolution. However, this growing presence has been accompanied by waves of organized digital violence seeking to reproduce gender discrimination in the virtual sphere and to exclude women from meaningful participation by spreading fear and social stigma. Digital violence reflects a broader social and political structure grounded in unequal power relations and cannot be understood simply as a technical or individual phenomenon. Patterns of repression intersect with other factors such as economic status, geographic location, cultural background, class affiliation, intellectual orientation, or political affiliation, making women more vulnerable to these violations. This intersection between gender and other social factors highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding the phenomenon rather than reducing it to a single dimension.

The impact of digital violence extends beyond the individual to affect society as a whole. It limits women's participation in public affairs and fosters a culture of fear and silence, thereby threatening the foundations of Tunisia's emerging democracy and undermining the possibility of building a public sphere based on equality and justice. Its danger increases when it intersects with political violence, transforming into a complex tool targeting women active in public life, whether

they are prisoners of opinion, convicted individuals, or activists. Its effects also extend to future generations. In this way, digital and political violence becomes a phenomenon whose consequences extend across time. It does not only disrupt the present but also threatens the future by reproducing mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization, undermining the gains achieved by women, and emptying the public sphere of feminist generations that are active, critical, and committed to change.

All of this calls for a reminder that Tunisia remains in the process of building a system of justice. Despite the existence of a legal framework and various legislative safeguards, women continue to face stigma and doubt regarding their capacities, and their voices are pushed out of the public sphere by political authorities that exploit existing social prejudices against them. This weakens their position and limits their courage in confronting discrimination and violence. The intersection between digital and political violence, combined with social stigma, creates an environment hostile to rights and freedoms and turns the public sphere into a risky space where psychological and social pressure are used to undermine women's presence and weaken their ability to continue their activism. This reinforces a culture of silence and diminishes the prospects for building a more just and equal future.

Within this framework, the study analyses the patterns of targeting affecting women active in public life and presents a counter narrative that exposes the falsity of the accusations and sham trials used to justify the violence directed against them. This work does not only aim to expose repressive practices but also to analyse the mechanisms through which violence is produced within both judicial and digital spaces and to highlight how these tools are mobilized to exclude women and undermine their presence. The study also seeks to understand the social and political consequences of these violations and to propose legal, societal, and technological protection pathways that guarantee women the right to free and safe participation in public life. In doing so, it contributes to strengthening the path toward democracy and equality within Tunisian society.

Research Problem

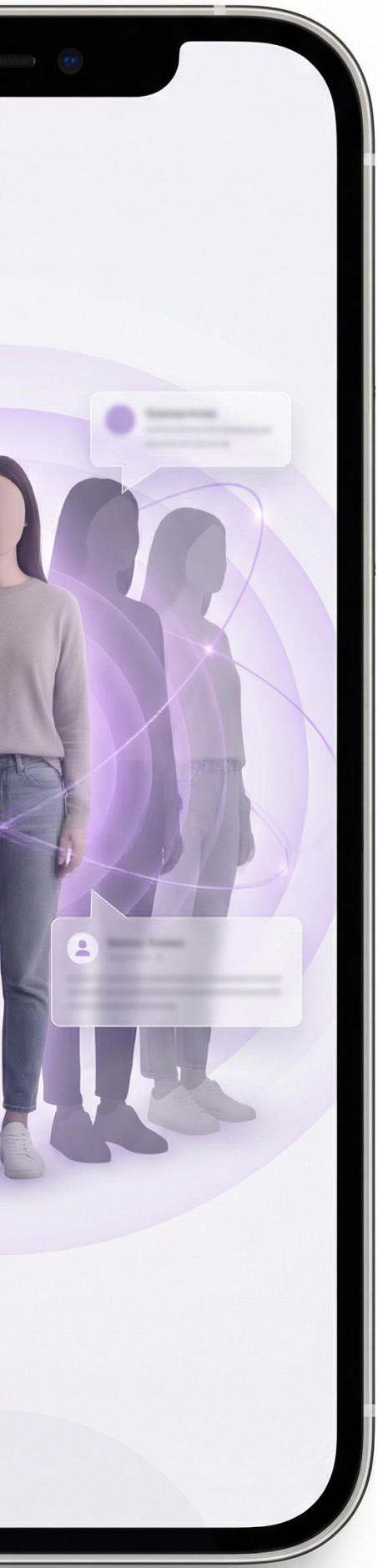
The central problem addressed by this study is that digital violence directed at women active in the public sphere, as well as women from the families of political prisoners in Tunisia, does not operate in a neutral manner. Rather, it takes intersecting gendered and political forms. Women are targeted first because of their gender through stigmatization and defamation grounded in gender stereotypes. This targeting intensifies when their presence in public life is linked to political positions or family relations with political detainees. Such digital violence produces significant psychological, social, and behavioural impacts, including withdrawal from the public sphere, increased self censorship in discourse, and the cautious reshaping of digital presence. These consequences threaten the continuity of women's participation in public life and weaken women's presence in political and human rights spaces

Methodology

The report adopts a qualitative intersectional feminist methodology based on narrative analysis in order to understand the experiences of women subjected to digital violence in Tunisia, whether they are activists in the public sphere or women from the families of political prisoners. This methodological approach allows for an in depth analysis of how gender, political, and social factors intersect in shaping patterns of violence. It reveals a complex structure in which women become exposed to multiple layers of targeting, where stigmatizing and defamatory discourse is mobilized as a tool to exclude them from public and digital participation.

It is important to note that this work, by virtue of its inherently intersectional approach, does not treat women as a homogeneous group. Rather, it recognizes gender and identity differences while respecting the diversity of political, intellectual, and social backgrounds. The objective has been to highlight the intersecting forms of violence and suffering experienced by women across different positions and experiences, and to demonstrate how multiple forms of violence interact to intensify their impact on women active in public life.

Data were collected through in depth interviews with participants with diverse social and political backgrounds. The research followed strict ethical safeguards prioritizing participant safety. These safeguards included the protection of identities and the careful documentation of abusive



language for analytical purposes without reproducing it unnecessarily, with certain expressions quoted verbatim only when required for documentation. The research also encountered several challenges, including difficulties in accessing some participants due to security concerns or the desire of some women to protect their privacy. Additional challenges were linked to the psychological sensitivity of certain topics, reflecting the level of pressure and distress generated by digital violence for those targeted.

This methodology does not aim solely to produce academic knowledge. It also seeks to document women's lived experiences and to highlight the need for comprehensive protection policies that take into account the intersectional dimension of digital violence. Addressing this phenomenon therefore requires a multi level approach that prioritizes the safety of women and their right to participate in a safe public space. At the same time, it emphasizes that protection policies must avoid imposing forms of guardianship under the pretext of protection.

Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality

Intersectionality constitutes an analytical framework used to understand how multiple systems of power and discrimination such as gender, class, race, religion, and sexual orientation intersect to shape complex experiences of violence and marginalization. In the digital context, these intersections become particularly visible. Women living in poverty are more exposed to economic and digital forms of violence due to limited resources. Women belonging to minority groups face compounded violence that combines gender-based and racial discrimination. Queer women are subjected to specific forms of targeting that link gender identity and sexual orientation.

The importance of this approach lies in its ability to provide a deeper understanding of the unequal impact of digital violence among women. It also underscores the need to develop protection and empowerment policies that take into account the diversity of women's experiences and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Such an approach ensures a comprehensive rights-based framework that does not reduce women to a single category, but instead recognizes the diversity and complexity of their realities.

The significance of an intersectional approach lies in its ability to provide a deeper understanding of how digital violence affects women unevenly. It highlights the need for protection and empowerment policies that recognize the diversity of women›s experiences and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Such an approach ensures a comprehensive rights based perspective that does not treat women as a homogeneous category but acknowledges the diversity and complexity of their lived realities.

Political and Social Context in Tunisia

Following the 2011 revolution, Tunisia entered a transitional phase marked by the opening of the public sphere to new voices. Women were among the prominent actors in these transformations. The revolution constituted a pivotal moment that brought issues of equality and social justice back to the center of political debate and offered women greater opportunities to express their demands and participate in shaping the country's future. This historic moment also created an opportunity to reconsider the position of women within both society and the state. Their presence was no longer confined to the private sphere or to traditional roles; rather, it evolved into an active political and social presence, demanding full recognition of citizenship rights and participation in decision-making processes.

The 2014 Constitution represented a key milestone in this trajectory. It enshrined the principle of equality between male and female citizens and affirmed the protection of individual and public rights and freedoms. It also established the principle of equal opportunities between women and men in assuming responsibilities and standing for elected office. This constitutional recognition was not merely symbolic. It paved the way for practical mechanisms such as vertical and horizontal gender parity in electoral lists, which significantly strengthened women's representation in political institutions. Women held nearly 31 percent of parliamentary seats in 2014[1] and approximately 47 percent of seats in municipal councils in 2018[2]. These figures were not merely statistics; they reflected a qualitative shift in Tunisia's political culture. The presence of women in positions of decision-making became an integral part of the emerging democratic landscape, lending strong legitimacy to the feminist movement and demonstrating that democracy can open new spaces for empowerment and participation.

Alongside constitutional advances, Tunisia also witnessed significant developments in legislation addressing violence against women. The most notable example is Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 on the elimination of violence against women, widely

1 Data from the Tunisian Council Observatory on the composition of Parliament following the2014 elections .Last accessed :January.2026

https//:majles.marsad.tn/ar/assembly/deputies?periodId1=

2 Al Jazeera .Last accessed :January.2026

https//:shorturl.at/n8e6O

considered a landmark legal reform in the region. The law established the first comprehensive legal framework defining gender based violence and recognizing its various manifestations. For many women, it represented the foundation of a broader legislative process aimed at advancing equality and justice while establishing legal mechanisms capable of protecting dignity and ensuring safety.

The law expanded the definition of violence to include physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and political violence. It also introduced protection and support mechanisms for survivors, including specialized police and judicial units and the creation of shelters for women subjected to violence. This legislation did not emerge in isolation. It was the result of sustained advocacy led by feminist and human rights organizations that exerted continuous pressure on state institutions to adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing gender based violence.

Civil society played a central role in consolidating these gains through awareness campaigns, advocacy initiatives, and the monitoring of public policies. All of these efforts contributed to integrating women's rights into national policy debates and to promoting a public discourse linking democracy with gender justice. Within this framework, the protection of women's rights came to be understood not as a secondary issue but as a fundamental component of a democratic state.

However, these gains revealed their fragility in the face of the political and economic crises that the country later experienced, particularly following the announcement of the exceptional measures on 25 July 2021. Tunisia subsequently entered a new phase characterized by the concentration of power in the hands of the President, effectively within the executive branch, alongside the weakening of constitutional institutions such as Parliament and the emergence of new institutional structures. At the same time, legal mechanisms were altered, with presidential decrees gaining precedence over organic laws, and the Administrative Court, whose role had long been to act as a safeguard against executive overreach, being constrained. These developments raised serious concerns about a potential setback in the trajectory of freedoms and democratic governance.

This political transformation had direct implications for women's rights within a society where patriarchal social structures remain deeply entrenched. Women's representation in parliament declined significantly, reaching approximately

15.5 percent in 2023.[3] This decline in political representation coincided with a shrinking public sphere and growing restrictions on open political debate. Several women activists and political actors within civil society were subjected to arrest, prosecution, or other forms of pressure, affecting women's participation both offline and in digital spaces and reintroducing patterns of exclusion that the revolution had sought to overcome.

The economic and social crisis that came with this period also had a direct impact on women, particularly in marginalized interior regions. Rising unemployment, increasing poverty, and the weakening capacity of the state to provide effective social protection programs further deepened women's vulnerability to discrimination and violence. These conditions widened gender gaps in access to economic opportunities and public services.

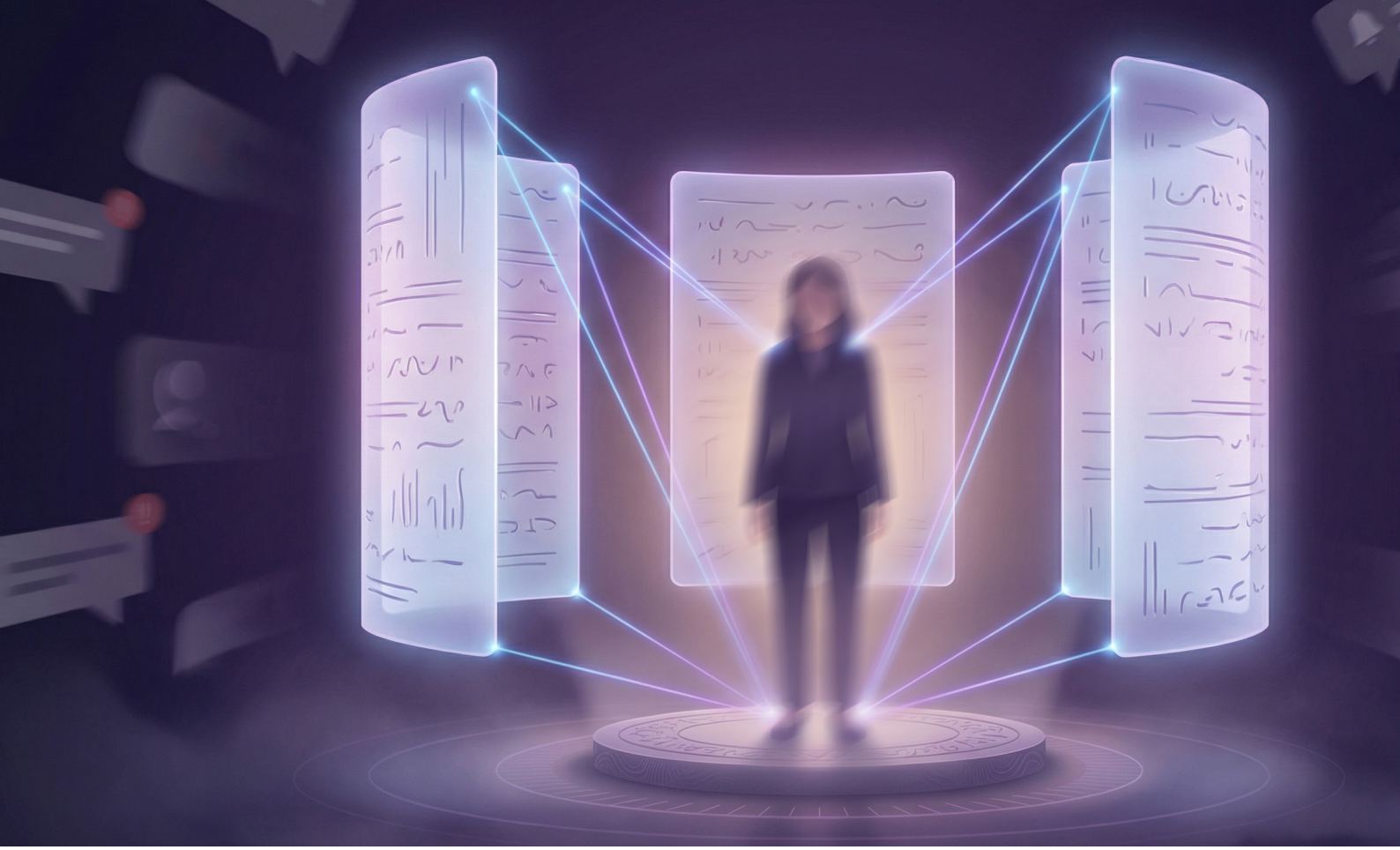
The severity of the situation is reflected in the rise in femicide and in the continuing tragedy of agricultural workers transported in unsafe vehicles often referred to as «death trucks.» Despite repeated incidents, adequate protective measures have remained limited. At the same time, the state continues to refuse to recognize gender-based crimes as a distinct legal category, a stance that aligns with broader patterns of misogynistic discourse directed against women in both political and social spheres. As a result, many women's lives have become increasingly constrained and precarious in the absence of any effective guarantees of justice.

Within the digital sphere, campaigns of defamation, harassment, and threats targeting women, particularly those active in public life, have intensified. These attacks reproduce gender based violence in more complex ways. They are no longer limited to isolated individual acts but have evolved into systematic mechanisms aimed at silencing women and forcing them to withdraw from public participation. As a result, spaces that had previously served as platforms for expression and civic engagement after the revolution are increasingly transformed into arenas of intimidation, exclusion, and repression.

3 Al Jazeera article .Last accessed :January.2026

https//:urls.fr/amQTW

The period of exceptional measures represented a clear setback in the trajectory of women's rights in Tunisia, as the gains achieved after the revolution receded in the face of a turbulent political, social, and economic context. This regression highlights that women's rights are not isolated from the broader environment, but are closely linked to the level of freedoms and democracy. Any contraction of the public sphere tends to affect the most vulnerable groups first, foremost among them women. It also illustrates how digital violence has become a central tool used to exclude women from free participation in public life. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive approaches capable of rebuilding institutional trust, strengthening digital protection mechanisms, and linking gender justice with broader struggles for social and economic justice. In this context, civil society remains a key actor in defending existing gains and advocating for more inclusive and equitable policies through continued mobilization, advocacy, and the development of a public discourse that connects democratic governance with gender equality.



Legal and Institutional Framework

First: International and Regional Treaties and Normative Frameworks

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and General Recommendation No. 35

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is widely recognized as the primary international framework for the protection of women›s rights. Often described as an international bill of rights for women, the Convention establishes clear obligations for states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in legislation, policies, and practices. Tunisia signed the Convention on 24 July 1980 and ratified it on 20 September 1985. However, the country initially maintained reservations related to personal

status laws. These reservations were fully lifted in 2014 in the context of the political and constitutional transformations that followed the revolution.

This development positioned Tunisia among the countries demonstrating increased alignment with international human rights standards. In particular, General Recommendation No. 35, which updates General Recommendation No. 19, expanded the scope of protection by explicitly recognizing gender based violence in digital environments and technological spaces as an extension of violence experienced in offline contexts. This recognition places Tunisia under an obligation to develop legislation and public policies that address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women in digital spaces and to ensure effective protection mechanisms against online harassment, defamation, and digital extortion. Such measures are essential to safeguard women›s right to participate freely and safely in the public sphere.

International Covenant on Civil and (Political Rights (ICCPR

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Tunisia signed on 30 April 1968 and ratified on 18 March 1969, is one of the key international instruments guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms. These include freedom of expression (Article 19), freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 21), and freedom of association (Article 22). These rights are not limited to the physical sphere but also extend to digital spaces, as affirmed in the General Comments of the Human Rights Committee. The Committee has emphasized that protecting individuals from acts committed by private actors requires positive measures by states as well as independent oversight.

The Covenant also links digital violence to the exercise of civil and political rights. Targeting women through digital spaces cannot be viewed merely as individual acts of abuse, but rather as a direct violation of their rights to citizenship and participation. Tunisia’s commitment to this Covenant therefore entails a heightened responsibility to protect women from digital targeting and to ensure that the digital environment serves as an extension of the democratic public sphere rather than a tool for their exclusion.

United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

Adopted by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly in 1998, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is not a legally binding treaty. However, it provides a normative framework affirming the responsibility of states to protect human rights defenders and to guarantee a safe environment free from retaliation for all those engaged in defending human rights, including when such targeting occurs through digital platforms.

As a member of the United Nations, Tunisia bears a political and moral responsibility to implement this Declaration, particularly in light of the restrictions that women human rights defenders have faced online in recent years. The Declaration therefore provides a basis for holding the state accountable for protecting women activists from digital defamation campaigns and threats, while reinforcing the legitimacy of their struggle. Failure to do so constitutes a breach of Tunisia's international commitments and further increases the vulnerability of women in the public sphere.

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Maputo Protocol

Tunisia ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on 21 October 1986. The Charter constitutes the main regional reference for the protection of human rights on the African continent. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the Maputo Protocol, was adopted in 2003. Tunisia ratified the Protocol through Organic Law No. 33 of 2018 dated 6 June 2018. The Protocol places particular emphasis on combating violence and discrimination against women and ensuring their equal participation in public life.

This regional framework is particularly important because it links women's rights in Africa to the digital context and affirms that equal participation cannot be achieved if digital spaces become arenas of violence and exclusion. The Maputo Protocol also opens the way for calls for shared regional policies to address digital violence and

strengthens cross border solidarity in protecting women. Tunisia therefore bears the responsibility of implementing these commitments in its national policies.

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, adopted in 2001, is the main international reference for combating cybercrime and regulating the handling of digital evidence, while providing safeguards for the protection of fundamental rights. Tunisia formally acceded to the Convention on 8 March 2024, becoming the seventieth state party, including to the Second Additional Protocol aimed at strengthening cooperation in obtaining electronic evidence.

This accession places Tunisia before a dual challenge: developing its technical capacities to combat cybercrime on the one hand, and ensuring respect for fundamental rights on the other.

The Convention is important because it strengthens international cooperation in addressing digital crimes. However, it also requires the explicit integration of a gender perspective, as digital violence against women is not merely a technical crime but a tool for reproducing discrimination. Tunisia's commitment to the Convention should therefore be translated into practical policies that protect women from digital targeting and ensure that efforts to combat cybercrime serve to empower women rather than restrict their freedoms.

Second: National Legal Framework in Tunisia

The 2014 Constitution and the 2022 Constitution

The 2014 Constitution enshrined the principle of equality between male and female citizens and obligated the state to protect women›s acquired rights and promote their advancement. This commitment is reflected in key provisions, most notably Article 21, which guarantees equality before the law without discrimination, and Article 46, which requires the state to protect women›s acquired rights and support their development. The Constitution represented a significant step in Tunisia's democratic transition following the revolution. It emerged within a pluralistic political context characterized by an active parliament and the establishment of independent bodies as part of the institutional balance of powers. Consequently, constitutional provisions were accompanied by institutional mechanisms capable of transforming these guarantees into enforceable protections through judicial oversight and accountability institutions.

The 2022 Constitution formally maintains the principle of equality between male and female citizens. Article 22 affirms equality in rights and duties without discrimination, while Article 55 reiterates the state›s obligation to protect women›s acquired rights and promote their advancement. However, the Constitution was adopted within a markedly different political context characterized by the concentration of power in the presidency following the exceptional measures adopted in 2021, the suspension of parliamentary activity, and the weakening of representative institutions and independent bodies.

These developments reshaped the political system around a dominant presidential model and granted broad powers to the executive at the expense of legislative and judicial institutions. This shift raised serious concerns that constitutional provisions could become declarations of principle rather than enforceable guarantees. These concerns were further reinforced by the low voter turnout in the constitutional referendum, which remained below 30 percent and intensified debates regarding the legitimacy of the Constitution and the extent to which it reflects the popular will.

One of the most notable changes introduced by the 2022 Constitution concerns the formulation of the state›s relationship to religion. The previous provision stating that Islam is the religion of the state was replaced by Article 5, which provides that Tunisia is part of the Islamic Ummah and that the state alone is responsible for working to achieve the objectives of Islam in preserving life, honor, property, religion, and freedom. This formulation does not merely refer to religious identity but assigns the state responsibility for realizing these objectives. Such language allows for multiple interpretations that may influence legislation and public policy. Some observers consider it a reinforcement of religious reference that could potentially restrict certain individual rights, while others interpret it as an attempt to anchor the civil nature of the state by linking it to broader ethical principles including freedom and justice. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of this provision remains, making the religious reference a potentially contentious factor in defining the nature of the state and the boundaries of individual freedoms.

Both constitutions therefore formally affirm equality and the protection of rights. However, the fundamental difference lies in the political and institutional context that determines the extent to which these provisions can be implemented. The 2014 Constitution was embedded in a pluralistic institutional framework that provided women and civil society with legislative and oversight mechanisms to defend rights and gradually dismantle restrictive practices inherited from earlier periods. By contrast, the 2022 Constitution faces significant challenges due to the concentration of power and the weakening of independent institutions. This raises the risk that constitutional guarantees may remain largely declaratory without meaningful implementation. Furthermore, the new religious reference may be invoked to justify conservative policies or restrict individual freedoms. Such developments tend to affect women and vulnerable groups first, particularly in digital spaces where forms of violence and discrimination intensify, especially when accusations of disloyalty or treason are echoed through official discourse.

(The Personal Status Code (1956

The Personal Status Code, promulgated on 13 August 1956, remains one of the most significant legal texts in the history of independent Tunisia. It represented a political and social declaration of the state›s intention to redefine the position of women within society. By abolishing polygamy, regulating divorce through judicial procedures, and introducing certain principles of equality within the family, Tunisia established itself as a regional pioneer in family law reform. At the time, the Code was widely regarded as a progressive step that challenged elements of the traditional patriarchal order.

Despite its historical importance, the Code remained largely confined to regulating the private sphere and did not extend to protecting women in public life or addressing emerging forms of violence. Issues such as political violence, economic violence, and digital violence remained outside its scope. As a result, the Code gradually became a limited legal framework unable to keep pace with social and technological transformations.

This limitation is partly explained by the fact that the Code has not undergone substantial structural revision since its adoption. Its legal architecture was originally designed to address the legislative needs of the period in which it was enacted, without subsequent adaptation to reflect the evolving role of women or the need for additional guarantees in contemporary society. Developments in the nature and forms of violence have also not been addressed with the necessary seriousness. Public debate has often focused on statistical indicators relating to women, yet these figures frequently demonstrate women›s resilience and their capacity to challenge patriarchal structures rather than reflecting the effectiveness of the existing legal framework.

Over time, the Code has shifted from being regarded as progressive to being seen as regressive in many respects. It has maintained discriminatory provisions in matters such as inheritance and guardianship and has reinforced a paternalistic vision in which the state determines the limits of women’s freedom rather than recognizing their full autonomy. Relying on it alone today reflects a form of legal stagnation. The text has not been revised in line with contemporary international standards, nor has it been adapted to the emerging challenges that women face today.

Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 on the Elimination of Violence against Women

Organic Law No. 58 of 2017, adopted on 11 August 2017, emerged within an important historical context following sustained advocacy by feminist movements in Tunisia after the revolution. These movements mobilized to strengthen women›s rights and combat gender based violence. The law introduced a comprehensive approach based on prevention, protection, and support for survivors and was widely regarded as a major legal achievement.

One of the most important contributions of the law is the expansion of the definition of violence to include physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and political violence. It also introduced several protection mechanisms, including judicial protection orders, specialized police and judicial units, shelters for women survivors of violence and their children, and awareness programs.

Although political violence is well recognized in legal scholarship and judicial practice, women have nevertheless experienced its mechanisms through exclusion, marginalization, and direct targeting, often without effective accountability. The risks are further intensified when such violence occurs through digital platforms. In many cases, attacks are met with silence or justified by the argument that women who participate in public life must accept such treatment as the price of visibility.

This narrative contributes to the normalization of violence and transforms it into a mechanism for disciplining women and excluding them from the public sphere. At the same time, Tunisia still lacks a specific legal framework addressing digital violence. Acts committed through digital communication platforms are generally prosecuted under broader criminal offenses such as harassment, defamation, or violations of privacy. These provisions do not provide a clear legal definition of digital violence, do not include procedures adapted to digital evidence, and rarely recognize such acts as forms of gender based violence.

This legal gap exposes women to repeated harm through the circulation of abusive content and contributes to delays in judicial procedures due to limited technical capacities within the justice system. The result is a cycle of targeting that weakens women›s trust in the justice system and discourages their participation in public life.

At the institutional level, the state established mechanisms such as the National Observatory for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is responsible for monitoring the phenomenon, collecting data, and coordinating public policies. However, the Observatory faces significant limitations, including insufficient human and financial resources and limited political support, which restrict its ability to perform its mandate effectively.

The law also provides for the establishment of shelters for women survivors of violence and their children. In practice, these shelters remain limited in number, unevenly distributed across regions, and insufficiently funded to provide comprehensive services. Similarly, the national hotline established by the Ministry of Social Affairs to receive reports of violence does not operate consistently and often fails to provide timely responses, further weakening women›s confidence in reporting mechanisms.

In addition, the state has not allocated a dedicated and sustainable budget to ensure the full implementation of the law. As a result, many of its provisions remain largely declaratory rather than operational. Awareness campaigns have not been conducted consistently, and specialized police and judicial units have not received sufficient training to address cases of violence with the necessary sensitivity and effectiveness.

Organic Law No. 58 therefore remains a historic legal achievement but continues to face significant limitations, particularly regarding digital violence. Weak implementation, combined with the absence of sustained funding and insufficient institutional commitment, leaves many women confronting violence without effective protection. As a result, the law risks functioning as a declaration of intent rather than a transformative instrument capable of producing meaningful change.

The Tunisian Penal Code

The Tunisian Penal Code was issued in 1913 and entered into force in 1914. It is one of the oldest legal texts establishing the general framework for criminalizing offenses against individuals and public order. Provisions such as Articles 131, 245, and 246 were adopted in this context, as they classify defamation, blackmail, and attacks on reputation as crimes that threaten social order and therefore warrant punishment.

These provisions criminalize the publication of false allegations or acts that harm honor and dignity. They also criminalize threats and blackmail aimed at coercing the victim into performing an act or refraining from it. In practice, these provisions can be relied upon to address certain forms of digital violence, such as the dissemination of private images or threats to disclose personal information.

Despite their importance, these provisions were not drafted from a gender perspective. They do not recognize that digital defamation and blackmail are often used systematically against women to subject them to social control and to exclude them from the public sphere. As a result, their effectiveness remains limited, as they do not account for the specific psychological and social harm resulting from digital violations and do not provide protection mechanisms tailored to women.

Telecommunications Code

The Telecommunications Code reveals clear shortcomings in keeping pace with contemporary digital transformations. It is often invoked through Article 86, which concerns “offending or disturbing others through communication networks.” This provision was originally drafted in the context of regulating traditional media and communication tools rather than as a framework suited to the digital age.

As a result, the text remains incomplete and ill equipped to address the new challenges that women face in digital spaces. In practice, Article 86 is frequently used to prosecute women for their expression or online activity rather than serving as a tool to protect them from digital violence.

The state also tends to rely on this provision primarily to protect its institutions or certain individuals operating in the public sphere, rather than using it to safeguard

citizens and guarantee their rights. For this reason, it is essential that legal provisions effectively promote rights and ensure substantive equality, rather than functioning merely as instruments of condemnation or restrictions on freedoms. This is particularly urgent in the absence of a comprehensive legislative framework that recognizes digital violence as a gender based crime.

Law No. 63 of 2004 on the Protection of Personal Data

Law No. 63 of 2004 on the protection of personal data establishes a general framework for the protection of privacy. However, it suffers from several structural shortcomings that limit its effectiveness. The law was drafted in a technical and administrative context rather than within a comprehensive rights based framework, which led it to focus primarily on consent as a condition for data processing without capturing the social and political dimensions of personal data violations. This general and neutral approach makes the law ill equipped to address violations that target specific groups, particularly women. In many cases, the publication of private images or personal information is used as a tool of blackmail or control, a reality that the law does not explicitly acknowledge.

On the other hand, the implementation of the law remains limited due to weak societal awareness of personal data rights. These rights are often not perceived as part of fundamental rights but are instead regarded as a secondary issue. This weakness in rights awareness affects the effectiveness of the law, as victims frequently do not have access to rapid or effective judicial remedies to address digital violations. In addition, judicial procedures related to this law are often slow and complex, making the theoretical protection it provides difficult to realize in practice, particularly in the context of digital crimes characterized by speed and wide dissemination.

The law was also not developed with a gender or social perspective, relying instead on the principle of individual consent. This limits its ability to address violations that have collective or systematic dimensions. As a result, the law appears as a technical legal framework that lacks deeper social and rights based foundations and remains distant from addressing digital violence as a phenomenon linked to the social and cultural structures that reproduce discrimination and control.

Decree Law No. 54 of 2022 on Combating Crimes Related to Information and Communication Systems

Decree Law No. 54 of 2022 on combating crimes related to information and communication systems reflects a deep crisis in the way the state approaches the digital sphere. Its provisions are drafted in broad and imprecise terms, particularly those concerning the dissemination of false information or online abuse. This ambiguous wording makes the text open to wide interpretation, which has enabled its use to criminalize free expression and prosecute individuals active in public affairs. As a result, it threatens fundamental rights to freedom of opinion and expression and creates a climate of fear and self censorship.

The decree also represents a clear step backward from the gains established by Law No. 58 of 2017 on the elimination of violence against women. Instead of the digital sphere serving as a space for empowerment and participation, it has become associated with legal risks that may be used to restrict women's freedom of expression and public participation. This shift places women in a dangerous paradox: the law that was meant to protect them from digital violence becomes part of a system that weakens their presence and discourages them from participating for fear of prosecution.

The decree also reveals that it fails to distinguish between digital violence as a tool of control and blackmail and free expression as a fundamental right. In doing so, the text contributes to reproducing digital vulnerability, particularly for women, and increases the risks they face in the public sphere. Legal protections are thus transformed into instruments of restriction. Moreover, the decree conflicts with Tunisia's international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which require the state to guarantee freedom of expression and participation without fear of punishment.

The contradiction does not end there. The decree is also inconsistent with the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, the main international reference in this field. The Convention establishes a framework that balances combating cybercrime with the protection of rights and clearly defines cyber offenses such as illegal access,

data falsification, and electronic fraud. By contrast, the decree conflates technical cybercrimes with free expression. The Convention also obliges states to strengthen international cooperation in combating cybercrime, whereas the decree focuses primarily on domestic punishment without establishing clear mechanisms for cross border cooperation. Most importantly, the Convention emphasizes the need to respect international human rights standards in its implementation, while the decree has been used in practice to restrict freedom of expression, placing it in tension with the spirit of the Convention.

Ultimately, Decree Law No. 54 does not incorporate gender justice into its structure. Instead, it reinforces a security driven approach that weakens rights and freedoms in general and excludes women from the digital sphere, reproducing discrimination rather than addressing it. The absence of gender awareness in legislation transforms legal texts from instruments of protection into tools of exclusion and makes the law part of a broader system of surveillance and control that contradicts Tunisia's international obligations and its path toward strengthening human rights and equality.

Conclusion

A review of the legal and institutional framework in Tunisia reveals a substantial body of international, regional, and national references affirming the state›s commitment to protecting women›s rights and combating gender based violence. Instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Maputo Protocol provide a strong normative foundation linking equality with the right to safe participation in public life, including in digital spaces.

However, when examining the national legal framework, it becomes evident that existing legal texts, ranging from the Personal Status Code to constitutional provisions and Organic Law No. 58 of 2017, despite their historical and political significance, have not sufficiently incorporated the digital dimension of violence nor translated these commitments into concrete, adequately funded, and sustainable public policies. At the same time, the Penal Code and legislation related to personal data protection remain broad and general in scope, failing to adequately address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women or the gendered nature of digital violations.

More concerning is the emergence of recent legislation, such as Decree Law No. 54 of 2022, which has increasingly been used as a tool to restrict freedom of expression rather than as a mechanism of protection. This development contradicts Tunisia's international obligations and further exacerbates the vulnerability of women in digital spaces. The gap between formal legal commitments and their practical implementation reflects deeper structural challenges related to political will, institutional capacity, and resource allocation. Mechanisms such as the National Observatory for the Elimination of Violence against Women and shelters for survivors remain insufficiently resourced and therefore unable to fully carry out their mandates.

Women in Tunisia today navigate a dual digital environment. On the one hand, digital spaces have the potential to serve as platforms for empowerment, participation, and expression. On the other hand, these same spaces increasingly become arenas of violence, harassment, and surveillance due to legislative gaps and institutional shortcomings. As a result, the current legal framework often functions more as a symbolic commitment or declaration of intent than as an effective system of protection.

Addressing this situation requires comprehensive legislative and institutional reforms that explicitly integrate both the digital and gender dimensions of violence. It also requires translating international commitments into concrete and adequately funded public policies capable of ensuring meaningful protection and enabling women to participate safely and freely in both physical and digital public spaces.

Forms of Violence Directed Against Women

Gender Based Violence

Gender based violence refers to harmful acts committed against individuals because of their gender identity or the social roles associated with gender. It is rooted in power relations that aim to reinforce male dominance and keep women in a subordinate position within the social structure. It takes multiple forms, including physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and digital violence, making it a complex phenomenon that permeates various aspects of everyday life. The structural nature of digital violence reflects the persistence of discrimination and inequality, as not all women are affected in the same way. Rather, its impact intersects with other factors such as economic status, cultural background, ethnic or religious affiliation, and gender identity or sexual orientation.

Political Violence

Political violence against women refers to any act or practice intended to prevent or hinder women from participating in political, partisan, or civic activities, or from exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms on an equal basis. This definition corresponds to the legal definition established under Organic Law No. 58[4] on the elimination of violence against women.

Political violence may take various forms, including threats, intimidation, exclusion, legal harassment, and psychological or digital attacks that restrict women›s ability to exercise their rights freely. It is closely linked to patriarchal power structures, as it seeks to control access to power, influence, and resources while preventing women from reaching positions of authority. In this sense, political violence reflects broader attempts to obstruct women›s political and social empowerment.

Beyond its immediate manifestations, political violence also produces significant psychological and social consequences. It generates sustained pressure that can

4 Article 3 of Organic Law No 58 .of ,2017 dated 11 August ,2017 on the elimination of violence against women .Last accessed :January.2026

https//:short-url.org1/lxe5

lead to forced withdrawal from public life, a loss of self confidence, and social stigmatization. It may also limit women›s opportunities to build alliances and participate in civic and political activities. Ultimately, political violence undermines women›s right to full citizenship and restricts the equal exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Prison Related Stigmatization

The United Nations defines prison related stigmatization as the continuation of punishment beyond the prison walls. Individuals who have served prison sentences are often perceived as 'permanent offenders', which results in social, economic, and legal discrimination that obstructs their reintegration into society.

This stigmatization includes negative stereotypes and prejudicial judgments that restrict access to employment and housing, weaken social relationships, and reinforce social isolation.[5] As a result, imprisonment becomes a long term social stigma that continues to affect individuals even after their release.

Although this stigma affects all formerly incarcerated persons, it tends to be significantly more severe for women in patriarchal societies characterized by strong gender norms. Women who have been imprisoned are often perceived as sources of social or familial "shame" and may face distrust even within their own families. This situation restricts their right to a dignified life, including access to safe housing and decent employment opportunities, and further deepens their economic and social vulnerability.

Women leaving prison therefore face not only institutional and legal discrimination but also heightened social rejection, which reinforces their marginalization and makes reintegration far more difficult than for men. In this way, prison related stigmatization becomes a mechanism through which exclusion and inequality

5 United Nations ,Human Rights in the Administration of Justice report) recognizing prison-related stigma .(Last accessed :January.2026

https//:shorturl.at/QrNdX

are reproduced, depriving women of basic rights associated with citizenship and human dignity.

Digital Violence

Digital violence constitutes a form of gender based violence carried out through digital and electronic communication technologies. It targets women and other vulnerable groups with the aim of exerting control, intimidation, or exclusion. Digital violence should not be understood merely as individual hostile behavior but rather as a manifestation of unequal power relations that reproduce discrimination and domination within digital environments.

Digital violence takes multiple forms, including defamation, the non consensual dissemination of images or personal information, hate speech, direct or indirect threats, unlawful surveillance, hacking, and online extortion. Its particular danger lies in its persistence and its capacity to follow victims across multiple digital and personal spaces, making it difficult for those targeted to escape its impact.

The Digital Space as an Extension of the Public Sphere

The digital sphere is no longer merely a technical tool for communication; it has become an extension of the public sphere where political and social debates take place. This space has created new opportunities for women to participate and exert influence, enabling them to overcome some of the traditional constraints imposed on them in the physical sphere. However, it is also used as a tool to reproduce gender discrimination and exclude women through digital violence and hate speech, transforming it into an uneven arena of struggle.

Forms of Digital Violence Against Women (Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls – TF-VAWG)

Digital violence[6] is rooted in patriarchal social structures that seek to control and regulate women's presence in the public sphere. Through digital technologies, these dynamics of domination are reproduced in ways that are faster, more pervasive, and capable of reaching wider audiences. Digital tools therefore amplify existing inequalities while creating new forms of harassment, intimidation, and exclusion.

Within online environments, these practices take multiple forms. The following represent some of the most prevalent manifestations of digital violence targeting women.

6 Types of digital violence recognized by the United Nations under the concept of technology facilitated violence .Last accessed :January.2026

https//:urls.fr4/jNfIk

Gender Based Digital Defamation and Doxing

Doxing constitutes a form of gender based digital violence that involves the exposure and dissemination of personal information about women activists and feminist voices with the aim of intimidating them and undermining their public presence. This practice may involve publishing private details such as family photographs, personal addresses, or other identifying information without consent.

By transforming private life into a tool of stigmatization and threat, doxing exposes women to harassment and can encourage further violence against them. It is frequently used against women human rights defenders and political activists as a tactic to silence their voices and discourage their participation in public debate. The psychological and social consequences are significant, as women are forced to navigate public engagement under constant threat and heightened vulnerability.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying manifests through various forms of hostile online behavior, including insults, ridicule, harassment, and repeated personal attacks. These acts frequently target women's appearance, personal lives, or the way they express themselves in digital spaces. Beyond the immediate psychological harm they inflict, such practices contribute to shrinking women's visibility and participation online. Over time, cyberbullying can discourage women from engaging in public discussions or expressing their opinions freely.

Digital Blackmail

Digital blackmail involves exerting pressure on women through threats to disclose private information, images, or personal communications. The objective is often to coerce women into taking certain actions or refraining from them. This form of violence places women in a constant state of fear and insecurity. Its impact extends beyond psychological distress, as it can also undermine women's autonomy, restrict their decision making, and limit their participation in social and public life.

Online Threats

Threats conveyed through digital platforms often take the form of messages or content that threaten physical, sexual, or psychological harm against women. Such threats create an atmosphere of intimidation and sustained anxiety.

The impact of these threats goes beyond the direct harm they cause. They also influence women's participation in public life, as many women withdraw from online engagement or choose silence in order to avoid further attacks.

Digital Social Stigmatization

Digital social stigmatization occurs when women are targeted online through narratives that associate them with negative stereotypes or socially discredited identities. These narratives are used to undermine women's credibility, reputation, and social standing.

Such stigmatization may take the form of coordinated online campaigns aimed at isolating women and weakening their presence in public debate. While these dynamics reflect longstanding gender stereotypes historically used to marginalize women, the digital environment amplifies their impact through rapid dissemination and the amplification mechanisms of online platforms. In this way, digital stigmatization becomes a powerful tool for reproducing patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices in new and intensified forms.

Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking refers to the repeated and systematic monitoring of women's activities in digital environments. It may involve sending persistent messages, leaving repeated comments, or closely tracking women's personal accounts and social media interactions. These practices generate a constant feeling of surveillance and psychological pressure. In this way, technology is transformed into a tool of control and intimidation, reinforcing gendered power dynamics and restricting women's freedom to engage safely in digital spaces.

Online Harassment

Online harassment targets women through unwanted messages, sexually explicit content, or offensive communications that intrude upon their digital spaces. Such behavior imposes an unwanted presence that transforms online engagement into a source of ongoing discomfort and insecurity.

This type of harassment contributes to the creation of unsafe digital environments and places women under continuous psychological pressure. It also reflects the transfer of patriarchal forms of control from physical public spaces into digital environments, where technology becomes a means of reproducing traditional gendered power relations.

Privacy Breaches and Unauthorized Access

Privacy breaches occur when individuals gain unauthorized access to women's digital accounts or personal devices. This may involve accessing private data, stealing personal photographs, or monitoring women's online activities without their consent.

Such intrusions create a climate of insecurity and mistrust, placing women in a vulnerable position that threatens their psychological and social well-being. They also undermine women's ability to control their personal information, transforming digital technologies into tools of surveillance, coercion, and domination.

Deepfakes

Deepfakes involve the use of artificial intelligence technologies to generate manipulated images or videos that falsely depict women in fabricated situations, often of a sexual nature or intended to damage their reputation.

This emerging form of digital violence illustrates how technological innovations can be exploited to reproduce patriarchal control through increasingly sophisticated and widely disseminated tools. Deepfakes are frequently used to intimidate women, silence their voices, and undermine their credibility and visibility in the public sphere.

Digital Disinformation Campaigns

Digital disinformation campaigns target women by spreading false or manipulated information intended to undermine their credibility and question their social or political legitimacy.

These campaigns often rely on multiple digital tactics, including the use of fake accounts, the coordinated amplification of misleading content, and the circulation of manipulated images or videos. Through these mechanisms, disinformation campaigns create information environments saturated with misleading narratives that distort public perception and damage women's reputations.

Astroturfing

According to reports by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and UN Women, astroturfing refers to a deceptive practice in which coordinated and orchestrated campaigns are presented as spontaneous grassroots expressions of public opinion. In reality, the actors behind these campaigns conceal the organized nature of the activity and the interests supporting it.

The aim is to manipulate public opinion by creating the false impression that a particular idea or narrative enjoys widespread public support. Within the context of technology facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG), astroturfing can function as a coordinated tactic to distort public debate, silence women's voices, and generate hostile digital environments. It is frequently deployed against women in public life, including journalists, activists, and women human rights defenders.

Hate Speech and Incitement

Hate speech and incitement in digital spaces refer to the dissemination or circulation of content that targets women or other social groups through insults, degrading language, or expressions that encourage discrimination and violence against them.

Such discourse contributes to the normalization of hostility and discrimination by reinforcing negative stereotypes and legitimizing unequal power relations. In doing so, it transforms digital platforms into hostile and exclusionary environments that limit women's ability to participate freely and safely in public debate.

Gender Equality Backlash and the Blaming of Women Activists

This pattern can be understood as gender based backlash, a form of structural violence that manifests through the blaming of women activists and feminist actors for what is perceived as a loss of patriarchal control.

In such contexts, public debate shifts away from addressing patriarchal structures and the violence itself, and instead frames women's rights and achievements as the source of social tension. Advocacy for equality and freedom is thus portrayed as a collective wrongdoing for which women are punished through stigmatization, delegitimization, and coordinated attacks.

This concept draws on United Nations literature on backlash against gender equality, as reflected in reports by UN Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Within this framework, backlash refers to systematic efforts to undermine women's rights defenders and feminist movements with the aim of reversing progress toward gender equality and reasserting patriarchal control.

Conclusion

Digital violence against women should not be understood merely as an extension of social and political violence. In many cases, it precedes and facilitates it, functioning as a preparatory tool used to weaken women who are active in public life before they are targeted socially or politically. Although the different forms of digital violence intersect and reinforce one another in producing harmful consequences for women and for future generations, their impact becomes particularly severe when multiple forms are directed simultaneously against the same victim. In such cases, the psychological and social consequences deepen and evolve into a complex system of harm that goes beyond individual acts of aggression, reproducing unequal power relations through new digital mechanisms.

When digital violence manifests through defamation, cyberbullying, blackmail, or threats, its impact extends beyond immediate psychological harm. It also constrains women's freedom of decision making and undermines their participation in public life. When it appears in the form of social stigmatization, disinformation

campaigns, or hate speech, it reproduces and amplifies long standing stereotypes through algorithmic amplification, reinforcing discrimination and legitimizing exclusion. Meanwhile, practices such as cyberstalking, online harassment, privacy breaches, and deepfakes demonstrate how technology can be mobilized as a tool of surveillance and domination. In this sense, the digital sphere becomes an extension of traditional patriarchal control, illustrating how digital violence may function both as a precursor to and a continuation of social and political violence. As a result, women are often caught in a closed cycle of multidimensional targeting.

The impact of these forms of violence is further intensified for women who stand at the intersection of multiple identities. This includes transgender women, women belonging to cultural or linguistic minorities, women with disabilities, migrant women, political activists, and women who challenge socially imposed gender norms. In these contexts, overlapping forms of discrimination interact to produce heightened vulnerability.

Digital violence is therefore not simply the result of individual hostile behavior. It is also embedded within the broader dynamics of the platform economy, where engagement and visibility are often prioritized over safety, and where sensational or harmful content can circulate widely because it generates attention and profit. At the same time, traditional social structures contribute to the persistence of such violence by reproducing existing hierarchies of domination within digital spaces. Weak legal and institutional accountability further entrenches a climate of impunity, allowing perpetrators to evade meaningful consequences.

This situation is compounded by limited public awareness and persistent social attitudes that seek to impose control over women's bodies, voices, and personal choices, while failing to recognize digital violence as a form of gender based violence. As a result, women are placed in a structurally vulnerable position, where violations continue without effective deterrence or protection. In this context, digital environments risk becoming exclusionary spaces that undermine women's ability to participate freely and equally in public life, institutionalizing exclusion and making accountability increasingly difficult in the presence of intertwined legal, cultural, and political gaps.

Section One: Women Active in Public Life and Families of Political Detainees

Content Warning: This section contains abusive language and direct threats. Some expressions have been partially obscured to reduce retraumatization while preserving their evidentiary value.

The documentation of interviews and the analysis of testimonies revealed a structural entanglement between digital violence and societal reactions, often reinforced by official discourse, making it nearly impossible to draw clear boundaries between the two. In many cases, digital violence operates as a direct catalyst for repressive social responses that materialize in the physical world through stigmatization, social exclusion, and both community surveillance and self-censorship. In other instances, digital targeting campaigns originate from pre-existing social prejudices, with digital platforms serving as spaces where these dynamics are reproduced and amplified. This reciprocal interaction demonstrates that digital violence is no less harmful than violence experienced in everyday life; rather, it intersects with and intensifies it, amplifying its impact on women active in public life.

The testimonies collected reflect the diversity of women's experiences and trajectories. Some women describe living under a constant sense of anxiety, others

have previously experienced imprisonment, and some have been forced into exile. Despite these differing paths, all of the women share two defining characteristics: their public engagement and their continued exposure to systematic social and political pressure. This pressure does not merely respond to particular opinions or positions. Instead, it targets women's very presence in public life and functions as a mechanism for disciplining them and reasserting socially prescribed gender roles within the public sphere.

Monitoring hate speech and gendered discriminatory expressions directed at women active in public life reveals a recurring discursive pattern based on the repetition of the same stereotypes and the use of ready-made expressions invoked across different contexts. This repetition produces a cumulative effect that transforms digital spaces into an effective mechanism of social regulation, aimed at silencing women, questioning their legitimacy, and pushing them to withdraw from participation in public life.

The interviews also provided an overview of the different types and degrees of violence experienced. They revealed forms and trajectories of violence that have been practiced in other international contexts and are now emerging in Tunisia, yet without being clearly named. It is therefore important to highlight and identify these patterns. These practices are already being directed primarily at women activists, and we consider it essential to mention them, as they are becoming normalized and may soon extend to women more broadly. At the same time, we emphasize that women's experiences intersect, as do their forms of resistance.

The women referred to are victims of astroturfing to varying degrees, shaped by complex factors in which gender identity intersects with political, social, and symbolic positioning. This reality shows that the violence exercised against women active in public life is neither incidental nor individual, but structural violence, managed through modern digital tools and grounded in social and political systems that seek to reproduce control and exclude women from the public sphere.

Women detainees and their families experience both an overt and a latent struggle. Likewise, the violence itself operates on both visible and invisible levels. More critically, the testimonies reveal the depth of the internalization of violence at the societal level, and how difficult it is to name and resist it within patriarchal contexts. They also expose the cost borne by women defenders, who resist not

only for themselves but for others. Some have internalized patriarchal thinking and therefore resist in more hidden ways. Here, intersectionality becomes visible through the social roles that women defenders carry and the cost this imposes within their own families.

The cost intensifies as the intersecting components of a woman defender's identity multiply. Difference itself becomes grounds for social punishment, exclusion, and the tacit acceptance of violence, as if it were the price to be paid for rejecting the position that patriarchal society has long assigned to her.

Experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders and Activists

Targeted attacks against women active in public life take a systematic and escalating form, aimed at limiting their presence, excluding them from political and civic spaces, or pushing them to withdraw. This targeting often begins in digital spaces through waves of insult, discrediting, and moral stigmatization, frequently relying on astroturfing to place women at the center of continuous online campaigns in which their private lives are exposed and their personal data disclosed. Their personal data are violated, their images circulated across multiple platforms, and details of their lives are made public, turning them into subjects of collective scrutiny over their individual choices.

This enables widespread commentary shaped by entrenched social biases and patriarchal standards of judgment. The targeting does not stop at the present, but extends to the investigation and mobilization of their past as a weapon against them, depriving them of their right to privacy and transforming their digital presence into an open arena for defamation and symbolic violence. This digital targeting quickly exceeds the virtual sphere to affect personal and family life, and may escalate into offline harassment and physical violence. This reflects a complex system that reproduces patriarchal control through new digital tools, further deepening women's vulnerability in public spaces. These campaigns also rely on the repeated circulation of stereotypes that target women's bodies and reputations more than their ideas or positions, turning digital platforms into mechanisms of "social control" that restrict women's participation and silence their voices. In addition, women are blamed as a form of violence for their political engagement, with moralizing discourses and ethical accusations deployed against them.

Violence Targeting Women Active in Civil Society

The targeting of women active in public life has become increasingly systematic and escalating, aiming to curtail their visibility and ultimately force them out of political and civic spaces. This targeting seeks to exert psychological and social pressure through new mechanisms that rely heavily on digital platforms as primary tools of control. It often begins with recurring waves of insults, accusations, and moral stigmatization, sometimes amplified through coordinated online mobilization and astroturfing campaigns. As a result, women become the subject of sustained digital attacks in which their private lives are exposed and scrutinized. Personal data are violated, and images and details of their lives circulate across multiple platforms, turning digital spaces into arenas of collective judgment where patriarchal social attitudes are projected and women's personal behavior is publicly evaluated.

The targeting does not remain confined to the present. Past events and personal histories are frequently resurfaced and weaponized against women, depriving them of their right to privacy and transforming their digital presence into a tool of defamation and symbolic violence. This dynamic creates a continuous state of psychological and social pressure. Digital violence also frequently spills beyond online spaces into women's personal and family lives, manifesting through harassment in public spaces, physical threats, or restrictions on freedom of movement. These dynamics reveal an interconnected system through which patriarchal control is reproduced, using new digital tools to intensify vulnerability and limit women's ability to participate fully in public life.

The intensity of violence against women active in public life is compounded by the fact that it is exercised not only because they are women, but also because they are feminists who reject social guardianship and defend the rights of other women. This dual dynamic renders them targets of both control and pressure. They bear the burden of defending marginalized women while simultaneously facing digital, social, and political campaigns, which further restricts their ability to participate in public life and increases the psychological and social costs they endure. These campaigns rely on the repeated circulation of stereotypes that target women's bodies and reputations more than their ideas or positions, turning digital platforms into tools of social control that constrain women's participation and limit their political and civic expression. This is particularly evident in the experiences of journalists, human rights defenders, and activists, whose professional positions are directly targeted and who are subjected to defamation simply for carrying out their work. This creates an environment of constant surveillance,

fear of retaliation, and social isolation, increasing the psychological pressure associated with remaining active in public life.

The case of Mira Ben Salah[7], a queer activist and human rights defender,illustrates these dynamics. She was subjected to a series of insults and threats rooted in aggressive sexualized and gendered language, including slurs such as “mutahawil” (trans woman, used here in a derogatory sense), “sl*t”, and “f*ggot,” among other degrading terms. These were followed by explicit death threats such as “you should die” and “we will throw you from a high place,” as well as religious and moral incitement, including: “People like you, who imitate women, deserve to burn and be stoned to death.”

This violence did not remain confined to digital spaces. It extended into the physical sphere through harassment in public spaces, targeting of her family, and eventually physical assault, revealing a clear escalation pattern that begins with verbal abuse, progresses through repeated harassment and threats, and culminates in physical violence.

Mira Ben Salah confirms that the attacks were not limited to the digital sphere: “People began harassing me and my family, and the harassment later escalated into physical violence.” Her experience also reflects another dimension of this burden: an outward appearance of resilience that conceals deep fear, recurring insomnia and anxiety triggered by continuous hate messages, and emotional exhaustion that weakens the ability to endure and continue.

7 Telephone interview with Mira Ben Salah] queer activist ,[Tunisia, 18September .2025 Consent was obtained to publish the quote as provided.

Her testimony reveals that digital violence against women is not merely an extension of social and political violence, but a tool capable of preceding and driving it. It places women in a primary position of vulnerability by violating their personal data, turning their families into points of pressure, and transforming their private lives into public material for scrutiny and patriarchal judgment. This targeting does not remain at the level of discourse or symbolism, but opens the door to physical violence by undermining psychological safety and creating a constant sense of threat, effectively turning women's very existence into a social burden for which they are held responsible.

This dynamic clearly demonstrates that digital violence can directly lead to physical and real-world violence. It is also important to note that Mira continues to struggle for recognition of her gender identity within a patriarchal context that is hostile to queer communities, where legal frameworks remain absent and their existence is largely ignored, effectively excluding them from full citizenship and rights. This structural marginalization places queer women in a position of compounded vulnerability.

In such contexts, the digital sphere often becomes an open arena for public shaming and collective surveillance, while the legal system itself may operate as a mechanism of exclusion rather than protection. Mira's experience illustrates how digital violence can escalate into harassment and physical attacks in public spaces, revealing the ways in which digital targeting can translate into real-world harm. At the same time, her experience exposes a deeper human rights crisis: the absence of legal recognition for diverse gender identities. Transgender women continue to be denied recognition as women under the law, and to date no meaningful legislative initiative has been introduced to address this gap.

Violence targeting transgender women in Tunisia takes multiple forms, ranging from symbolic and verbal violence to social exclusion, as well as physical threats, digital harassment, and harassment in public spaces. The term "trans woman" remains largely confined to human rights and activist circles, while stigmatizing terms such as "mutahawwil" (literally "transformed," used in a derogatory sense to misgender and delegitimize transgender identities) continue to circulate in public discourse as labels that reinforce marginalization. This linguistic reality reflects both a lack of societal awareness and the persistence of patriarchal stereotypes shaping perceptions of gender identity. The absence of official or legislative

recognition of transgender identities effectively excludes transgender women from full citizenship and places them in a condition of structural vulnerability. In such circumstances, social discrimination can easily intersect with legal marginalization, leading to the denial of basic rights and protections. Digital violence emerges as a particularly visible mechanism for targeting transgender women. Their personal lives are frequently exposed on social media platforms, where they become subjects of collective shaming and public judgment. The loss of privacy and the daily psychological pressure generated by these attacks become embedded in their lived experience. Moreover, digital harassment often spills into physical spaces, transforming psychological intimidation into direct threats to personal safety.

In some cases, the law itself becomes a tool of exclusion rather than protection. The absence of clear legislation recognizing gender diversity reinforces legal ambiguity and contributes to the structural nature of the violence directed against transgender women.

Social violence further reinforces this dynamic through the reproduction of patriarchal control within both family and community structures. Transgender women are continuously subjected to stigmatization in public and private spaces, deepening their exclusion and turning public environments into hostile spaces. The targeting of transgender women therefore cannot be understood as a series of isolated incidents. Rather, it reflects broader social and cultural structures that reject gender identities outside traditional norms.

This structural rejection exposes transgender women to discrimination and stigma across multiple areas of life, including education, employment, and access to healthcare. The absence of official legal recognition further deepens this crisis. No serious legislative efforts have been undertaken to recognize transgender women as women entitled to full rights, nor have coordinated protection policies been developed to prevent discrimination and violence. This legal and social exclusion perpetuates a persistent climate of insecurity and risk, producing overlapping forms of violence that operate simultaneously across digital, social, and legal spheres. As a result, the loss of psychological security and the denial of fundamental rights become embedded in everyday life, revealing the fragility of Tunisia's human rights and legal framework when confronted with gender diversity.

The testimony of Asrar Ben Jouira[8], a human rights activist and intersectional feminist, documents how her arrest was preceded by a systematic campaign of defamation and incitement that targeted her identity as a woman in public life rather than merely her political positions. The hate speech directed at her frequently took the form of insinuations intended to diminish her legitimacy, framing her activism as a form of "rebellion" or "improper behavior." These attacks repeatedly invoked narratives of "honor," "morality," and family roles as instruments of stigmatization and social pressure. Typical comments included statements such as: "She left her home and now wants to teach us morals," "If she were respectable, she wouldn't be in the streets," "She claims to be an activist but is only looking for attention," and "She does not represent Tunisian women."

Reflecting on her experience, Asrar Ben Jouira explains: «My digital presence was constantly targeted, not only because of what I say, but because of who I am. Many comments did not engage with my ideas at all; instead, they focused on my body, my appearance, the tone of my voice, and even my personal life. This form of gendered violence is used to shrink women's presence in public space by turning them from political actors into easy targets for bullying and defamation.» She further notes: «I faced both organized campaigns and individual attacks, yet they all followed the same pattern: attempts to silence women's voices through insults, delegitimization, and accusations linking activism to 'immorality' or 'rebellion against social values.' This reveals the deeply gendered nature of digital violence.»

As the attacks intensified, she found herself compelled to adopt forms of self-censorship: «I began reviewing what I posted, avoiding certain topics, and thinking twice before sharing photos or personal details. In my daily life, I also changed certain habits; from the way I dress to the places I go.»

Digital violence thus forced the activist into a state of continuous anticipatory self-protection. She increasingly felt compelled to conform to restrictive patriarchal expectations in order to avoid further attacks. This situation produced a persistent pattern of self-censorship: she carefully reviews her online posts, avoids certain topics, moderates the tone of her opinions, and alters aspects of her everyday behavior. She also found herself concealing parts of her private life, such as

8 Source :Interview with Asrar Ben Jouira ,human rights and feminist activist and President of the Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms ,Tunisia 27 ,October.2025

personal relationships or interests, out of fear that these details might be exposed online and turned into material for public defamation or collective judgment. This form of self-censorship does not stem from free choice but from social pressure that compels women to adapt to patriarchal norms in order to minimize harm. As a result, women are effectively deprived of their right to express themselves authentically.

The immediate consequence of such violence is the creation of a continuous process of psychological and social exclusion. Each feminist expression becomes a potential risk, and participation in public life is transformed into an act of resistance imposed by the violence itself. At the same time, this dynamic exposes the fragility of digital spaces in the absence of clear legal protections. Social media platforms, rather than serving as tools for expression and civic engagement, become open arenas for harassment and intimidation. Activists are thus confronted daily with overlapping systems of patriarchal control and social repression, without any legal framework capable of guaranteeing effective protection or recognition of their rights.

Moreover, this pattern of anticipatory self-protection demonstrates that digital violence does not operate solely through direct attacks. It also generates systems of internalized and externalized surveillance, forcing women to adapt their daily lives to the expectations of patriarchal society. This constitutes a direct violation of their rights to privacy, freedom, and dignity. In this way, digital spaces become instruments for reproducing domination; not only through visible attacks, but also by compelling women to conceal aspects of their identities and restrict their presence for fear that personal information may be weaponized against them.

The consequences of this persistent threat extend beyond the women themselves. Anxiety spreads to their families, colleagues, and friends, and to anyone in their circles, turning digital violence into a mechanism capable of disciplining entire networks of relationships. Ultimately, this reality demonstrates that digital violence is not simply the result of individual hostility. Rather, it forms part of a broader system through which patriarchal domination is reproduced, relying on social norms, stereotypes, and public shaming to maintain women in positions of structural vulnerability.

Impacts of Violence on Women Activists

Violence against women activists produces profound and multidimensional impacts that extend from the psychological to the social, economic, and familial spheres. These pressures intersect and reinforce one another, constraining women's freedom and limiting their ability to participate meaningfully in the public sphere. Psychologically, such violence places a heavy burden on women through persistent anxiety and stress generated by the need to navigate ongoing threats. Socially, it manifests in forms of symbolic isolation and in the pressure exerted by societal norms that seek to restrict women's presence and silence their voices.

Its economic impact further undermines women's autonomy by limiting financial independence and restricting their ability to pursue personal initiatives, while simultaneously increasing their economic responsibilities within the family. Unpaid labor remains a continuous and often invisible burden that compounds both direct and indirect pressures. At the familial level, the strain experienced by women extends into a collective burden, affecting relationships within the household and exposing the fragility of existing social support structures. As a result, personal challenges become deeply intertwined with broader familial and social dynamics.

In this sense, violence against women activists cannot be understood as an individual phenomenon. It constitutes a structural reality with far reaching consequences

for society as a whole. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive protection mechanisms and sustained solidarity efforts capable of strengthening women's resilience and enabling them to continue resisting despite the layered and persistent pressures imposed by prevailing social and political systems.

Violence against women political activists

Historically, politics has been defined as an overwhelmingly male domain, associated with concepts of power, decision making, and sovereignty. These concepts were socially constructed and linked to men, excluding women from them. Women have only reclaimed space within this field after years of struggle across the world. To this day, they continue to fight this battle as part of the broader struggle for equality. In patriarchal societies, women active in politics are still perceived as a troubling exception rather than a natural part of public life. Their political participation is not understood as an exercise of citizenship, but interpreted as a deviation from imposed gender roles and a direct threat to existing systems of social power. As a result, attention is often shifted away from their ideas and political positions toward their bodies, behavior, and personal choices.

This is evident in the case of Yamina Zoghlami, former member of parliament and leader within Ennahda, where campaigns take the form of ridicule. Mocking expressions such as "owl face," "snake," and "umm gorgor" (a derogatory term referring to a frog) circulate widely. These ready made verbal labels are used to distort her public image and cast doubt on her competence, particularly during moments of political controversy or electoral periods. This ridicule is often reinforced through memes and synchronized reposting, appearing as "humor" while in reality functioning as a mechanism of exclusion, intimidation, and pressure that pushes women toward self censorship and withdrawal from public visibility.

Yamina Zoghlami's experience shows how ridicule directed at women in politics can become an effective tool of repression. These comments targeting her appearance or voice are not harmless jokes, but strategies that reproduce marginalization and exclusion. Superficial criticism is used to undermine credibility and competence, creating a constant sense of insecurity. Women are forced to reconsider every public appearance or statement, while enduring continuous psychological pressure to reshape their behavior and speech to align with patriarchal expectations.

These attacks are amplified by digital tools such as memes and rapid reposting, allowing them to spread quickly and appear normalized or 'entertaining' to the public, while carrying deeply harmful consequences for women's reputations and their ability to participate effectively. Each public act becomes a test of endurance, where women are expected to withstand concentrated attacks targeting both their personal and professional lives.

As Yamina Zoghlami[9] stated, “This is the price women politicians and activists pay in public space.” This produces a dangerous normalization of gendered political violence. First, it reframes harm from a violation of the right to political participation into an inevitable consequence of engagement. Second, it shifts responsibility away from perpetrators and structural factors such as digital platforms, weak legal protections, and exclusionary cultures, placing it instead on women’s own choices, reinforcing victim blaming. Third, it normalizes inequality by presenting violence as part of the “nature of politics,” rather than naming it as a systematic targeting aimed at silencing and deterring women’s political participation.

Based on the political activist’s statement, this pattern of digital violence can be understood in its depth as a mechanism that does not merely produce immediate exclusion, but generates long term psychological and social effects. When ridicule and mockery are framed as “humor,” harm is reframed as an inevitable reality, as if women are expected to accept this as the natural price for choosing to engage in political life and challenge established norms.

This acceptance leads to internalized blame, as women are held responsible for the violence they face simply for stepping outside traditional roles. Violence is reduced from a violation of their right to political participation to a “logical” consequence of their choices. In this way, digital violence becomes a tool for reproducing patriarchal control, by entrenching a persistent sense of guilt and alienation, undermining self confidence, and weakening the will to continue engaging in political participation.

The deeper impact is that women are pushed toward self censorship and gradual withdrawal, not only out of fear of attacks but out of a growing belief that their very presence in public space is a source of danger to themselves and those around them. Gendered political violence is thus normalized and legitimized, shifting from systematic abuse into a perceived “rule of the game,” reinforcing inequality by holding women responsible for the harm inflicted upon them. This language serves a dual function. On one hand, it turns women’s bodies, images, and voices into sites of symbolic punishment. On the other, it mobilizes family belonging as a mechanism of control, forcing women back into narrow social roles. Notably, some of these expressions have come from individuals who are themselves part of human rights spaces, highlighting the deep entrenchment of symbolic violence.

Across these cases, despite differences in backgrounds and positions, a common pattern emerges. Women are targeted not only for their ideas but through their gender, social roles, and professional choices. Attacks range from violations of privacy and reputation to moral shaming linked to clothing or personal images, sexual harassment in messages and comments, threats of physical or sexual violence, the publication of private data or images without consent, and efforts to undermine credibility by labeling them as ‘attention seeking’ or as ‘sources of social discord’.

9 Telephone interview with Yamina Zoghlami] political activist ,[Tunisia 20 ,September .2025 Consent was obtained to publish the quote as provided.

By contrast, men are generally attacked based on their ideas or political positions in a more issue based manner, without the same intrusion into their private lives or the use of their bodies as sites of symbolic punishment. They are also more likely to receive social support. This confirms that the neutrality of digital space is an illusion. It reflects existing discriminatory structures and reproduces them through faster and more pervasive tools. These testimonies provide clear evidence that the issue is fundamentally gendered. It is not a battle of ideas or affiliations, but one rooted in the structural vulnerability imposed on women. Patriarchy, as clearly demonstrated, does not leave any aspect of women's lives untouched. It competes with their presence in both digital and physical spaces as long as they refuse to conform to patriarchal norms sustained by social residues, dominant traditions, and both direct and indirect mechanisms of control. Every feminist expression, every public opinion, and every political or cultural participation is subjected to constant surveillance and threat. Women's presence itself becomes a challenge, while men largely remain shielded from similar targeting of their private lives or bodies, and are evaluated primarily based on their ideas and political alignments, often benefiting from societal support.

In this context, digital violence becomes an extension of offline violence. Every comment, image, and post can be used as a tool for threat, restriction, and psychological pressure. Women face a dual challenge: confronting direct patriarchal control over their daily lives and dealing with the psychological and social consequences of digital violence that continuously reproduces stigma and domination. This reality forces women into a constant state of alertness, where strict self censorship is not a personal choice but a forced response to a hostile environment that punishes their very existence. This confirms the gendered nature of the violence and highlights the urgent need to rethink legal and social protection frameworks.

The impact of stigma linked to imprisonment on families

For the families of political prisoners, imprisonment is not merely a legal event, but one that organizes the rhythm of daily life. Days are structured around visiting schedules and administrative procedures, along with the exhausting preparations in between. This burden becomes heavier when this routine is compounded by prison stigma, shared by both the prisoners and their families.

Routine pressure

For the families of political prisoners, imprisonment becomes an organizing mechanism that dominates their lives above all. Days are defined by preparation schedules, coordination among family members, follow up with lawyers, and the search for reassurances that remain absent. This pressure intensifies in the days leading up to visits, where psychological tension meets the exhaustion of constant preparation, turning waiting into an experience filled with fear and anticipation. Hours and days become entangled in overlapping schedules of appointments, bureaucratic procedures, visit preparations, and movement between prisons and courts. This imposes continuous pressure on the entire family and creates an invisible psychological and physical burden. Women often carry the largest share of these responsibilities, including caring for other family members, ensuring the continuity of children's daily lives, managing the household, and dealing with the direct and indirect financial consequences of the absence of an income provider. This responsibility is not only heavy, but also public. These families carry their cases beyond courtrooms into the public sphere, as they are often known cases that take on the nature of public opinion cases, closely followed by Tunisian society, especially when they involve political speech or political decisions. Personal and family matters become circulated and can turn into subjects of digital discussion and even criticism, creating a form of acquired stigma linked to blood and family ties, without any means of defense.

Stigma Associated with Imprisonment

Through the interviews, we observed how stigma associated with imprisonment creates significant psychological pressure on families, and how hardship becomes compounded, particularly for those caring for prisoners and prisoners of conscience. This burden falls most heavily on women within the family. It is not limited to the role of the wife, as might be assumed. Regardless of the social position of the imprisoned person, the responsibility is most often carried by women, irrespective of their relation to the prisoner.

As Mariem Zaghidi[10] explained when describing the exhausting nature of visiting days, the difficult journey, and the preparation involved: “This constant anxiety turns into a heavy psychological burden, which becomes even more intense when the detainee is a prisoner of conscience or a political prisoner. The case is public, everyone is talking, and calls and pressures accumulate. Solidarity is important, yes, but at times it becomes overwhelming and heavy, adding another layer of exhaustion to the pain.”

Based on this statement by the prisoner’s sister, it becomes clear that political imprisonment does not affect only the detained individual, but extends to encompass the entire family, particularly women, who carry the greatest burden in the form of a daily psychological confinement. The hardship of travel, preparation for visits, and long periods of waiting become a repeated form of suffering, while the brief encounter does not bring relief but instead reproduces the pain. When the case is public, the pressure intensifies, as the family is surrounded by statements, calls, and media attention. Solidarity, despite its importance, can become an additional burden, adding another layer of exhaustion. Continuous anxiety becomes a heavy psychological weight, further compounded by the absence of solutions or meaningful change. Women thus find themselves in a dual position, supporting the political prisoner while also confronting society. This reveals the feminization of suffering, where women are turned into the visible face of resilience without recognition of their rights or burdens. Their presence in the public sphere is assigned the symbolism of resistance rather than understood as an expression of personal suffering, reflecting the politicization of the female body and its transformation into a symbol of struggle, while their psychological exhaustion remains unacknowledged. Women are therefore caught between the duty of solidarity and the duty of care, between being the voice of the case and remaining the backbone of the family. This multiplies the pressure placed upon them and renders their suffering an invisible part of the punishment. It further confirms that political repression intersects with patriarchal and social structures to reproduce traditional roles that burden women and deny recognition of their rights as autonomous individuals.

This is further illustrated by Dalenda Dous,[11] the mother of political prisoner Iman Werdani,[12] who said in a long conversation: “I travel 300 kilometers every week for just ten minutes of visit, I have lost the taste of life. I constantly think about Iman:

10 Mariem Zoghlami ,sister of political prisoner and journalist Mourad Zoghlami .Statements were collected through a telephone interview on 19 November.2025

11 Telephone interview with Dalenda Dous ,mother of political detainee Iman El Wardani ,Tunisia25 , September .2025 Consent was obtained to publish the quote as provided.

12 :For more information on Iman El Wardani ,see the following link:https//:intersection.uno/freedom-faces%/D8%A5%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%-D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A /

is she well? Is she sick? My mind is occupied all the time with the day of the visit." What Dalenda describes is not merely personal suffering, but a lived example of how social and political structures intersect with gender roles. In the context of political imprisonment, motherhood itself becomes a form of moral confinement parallel to the imprisonment of the daughter. Mothers are trapped in cycles of anxiety and waiting, and are forced to normalize pain as part of their daily lives.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, this experience is not individual, but the result of a broader social and political structure that intensifies the burden on women. The visit shifts from a moment of support into a moment of psychological strain, adding to the weight of suffering rather than easing it. Life becomes divided into what comes before and after the visit, while women carry the primary responsibility of maintaining family cohesion, managing the household, and caring for children. At the same time, prolonged anxiety drains attention and energy, turning each week into a repeated cycle of the same emotional exhaustion.

The impact of this confinement intensifies when children are directly affected by forced absence. In the case of Sherifa Riahi, her daughter was only two and a half months old at the time of her arrest. The care of her two children was entrusted to their grandmother, Amina Farida Riahi, who described to us the experience of the older child, who believed that his mother had died and would enter intense crying episodes, demanding her return. This illustrates how the imprisonment of a mother for political reasons becomes a form of symbolic violence exercised on children. It disrupts their understanding of the world, as the child, still developing tools of comprehension, learns that absence is not temporary but a constant organizing force in daily life. The state appears capable of removing the most important person in their world without explanation they can grasp, creating a gap between the idea of punishment for wrongdoing and the reality in which the mother is perceived as a victim of her position or public engagement.

This gap does not manifest only as crying or anxiety, but as a distortion in the child's sense of self. The child reinterprets themselves and their family under the weight of an unnamed social stigma. Changes in care networks, such as the transfer of care to the grandmother, impose a forced shift in attachment and dependence, teaching the child to manage deprivation as a daily condition rather than developing a sense of trust. Gender is central in this context. The absence of the mother disrupts the child's primary source of emotional security and regulation, while public discourse fails to provide a coherent and just alternative narrative. The child is left in prolonged states of exhausting waiting and uncertainty.

For this reason, the discussion of alternative sentencing is not only a humanitarian issue, but a matter of structural justice. Such measures would preserve the maternal bond and prevent the transfer of repression from the political sphere into the psychological and social formation of the child, by recognizing the state's obligation not to turn children into victims of penal policies. This is particularly critical given that the infant daughter was deprived of care during one of the most

vulnerable stages of life. Both children are now subject to psychological harm and may, in the future, face stigma linked to the imprisonment of their mother, without any legitimate basis. This impact is not limited to young children. Even adult sons and daughters of imprisoned women experience profound consequences. Belkis Ghrissa describes a sensitive layer of this experience, marked by panic attacks that accompany the weekly routine of preparing the prison visit package, and a home environment where every space triggers the memory of absence. She explains that she can no longer bear staying at home, and that loneliness overwhelms her, leading her to spend more time outside.

In this way, imprisonment becomes a parallel time that consumes everyday life and reshapes family roles under constant pressure from anxiety and absence. These testimonies show that imprisonment as a deprivation of liberty does not affect only the detained individual, but extends to the family as the primary unit of life. When the detained person is the main provider, the family loses its primary source of income, directly affecting living conditions and increasing economic vulnerability.

The burden does not stop at the loss of income. Families are also forced to bear a series of additional expenses linked to supporting the prisoner inside the prison. These include the costs of travel for visits, the expenses of preparing the "package" and sending money transfers, purchasing items from prison shops, as well as lawyers' fees, legal costs, and administrative follow up expenses. According to the testimonies we documented, women in prisoners' families carry the greatest share of this burden, particularly in preparing the "provisions" twice a week. The cost of a single package ranges between 100 and 200 Tunisian dinars, excluding transportation, transfers, legal fees, rent, bills, and children's needs.

This reality produces a double pressure. On one hand, resources shrink due to the absence of the main provider. On the other, unexpected expenses increase to meet the needs of the prisoner inside the prison. As a result, the family becomes an indirect victim of imprisonment and its long term social and financial consequences.

These burdens are further deepened by practices that increase costs and undermine coping mechanisms. In some cases, including the "conspiracy against state security" case, the bank accounts and financial assets of detainees have been frozen, depriving their families of savings and access to financial resources, and intensifying their daily hardship.

In addition, prisoners continue to be transferred to prisons far from their place of residence, in clear violation of the Nelson Mandela Rules, specifically Rule 59, which states that prisoners should be held in prisons close to their homes.[13] This significantly increases travel costs and adds to the material and psychological

13 United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) the Nelson Mandela Rules(https//:docs.un.org/ar/A/RES 70/175/

exhaustion of families.[14] The result is a cumulative impact that weakens families' ability to endure, effectively turning penal policy into a form of collective punishment that extends beyond the imprisoned individual to their broader social environment.

Gender based political and digital violence penetrates the details of everyday life, forcibly reproducing gender roles and undermining support networks through stigma and the pressure of "reputation."

Women activists and politicians are pushed into labels that criminalize their public presence, such as "rebellious," "a threat to values," or "troublesome," not only through direct attacks but also through silent exclusion, marginalization, and judgmental gazes. Their presence is framed as a threat to the socially accepted image of "the proper woman."

The cost extends to the family, as familial ties are used as tools of pressure through insinuation, threats, or harassment. Daily life becomes a continuous management of risk, involving careful choice of words, restriction of visibility, and constant anticipation of harm affecting relatives.

14 " The Dispersal of Political Detainees Across Tunisian Prisons :A New Chapter of Abuse ",Legal Agenda.09/06/2025 ,https//:legal-agenda.com%/D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%AA%-D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86%-D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86%-D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%86%-D8%AA%D9%88 /

Women in Exile and Compounded Challenges

In a context marked by the absence of fair trial guarantees and a system that lacks justice and respect for rights and freedoms, many women face a reality in which imprisonment is not something they are willing to confront, not out of fear or lack of courage, but because their past experiences have revealed the extent of the system's hostility toward them and its tendency to condemn them even before any judgment is issued. In addition, the smear campaignsagainst them have been rifle with clear hostility and vindictiveness, while effective protection from online harassment has been absent. These practices have been allowed to continue within a context where the prospects of justice are diminishing and the chances of proving innocence are collapsing. As a result, women in forced exile face compounded challenges, where gender based violence intersects with other forms of discrimination, further complicating efforts to defend rights and freedoms and intensifying the psychological and social impact of punishment.

This is reflected in the case of lawyer and human rights defender Bochra Belhaj Hmida[15], where gender based violence intersects with intimidation rooted in social, religious, and political grounds. She has been subjected to repeated insults such as

15 Telephone interview with Bochra Belhaj Hmida] politician ,human rights and feminist activist,[Tunisia 25 ,September .2025 Consent was obtained to publish the quote as provided.

“w**e,” “hag,” “devil,” “go get married,” “corrupt,” “you corrupt women,” “‘loose’ woman,” “you want to destroy families,” “qahramana” (used here as a derogatory term implying a manipulative or scheming woman), and “non-believer, enemy of Islam.” These attacks led her to close her social media accounts and avoid public appearances, deepening her sense of isolation following the loss of support networks within the country. The psychological cost of participation increases, and silence is reproduced.

The burden of stigma becomes particularly heavy when a person’s name becomes associated with multiple phases the country has gone through, and they are blamed for everything, whether negative or positive. This is the case for Bochra, whose name became closely tied to women’s rights, turning her advocacy into a source of constant blame. In Tunisia, some men direct anger and hostility toward her even without knowing her personally. This reflects a pattern of gender based violence that targets women active in the public sphere. This blame takes multiple forms of verbal and symbolic violence, including intrusion into her private life and personal images, the reproduction of repressive practices against her, and holding her responsible even for personal or social issues, as if she were accountable for the loss of patriarchal control over women’s lives in Tunisia. This effectively assigns her an illegitimate burden of blame.

This pattern of demonization shows how women’s presence in the public sphere is turned into an open space for symbolic and verbal violence, where degrading and exclusionary language is used to strip them of legitimacy and restore patriarchal control. In the case of Bochra Belhaj Hmida, the targeting is not limited to her legal or political positions, but extends to her name as a symbol onto which broader social, religious, and political tensions are projected. She becomes a constant target of blame and hostility, whether present or absent. This form of violence goes beyond

the individual to become a structural mechanism for reproducing silence and excluding women from public life. Religious and moral discourse is used to justify exclusion, and even her private life and personal image are made subject to public scrutiny. Defending women’s rights is thus transformed into a “collective sin,” punished through continuous stigmatization and calls for violence.

The psychological and social impact of this violence is profound. It deepens isolation, leads to the loss of support networks within the country, and turns participation itself into a daily burden that weighs on women activists, making presence in the public sphere a constant experience of threat. In Bochra’s case, defending women’s rights is no longer simply a legal or political position, but becomes a symbol of the loss of patriarchal control over women’s lives. This makes the violence against her both intensified and continuous, even after leaving the country, as her presence is reproduced as a “ghost” blamed for everything related to women and held responsible for any crisis or conflict. This pattern of violence, often expressed through the blaming of women activists as a backlash against

women's rights, reveals the intersection of social, religious, and political structures in producing mechanisms of exclusion. It shows that the demonization of women in public life is not merely an individual reaction, but an informal system that seeks to regulate the public sphere according to patriarchal norms, turning women into constant scapegoats and reinforcing a culture of blame for anything perceived as a threat to patriarchal authority. At the core of this lies the perception that the freedoms women create are acts of rebellion. Instead of being recognized as steps toward equality, women are blamed for encouraging others to break constraints and "disrupt" the family structures that patriarchal societies seek to preserve. The loss of control over women is seen as a threat that exposes their agency and challenges the longstanding social narratives that have been built on silencing them. Feminist struggles have secured rights that current and future generations now benefit from, yet the confrontation with both the system and society remains ongoing, and their voices continue despite sustained attempts to silence them. Women activists are not shielded from violence. On the contrary, they are targeted both as women and as feminists, paying the price twice, for their gender and for their activism.

The testimony of human rights activist Ghofrane Binous[16] further illustrates how harm is compounded when intersecting identities are involved. As she states, "It is not easy to be a woman, let alone a woman human rights defender, and Black."

Despite the state's repeated claims that racism does not exist within its territory, and that equality between individuals is fully realized with no hierarchy between white and Black people, this narrative is contradicted by Ghofrane's experience. She is not the first defender to speak about this. Many activists have raised these issues, yet their voices are quickly silenced or dismissed, even though it is widely known that Tunisian society resists acknowledging its African belonging, often perceiving it as diminishing. This denial is rooted in colonial legacies that have embedded the idea of white superiority within the social fabric. At the same time, racism is denied and reduced to the absence of physical violence, while everyday discourse continues to construct difference as a fault rather than something to be accepted. The daily discourse directed at Binous is therefore nothing but racism and violence.

Ghofrane has also been subjected to repeated waves of digital violence, including attacks, mockery, threats, and ongoing harassment that undermine her dignity. The abuse did not stop at verbal attacks, but extended to the dissemination of her personal photos. Women human rights defenders are frequently exposed to digital defamation, where their private lives are turned into open territory, and their personal choices become subject to judgment, scrutiny, and criticism. The private lives of women defenders and feminist activists are thus transformed into a space of exposure, used as a tool to weaken their presence in the public sphere. This form of digital violence goes beyond the exposure of images or personal data.

16 Source :Interview conducted via an application with Ghofrane Binous ,journalist and human rights defender 19 ,November.2025

It operates by turning individual choices, from clothing to family decisions and personal relationships, into constant objects of evaluation, criticism, and stigma, placing defenders under continuous social surveillance and stripping them of their right to privacy.

The severity of this violence lies in its ability to intensify psychological and social harm. It turns public participation into a daily cost marked by risk, forcing women activists to withdraw or reduce their presence out of fear of defamation or retaliation. The boundaries between private and public spheres collapse, and privacy is no longer a guaranteed right but a rare exception. Personal details are exposed and presented to the public as a means of pressure and exclusion. This targeting extends to the point of scrutinizing appearance and the body, turning the female body itself into a site of symbolic struggle. Patriarchal discourse is used to undermine women's legitimacy and reassert control over them. This pattern of violence reinforces a culture of constant surveillance, where the activist is reduced to her body and image, and silence is reproduced by turning her existence into a continuous object of judgment and stigma. As a result, public participation itself becomes an act marked by ongoing threat, deepening the isolation of women active in the public sphere.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, this pattern shows how digital violence intersects with political and social violence. Women are not targeted solely because of their gender, but also because of their human rights activism and their position as defenders of equality. Digital defamation thus becomes an extension of political violence against women human rights defenders, used as a weapon to silence them and strip them of legitimacy, and to transform the defense of rights into a "collective sin," punished through stigmatization and threats. In this way, the digital space becomes a new arena for reproducing patriarchal control and guardianship over women's bodies and voices, reinforcing a culture of blaming women and holding them responsible for broader social and political crises, while obscuring the real violence and making it less accountable.

This pattern can be clearly identified as digital defamation targeting feminist activists, a form of gender based digital violence that seeks to undermine women's participation in public life by violating privacy and turning it into a tool of intimidation and exclusion. As Ghofrane recounts, she has been subjected to insults such as "dirty," "wh*re," "you smell bad," along with explicitly racist language. In a particularly shocking incident during an international human rights conference last year, she described how a participant interrupted the event to state publicly, "There is a bad smell coming from G.B.," a clearly racist remark targeting her presence in that space.

This pattern of violence reveals a form of indirect exclusion through humiliation, where degrading and racist language related to the body, appearance, and smell is used to strip women activists of their legitimacy in the public sphere. Its danger lies in the fact that it is not exercised as formal prohibition or explicit exclusion,

but as a symbolic mechanism that turns their presence into an object of ridicule and stigma. This intensifies psychological and social harm and pushes them to withdraw or reduce their presence. In this way, public humiliation becomes a tool for reproducing patriarchal control and reinforces a culture of silence by turning public participation into a degrading experience. The activist is reduced to her body and image and placed under constant scrutiny and evaluation, making the public sphere itself unsafe for women.

At the psychological level, Ghofrane describes her experience by saying, “I got so tired,” as the pressure reached the point of contributing to the onset of diabetes. She suffered from recurring panic attacks, and her self confidence was undermined.

These recurring panic attacks reflect a condition of continuous threat, where her body remains in a constant state of alert, as if danger is always present. The erosion of her self confidence is a direct result of exclusionary and humiliating discourse, where her image is continuously reproduced as an object of stigma, weakening her sense of worth and capacity to act. Violence thus becomes not only an attack on her presence in the public sphere, but also on her internal psychological structure. It turns participation into a threat filled experience and deepens isolation by making her feel unable to confront society or continue defending her rights.

The violence did not affect her alone, but extended to her entire family, increasing the burden of suffering. As she explains, “My mother often told me to stop my work.” This extension of violence into the family sphere functions as an additional form of intimidation aimed at breaking the will of women human rights defenders. This pattern of violence does not stop at direct insult or digital defamation. It takes on a layered and multidimensional form that targets the activist on multiple levels and turns her presence in the public sphere into a daily experience marked by threat. It begins with insult and stigma that attack personal dignity and instill a lasting sense of humiliation. It then expands to the violation of private life through the dissemination of personal images and data, turning privacy into a rare exception and making individual choices subject to constant judgment and criticism. It is further reinforced by indirect exclusion through public humiliation, where the activist is stripped of legitimacy and her presence is turned into an object of ridicule. In this way, patriarchal control is reproduced through symbolic mechanisms that may appear as mere comments, but in reality function as tools to silence and exclude women.

Violence does not stop at the activist herself, but extends to her family, where fear compels relatives to urge their daughters to withdraw from public participation in anticipation of potential harm. In this way, the natural support network is transformed into an additional source of pressure, and the victim finds herself trapped between an external threat that continues to pursue her and an internal fear imposed by those closest to her. This extension of violence into the family sphere intensifies its psychological and social impact, as it makes the activist feel responsible for her family’s suffering. This erodes her sense of worth and self

confidence, and reinforces a culture of silence through a social mechanism that appears “natural,” but is in fact part of a broader system of structural violence. It is therefore necessary to recognize that the forms of this violence are deeply interconnected. Direct insult undermines dignity, digital defamation violates privacy, public humiliation erodes legitimacy, and family based intimidation turns support into pressure. Together, these dimensions create a closed cycle of fear and stigma, where public participation becomes an unbearable daily cost, and withdrawal or isolation emerges as a logical outcome in the face of a system built on humiliation, defamation, public shaming, and intimidation.

In this sense, violence against women human rights defenders is not a series of isolated incidents, but a coherent structure aimed at breaking their will and reproducing control through overlapping psychological, social, and political mechanisms. This makes it difficult for women to continue defending their rights without paying a high cost at the level of the self, the family, and society.

Exile as the Illusion of Safety

Exile is often presented in dominant discourse within human rights circles as a "solution" or a "safe haven" for women human rights defenders facing threats and violence in their home countries. Yet this idealized image collapses in the face of lived reality. As Ghofrane states, "Exile is not salvation, I left my father sick." In this brief sentence lies the full weight of forced displacement, which is not only the act of leaving a geographical space, but the compelled abandonment of parents and loved ones at moments of illness and vulnerability, and the loss of social and familial support networks that once provided refuge in times of crisis.

The coercive nature of exile also means living in a state of chronic uncertainty. "This is not easy, we have no guarantee of when we can return to our country," she adds. Every plan and every future becomes uncertain, and every decision remains suspended between the desire to return and the reality of impossibility. Exile here is not only a geographical distance, but a loss of support systems and a deepening sense of isolation. Violence moves from the outside to the inside, transforming into self doubt and fear of participation. The defender becomes trapped between two pressures: if she remains silent, the repressive system prevails; if she speaks, she pays a heavy psychological cost in isolation.

In the end, Ghofrane chose to withdraw "for my mental health and my peace." This decision is not a free choice, but a forced response to an unbearable reality. Exile does not resolve the problem, it displaces it. Violence that was once direct and visible in the homeland becomes subtle and chronic in exile, and silence that was once imposed by force is reproduced voluntarily as a mechanism for psychological survival.

The decision to withdraw reveals another layer of violence, where retreat becomes a survival mechanism rather than a conscious choice. Leaving does not end the cycle of targeting, but reshapes it. Fear persists, memory remains marked by experiences of humiliation and defamation, and a state of chronic anxiety and internal alienation takes hold. Violence becomes silent, embedded in a constant sense of vulnerability and the ongoing need for self monitoring and restraint, even in spaces presumed to be safe.

Exile does not provide full protection. It transforms external pressure into internal pressure, where self censorship is practiced voluntarily and silence is reproduced as a condition for psychological survival. The depth of this experience lies in the fact that violence is no longer an isolated event, but an ongoing structure that reshapes the relationship between the activist, herself, and the world. Public engagement becomes an existential burden that transcends place and time.

Adapting to this new reality does not mean surrender. It compels women defenders to seek alternative pathways to continue their work and uphold their commitments.

Stopping their human rights engagement would be perceived as a victory for the system and a success in silencing voices and undoing the gains women have built over years of struggle.

In this context, exile becomes another space of resistance. The experience is used to reshape tools of advocacy and to create new avenues for influence, whether through international networks or transnational digital spaces. Leaving does not mean that conditions in their home countries have improved. Rather, it exposes them to societies with broader freedoms and deepens the contrast between restricted realities and more open ones, reinforcing the possibility of change. In this sense, continuing advocacy from abroad is not simply a choice, but an existential role. Their fate remains tied to that of women in their home countries, and exile cannot be understood as the end of struggle, but as its continuation in another form. The message is reproduced across contexts, and pain is transformed into a force that sustains commitment to the cause.

The testimonies of Bochra Belhaj Hmida and Ghofrane Binous reveal a systematic pattern of multilayered violence faced by women human rights defenders, particularly in exile. Gender based violence, racism, age based discrimination, and political and religious intimidation intersect to create an unbearable reality, ultimately leading to the reproduction of silence as a "safe option," as described by Bochra Belhaj Hmida.

Advocacy Beyond Borders

This reality shows that violence against women human rights defenders does not end when they leave their country. It continues to follow them through new mechanisms that are more subtle and persistent. Even in exile, where they are expected to find space for safety and relief, judicial and social targeting remains present, and online harassment continues to recycle their statements and turn them into material for demonization and stigma. Despite their physical distance, they remain constantly blamed, as if their very existence is treated as an offense that can be invoked at any moment. This pattern of violence reflects the intersectionality of harm, beginning with stripping them of legitimacy through accusations of collusion with foreign actors, and reproducing the image of an internal threat even in exile. Distance thus becomes not a form of protection, but another extension of violence. Exile is transformed into a space of continuous surveillance, where silence is reproduced as a forced condition for psychological survival. The testimonies of Bochra Belhaj Hmida and Ghofrane Benous reveal that multilayered violence, including gender based, racial, generational, political, and religious dimensions, does not stop at national borders. It follows women defenders wherever they go, turning exile into another arena for control and the silencing of voices.

This is reinforced by political discourse that blames and targets women, often

expressing hostility that can reach the level of accusations of betrayal and labeling them as unpatriotic. Their images abroad are circulated and even their moments of joy are exploited and reframed against them. Yet, it is essential to emphasize that these women remain committed to the causes they defend. Their existence is inseparable from their activism, and they continue despite having already paid a high price for their resilience.

Intersectionality of Vulnerability and Violence

The impacts of violence on women human rights defenders intensify as overlapping identities and social, political, and cultural factors constrain their existence. Their departure from socially accepted norms is not perceived as an individual choice, but judged as disobedience and rebellion. They are expected to remain confined to roles of care, control over the body, and service to the family. Any attempt to assert independent agency or engage more deeply in public life is met with stigma and exclusion. Violence thus operates as a multilayered system: digital through defamation and online harassment, social through constant criticism and collective surveillance, institutional through judicial prosecution and discrimination in employment, and cultural through the reproduction of stereotypes that criminalize any deviation from traditional roles. This places women in a constant state of vulnerability and turns their lives into an open space of pressure and threat, where silence becomes a forced condition for survival, and exile becomes another form of violence, even as it may expose them to contexts with greater freedoms. At the legal level, particularly for LGBTIQ women, provisions related to “public morality” and “decency” are used as entry points to criminalize gender expression and private conduct, especially when they choose to live according to their gender identity rather than a legally imposed biological identity. They are neither recognized nor

protected, but treated as citizens in the shadows. The state engages with them primarily in contexts of condemnation, deprivation of liberty, and control over their bodies, forcing them back into identities they seek to move beyond within a long and difficult transition process. They pay the price of their identity daily, facing exclusion across all areas of life, including deprivation of constitutional rights, from dignity to work, education, and health. Convictions also leave the constant threat of imprisonment, pushing many to live in enforced secrecy.

In this context, moments of freedom are reduced to brief escapes from social surveillance, often paid for through stigma, social violence, or imprisonment through judicial processes. Many LGBTIQ women avoid filing complaints out of fear that procedures will turn against them, whether through vague charges or degrading practices such as denial of gender identity or threats of forced examinations condemned under human rights standards. This occurs within a broader pattern of degrading treatment by certain state structures, deepening exclusion and the absence of legal and institutional protection.

This risk is further entrenched through arbitrary prosecutions under the Penal Code. Article 230 criminalizes same sex relations, with penalties of up to three years of imprisonment and a fine. Articles 226 and 226 bis criminalize “public indecency” and acts or expressions deemed “contrary to public morals,” with penalties of up to six months of imprisonment.

As a result, pathways to justice themselves become sources of legal and social risk, forcing victims into silence and widening the gap in effective protection. This produces compounded harm for LGBTIQ women, who find themselves caught between escalating violence and accountability processes that may criminalize rather than protect them.

In the digital sphere, violence against LGBTIQ women takes specific forms, including non consensual outing of sexual orientation or gender identity, blackmail through the non consensual dissemination of intimate content, public exposure of personal data, gender based hate speech and homophobia, as well as coordinated campaigns of incitement and defamation.

These attacks often extend beyond the digital space into direct physical harm, including family violence, eviction, and loss of employment or educational opportunities, while psychological and physical impacts intensify in the context of slow institutional response and delays in removing harmful content. Vulnerability is further exacerbated when intersecting with factors such as economic status, age, disability, and gender identity. Media and official discourse also contribute to legitimizing and reinforcing this exclusion.

Section Two: The Implications of Digital Violence on Women Activists

Digital violence constitutes an extension of the social and political violence exercised against women. It is not limited to isolated incidents of harassment or fleeting abusive comments, but operates as a mechanism for sustaining systems of social and political domination and reproducing gender-based discrimination. Within the digital sphere, psychological, social, political, and economic dimensions of violence intersect and reinforce one another, often requiring little more than the intent to discredit and exclude women in an environment where effective accountability remains limited. This dynamic deepens women's vulnerability, undermines their public image, and restricts their ability to participate meaningfully in public life. This violence is not neutral. It targets women first and foremost on the basis of gender, and intensifies when their digital presence intersects with political positions, human rights activism, familial ties to political detainees, or partisan affiliation. It may also be linked to their visibility in public roles. In many cases, it is sufficient that women are visible and dissenting for them to become targets.

Over the past two years, this phenomenon has taken on more complex and severe forms. The digital sphere has increasingly been used to reinforce stigmatization associated with detention and political engagement, while expanding mechanisms of control and exclusion to encompass families and surrounding communities. In this context, women face layered pressures, as their daily lives become shaped by a combination of psychological strain, preparation for prison visits, management of family responsibilities, and confrontation with social stigma. At the same time, digital platforms are used to reproduce negative narratives, entrench marginalization, and weaken women's political and social presence.

Implications of Digital Violence on Women Prisoners of Conscience

Digital violence is part of the global framework of gender based violence, and has been documented in multiple United Nations reports as an escalating threat to women's rights in both digital and public spaces.[17] This violence is not limited to individual abuse, but is used as a tool to sustain political and social repression. It takes multiple forms, including defamation, surveillance, hacking, and coordinated threats across digital platforms. According to the Human Rights Council and the

17 تقرير للأمم المتحدة بعنوان **يتزايد العنف الرقمي، ومع ذلك فإن ما يقرب من نصف النساء والفتيات في العالم يفتقرن إلى الحماية القانونية من الإساءة الرقمية بتاريخ 28 نوفمبر 2025** آخر تاريخ اطلاع جانفي 2026

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Commission on the Status of Women, digital violence produces interconnected psychological, social, economic, and political impacts, and increases women's vulnerability in patriarchal societies. In the Tunisian context, where women bear the burden of reputation and political identity, digital violence takes on more severe and complex forms, becoming a tool for reproducing political and social repression in compounded ways. Women prisoners of conscience are the most exposed to these impacts, as judicial condemnation intersects with digital stigma to reinforce demonization and reproduce the image of guilt beyond prison walls. The digital space becomes an extension of formal punishment, used to expand defamation and marginalization.

These impacts do not stop at the detainee herself, but extend to women in their families, who find themselves surrounded by stigma and psychological and social pressure, as they are perceived as extensions of the detainee's political identity. This translates into exclusion from employment opportunities and economic support, and leads to direct material harm affecting the entire household. This has been clearly observed in the experiences of women prisoners of conscience, whether detained or in exile, where digital violence appears as a complex phenomenon that goes beyond individual abuse to become a wider cycle affecting society as a whole. This violence reproduces social marginalization, excludes women from the public sphere, and weakens their political and social participation. In patriarchal societies, its impact is more severe, as women are made to carry the burden of reputation and political identity, turning digital violence into a means of sustaining control and reproducing repression across interconnected psychological, social, economic, and political dimensions.

Implications of Digital Violence on Women Activists

Women activists in the public sphere, whether inside the country or outside it, face similar forms of digital violence shaped by the nature of their political and human rights engagement. This violence appears through ongoing defamation, surveillance, threats, and attempts at digital exclusion aimed at undermining their presence and influence in society.

This experience is marked by compounded targeting, as negative labels are attached to activists at both the social and political levels, increasing their sense of isolation and continuous psychological pressure.

Women activists carry the burden of responding to this violence while trying to maintain their political and human rights engagement. Digital violence does not affect them only on a personal level, but also extends to their social and professional networks, undermining their participation in both digital and public spaces.

The digital sphere becomes a tool for reproducing social marginalization and expanding discrimination against women who seek to exercise their political and social rights freely. This reflects how digital platforms can be used to sustain social and political repression against women activists.

In some cases, this leads to psychological exhaustion to the point of withdrawal, self questioning, and at times self blame, simply because society attacks them on a daily basis. Over time, this violence may also become normalized as a condition for continuing engagement.

Psychological and Social Impacts

Digital violence against women, particularly women prisoners of conscience and activists, represents one of the most complex and harmful forms of gender based violence, due to its deeply interconnected psychological and social effects. At the psychological level, this form of violence generates a state of continuous pressure that reshapes women's relationship with themselves and with the public sphere. Everyday experience becomes marked by self surveillance and a persistent fear of renewed harm, undermining feelings of safety, trust, and the ability to sustain engagement in public life.

This suffering does not remain confined to the individual level. It extends into familial and social environments, producing collective fractures in which women and their families share the burden of stigmatization, threats, and the resulting isolation and emotional strain. At the social level, digital violence contributes to the reproduction of marginalization and exclusion by transforming judicial processes or political accusations into continuously circulating digital content. This content is used to entrench negative stereotypes about women and to undermine their legitimacy within the public sphere.

This systematic use of digital spaces deepens social isolation and weakens opportunities for integration, whether in employment, social relations, or the building of support networks. As a result, public presence becomes conditional, costly, and persistently exposed to defamation and doubt.

The structural danger of this form of violence lies in the organic intersection between the psychological and the social. Psychological pressure intensifies social vulnerability, while social marginalization reproduces psychological suffering, creating a self reinforcing cycle of harm. In such a context, withdrawal from the public sphere is no longer a free choice, but a forced outcome of a hostile environment that penalizes participation and strips women of the conditions necessary for equal engagement.

In this sense, digital violence cannot be understood merely as an extension of traditional forms of discrimination. Rather, it constitutes a contemporary

mechanism for sustaining repression, transforming individual harm into organized collective practice, and entrenching women's exclusion from full citizenship and human dignity through digital tools that reproduce control in increasingly complex and far reaching ways.

Psychological Impact

The psychological impact of digital violence constitutes an extended and complex system that goes beyond the immediate moment of harm, evolving into a sustained state of anxiety and fear. Psychological distress becomes a persistent condition for targeted women, as a sense takes hold that any form of visibility or interaction may be exploited to reproduce condemnation or defamation. This has been reflected, for instance, in cases where women choose to close their social media accounts.

Psychological isolation emerges as a direct consequence of this pressure. Women withdraw from spaces of communication out of fear of further harm, and this withdrawal gradually erodes self confidence and trust in their surroundings. Over time, it may lead to the internalization of harm as an inevitable cost of challenging dominant norms and breaking prescribed roles. The impact of trauma extends beyond digital interactions into the details of everyday life, leading many women to avoid sharing personal experiences and to engage in constant self monitoring of what they might express or publish, even in anticipation of interpretation and social judgment from close circles that should not exercise authority over them. These dynamics also affect personal relationships and weaken the ability to build stable professional and social trajectories, resulting in the loss of the possibility of living freely, even if only temporarily.

Loss of self confidence becomes an expected outcome when judicial accusations are repeatedly reproduced in digital spaces as the primary marker of identity, reinforcing a fractured sense of self. Psychological exhaustion manifests as continuous mental strain, where even everyday decisions carry a heightened emotional cost. Heightened sensitivity to criticism reflects the lasting effects of defamation, as comments are given disproportionate weight and their psychological impact is amplified.

Memory itself becomes a repository of harm, where negative narratives accumulate and reproduce pain beyond the original moments of abuse. A form of internal disconnection emerges between the self and the social environment as a direct consequence of digital stigmatization. Women find their identities confined between official narratives of accusation and ongoing cycles of online defamation, often experiencing social judgment from the moment accusations are made, regardless of legal outcomes. This disconnection translates into a diminished capacity to express oneself freely and a persistent fear of renewed harm with every attempt to re engage in public life. In this sense, the psychological impact is not a temporary experience but a sustained and complex structure that shapes future decisions and

everyday choices. Digital violence thus becomes a mechanism for the continuous reproduction of trauma, one that can be mobilized to silence activists, who remain ongoing targets of harassment, making psychological recovery increasingly difficult and reinforcing women's vulnerability within society. Despite differences in context, harm is shared between activists who remain outside prison walls and women detainees who face uncertain judicial outcomes. Activists, although physically free, remain confined within systems of stigma, harassment, defamation, and moral judgment, while detainees confront their situations in environments marked by the absence of fair trial guarantees and, at times, by public hostility. Their families, particularly women within these families, experience the same forms of harm across different ages and roles.

For families, the most profound impact extends beyond pressure, blame, or even guilt. It is reflected in the erosion of hope in justice and in the possibility of accountability. Over time, this sense of inevitability can become internalized, shaping perceptions of fate. This dynamic also affects younger activists, who may come to view similar outcomes as a likely consequence of their engagement. As a result, their experiences become marked by doubt and uncertainty, shifting their focus not only toward confronting patriarchal domination, but also toward seeking ways to support those most affected by systemic repression. This rupture extends beyond feelings of anxiety or isolation to include a diminished capacity to imagine a secure future. Planning and participation increasingly become sources of perceived risk. A growing sense of alienation emerges as women recognize that society does not offer protection, but often contributes to the reproduction of stigma through silence or complicity. This reinforces the perception of exclusion from recognition and representation.

In this context, participation in public life becomes associated with a high psychological cost, and withdrawal emerges not as a free choice, but as a forced response to a hostile environment. The psychological impact thus takes the form of an enduring structure that reshapes women's relationship with themselves and with society. Digital violence becomes a prolonged experience of sustained psychological pressure, weakening the capacity for resistance and producing compounded vulnerability that is transmitted across generations of young activists who perceive in the experiences of women prisoners of conscience a potential future of their own if they continue to assert their rights.

Social Impact

The social impact of digital violence is manifested in the production of exclusion and the weakening of women's presence within society, particularly as independent actors. Women are isolated and rejected, as judicial accusations or convictions are transformed into circulating digital content used to reinforce negative portrayals of women detainees and young activists, as well as those who share their views and positions, ultimately excluding them from public participation.

It is important to emphasize that social stigmatization does not affect the detained woman alone. It extends to women within her family, who are often perceived as extensions of her political identity. This becomes evident even when these women attempt to create spaces for free expression, such as through live broadcasts on social media to speak about their conditions. These efforts are frequently met with abusive comments, including mockery, accusations, and at times direct threats and digital violence, further undermining their social standing.

For formerly detained women, even in cases of acquittal, the consequences persist. They often face exclusion from employment opportunities and economic support, as observed in the broader context of women detainees in Tunisia. Even when they are not convicted for their opinions, the stigma associated with detention remains deeply entrenched, particularly for women, as highlighted by sociological research. This is compounded by the lack of effective reintegration programs, which further entrenches their marginalization.

Social marginalization takes the form of weakened community ties, where women are deprived of opportunities to build support networks or participate in public life. In this way, digital violence becomes a mechanism for excluding women from the public sphere. Online defamation constructs negative narratives that are mobilized against women in both their personal and professional lives, serving as a tool to silence them and diminish their social presence. Cyberbullying further discourages digital participation and restricts women's ability to express themselves freely.

In this context, the social impact of digital violence becomes a mechanism for reproducing discrimination in new forms, transforming the digital sphere into an unequal arena of struggle where women are systematically excluded and their presence diminished. This impact is amplified within patriarchal societies, where digital violence functions as a means of sustaining control and reproducing repression across interconnected psychological, social, economic, and political dimensions.

Moreover, the social impact extends beyond individual experience and becomes a collective mechanism, reproducing discrimination and reinforces structures of domination. Stigmatization is transformed into a lasting social reality that constrains women's opportunities for integration and increases their vulnerability within the broader social structure.

Economic and Familial Impact

The impact of digital and political violence against women, particularly women prisoners of conscience and activists, is marked by a sharp intersection between economic and familial dimensions. Families bear both direct and indirect financial burdens resulting from detention, ranging from the cost of basic provisions and transportation for prison visits to managing daily life under conditions where dignity is often compromised within detention settings. These economic pressures are compounded by growing social strain, placing additional weight on families and forcing a reordering of priorities at the expense of essential needs. At the same time, women's economic vulnerability intensifies, both within and beyond the household, as limited financial independence restricts their ability to meet personal needs and safeguard their economic resources.

This situation is further exacerbated for activists, who are often not part of formal employment structures or stable economic protection systems. Many rely on civil society work characterized by instability and constant pressure, including the risk of institutional closure or suspension of activities, as has been observed since 2024. In this context, digital and political targeting becomes not only a personal threat but also a mechanism for weakening women economically and socially. Families face increased financial strain, while women encounter growing restrictions on their economic and social autonomy, placing them within a dual dynamic of dependency and pressure.

Moreover, these pressures undermine the social security of women human rights defenders, who frequently engage in advocacy and rights based work without financial compensation, while risking the erosion of social support networks built over years. In this way, digital and political violence functions as a multidimensional mechanism for weakening women and activists, where economic and familial pressures intersect to create a continuous cycle of strain. This cycle reduces women's capacity for independence, transforms public participation into a costly endeavor both financially and socially, and reproduces patterns of dependency and control through contemporary means.

Economic Impact

Digital and political violence against women, particularly women prisoners of conscience and activists, significantly constrains economic independence and disrupts professional trajectories. Digital defamation, stigmatization, and coordinated online targeting, often linked to prolonged judicial processes and opaque procedures in politically motivated cases, function as tools to weaken women's position in the labor market and undermine professional credibility within institutions and the public sphere. The loss of direct income and professional opportunities further disrupts individual projects, limits possibilities for independent employment, and increases the financial burden associated with legal defense and

psychological support, which women must bear individually or within the family. For detained women, families incur both direct and indirect costs, including basic provisions, transportation for prison visits, and expenses required to preserve a minimum level of dignity in detention conditions where basic standards of living are often lacking. At the same time, women's economic autonomy is severely reduced, limiting their ability to meet personal needs or respond to urgent circumstances related to health and physical well being, while psychological needs remain largely neglected.

These dynamics are further intensified for activists who are not employed in stable public sector positions and who often experience economic precarity due to the instability of civil society organizations. The sustainability of such organizations depends on uncertain external conditions, with increasing risks of suspension or closure, as observed since 2024. This context amplifies the economic cost of rights based engagement, threatens the social security developed through years of activism, and transforms public participation into a continuous financial risk that undermines women's ability to manage resources and build independent and sustainable life paths that preserve their dignity.

Economic vulnerability is further exacerbated by the absence of stable financial guarantees and the limited legal protections for civil society work. This results in reduced financial autonomy, diminished capacity to meet basic needs, and increased reliance on unstable sources of support. Women are thus exposed to ongoing economic risks linked to the fragility of the legal framework governing civil society, as well as to political targeting that includes the use of serious accusations against organizations and, in some cases, coercive prison sentences against their members in the absence of fair trial guarantees. In many instances, judicial decisions reflect political will, if not direct political intervention, particularly when targeting activists who have been engaged in rights based work for longer periods than the tenure of the current authorities. It is also important to underscore that rights based activism and political engagement are rarely accompanied by financial compensation. As evidenced by these impacts, participation in public life may come at the cost of one's freedom. In such conditions, digital and political targeting further intensifies constraints on women's ability to make independent financial decisions. Limited economic autonomy reinforces patterns of dependency and pressure, transforming public presence into a sustained financial risk.

More broadly, digital and political violence imposes a tangible economic cost that exposes the fragility of women's empowerment and challenges assumptions of full economic independence. It manifests in restricted access to professional opportunities due to political positions or prior records that hinder reintegration, increased individual burdens in the absence of supportive policies or safeguards, and persistent inequality in access to financial opportunities. The lack of financial and social protection mechanisms forces women into competition for limited stable income opportunities, constrains their capacity to manage financial resources, and limits their ability to build independent and sustainable life trajectories.

Familial Impact

Women, particularly women prisoners of conscience and activists, occupy a central role within family structures. They are often responsible for meeting daily needs, managing limited household resources, caring for children, and performing unpaid domestic labor. In many cases, they also assume primary responsibility for sustaining the household. As a result, digital and political targeting of women who carry these roles places additional strain on the family. This includes both direct and indirect financial burdens, such as transportation costs for prison visits, legal defense expenses, especially in cases linked to public opinion, and the ongoing effort to preserve women's dignity within detention environments that lack basic conditions for a dignified life. Feminist and human rights work carried out by women can also become an additional source of pressure within a prevailing patriarchal context. Families are often subjected to harassment, social stigma, and moral judgment, including the use of degrading and gendered language that undermines their dignity. This occurs despite the fact that such work represents a vital social and political contribution to the protection of rights and the advancement of feminist and human rights causes. As a result, women's participation in public life becomes increasingly risky, both socially and economically, and often deepens their reliance on family members for financial and emotional support.

When detained women are mothers, the impact extends directly to their children, who may experience fear, social exclusion, and isolation as a result of the targeting of their mothers. This creates a psychologically tense environment, particularly for children who are exposed to societal norms that judge families through patriarchal standards encountered in public spaces. Over time, children may internalize these narratives, becoming part of a cycle of blame directed at their mothers and families, which further intensifies psychological and social pressure on all family members and shapes their developing social identities. The burden is also intensified for other family members, particularly older women such as grandmothers, who are often required to compensate for the absence of the targeted women. This increases domestic and caregiving responsibilities and places families in a constant state of psychological and financial strain. At the same time, women engaged in feminist and human rights work remain economically unprotected and are continuously exposed to social targeting, both in public spaces and online. This is compounded by economic precarity, the absence of stable income or social protection, and the instability of civil society organizations, including the risk of suspension or closure, as observed since 2024.

In this context, digital and political targeting of women becomes a mechanism for destabilizing family structures, generating a continuous cycle of economic, social, and psychological pressure. It limits families' ability to manage resources and distribute daily responsibilities, and renders women's participation in public life a high risk undertaking that affects the entire household. This dynamic reinforces interconnected vulnerabilities between women's rights based engagement and its broader familial impact, ultimately constraining women's ability to build

independent and sustainable life trajectories within both family and society. In many cases, it also leads women to live under heightened fear, seeking to avoid further consequences and reactions that restrict their ways of living and their public presence.

Section Three: Feminist Resistance and Strategies

Feminist resistance constitutes an ongoing and multidimensional process in confronting political, digital, and social violence. In this context, maintaining one's positions and expressing one's views becomes in itself an act of resistance, reflecting a deeply rooted awareness that systematic attacks against women are not directed at individuals alone, but are intended to undermine collective hope and silence shared agency. Yet rather than breaking feminist resolve, these attacks have contributed to reinforcing a sustained sense of defiance and a continued insistence on asserting presence and claiming rights.

This resistance is expressed through everyday practices, including confronting fear, refusing silence, exercising free expression, and reclaiming symbolic control over spaces in which women are subjected to repression and defamation. Moreover, individual experiences, when documented and shared, evolve into a collective memory of resistance, one that exposes structures of domination and contributes to the dismantling of their underlying mechanisms.

Forms of Individual and Collective Resistance

The forms of individual and collective resistance practiced by women constitute a continuous process in confronting political and digital violence, as well as patriarchal structures that permeate social and institutional systems and shape the fabric of everyday life. In this context, the insistence on speaking out and maintaining one's positions becomes an act of resistance in itself, particularly in the face of systematic pressure aimed at silencing voices and normalizing fear. This persistence reflects a deep awareness that the targeted hope has not been extinguished, and that attempts at subjugation have not succeeded in breaking collective will. Rather, they have reinforced defiance as both a political and ethical stance. Public presence emerges as a form of resistance. Raising one's voice in the public sphere challenges exclusion, while speaking freely despite threats signals a clear rejection of repression and a reclaiming of spaces in which women have been symbolically and materially violated. This reflects a conscious effort to redefine the self beyond the binary of silence and punishment.

This individual trajectory of resistance is inseparable from a broader struggle against a deeply rooted patriarchal order that governs social relations and reproduces control through stigmatization, surveillance, and social sanction. Within this context, resistance takes shape in the refusal to normalize violence, in everyday acts of defiance, in choices of speech and ways of living, and in the insistence on narrating and documenting lived experiences. These experiences evolve into a collective memory of resistance that exposes tools of repression and contributes to dismantling their underlying mechanisms. Personal narratives thus become political instruments, and storytelling becomes a means of reclaiming control over the body, voice, and meaning, while directly confronting attempts at erasure and defamation in a context that imposes significant costs on those who challenge imposed norms.

At the collective level, feminist resistance takes on an organized and dynamic form that extends beyond individual action to the creation of spaces of solidarity and mutual protection. Strength is sustained through feminist networks, the organization of protests, the mobilization of collective action, sustained advocacy around women detainees, and efforts to break the isolation imposed upon them. It also involves designing and implementing advocacy campaigns within the very spaces where repression has been exercised, namely social media platforms, as a form of symbolic and political reclamation that transforms these spaces from tools of subjugation into arenas of contestation.

The adoption of a unified discourse and shared practices reflects an understanding that feminist struggle is not a situational response, but a long term commitment grounded in feminist solidarity as a political practice. It is sustained through

continued resistance despite psychological, social, and economic costs, and through the transformation of individual suffering into collective power capable of breaking silence, holding systems accountable, and resisting patriarchal structures that seek to fragment and isolate women one by one

Independent Feminism

Independent feminism is articulated as an emancipatory pathway that seeks to dismantle the social, political, and symbolic constraints imposed on women in the name of norms, morality, or prescribed forms of belonging. It affirms women's right to define their positions and choices beyond the logic of guardianship, social disciplining, and the conventional frameworks through which patriarchal systems have constructed and promoted the image of the obedient, weak, and submissive woman. This model is not treated as an adversary in itself. Rather, independent feminism seeks to liberate women from it, recognizing it as a patriarchal projection imposed upon them, often internalized under conditions of constraint and in the absence of alternatives during formative stages of life. In this way, femininity is reduced to a narrow and distorted condition, tied to compliance with patriarchal expectations and confined to a superficial and limiting definition. This feminist orientation does not confine itself to opposing direct forms of violence. It also confronts the less visible structures that reproduce domination from early socialization onward, whether within the family, across society, or in the public sphere, where roles and boundaries are continuously regulated and reinforced.

Independence, in this sense, is not understood as isolation or a purely individual act of refusal. It is a process of liberation from enforced conformity shaped by patriarchal authority, and from the compromises imposed on women in exchange for social acceptance or conditional protection. Independent feminism places the body, the voice, and lived experience at the center of political action, recognizing them as core sites of resistance. It redefines freedom as the capacity to exist, to express, and to participate without subjection to patriarchal systems of control, whether reproduced socially or reinforced through legal frameworks rooted in social legacies and laws with religious foundations. At the same time, it resists reducing feminist struggle to an extension of dominant power narratives or to a form of symbolic rights discourse that normalizes superficial engagement and practices of pinkwashing. Within this framework, refusal becomes a conscious act, independence becomes a political position, and accountability becomes a daily practice that challenges the legitimacy of domination and opens pathways toward forms of liberation that move beyond socially and culturally imposed limits.

Intersectional Feminism Among the New Generation (Gen Z)

The intersectional feminism embraced by the new generation of feminists is grounded in a radical awareness of the interconnected nature of systems of oppression and the impossibility of achieving liberation through isolated individual success. It is guided by the principle that no one is free until all women are free, echoing the approach articulated by Audre Lorde. Within this framework, the use of class, social, or geographic privilege to secure advancement for a limited group of women at the expense of others is firmly rejected. This generation advances feminism as a collective project rooted in solidarity and shared accountability. It insists that feminist struggle remains incomplete unless it includes marginalized women, women living in poverty, women in detention, refugees, workers in the informal economy, transgender individuals, women of diverse sexual orientations, and all those excluded from systems of privilege and representation. Intersectionality here is not merely a theoretical framework, but a political practice that centers those most marginalized, confronts inequalities within feminist movements themselves, and resists the reproduction of hierarchies under the guise of individual success. Meaningful liberation and accountability can only be realized through justice for all women, not only at the national level but also globally, where denouncing oppression becomes both a political and ethical obligation whenever any woman is targeted.

In this sense, feminism takes shape as a transnational network that moves across borders and engages directly with structures of domination, reshaping them from within through collective action grounded in feminist solidarity. It involves building alliances of resistance through an intersectional approach and redefining power as a shared capacity for resilience, confrontation, and transformation. For this generation, difference is no longer a basis for exclusion, but a catalyst for collective defense, while diversity is understood as a source of strength rather than a threat to the unity of struggle. This perspective is rooted in a comprehensive recognition of difference in all its forms, whether class based, embodied, cultural, identity related, or political, as an integral part of liberation rather than an obstacle to it. It allows these differences to be mobilized toward broader horizons of freedom and accountability. Rejecting guardianship in all its forms, whether social, political, or internal to feminist movements, becomes a foundational principle. Freedom is reclaimed in action, in the body, and in expression as indivisible rights that cannot be deferred. Occupying spaces historically dominated by men, whether political, media, digital, or professional, becomes a deliberate practice aimed at disrupting monopolies over visibility and decision making and redistributing symbolic and social legitimacy within the public sphere. This presence does not seek to replicate dominant patriarchal models, but to dismantle them from within, challenge imposed narratives of incapacity, and replace them with new narratives that redefine power as the ability to initiate, resist, and organize collectively, and to transform difference into a force for intersectional liberation that dismantles exclusion and enables full and unconditional feminist participation.

Where distinctions are grounded in objective and fair criteria, feminists demand nothing beyond substantive equality and the full realization of their rights. Their struggle centers on reclaiming what is already theirs: the right to dignity, to full presence in both public and private spheres, and to reject the instrumentalization of their appearance or voices as a basis for exclusion or doubt regarding their legitimacy. This position is grounded in the conviction that women can no longer be persuaded of their supposed inferiority, having demonstrated through lived experience that they often exert greater effort, face harsher conditions, and yet succeed in securing rights, achieving gains, and advancing political, social, and legal struggles. These achievements are not isolated exceptions, but structural evidence of women's capacity to dismantle systems of exclusion when conditions of justice and recognition are in place. Accordingly, the continuation of the feminist process becomes essential and non negotiable. It is a cumulative trajectory that does not rest on past gains, but continues to challenge power relations, dismantle patriarchal dominance, and ensure that discrimination is not reproduced in new forms under the guise of formal equality.

The Role of Human Rights and Feminist Organizations

Human rights organizations play a central role in supporting women and addressing violence in all its forms by affirming that women's rights are inseparable from the broader human rights framework. They operate on the principle of the interdependence and indivisibility of rights, as established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This role is reflected in concrete actions, including the provision of direct support to survivors through psychological assistance, legal representation, and efforts to restore the material and social rights lost as a result of violations. These organizations also engage in the systematic collection and analysis of data, building reliable knowledge bases that document patterns of violence, assess their impact, and identify the groups most affected by marginalization. This evidence based work supports the development of informed policies and effective strategies aimed at preventing violence and strengthening protection mechanisms. In this sense, the role of human rights organizations extends beyond individual support to influencing public policy, exposing entrenched patriarchal domination across public and private spheres, and transforming women's lived experiences into strategic resources for advocacy capable of sustaining collective resistance.

Feminist frameworks, by contrast, focus on the theoretical, social, and political analysis of violence, and on dismantling the cultural and social legacies within which women are socialized. Through contextual analysis, these frameworks reveal how such legacies are mobilized to reproduce exclusion and marginalization. They contribute to the development of critical tools and approaches, strengthen women's awareness of the structures of control they face, and encourage their active engagement in political and social life. Through this work, feminist resistance becomes more grounded and sustainable, while the public sphere is reimagined

as a space where women can exist with freedom and dignity, and where imposed narratives of incapacity rooted in patriarchal structures are actively challenged. Distinguishing between human rights organizations and feminist frameworks helps clarify their respective roles and areas of focus. The former prioritize direct support and legal and social interventions, while the latter emphasize analysis, conceptual framing, and political engagement, reinforcing a feminist human rights approach. However, their impact is greatest when they operate in coordination, linking individual and collective interventions and creating integrated systems of support capable of addressing violence at multiple levels, ensuring comprehensive protection for women, and contributing to a more equitable distribution of power in public and political spaces.

At the international level, United Nations mechanisms and global human rights organizations emphasize that women across different contexts share intersecting vulnerabilities, despite variations in levels of privilege and access to rights. Gains achieved in more advanced contexts are not framed as competition, but as opportunities to support women in more marginalized and repressive settings through the sharing of experiences, strategies, and advocacy tools. This transnational solidarity enables women in highly constrained environments to connect with broader struggles, benefit from accumulated knowledge and resources, and draw on concrete examples that demonstrate that their demands are neither unrealistic nor excessive. It strengthens cross border feminist alliances and reinforces the understanding that feminist struggle is interconnected, and that freedom and equality cannot be fully realized unless they extend to all women across local, national, and global levels. In this sense, defending the rights of any woman is inseparable from defending the rights of all women. This integration between direct human rights action and critical feminist analysis, and between local initiatives and international support, creates a robust and sustainable framework for feminist struggle. It brings together individual and collective resistance, transforms personal experiences into collective tools for action, and affirms that feminism is not a choice, but an ongoing and interconnected project. This project strengthens the capacity to confront violence, dismantle structures of domination, and advance equality across all spaces. It also reflects a shared responsibility among all those who seek justice and uphold the universality of human rights.

Digital Solidarity as a Tool of Resistance

Digital solidarity has emerged as a central and effective tool through which women confront the digital, political, and social violence they face, particularly in spaces where patriarchal dominance seeks to silence their voices and restrict their participation. The digital sphere enables women to express themselves freely, share their experiences, and document violations beyond traditional spatial and social constraints. Through these platforms, information circulates rapidly, unjust practices are exposed, and advocacy efforts expand to reach broader audiences

at both national and international levels, strengthening the capacity to challenge marginalization and exclusion.

Digital solidarity allows women to transform individual experiences of violence and exclusion into visible collective action. It reduces the isolation often produced by psychological and social pressures and reinforces women's ability to claim their rights. Within these spaces, women's voices intersect, enabling them to learn from one another, develop shared strategies of resistance, and coordinate efforts to expose violations, organize advocacy campaigns, and assert their presence in the digital public sphere. This collective engagement fosters a sense of belonging to a broader movement and sustains women's capacity to continue their struggle despite ongoing pressures. It also provides practical tools for coordination among feminist initiatives, enabling women to organize digital mobilizations, design advocacy campaigns, and advocate for issues such as women prisoners of conscience and survivors of violence, while bringing attention to overlooked or excluded cases. This form of digital organizing enhances the ability to monitor violations, respond more effectively, and translate accumulated knowledge into practical strategies and policy oriented approaches, thereby increasing impact in confronting structures of repression.

At the same time, digital solidarity challenges dominant stereotypes imposed on women and contributes to redefining power and feminist presence in the public sphere. It enables women to resist social and political constraints, assert their rights, and transform experiences of repression and discrimination into opportunities to reaffirm their right to visibility and participation. It also facilitates the exchange of legal, social, and psychological knowledge, functioning as a support network that helps women overcome isolation and respond collectively to shared pressures in a coordinated manner. Moreover, digital solidarity connects women across different contexts, highlighting global intersections in experiences of vulnerability despite variations in access to rights and privilege. This connection reinforces the understanding that feminist struggles are interconnected, and that supporting women in any context contributes to advancing the rights of all women. It creates a shared space for learning, coordination, and collective advocacy, while enabling women in more marginalized contexts to benefit from the experiences, strategies, and resources developed in other settings and to engage more actively in international human rights efforts.

In this sense, digital solidarity is not merely a tool for communication or symbolic expression. It is an effective mechanism for transforming individual awareness into collective power, building resilient networks of resistance, creating safer spaces for women, and redistributing the capacity to act, organize, and confront injustice. It enables women to directly challenge repressive practices, expose violations, and engage in political and social action within a framework of mutual support. It also affirms that feminist struggle is not confined to a specific place or moment, but extends across contexts, with digital solidarity playing a crucial role in enabling women to defend their rights, resist domination, and challenge the constraints that limit their participation and access to fundamental freedoms. Digital solidarity

further strengthens collective dynamics that transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. It allows women to connect local experiences to global struggles, transforming each instance of digital violence into an opportunity for cross border solidarity, shared advocacy, and the exchange of knowledge and strategies. This connection places women at the center of global struggles and underscores that resistance to digital violence is inseparable from the broader project of feminist liberation, where each act of repression becomes a moment of mobilization that strengthens collective resistance and exposes the patriarchal systems shaping women's lives. In addition, digital solidarity contributes to the creation of safer digital environments where women can participate freely, exchange experiences, and provide mutual psychological and social support without fear of retaliation or surveillance. These spaces function as sites for rebuilding confidence, reclaiming control over identity and rights, and strengthening women's capacity to make decisions and engage actively in both digital and physical spheres.

In this way, digital solidarity transforms spaces of violence into spaces of resistance. It redefines the digital sphere from a site of threat and exclusion into one of empowerment, collective advocacy, and political engagement. It demonstrates that feminist struggle extends beyond confronting repression within fixed boundaries to encompass all spaces where women's voices are silenced or restricted, and that digital alliances among women globally strengthen the capacity to defend rights and challenge the social, political, and digital structures that shape their lives. Digital spaces have thus become a natural extension of feminist resistance that once took place in streets and public arenas, enabling women to carry social and political struggles into more flexible and far reaching environments. Within this shift, digital platforms enable women of diverse identities and experiences to emerge, bringing together activists, advocates, and defenders of women's rights in spaces dedicated to knowledge exchange, collective organizing, and resistance to violence and stigmatization that once constrained expression in traditional settings.

The digital sphere also allows women to engage in social and rights based struggles through new mechanisms, transforming traditional campaigns into innovative digital initiatives, designing collective awareness efforts, and advocating for specific cases such as women in detention or those exposed to violence. By leveraging digital tools and multimedia, women can expand their reach, sustain resistance, reassess strategies, and extend their impact beyond local contexts to national and global levels. Importantly, the shift toward digital spaces broadens participation to include women whose access to public protest or physical spaces is limited due to social, economic, or security constraints. The digital sphere offers a relatively safer platform through which women can contribute to collective advocacy, express themselves independently, and influence public opinion and policy without direct exposure to conventional forms of repression.

This transition also strengthens collaboration among women from diverse backgrounds, linking local and global struggles, facilitating the exchange of experiences, and enabling the development of shared strategies. It transforms individual violations into collective advocacy tools and contributes to the formation of expansive networks of solidarity and resistance. The visibility of women in their diversity ensures that feminist resistance is not confined to a single narrative, but reflects the multiplicity of women's realities and demands, thereby strengthening the broader project of feminist liberation. Through this shift from the street to the digital sphere, each experience of violence, marginalization, or exclusion becomes a site of political and social engagement. Digital spaces emerge as active arenas of struggle that redistribute symbolic and social power, challenge traditional barriers imposed by patriarchal domination, and expand feminist resistance beyond immediate crises to address broader social, political, and cultural systems. In doing so, they provide a continuous platform for women to advocate for their rights and participate meaningfully in both digital and global public life.

Recommendations

Digital violence against women and girls is no longer an isolated phenomenon, but rather an extension of structural discrimination and gender-based violence across both public and private spheres. It has become a direct threat to fundamental human rights, including the rights to dignity, privacy, freedom of expression, and equal participation in social and political life. Despite the existence of Organic Law No. 58 of 2017, which established a framework to combat violence against women, institutional responses remain limited in addressing emerging forms of violence such as digital violence, underscoring the need to develop policies and legislation that take this dimension into account.

Grounded in an intersectional feminist approach, these recommendations do not focus solely on the protection of women in general, but also take into account the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, including girls, women with disabilities, migrant women, and LGBTQI+ persons, in order to ensure comprehensive digital justice. The objective is to move beyond the recognition of digital violence as a reality toward the establishment of an integrated system of protection, prevention, and accountability that reinforces the rights to equality and non-discrimination, and places clear responsibilities on both the state and society in addressing these violations.

Recommendations to the Legislative Authority

- Recognize digital violence and explicitly incorporate it into Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 as a form of gender-based digital violence, and criminalize it to include hate speech, threats, harassment, violations of privacy, and the dissemination of personal data.

- Integrate a feminist approach into legislation to ensure equal protection for all groups affected by digital violence, including women and girls, LGBTQI+ persons, women with disabilities, and migrant women.

- Ratify relevant regional and international conventions related to women's rights and the elimination of digital violence.

- Repeal all forms of discrimination in national legislation, including the Personal Status Code and the Tunisian Nationality Code, in order to ensure substantive equality before the law.

- Simplify legal and administrative procedures for victims, ensuring prompt response and effective access to justice without discrimination or exclusion.

Recommendations to the Executive Authority

- Activate the mechanisms provided under Organic Law No. 58 of 2017, including protection, prevention, support, accompaniment, and sanction measures.

- Establish independent and specialized units within the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Family, Women, Children, and the Elderly to monitor and follow up on cases of digital violence against women and marginalized groups.

- Establish a national observatory on violence and discrimination, and allocate a dedicated budget for combating digital violence against women within the Finance Law.

- Improve hotline services to better guide women and provide them with relevant referral information.

- Protect women human rights defenders working with victims of violence and ensure their safety while carrying out their activities.

- Establish specialized courts to handle cases of violence against women, including digital violence.

- Expand listening and guidance centers across all regions of the country, ensuring supportive and survivor-centered services.

- Train law enforcement and judicial actors on gender-sensitive approaches, ensuring trauma-informed engagement with victims during reporting and investigation processes.

- Strengthen personal data protection and ensure the confidentiality of complaints, while providing safe and accessible reporting mechanisms that take into account geographic and social disparities.

Recommendations to the Judicial Authority

- Ensure the effective and direct application of Organic Law No. 58 of 2017, affirming that protection extends to all forms of violence and discrimination against women, whether physical or digital.

- Adopt mandatory and continuous training programs for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers on gender sensitivity, trauma-informed responses, and the technical handling of digital evidence.

- Take victims' suffering seriously, assess risks to their safety, and ensure they are informed of their right to report violations and pursue legal action against perpetrators.

- Provide appropriate legal guidance and legal aid to facilitate victims' access to justice.

- Provide for aggravated penalties for repeat offenders and establish reasonable timeframes for judicial proceedings.

- Ensure the application of family proximity principles in detention and transfer policies, in order to safeguard the best interests and emotional well-being of children.

Recommendations to Civil Society

- Develop secure digital platforms for reporting and remote consultation, ensuring confidentiality, encryption, and the availability of user-friendly tools for documenting violations and preserving evidence.

- Organize national awareness campaigns to counter stigmatization and hate speech, alongside the production of training content on digital security, privacy protection, and reporting and litigation mechanisms.

- Develop capacity-building programs for individuals responsible for supporting women survivors of violence.

- Encourage the creation of support groups and spaces for experience-sharing among women survivors of violence, in order to strengthen solidarity and collective empowerment.

Recommendations to the Media

- Launch national media campaigns to combat cyber and gender-based violence, aimed at transforming social narratives that normalize hate and violence, while highlighting stories of resistance and empowerment.

- Engage media institutions in combating violence against women through the development of ethical charters and guiding principles for responsible coverage.

- Train journalists and media professionals on responsible reporting on issues affecting women and marginalized groups, avoiding the reproduction of stereotypes or stigmatizing discourse, and ensuring balanced representation that reflects social and cultural diversity.

Educational and Cultural Recommendations

- Integrate education on non-violence into school curricula, with a focus on respect for freedoms, acceptance of difference, tolerance, equality, and non-discrimination.

- Organize preventive and awareness-raising campaigns targeting children and youth to strengthen awareness of women's rights and the risks of digital violence.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is no longer an isolated or incidental phenomenon, but rather a complex system that reproduces relations of domination and discrimination across both digital and physical spaces simultaneously, particularly since 25 July, when forms of political and social restriction have intensified. This violence targets a wide spectrum of women, ranging from activists and political actors to the families of political prisoners, revealing that such targeting is not based solely on gender, but is compounded when it intersects with political or familial affiliation, turning women into layered targets of violence.

The testimonies further reveal a continuous chain of harm that begins with digital stigmatization and incitement, and progressively extends into legal, psychological, and economic burdens, thereby positioning digital violence as an extension of an unjust social and political structure. It also becomes evident that the impact of imprisonment extends beyond its physical boundaries to affect the families of detainees, reproducing violence across both private and public spheres.

Despite this, women demonstrate daily resilience and develop diverse coping and resistance strategies, including the cautious reshaping of their digital presence and the creation of informal support networks. However, these strategies cannot serve as a substitute for effective institutional protection, nor for the state's commitment to fulfilling its obligations in eliminating violence against women in all its forms. What is required is a shift from limited individual responses to comprehensive public policies that take into account the intersectional dimension of violence, and that are grounded in legislative

harmonization capable of defining forms of technology-facilitated violence without undermining freedom of expression, thereby ensuring women's and human rights defenders' right to safe political participation.

Advancing the path toward justice requires recognizing that women do not experience digital violence equally, but rather through intersections shaped by their economic, geographic, cultural, and identity-based conditions, rendering certain groups more vulnerable and less able to access protection and remedy. This necessitates the provision of support and protection for victims and survivors, as well as the meaningful inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes as a fundamental condition for achieving substantive equality.

There can be no justice without protection from all forms of violence, both digital and physical, and no democracy without ensuring equal political participation that reflects the diversity and complexity of women's lived realities. Accordingly, addressing digital, gender-based, and political violence constitutes a fundamental condition for consolidating the rule of law, safeguarding freedom of expression, and ensuring a public sphere that enables all citizens to participate on equal footing. Justice cannot be fully realized unless intersecting structures of discrimination are dismantled and policies are developed that respond to the plurality and diversity of women's experiences.

INTERSECTION
ASSOCIATION