



Research Article

When Law Coexists with Control: Social Liability and Violence Under Divergent State Regimes in Nigeria and Uganda

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Abstract

This article examines why gender-based and honor-related violence persists in African contexts despite the presence of formal legal protections, through a comparative analysis of Nigeria and Uganda. Drawing on network theory, legal pluralism, and gender scholarship, the study advances the analytical distinction between social capital and social liability to explain how informal governance systems regulate women's lives through coercive forms of social control. In Nigeria, fragmented state authority and legal pluralism allow kinship, religious, and community networks to dominate enforcement by default. In Uganda, similar outcomes emerge under a more centralized state that frequently aligns with moralized community authority in matters of gender, family discipline, and sexuality. Using demographic and health survey data, documented cases of lethal violence, and human rights reporting, the analysis demonstrates why legal reform and internal relocation repeatedly fail as protection strategies in network-dense societies. The findings show that women's dependence on social capital for survival becomes a mechanism of vulnerability when conformity to gendered norms is perceived to break down. By placing Nigeria and Uganda in comparative dialogue, the article demonstrates that social liability does not depend on state weakness alone, but arises wherever social capital is embedded in systems of moral regulation that prioritize collective order over individual protection. The study contributes a generalizable framework for understanding the persistence of violence against women across divergent political contexts.

Keywords

Social Liability, Social Capital, Gender-Based Violence, Informal Governance, Honor Norms, Nigeria, Uganda, Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

Despite the expansion of formal legal protections addressing gender-based violence across Africa, violence against women remains pervasive and, in many contexts, intensifies rather than declines. Domestic violence statutes, criminal prohibitions, and constitutional guarantees exist on paper in numerous countries, yet women continue to face coercion, lethal

violence, and systemic barriers to protection. [1] This persistent gap between law and lived reality has prompted a growing body of scholarship to question not only the adequacy of legal enforcement, but the deeper social structures through which authority, legitimacy, and discipline are exercised in everyday life. [2]

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This article advances the argument that gender-based and honor-related violence persists not primarily because formal law is absent or poorly designed, but because it operates within social environments governed by more immediate and authoritative systems of informal regulation. [3] Family authority, kinship networks, community leadership, and moral norms shape behavior through continuous social interaction, reputational control, and collective sanction. In such contexts, women's dependence on social relationships for survival, housing, livelihood, and security renders them especially vulnerable when conformity to gendered norms is perceived to break down. [4]

To explain this dynamic, the study develops and applies the analytical distinction between *social capital* and *social liability*. Social capital refers to the resources embedded in social networks that provide protection, legitimacy, and access to opportunity. [5] Yet these same networks can be transformed into mechanisms of coercion when individuals deviate from dominant norms. Under conditions of moralized informal governance, social capital becomes social liability, exposing women to stigma, exclusion, economic deprivation, and, in extreme cases, lethal violence enforced by family members, communities, or mobs.

The article employs a comparative analysis of *Nigeria and Uganda* to demonstrate how social liability operates across distinct political and institutional contexts. Nigeria represents a case in which informal governance dominates largely due to fragmented state authority, legal pluralism, and uneven enforcement. [6] Uganda, by contrast, illustrates a context in which formal state institutions are relatively stronger but increasingly aligned with moralized community authority, particularly in matters of gender, family discipline, and sexuality. [7] Despite these differences, both countries exhibit remarkably similar outcomes: widespread violence against women, chronic underreporting, institutional retreat, and the failure of conventional protection strategies such as legal reform and internal relocation.

Using demographic and health survey data, documented cases of lethal violence, human rights reporting, and comparative sociological analysis, the study shows that women's vulnerability is structurally produced through the interaction of honor norms, economic dependency, and network-based enforcement. In both Nigeria and Uganda, women accused of sexual impropriety, disobedience, or moral transgression are disproportionately targeted as symbols of social order. [8, 9] Violence is frequently framed as discipline or moral correction rather than criminal harm, and state institutions often defer to informal authority through mediation, reconciliation, or inaction.

By placing Nigeria and Uganda in comparative dialogue, this article makes three contributions. First, it demonstrates that social liability does not require state weakness; it can also flourish under strong states that align with informal moral governance. Second, it explains why widely promoted protection strategies, particularly reliance on formal law and internal

relocation, systematically fail in network-dense societies. Third, it advances a generalizable framework for understanding how social capital is converted into coercive control, shaping women's lived experiences of violence across diverse African contexts.

The analysis proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework of social capital and social liability. Section Three describes the comparative methodology. Sections Four and Five examine Nigeria and Uganda respectively. Section Six offers a comparative analysis of convergent outcomes and divergent pathways. The final sections discuss implications for protection, policy, and future research.

2. Theoretical Framework – Social Capital and Social Liability

Social relationships generate both resources and constraints. A substantial body of sociological theory has shown that networks of social relations facilitate cooperation, trust, and access to opportunity, while simultaneously imposing obligations, expectations, and limits on individual behavior [10-12]. These dual effects become especially salient in settings where state institutions are uneven, inaccessible, or subordinated to community authority.

Social capital refers to the benefits embedded within social networks that enable individuals to secure material support, protection, and social legitimacy. [13] In many African contexts, social capital is not an auxiliary resource but the principal means through which survival is organized. Access to housing, land, employment, marriage, and security is frequently mediated through family, clan, religious, and community ties rather than formal institutions. Dependence on these networks provides stability, but it also creates vulnerability when social membership becomes conditional. [14]

This study introduces the concept of *social liability* to capture the coercive potential inherent in social capital. Social liability emerges when the same networks that sustain survival are mobilized to discipline, exclude, or punish individuals perceived to violate dominant moral norms. Under conditions of informal governance, belonging becomes contingent on conformity. When conformity is questioned, social capital is withdrawn and replaced with sanctions that may include stigma, economic deprivation, social isolation, and physical violence. [15, 16]

James Coleman's formulation of social capital emphasizes that norms, obligations, and expectations of reciprocity are embedded in social structures themselves, generating compliance through ongoing social interaction rather than through formal coercion [17]. These mechanisms reduce uncertainty and enable coordination, but they also facilitate continuous monitoring and behavioral control. Where family and community authority eclipse the reach of formal law, such mechanisms function as primary instruments of governance.

Network theory further clarifies why exit from coercive networks is difficult. Ronald Burt's work on structural holes demonstrates that individuals embedded in dense, closed networks experience strong normative pressure and limited autonomy, while those positioned across bridging ties enjoy greater flexibility and protection [18, 19]. In settings where bonding ties dominate and bridging connections are socially restricted, the costs of deviation are particularly high, especially for women.

The distinction between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital is therefore central to understanding gendered vulnerability. Bonding ties strengthen internal solidarity within families, clans, or tightly knit communities, but they also intensify surveillance and enforcement of conformity. [20] Bridging ties connect individuals to external networks and institutions, creating opportunities for mobility, alternative support, and exit [12, 21]. In honor-based and patriarchal systems, women's access to bridging capital is often limited or actively discouraged, deepening dependence on coercive networks.

Recent developments in network analysis further illuminate how social liability operates across space. Research on *guanxi* demonstrates that certain strong relational ties function as independent bridges capable of transmitting trust, obligation, and reputational judgment without reliance on formal institutions or third-party enforcement [22]. Such ties help explain why reputational sanctions and moral enforcement often persist even when individuals relocate geographically or engage with formal legal systems.

Comparative scholarship on informal economies and political networks shows that the coercive transformation of social capital is not culturally idiosyncratic but structurally contingent. Networks that facilitate cooperation under certain conditions can become instruments of exclusion and discipline when they enforce parochialism, moral conformity, or collective control [23, 24]. In these contexts, social capital operates as an informal regulatory system with its own norms, sanctions, and enforcement mechanisms.

Gendered honor norms intensify this dynamic. In honor-based systems, women's conduct is imbued with symbolic significance, and deviations are interpreted as collective threats to family or community reputation. Social liability is thus disproportionately imposed on women, whose reliance on social capital for survival magnifies the consequences of non-conformity. [25]

The Nigeria–Uganda comparison extends this framework by examining how social liability operates under contrasting state configurations. Nigeria illustrates how informal governance prevails when state enforcement is fragmented and pluralistic. Uganda demonstrates how similar mechanisms persist when formal institutions align with moralized community authority. Together, these cases show that social liability does not depend solely on weak states; it emerges wherever social capital is embedded within systems of moral regulation that prioritize collective order over individual protection.

This theoretical framework underpins the comparative analysis that follows, providing a lens through which women's vulnerability, institutional retreat, and the failure of conventional protection strategies can be understood across divergent political contexts.

3. Methodology and Comparative Design

This study employs a qualitative, comparative research design to examine how social capital is transformed into social liability in contexts of gender-based and honor-related violence. The comparison between Nigeria and Uganda is theoretically driven rather than purely descriptive. Both countries exhibit high levels of violence against women despite the presence of formal legal protections, yet they differ markedly in state structure, modes of governance, and the relationship between law and informal authority. This contrast allows for a focused examination of how similar outcomes are produced through distinct institutional pathways.

The analysis draws on *multiple sources of evidence*, triangulated to capture both structural patterns and lived social dynamics. These sources include nationally representative demographic and health surveys, official crime and police data, reports by international and local human rights organizations, investigative journalism, and peer-reviewed scholarship. This multi-source approach is particularly appropriate in contexts where gender-based and honor-related violence are systematically underreported, misclassified, or resolved through informal mechanisms that leave little trace in official statistics.

For Nigeria, the study relies on data from the *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey* [26], human rights documentation by Amnesty International [27] and Human Rights Watch [28], and detailed investigative reporting on lethal cases of gender-based violence. For Uganda, comparable sources include the *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey* [29], Uganda Police crime reports, documentation by civil-society organizations such as CEHURD [8] and UN Women Uganda [30], and international human rights reporting [31, 32]. These materials provide insight not only into prevalence and patterns of violence, but also into institutional responses, community reactions, and barriers to protection.

The comparative logic follows a *most-different systems design*. Nigeria represents a context in which informal governance dominates largely due to fragmented authority, legal pluralism, and uneven enforcement. Uganda represents a contrasting case in which state institutions are relatively stronger and more centralized, yet increasingly aligned with moralized community authority in matters of gender, family discipline, and sexuality. By holding the outcome constant—persistent violence against women—and varying the configuration of state–society relations, the analysis isolates the role of social capital and social liability as mechanisms of governance.

Case studies of lethal violence are used as *analytic illustrations*, not as exhaustive representations. These cases are selected because they are well-documented, women-centered,

and reveal the escalation of informal enforcement from stigma and exclusion to physical and lethal sanction. The purpose is not to generalize statistically from individual cases, but to demonstrate how social liability operates at its most extreme and how institutional responses reinforce or fail to disrupt these dynamics.

Throughout the analysis, particular attention is paid to *relocation, reporting behavior, and institutional mediation*. These dimensions are central to evaluating common protection assumptions, including the belief that legal reform or geographic movement can mitigate risk. By tracing how reputational sanction, network reach, and moral surveillance persist across space and institutions, the study highlights the relational nature of risk in network-dense societies.

Ethical considerations are addressed through reliance on secondary data and publicly available sources. No original interviews were conducted for this study. This approach minimizes risk to survivors while allowing for a critical examination of patterns that are otherwise difficult to document due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and institutional silence.

In sum, the methodology is designed to bridge theory and evidence, linking macro-level structures of governance to micro-level experiences of vulnerability. By comparing Nigeria and Uganda through a common analytical framework, the study demonstrates how social capital becomes social liability under different political conditions, offering a robust explanation for the persistence of violence against women despite formal legal protections.

4. Nigeria: Informal Governance, Honor Norms, and Gender-Based Violence

Nigeria provides a critical case for examining how social capital is transformed into social liability in a context of fragmented state authority, legal pluralism, and dense informal governance. Although Nigeria maintains one of the most comprehensive formal legal frameworks addressing gender-based violence in sub-Saharan Africa, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act [33], enforcement remains uneven and highly contingent on local social legitimacy. Federal law, customary authority, and religious norms coexist, often in tension, creating a governance environment in which informal systems frequently override statutory protections.

In this setting, family hierarchies, religious communities, and ethnic networks regulate daily life through mechanisms of reputation, honor, and obligation. [34] Women's bodies and conduct are central sites of moral regulation, and perceived deviations from sexual, marital, or religious norms are interpreted as collective threats rather than individual choices. Social capital provides access to housing, employment, protection, and social belonging, but this access is conditional. When conformity breaks down, social capital is withdrawn and converted into social liability through stigma, exclusion, economic deprivation, and, in extreme cases, lethal enforcement.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that violence against women in Nigeria is widespread and underreported. National survey data indicate that approximately one-third of women have experienced physical violence [26], yet most survivors never seek formal help. Reporting is discouraged by fear of retaliation, economic dependency, and the perception that violence is a private family matter. Police and local authorities frequently prioritize mediation or reconciliation over prosecution, reinforcing the authority of informal governance and signaling that statutory law is negotiable.

Cases of lethal violence illustrate how these dynamics culminate in extreme enforcement. Women accused of blasphemy, sexual impropriety, or dishonor—such as Deborah Samuel Yakubu [35], Bridget Agbahime [36], Falmata [37], and Ochanya Ogbanje [38]—were subjected to collective sanction in which community legitimacy overwhelmed institutional response. In each case, violence functioned not as a breakdown of order but as a mechanism for restoring moral equilibrium. Institutional retreat, delayed intervention, or impunity reinforced the dominance of informal authority and normalized lethal enforcement as socially justified.

Internal relocation offers little protection in this context. Extended kinship, religious affiliation, and reputational networks transmit social liability across geography, stripping women of social capital while preserving stigma and risk. Nigeria thus illustrates how social liability flourishes when fragmented enforcement allows informal governance to dominate by default.

5. Uganda: Moralized State Power and Community-Based Enforcement

Uganda presents a contrasting but complementary case. Unlike Nigeria, Uganda possesses a more centralized state apparatus and has enacted formal legal protections addressing domestic violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. Yet violence against women remains pervasive, and outcomes for women closely resemble those observed in Nigeria. [39] The key difference lies not in results, but in pathways.

In Uganda, informal governance is not merely tolerated by the state but frequently reinforced through moralized political discourse and institutional practice. Family, clan, and community authority play a decisive role in regulating women's behavior, particularly in matters of marriage, sexuality, and obedience. Social capital is indispensable for survival, mediating access to land, food security, housing, and childcare. Women who lose clan or family support face immediate precarity.

National data reveal exceptionally high levels of violence against women, with more than half of women reporting physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Despite this prevalence, formal reporting remains limited. Police, local councils, and community leaders routinely encourage reconciliation and mediation, prioritizing social cohesion over accountability. Legal remedies exist, but their application is filtered through

informal norms that frame violence as discipline, correction, or family matter.

Lethal cases underscore the operation of social liability. Women killed in the context of bride-price disputes, accusations of adultery, or perceived disobedience are often rendered invisible within official narratives of domestic homicide. Community silence, delayed intervention, and reliance on compensation or mediation reproduce impunity. [40] Even where the state is present, its alignment with moralized informal authority allows social liability to persist as a dominant mode of governance.

Internal relocation similarly fails in Uganda. Clan-based reputational systems follow women across space, and relocation without social capital results in economic vulnerability and exposure to further violence. The state's endorsement of community authority in matters of morality and family discipline further constrains women's ability to seek protection outside informal structures.

6. Comparative Analysis: Convergent Outcomes, Divergent Pathways

The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Uganda reveals a striking convergence in outcomes alongside divergent institutional pathways. In both contexts, violence against women persists at high levels despite the presence of formal legal protections, and women accused of moral, sexual, or behavioral transgression are disproportionately targeted for sanction. Yet the mechanisms through which social capital is transformed into social liability differ in important ways, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of informal governance across distinct state configurations.

In Nigeria, social liability emerges primarily through the *absence or fragmentation of effective state enforcement*. Legal pluralism, uneven adoption of statutory protections, and limited institutional reach allow kinship networks, religious communities, and ethnic associations to function as de facto governing authorities. Informal governance dominates by default. [41] When accusations arise, collective moral outrage mobilizes network-based enforcement, while state institutions retreat, delay, or defer to community legitimacy. Violence is enacted publicly through mobs or family-based execution, and impunity is sustained through institutional weakness and social pressure.

Uganda, by contrast, illustrates how social liability can flourish *in the presence of a relatively strong and centralized state*. Here, formal legal protections exist and state authority is visible, yet informal governance is reinforced rather than displaced. Police, local councils, and courts frequently priori-

tize mediation, reconciliation, and social harmony over prosecution, especially in cases framed as domestic or moral matters. Political discourse and institutional practice often align with conservative moral norms, legitimizing community discipline and constraining women's access to protection. Social liability operates not because the state is absent, but because it is *morally aligned with informal authority*.

Despite these differences, the lived experience of women in both countries is remarkably similar. In Nigeria and Uganda alike, women depend on social capital for housing, livelihood, childcare, and physical security. This dependence renders exit costly and resistance dangerous. When conformity to gendered norms is perceived to fail, social capital is withdrawn and replaced by sanctions that escalate from stigma and exclusion to economic deprivation and violence. [42] In both contexts, internal relocation fails as a protective strategy because reputational systems, kinship ties, and moral surveillance extend beyond local boundaries.

The comparison also clarifies the *gendered nature of social liability*. In both Nigeria and Uganda, women's bodies and conduct function as symbolic sites of moral order. Accusations of sexual impropriety, disobedience, or dishonor trigger collective responses that seek not merely to punish individuals but to restore social equilibrium. [43] Violence is framed as correction, discipline, or necessity rather than as criminal harm. This framing neutralizes moral outrage against perpetrators and shifts scrutiny onto victims.

Crucially, the comparison demonstrates that *legal reform alone is insufficient under divergent state conditions*. In Nigeria, law fails because it is overridden by informal governance. [44] In Uganda, law fails because it is selectively applied and subordinated to moralized authority. In both cases, formal institutions become secondary reference points, while social capital and social liability constitute the primary mechanisms of governance.

This comparative insight advances the theoretical contribution of the study. It shows that social liability is not a residual feature of weak states or cultural tradition, but a structural property of network-dense societies in which survival depends on conformity and belonging. Whether through state absence or state alignment, informal governance retains decisive authority over women's lives. [45]

The implications of this finding extend beyond Nigeria and Uganda. They suggest that protection strategies premised on institutional strengthening, legal reform, or geographic relocation will continue to fail unless they address the social conditions that convert social capital into coercive control. The following section examines these implications for protection, policy, and future research. Table 1 summarizes the key comparative dimensions through which social capital is transformed into social liability in Nigeria and Uganda.

Table 1. *Nigeria–Uganda Comparative Framework: Social Capital → Social Liability.*

Dimension	Nigeria	Uganda
Dominant form of informal governance	Kinship, religious communities, ethnic networks	Kinship, clan authority, community councils
Role of the state	Often weak, fragmented, or absent in enforcement	Stronger, centralized state that often aligns with moral governance
Legal framework on GBV	VAPP Act (2015); uneven adoption across states	Domestic Violence Act (2010); Anti-FGM Act
Actual enforcement	Selective, hesitant, frequently overridden by community pressure	Mediation and reconciliation prioritized over prosecution
Honor-based violence	Present but unclassified; absorbed into mob violence, domestic homicide, blasphemy cases	Present but unclassified; framed as discipline, bride-price enforcement, or family matters
Primary targets	Women accused of sexual impropriety, religious transgression, disobedience	Women accused of adultery, disobedience, refusal of marriage or bride-price norms
Mechanism of social liability	Networked moral outrage → collective sanction → institutional retreat	Clan/community authority → reconciliation pressure → impunity
Form of lethal enforcement	Mob lynching, family killings, public executions	Domestic killings, clan-sanctioned violence, community silence
Internal relocation as protection	Fails due to extended kin and religious networks	Fails due to clan reach and reputational transmission
Social capital for survival	Essential for housing, employment, protection	Essential for land access, food security, childcare
Transformation into liability	Loss of network support → exposure to violence	Loss of clan protection → sanctioned punishment
Gendered outcome	Women disproportionately punished as symbols of moral order	Women disciplined as bearers of family and clan honor

7. Implications for Protection and Policy

The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Uganda carries important implications for protection strategies, legal reform, and policy design in contexts of gender-based and honor-related violence. Most existing interventions assume that violence persists because laws are absent, enforcement capacity is weak, or victims lack awareness of their rights. The findings of this study challenge these assumptions by demonstrating that violence against women persists because informal governance systems exercise decisive authority over everyday life.

First, protection strategies must move beyond a narrow focus on statutory reform to engage the social environments in which authority, legitimacy, and compliance are produced. In both Nigeria and Uganda, the presence of formal legal protections has not translated into safety because enforcement is filtered through family authority, community norms, and moralized expectations that prioritize social cohesion over women's protection.

Second, the findings underscore the central role of social

capital as a condition of survival. In both Nigeria and Uganda, women rely on family, clan, religious, and community networks for access to housing, land, employment, childcare, and security. This dependence constrains reporting and exit options. Protection strategies that require women to sever ties with these networks—whether through relocation, shelter placement, or legal confrontation—often exacerbate vulnerability rather than reduce it.

Third, the study highlights the limitations of internal relocation as a protection strategy. In network-dense societies, risk is not territorial but relational. Reputational sanctions, kinship ties, and moral surveillance follow women across space, while relocation strips them of the social capital necessary for survival. Policies that assume geographic movement can neutralize risk underestimate the reach of informal governance and the persistence of social liability.

Fourth, the comparative findings point to the need for policy frameworks that explicitly engage informal authority structures rather than bypass them. Community leaders, religious figures, elders, and local councils function as gatekeepers of moral legitimacy in both Nigeria and Uganda. While

these actors often reinforce coercive norms, they also shape the boundaries of acceptable behavior and intervention. Sustainable reduction of violence therefore requires altering the normative foundations that authorize discipline and silence, not merely punishing individual perpetrators after harm has occurred.

Fifth, women's economic autonomy emerges as a critical protection mechanism. Expanding women's access to independent income, land rights, education, and social services reduces the costs of nonconformity and creates viable alternatives to coercive dependence. Without material alternatives, legal protections remain difficult to invoke and largely symbolic.

Finally, these findings call for a reorientation of how protection is measured and evaluated. Success should not be assessed solely by the existence of laws or the number of prosecutions, but by whether women can safely resist, exit, or renegotiate coercive social relationships without losing access to survival resources. This shift in measurement is essential for designing interventions that address social liability as a structural feature of informal governance rather than as an episodic failure of law.

8. Conclusion

This comparative analysis of Nigeria and Uganda demonstrates that gender-based and honor-related violence persists not because legal frameworks are absent, but because they operate within social environments governed by more immediate and authoritative forms of informal regulation. Across both cases, family authority, kinship and community networks, and moral norms structure daily life through continuous interaction, reputational control, and collective sanction. Within these settings, social capital remains essential for survival and belonging, while its coercive transformation into social liability converts dependence into a mechanism of control.

The comparison reveals that social liability is not tied to a single model of state power. In Nigeria, informal governance dominates largely because fragmented authority and legal pluralism limit the reach of statutory enforcement. In Uganda, comparable outcomes arise under a more centralized state that frequently reinforces community-based moral authority through mediation, reconciliation, and selective application of the law. Despite these institutional differences, women in both contexts face similar constraints: violence is normalized, reporting is discouraged, accountability is limited, and lethal enforcement is framed as discipline rather than crime.

Women's vulnerability in both countries is structurally produced at the intersection of honor norms, economic dependency, and network-dense social organization. Access to protection and resources is secured through conformity, while perceived deviation activates social liability through escalating sanctions that include stigma, exclusion, economic deprivation, and, in extreme cases, lethal violence. Acts commonly

described as private or domestic abuse thus function as instruments of informal governance that regulate behavior and preserve moral order beyond the effective reach of formal law.

The findings also explain the persistent failure of widely promoted protection strategies. Legal reform alone proves insufficient under both weak and morally aligned states. Internal relocation fails because risk is relational rather than territorial: displacement strips women of social capital while reputational sanctions and networked surveillance continue to operate. Institutional remedies falter when enforcement is filtered through informal authority structures that prioritize cohesion and moral order over women's safety.

By placing Nigeria and Uganda in comparative dialogue, this study advances the concept of social liability as a generalizable mechanism for understanding gendered violence in network-dense societies. It demonstrates that social capital is not inherently protective; its value is conditional, and under moralized informal governance it becomes a means of coercive control. This framework helps account for persistent gaps between legal commitments and lived safety across divergent political settings.

Future research should explore how social liability is activated, transmitted, and contested at the micro level, including how women navigate, negotiate, or strategically exit coercive networks under conditions of limited formal protection. Comparative analysis across additional contexts would further clarify how different configurations of state authority and informal governance shape women's vulnerability and agency.

Ultimately, meaningful protection requires more than law. It requires transforming the social conditions that convert belonging into coercion and authorize violence as governance. Without confronting social liability as a structural feature of informal governance, efforts to reduce gender-based and honor-related violence will remain constrained, regardless of the strength or intent of formal legal systems.

Abbreviations

CEHURD	Center for Health, Human Rights and Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICFM	ICF International Michael
NPC	National Population Commission
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VAPP	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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