

GENDER EQUITY AND CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN PLANNING: A FORESIGHT-BASED SCENARIO STUDY OF IRANIAN CITIES

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Abstract: Achieving equitable and sustainable urban development requires a gender-sensitive approach to spatial planning. This study investigates Iranian citizens' awareness of gender and citizenship rights within urban planning processes and examines how such awareness influences inclusive urban governance. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a quantitative survey of 382 residents from four major cities (Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Tabriz) with qualitative insights from a Delphi panel of 50 experts in urban planning, gender studies, and public policy. For the first time in Iran, a foresight-based analytical framework integrating scenario modeling and cross-impact balance (CIB) analysis was applied to examine gender and citizenship dimensions in urban governance. Statistical analysis using one-sample t-tests revealed significant deficiencies across several indicators. The most pronounced gaps were observed in socio-cultural participation, economic inclusion, spatial accessibility, and legal literacy, all scoring below the neutral threshold and indicating structural barriers to gender-equitable urban development. Scenario Wizard software generated over 1.2 billion possible futures, of which only a limited number satisfied internal consistency conditions. Most consistent scenarios reflected undesirable trajectories characterized by exclusionary practices and centralized planning structures. However, the scenario analysis also identified several high-impact drivers capable of influencing more inclusive futures, particularly women's participation in governance, legal empowerment, and gender-responsive spatial design. The findings highlight the urgent need for institutional reforms, participatory planning mechanisms, and strengthened legal awareness to prevent gender-blind urban futures. By integrating foresight techniques with empirical analysis, this study provides a novel framework for evaluating gender equity in urban policy and offers practical insights for advancing inclusive and sustainable urban governance.

Keywords: gender equity, gender-sensitive urban planning, citizenship rights, scenario analysis, Iran

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the spatial structure of cities is a critical and necessary foundation for urban planning (Taghvaei et al., 2021). In the context of Iranian cities, spatial structures are not gender-neutral; they often shape differentiated experiences of mobility, safety, and access to public resources for women and men, reflecting how built environments can reinforce or challenge gendered inequalities in everyday urban life.

Urban planners rely on this knowledge to make strategic decisions that engage with public wisdom, promote democratic processes, and incorporate citizen participation in managing cities. Today's urban environments are composed of diverse actors—each pursuing their own interests and goals. Both men and women experience urban space in different ways. Their interaction with the city is shaped by roles, opportunities, and constraints that are often gendered. As a result, gender is directly linked to how urban space is lived, perceived, and shaped (Rebello, 2024).

In the absence of inclusive governance, authority remains centralized. Urban management then becomes an elite-driven process, disconnected from the needs of the majority (Valigholizadeh & Kheyri, 2016). Urban planning, therefore, must be a participatory and skilled process. It should enable all citizens to express creativity, influence urban change, and exercise their rights equally—regardless of gender (Ababneh et al., 2025). Urban legislation defines this framework.

On one hand, laws guide the behavior of citizens. On the other hand, they regulate institutional structures, such as municipalities, city councils, and urban authorities (Tabrizishahravi et al., 2022). However, urban space is not neutral. Gendered ideologies and patriarchal structures still influence how spaces are designed and controlled.

These structures can marginalize women, limiting their agency in public life (Sadeghi & Jangjoo, 2022). Scholars in feminist geography have explored these patterns of exclusion. Concepts like spatial marginalisation, patriarchal planning, and the silencing of gendered voices remain central to the critique of urban design (Peake, 1993; Day, 2011).

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From a policy perspective, citizens typically demand four key things: (1) fair access to urban resources, (2) meaningful influence in decision-making, (3) institutional mechanisms to ensure civic participation, and (4) protection of mutual rights and responsibilities between individuals and institutions (Legard, 2022).

In democratic systems, empowering women in urban planning creates more effective and inclusive cities. When gender is considered in policymaking, cooperation between society and urban institutions improves (Gudekli, 2023).

While gender equality is increasingly integrated into urban development strategies globally, its operationalization remains uneven—particularly in contexts with centralized governance and conservative socio-political structures. Related research has also highlighted spatial disparities in women's representation in tourism management, emphasizing the role of cultural norms and institutional frameworks in shaping gender inclusion (Szabó-Szentgróti et al., 2025). Citizenship is more than a legal status. Citizenship extends beyond formal legal status and encompasses a set of rights, responsibilities, everyday practices, and forms of participation through which individuals negotiate their position within urban spaces and governance structures (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Holston, 2009).

It entails equal rights, duties, and opportunities in both private and public spheres (World Bank Group, (2023). In recent decades, the importance of women as active participants in city life has been increasingly recognized. Gender-sensitive planning is no longer a theoretical ideal—it is a practical necessity (Hanmer, 2024).

In the Iranian context, despite formal commitments to equality in national development plans, gender remains a marginal concern in both urban policy discourse and practice (Rahbari & Sharepour, 2015). Yet, in societies with structural limitations—such as Iran—urban planning still tends to overlook gender as a vital dimension. There is a lack of institutional awareness, political will, and citizen empowerment. These challenges continue to obstruct efforts toward inclusive city development. Additionally, patriarchal norms embedded in planning institutions often result in the exclusion of women's perspectives from decision-making processes and urban spatial design.

This study seeks to fill this empirical and theoretical gap by investigating how Iranian citizens perceive their gender and citizenship rights in relation to urban planning. Therefore, promoting local knowledge, increasing civic awareness, and building participatory mechanisms are essential steps toward gender equity and improved urban quality of life (Pourhossein Roshan et al., 2021). This study explores the extent to which Iranian citizens are aware of their gender and citizenship rights in the context of urban planning, and how such awareness can inform both current policies and future planning strategies. It makes an innovative contribution as the first empirical research in Iran to apply a foresight-based, scenario-driven methodology to issues of gender and citizenship in urban governance (Sharifzadeh Aghdam et al., 2020).

By integrating futures studies with gender-sensitive urban planning, this research introduces a novel analytical perspective that goes beyond descriptive critique toward proactive, policy-oriented scenario building.

Gender is not a biological given but a social construct shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors. It refers to the roles, identities, and expectations assigned to individuals based on perceived sex differences, and is reproduced through law, religion, education, and daily interactions (Crenshaw, 2013; Peake, 2010). As feminist urbanists argue, the city is not a neutral environment: it reflects power hierarchies that often marginalize women and gender minorities (Fenster, 2005).

Urban environments reproduce and amplify gender inequalities through design, accessibility, and allocation of resources. Women's exclusion from public life is not only symbolic but spatially embedded—in transport systems, public safety policies, infrastructure design, and political representation. As Massey (2005) and Lefebvre (1991) argue, space is socially produced; hence, urban planning is inherently political and gendered. This conceptualization informed the survey design and indicator selection by operationalizing gender through dimensions such as legal literacy, socio-cultural participation, economic inclusion, and spatial accessibility. Cities are shaped by interactions among space, society, and power. Following Lefebvre's triad—spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation—urban space is both materially constructed and symbolically encoded with meanings that reinforce dominant ideologies (Makinde & Lanrewaju, 2024). Soja (1996) builds on this by framing urban space through the “trialectics of spatiality,” emphasizing the interplay of lived experience, perception, and representation (Badafshani, 2023).

Feminist geography deepens this analysis by revealing how patriarchal norms manifest in spatial arrangements, reinforcing gendered access and exclusion (Fenster, 2020). Urban features—such as street lighting, transport nodes, public toilets, or even zoning laws—can act as tools of inclusion or exclusion. Gendered spatial justice thus demands that urban design reflect diverse lived experiences, not just normative male-centric ones.

Citizenship, traditionally defined in legal or political terms, is increasingly understood as a multi-dimensional concept encompassing access to resources, rights to participation, and recognition of diverse identities (Humphris, 2026). Feminist scholars argue that formal legal equality does not automatically lead to substantive equality, particularly in contexts where structural barriers persist (Cornwall, 2003). In urban contexts, gendered citizenship refers to the extent to which women and marginalized genders can exercise agency and participate in shaping the city.

This includes not only voting or legal standing, but also access to public services, representation in planning processes, and freedom of movement and safety. Yet, as Meer & Shever (2004) show, institutional frameworks often reproduce exclusion, even when equality is nominally protected (Meer & Sever, 2004). The World Charter on the Right to the City (2004) and the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat, 2008) call for gender-responsive governance, highlighting that equitable cities must ensure inclusive services, participatory planning, and spatial justice.

However, the translation of these frameworks into national or local policy remains uneven, especially in settings with hierarchical and technocratic governance systems. While international literature on gender and urban planning has grown substantially, research in Iran remains fragmented. Studies often focus on women's safety, mobility, or symbolic

representation, without integrating these into broader urban governance frameworks (Hosseini, 2012). Furthermore, most existing research is descriptive or policy-focused and lacks strategic foresight or anticipatory planning approaches.

Few Iranian studies have applied mixed-methods approaches to gender and urban planning, and none, to our knowledge, have employed foresight-based frameworks such as scenario analysis or cross-impact balance (CIB). Moreover, institutional analysis of gendered barriers in city planning has rarely been tied to citizen perceptions or participatory methodologies. As such, a theoretical and empirical gap persists (Pourmohammadi et al., 2020).

This study aims to bridge this gap by bringing together feminist urban theory, spatial justice, and citizenship rights into a unified framework, while also operationalizing these concepts through empirical data and scenario-based modelling (Raisi, 2021). By integrating citizen perspectives with expert foresight, this research offers a multidimensional analysis that moves beyond critique toward actionable future planning (Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of Urban Governance and Gendered Citizenship Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Source: Compiled by the authors based on Bayat (2013), Behdad & Nomani (2009), Hoodfar & Sadr (2010), Rezazadeh (2011), and Emamian & Bagheripour (2024))

Presidential Term	Urban Planning and Spatial Management Characteristics	Gender and Citizenship Rights Dimensions
Mohammad-Ali Rajai & Ali Khamenei (1981–1989)	Urban management primarily centered on consolidating the Islamic Republic and post-war reconstruction; urban planning was highly centralized, security-oriented, and instrumentalized for political control; social dimensions, especially gender concerns, were largely neglected (Bayat, 2013).	Women's citizenship rights severely restricted; minimal female participation in urban governance; absence of gender-sensitive policies; war conditions further marginalized social and gender equity considerations.
Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997)	Focused on rapid economic reconstruction, infrastructure development, and physical urban expansion; planning remained technocratic and centralized with limited incorporation of social equity or gender perspectives; data on gender-disaggregated urban indicators scarce (Behdad & Nomani, 2009).	Women largely excluded from decision-making; nascent formation of local councils offered limited participatory opportunities; gender justice frameworks undeveloped; civil society engagement began but had minimal impact on planning policies.
Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005)	Marked by the emergence of democratic discourse and civil society engagement; urban policies began to acknowledge social inclusion; programmatic references to gender participation appeared in development plans; however, implementation lagged (Bayat, 2013; Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010).	Increased visibility of women in local councils and NGOs; embryonic gender-sensitive planning initiatives; absence of binding mechanisms to institutionalize gender equity; persistent centralized control limited transformative potential.
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013)	Emphasis on large-scale physical infrastructure projects (e.g., “Mehr Housing”); planning remained top-down and economically driven; limited integration of social-spatial justice; gender-disaggregated data rarely used in planning evaluation (Rezazadeh, 2011).	Women's structural participation in urban governance declined; conservative gender norms reinforced; social programs lacked gender-responsive design; institutional neglect of gender equity persisted.
Hassan Rouhani (2013–2021)	Introduction of the 2016 Citizen's Rights Charter signaling policy commitment to equity and participation; however, implementation gaps existed; urban planning began incorporating inclusive rhetoric but without systemic enforcement; data and participation mechanisms remained weak (Emamian & Bagheripour, 2024).	Formal recognition of women's rights and participation in urban decision-making; however, institutional inertia and lack of structural reforms limited real progress; gender-disaggregated data and accountability mechanisms not fully institutionalized.
Ebrahim Raisi (2021–2024)	Persistence of centralized, technocratic urban planning paradigms; absence of structural reforms for inclusive governance; limited availability and use of gender-disaggregated data; urban governance models continued to marginalize women's spatial citizenship (Emamian & Bagheripour, 2024).	Implementation of conservative family policies (e.g., “Support for Family and Promotion of Hijab and Chastity Law” 2024) increased constraints on women's urban participation; negligible institutional support for gender equity in urban management; participation largely symbolic or absent.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine gender and citizenship rights in Iranian urban planning. Two sequential phases were conducted: (1) a quantitative survey of citizens and (2) a Delphi-based scenario analysis using Scenario Wizard and cross-impact balance (CIB) modeling. Quantitative Phase: A structured questionnaire assessed six indicators: socio-cultural participation, economic inclusion, political participation, legal literacy, legal awareness, and spatial accessibility. Reliability was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). Using Cochran's formula (95% confidence, 5% error), 382 citizens from Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, and Tabriz were randomly selected. This sample size is commonly considered adequate in survey research and provides sufficient representativeness for comparative analysis across the selected cities. A one-sample t-test evaluated deviations from the neutral midpoint (3) on a five-point Likert scale.

In phase two, 50 experts in urban planning, sociology, gender studies, political science, and urban management participated in two Delphi rounds and four workshops to reach consensus on critical drivers and interdependencies. The Delphi panel included professors, doctoral candidates, and practitioners with expertise in urban planning, women's studies, sociology, political science, and spatial planning, and most panelists held PhD or post-doctoral qualifications. Variables were weighted and validated through expert judgment, then modeled with Scenario Wizard using the CIB framework. Six descriptors—spatial justice, women's participation in governance, legal literacy, civic empowerment, economic inclusion, and gender-sensitive urban design—were analyzed across -3 to $+3$ influence levels. Of 1.2 billion combinations, 3,842

consistent scenarios emerged, categorized as desirable, intermediate, or undesirable. In this study, undesirable scenarios are defined as internally consistent futures characterized by persistent gender-based exclusion from decision-making processes, continued centralization of urban governance, limited economic empowerment of women, restricted access to urban resources and public spaces, and weak institutional support for gender-sensitive planning. Data triangulation linked survey findings with expert insights and legal frameworks, including Iran's 2016 Citizenship Rights Charter.

Iterative Delphi feedback ensured construct validity. Panelists' expertise covered urban planning, women's studies, sociology, political science, and spatial planning, with the majority holding PhD or post-doctoral qualifications (Table 2). Building on futures studies frameworks (Amer et al., 2013), conceptual variables were operationalized and tested across scenarios to detect systemic change. Scenario narratives were then ranked by plausibility and impact. Together, these methodological components enabled a multi-layered analysis—from citizens' lived experiences to expert foresight—allowing the research to bridge the gap between descriptive analysis and strategic planning. Expert input played a central role throughout the process. A total of 50 panelists participated in structured interviews and Delphi rounds. Their perspectives were cross-referenced with the legal and normative frameworks found in Iran's Charter of Citizenship Rights (Rouhani Administration, 2016), thereby shaping the formulation and final selection of indicators (Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators for Assessing Gender and Citizenship Rights in Urban Planning in Iranian Cities

Category	Sub-Indicators	
Socio-Cultural	- Equitable distribution and allocation of resources and facilities between men and women	Zukin, 1995; Cornwall, 2003; Mwagiru, 2016
	- Women's role in problem-solving and their effective participation in managerial and executive levels	
	- Influence of culture and traditions on urban space planning	
	- Women's involvement in the management and implementation of urban projects	
Economic	- Creation of equal economic opportunities in employment and leadership positions for men and women	Ellis, 2007; Dufflo, 2012; Moser, 2012; Kabeer, 2018
	- Gender-based disparities in budget allocation and urban development activities	
	- Development of adequate capacities to enhance women's participation in commercial spaces	
Political	- Establishment of political capacities for women's participation in urban planning and decision-making	East, 2022; Marquet & Maciejewska, 2024; Gudekli et al., 2012; Hemaputi & Hua, 2024
	- Provision of appropriate platforms for women to hold positions such as city mayor or senior urban roles	
	- Adherence of officials and managers to principles of equality and equity based on laws and citizenship rights	
	- Development of infrastructure for free and equitable access to cyberspace to enhance civic awareness	
	- Implementation of policies aimed at eliminating gender discrimination in urban planning	
	- Strengthening and improving citizenship education strategies grounded in political and legal frameworks	
Physical and Spatial	- Design and construction of urban spaces with a social justice perspective	Moonen, 2024; Zuleta et al, 2025; Gauvin et al, 2020; Li et al., 2025
	- Accessibility and efficiency of transportation systems suitable for all community members	
	- Perceived safety and comfort in public spaces during all hours	
	- Design of recreational, sports, and park facilities tailored to women's needs	
	- Availability of gender-responsive urban facilities (e.g., childcare centers, restrooms, drinking fountains)	
Legal Rights	- Affordable and convenient access to urban amenities and services via efficient public transport networks	Zysk, E. 2024; Terraza et al. 2020
	- Access to codified and disseminated standards by municipal authorities to inform and guide citizens	
	- Awareness of urban planning processes and implementation mechanisms	
	- Protection from social, cultural, and environmental exploitation of public and semi-public urban spaces	
	- Equal access to public utilities and urban services	
Legal Awareness	- Ensuring healthy and safe urban environments	Rakodi, 1991; Hernández, 2010; Brouder & Sweetman, 2015
	- Awareness of regulations concerning pedestrian pathways	
	- Knowledge of laws related to business rights and operations	
	- Understanding rules governing maintenance, repair, and construction of public spaces	
	- Awareness of municipal laws regarding per capita neighborhood resource allocation	
	- Awareness of gender rights within the legal framework	
	- Familiarity with business-related legal rights	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from quantitative data analysis using the One-Sample t-test, aimed at evaluating Iranian citizens' perceptions regarding gender equity and citizenship rights within urban planning frameworks. The statistical assessment rigorously tests the extent to which observed indicators diverge from a neutral midpoint, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of existing disparities across multiple domains, including socio-cultural, economic, political, spatial, and legal dimensions. These results not only quantify the perceived gaps in gender-sensitive urban governance but also establish a critical evidentiary basis for subsequent interpretative discussion. The detailed statistical outputs, as summarized in the following table, facilitate a systematic examination of the structural challenges and inform targeted policy interventions in the context of Iran's urban development.

The One-Sample t-test results in Table 3 clearly indicate a statistically significant deviation of all gender and citizenship rights indicators from the neutral midpoint (test value = 3), with p-values less than 0.001. This signifies a pervasive perception of deficiencies across all dimensions of urban planning from the viewpoint of Iranian citizens, with the most pronounced gaps observed in the economic and political domains, followed by socio-cultural participation.

Table 3. One-Sample Test (Citizens) (Source: Authors (Research findings))

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Mean	Std. Deviation .66207	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Descriptor							Lower	Upper
Social and Cultural	-22.444	381	0.000	-0.76028	2.2397	0.95645	-0.8269	-0.6937
Economic	-24.126	381	0.000	-1.18063	1.8194	0.86247	-1.2768	-1.0844
Politics	-22.879	381	0.000	-1.00960	1.9904	0.86247	-1.0964	-0.9228
Space	-14.299	381	0.000	-0.43815	2.5618	0.59888	-0.4984	-0.3779
Law	-5.665	381	0.000	-0.38743	2.6126	1.33660	-0.5219	-0.2530
Advance	-3.402	381	0.000	-0.10995	2.8901	0.63164	-0.1735	-0.0464

The lowest mean scores were observed in the economic and political dimensions (mean differences of -1.18 and -1.01, respectively), underscoring substantial perceived inequalities in economic opportunities and political participation for women within urban contexts. The socio-cultural domain also exhibited a pronounced negative evaluation (-0.76), reflecting deep-rooted challenges in social norms and cultural practices that influence gender equity in urban spaces.

Moreover, the physical and legal indicators, though marginally higher, still fell significantly below the neutral threshold, indicating systemic shortcomings in spatial justice and legal awareness related to gender-sensitive urban planning.

These findings not only reaffirm earlier research on gendered urban inequality in Iran, but also extend the discourse by incorporating scenario-based foresight to map out possible trajectories for reform. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the multifaceted barriers to women's equitable participation in urban governance and planning (e.g., Razavi, 2016). For instance, Razavi (2016) highlights how economic disempowerment and political exclusion are intertwined factors limiting gender equity in urban development. Similarly, Kabeer (2018) discusses how socio-cultural constraints persistently undermine women's citizenship rights, particularly in patriarchal societies.

Therefore, the data robustly support the need for integrated policy frameworks that address economic, political, socio-cultural, spatial, and legal dimensions to foster gender-sensitive urban planning in Iran. The statistically significant negative deviations across all dimensions underscore a widespread perception of gender-based exclusion in Iran's urban governance system. Overall, the quantitative findings set the foundation for scenario-based analysis, allowing the study to explore how different strategic drivers might alter future outcomes for gender equity and urban citizenship rights.

Foresight Model Using the Scenario Wizard

The Scenario Wizard software, developed at the Research Center of the University of Stuttgart, Germany, is based on the use of interaction matrices. These matrices facilitate the systematic extraction of expert judgments concerning the influence of the likelihood of one descriptor's state on the state of another descriptor, expressed through verbal phrases (ZIRIUS, 2018). This methodology standardizes scenario development by methodically addressing the future of urban environments, enabling the generation of scenarios that range from the most desirable to the most catastrophic, proportionate to the collected data. In this study, scenario-based foresight was conducted using Scenario Wizard, a software tool developed at the University of Stuttgart that operationalises Cross-Impact Balance (CIB) analysis. This method allows for the systematic exploration of interdependencies among key variables—referred to as descriptors—each of which can take on a range of possible states.

Each descriptor was assigned five plausible states, ranging from very weak to very strong realisation. These were evaluated for mutual influence using a 30×30 judgment matrix completed by 50 interdisciplinary experts.

The total number of theoretically possible scenarios was 1,270,566,400 (5⁶), of which only 3,842 scenarios met the threshold for internal consistency—defined as the logical coherence of state combinations based on cross-impact scores.

Scenarios were categorized into three groups:

Desirable (Green) – Scenarios with high systemic consistency and alignment with equity-focused planning goals

Intermediate (Orange) – Mixed outcome scenarios with partial consistency and moderate feasibility

Undesirable (Red) – Highly consistent but reflect regressive, exclusionary futures under current trends

Scenario selection was based on internal consistency, frequency of occurrence, and alignment with real world governance conditions in Iran. Subsequently, these descriptors and their possible states were presented to a diverse panel of experts—including professors, doctoral candidates, and executives—whose evaluations were critically appraised. The selection of these six descriptors was informed by Delphi panel consensus, prioritising those variables with high systemic leverage and future-shaping potential across Iran's urban development trajectories.

Drawing upon these expert judgments and existing research, probable scenarios describing various states of each descriptor were identified and categorized (Table 4). The system comprised six descriptors encompassing 30 uncertain states, resulting in a 30 × 30 interaction matrix.

To quantify the significance of each element, participants rated the effects within a balanced cross-impact matrix questionnaire, using a scale from -3 to +3, where +3 indicates a strong positive effect, +2 a moderate positive effect, +1 a weak positive effect, 0 no effect, -1 a weak negative effect, -2 a moderate negative effect, and -3 a strong negative effect. Following data entry, the Scenario Wizard software computed normalized and standardized matrices, with the analysis of descriptors. Additionally, the influence of various factors within each descriptor on others was assessed in terms of one-way and reciprocal (two-way) relationships. For example, factor F1 of descriptor F might impact factor F1 of another descriptor F in either unidirectional or bidirectional ways, as illustrated in Figure 2.

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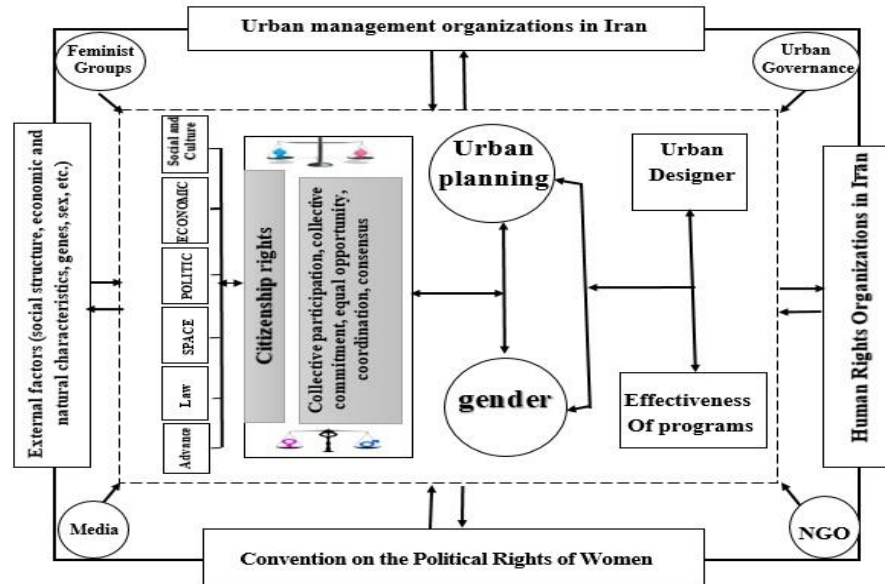


Figure 1. Conceptual model of research

The analytical workflow of the scenario construction process using Wizard software is illustrated in Figure 2, while the numerical configuration of the profile matrix and scenario calculations is summarized in Table 4. The research information for the software is as follows. The status of each variable is presented in Figures 2, and Table 4.

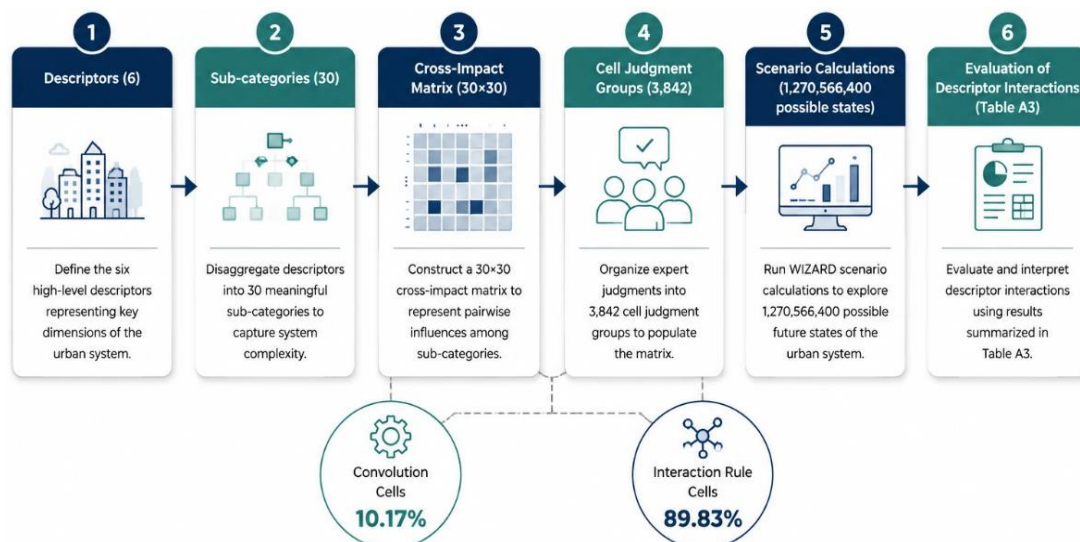


Figure 2. Methodological framework of Wizard scenario analysis

Analysis of Key Driving Forces and Design of Future Scenarios

Based on the results obtained from the Scenario Wizard software and the analyses conducted within expert panels, multiple scenarios have been generated, each reflecting probable future conditions concerning gender and citizenship rights in urban planning in Iran. Among these, certain indicators and variables have been identified as key driving forces; these variables, due to their high impact weight and pivotal role in the cross-impact network, play a prominent role in shaping plausible future scenarios.

Firstly, within the socio-cultural dimension, the component of “women’s participation in urban management and implementation”, scoring 94.9, emerged as the most significant driving force. This indicator highlights that a high level of women’s participation can directly and indirectly influence other dimensions of sustainable urban development.

Finally, in the awareness and empowerment domain, the indicator of “public knowledge of gender rights” (score 51.4) is assessed as one of the most impactful factors in shaping desirable future scenarios. Awareness of equal rights provides a crucial platform for active participation and advocacy by women at both neighborhood and city levels.

Table 4. Status of scenarios with compatibility and Probability in the 15-year horizon (Source: Authors (Research findings))

	The elements of the scenario	Firmness of assumptions	Assumption quality	Scenario situation	Influences on the scenario element	Scenario realization
1	Equitable distribution and equalization of resources and facilities for men and women	Medium	Not passable	Red	175	Not very probable
2	The Role of Women in problem-solving and being effective in Management and Executive Level	High	slightly passable	Orange	671	slightly probable
3	The Impact of Culture and Tradition in Urban Space Planning	High	slightly passable	Green	1200	Very probable
4	Women's participation in the management and implementation of urban projects	High	passable	Red	214	slightly probable
5	Creating Equal Economic Opportunities in Achieving Jobs and Managing Positions between Men and Women	High	Not passable	Red	51	Not very probable
6	Discrimination in 3 budget allocations and civil development activities between the genders	High	slightly passable	Red	115	Fairly probable
7	Creating adequate capacities for women's participation in commercial spaces	High	slightly passable	Red	47	slightly probable
8	Creating political capacities for women's participation in urban planning and plans	High	passable	Red	212	slightly probable
9	Providing appropriate platforms for the presence of women as the city mayor or city positions	High	Not passable	Red	219	slightly probable
10	Adherence of officials and managers to equality and equity based on the law and citizenship rights	High	slightly passable	Orange	199	Probable
11	Building Infrastructure for free access to cyberspace in order to improve citizens' awareness	High	slightly passable	Red	172	slightly probable
12	Policies and doing necessary measures to eliminate gender discrimination in planning	High	passable	Red	184	slightly probable
13	Strengthening and improving citizenship education strategies based on political laws	High	Not passable	Orange	879	Probable
14	Construction and proper form of space with the social justice approach	High	slightly passable	Red	66	slightly probable
15	The utility of the transportation system suitable for all people in the community	High	slightly passable	Orange	1200	Probable
16	Feeling safe and relaxed to attend public spaces at various hours of the day	High	passable	Orange	1370	Probable
17	Design of recreational, sports and park spaces for women	High	Not passable	Red	91	slightly probable
18	The existence of 3 urban facilities that fit the needs of women (child care centers, bathrooms, drinking water ...)	High	slightly passable	Green	3100	Very probable
19	Comfortable and low-cost access to urban facilities and services (efficient and comprehensive public transport network)	High	slightly passable	Green	3150	Very probable
20	Access to codified and published standards by the city administration for awareness and guidance of citizens in spaces	High	passable	Red	214	slightly probable
21	Awareness of the process of preparing and implementing urban plans	High	Not passable	Red	71	slightly probable
22	Social, cultural and environmental exploitation of the city's public and exclusive public spaces	High	slightly passable	Red	58	slightly probable
23	Equal access to public utilities and urban facilities	High	slightly passable	Green	4800	Very probable
24	Having healthy environments	High	desired	Orange	1750	Probable
25	Awareness of non-occupied sidewalk rules	High	desired	Orange	1800	Probable
26	Awareness of the laws relating to the business rights	High	desired	Orange	1900	Probable
27	Awareness of the rules relating to the maintenance, repair and construction of public places	High		Red	51	slightly probable
28	Awareness of the matter and the notes of the municipal law regarding the level of per capita use of each neighborhood	High		Red	81	slightly probable
29	Awareness of gender rights	High	desired	Orange	653	Probable
30	Awareness of the laws relating to the right to business	High		Red	145	slightly probable

All these driving forces were analyzed comprehensively within the final scenario matrix. According to the Scenario Probability Dispersion Diagram (Figure 2), scenarios were classified into three main categories:

- **Undesirable Scenarios (Red):** Characterised by high inconsistency and low likelihood of realisation; these reflect critical conditions necessitating fundamental policy revisions.
- **Intermediate Scenarios (Yellow):** Exhibiting moderate compatibility; these scenarios may transition to favourable conditions through gradual reforms.
- **Desirable Scenarios (Green):** Marked by the highest levels of compatibility and feasibility; they represent pathways toward achieving gender justice and citizenship rights through targeted policy implementation.

Figure 2 depicts the spatial distribution and descriptive positioning of indicators within the analytical system. The placement of indicators in the upper-right quadrant of the chart signifies their high impact and frequent recurrence within scenario structures. These indicators effectively constitute the core focal points for future-oriented policymaking.

In summary, the combined insights derived from software analyses and expert evaluations underscore that focusing on the aforementioned key driving forces forms a fundamental initial step for designing future scenarios related to gender justice and citizenship rights in Iran's urban spaces. This focus serves as a critical foundation for informed policy development and forward-looking urban planning.

The distribution of probabilities in the Scenario Dispersal diagram, ultimately ends in the results of Table 4. In that case, the amount of realization of the scenario in the form of levels of credibility, assumption quality, the final score of the scenario to examine the elements of the scenario for extracting descriptors that show a high degree of compatibility among the situations of other descriptors. Based on Figure 1, in a spatial distribution, we will find a more realistic situation about the parameters of the scenarios and the rate of realization of each of the indicators.

In the case that there are red state scenarios with weak and unreliable compatibility and reliability, the elements of the second scenario or the green with a high adaptability coefficient and scenarios with a favourable and moderate compatibility status. The status of each indicator as a probable scenario is presented in Table 4. Based on internal consistency, frequency across judgment cells, and alignment with policy priorities, the scenarios were categorised as: desirable (green), intermediate (orange), and undesirable (red). This typology enables planners and policymakers to distinguish between risk-laden, status-quo, and transformative urban futures.

Finally, based on the above scenarios, as the main elements from the specialized panels and groups, the key drivers of the research scenarios, the analysis of the results and the preparation for their use, are presented in Table 5 at three levels.

Table 5. The status of key propulsion forces in gender and citizenship rights in urban space planning on the horizon of the next 15 years (Source: Research findings)

Desirable scenario	Disaster scenario	Median scenario	Key factor
Strengthening and promoting gender criteria in the urban planning process, form and construction, transportation and safe places and its positive impact on the quality of urban spaces	Ignoring gender norms in the urban planning process, form and construction, transportation, and safe places and their impact on the quality of urban spaces	The execution of some of the Presidential Citizenship Rights Document and the modification of the content of the documents regarding this	Form and Construction, Transportation and Safe spaces
Including the needs of women and community groups in planning and zoning laws, in the preparation and implementation of urban plans	Concentrating on planning, influenced by comprehensive and technical approaches	Soft reforms with a regular process of paying more attention to the needs of women in planning and zoning laws, in the preparation and implementation of plans	Planning and Zoning laws, Urban Plans
Including gender sensitive planning and strategies in the process of preparing, approving and implementing urban development projects	Concentrating on planning, a lack of attention to the needs of women and a lack of attention to the future	Structural reforms in the process of preparing and implementing plans and providing conditions for strategies	The process of preparing, approving and implementing urban development projects
Providing the social-cultural context appropriate for the presence of women in local governance (municipal and city council, etc.)	Focused and patriarchal urban management, and the lack of attention to women's ignorance in current management and the current state of affairs	Attention to the draft charter is an attempt to implement it as a process	Urban Management
More attention to supportive planning through state and public institutions, to increase gender awareness in the people	Paying more attention to supportive planning through state and public institutions, to increase gender awareness in the people	Continue the status quo	Supportive Plans, Levels of Gender Knowledge in People
Increasing and improving the public awareness of the laws and rights of the urban community	Creating a closed environment and developing government pressures on the media ...	Continue the status quo	Public awareness of the laws and rights of citizens in the urban communities

The present study, while measuring the effects of variables applicable to other research contexts, demonstrates both compatibility and reliability. By employing spatial mapping of variables, elaborating key propulsive forces, and developing final scenarios, it offers more realistic insights into the current status of the system and generates logically grounded

projections. Such enhanced analytical capacity is attainable only through the integration of citizenship rights frameworks with future-oriented strategic and scenario-based methodologies rooted in modern foresight techniques.

Moreover, active consultation with academic elites and executive authorities in Iran throughout all phases of the research—from defining variables to scoring, evaluating, and interpreting the outcomes—significantly minimized the margin of error. All derived scenarios were thoroughly discussed during expert meetings, wherein weaknesses in the variable framework and the initial scenarios were critically reviewed and revised. Consequently, the reliability of the research instruments was reinforced through iterative expert consultations, revisions of foundational assumptions, formulation of key hypotheses, and refinement of the questionnaire based on expert feedback.

The findings, from the citizens' perspective, reveal a clear marginalisation of women in the urban planning process—ranging from awareness and design to approval and implementation. Women's needs and aspirations have been overlooked in the design and construction of urban spaces. Their presence in urban environments has been substantially constrained by socio-cultural barriers, economic limitations, time restrictions, and domestic responsibilities. This underscores the critical importance of ensuring equitable citizenship rights, particularly for women, as integral members of society.

Furthermore, scenario-based analyses indicate a general lack of confidence in the potential for structural transformation brought about by increased female participation in public life or shifts in gender dynamics. The prevailing forecast aligns more with a disaster-oriented scenario. Under the current societal and ideological conditions, the active engagement of women in urban spatial and temporal domains, their meaningful participation in planning processes, and significant changes in socio-spatial structures remain extremely limited.

In effect, Iran's urban management system has largely neglected the spatial distribution, organization, and interaction of human phenomena, failing to consider the diverse experiences and needs of women, men, and cultural or ethnic minorities. At both macro and micro levels, urban planning has been inadequate and, in some cases, contradicts the fundamental mission of geography—namely, to promote more equitable, inclusive, and human-centred spatial development.

The foresight model demonstrates that maintaining current patterns is likely to produce gender-blind, exclusionary outcomes. However, strategic interventions—especially in spatial design, participatory governance, and legal literacy—can meaningfully alter Iran's urban future toward equity and inclusion.

The findings of this study highlight urgent policy interventions to address gender-blind urban governance in Iran. First, institutional reforms are essential to decentralize planning processes and integrate gender-responsive criteria into zoning laws, budgeting, and project evaluations. Second, legal empowerment initiatives, such as public legal literacy programs and transparent dissemination of municipal standards, are necessary to bridge the gap between formal rights and practical access. Third, participatory mechanisms must be strengthened by institutionalizing women's representation in municipal councils, urban design committees, and decision-making platforms. Fourth, gender-sensitive spatial design—including safe public spaces, accessible transportation, and inclusive recreational facilities—should become a mandatory component of urban development plans. Finally, adopting foresight-based planning tools within national and local urban governance frameworks can help policymakers anticipate risks and design adaptive strategies. These measures collectively represent a strategic roadmap toward equitable and inclusive urban futures.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the level of Iranian citizens' awareness of their gender and citizenship rights within the context of urban planning and to assess how this awareness could inform inclusive governance and planning strategies. By employing a mixed-methods approach—combining a survey of 382 citizens across four major Iranian cities (Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Tabriz) with expert-based Delphi analysis and scenario modelling—this research offers a multidimensional understanding of gender equity in urban contexts.

As demonstrated in the one-sample t-test results (Table 3), all six key indicators—social participation, legal literacy, economic inclusion, spatial accessibility, political representation, and civic engagement—scored significantly below the neutral threshold ($p < 0.001$). These results confirm the widespread perception of marginalization and exclusion experienced by women in Iran's urban planning system. Although this finding aligns with earlier research in the Global South (e.g., Kabeer, 2018; Razavi, 2020), it also underscores the specific institutional and spatial barriers prevalent in Iranian cities.

Importantly, this study presents the first application in Iran of a foresight-based, scenario-driven methodology to issues of gender and citizenship rights in urban governance. Through the use of Scenario Wizard and cross-impact analysis, the study developed multiple plausible urban futures and identified the key variables (such as women's participation in planning, inclusive spatial design, and legal empowerment) that could shift outcomes toward more equitable trajectories. This foresight approach moves beyond descriptive critique and introduces a strategic, anticipatory framework to guide long-term urban policy interventions (Jacobs, 1991). The findings strongly suggest that without immediate structural reforms—particularly those enabling participatory decision-making, legal education, and spatial justice—urban planning in Iran will likely continue to reproduce existing gender disparities. Therefore, policymakers must institutionalise gender-sensitive frameworks by integrating women into decision-making bodies, investing in inclusive design, and mainstreaming legal access and awareness at the community level. These actions are not merely aspirational but essential to prevent the reinforcement of exclusionary patterns in future urban development.

Moreover, the study underscores the pivotal role of urban managers, universities, and civil society organizations in institutionalizing gender foresight within planning processes. Without their coordinated efforts, technocratic and top-down planning approaches will continue to marginalize women's lived realities. Integrating gender-sensitive indicators into urban audits, budgeting frameworks, and spatial planning tools can enhance accountability and inclusiveness. As Iran's cities

confront intensifying social, economic, and environmental pressures, embracing anticipatory governance that accounts for gender diversity is not merely a progressive ideal—it is a pragmatic necessity.

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