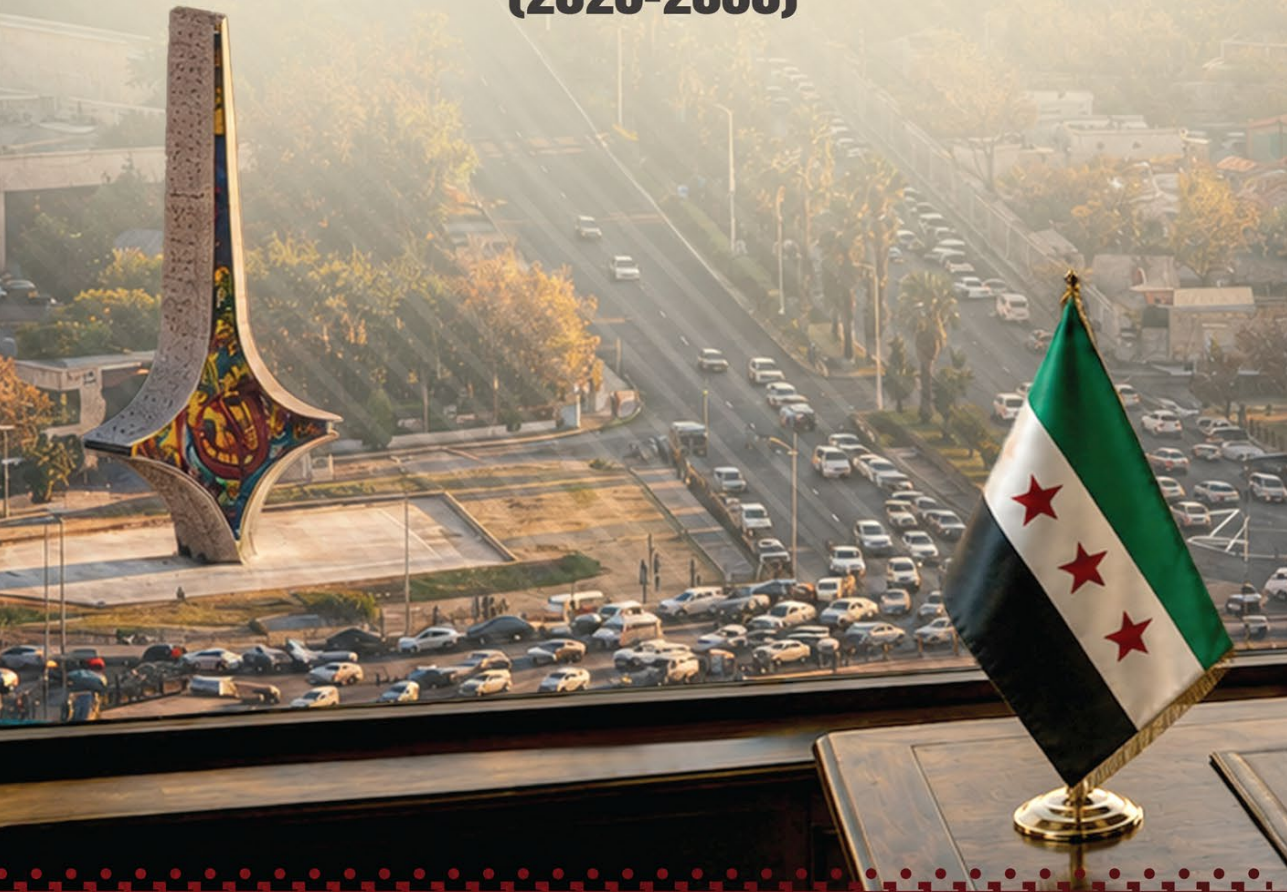


Building the State in Syria

A Strategic Vision for Managing the Transition and Achieving Stability (2026-2030)



**JUSOOR
FOR STUDIES**

A Strategic Study
Prepared by:
Mohammad Sremini
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Executive Summary

This study addresses the task of building the Syrian state during the transitional period and up until 2030, as the most critical national challenge facing the country over that period. The study builds on the premise that the success of the transition will be measured not only by potential political shifts or a cessation of conflict, but rather by the state's capacity to restore its core functions, strengthen the legitimacy of its institutions, consolidate the rule of law, and achieve sustainable development.

The study begins by positing that the post-Assad transitional period offers a historic opportunity to rebuild the Syrian state upon modern institutional foundations, moving on from the logic of crisis management and ad hoc responses toward the creation of public institutions capable of performing their functions efficiently and sustainably—all within a framework of good governance, accountability, and the rule of law.

The study employs the methodology of institutional analysis, drawing upon literature regarding state-building and governance, as well as comparative experiences from post-conflict nations, considering the specificities of the Syrian context without assuming that models from elsewhere around the globe can be directly replicated.

In this context, it offers an analytical framework based on five strategic pillars essential for state-building during the transition: state sovereignty and the rule of law; institutional legitimacy; governance and public administration; a productive economy and sustainable development; and societal trust and the social contract. It views these pillars as an interconnected system, wherein the success of each element relies on the integration of the others.

The study places special emphasis on the political and constitutional dimensions of the transitional phase, proceeding from the premise that the institutions of this period—such as the People's Assembly (formed via indirect elections under the interim electoral system) and the administration established by the March 2025 Constitutional Declaration—are temporary in nature. It argues that completing the process of state-building necessitates the fulfilment of certain constitutional and electoral milestones, from electing a constituent assembly charged with drafting a permanent constitution for public referendum, to holding direct legislative and

local elections, so the country can move from the legitimacy of transitional arrangements to a stable constitutional and electoral legitimacy. Furthermore, the study addresses transitional justice as a foundational pillar of this vision, rather than a peripheral issue, evaluating Syria's emerging institutional experience of it and proposing an integrated legislative and judicial pathway for it.

Within this framework, the study proceeds to assess the current situation of the Syrian state by analyzing its core functions and identifying the institutional gaps that hinder its ability to perform tasks related to security, justice, public services, economic management, and legitimacy-building. The analysis reveals that the primary challenge lies not less in the fact that Syria faces multiple simultaneous crises than in the need to restore the state's institutional capacity and transform its institutions into bodies capable of planning, implementation, coordination, and the efficient, effective delivery of services.

In light of this assessment, this study presents a strategic vision for the Syrian state up until 2030: the construction of a unified, sovereign state grounded in the rule of law, endowed with efficient and effective public institutions, enjoying the trust of its citizens, and capable of driving forward the country's development and bringing about long-term stability.

To realize this vision, the study proposes five strategic goals: building a capable and effective state; bolstering the rule of law and the legitimacy of institutions; building a sustainable, productive economy; enhancing social capital and public trust; and consolidating good governance and institutional sustainability.

The study also identifies priority areas for national reforms, including institutions, the justice system and rule of law, economic management, public service development, community partnership, the completion of constitutional and electoral processes, and transitional justice and civil peace. It proposes an integrated framework for implementing these priorities, based on clear responsibilities, phased implementation, results-based management, institutional coordination, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Furthermore, the study presents three potential scenarios for the state-building trajectory through 2030: gradual success, slow progress, and stalled reform. It analyzes key institutional, economic, security, societal, and external risks that could impact the vision's implementation, and proposes principles for managing these risks and enhancing the state's capacity to adapt to them.

The study concludes that the success of the state-building project in Syria requires a shift from management of the transitional phase to managing the state-building process itself, seeing it as a long-term national undertaking grounded in strong institutions, sound governance, a productive economy, effective justice, and broad community partnership. It emphasizes that the sustainability of this effort hinges on the state's ability to build institutions that command public trust and operate according to the principles of accountability and the rule of law, thereby creating the necessary environment for achieving development and stability through 2030 and beyond.

On this basis, the study presents a set of recommendations to specific actors—state institutions, the legislative and judicial branches, local government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and regional and international partners—with the aim of unifying efforts at reform, strengthening institutional capacity, and transforming the proposed strategic vision into a sustainable national path for building the Syrian state.

Introduction

Since the fall of president Bashar al-Assad and his regime in late 2024, Syria has undergone a profound political transformation, ending a decades-long historical era and ushering the country into a transitional phase. This phase presents both challenges and opportunities: while the shift has offered the possibility of rebuilding state institutions and launching a new process of reform, it also places on Syria's state and society the responsibility of managing a complex phase of intertwined political, security, economic, and social considerations. This necessitates a strategic vision that moves beyond merely responding to day-to-day developments, and toward establishing the foundations for sustainable stability.

This phase has drawn its institutional character from a series of transitional arrangements. A Constitutional Declaration was issued on March 13, 2025, serving as the governing framework for the transitional period.¹ Subsequently, in October 2025, the People's Assembly was formed in accordance with the interim electoral system established by Decree No. 143 of 2025. This decree set the Assembly's membership at 210: two-thirds elected indirectly via constituency-level electoral bodies, with the remaining third appointed by the President of the Republic. The Assembly is mandated to exercise legislative authority for a renewable 30-month term, pending the adoption of a permanent constitution under which elections are then to be held.² Additionally, a National Commission for Transitional Justice and a National Commission for the Missing were established in May 2025—under Decrees No. 20 and No. 19 of 2025, respectively—and form the nucleus of an institutional process that aims to address the legacy of Syria's 13-year conflict.³

These arrangements imply that the institutions of the current phase, despite their foundational importance, are transitional by their nature and temporary by virtue of their establishing documents. The current People's Assembly was not elected via direct popular vote; the country is governed by an interim constitutional declaration rather than a permanent constitution; and local administration councils

¹ Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, March 13, 2025 (in Arabic). Particularly notable are Articles 24 and 25, concerning the formation and term length of the People's Assembly.

² Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decree No. 143 of 2025, Approving the Provisional Electoral System for the People's Assembly, August 2025 (in Arabic). See also: Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decree No. 66 of 2025, Establishing the Supreme Commissions for People's Assembly Elections, June 2, 2025 (in Arabic).

³ Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decree No. 20 of 2025, Establishing the National Commission for Transitional Justice, May 17, 2025 (in Arabic); Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2025, Establishing the National Commission for Missing Persons, May 17, 2025 (in Arabic).

have yet to hold elections. Consequently, any vision for state-building will remain incomplete unless it includes a clear pathway to completing these steps, thereby transitioning the country from a state of temporary exception to one of constitutional stability.

Comparative experience demonstrates that the success of transitional periods is not measured merely by the cessation of conflict or the fact that a political change has taken place. Rather, it is gauged by the state's ability to restore its core functions, bolster the legitimacy of its institutions, consolidate the rule of law, achieve economic development, and rebuild trust between the state and society.⁴ The literature on state-building further emphasizes that sustainable stability hinges on the existence of capable, efficient, and legitimate public institutions. Conversely, institutional weakness often perpetuates fragility even after armed conflicts have ceased. Comparative studies of post-conflict nations indicate that prospects for recovery improve when reforms in security, justice, institution-building, and economic development are integrated within a unified national framework.⁵

From this perspective, this study views Syria's transitional period as a phase of state-building, rather than merely a process of managing political transformation. The primary challenge lies not in addressing accumulated crises in isolation, but in constructing public institutions capable of performing their functions efficiently and sustainably—thereby reinforcing state legitimacy and creating the environment necessary for development and stability.

The Study's Central Question

This study offers a response to the following question:

How can Syria transform the transitional period into a sustainable institutional pathway for state-building and stability up until 2030?

This central question leads to several secondary questions:

- What are the theoretical and institutional pillars of state-building throughout such a transition?

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 3–17.

⁵ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), p.2–21.

- What are the key structural challenges hindering the restoration of the Syrian state's functions?
- What strategic vision can guide the reform process through to 2030?
- What are the priorities for national reform and the mechanisms for their implementation?
- What are the prerequisites for completing the political and constitutional transition, and what role does transitional justice play in the state-building project?
- What are the potential scenarios and risks facing the state-building process?

Hypothesis

This study argues that the greater the capacity of Syrian state institutions to perform their core functions in accordance with the principles of the rule of law and good governance, the brighter the prospects for achieving sustainable stability and development throughout the transitional phase.

Significance

The study draws significance from the fact that it offers a strategic framework that links state-building with the management of the transitional phase. It draws upon contemporary literature in the fields of state-building and governance, while considering the specificities of the Syrian context and avoiding applying comparative experiences in a mechanical manner.

Methodology and Scope

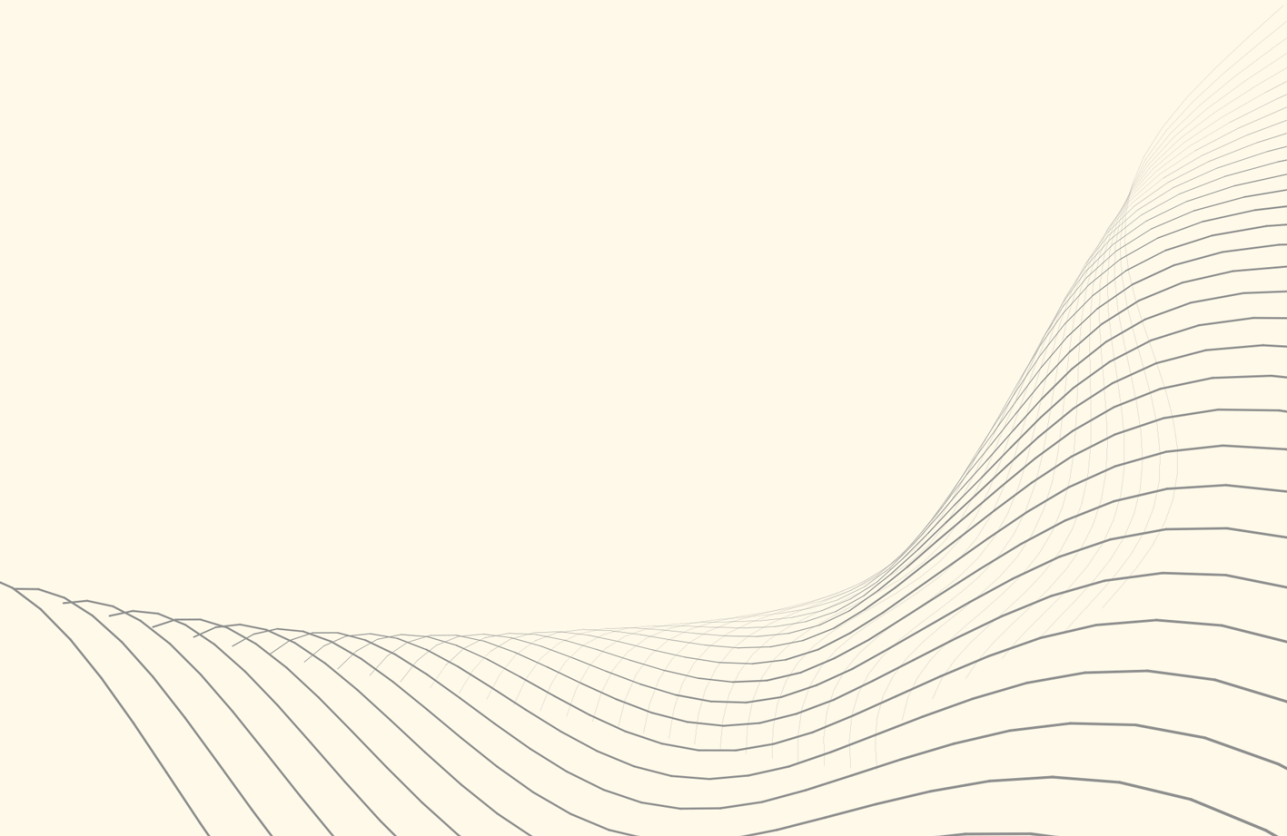
The study employs an approach of institutional analysis, by examining core state functions and diagnosing structural challenges. It then constructs a strategic vision encompassing priorities for reform, implementation mechanisms, monitoring indicators, and potential scenarios up until 2030. It also draws comparisons with experiences in other post-conflict nations—as an analytical framework, rather than as prefabricated models ready to be applied to Syria.

The study focuses on the period 2026-2030, an anticipated timeframe for consolidating institutional reforms and launching a sustainable development trajectory. It does not aim to present a detailed program for government; rather, it

seeks to formulate a strategic vision to guide state institutions, policymakers, and researchers in the design and evaluation of public policies.

Study Structure

The study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 presents a conceptual framework and lays out the strategic pillars of state-building. Chapter 2 examines the current reality of the Syrian state and analyzes its institutional gaps. Chapter 3 outlines a strategic vision for the Syrian state through to 2030. Chapter 4 identifies priorities for national reform and pathways for the transition, including constitutional and electoral processes and transitional justice. Chapter 5 details the framework for implementation and mechanisms of governance. Chapter 6 discusses scenarios and risks. Finally, Chapter 7 presents findings and recommendations, followed by a Conclusion.



Chapter 1:

Conceptual Framework and the Strategic Pillars of State-Building

1.1: The Study's Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon the literature of state-building, which posits that achieving sustainable stability in states emerging from armed conflict depends primarily on the ability of state institutions to restore their core functions, consolidate the rule of law, and strengthen their institutional legitimacy. Accordingly, the study adopts the concept of state-building as a gradual institutional process aimed at enhancing the capacity of public institutions to perform their functions efficiently and effectively, rather than merely restructuring organizational frameworks or redistributing competencies.⁶

In this context, the transitional phase may be seen as a period for rebuilding public institutions and reorganizing the relationship between state and society, thereby ensuring a gradual shift from crisis management to the consolidation of institutional stability. Thus, the study views the transitional phase not as an end in itself, but rather as a temporal and organizational framework for launching the state-building process.

The success of this process hinges on the state's institutional capacity—specifically, the ability of public institutions to design and implement public policies, enforce the law, manage resources, and deliver services efficiently and consistently. In contemporary literature, this capacity is regarded as a key indicator of state quality and the effectiveness of public administration.⁷ Reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) confirm that the quality of contemporary public administration is measured by composite indicators encompassing organizational efficiency, service digitization, and the capacity of institutions to carry out data-driven strategic planning.⁸

Furthermore, the state-building process is grounded in the principles of good governance—namely transparency, accountability, the rule of law, participation, and efficiency, all of which serve to bolster citizen trust in public institutions and enhance the quality of policies and services. The current study treats governance

⁶ Fukuyama, *State-Building*.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Government at a Glance 2023* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023).

not as a standalone sector, but rather as a governing framework for all institutional reforms.⁹

Accordingly, the study employs the concept of institutional legitimacy to denote the level of trust and acceptance that state institutions enjoy as a result of their ability to perform their functions efficiently, equitably, and transparently. In this view, legitimacy is not merely the product of a legal framework; it is also reinforced by the quality of institutional performance and responsiveness to societal needs.¹⁰

Based on the foregoing, the study treats durable stability as a natural outcome of the integration of all these elements. Such stability is not limited to an absence of security disturbances, but rather reflects the state's capacity to maintain its core functions within a framework comprising the rule of law, good governance, economic development, and societal trust. Thus, stability represents an outcome of the state-building process rather than a starting point for it.¹¹

On this basis, the study's analysis rests on the premise that state-building serves as the overarching strategic framework for managing Syria's transitional phase, and that enhancing institutional capacity, consolidating good governance, and building institutional legitimacy constitute key pillars for achieving sustainable stability by 2030.

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Governance for Sustainable Human Development* (New York: UNDP, 1997).

¹⁰ Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011).

1.2: The Five Strategic Pillars of State-Building

State-building proceeds from the premise that sustainable stability is not achieved merely through the cessation of conflict or the adoption of new political arrangements, but rather through the construction of public institutions capable of performing their core functions with efficiency, legitimacy, and continuity. Therefore, the transitional phase is not an end in itself, but rather a temporal, institutional framework for re-establishing the state on foundations that ensure its capacity to meet the demands of security, development, justice, and the rule of law.

This vision holds particular significance in the Syrian context, in which the state-building project faces a complex challenge: the shift from managing the transitional phase to establishing a modern state grounded in stable institutions capable of managing a diverse society, protecting rights, promoting development, and fostering trust between state and society. Consequently, the success of the transitional phase will be measured not merely by its ability to address immediate challenges, but by the extent to which it contributes to building institutions capable of enduring beyond that phase.

Based on this perspective, the study proposes an analytical framework resting on five strategic pillars, which collectively constitute the necessary conditions for state-building throughout the transition. The study views these pillars not as isolated sectors, but as an interconnected system wherein each element influences the others. Thus, the failure of any single element undermines the effectiveness of the entire system. These pillars are as follows:

1. State Sovereignty, Security, and the Rule of Law

State sovereignty serves as the foundation for all other state functions. State institutions cannot perform their duties, enforce the law, or deliver services when multiple power centers are at play, or in the absence of a public authority capable of monopolizing the legitimate use of force in accordance with the law. Modern literature therefore regards security and the rule of law as the institutional gateway via which the state can exercise its other functions and achieve stability.¹² World Bank studies confirm that an absence of the rule of law remains the primary

¹² World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

obstacle to sustainable reform in post-conflict states, even when resources and political will are present.¹³

However, security in the modern state is not limited to maintaining public order or confronting security threats. It is also linked to the existence of a legal and institutional framework that ensures that the law applies to all without discrimination, protects rights and freedoms, and subjects law enforcement agencies to legal accountability and institutional oversight.

In the Syrian context, this pillar requires completing the construction of a unified national security sector operating within the framework of the state, strengthening integration between security and judicial institutions, and developing capabilities for border management and the fight against terrorism and organized crime—all of which serve to consolidate state sovereignty and bolster citizens' trust in state institutions.

This pillar is not merely a sectoral objective; it constitutes the fundamental prerequisite for implementing the remaining reforms in the political, administrative, and economic spheres.

2. Legitimacy and Institutions

The modern state derives its stability not merely from the existence of formal institutions, but from its ability to gain legitimacy through the quality of its performance, the fairness of its decisions, and its commitment to the rule of law. Institutional legitimacy is not built on legal texts alone; rather, it is reinforced when citizens trust that institutions are serving the public interest efficiently and impartially.¹⁴

Consequently, institution-building during the transitional phase is not limited to reorganizing administrative structures or enacting legislation. It also extends to consolidating an institutional culture, clarifying institutional mandates, strengthening the independence of state authorities, and developing oversight and accountability mechanisms—all of which serve to curb the personalization of power and ensure that institutions become the governing framework for the relationship between state and society.

¹³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

¹⁴ North et al, *Violence and Social Orders*.

The literature on democratic transitions distinguishes between the legitimacy of transitional arrangements—which derive their strength from the consensus and exigencies of the moment of transition—and established constitutional and electoral legitimacy, which is achieved only through the completion of the foundational process: the passing of a permanent constitution with popular approval, periodic competitive elections based on direct suffrage, and political pluralism underpinned by legal regulation. In this sense, the transition is not completed simply by establishing interim institutions, however efficient they may be. Rather, it is completed only when those very institutions become subject to agreed-upon, permanent constitutional rules.¹⁵

This distinction applies directly to the Syrian context. The current People's Assembly—formed via electoral bodies formed through electoral bodies whose members have the exclusive right to run for office, and with one-third of members appointed by the President—represents a transitional arrangement that is acceptable based on the logic of necessity and incremental progress. However, it does not preclude the need for a more fundamental step: the election of a constituent assembly to draft a permanent constitution for public referendum, followed by direct elections for the legislature, local councils, and the presidency. Consequently, the building of institutional legitimacy in Syria is proceeds along two parallel tracks: improving the performance of existing institutions, on the one hand, and completing the constitutional and electoral processes that provide these institutions with a permanent foundation, on the other.

In this context, completing the constitutional and legislative framework, strengthening the independence of the judiciary, and ensuring the neutrality of public administrative bodies all constitute essential pillars for building the kind of sustainable institutional legitimacy that can underpin political and social stability.

3. Governance and Public Administration

A state's ability to implement its policies is directly linked to the efficiency of its public administration and the quality of its governance. Regardless of how ambitious reforms may be, their impact will remain limited if they lack institutions capable of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

¹⁵ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3–15.

Good governance is grounded in principles of transparency, accountability, efficiency, the rule of law, and participation; these principles ensure the sound management of public resources, help improve the quality of services, and bolster public trust in institutions.¹⁶

In this context, developing public administration goes beyond merely modernizing or simplifying procedures. It also demands a shift toward strategic management that embraces long-term planning, performance management, digital transformation, and human resource development, while linking public policies to measurable outcomes. This pillar serves as the implementation mechanism that translates the national vision into actionable public policies and ensures the sustainability of the reform process.

4. A Productive Economy and Sustainable Development

Comparative experience indicates that state-building remains incomplete in the absence of an economy capable of generating jobs, improving living standards, and securing the resources needed to fund public services and invest in development. Thus, a productive economy is a key pillar for sustaining stability, rather than merely an outcome thereof.¹⁷ This vision aligns with the global trend embodied in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which link economic development with social justice and resource sustainability.¹⁸

Bringing this vision to fruition requires a shift from short-term recovery policies toward building a productive economy based on diversifying sources of income, encouraging investment, supporting productive sectors, enhancing the efficiency of public finances, and strengthening the role of the private sector—all of which can contribute to sustainable economic growth.

Furthermore, reconstruction programs must be managed according to principles of transparency, accountability, and competition. This ensures that resources are directed toward development priorities and bolsters the confidence of citizens, investors, and international partners in state institutions.

¹⁶ UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Human Development*.

¹⁷ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

¹⁸ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

5. Societal Trust and the Social Contract

Building trust between the state and society remains the decisive factor in the success of any state-building project. Regardless of their efficiency, institutions cannot function in a stable way if they lack the trust of citizens, or if societal divisions continue to undermine their legitimacy.¹⁹

From this perspective, the transitional phase offers an opportunity to rebuild the social contract based on equal citizenship, respect for rights and freedoms, the rule of law, participation in public affairs, and equality of opportunities. This fosters a sense of national belonging and establishes the state as an inclusive framework for shared interests.

This pillar also requires addressing the social consequences of the conflict through legal and institutional processes. These include protecting property rights, facilitating the return of displaced persons and refugees (when conditions permit), fostering community dialogue, and supporting local initiatives that help restore trust and rebuild social capital. Transitional justice lies at the heart of this pillar. By established definition, it is a comprehensive system that encompasses uncovering the truth and ensuring accountability, reparation, memory preservation, institutional reform, and guarantees of non-recurrence—rather than merely carrying out criminal trials.²⁰

Comparative experience confirms that overlooking transitional justice or deferring it until after stability is achieved turns the equation upside down. Durable stability does not precede justice, but is built upon it. Accordingly, leaving major grievances institutionally unaddressed turns them into latent fuel for new cycles of violence, and undermines the trust essential to the new social contract. Consequently, this study treats transitional justice as a direct investment in both civil peace and state legitimacy, and dedicates a distinct track to it within the priorities for national reform laid out in Chapter 4.²¹

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2023/2024* (New York: UNDP, 2024).

²⁰ Ruti G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); see also: United Nations Security Council, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2004/616 (23 August 2004).

²¹ United Nations Security Council, *The Rule of Law*, paragraphs 2–8.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has proposed an analytical framework, based on five strategic pillars that constitute the fundamental prerequisites for state-building during the transitional period: state sovereignty and the rule of law, institutional legitimacy, governance and public administration, a productive economy, and societal trust. The study emphasizes that these pillars do not operate in isolation; rather, they form an integrated system in which the success of each element depends on the effectiveness of the others.

Building on this framework, the next chapter moves to assess the current situation of the Syrian state and analyze the structural challenges hindering the consolidation of these pillars, thereby paving the way for the development of a strategic vision that outlines priorities for reform until 2030.

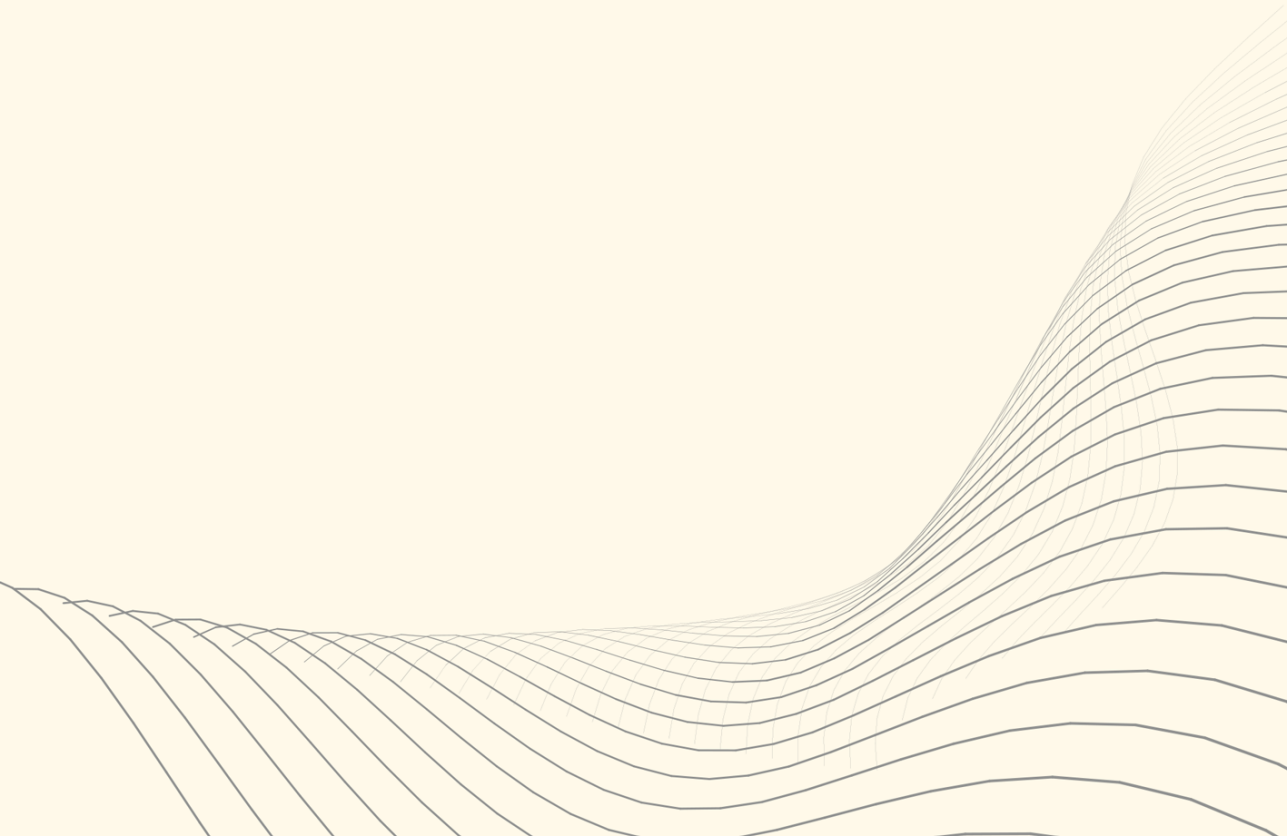
Strategic Pillars of State-Building





Chapter 2:

Restoring State Functions: An Analysis of Institutional Gaps



Introduction

The capacity of a modern state is not measured by the mere existence of its formal institutions or the reach of its administrative apparatus, but rather by its success in performing the public functions that underpin the relationship between state and society. A capable state is one that can provide security, administer justice, deliver public services, manage the economy, and build sustainable legitimacy through the quality of its institutional performance, rather than through legal texts or raw power alone.²²

These functions take on heightened importance in states undergoing transitions. Ending conflict or restructuring a system of political authority is insufficient to achieve stability unless state institutions can regain the capacity to perform their core functions consistently and effectively. Comparative experience indicates that the stalling of transitions is often linked to a persistent gap between the nominal existence of state institutions and their actual ability to exercise their mandates and meet citizens' aspirations.²³

Building on the analytical framework presented in the previous chapter, this chapter employs institutional gap analysis to evaluate five key state functions: security, justice, public services, economic management, and the building of legitimacy. This is not intended to provide a detailed description of the situation in Syria, but to identify the key institutional gaps that must be addressed to make state-building a feasible process during the transition.

²² Fukuyama, *State-Building*.

²³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

2.1: The Security Function

Security is the foundational function of the state. It creates the environment that enables other institutions to exercise their mandates, and establishes the necessary conditions for the protection of rights, stimulation of economic activity, and implementation of public policies. However, the concept of security in the modern state extends beyond merely controlling crime or confronting armed threats; it encompasses the state's capacity to uphold the rule of law, maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, secure the borders, and safeguard rights and freedoms, within a stable legal and institutional framework.²⁴

In the Syrian context, the security environment has undergone significant transformations since the onset of the transitional phase. Yet completing the process of building the security function still requires shifting from a mindset of managing immediate security challenges to that of building a professional security sector that operates according to clear institutional rules, is subject to legal accountability, and performs its duties in adherence to the constitution and the law.

This entails unifying security and military institutions under a single national structure, developing command-and-control systems, enhancing coordination between security agencies and the judiciary, improving the effectiveness of border management, and combating terrorism and organized crime—all of which strengthen the state's ability to enforce the law equitably vis-à-vis all its citizens.

The Performance Gap

The primary gap regarding security lies not in the persistence of security challenges per se, but in the need to transition from mere security management to security governance. This means building a security sector grounded in professionalism, a unified command, the rule of law, and institutional oversight, thereby transforming it into a source of public legitimacy rather than just a tool for maintaining order.

²⁴ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*, 2–21.

2.2: The Justice Function

Justice constitutes the framework through which the state regulates its relationship with society, ensuring protection of rights, resolution of disputes, enforcement of the law, and consolidation of the principle of equality before the law.

Consequently, the role of the judiciary extends beyond merely adjudicating disputes; it encompasses fostering trust in institutions, supporting political and social stability, and consolidating the state's legal legitimacy.²⁵

This function takes on particular importance during the transitional phase, given the challenges it entails in terms of rebuilding trust in the institutions of justice, modernizing legislation, strengthening judicial independence, and improving access to justice—all to ensure the protection of rights and freedoms for all citizens.

There is also a pressing need to address issues stemming from years of conflict within a legal and institutional framework. This includes resolving property disputes, addressing the needs of victims, and linking processes of transitional justice to national judicial institutions in a manner that preserves the unity of the legal system and avoids a duplication of mandates. A foundational step in this direction was taken with the establishment of the National Commission for Transitional Justice and the National Commission for the Missing—pursuant to Decrees 20 and 19 of 2025, respectively—as independent bodies possessing legal personalities and financial and administrative autonomy.²⁶

However, this process remains in its formative stages and faces three gaps that must be clearly acknowledged. First is the absence of a transitional justice law defining the Commission's mandate, competencies, and relationship with the judiciary; ongoing trials of Assad regime figures still rely on a hybrid legal framework based on the general Penal Code. Second is the fact that the Commission's mandate, as set out in its establishing decree, is limited to violations committed by the former regime—a restriction that has drawn documented criticism from human rights groups advocating for the inclusion of all victims, regardless of the perpetrator. Third is the need for effective, victim-centered consultative mechanisms, as stipulated in the Constitutional Declaration itself.²⁷

²⁵ North et al, *Violence and Social Orders*.

²⁶ Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decrees No. 20 and No. 19 of 2025.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Syrian Transitional Justice Commission: A Missed Opportunity for Victim-Centered Justice*, May 20, 2025 (in Arabic). See also: International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), "ICTJ Welcomes

The Performance Gap

The primary gap here lies in the transition from a justice system that merely responds to disputes after they occur to one that sustainably fosters trust and the rule of law. This requires developing the judiciary into an independent and effective institution capable of protecting rights and bolstering institutional legitimacy, rather than simply adjudicating disputes. Regarding transitional justice specifically, the gap lies in the need to shift from a system based on decrees to one grounded in law; in other words, transforming existing bodies from temporary arrangements into a comprehensive legislative and judicial framework centered on and inclusive of all victims, and organically linked to the national judiciary.

2.3: The Public Service Function

Public services represent the most visible face of the state in citizens' daily lives, directly reflecting the efficiency of public institutions and their capacity to meet society's fundamental needs. This function extends beyond merely providing electricity, water, education, and healthcare and transport, to encompass ensuring the continuity, equitable distribution, quality, and accessibility of these services. This in turn reinforces citizens' trust in the state and solidifies its role as the entity responsible for upholding the public interest.²⁸

During the transitional phase, the Syrian state faces accumulated challenges in this sector due to damage to infrastructure, disparities in service levels across regions, pressing demand for basic services, and limited financial and human resources. Furthermore, improving services is not merely a matter of increasing public spending; it relies more heavily on developing public administration, improved planning, improving the efficiency of spending, and fostering administrative decentralization—all measures that facilitate a more effective response to local needs while maintaining state unity.

In this context, public services should be viewed as a tool for rebuilding the relationship between the state and the citizen. Service quality is a key practical indicator of successful institutional reform, while also contributing to social stability and mitigating developmental disparities between regions.

Establishment of Syria's New National Commissions for Transitional Justice and the Missing," Press Release, May 22, 2025.

²⁸ UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Human Development*.

The Performance Gap

The primary gap in this regard lies in the transition from service *management* to service *governance*—shifting the focus from merely operating public facilities to building an institutional system in which the efficiency of government bodies is measured by their ability to achieve quantifiable results, improve service quality, and boost public satisfaction.

2.4: The Economic Management Function

The economic role of the modern state is no longer limited to managing public resources or controlling financial indicators. Instead, it involves building an institutional environment that enables sustainable economic growth, supports investment, production, and innovation, creates job opportunities, and ensures fair competition and the protection of public funds. Consequently, the quality of economic management serves as a crucial indicator of the state's capacity to achieve development and foster social stability.²⁹

In the Syrian context, economic priorities during the transition phase include restoring confidence in the national economy, improving the business environment, reforming public finances, stabilizing economic policies, revitalizing productive sectors, and developing infrastructure. These measures all aim to facilitate a gradual shift from a recovery-focused economy to one driven by production and sustainable growth.

This phase also requires the management of reconstruction programs within a clear national framework that directs resources toward development priorities, fosters transparency and competition, and links investment to rebuilding the state's productive capacity rather than merely addressing immediate needs.

The Performance Gap

In Syria, the primary gap in this regard lies in the need to transition from an economy managed through the logic of crisis response to one driven by long-term development policies—policies grounded in institutional stability, the encouragement of productive investment, strengthened public-private partnerships, and efficient public resource management.

²⁹ World Bank, World Development Report 2017: *Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

2.5: The Legitimacy-Building Function

Legitimacy represents the ultimate outcome of a state's ability to perform its core functions. It is not built solely through political decrees or constitutional provisions. Rather, it is formed cumulatively through the capacity of institutions to ensure security, deliver justice and services, manage the economy efficiently, and respond to citizens' aspirations. Consequently, institutional legitimacy is as much a result of the quality of public performance as it reflects legal validity.³⁰

In the Syrian context, the process of building legitimacy takes on exceptional importance during the transitional phase, as it forms the foundation for public trust and the stability of the institutional system. This necessitates developing channels for public participation, enhancing transparency, bolstering accountability, and improving institutional communication—all of which serve to reinforce the citizen's sense that state institutions are credible and operate according to fair rules.

Building legitimacy also requires fostering national dialogue, respecting societal diversity, enshrining the principle of equal citizenship, and establishing a legal and institutional environment that enables participation in public life within the framework of the rule of law.

2.6: Political Representation and Participation: The Transitional Reality

Accurately assessing the process of building legitimacy requires examining the current structure of political representation as it actually exists, rather than as one might wish it to be. The current People's Assembly was formed under an interim electoral system, and comprises 210 members. Of these, 140 were elected indirectly via electoral bodies, which were themselves selected through sub-committees, with candidacy restricted to members of those bodies. The remaining third (70 members) were appointed by the President of the Republic to address gaps in representation and ensure the inclusion of qualified individuals.³¹ The election results revealed clear gaps in representation—most notably the low number of women among elected members and limited representation of certain

³⁰ North et al, *Violence and Social Orders*.

³¹ Syrian Arab Republic, Presidential Decree No. 143 of 2025; Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, Article 24.

segments of society—alongside the postponement of voting in several constituencies for security reasons, with the process subsequently completed in stages extending into 2026.³²

This study does not dismiss these arrangements out of hand. They represent a pragmatic response to exceptional circumstances that made holding a reliable direct vote impossible in the immediate term (e.g., the absence of updated voter registries, the presence of millions of displaced persons and refugees, and varying security conditions among different regions of Syria). However, accepting them as a matter of necessity does not imply that they should become a permanent model. The current Assembly's term is limited to 30 months, and its most critical foundational task—beyond passing legislation—is to establish the legal and institutional conditions for a transition to direct representation. This entails passing laws on general elections and political parties, paving the way for regulated political pluralism; establishing an independent electoral commission; and creating a national voter registry that includes displaced persons and refugees.

This same assessment applies to the local level; local administration continues to operate through appointed councils and transitional arrangements under the legal framework inherited from the previous regime (Law No. 107 of 2011), in the absence of local elections. Yet elected local councils serve as the primary training ground for political participation, a practical gateway to consolidating administrative decentralization while maintaining state unity, and the most direct indicator of a shifting relationship between the authorities and citizens in their daily lives.

The Performance Gap

The primary gap under this theme lies in a dual transition: from a legitimacy based on the prevailing political reality and the arrangements necessitated by the transition, to a legitimacy drawn from two sources—institutional performance, on the one hand, and a direct popular mandate derived from a permanent constitution approved by referendum and direct legislative and local elections, on the other. While effective performance can earn institutions acceptance, only direct elections confer them a mandate. Legitimacy is complete only when both elements are present.

³² Jusoor Center for Studies, *Syrian People's Assembly Elections: Analysis of Results and Projections for the Remaining Rounds*, October 2025 (in Arabic).

Chapter Summary

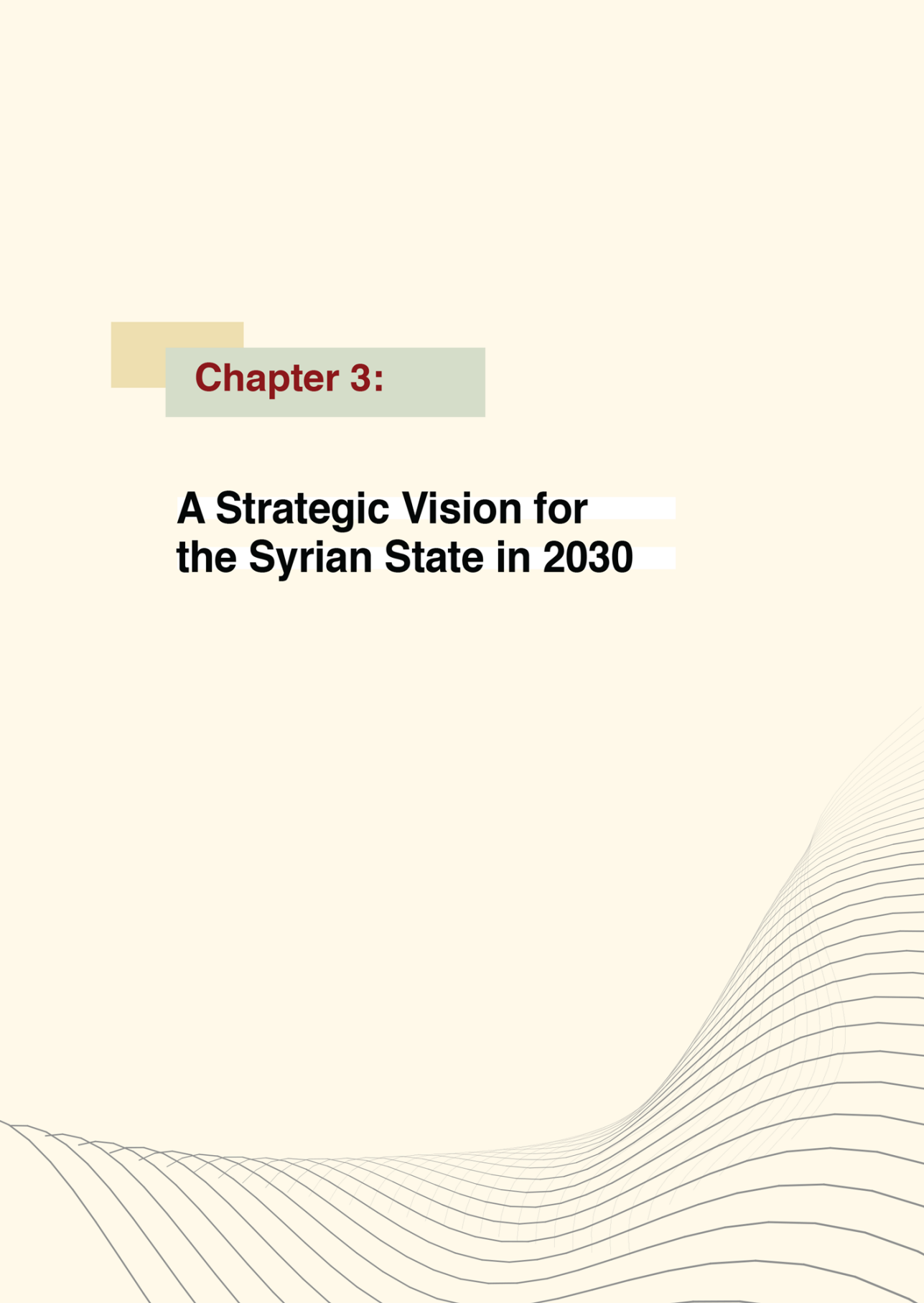
This chapter has demonstrated that the challenge facing Syria during the transition lies not so much in the multiplicity of crises as in the existence of institutional gaps that limit the state's ability to fully perform its core functions. The above analysis reveals that security, justice, public services, economic management, and legitimacy-building are not isolated issues but interconnected functions, and that the success of each depends on the effectiveness of the others.

This assessment underscores that state-building does not begin with treating symptoms, but rather by narrowing the institutional gaps that hinder the state from performing its public functions. Consequently, a transition to the phase of reform requires a strategic vision that goes beyond merely setting general goals. It must define the desired state model, operational priorities, implementation mechanisms, and progress indicators.

Building on this assessment, the next chapter addresses the study's central question: What kind of state should Syria build by 2030? It will do so by formulating the strategic vision that will guide reform trajectories in the coming period.

Organizational Performance Gap Analysis





Chapter 3:

A Strategic Vision for the Syrian State in 2030

Introduction

The previous chapter concluded that the primary challenge facing Syria lies not in the number of simultaneous crises it faces, nor the complexity of reform agendas, but rather in institutional gaps that limit the state's ability to perform its core functions efficiently and sustainably. Overcoming these gaps will require a shift from a mindset of managing daily challenges to adopting a strategic vision that defines the form of the state to be built and steers public policies toward clear, integrated goals.

This strategic vision is neither a program for government nor a detailed plan for implementation. Rather, it is a national framework that lays out a general direction for reform, provides a shared reference for decision-makers, and helps coordinate government and societal efforts toward long-term objectives. International experience indicates that nations that successfully navigate transitional periods are those with a clear vision of the state they seek to build, and which consistently align their day-to-day policies with that vision.³³

Accordingly, this study proposes a strategic vision for the Syrian state until 2030. Grounded in the findings of the diagnostic analysis above, this vision aims to build a capable, legitimate, and effective state with institutions equipped to drive development and cement sustainable stability.

³³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

3.1: The Vision

“A unified, sovereign Syrian state capable of performing its functions efficiently and equitably, based on the rule of law and good governance, and with institutions that enjoy the trust of its citizens, thereby achieving sustainable stability and comprehensive development by 2030.”

This vision reflects a conception of the state as a public institution that serves society, is governed by established constitutional and legal rules, and exercises its functions through competent and accountable institutions. It is also premised on the understanding that state-building is not limited to rehabilitating existing institutions, but extends to developing their capacity to respond to economic, social, and technological transformations, thereby ensuring the sustainability of reform.

3.2: The Mission

The state’s mission during the transitional phase is to lead a comprehensive institutional reform process that restores the state’s core functions, enhances the quality of public administration, consolidates the rule of law, supports a productive economy, and expands societal participation—all in a manner that serves the public interest and preserves the state’s unity and sovereignty.

This mission presupposes that the state’s success will be measured by its ability to build effective institutions, formulate balanced public policies, manage resources efficiently, and achieve tangible results that the citizen can feel.

3.3 Guiding Principles of the Vision

This vision is grounded in a set of principles intended to guide all policies and reforms during the transitional phase, namely:

1. State Unity and Sovereignty

State unity and sovereignty constitute the framework within which all subsequent reforms are organized, ensuring the unity of public institutions, respect for the law, the protection of national sovereignty, and preventing the emergence of parallel power centers that compete with state institutions.

2. The Rule of Law

All authorities and individuals are subject to the law without discrimination, in order to foster trust in institutions, protects rights and freedoms, and ensure equality before the judiciary.

3. Good Governance

State institutions commit to the principles of transparency, accountability, efficiency, participation, and responsiveness to the public interest, thereby enhancing the quality of public policies and improving the use of resources.

4. Sustainable Development

Economic and social policies are directed toward building a productive economy, ensuring equitable distribution of opportunities, and boosting investment in human capital and infrastructure in order to guarantee sustainable growth in keeping with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.³⁴

5. Community Partnership

The state-building process is built on cooperation among state institutions, civil society, the private sector, universities, and research centers, thus broadening the base of national participation and fostering societal ownership of the reforms.

³⁴ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

3.4: The Overarching Strategic Goal

The overarching strategic goal of this vision is to build a state capable of performing its core functions efficiently and sustainably. It aims to transform state institutions into effective entities grounded in institutional legitimacy, enabling them to bring about security, justice, and development, while bolstering public trust and consolidating stability over the long term.

This goal is not merely sectoral; rather, it serves as a comprehensive framework that encompasses the five strategic goals below.

3.5: Strategic Goals for the Syrian State through 2030

The strategic vision proposed here builds on the conviction that the success of the transitional phase cannot be measured by the completion of isolated reforms, but rather by the state's ability to drive through a comprehensive institutional transformation that impacts its core functions and its relationship with society. Accordingly, this study identifies five interconnected strategic goals that form the governing framework for all public policies during the 2026–2030 period.

Goal 1: Building a Capable and Effective State

The first goal entails restoring the ability of state institutions to perform their core functions efficiently and sustainably, by developing public administration, strengthening institutional capacities, improving the quality of public policies, and enhancing the efficiency of their implementation.

This requires a shift from a style of administration that reacts to problems after they occur, to a proactive approach grounded in strategic planning, risk management, and performance measurement, thereby enabling state institutions better to adapt to changes and respond to challenges.

Goal 2: Consolidating the Rule of Law and Strengthening Institutional Legitimacy

This goal centers on establishing a legal and institutional framework that ensures that all authorities and individuals are subject to the law, reinforces the independence of the judiciary, and guarantees equality before the law, thereby fostering public trust in state institutions.

It also aims to develop oversight and accountability mechanisms, improve the quality of legislation, and bolster the principles of integrity and transparency, in

order to ensure that institutional legitimacy stems from high-quality performance and respect for the law, rather than from momentary considerations or the dynamics of political power.

At its core, this goal encompasses the steps that complete the state-building process: the election of a constituent assembly to draft a permanent constitution, subject to a public referendum; the holding of direct legislative and local elections in accordance with the new constitution; passing the legislative framework governing political life, first and foremost the laws governing political parties and general elections; then the holding of a presidential election in accordance with the provisions of the permanent constitution's provisions regarding the form of government, the mechanism for selecting the President, and his presidential term, in order to complete the transition of all state institutions—legislative, local, and presidential—from the legitimacy of transitional arrangements to permanent constitutional and electoral legitimacy, prior to the conclusion of the transitional period.

Goal 3: Building a Sustainable, Productive Economy

Stability cannot take root within an economy incapable of generating job opportunities or funding public services. Therefore, the vision aims to build a productive economy capable of achieving sustained growth, diversifying income sources, improving the investment environment, and enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy.

This requires developing infrastructure, improving the business climate, reforming public finances, encouraging innovation, and strengthening public-private partnerships, all while striking a balance between economic efficiency and social justice.

Goal 4: Strengthening Social Capital and Public Trust

This goal aims to rebuild the relationship between the state and society based on trust, equal citizenship, participation, and respect for rights and freedoms.

Achieving it requires more than just political rhetoric: it necessitates improving the quality of public services, ensuring justice, opening channels for participation, and fostering national dialogue—thereby contributing to the restoration of the social fabric and the strengthening of national belonging.

Goal 5: Consolidating Governance and Institutional Sustainability

The fifth goal entails building an institutional system capable of enduring and evolving, by consolidating the principles of good governance across all state institutions, adopting results-based management, advancing digital transformation, developing human resources, and linking planning with continuous evaluation.

In doing so, governance becomes the overarching framework for all reform processes and a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of achievements beyond the transitional phase.

3.6: Pillars of Strategic Transformation

To achieve the aforementioned goals, this study proposes six pillars for institutional transformation, representing the primary focal areas of work leading up to 2030:

- **Constitutional and Political Transformation:** Completing foundational milestones, from passing a permanent constitution to holding direct elections and ensuring organized pluralism.
- **Institutional Transformation:** Developing the structure of state institutions and enhancing their efficiency.
- **Legal Transformation:** Modernizing the legislative framework and strengthening the rule of law.
- **Economic Transformation:** Transitioning toward a productive and competitive economy.
- **Societal Transformation:** Fostering participation, trust, and social capital.
- **Administrative and Digital Transformation:** Modernizing public administration and adopting digital technologies for service and policy management.

These pillars interact in an integrated manner, whereby each reinforces the success of the others, thereby ensuring the coherence of the reform process and preventing it from fragmenting into isolated sectoral initiatives.

3.7: Strategic Success Indicators

To ensure the vision remains measurable, the study proposes a set of qualitative indicators to guide the monitoring of progress through 2030. These draw upon international methodologies for measuring the performance of government,³⁵ and they include:

- The passing of laws on political parties, general elections, and local administration, with their impact measured by the number of parties licensed and by voter turnout at polls.
- The passing of a law on transitional justice, along progress on transitional justice itself, measured by the number of cases resolved in terms of fact-finding, reparation, and determining the fate of the missing.
- Increased capacity of state institutions to perform their core functions.
- Improved efficiency of public administration and quality of government services.
- Strengthened judicial independence and the rule of law.
- An improved investment environment and increased contribution of productive sectors to the national economy.
- Higher levels of public trust in institutions.
- Expanded application of the principles of governance, transparency, and accountability.
- Improved institutional coordination among authorities and public administrations.
- Adoption of a permanent constitution via a general popular referendum, the holding of legislative and local elections by direct vote in accordance with that constitution, and the completion of the presidential transition under the same.

While these indicators do not constitute a detailed framework for performance measurement, they serve as strategic benchmarks to guide the design of executive programs and the monitoring of their outcomes.

³⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Government at a Glance 2023* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023).

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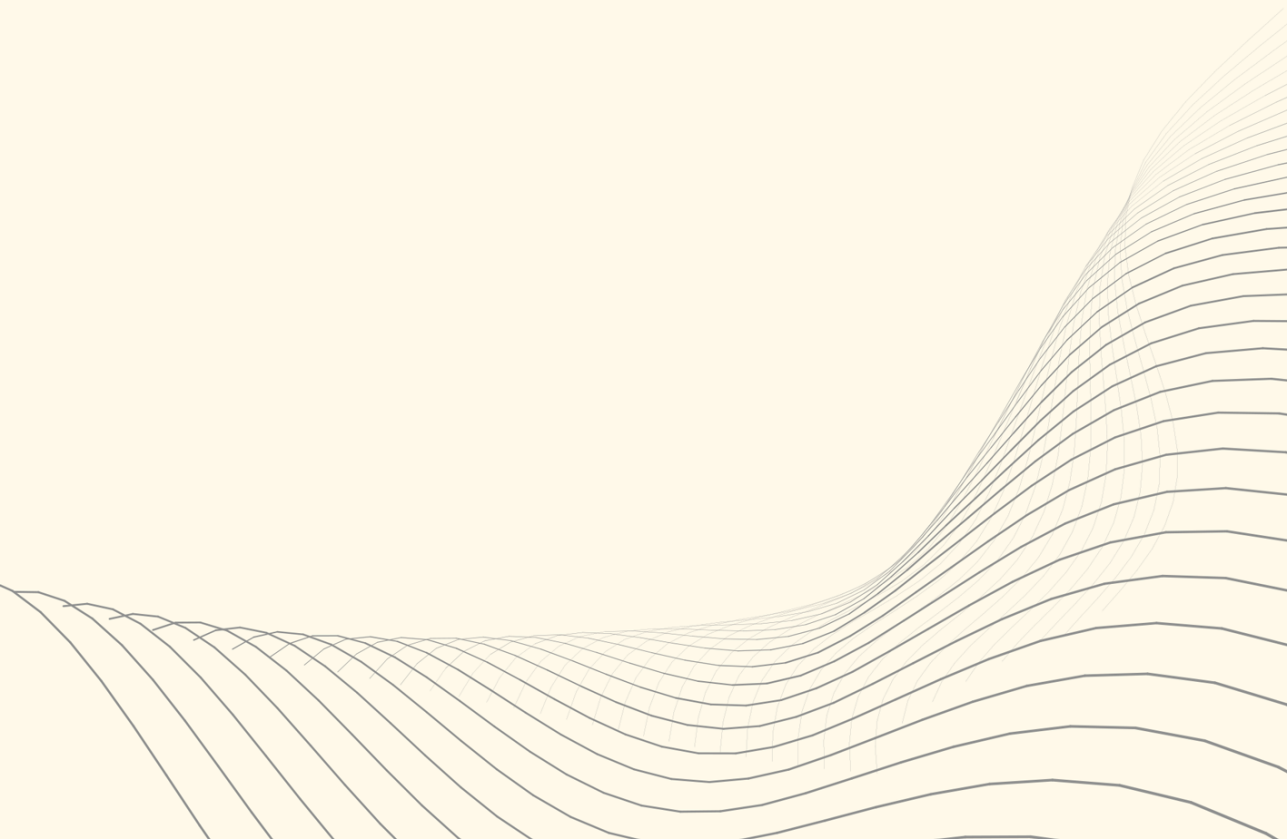
This chapter has presented the strategic vision underpinning the study for building the Syrian state through 2030, outlining the desired model of the state, its guiding principles, strategic goals, pillars of transformation, and indicators of success. This vision affirms that state-building is neither a sectoral project nor solely a transitional measure, but rather an integrated institutional process aimed at enhancing the state's capacity to perform its functions, consolidating the rule of law, achieving development, and rebuilding trust between the state and society.

Building on this vision, the next chapter moves to the level of implementation, by identifying national reform priorities and the public policies needed to translate this vision into programs that can be carried out during the transitional phase.



Chapter 4:

National Reform Priorities and Pathways for Transformation



Introduction

The previous chapter laid out a vision for the Syrian state by 2030, by formulating a strategic approach based on building capable and effective institutions, establishing the rule of law, strengthening governance, and achieving sustainable development. However, the success of that vision depends on translating it into practical priorities that guide public policy and identify the most urgent areas for reform during the transitional phase.

Comparative experiences indicate that countries emerging from conflict rarely achieve positive outcomes when attempting to reform all sectors simultaneously; rather, success comes from setting clear priorities, implementing them incrementally, and linking institutional, economic, and social reforms within a unified strategic framework.³⁶

Accordingly, this study proposes seven main pathways for reform, representing national priorities during the transitional phase and translating its strategic vision into integrated areas of action. In presenting these pathways, the study is careful to link the general with the specific: each pathway is guided by a core principle derived from the above analytical framework, and entails specific, achievable, and measurable deliverables that are achievable within the transitional timeframe.

³⁶ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*.

4.1: Institutional Reform

Institutional reform serves as the starting point for all the other pathways of transformation, because the success of any public policy is tied to the existence of institutions capable of planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation. This pathway requires reorganizing public administration, modernizing organizational structures, developing human resources, enhancing institutional efficiency, rebuilding strategic planning systems, and linking performance to indicators and results. These measures aim to embed a culture of institutional action and minimize the overlap of competencies.

This pathway also includes developing local administration in a way that strengthens its capacity to manage services and address development needs, all while upholding state unity and national policy frameworks.

4.2: Judicial Reform and the Rule of Law

Sustainable stability cannot be achieved in the absence of an independent and effective justice system that guarantees the protection of rights and impartial application of the law. Therefore, reforming the justice sector represents one of the most important national priorities during the transitional phase.

This track includes modernizing legislation, reinforcing judicial independence, enhancing the efficiency of courts and public prosecution offices, improving access to justice, and strengthening legal oversight mechanisms—all of which contribute to building confidence in judicial institutions.

It also includes completing the legal framework necessary to support economic and administrative reform, thereby ensuring legislative stability and enhancing confidence in the institutional environment.

4.3: Reforming Economic Management

Economic recovery represents one of the fundamental conditions for the sustainability of institutional reform. However, this study proceeds from the premise that the priority is not merely to achieve rapid economic growth, but rather to build economic institutions capable of managing development efficiently and sustainably.

This requires reforming public finances, improving the business environment, simplifying investment procedures, developing tax policies, strengthening transparency in public resource management, and encouraging productive sectors in a way that contribute to increasing job opportunities and enhancing the national economy's competitiveness. Reconstruction programs should also be linked to long-term development plans and subject to clear standards of accountability and economic efficiency.

4.4: Public Service Development

The quality of public services is the most direct measure for gauging the impact of reforms on citizens' lives. Therefore, efforts should be directed toward improving the quality of services rather than merely restoring them to their previous levels.

This entails modernizing the education, health, water, energy, and transport sectors; adopting digital administration; developing planning and financing systems; and improving spending efficiency to ensure equitable service distribution and boost citizen satisfaction.

The role of local administration in service planning and implementation should be strengthened to accelerate the speed of responses to local needs and to improve the efficiency of government.

4.5: Strengthening Trust and Community Partnership

State-building is incomplete unless it establishes a new relationship between the state and society—one grounded in trust, participation, and shared responsibility.

This pathway requires expanding community participation in public policy formulation, strengthening national dialogue, supporting civil society organizations, and enabling universities and research centers to contribute to policy assessment and development. It also involves enhancing transparency and public access to information to help build trust in institutions.

This priority is a condition for the sustainability of reforms, because it transforms society from a mere recipient of policies into a partner in their formulation and following up on their implementation.

4.6: Completion of Constitutional and Electoral Measures

This pathway represents the direct political manifestation of the principle of institutional legitimacy. In essence, it consists of an orderly transition from the institutions of transitional necessity to the institutions of a permanent constitution. It is not to be viewed as a political file separate from state-building, but rather as the backbone that grants the rest of the reforms their constitutional foundation and popular acceptance.

This path is defined by a clear schedule of milestones aligned with the current People's Assembly's 30-month term, as stipulated in Article 26 of the Constitutional Declaration.³⁷

- The formation of a committee to draft the permanent constitution through a transparent, representative mechanism that considers societal and geographic diversity as well as women's representation, alongside the launch of a parallel national dialogue on major constitutional questions (the form of government, the distribution of powers, and local administration).
- Submission of the draft constitution to a general public referendum once conditions for safe, inclusive voting are met, thereby granting the constitutional document the legitimacy of a direct popular mandate.
- Approval of the legislative framework governing political life during the Assembly's current term, most notably: the political parties' law which regulates pluralism and sets the rules for establishment, funding, and oversight of political parties; a permanent general elections law based on direct suffrage; and the law establishing an independent national electoral commission to manage the electoral roll and oversee all electoral processes.
- The preparation of an updated national voter registry that guarantees the right to vote for internally displaced persons and refugees outside

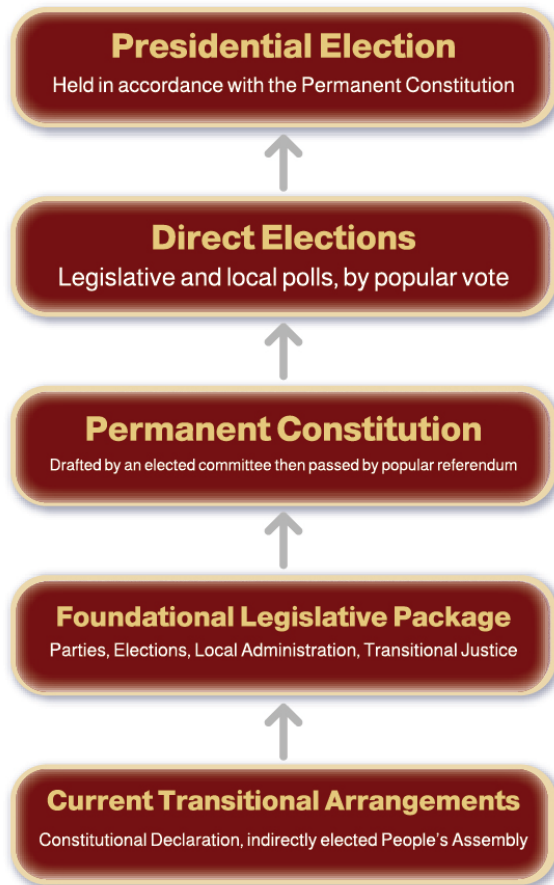
³⁷ Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, Article 26.

Syria, as an indispensable technical prerequisite for any credible direct vote.

- The holding of legislative elections via direct popular vote in accordance with the permanent constitution and the new electoral law, addressing representation gaps revealed during the transitional period—particularly regarding the representation of women and various societal components.
- The holding of a presidential election, according to the permanent constitution's provisions regarding the form of the system of governance, the mechanism for selecting the President of the Republic, the term of office, and the limits of presidential powers. This step crowns the hierarchy of legitimacy and concludes final transitional arrangements within the power structure. The transitional presidency—like the current People's Assembly—is a temporary arrangement mandated by the Constitutional Declaration, and the transition cannot be considered complete until the presidency, too, is brought under the framework of the permanent constitution.
- The issuing of a new local administration law, based on administrative decentralization within the unity of the state, and replacing the inherited framework (Law No. 107 of 2011), to define the powers, financial resources, and central-local relationships of administrative units. Subsequently, local council elections would be held based on this law, serving as a practical pathway toward the localization of services, development, and participation.

This sequence fulfills three complementary functions: it ends the state of constitutional exception within a defined timeframe; it transforms political participation from a general slogan into a specific legal and institutional structure; and it provides the remaining reform pathways with a legitimate umbrella that protects them from disruptions along the way.

National Reform Priorities and Transformation Pathways



4.7: Transitional Justice and Civil Peace

This study proceeds from the premise that transitional justice is not merely a human rights dossier appended to the state-building project, but rather one of its foundational pillars. Transitional justice is the mechanism through which the new state addresses the legacy of violations through institutions, blocking the path of the logic of retribution and parallel systems of justice, and transforming the recognition of victims into the foundation for a new social contract. International standards affirm that this process rests on four interconnected pillars: the right to truth, accountability, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence.³⁸

The formation of the National Transitional Justice Commission and the National Commission for the Missing Persons has provided an important institutional starting point. Transforming this into a comprehensive national process will demand a specific set of measures:

- Enacting a transitional justice law during the current session of the People's Assembly. This law should define the National Commission's mandate, competencies, and relationship with the judiciary; enshrining the inclusiveness of its mandate to cover all victims regardless of the violating party, and establishing the participatory, victim-centered approach in the design and implementation of these processes.
- Establishing specialized judicial chambers within the national justice system to handle conflict-related crimes. These chambers should operate under a clear legal framework that addresses current shortcomings—specifically the reliance solely on the general penal code—while simultaneously building the capacity of judges and prosecutors to handle grave crimes and ensure protection of witnesses.
- Adopting a national reparations program that combines material and symbolic compensation. This program must address violations regarding property, housing, and land rights, as these issues

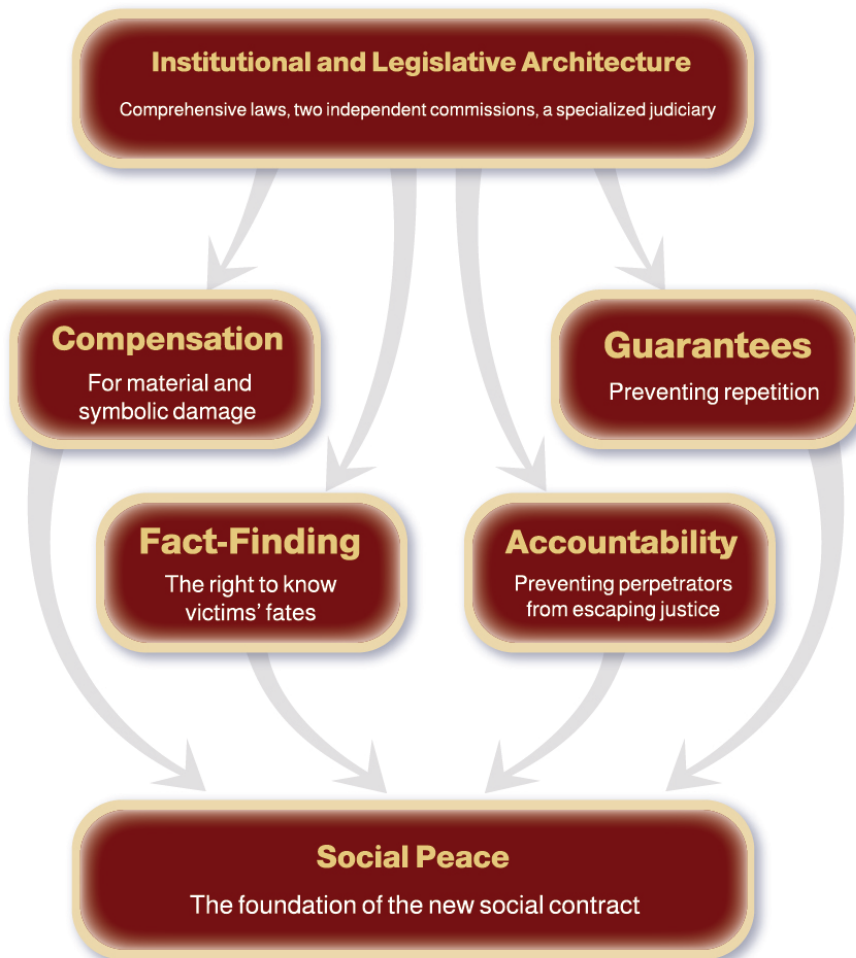
³⁸ United Nations Security Council, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice*.

most directly impact the return of displaced persons and refugees, as well as local civil peace.

- Enabling the National Commission for the Missing People to complete its operational structure, establish a national database, develop forensic capabilities and handle of mass graves in accordance with international standards, as well as protecting such sites from encroachment during reconstruction efforts.
- Launching a national policy for memory preservation and documentation, and linking transitional justice processes with local community reconciliation programs—ensuring that reconciliation does not come at the expense of victims’ rights, nor justice at the expense of social cohesion.

This pathway, alongside the constitutional process, constitutes the two intertwined facets of building legitimacy: the first establishes the legitimacy of the future through the ballot box and the constitution, while the second addresses the past through recognition and redress. Neither can stand without the other.

Strategic Vision Implementation Framework



Chapter Summary

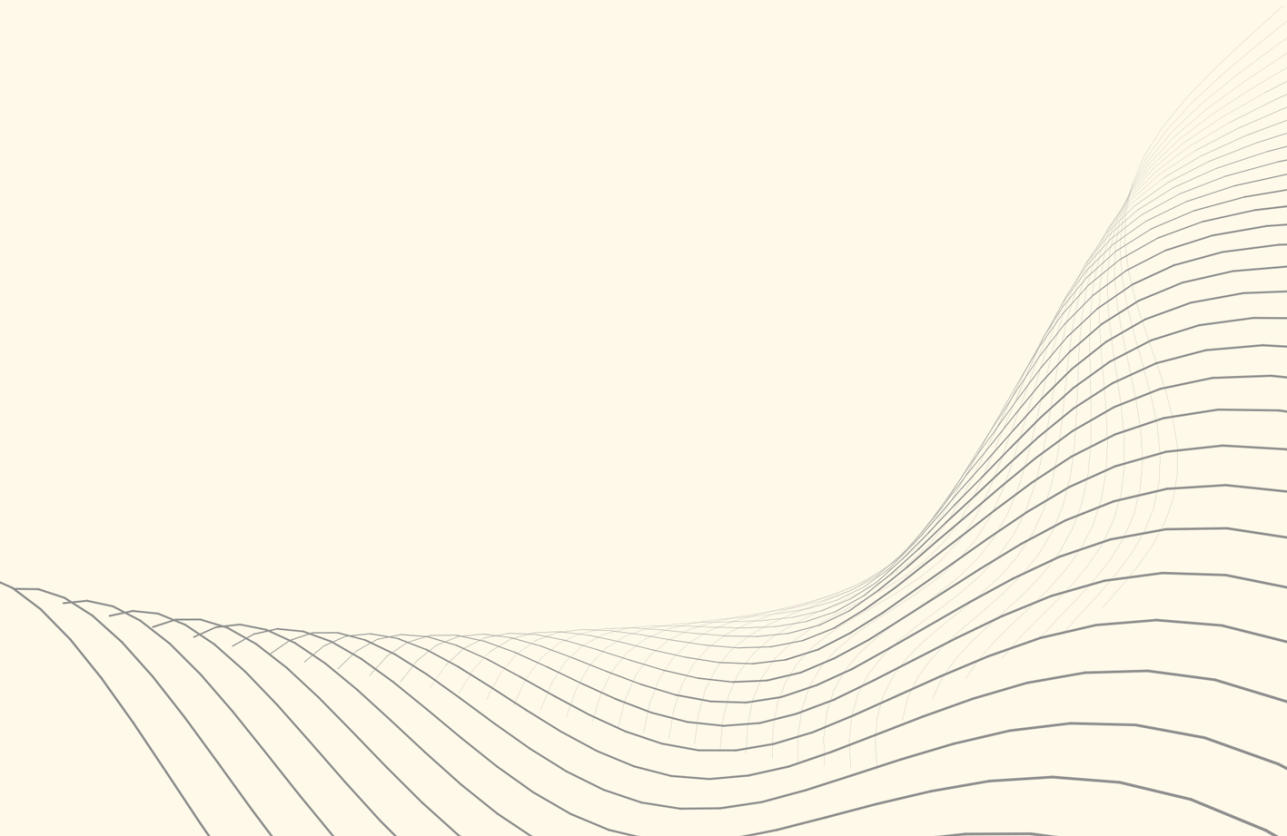
National reform priorities demonstrate that state-building is not achieved through reforming a single sector or implementing isolated programs; rather, it requires integrated pathways that advance in a balanced manner, with each reinforcing the success of the others. These priorities serve as the bridge between the strategic vision and implementation programs, providing a framework to guide public policy during the transitional phase.

Building on these priorities, the next chapter outlines the framework for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It details institutional roles, stages of implementation, performance indicators, and governance mechanisms designed to translate these priorities into measurable outcomes.



Chapter 5:

The Strategic Vision's Implementation Framework and Governance Mechanisms



Introduction

The value of strategic visions lies not merely in the quality of their formulation, but in potential to translate them into actionable public policies and programs for implementation. Comparative experience shows that many reform programs have faltered—not due to weak objectives, but because of a lack of institutional frameworks capable of coordinating their implementation, assigning responsibilities, monitoring performance, and measuring outcomes.³⁹

Accordingly, this study views the implementation of the strategic vision not as the responsibility of a single government body, but as an integrated governance process in which state institutions, local government, the private sector, civil society, and research centers all participate. This process operates within a unified institutional framework that ensures clarity of roles, the integration of efforts, and sustainable reform.

³⁹ World Bank, *World Development Report 2017*.

5.1: Principles for Implementing the Vision

The implementation of the strategic vision is grounded in a set of principles intended to guide all stages of reform, namely:

- Clarity of institutional responsibilities.
- Integration of public policies.
- Gradual, phased implementation.
- Results-based management.
- Transparency and disclosure.
- Institutional accountability.
- Flexibility in dealing with changing circumstances.

These principles constitute a governing framework for all executive programs, ensuring their consistency with the strategic goals outlined in the previous chapter.

5.2: Institutional Governance of Implementation

Implementing the vision will require a system of governance that clearly defines responsibilities, coordinates between institutions, and prevents the overlapping of mandates. This does not necessarily entail creating new structures. Rather, it involves activating existing institutions, enhancing coordination mechanisms among them, and linking planning with implementation and follow up.⁴⁰

In this context, the study proposes distributing responsibilities across four integrated levels:

Level 1: Strategic Leadership. This consists of the high-level bodies responsible for formulating public policies, approving national priorities, and monitoring their implementation.

⁴⁰ UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Human Development*.

Level 2: Ministries and Executive Institutions. Responsible for preparing sectoral programs, implementing policies, managing resources, and submitting periodic performance reports.

Level 3: Local Administration. Responsible for implementing policies at the local level, ensuring responsiveness to the needs of governorates and local communities within the framework of national policies.

Level 4: National Partners. Including the private sector, civil society organizations, universities, and research centers, acting as partners in implementation, advisory services, capacity building, and policy evaluation.

5.3: Phases of Implementation

The study proposes dividing the implementation process into three interconnected phases:

Phase 1: The Institutional and Legislative Foundation (2026)

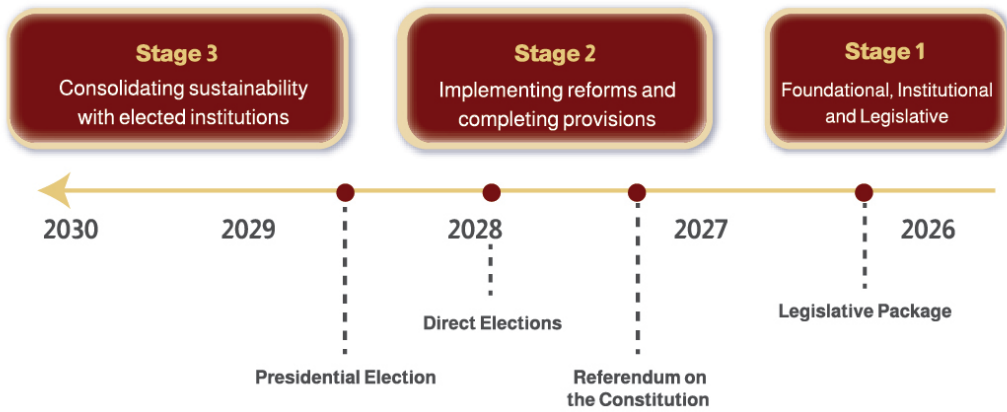
This phase focuses on finalizing priority legislative frameworks during the current session of the People's Assembly—foremost among them the law on political parties, the transitional justice law, the new local administration law, and a law on the independent national electoral commission. It also entails forming a drafting committee for the permanent constitution, establishing coordination mechanisms, defining responsibilities, and launching capacity-building programs.

Phase 2: Implementing Reforms and Fulfilling Key Milestones (2027–2028)

This phase encompasses the implementation of high-priority institutional, economic, and administrative reforms, the improvement of public services, and the enhancement of institutional efficiency. It also covers major foundational milestones: a national referendum on the permanent constitution, followed by direct legislative and local elections in accordance with it and the completion of the presidential election process as stipulated therein—all aligned with the expiration of the 30-month term of the interim People's Assembly.

Phase 3: Consolidating Sustainability (2029–2030)

This phase aims to embed reforms under the newly elected constitutional institutions, evaluate outcomes, address emerging challenges, and complete long-term transitional justice programs (such as reparations, memory preservation, and resolving the issue of missing persons). It also seeks to ensure the transition of state institutions into a phase of stable operation.



5.4: Risk Management During Implementation

Major reform programs entail a degree of uncertainty, necessitating risk management as an integral part of the implementation process, rather than a reactive response to problems.

Therefore, all implementation programs should include periodic assessments of potential risks, analyses of their impacts, and the development of contingency plans. These steps strengthen the ability of institutions to maintain the reform trajectory in the face of changing circumstances.

5.5: Monitoring and Evaluation

This study promotes the principle of results-based management, whereby the effectiveness of reforms is measured by actual outcomes, rather than the number of activities implemented or resources utilized.

Accordingly, a system for monitoring and evaluation should be based on:

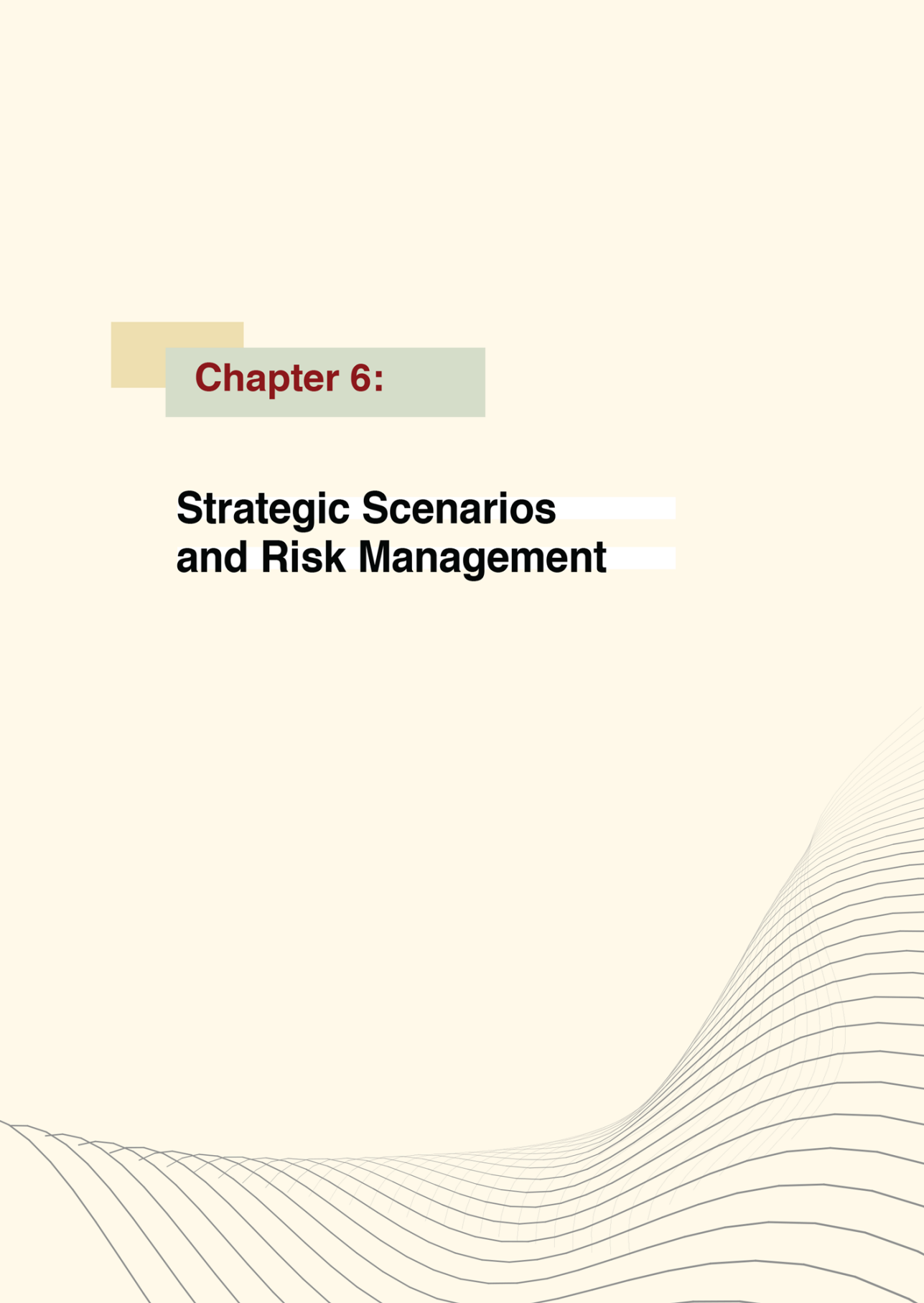
- Strategic performance indicators.
- Periodic reviews.
- Annual progress reports.
- Independent evaluations.
- Policy reviews as needed.

This approach ensures continuous program development and allows for course correction whenever necessary.

Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrated that the success of a strategic vision depends not only on the quality of policies but also on the existence of an institutional system capable of implementing, coordinating, and monitoring them, as well as continuously adjusting their course. Thus, institutional governance of implementation is a key factor in the success of the transitional phase, as it transforms the strategic vision from a theoretical framework into a viable reform pathway.

Building on this, the next chapter analyzes future scenarios and potential risks facing the state-building process, aiming to anticipate alternatives and enhance the capacity of decision-makers to manage transitions during this period.



Chapter 6:

Strategic Scenarios and Risk Management

Introduction

National strategies are not implemented in environments that are stable or free of challenges. Rather, they are often executed in contexts characterized by varying degrees of uncertainty. Consequently, the ability to anticipate the future and manage risks is a fundamental factor in their success. This dimension is particularly critical for post-conflict states, given the interplay of political, security, economic, and social factors—and the potential for rapid changes that could impact the trajectory of institutional reform.⁴¹

Accordingly, this chapter does not treat the future as a single, inevitable path. Instead, it presents a range of potential scenarios, analyzes the drivers behind each, and proposes risk management mechanisms designed to maintain the strategic vision's overall direction through 2030.

⁴¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *States of Fragility 2022* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

6.1: The Baseline Scenario (Gradual Success)

This scenario assumes that the institutional reform process continues in line with the priorities outlined in this study, alongside the maintenance of political stability and an improving security environment. It also entails the timely fulfillment of key foundational milestones: enacting the political legislative package during the current parliamentary term; adopting the permanent constitution via referendum; holding direct legislative and local elections before the end of the parliament's mandate; completing the presidential election process in accordance with the permanent constitution; and enacting the transitional justice law and initiating its implementation. Under this scenario, administrative and economic reform programs advance, the quality of public services improves, and citizen confidence in institutions grows. Investment opportunities expand, and coordination between state institutions and local administration improves—thereby reinforcing stability and driving the achievement of most of the Vision's targets by 2030.

This scenario serves as the baseline upon which other scenarios are built, and represents the target trajectory that the study aims to support.

6.2: The Conservative Scenario (Slow Progress)

This scenario assumes that the country remains generally stable, but reforms take place at a slower pace due to limited resources, weak institutional capacities, or sluggish implementation of the relevant programs. This may include delays in meeting certain constitutional and electoral milestones beyond their target dates, even though they remain on the national agenda.

In this case, the state makes progress in some sectors while lagging in others, resulting in uneven reform outcomes and delaying the achievement of certain strategic goals, without altering the overall trajectory of the state-building process.

Navigating this scenario would require prioritizing high-impact reforms, strengthening capacity-building, and improving inter-institutional coordination to mitigate the effects of the slowdown and maintain the momentum of reform.

6.3: The High-Risk Scenario (Stalled Reform)

This scenario is based on the assumption that the reform process faces significant challenges that disrupt the implementation of strategic programs—whether due to political or economic crises, a decline in institutional capacity, or poor coordination among relevant stakeholders. In this scenario, performance gaps widen, service quality declines, investment weakens, and public confidence in institutions erodes—all of which negatively impact the state’s ability to achieve its strategic objectives.

This scenario does not imply inevitable failure; rather, it underscores the importance of contingency plans, early warning mechanisms, and periodic reviews that enable the state to correct its course before challenges escalate into structural crises.

6.4: Strategic Risks

Comparative experience indicates that state-building programs typically face a set of common risks. In the Syrian context, these can be categorized into six main groups:

1. Political and Constitutional Risks

These include the stalling of the constitutional process; delays in holding the constitutional referendum and direct elections beyond the timeframe aligned with the current council’s mandate; repeated extensions of transitional arrangements, effectively turning them into a semi-permanent state; the enactment of political legislation (regarding political parties, elections, and local administration) in forms that strip these institutions of their pluralistic substance; and persistent gaps in the representation of women and various societal components, which undermine public acceptance of emerging institutions. This category carries the most significant impact, as any failure here deprives other reforms of their legitimizing framework.

2. Institutional Risks

These involve poor coordination among institutions, slow implementation of reforms, limits to administrative capacity, or resistance to change within the government's apparatus.

3. Economic Risks

These encompass declining growth rates, weak investment, pressure on public finances, high unemployment, and delays in reconstruction programs.

4. Security Risks

These include the resurgence of security threats, the rise of organized crime, ineffective border management, or stalled security sector reform.

5. Societal Risks

These include eroding public trust, widening developmental disparities between regions, low levels of civic engagement, and the lingering impact of the conflict on social cohesion.

6. External Risks

These encompass regional and international variables, global economic fluctuations, the impact of sanctions or economic restrictions, and any developments affecting the recovery and investment environment.

6.5: Risk Management

Risk management is not about attempting to forestall every challenge. Rather, it aims to strengthen the capacity of state institutions to anticipate challenges and prepare to address them.

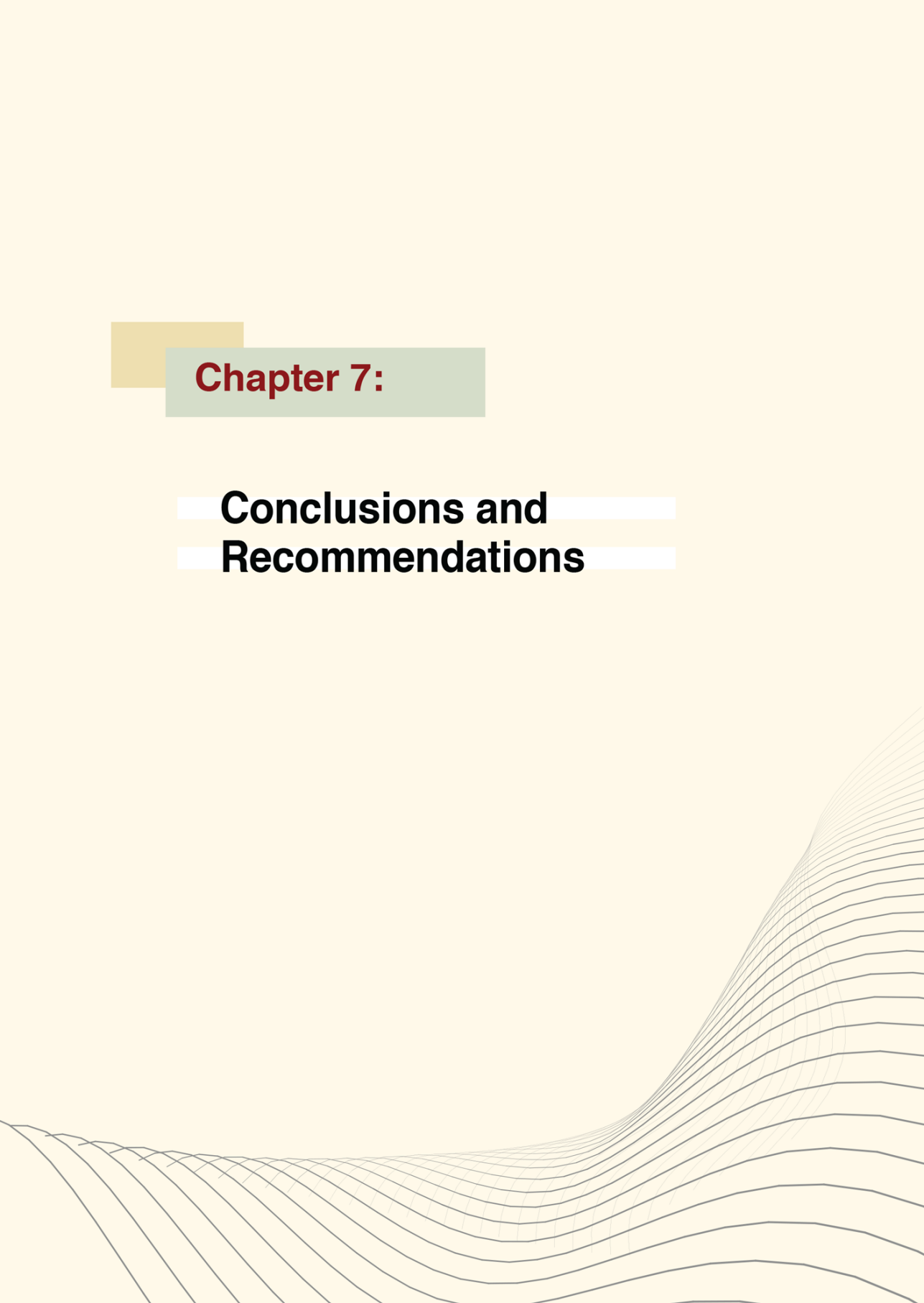
Accordingly, this study proposes adopting a set of risk management principles, most notably:

- Integrating risk management into the strategic planning process.
- Establishing an early warning system based on performance indicators and periodic monitoring.
- Regularly reviewing policies in light of changing circumstances.
- Building institutional and financial reserves to enhance the state's crisis response capacity.
- Strengthening coordination between state institutions and national partners to ensure rapid decision-making.

This approach constitutes an element of good governance, as it bolsters state resilience and mitigates the impact of potential shocks on the trajectory of reform.

Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrates that successful state-building depends not only on the quality of the vision or the efficiency of implementation but also on the ability of state institutions to engage with the future as a realm of multiple possibilities. Consequently, adopting a scenario-based approach and risk management practices contributes to enhancing state resilience, improving adaptability to changing conditions, and maintaining the overall direction of reform, even amidst unforeseen circumstances. Building on this, the final chapter draws general conclusions and formulates recommendations addressed to state institutions, public authorities, civil society, and international partners, aiming to support the transformation of the strategic vision into a sustainable national trajectory.



Chapter 7:

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This study began with a central question regarding how to transform Syria's transitional phase into a sustainable, institution-based state-building process up until 2030. It employed an analytical framework linking the literature on state-building, via the analysis of state functions, with strategic planning—all with the aim of moving from a diagnosis of the current reality to the formulation of an actionable vision.

The subsequent chapters have demonstrated that the success of the transition will depend not merely on eliminating the underlying causes of the conflict, but on the state's ability to rebuild its institutions, restore its core functions, and bolster its legitimacy through institutional performance, the rule of law, and the quality of public services.

In light of this, the study presents its key findings below, followed by a set of recommendations addressed to relevant stakeholders to support the state-building process during the transition.

7.1: Key Findings

The analysis conducted in this study yielded several key findings. They can be summarized as follows:

- State-building serves as the overarching framework for managing the transitional phase. Addressing sectoral crises in isolation, without an integrated institutional vision, would limit the prospects for long-term stability.
- The success of the transition hinges on the ability of state institutions to restore their core functions—particularly in the areas of security, justice, public services, and economic management—and to establish institutional legitimacy.
- The diagnosis revealed institutional gaps in the performance of state functions, revealing that institutional reform must take priority over isolated sectoral reforms.
- It is evident that state-building requires the integration of political, administrative, economic, and social reforms within a unified strategic framework, to prevent policy conflicts and enhance resource-use efficiency.
- Good governance, the rule of law, and institutional capacity are interconnected elements, and long-term stability cannot be achieved without them.
- The success of reform programs hinges on a system of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation capable of translating a strategic vision into public policies and measurable programs.
- Transitional institutions, from the People’s Assembly (formed through indirect election and appointment) to the administration operating under the Constitutional Declaration, are temporary, necessary arrangements, as per their founding provisions. State legitimacy can only be fully realized through the completion of foundational milestones: a permanent constitution ratified by referendum; direct legislative and local elections; a presidential election in accordance with the permanent constitution; and a legally regulated political pluralism.
- Transitional justice is not an afterthought, but a fundamental pillar of state-building. While the establishment of the Transitional Justice Commission and the Commission on the Missing provided an

important starting point, completing the process will require a comprehensive law focused on the victims, specialized judicial chambers, and a national reparations program.

- Comparative experience confirms that state-building is a long-term, cumulative process requiring continuity, flexibility, and risk management capabilities, rather than quick fixes or ad-hoc responses.

7.2: Recommendations

7.2.1: Recommendations for State Institutions

- Adopt the Strategic Vision outlined in this study as a reference framework to guide Syria's reform programs through to 2030.
- Prioritize institutional reform as the primary pathway for improving state performance.
- Develop a national strategic planning system and link it to the preparation of public budgets.
- Strengthen coordination between central institutions and local administrations.
- Adopt results-based management and performance indicators across all government programs.
- Announce a binding national timeline for key milestones, including the formation of the constitution-drafting committee and the holding of the public referendum, direct legislative and local elections, and the presidential election (as stipulated by the permanent constitution), consistent with the 30-month mandate of the current People's Assembly and the government's declared commitment not to transform transitional arrangements—including the transitional presidency—into a permanent status quo.

7.2.2: Recommendations for the Legislative Authority

The current People's Assembly, by virtue of its time-bound foundational mandate, has a responsibility to enact a specific legislative package during its current term. This package should prioritize:

- A law on political parties: Serving as the legal gateway to regulated political pluralism, this law must define rules for the establishment, licensing, and transparent funding of political parties, while prohibiting the formation of parties based on discriminatory grounds.
- A permanent law on general elections, enshrining direct voting, establishing an independent national electoral commission and a voter registry that includes displaced persons and refugees, and addressing the representation of women and various other components of society through structural, rather than remedial, measures.
- A new local administration law, based on administrative decentralization while maintaining state unity; replacing the framework inherited from the Assad regime (Law No. 107 of 2011), and defining regulations for elections to local councils, their powers, and their resources.
- A transitional justice law, encompassing all victims, defining the mandate of the national commission and its relationship with the judiciary, and enshrining a victim-centered approach.
- A law on the right to access to information, to serve as the legislative infrastructure for transparency, accountability, and societal oversight.
- A review of Assad-era legislation, strengthening the legal framework for integrity, supporting judicial independence, and developing legislation governing public administration and investment.

7.2.3: Recommendations for the Judiciary

- Enhance the efficiency of judicial institutions and expedite litigation procedures.
- Improve access to justice for all citizens.
- Support judicial capacity-building and modernize the digital infrastructure of the justice system.
- Link transitional justice processes with national judicial institutions in accordance with the rule of law—including by establishing specialized judicial chambers for conflict-related crimes and addressing the current sole reliance on the general penal code.

7.2.4: Recommendations for Local Administrations

- Prepare to hold local council elections immediately upon the enactment of the new local administration law, as this serves as the practical gateway for grassroots political participation.
- Strengthen administrative decentralization within the framework of state unity.
- Develop the institutional capacities of administrative units.
- Engage local communities in defining development priorities.
- Improve the quality of public services and link them to clear performance indicators.

7.2.5: Recommendations for the Private Sector

- Expand partnerships with the state on development and investment programs.
- Support productive projects and national industries.
- Contribute to skills development and the labor market.
- Adhere to standards of governance and social responsibility.

7.2.6: Recommendations for Syrian Civil Society

Civil society acts as a national partner in state-building, not a substitute for state institutions. Accordingly, the study offers it the following recommendations:

- Direct community initiatives toward supporting the construction of public institutions and fostering trust in them.
- Contribute to the dissemination of a culture of citizenship, the rule of law, and the values of participation and public responsibility.
- Participate in national dialogue, monitor the implementation of public policies, and objectively offer constructive proposals.
- Strengthen local initiatives that support social reconciliation, restore social capital, and encourage volunteerism.
- Collaborate with universities and research centers to produce periodic research and assessments that support the public policy-making process.

7.2.7: Recommendations for Regional and International Partners

- Align support programs with national priorities defined by Syrian state institutions.
- Focus on institutional capacity building and knowledge transfer, alongside financial support.
- Support programs on administrative reform, governance, and digital transformation.
- Encourage investment in productive sectors and infrastructure.
- Enhance coordination among donors to minimize duplication and maximize the efficiency of resource use.
- Provide technical support for foundational processes, ranging from the construction of the electoral roll to forensic medicine and databases for the missing, as a direct investment in Syria's long-term stability.

Conclusion

This study concludes that state-building in Syria is neither a temporary government project, nor one limited to addressing the aftermath of a transitional phase. Rather, it constitutes a long-term national undertaking aimed at re-establishing the relationship between the state and society based on the rule of law, good governance, institutional capacity, and sustainable development.

Based on this understanding, the study has presented an analytical framework grounded in five strategic pillars. It has identified performance gaps in core state functions—including the transitional political representation structure and the emerging institutional framework for transitional justice—and formulated a strategic vision extending to 2030, with the completion of constitutional and electoral processes at its core. It has further outlined seven reform pathways, implementation mechanisms, and potential scenarios, culminating in specific, actionable recommendations, first and foremost a package of legislative measures to be undertaken during the current session of the People's Assembly, which offer a guide to state institutions, policymakers, and researchers.

The study does not attempt to offer a complete model or a ready-made formula. Rather, it seeks to contribute to a national dialogue on state-building as an ongoing institutional process. This process requires political will, administrative competence, societal participation, and the ability to learn from comparable experiences, all while taking into account the specificities of the Syrian experience and its historical and political circumstances.

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جسور للدراسات
JUSOOR FOR STUDIES



head office Damascus, Syria

☎ +963 989 162 800

✉ info@jusoor.com

@f t w /jusoorstudies

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