



A PARADOX OF POWER: INDONESIA'S PRESIDENCY AND THE CO-OPTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN UN PEACEKEEPING

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Abstract:

This article uses the lens of Feminist Institutionalism to examine Indonesia's UNSC presidency and its sponsorship of Resolution 2538 on women in peacekeeping. Addressing the paradox of a patriarchal state championing a global feminist norm, the article argues that Indonesia's advocacy represents instrumental norm entrepreneurship, leveraging the WPS agenda for prestige rather than transformation. The analysis reveals how the resolution's substance was diluted by geopolitical resistance and a consensus-driven 'logic of appropriateness', while domestic scrutiny shows a stark disconnect between Indonesia's international rhetoric and the masculine hegemony embedded in its military and politics. The findings demonstrate that the institutionalisation of norms is a contested process susceptible to co-optation. For middle powers, the WPS agenda can serve as a form of soft power, yielding performative compliance that fails to disrupt patriarchal structures either abroad or at home. This case study highlights the limitations of state-led feminist foreign policy in the absence of genuine domestic reform.

Keywords: Indonesia, UN Security Council, UNSC Resolution 2538, feminist institutionalism, gender, peacekeeping

Titulo en Español: *Una paradoja del poder: la presidencia de Indonesia y la cooptación de la igualdad de género en las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz de la ONU*

Resumen:

Este artículo utiliza el enfoque del institucionalismo feminista para examinar la presidencia de Indonesia en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU y su patrocinio de la Resolución 2538 sobre las mujeres en las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz. Al abordar la paradoja de un Estado patriarcal que defiende una norma feminista global, el artículo sostiene que la posición de Indonesia constituye un ejercicio instrumental normativo que aprovecha la agenda de las mujeres, la paz y la seguridad (WPS) para obtener prestigio más que para lograr una transformación. El análisis revela cómo el contenido de la resolución se vio diluido por la resistencia geopolítica y una lógica de apropiación impulsada por el consenso, mientras que el escrutinio interno muestra una marcada desconexión entre la retórica internacional de Indonesia y la hegemonía masculina arraigada en su ejército y su política. Los resultados demuestran que la institucionalización de las normas es un proceso controvertido susceptible de ser apropiado. Para las potencias medias, la agenda WPS puede servir como una forma de poder blando, generando un cumplimiento aparente que no logra alterar las estructuras patriarcales ni en el extranjero ni en el ámbito nacional. Este estudio de caso pone de relieve las limitaciones de la política exterior feminista impulsada por el Estado en ausencia de una reforma interna genuina.

Palabras Clave: *Indonesia, Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas, Resolución 2538 del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, institucionalismo feminista, género, mantenimiento de la paz*

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1. Introduction

Twenty-five years after Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security, the world has witnessed growing attention on improving gender equality. Violence and discrimination against women, which restrict their agency and undermine the fulfillment of their rights, are deeply entrenched issues. Having persisted for centuries and manifested across the globe, this scourge constitutes a problem that transcends political divisions and geographical boundaries. Despite decades of struggle, gender inequality not only persists but remains a pervasive force that marginalizes women across much of the globe. The contemporary discourse on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) argues that the inclusion of women in tactical security roles is a key factor in reducing violence and fostering trust among conflict-affected populations. The imperative for women's inclusion in security operations, as outlined by the WPS agenda, directly informs the evolving mandate and composition of United Nations peacekeeping missions. Recognizing that gender-equal participation is a force multiplier, the success of these multinational operations increasingly depends on their ability to institutionalize this principle at every level, from headquarters to the most tactical field operations.

Acknowledging the gendered dimensions of conflict logically culminates in a discourse on political institutions. The analysis necessarily shifts to these institutions, which function as key structural sites for norm formation and are dynamically co-constitutive with the agency of individuals and groups³. This indicates that policies enacted by political institutions like the UNSC can influence the progress of norm enforcement—in this case, gender equality—particularly in conflict areas. The agency of members within a political institution also influences the institutionalization of norms, thereby enabling the institution to make policy based on its institutional norms. An examination of this issue can broaden our understanding of how oppressive and unequal structures, norms, or policies can be challenged, changed, and adapted⁴.

Departed from this backdrop, the objective of this study is to examine the institutionalization of the gender equality norm within the body of UNSC. It is within this context that Indonesia's 2019-2020 presidency of the UN Security Council presented a crucial opportunity to advance the institutionalization of gender equality within peacekeeping mandates. Accordingly, this study is led by the central research question: How did Indonesia's presidency in 2020 facilitate the institutionalization of gender equality norms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)? In pursuing this inquiry, the analysis further considers: 1) how UNSC frames and engenders collective action to improve gender equality within PKO; 2) how Indonesia perceives gender equality within its military system that influences its international policy direction; 3) how the presidency encouraged (or discourage?) gender mainstreaming action within international PKO. The analysis unfolds in two parts: first, by problematizing the negotiation of Resolution 2538 (2020), where resistance from member-states potentially diluted its substance into a ceremonial outcome; and second, by interrogating the paradoxical nature of Indonesia's feminist advocacy on the global stage against its domestic patriarchal context. This two-pronged approach ultimately questions the resolution's practical impact, revealing the contentious gap between the adoption of gender norms and their meaningful institutionalization. It is also important to highlight that this study's reliance on library-based research and its focus on the UNSC's institutional level may not fully capture the nuanced realities and on-the-ground experiences of individual peacekeeping operations. Nonetheless, this article offers a critical insight into the structural and ideological barriers

³ Chappell, Louise (2003): *Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada*, Vancouver, UBC Press, p. 4.

⁴ Thomson, Jennifer: "Resisting gendered change: Feminist institutionalism and critical actors", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 39, n° 2 (2018), pp. 178–191.



within global security governance, demonstrating how the advancement of gender norms in peace and security is persistently challenged by a patriarchal international order.

2. Literature Review

In the decades since the Cold War, peacekeeping operations mandated by United Nations have rapidly expanded in both number and intensity, particularly in civil conflicts. This growth has underscored its ongoing importance as a vital tool for mitigating conflict at global and regional levels.⁵ A significant body of literature has examined the efficacy of these peacekeeping operations, highlighting the experience of the operations.⁶ There are also a number of articles⁷ that highlight the leadership and norm entrepreneurship of peacekeeping operations.

A growing and profoundly concerning body of literature has meticulously documented the detrimental phenomenon centering United Nations peacekeepers: sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Reports consistently reveal how combatants weaponize sexual violence against vulnerable women in conflict zones as a tactical instrument of war. Scholarly work, however, extends this analysis to the very forces deployed to protect these populations, revealing a troubling parallel.⁸ The abuse is not merely the act of individual perpetrators but is often facilitated by a hyper-masculine institutional culture within peacekeeping contingents. This culture normalizes such behavior, framing it as an inevitable byproduct of deploying predominantly male troops to stressful environments⁹, while other militias have been studied to even utilize rape as a weapon of war¹⁰. Furthermore, not only combatants but also peacekeeping forces have been reported for committing sexual violations against civilians in mission areas, particularly targeting young girls¹¹. These literatures prove further that the needs to integrate

⁵ Di Salvatore, Jessica; Ruggeri, Andrea (2017): "Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁶ See Anwar, Dewi Fortuna: "Indonesia's peacekeeping operations: History, practice, and future trend", in Aoi Chiyuki; Heng Yee-Kuang (eds.) (2014): *Asia-Pacific Nations in International Peace Support and Stability Operations*, pp. 189–210, London, Springer; Guo, Yong; Puja, I Gusti Agung Widya (2022): *Sustaining Peace in ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific: Preventive Diplomacy Measures*, Vol. 8, Singapore, World Scientific; Jenne, Nicole: "Peacekeeping: An Emerging Area of Southeast Asia's Defence and Security Cooperation?", in Chong Alan and Jenne Nicole (eds) (2023): *Asian Military Evolutions*, Bristol, Bristol University Press, pp. 170–194.

⁷ Holmes, Georgina: "Situating Agency, Embodied Practices and Norm Implementation in Peacekeeping Training", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 26, n° 1(2019), pp. 55–84; Howe, Brendan: "Whose Responsibility? The Protection of Refugees in East Asia", *Global Responsibility to Protect*, Vol. 15 (2023), p. 48; Howe, Brendan M. (2025): "Normative Expansion and Reaction in PKOs and Global Governance", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 28, n° 1, pp. 48–80; Stefan, Cristina G. (2021): "The Responsibility to Protect: Locating Norm Entrepreneurship", *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 35, n° 2 (2021), pp. 197–211.

⁸ Azizah, Nur; Maksum, Ali; Hidayatulloh, Muhammad Ammar: "Enhancing Women Contribution in Peace, Conflict Resolution, and Security Agenda: Indonesian Female Peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation (Garuda Contingent – KONGA)", *UNISCI Journal*, Vol. 18, n° 53 (2020), pp. 111–129; Cuber, Gabriella (2021): *Understanding Variation in Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN PKOs: The Role of Military, Police, and Civilian Peacekeepers*, PhD Dissertation, Orlando, University of Central Florida; Freedman, Rosa: "UNaccountable: A New Approach to Peacekeepers and Sexual Abuse", *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 29, n° 3(2018), pp. 961–985; Karim, Sabrina; Beardsley, Kyle : "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 53, n° 1 (2016), pp. 100–115; Wieberneit, Marie; Thal, Sophia; Clare, Joseph; Notebaert, Lies; Tubex, Hilde: "Silenced Survivors: A Systematic Review of the Barriers to Reporting, Investigating, Prosecuting, and Sentencing of Adult Female Rape and Sexual Assault", *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Vol. 25, n° 5 (2024), pp. 3742–3757.

⁹ Simić, Olivera: "Does the Presence of Women Really Matter? Towards Combating Male Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 17, n° 2 (2010), pp. 188–199.

¹⁰ Majewski, Christina (2005): "Rape as a Weapon of War", *Body & Society*, Vol. 11, n° 1.

¹¹ Wagner, Katie (2022): "Sexual Exploitation by UN Peacekeepers in DRC: Fatherless Children Speak for First Time about the Pain of Being Abandoned", *The Conversation*, 9 July 2022.



substantive participation of women and incorporate gender-sensitive perspective into peacekeeping is growing significantly¹².

In the specific context of gender and peacekeeping, there is increasing scholarly focus on the influence of the international gender regime—a "global culture"—which significantly shapes the perception and practice of military and peacekeeping¹³. A study by Tryggstad (2018) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) highlights that the agenda was born from a simple yet transformative realization: war and peace are not gender neutral. By formally acknowledging that conflict impacts women and men differently, Resolution 1325 in 2000, redefined the concepts of peace and security to establish gender equality as a central pillar of the international security architecture¹⁴. This institutionalization of gender into the security discourse was not an endpoint but a genesis, marking the beginning of a complex, global process of norm shifting within the traditionally masculine domain of international peace and security.

However, the institutionalization of gender norms within major international bodies and its reflection on critical relationship to member-state accountability remains significantly understudied and undertheorized. This gap in literature points to an urgent need for a more comprehensive institutionalization of gender equality that aims to fundamentally reform or reorient existing governance frameworks rather than merely incorporating gender issues into unchanged structures¹⁵. The central challenge lies in the fact that while many institutions possess the capacity to add gender equality to their agendas, this often occurs without the profound structural change necessary for meaningful transformation, thereby limiting the potential for substantive accountability.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationship between power relations and the meaning-making process within UNSC policy formulation. It examines how Indonesia, during its presidency, navigated the Council's entrenched power dynamics to institutionalize a gender equality norm, and how this process ultimately shaped the final substance and authority of Resolution 2538. To understand this phenomenon, Feminist Institutionalism provides critical analytical tools that acknowledge international bodies' importance in constructing international norms. The Feminist Institutionalism viewpoint emphasizes that peacekeeping operations are shaped by the interactions of various actors rather than being static, uniform entities. Despite being prearranged, these missions are by their very nature transient and flexible. The host state's political commitment, UN finance, member state contributions, and the practical constraints faced during deployment are only a few of the

¹² Dharmapuri, Sahana: "Just Add Women and Stir?", *Parameters*, Vol. 41, n°1 (2011), pp. 56–70.

¹³ The term "global culture" and similar phrasings have been mentioned in several studies, such as Paris, Roland: "Peacekeeping and the Constraints of Global Culture", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9, n° 3 (2003), pp. 441–473; Carreiras, Helena: "Gendered Organizational Dynamics in Military Contexts", in Woodward, Rachel; Duncanson Claire (eds) (2017): *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 105–122; Carson, Lisa: "Pre-deployment 'Gender' Training and the Lack Thereof for Australian Peacekeepers", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 70, n° 3 (2016), pp. 275–292; Diana, Dianatul Ilmi; Pratiwi, Fanisa Ira Ronia; Hidayatullah, Achmad Diny: "The Role of Women in Global Peacekeeping Missions: UNSC Resolution 2538", *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender*, Vol. 19, n° 2 (2024), p. 2.

¹⁴ Aggestam, Karin; Towns, Ann: "The Gender Turn in Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, n° 1(2019), pp. 9–28.

¹⁵ The inclination towards structural governance reorientation has been mentioned in Duriesmith, David (2018): "Manly States and Feminist Foreign Policy: Revisiting the Liberal State as an Agent of Change", in Peterson, V. Spike; Parashar, Swati; Tickner, J. Ann; True, Jacqui (eds.) (2018): *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; and supported by specific case in Parisi, Laura: "Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy: Business as Usual?", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 16, n° 2 (2020), pp. 163–180.



variables that affect their efficacy¹⁶. The significance of this study lies in its critical interrogation of a paradox at the heart of global governance: how a state with a contradictory domestic record on gender equality can become a prominent sponsor for feminist norms on the world's most powerful security stage. By dissecting Indonesia's 2019-2020 UNSC presidency, this research moves beyond simply describing the institutionalization of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to unveiling the complex political processes, power struggles, and compromises that underpin it.

3. Methodology

A qualitative method was employed to examine the institutionalization of the gender equality norm within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) during Indonesia's presidency. This study presented supporting data to analyze the relational dynamics between the UNSC as a structure, Indonesia's agency as a feminist actor promoting institutional change, and its utilization of the powers of the presidency to advance this norm. Data collection and analysis were conducted through library research, which involved examining relevant literature to reconstruct the process of resolution drafting and negotiation within the UNSC. Literary sources were drawn from books, academic journals, prior research, reports, and official documents and websites from international organizations and state institutions, as well as reputable news articles.

4. Finding and Discussion

According to feminist institutionalism (FI), institutions are fundamentally gendered, creating and perpetuating unequal power dynamics, a failure to acknowledge women as a group, and an unfair allocation of resources¹⁷. This lens reveals how certain structures can create windows of opportunity for pro-gender norms in foreign policy. It asserts that foreign policy actors must navigate an international society saturated with gendered symbolism and practices, which shape state's self-presentation, perception, and interaction. Consequently, this framework sharpens empirical analysis by highlighting how gender intersects with other social categories to shape material lived experiences. Finally, it focuses our attention on how gendered institutional innovations—'new gender rules' in both 'old' and 'new' institutions—are enacted and negotiated¹⁸.

Yet, despite this analytical clarity and the escalating prevalence of global conflicts, the meaningful involvement of women continues to be sidelined. This persistent gap between theoretical recognition and practical implementation is not an anomaly but rather the predictable output of the very gendered institutions FI critiques. The UN Security Council, as a prime example of an 'old institution,' often replicates the exclusionary dynamics of the conflicts it seeks to manage. Its structures, dominated by traditional security paradigms and patriarchal diplomatic practices, systematically filter out transformative gender agendas. The negotiation of Resolution 2538 under Indonesia's presidency serves as a critical case study to dissect this very process: an attempt to install 'new gender rules' that was ultimately constrained by the 'old' institutional rules of the game, resulting in a outcome where the participation of women in peacekeeping was acknowledged, yet the deeper power relations that keep them on the sidelines remained largely unchallenged.

¹⁶ Holmes, Georgina: "Feminist Institutionalism", in Oksamytna Kseniya and Karlsrud John (eds.) (2020): *United Nations Peace Operations and International Relations Theory*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 214–235.

¹⁷ Chappell, Louise; Waylen, Georgina: "Gender and the Hidden Life of Institutions", *Public Administration*, Vol. 91, n° 3 (2013), pp. 599–615.

¹⁸ Mackay, Fiona: "Nested Newness, Institutional Innovation, and the Gendered Limits of Change", *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 10, n° 4 (2014), pp. 549–571.



4.1. Beyond “Add Women and Stir”: The Patriarchal Underpinnings of Institutional Change

The first recorded instance of sexual abuse within a UN Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) occurred in 1993 in Cambodia (UNTAC), marking a pivotal moment for gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping. Such acts are classified as Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), posing a distinct challenge to the UN's humanitarian mandates. In response to growing international attention, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) introduced adjustments, notably through UNSC Resolution 1820 (2008), which advocated for increasing female personnel to prevent and address CRSV. The underlying rationale is that women in all roles enhance mission skillsets, improve community accessibility, and serve as role models¹⁹.

It is suggested that having more female peacekeepers will better shield women and girls from gender-based and sexual violence, such as CRSV and SEA²⁰. Initiatives like the all-female police unit in Liberia (UNMIL) exemplify this effort. However, even in missions with higher female participation, rigid gender norms often restrict their mobility and interactions with locals, hindering their effectiveness²¹. A deployment bias also exists, with female personnel less likely to be sent to high-CRSV areas. Therefore, establishing institutional conditions for gender justice demands substantial international cooperation in order to achieve WPS goals. Crucially, however, institutionalizing gender at the structural level does not guarantee effective implementation, as progress is often hindered by agent-level barriers related to actors' commitments and power relations. FI particularly highlights this contradictory nature of global norms that evolve with international behaviour; normative shifts can gradually increase or reduce the acceptability of certain policies. Consequently, peacekeeping institutions tend to reject strategies that violate prevailing global norms, prioritizing normative conformity over potential gains in operational effectiveness. Nevertheless, FI remains positive on the shift within a structure can provoke societal change.

This co-constitutive relationship opens a window for feminist actors to advance gender equality. However, this effort confronts the deeply entrenched barrier of hegemonic masculinity within military institutions. UNSC Resolution 2538 represents a direct attempt to reform this very space within peacekeeping operations. Its significance lies in its potential to transform military bodies, yet it remains contested between genuine change and mere ceremonial absorption by the patriarchal structures it challenges. The persistent failure of the 'Add Women and Stir'²² model to eradicate Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in peacekeeping reveals a core institutional contradiction: the 'logic of appropriateness', where actors perform compliance with global norms like gender equality for legitimacy, often operates in direct tension with a 'logic of effectiveness'. The negotiation of UNSC Resolution 2538 under Indonesia's presidency epitomizes this clash. The process prioritized achieving a consensus-based resolution that performed adherence to the norm over creating a robust mechanism to dismantle the patriarchal structures enabling such

¹⁹ Olsson, Louise; Muvumba Sellström, Anna; Moncrief, Stephen; Wood, Elisabeth Jean; Johansson, Katarina; Lotze, Walter; Ruffa, Chiara; Hoover Green, Amelia; Sjöberg, Anna K.; Kishi, Roudabeh: “Peacekeeping Prevention: Strengthening Efforts to Preempt Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 27, n° 4 (2020), pp. 517–585; Shepherd, Laura J.: “Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond”, in Pratt, Nicola; Richter-Devroe Sophie (eds.) (2014): *Gender, Governance and International Security*, London, Routledge, pp. 16–33.

²⁰ Karim, Sabrina: “Gender and Peacekeeping”, in Gentry, Caron E.; Shepherd, Laura J.; Sjöberg Laura (eds) (2019): *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security*, London, Routledge, pp. 334–345.

²¹ Karim, Sabrina and Beardsley, Kyle (2017): *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

²² Dharmapuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–57.



violence. Consequently, the resolution's potentially ceremonial nature is not a design failure, but the direct outcome of an institutional system where the appearance of conformity systematically trumps transformative change.

UNSC Resolution 2538 (2020) is the first resolution dedicated exclusively to issues concerning female peacekeepers. It provides a set of 12 guidelines for member states to enhance women's participation, with a specific focus on increasing uniformed personnel and sharing best practices for their recruitment, retention, and deployment.²³ Notably, the resolution also addresses previously contentious issues like sexual harassment and childcare, reflecting the mainstreaming of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda within the UNSC's peacekeeping framework. By institutionalizing the increase of female personnel and addressing their specific challenges, Resolution 2538 aims to embed a more holistic value of "equal opportunity" within UN peacekeeping. This concept transcends mere numerical parity. It signifies creating space for marginalized identities beyond dominant masculine norms and equally valuing the contributions of all genders. Ultimately, it demands equal access to power and leadership within missions, ensuring both women and men can equally participate in identifying and resolving discriminatory practices, including sexual exploitation and abuse, as envisioned by Karim & Beardsley²⁴. Thus, the resolution pushes for peacekeeping to become "a genuine vehicle", as envisioned by Olsson²⁵, for gender equality, moving beyond conceptual rhetoric.

Rooted in the process of institutional layering, Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy²⁶ and the principles of "equal access, equal opportunity", the need for a supportive environment were codified through the initiation and adoption of UNSC Resolution 2538 (2020) under Indonesia's leadership. The resolution requires member states and Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs) to support women's full, meaningful, and effective involvement in all mission functions, levels, and components. This includes deploying mixed-gender engagement teams and increasing female personnel in underrepresented roles. By being formalized as a resolution, these provisions become binding mandates, compelling member state action and determining the allocation of political-economic resources and mechanisms²⁷. The unanimous adoption of UNSC Resolution 2538 in 2020 stands as a milestone, formally acknowledging that women's significant involvement in peace operations is impeded by gender hierarchies. Indonesia, presiding the Council in August 2020, initiated this resolution, culminating a diplomatic campaign on female peacekeepers that began with its non-permanent membership in 2019²⁸.

Indonesia's journey to this point started with its 2016 campaign for a Council seat, promoting the theme "True Partner for World Peace".²⁹ As a member, it consistently advanced this agenda. In a May 2019 open debate, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi emphasized the need

²³ Newby, Vanessa F. and Sebag, Clémentine: "Gender Sidestreaming? Analysing Gender Mainstreaming in National Militaries and International Peacekeeping", *European Journal of International Security*, Vol. 6, n° 2 (2021), pp. 148–170.

²⁴ Karim and Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

²⁵ Olsson, Louise (2009): *Gender Equality and United Nations Peace Operations in Timor Leste*, Leiden, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

²⁶ "Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028", United Nations Peacekeeping, 8 March 2019, at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2018-full-text>

²⁷ Benson, Michelle; Tucker, Christopher: "The Importance of UN Security Council Resolutions in Peacekeeping Operations", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 66, n° 3 (2022), pp. 473–503.

²⁸ Azizah, Nur; Sallimi, Hani; Dwiyantri, Ayu (2022): "The Increasing Number of Female Troops in Indonesia's Peacekeeping Operations: Why Women's Presence Matters?", *Journal of Islamic World and Politics*, Vol. 6, n° 1 (2022), pp. 81–103.

²⁹ "Indonesia Launches Campaign for UN Security Council Seat—National", *The Jakarta Post*, 23 September 2016, at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/09/23/indonesia-launches-campaign-for-un-security-council-seat.html>



for meaningful female participation through training and capacity-building.³⁰ This "Investing in Women" narrative was reiterated in a November 2019 dialogue on Afghanistan, advocating for women's role in peacebuilding³¹. To garner consensus for its resolution, Indonesia pioneered the "sofa talks" format³², a series of informal dialogues designed to stimulate open discussion among member states. These meetings, held regularly, covered "everything under the sun"³³ related to the Security Council's agenda. While no formal agendas or records were kept, this platform proved invaluable for discreetly gauging positions on contentious issues³⁴. This innovative diplomatic tool mirrored the established ASEAN Retreat format³⁵, which Indonesia had utilized for decades as part of high-level consultation processes. By adapting this familiar, trust-building mechanism to the politically fragmented environment of the UNSC, Indonesia demonstrated a strategic approach to navigating the Council's inherent divisions.

A prevailing tendency within the UN Security Council is to prioritize numbers of women's participation effectively precludes substantive engagement with the underlying gender hierarchies that inhibit substantive participation³⁶. This approach systematically overlooks the gender-specific barriers constraining women's involvement in both formal and informal peace and security processes. Moreover, despite the entrenched normative framework established by Resolution 1325, significant political resistance from Member States endures. This resistance manifests in various forms, such as inconsistency, reflecting a selective approach and a profound lack of accountability. This normative progress has been hindered by the Council's fractious geopolitical divisions,³⁷ which weaken multilateralism, international human rights and humanitarian law. These regressive trends unfold against a backdrop of deeply gendered phenomena; rising populism, violent extremism, and widening economic inequality. Collectively, these conditions demonstrate that the prevailing climate within the UN Security Council is often fundamentally ill-suited for advancing the transformative ambitions of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Permanent members such as China and Russia often contest the very legitimacy of the Council's mandate, particularly concerning conflict-related sexual violence. Divisions run deeper still, as even generally supportive states disagree on critical language pertaining to state accountability. A telling illustration occurred in April 2019³⁸, when the United States threatened to veto a draft resolution on conflict-related violence over text related to sexual and reproductive health, despite this language having clear precedent in prior Council decisions. In the end, this disagreement calls for diluting mandates to reach a compromise, putting political expediency

³⁰ "Letter Dated 10 July 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council", United Nations, 17 July 2019, at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813066>

³¹ "Investing in Women Means Investing in Peace, Indonesia Tells Afghanistan", *The Jakarta Post*, 2 December 2019, at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/12/02/investing-women-means-investing-peace-indonesia-tells-afghanistan.html>

³² "Indonesia Introduces Informal 'Sofa Talk'", *The Jakarta Post*, 14 June 2019, at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/06/14/indonesia-introduces-informal-sofa-talk.html>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Pallapothu, Varsha: "Indonesia: An Emerging and Crucial Player in Pushing the WPS Agenda Forward", The Gender Security Project, 2020, at <https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/wpsanalysis/indonesia-an-emerging-and-crucial-player-in-pushing-the-wps-agenda-forward>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "Mapping Women, Peace and Security in the UN Security Council: 2018", NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 2019, at <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/mapping-women-peace-and-security-in-the-un-security-council-2018/>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Kane, Angela: "Maintain the Promise: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at Twenty", European Leadership Network, 6 November 2020, at <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/maintain-the-promise-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-at-twenty/>



ahead of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda's revolutionary potential. Some member states and external stakeholders questioned the resolution's added value, contending that the existing normative framework was sufficient and that implementation should be prioritized. Conversely, despite most components being reflected in established frameworks like the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, Russia and China argued that the strategy lacked universal member state approval and thus created no binding obligation for its implementation³⁹.

Further objections emerged among member states, who feared that detailing specific WPS and peacekeeping tasks in a resolution would provoke protracted negotiations. Several members, notably China, cautioned against overly prescriptive language regarding national-level implementation, contending that "the Security Council is not the correct place for this"⁴⁰. This resistance compelled Indonesia to draft a resolution with deliberately diluted language, merely "encouraging" states to "consider ways, as appropriate, to increase women's participation"⁴¹. Additional opposition arose against shifting member states' "primary responsibility"—such as troop training—to the UN Secretariat. This training is conceptually vital as a channel for transferring UN-institutionalized human rights norms, effectively resocializing military personnel into UN peacekeepers, and imparting essential technical skills⁴².

The very definition of what is deemed "appropriate" was contested during the drafting of Resolution 2538, particularly regarding Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). Several Council members argued it was inappropriate to address SEA in a resolution on women in peacekeeping, as it pertains to crimes committed by male peacekeepers⁴³. Consequently, all references to SEA were purged from the final text. This selective application of "appropriateness" creates a critical accountability gap, shielding perpetrators and contradicting the Council's robust rhetorical stance against Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV). This inconsistency stems from a foundational legal structure: UN peacekeepers remain under the jurisdiction of their Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs), making accountability contingent on often reluctant national systems. This reluctance frequently reflects deeper gender justice inequalities within TCCs' domestic policies. Challenging this can be perceived as challenging the deeply entrenched hegemonic masculinity that dominates both military institutions and the states that contribute to them.

The negotiation of Resolution 2538 revealed an inherent gender bias within the UNSC, crystallized in debates over language. A proposal by Russia to stipulate that women in leadership must be "qualified"⁴⁴, a requirement notably absent for male personnel, exposed a pervasive assumption that female peacekeepers must prove their merit disproportionately. Although omitted from the final text, this incident illustrates how patriarchal norms within peacekeeping institutions create higher barriers for women, often confining them to traditionally feminized roles like administration and nursing, thereby impeding their path to leadership. This gendered framing extended to the roles assigned to women. An initial draft, proposed by Indonesia, perpetuated stereotypes by uniquely linking female personnel to

³⁹ "Women in Peacekeeping Operations: Adoption of a Resolution", Security Council Report, 27 August 2020, at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2020/08/women-in-peacekeeping-operations-adoption-of-a-resolution.php>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ "Resolution 2538 (2020) on Women in Peacekeeping Operations (S/RES/2538 (2020))", UN Security Council, at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3878808>

⁴² Holmes, Georgina: "Situating Agency, Embodied Practices and Norm Implementation in Peacekeeping Training", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 26, n° 1 (2019), pp. 55–84.

⁴³ Sharland, Laura: "Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact", International Peace Institute, 2021, at <https://apo.org.au/node/310701>

⁴⁴ Women in Peacekeeping Operations, Security Council Report, *op. cit.*



community trust-building and protection—responsibilities that should be universal for all peacekeepers. Critical member states argued that such language reinforces the perception of women as suited only for "soft" issues, despite evidence that their presence statistically improves mission effectiveness and reporting of CRSV⁴⁵. The central debate underscores a fundamental tension: women's contributions are often welcomed only as an "added value" that does not fundamentally challenge the masculine-dominated structure of peacekeeping.

Resolution 2538 nonetheless represents a significant institutional advancement within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, particularly when situated alongside the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (UGPS) 2018–2028. Its primary achievement lies in translating normative commitments into measurable targets for women's participation in peacekeeping. By the end of 2024, most UGPS targets had been met or exceeded, especially in non-military domains: women comprised 40 per cent of justice and corrections personnel (target 30 per cent), 31 per cent of individual police officers (target 25 per cent), 23 per cent of military experts and staff officers (target 21 per cent), and 17 per cent of formed police units (target 14 per cent)⁴⁶. Although military contingents remain below target at 8 per cent (against 11 per cent), these figures indicate incremental change within a historically male-dominated sector. This trend is mirrored at the national level, where women's representation in armed forces rose from 11 per cent in 2016 to 14 per cent in 2022, suggesting broader norm diffusion beyond UN missions.

These gains have been reinforced by targeted initiatives such as Canada's Elsie Initiative and the Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (EIF), which address structural barriers through financial and institutional incentives⁴⁷. In 2024, EIF-supported recruitment campaigns in Ghana reached over 21,000 students and increased women's recruitment from 16 to 26 per cent, while its partnership with Senegal raised women's representation in the police force from 9 to 15 per cent and secured national funding for gender units within security institutions. Such examples demonstrate that, when backed by material support, the commitments embedded in Resolution 2538 can translate into measurable outcomes.

Beyond numerical gains, the resolution also promotes women's inclusion in command and specialized roles while recognizing structural barriers such as inadequate facilities and institutional support. By embedding these concerns within a Security Council mandate, it elevates gender equality from a normative aspiration to an institutional priority. Yet, disparities in progress most evident in military contingents underscore that these achievements remain contingent upon existing institutional arrangements, reproducing rather than transforming underlying gendered power relations.

Despite these advancements, significant structural and operational limitations remain unresolved. First, women continue to be underrepresented in military contingents, where participation stood at only 8 per cent in 2024—below the 11 per cent target set by the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (UGPS)⁴⁸. This gap reflects not only a discrepancy between institutional targets and outcomes but also the persistence of gendered institutional path dependencies within national defence structures. In many countries, laws and policies continue to exclude women from combat roles, including infantry, armoured units, and special forces, effectively blocking

⁴⁵ Karim Sabrina; Beardsley Kyle: *Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions*, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-112.

⁴⁶ "Facts and figures: Women, Peace and Security", UN Women, 20 October 2025, at https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#_edn24

⁴⁷ "Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (EIF), Annual Report 2024", United Nations, 2025, at <https://elsiefund.org/eif-annual-reports/annual-report-2024/>.

⁴⁸ "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security", *op. cit.*



access to senior command positions. As a result, women comprise only around 3 per cent of generals and admirals globally, illustrating how formal rules and informal norms interact to reproduce male-dominated hierarchies.⁴⁹ Second, the implementation of Resolution 2538 remains heavily dependent on member states, many of which maintain discriminatory laws, restrictive policies, and entrenched institutional cultures that constrain women's access to training, leadership, and deployment. These dynamics reflect the limits of institutional reform where compliance is mediated by domestic power structures, allowing states to perform adherence to global gender norms while avoiding substantive institutional transformation—thereby privileging a logic of appropriateness over effectiveness.

Third, persistent gender stereotypes continue to shape both perception and practice within peacekeeping operations, reinforcing informal institutional norms that confine women to feminized roles.⁵⁰ Empirical evidence shows that women peacekeepers frequently experience discrimination, marginalization, and gender-based violence, while being disproportionately assigned to roles such as administration or community engagement regardless of their qualifications.⁵¹ Fourth, the persistence of sexual harassment and unsafe working environments directly contradicts the premise of meaningful participation and highlights the gap between formal commitments and everyday institutional practice. In 2024, the United Nations documented over 4,600 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, marking an 87 per cent increase since 2022, underscoring the failure of institutional norms to translate into effective protection outcomes.

Finally, women remain systematically excluded from formal peace processes, revealing the limited transformative spillover of peacekeeping participation into broader decision-making arenas. Reports of the Secretary General on Women and Peace and Security (S/2025/556) show that women comprised only 7 per cent of negotiators and 14 per cent of mediators, with nearly nine out of ten peace processes including no women negotiators at all.⁵² Together, these patterns demonstrate that, despite formal institutional commitments, gender inclusion remains constrained by deeply embedded gendered power relations, where the appearance of normative compliance continues to take precedence over transformative effectiveness.

In this context, Resolution 2538 represents a paradoxical achievement. It sets concrete targets for women's participation and recognizes their unique contributions to conflict resolution.⁵³ Yet, its negotiation process was a site of intense contestation over masculine-feminine norms. The resolution's institutionalization of gender equality now hinges on the agency of member states, particularly Indonesia, which championed it. The enduring question remains: Will this normative framework translate into a genuine transformation of peacekeeping culture, or will it be co-opted by the very structures it seeks to reform?

⁴⁹ "Towards equal opportunity for women in the defence sector", United Nations, 2024, at https://www.un.org/ssr/sites/www.un.org.ssr/files/general/dpo_women_in_defence_web.pdf

⁵⁰ Lee-Koo, Katrina and Gordon, Eleanor: "The Case for Women Peacekeepers from Those Who Serve", *The Interpreter*, 5 August 2025, at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/case-women-peacekeepers-those-who-serve>

⁵¹ Nesa, Meherun: "The Ethical Failure: Gender Exploitation and Moral Accountability in UN Peacekeeping Operations", (n.d.), at https://wiisglobal.org/resource_library/the-ethical-failure-gender-exploitation-and-moral-accountability-in-un-peacekeeping-operations/

⁵² "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/556)", United Nations, 2025, at <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/556>

⁵³ Permatasari, Reni: "The Evolution of Peacekeeping: Indonesian Perspective on Women Peacekeepers", MEIG Programme, 4 January 2025, at <https://www.meig.ch/highlight-44-2024-the-evolution-of-peacekeeping-indonesian-perspective-on-women-peacekeepers/>



5. Indonesia's Paradoxical Stance: The Disconnect between Reality and Global Advocacy

The overarching question of genuine transformation versus co-option finds a critical case study in Indonesia itself. To understand whether the normative framework of Resolution 2538 can overcome the structural constraints of peacekeeping, we must first examine the actor who championed it. This leads to the second part of our analysis: an interrogation of Indonesia's paradoxical position as a promoter of global gender norms against a domestic backdrop of entrenched patriarchy.

Indonesia's successful adoption of Resolution 2538 reflects a strategic alignment with prevailing global currents as much as its own intentional advocacy. This achievement was not crafted in a vacuum but was buoyed by the decades-long struggle of civil society organizations. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security played a pivotal role in ensuring the issue remained on the Council's agenda. Their briefings provided the essential, ground-level analysis that made normative discussions substantive.

However, the Council's engagement with these civil society voices has been inconsistent, often hinging on the disposition of the presiding President. Indonesia's presidency, with its "Investing in Women" campaign, created a rare and favorable climate for these briefers. By actively leveraging this platform, Indonesia did not single-handedly create the momentum for gender equality in peacekeeping but rather skillfully harnessed a "fertile ground" already cultivated by global feminist advocacy⁵⁴. This confluence of national diplomacy and transnational civil society pressure was instrumental in shaping the consensus for Resolution 2538, revealing a complex interplay between state agency and the broader normative ecosystem.

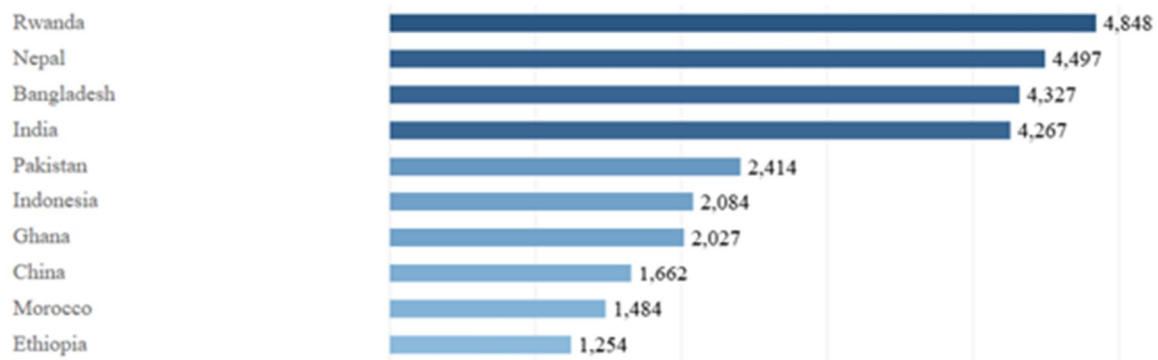
As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Indonesia had a distinct advantage: the power to integrate national interests into global peace and security policy. While there is no formal mechanism for election, UN Member States traditionally consider several factors when selecting non-permanent members. These include a country's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, its experience in peacekeeping and international leadership, its representation of significant demographic groups, and its financial contributions to the UN budget⁵⁵.

In the 2019-2020 period, Indonesia was elected for its fourth term as a non-permanent member. Its candidacy was bolstered by its significant global stature due to its status and activism. Indonesia's diplomacy on the international stage has been characterized by a core emphasis on inclusivity and tolerance as foundations for peace⁵⁶. Furthermore, Indonesia substantiated its commitment through concrete action, ranking as the sixth-largest troop-contributing country to UN peacekeeping operations (see Figure 1), a key credential in its successful campaign.

⁵⁴ Coomaraswamy, Radhika: "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325", UN Women, 2015, at <https://wps.asean.org/resources/preventing-conflict-transforming-justice-securing-the-peace-a-global-study-on-the-implementation-of-unscr-1325/>; McMillan, Caitlin; Tonelli, Angela; Mader, Katharina: "'Do our voices matter?': An analysis of women civil society representatives' meaningful participation at the UN Security Council", Joint Research Report, Oxfam and NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 2020, at <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/621133>

⁵⁵ "Research Guides: UN Membership: UN Security Council Membership", United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, at <https://research.un.org/en/unmembers/scmembers>

⁵⁶ Saragih, Hendra M.: "Indonesian Diplomacy to Become a Non-Permanent Member of the UN Security Council 2019–2020", *International Journal of Arts and Humanities Studies*, Vol. 1, n° 1 (2021), pp. 123–128.

Figure 1. Ranking of Troops Contributing Countries as per December 2025

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping, at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Acquiring a position on the UN Security Council presents a significant opportunity for a country like Indonesia to exert tangible influence on global affairs and cultivate a legacy of positive international standing. A state's capacity for international leadership is often measured by quantitative variables like power and military strength. However, qualitative factors are equally critical motivators. These include its role as a norm entrepreneur, its international and domestic image, the priorities of its national leadership, and its administrative competence⁵⁷. For Indonesia, pursuing a council seat was thus a strategic endeavor to leverage both its tangible contributions and its normative capital to shape the global agenda. Indonesia's participation in peacekeeping is ideologically anchored in its "free and active" foreign policy and the constitutional mandate to participate in world peace. Politically, such engagement is a strategic tool for elevating its international profile, gaining prestige, and strengthening its leadership status within the international community⁵⁸. Consequently, the government has adopted peacekeeping as a core strategy for deeper integration into the international system⁵⁹.

Indonesia's agency in championing Resolution 2538 was thus not solely driven by feminist ideals but also by a calculated aim to bolster its regional and global standing. Promoting gender equality served as a strategic vehicle for enhancing its international profile, particularly its leadership within ASEAN⁶⁰. Authorship of a UNSC resolution is a critical indicator of influence, as it demonstrates which state has shaped a binding legal instrument⁶¹. By leading this initiative, Indonesia reinforced its image as a normative leader. Support for the WPS agenda has become a modern "standard of civilization" for states seeking international recognition, allowing Indonesia to consolidate its influence, especially in a region where gender inequality remains significant. This instrumental approach aligns with Feminist Institutionalism, which recognizes that states are gendered entities whose national interests are formulated within internal gender power relations. The international system naturally privileges

⁵⁷ Thorhallsson, Baldur: "Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol. 7, n° 2 (2012), pp. 135–160.

⁵⁸ Bullion, Anthony: "India and UN Peacekeeping Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 4, n° 1 (1997), pp. 98–114; Krishnasamy, Karthikeyan: "'Recognition' for Third World Peacekeepers: India and Pakistan", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 8, n° 4 (2001), pp. 56–76; Sorenson, David S.; Wood, Paul C. (2004): *The Politics of Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era*, London, Routledge.

⁵⁹ Anwar, *op. cit.*, p. 195.; Hutabarat, Leonard F. (2018): "Diplomasi Indonesia dalam Misi Pemeliharaan Perdamaian PBB", *Jurnal Pertahanan & Bela Negara*, Vol. 6, n° 2 (2018).

⁶⁰ True, Jacqui; Gayatri, Irine Hiraswari; Veronika, Nuri Widiastuti: "Indonesia's UN Security Council Drive for Inclusive Peace and Security", *The Interpreter*, 2 September 2020, at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indonesia-s-un-security-council-drive-inclusive-peace-security>

⁶¹ Brosig, Malte: "More Than Just Productive? Evaluating Germany's Term at the UN Security Council 2019–2020", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 30, n° 3 (2023), pp. 308–333.



masculinized policy practices that have historically dominated the field.⁶² Therefore, a pro-gender policy does not automatically stem from female leadership but is contingent on how it serves constructed national interests. This framework demands critical attention to how masculine identities are constructed and reproduced, fundamentally shaping international relations theory and practice.

The passage of Resolution 1325 (2000) has represented a performative commitment to inclusion, yet tangible policy outcomes, such as gender-responsive budgeting or the reorganization of power structures, remain elusive.⁶³ This gap reveals a critical truth: the international arena, including peace diplomacy, remains a field where the national interest in legitimacy and status is paramount, and this interest is formulated within deeply gendered power distributions. As Joan Acker⁶⁴ theorized, institutions are permeated by a gendered logic of power—a logic developed historically by and for men, and still dominated by them. According to feminist research, states often offer "women and children" with masculinized protection while maintaining the same social, political, and economic injustices that pertains women's insecurity and vulnerability.⁶⁵ Consequently, the state is not a neutral agent but a gendered structure.⁶⁶

For women to advance as state agents, they are often compelled to conform to its inherently masculinist norms and discourses. Thus, the patriarchal underpinnings of the organizations that women enter are not inherently undermined by their mere presence in leadership roles; it often necessitates their assimilation into the very system they seek to change. Contradict with the image it poses through proactive international diplomacy, stands in stark contrast a domestic landscape in Indonesia where gender equality remains an elusive ideal. Domestically, Indonesia's political arena is characterized by the persistent marginalization of women, where a 30% gender quota has failed to secure meaningful representation, stymied by male-dominated party structures that engage in vote-stealing and the dismissal of elected female legislators.⁶⁷ While Indonesia champions the participation of female peacekeepers abroad, its own military institutions remain a bastion of hegemonic masculinity where the voices of women are systematically marginalized. The pathway for women to even attain leadership is fraught with barriers, often requiring familial ties to male officials or the need to meet a higher, often unstated, standard of qualification than their male counterparts.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the national security and defense apparatus remains a bastion of hegemonic masculinity, evident in the

⁶² Pandya, Mehar: *Gender and International Relations*, 13 April 2021, at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350897056_Gender_and_International_Relations; Parashar, Swati; Tickner, J. Ann; True, Jacqui (2018): *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁶³ Mackay, Fiona: "'Thick' Conceptions of Substantive Representation: Women, Gender and Political Institutions", *Representation*, Vol. 44, n° 2 (2008), pp. 125–139.

⁶⁴ Acker, Joan: "From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions", *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 21, n° 5 (1992), pp. 565–569.

⁶⁵ Parashar, Swati; Tickner, J. Ann; True, Jacqui: "Introduction: Feminist Imaginings of Twenty-First-Century Gendered States", in Parashar, Swati; Tickner, J. Ann; True, Jacqui (eds.) (2018): *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 1–15.

⁶⁶ Peterson, V. Spike (ed.) (1992): *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers; Stetson, Dorothy M. (1995): *Comparative State Feminism*, London, Sage.

⁶⁷ Komnas Perempuan: "Amicus Curiae terhadap Uji Materiil PKPU n° 10 Tahun 2023: Langkah Mundur Kebijakan Tindakan Afirmasi 30 Persen Kuota Keterwakilan Perempuan", *Komnas Perempuan (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan)*, 3 July 2023, at <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/siaran-pers-detail/amicus-curiae-terhadap-uji-materiil-pkpu-no-10-tahun-2023-langkah-mundur-kebijakan-tindakan-afirmasi-30-persen-kuota-keterwakilan-perempuan>

⁶⁸ Robinson, Kate: "2 Dismantling the Old Gender Order: A Work in Progress", in Bexley, Angie; Xue Dong, Sara; Setyonaluri, Diahadi (eds.) (2023): *Gender Equality and Diversity in Indonesia: Identifying Progress and Challenges*, Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, pp. 9–33.



complete absence of women in top military leadership and the lack of gender-sensitive policies for domestic operations, which are designed exclusively around the needs of male soldiers⁶⁹.

This profound disconnection between Indonesia's cosmopolitan feminist agenda abroad and its patriarchal foundations at home reveals its international advocacy to be less a genuine reflection of a national vision and more a strategic performance of norm entrepreneurship, leveraging a global "standard of civilization" to enhance its international profile while leaving its own entrenched power structures unchallenged. The structural and cultural barriers hindering Indonesian women from attaining leadership are rooted in a pervasive patriarchal culture, often reinforced by specific religious interpretations. This creates a fundamental duality: the state, including Indonesia, can actively obscure these daily reproduced patriarchal values while simultaneously promoting a pro-gender foreign policy. Scholarly critique of such "feminist" state actors focuses precisely on this phenomenon—the cynical use of feminist language to justify a protective, masculinized international role without a substantive commitment to feminist goals, or the provision of social safety nets as an excuse for failing to address foundational gender⁷⁰. This analysis positions Indonesia's international advocacy not as an organic outgrowth of domestic progress, but as a potential strategic performance that leverages global gender norms to build soft power and legitimacy, leaving its own entrenched patriarchal power structures fundamentally unchallenged.

This resistance is not incidental but foundational, as the hierarchal principles of patriarchy are historically embedded within the very identity of the state, its diplomatic practices, and the architecture of the global order⁷¹. Therefore, Indonesia's pro-gender foreign policy cannot be understood in isolation from these pervasive structural constraints. The impact of gender equality policies, whether positive or negative, is conditioned by the specific characteristics of a state. Its effects are not monolithic but are, instead, "mediated by institutions, and vary across institutional arenas, policy sectors, and over time and space"⁷². With the adoption of Resolution 2538, Indonesia pledged to expand protection mechanisms for women and children in conflict, increase the number of women serving in UN peacekeeping and police forces, and include the WPS agenda into initiatives to prevent and combat violent extremism. The resolution also aims to bolster national and community capacity for engaging women as agents of peace and tolerance⁷³. This has contributed to increased institutional recognition of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda within Indonesia's security sector, as well as greater visibility of female peacekeepers in international deployments. While these shifts remain incremental, they indicate that global normative frameworks can exert measurable influence on national policy orientations.

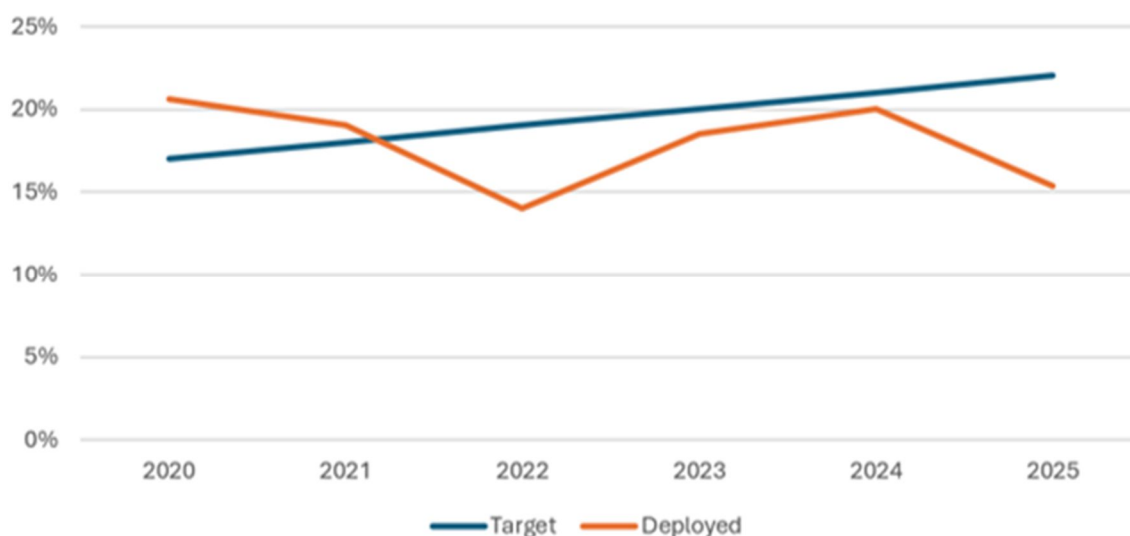
⁶⁹ Kusmiyati, Nani and Efendy, Hady: "The Leadership of Women in Military Organization", *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, Vol. 7 (2017), pp. 165–179.; Sriyanto: "Strategi Pemerintah Dalam Peningkatan Peran dan Kapabilitas Female Peacekeepers Guna Mewujudkan Gender Mainstreaming", *Jurnal Lemhannas RI*, Vol. 11, n° 2 (2023), p. 2.

⁷⁰ Pateman, Carole: "The Patriarchal Welfare State", in *Feminism, The Public and The Private*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; Young, Iris Marion (2003): "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State", *Signs*, Vol. 29, n° 1(1998), pp. 1–25.

⁷¹ Duriesmith, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–68.

⁷² Vickers, Jill: "Gendering Federalism: Institutions of Decentralization and Power-Sharing", in Krook Mona Lena; Mackay Fiona (eds.) (2001): *Gender, Politics and Institutions*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 129–146.

⁷³ "Indonesia-2020 Commitments – 1325 National Action Plans", *PeaceWomen*, 2020, at <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/2019-commitments/indonesia-2020-commitments/>

Figure 2. Indonesia Peacekeeping Deployment in UN Military Experts on Mission (UNMEM)

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping, at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Figure 2 reveals a stark paradox: Indonesia's deployment of female peacekeepers plummeted in 2022, a direct result of pandemic-related training halts⁷⁴. Despite a post-pandemic recovery, targets remain unmet. The number dropped significantly again in 2025, revealing inconsistencies between earlier efforts in international fora and actual outcomes, as well as exposing the profound influence of structural and cultural barriers within its security institutions. A telling example was the mandatory virginity testing for female cadets—a practice that institutionalized the patriarchal conflation of a woman's worth with her perceived "purity"⁷⁵. While formally abolished in 2022 after intense advocacy by Human Rights Watch⁷⁶, its recent revocation highlights the tenacity of such norms. This symbolic victory has not dismantled the hegemonic masculinity that pervades the defense sector. Policymaking remains a male-dominated arena, sustaining a formidable glass ceiling that continues to block women's ascent to leadership and prevents the deep, institutional reform necessary for genuine gender equality in Indonesian peacekeeping.

Empirical studies demonstrate that improvements in women's participation have not been matched by corresponding enhancements in their capabilities or institutional support. As noted by Sriyanto, the limited integration of a gender perspective among key stakeholders has hindered the effective development of female peacekeepers' capacities⁷⁷. Moreover, the role of leadership within missions remains critical; entrenched perceptions among some mission leaders that women are "weak and powerless" continue to shape task allocation and limit women's substantive participation⁷⁸. This reflects a broader organizational culture that

⁷⁴ Isnarti, Rika; Kamayi, Aditya; Anggorowati, Anita: "Challenges, Benefits, and Opportunities of Indonesian Female Peacekeepers", *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 13, n° 1 (2023), pp. 31–41.

⁷⁵ Robotjazi, Mostafa; Simbar, M.; Nahidi, F.; Gharehdaghi, J.; Emamhadi, M.; Vedadhir, A.; Alavimajid, H. (2016): "Virginity and Virginity Testing: Then and Now", *International Journal of Medical Toxicology and Forensic Medicine*, Vol. 6, n° 1 (2016), pp. 36–43; Satiawan, Andini Adha Putri; Wahyuni, Sri and Casmiwati, Dewi: "Implementation of Perkasal Policy Number 38 of 2021 Regarding the Acceptance of Cadets and Cadets of the AL Navy Academy in a Gender Perspective", *Science and Education*, Vol. 4, n° 6 (2024), pp. 551–560.

⁷⁶ Harsono, Antonius: "TNI Akhirnya Mengakhiri 'Tes Keperawanan' yang Kejam Itu", Human Rights Watch, 19 April 2022, at <https://www.hrw.org/id/news/2022/04/19/indonesia-military-finally-ends-abusive-virginity-test>

⁷⁷ Sriyanto, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Ricarvy, Zahra Ayu Kusuma and Wahyuningroem, Sri Lestari: "Feminist Policy Analysis on Gender Mainstreaming Policy in Indonesian International Peacekeeping Forces", *Jurnal Politik*, Vol. 10, n° 1 (2024), Article 3, pp. 14, 27.



continues to reproduce hegemonic masculinity, thereby restricting the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming initiatives.

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda has strongly emphasized increasing women's representation in military and peacekeeping missions. However, despite international instruments like Resolution 2538, adopted under Indonesia's own presidency, significant gender disparities persist in Indonesia's military and police units⁷⁹. This implementation failure stems from two fundamental constraints: structural limitations in recruiting women due to their small numbers in security forces, and a deeply entrenched masculine culture that reinforces traditional gender stereotypes⁸⁰.

Indonesia's Minister of Defence Regulation No. 23/2020, which governs participation in international peacekeeping, demonstrates that the institutional core of its military policy remains unshaken by global gender norms⁸¹. The regulation's technical focus on troop deployment mechanisms is entirely gender-blind, systematically excluding any consideration of how to actively recruit, integrate, or recognize women. This silence is not a mere oversight but a telling indicator of an institutional logic still governed by entrenched masculine norms. By failing to incorporate inclusive language or a gender perspective, the policy actively upholds the status quo, revealing a profound disconnect between Indonesia's diplomatic endorsement of UNSC Resolution 2538 and the patriarchal foundations of its own defense bureaucracy. Consequently, Indonesia's implementation of its international commitments remains tokenistic at best, constrained by a military ideology that has yet to internalize the substantive inclusion of women as a strategic imperative.

At the institutional level, the gap between international commitments and domestic implementation persists. Gender mainstreaming policies within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and National Police (Polri) have not been consistently or comprehensively implemented, indicating that the adoption of global norms has yet to penetrate the core of security governance⁸². Existing policies often fail to account for the social, cultural, and political contexts that shape women's roles within these institutions, resulting in measures that are formalistic rather than transformative. Consequently, gender inequality within Indonesia's peacekeeping contingents mirrors broader patterns within its domestic military structures, underscoring that the challenges are systemic rather than mission-specific.

These domestic constraints demonstrate how national institutional contexts shape peacekeeper behavior. As Horne, Robinson, and Lloyd establish⁸³, troop-contributing countries' domestic practices strongly predict their personnel's conduct in UN missions. Thus, Indonesia's limited integration of gender norms in its security policy directly impacts its peacekeeping performance. Meaningful change depends not on automatic progression but on external variables, particularly women's position in broader society, influencing military policy orientations⁸⁴. Ultimately, Indonesia's selective engagement with gender equality exemplifies the co-optation of feminist agendas, where feminist ideas are instrumentalized for institutional

⁷⁹ Azizah; Maksum; Hidayatulloh: *Enhancing Women Contribution in Peace, Conflict Resolution, and Security Agenda*, op. cit., p. 112

⁸⁰ Moncrief, Stephen (2017): "Military Socialization, Disciplinary Culture, and Sexual Violence in UN Peacekeeping Operations", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, n° 5 (2017), pp. 715–730.

⁸¹ Ricarvy and Wahyuningroem, op. cit., p. 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Horne, Charlotte; Robinson, Kate; Lloyd, Megan (2020): "The Relationship Between Contributors' Domestic Abuses and Peacekeeper Misconduct in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 64, n° 1(2020), pp. 235–247.

⁸⁴ Carreiras, Helena: "Gender Integration Policies in the Armed Forces: A Double-Edged Sword?", in Cafforio Giuseppe (ed) (2009): *Advances in Military Sociology: Essays in Honor of Charles C. Moskos*, Bingley, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 183–194.



purposes unrelated to feminist goals⁸⁵. While Indonesia's leadership in advancing Resolution 2538 may not constitute genuine feminist advocacy, it nonetheless establishes gender frameworks in peacekeeping and demonstrates non-hegemonic leadership in the international system, creating potential for future normative influence.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that while Resolution 2538 has catalyzed incremental changes in discourse, representation, and policy visibility, it has not fundamentally altered the gendered power relations embedded within Indonesia's security institutions. The persistence of masculine norms, leadership biases, and weak policy implementation highlights the limits of normative diffusion when it is not accompanied by deep institutional reform. In this sense, Indonesia's experience exemplifies the broader tension identified by Feminist Institutionalism: that formal commitments to gender equality may coexist with, and even obscure, the continued reproduction of patriarchal structures in practice.

Feminist Institutionalism posits that the international system is fundamentally gendered, structured by pervasive power relations. While the past half-century has witnessed significant yet uneven transformations in patriarchal gender relations, marked by evolving social roles, global feminist movements, and increased female political leadership, gender equality has increasingly become a standard of international legitimacy. A state's treatment of women now directly impacts its international standing, creating a gendered hierarchy between included and marginalized nations⁸⁶. However, achieving superficial numerical balance, simply "Add Women and Stir", proves insufficient for substantive equality⁸⁷. Norms must evolve to embrace intersectionality, critically examining how gender inequality interacts with other hierarchies like race, class, and nationality. Without this deeper, intersectional perspective, even well-intentioned gender norms risk reinforcing the very inequalities they seek to dismantle.

Nevertheless, Indonesia's leadership on Resolution 2538 constitutes a significant diplomatic achievement for a non-Western, post-colonial state. This success challenges the entrenched skepticism and racialized power dynamics that often dismiss gender equality initiatives from the Global South. The field of international peacekeeping itself is structured by what scholars term a 'global color line,' where unspoken hierarchies—evident in missions like MINUSMA—dictate the allocation of risk, resources, and respect between predominantly white Global North and non-white Global South contingents⁸⁸. Indonesia's agency in shepherding this resolution thus represents a crucial intervention not only into gendered norms but also into the racially stratified power relations that have long defined global security governance.

6. Conclusion

Indonesia's successful shepherding of UNSC Resolution 2538 represents a quintessential case of *instrumental norm entrepreneurship*. While its diplomacy successfully codified the significance of women's involvement in peacekeeping, this international advocacy was fundamentally decoupled from a genuine, revolutionary dedication to gender parity at home. The resolution thus stands as a paradoxical achievement: a significant normative milestone whose potential impact is constrained by the patriarchal structures it seeks to challenge, both

⁸⁵ Otto, Dianne: "The Exile of Inclusion: Reflections on Gender Issues in International Law Over the Last Decade", *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, Vol. 10, n° 1 (2009), pp. 11–26.

⁸⁶ Agathangelou, Anna M. and Ling, L. H. M.: "Desire Industries: Sex Trafficking, UN Peacekeeping, and the Neo-Liberal World Order", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 10, n° 1 (2003), pp. 133–148.

⁸⁷ Bogaards, Matthijs (2022): "Feminist Institutionalism(s)", *Italian Political Science Review*, Vol. 52, n° 3 (2022), pp. 418–427.

⁸⁸ Cold-Ravnkilde, Signe; Albrecht, Peter; Haugegaard, Rasmus (2017): "Friction and Inequality among Peacekeepers in Mali", *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162, n° 2 (2017), pp. 34–42; Oksamytna, Kateryna; von Billerbeck, Sarah: "Race and International Organizations", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 68, n° 2 (2024).



within the UNSC and within Indonesia's own institutions. Although measurable progress has been recorded globally—particularly in police and justice sectors, supported by initiatives such as the Elsie Initiative—persistent gaps in military participation, uneven implementation across member states, and enduring institutional barriers underscore the limits of these gains.

This case study speaks directly to a central debate within the WPS agenda. Feminist scholars have long questioned whether a state-led, militarized approach can genuinely advance gender equality, and to what extent the WPS agenda remains embedded within structures of patriarchy and imperialism. The findings reinforce these concerns: despite formal commitments, women continue to face restricted access to combat roles, limited leadership pathways, and institutional cultures that reproduce masculine norms. Persistent gender stereotypes further marginalize women into feminized roles, while their exclusion from peace processes and the continued prevalence of gender-based violence highlight the gap between normative commitments and lived realities.

This does not, however, render engagement with the state futile. Instead, it necessitates a reframing of expectations. As feminist scholars suggest, the state, as a profoundly gendered entity, cannot be seen as an impartial force for feminist reform. Yet, it possesses the unique capacity to enact international policy shifts. Therefore, the most productive path forward is to conceptualize states not as core *feminist actors*, but as strategic *feminist allies*. This framing acknowledges their privileged position within the dominant structure while holding space for their contribution to incremental change, without granting them authority over the feminist movement's core objectives.

Ultimately, the story of Resolution 2538 is not one of simple success or failure, but a revealing snapshot of the contemporary struggle for gender equality in global politics. It underscores that WPS agenda's future heavily depends on relentlessly scrutinizing the gap between rhetorical promises and practice, and on holding all states accountable to the transformative ideals they profess to uphold, while strategically navigating the complex and often contradictory role of the state as an ally, not a leader, in the pursuit of feminist peace.

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