



Studienabschlussarbeiten

Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät

Latella, Luisa Valentina:

Women's Rights in the UN
Norms (and their Content) Matter! A Two-Dimensional
Conceptual Framework for Norm Robustness,
Illustrated through the Women, Peace and Security
Agenda

Bachelorarbeit, Sommersemester 2025

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1 Introduction

The liberal international order (LIO) is facing growing challenges, with fundamental institutions and values coming under increasing pressure (Ikenberry 2018, 2020; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Hofmann 2020; Flockhart 2020). Among those particularly affected are international human rights regimes – especially norms concerning women’s rights. While previous decades witnessed significant advancements in the international protection of women, these gains are now subject to mounting contestation (Sanders 2018: 271; Cupaé & Ebetürk 2020: 2). As early as 2017, the then United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights warned: “we are witnessing a backlash against women's rights, a backlash that *hurts us all*” (Al Hussein 2017). This observation prompts a broader question: what are the consequences of sustained and repeated contestation for international norms? To what extent does such contestation really *hurt* or in other words merely weaken, or fundamentally transform the affected norms?

A growing body of scholarship has explored how international norms respond to processes of contestation. However, the findings remain ambivalent. While some scholars argue that contestation does not necessarily undermine norm robustness (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2013, 2019; Zimmermann et al. 2023) and may even contribute to their reaffirmation (Wiener 2004, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018; Hurd 2013; Clark et al. 2018), others maintain that contestation can lead to the weakening of norms (Rosert & Schirmbeck 2007; McKeown 2009: 11; Heller et al. 2012: 283; Panke & Petersohn 2012, 2016). Recent contributions have further emphasized norm change as a possible outcome of contestation, including the phenomenon of norm spoiling, where repeated challenges gradually undermine the norm’s content (Sanders 2018: 276).

This thesis seeks to reconcile these diverging perspectives by building on and extending the analytical framework of Zimmermann et al. (2023). Specifically, it proposes a conceptual distinction between two dimensions of overall norm robustness: social validity and normative stringency. While Zimmermann et al.’s framework offers a valuable lens to assess a norm’s behavioral relevance, it overlooks the dimension of normative stringency – that is, the clarity, scope, and prescriptive strength of the norm’s substantive content. This thesis argues that what Zimmermann et al. capture under the label of “norm robustness” in fact primarily reflects a norm’s social validity. However,

assessing overall robustness requires an additional layer of analysis: even if a norm continues to be cited, implemented, or formally upheld, its normative substance may have changed over time. Without considering this second dimension, we risk misinterpreting the robustness of norms. Based on this distinction, the thesis puts forward the following core assumption:

The robustness of a norm is reflected not only in the stability of its social validity, but also in the stability of its normative stringency.

The necessity of this analytical distinction becomes particularly evident when examining the case of women's rights within the UN – a field that has been especially affected by sustained contestation. While norms protecting women's rights may appear robust when assessed through existing frameworks, there is reason to assume that their substantive content has become increasingly vulnerable to erosion. As a result, what seems to be a stable and uncontested norm may, in fact, have experienced significant weakening in terms of its normative stringency. This thesis therefore argues that the more pressing analytical question is not merely whether a norm persists in one of these dimensions, but *in both*. By doing so, this thesis connects the study of norm robustness and norm change as integral parts of the broader research on norm contestation, aiming to contribute to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of how international norms – particularly those related to human rights and gender equality – evolve under the mounting pressures of the current crisis of the LIO.

To develop this argument, the thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 lays the theoretical foundation by tracing the evolution of norm research within constructivist International Relations (IR) theory, highlighting how norms have been conceptualized and studied over time. It then turns to the growing literature on norm contestation and reviews the diverging findings regarding its potential effects on international norms. Building on this, the chapter introduces the analytical framework of norm robustness as developed by Zimmermann et al. (2023), which serves as a central point of reference. However, this framework primarily captures one side of norm robustness – what this thesis refers to as social validity – while leaving aside the dimension of normative stringency. Therefore, in a final step, the framework is therefore critically evaluated and extended through the introduction of this second dimension, which enables a more differentiated analysis of how contestation affects both the institutional standing and the substantive content of

norms over time. The resulting theoretical framework provides the foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis, which focuses on women's rights within the United Nations system specifically, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Introduced by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and expanded through subsequent resolutions, the WPS agenda constitutes one of the most significant achievements of the international women's rights movement. At the same time, it has become an increasingly prominent target of contestation (Sanders 2018: 271). This dual character makes it particularly well suited for assessing a norm's social validity and normative stringency. The empirical analysis begins by applying the framework developed by Zimmermann et al. to the WPS agenda to assess its social validity. In a second analytical step, the thesis turns to the newly introduced dimension of normative stringency to investigate whether the agenda's substantive content has changed over time as a result of contestation. The concluding chapter synthesizes the findings and argues for a refinement of the existing analytical model for norm robustness. It demonstrates that an exclusive focus on social validity risks obscuring substantial normative transformations. By introducing and empirically substantiating the dimension of normative stringency, the thesis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of norm robustness under contestation, particularly in contexts where the stakes of normative effectiveness are high – such as in the realm of women's rights.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 What Are Norms and Contestation?

In IR scholarship, social norms are commonly understood as “intersubjective standards of appropriate behavior for actors” (Nadelmann 1990; Katzenstein 1996: 5; Finnemore & Sikkink 1998; Zimmermann et al. 2023: 4). They articulate shared expectations within a given social context and serve to constitute and regulate the behavior of actors, so-called norm addressees. By defining what is considered legitimate or appropriate, norms delineate the boundaries of acceptable action in international politics. As such, they are not merely descriptive but inherently normative, as they reflect and promote conceptions of desirable conduct (Wiener 2008; Kratochwil 1989). While it is rare for states to openly reject international norms (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 9), contestation is widespread. Most international norms have faced challenges, and virtually all have been subject to some form of contestation (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 3). In this context, contestation is broadly

defined as “any verbal criticism directed at the application and/or validity of a norm” (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 3; see also Wiener 2014). Understanding what constitutes a norm – and how such norms are challenged – thus provides an essential conceptual foundation for analyzing their robustness.

2.2 The Evolution of Norm Research and Norm Contestation in Constructivist International Relations Theory

Since the late 1980s, the emergence of social constructivism (Wendt 1987) and the ensuing “constructivist turn” (Checkel 1998) in IR has catalyzed a systematic engagement with international norms, emphasizing their constitutive and regulative functions in world politics (Wiener 2004; Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2020; Zimmermann et al. 2023). Whereas realist theory and “classic” security studies focus primarily on the distribution of power and the threat of violence (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 1983; Jepperson et al. 1996: 33), constructivist scholars argued that international behavior cannot be understood by material interests alone. Rather, norms, identities, and intersubjective meanings shape what states perceive as appropriate, legitimate, or desirable conduct (Jepperson et al. 1996: 33). Accordingly, “norms matter” (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; see also Katzenstein, ed. 1996).

Early constructivist work, particularly the norm life cycle model developed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), focused on the processes through which norms emerge, spread, and become institutionalized. Norms were portrayed as gaining traction through a sequence of advocacy, institutionalization, and internalization, culminating in broad international acceptance (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998). The norm life cycle model conceptualizes norm development as a three-stage process (Figure 1). In the emergence phase, norm entrepreneurs formulate and promote new normative claims aimed at influencing the behavior of powerful actors, especially states. They use persuasion, strategic framing, and organizational platforms to mobilize support and build legitimacy. Once a tipping point is reached, the norm enters the cascade phase, marked by its rapid diffusion across states and international organizations through processes of socialization, strategic adaptation, and peer influence. In the final internalization phase, the norm becomes widely accepted

as legitimate and is integrated into domestic and international practice as a taken-for-granted standard of appropriate behavior (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 895).

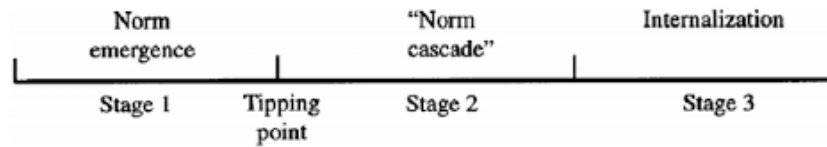


Figure 1: Norm Life Cycle (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 896)

According to this model, contestation was seen as primarily associated with the early phase of norm emergence. Once institutionalized, norms were assumed to be relatively stable and uncontested (Payne 2001; Wiener 2004, 2007, 2014). If contestation was acknowledged at all, it was typically confined to domestic processes or to efforts by international organizations to promote norm internalization (Katzenstein 1993; Checkel 1999; Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999; Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel 2006). This led to a widespread neglect of the possibility that norms might remain contested even after being formally adopted, and that such contestation could affect their meaning, legitimacy, or effectiveness. Norms were treated as either successfully institutionalized or ineffective due to their failure to reach the tipping point (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 895–896; Risse & Sikkink 1999: 17). In short, while the diffusion process was understood as dynamic, the norm itself was treated as *static* (Krook & True 2010; Wiener 2014).

In contrast, more recent scholarship arrives at a different conclusion. Wiener (2004, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018) argues that norms do not reach a fixed “end point” but must instead be understood as inherently *dynamic*. From this perspective, norms remain subject to contestation even after they have been institutionalized (Wiener 2008). Building on Finnemore and Sikkink’s life cycle model, the concept of the norm antipreneur was developed to capture actors who aim not to promote but to obstruct, redirect, or dismantle established norms (Bloomfield 2016: 311). Consequently, contemporary norm research increasingly shifts from “norms *as* structures to norms *within* discursive structures or larger practices” (Wiener 2018: 6). This conceptual move opens up analytical space to trace how norms develop over time. In other words, a norm may remain stable, become strengthened, or gradually erode due to contestation.

2.3 Norm Contestation and Its Effects: A Review of Diverging Findings

In response to this question, the existing literature offers divergent assessments. Some scholars argue that sustained norm contestation leads to the destabilization or even erosion of the contested norm (Rosert & Schirmbeck 2007; McKeown 2009: 11; Heller et al. 2012: 283; Panke & Petersohn 2012, 2016). In contrast, others contend that contestation may strengthen norms by fostering processes of deliberation and legitimation (Wiener 2004, 2008, 2010; Hurd 2013; Clark et al. 2018). The interpretation of these findings is further complicated by the fact that some studies concentrate exclusively on discursive expressions of commitment, while disregarding practical implementation and behavioral compliance – or vice versa. In the first strand of norm research, norm robustness is primarily linked to compliance, whereas scholars like McKeown (2009: 11) argue that “norms will always lose some salience just in virtue of it being publicly challenged,” thereby emphasizing the discursive dimension and suggesting that the degree of contestation itself may serve as an indicator of robustness (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2019: 6). One of the few recent contributions that explicitly distinguishes and incorporates both dimensions is the analytical framework developed by Zimmermann et al. (2023).

2.4 Conceptualizing Norm Robustness: The Framework of Zimmermann et al.

Zimmermann et al. (2023) add to the contestation debate by arguing that norms often display a surprising degree of robustness, even when confronted with contestation (see also Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2019: 13). Their framework seeks to integrate both discursive and practical dimensions of norm robustness, aiming to “bridge the gap between discourse and practice” (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 15). Their framework identifies four distinct dimensions of robustness: compliance, implementation, concordance, and reactions to norm violations (Table 1). While two of these dimensions emphasize discursive engagement, the other two focus on practice-oriented aspects.

Compliance	Norm addressees’ behavior that is consistent with the norm. This includes, for instance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Adoption of practices consistent with the norm’s provisions
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Absence of actions by norm addressees that would constitute a violation of the norm
Implementation	<p>Integration of the norm into institutional and legal frameworks. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inclusion in policy papers, protocols, and standards of regional and international institutions ○ Founding of domestic, regional, and international institutions ○ Adoption of domestic legislation on norms
Concordance with the Norm	<p>Acceptance of a norm's legitimacy. This includes for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Widespread ratification ○ Few opt-out clauses or reservations ○ Positive references to the norm in official statements or resolutions ○ Support for the implementing institution
Negative Reaction to Norm Violations	<p>Reactions of other norm addressees to norm violations. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public criticism or condemnation in multilateral settings ○ Expressions of concern by states and international organizations ○ Use of discursive tools such as naming, shaming, or rhetorical pressure

Table 1: Framework for Norm Robustness (based on the work of Zimmermann et al. 2023: 16–17)

Zimmermann et al. (2023) apply their framework to a range of international norms, including the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the prohibition of torture. Their analysis suggests that international norms tend to exhibit a higher degree of robustness than often assumed, even in the face of contestation (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 3; see also Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2013: 14; 2019: 13).

2.5 Extending the Framework: Introducing the Dimension of Normative Stringency

The analytical framework developed by Zimmermann et al. has therefore made a significant contribution to the study of international norms. Their finding challenges the intuitive assumption that increasing levels of contestation lead to the weakening or erosion of norms. However, an important methodological caveat must be acknowledged: Zimmermann et al. (2023: 17) explicitly state that changes in a norm's content do not affect its robustness, as they "disentangle norm content from robustness" (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 15). In this view, norm change, and norm robustness are treated as analytically distinct, though related, phenomena (Wiener 2018: 6; Zimmermann et al. 2023: 17). As a result, alterations in a norm's scope are not considered indicative of either weakening or strengthening in terms of robustness as it has no effect on the latter.

This distinction has crucial implications. It allows for the possibility that a norm may remain formally robust over time while simultaneously undergoing significant shifts in its substantive content as a result of contestation. From an analytical perspective, this raises the concern that the concept of robustness, as defined by Zimmermann et al., may be misleading at first glance, as they say their framework is "an excellent tool for analyzing and judging both the scope and depth of current contestations as well as weakening and strengthening trends" (Zimmermann et al. 2023: 3). One might assume that a change in a norm's core content would also imply a transformation of the norm robustness. Yet, under the current framework, such a shift does not register analytically.

This leads to the argument that, while the framework developed by Zimmermann et al. provides an important approach to evaluating the robustness of international norms, it captures only one of two key dimensions. What their analysis considers is referred to in this thesis as social validity, but it does not fully represent overall robustness. To address this blind spot, the present study proposes an extension of the robustness framework by introducing the complementary dimension of normative stringency, taking account any norm changes. This additional category enables the assessment of whether a norm's substantive content remains stable or is gradually modified through contestation. The goal is to evaluate not only the formal continuity of a norm but also the extent to which its normative claims continue to reflect the behavior it originally prescribed. Building on the words of Wiener (2018: 6) that: "norm research centres on understanding and explaining

norm change *or* robustness in relation with practices of contestation”, the aim of this thesis is to do *both*.

To do so, it draws on the emerging literature on norm spoiling, which explores how actors intentionally challenge existing norms in order to weaken their influence (Sanders 2018: 272). Rather than resulting in outright rejection or repeal, norm spoiling often leads to changing the wording of a norm (Sanders 2018: 284 et seqq.). As such, it highlights the potential for norms to remain formally robust while becoming substantively “hollow”. At the same time, the developed analytical approach also allows for the possibility that a norm may grow stronger in normative terms. Just as the social validity of a norm can increase over time, this thesis argues that its normative stringency can also be strengthened. Indeed, such a strengthening of normative content has already taken place in various international legal frameworks: A compelling one is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). While its 1989 text set out a broad normative framework, subsequent optional protocols significantly expanded its scope and specificity – prohibiting child recruitment, strengthening protections against sexual exploitation, and establishing a complaints mechanism (for an overview see: Vandenhoe et al. 2019). Similarly, the Convention Against Torture (CAT) was reinforced through its Optional Protocol, which introduced national and international preventive mechanisms to enhance compliance and oversight (for an overview see: Murray et al. 2011). Both cases demonstrate how international norms can gain in prescriptive clarity and ambition through the incorporation of new substantive elements. To trace such potential changes in a norm’s content, this thesis relies on indicators designed to capture developments in normative substance. Specifically, it distinguishes between the introduction of new normative content, changes in existing normative content, and the omission of previously affirmed normative elements (Table 2).

Introduction of New Normative Content	<p>The inclusion of new thematic or conceptual elements into the normative framework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These additions may strengthen the original normative intent by addressing emerging challenges or neglected areas, but may also shift attention away from core objectives, potentially diluting the norm’s original core objectives.
Change in Existing Normative Content	<p>Modifications to previously established normative content that alter the norm’s clarity, scope, or prescriptive strength.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This includes both reinforcing and weakening developments, such as the use of more specific or binding language, but also the omission, softening, or narrowing of previously affirmed elements.
Omission of previously affirmed Normative Content	<p>The removal of whole thematic elements that were previously part of the normative framework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While such omissions often weaken the norm by reducing its clarity, scope, or prescriptive strength, they may occasionally restore the norm’s original intent – for instance, by eliminating prior formulations that introduced limitations to its applicability or diluted its normative direction.

Table 2: Framework for Normative Stringency

Integrating the normative content into the analysis of norm robustness becomes also particularly compelling when revisiting the definition of norms. Zimmermann et al. (2023: 4) define norms as “claims [of] normatively desirable behavior,” implying that it is the content of a norm that determines which forms of conduct are considered appropriate, thereby making it constitutive of the norm itself. From this perspective, maintaining a strict conceptual separation between a norm and its content is difficult to justify. If the primary function of a norm is to prescribe specific behavior, any significant alteration to its content necessarily entails a transformation of the norm itself, one that

should be reflected in assessments of its robustness. The revised analytical framework therefore proposes the following conceptual differentiation between the two dimensions of what this work calls “overall norm robustness”: social validity and normative stringency (Figure 2).

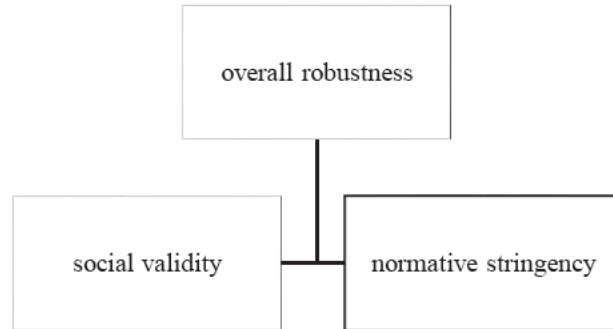


Figure 2: Dimensions of Overall Norm Robustness (own illustration)

By cross-referencing social validity and normative stringency, the framework yields a nuanced portrait of a norm’s overall strength, identifying four analytically distinct types (Table 3).

	Low Normative Stringency	High Normative Stringency
Low Social Validity	Soft Norm	Normative Ideal
High Social Validity	Empty Norm	Hard Norm

Table 3: Typology Overall Norm Robustness

These types are not points along a linear “more-to-less robust” scale but rather classifications of an already institutionalized norm according to the two introduced dimensions. Once a norm has completed its initial life cycle of emergence, cascade, and consolidation it becomes an institutionalized norm which then can evolve into one of the four different norm types: hard, empty or soft norm or a normative ideal – based on the stability of the two different dimensions.

These types represent distinct constellations rather than points along a single continuum of overall robustness. Importantly, this framework does not assume a fixed endpoint: norms may shift between these types over time if their social validity or normative stringency is changing.

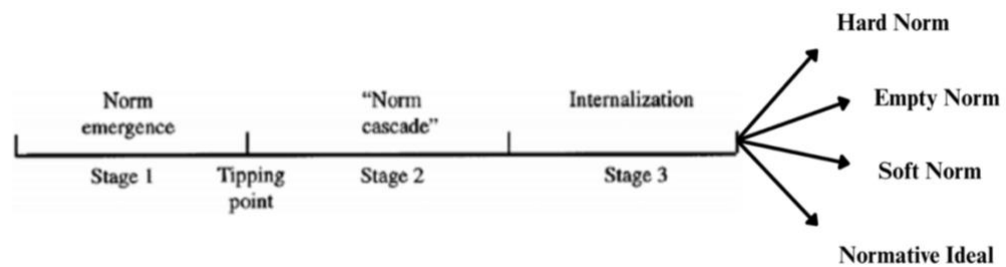


Figure 3: The Norm Life Cycle and the Norm Typology (own illustration based on Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 896)

The following characteristics can be attributed to the respective norm types, each reflecting a distinct combination of social validity and normative stringency within the two-dimensional framework (Table 4).

Hard Norm

High Social Validity, High Normative Stringency

A hard norm is both socially embedded and normatively forceful. It is supported by sustained compliance, active implementation, and discursive affirmation. Its content closely reflects and even reinforces the original normative core and effectively regulates behavior as intended.

→ Strong in both practice and content, enabling consistent behavioral regulation and resulting in high overall robustness

<p>Empty Norm</p> <p><i>High Social Validity, Low Normative Stringency</i></p>
<p>An empty norm continues to be invoked and formally applied, but its substantive content has been diluted or reinterpreted in ways that deviate from its original core.</p> <p>→ Still invoked and applied, but no longer directs behavior in its original sense leading to medium overall robustness</p>
<p>Ideational Norm</p> <p><i>Low Social Validity, High Normative Stringency</i></p>
<p>An ideational norm retains a strong and coherent normative core: its behavioral prescriptions remain intact or have even been reinforced. However, former norm addressees no longer implement the norm, uphold it, or act in accordance with its principles.</p> <p>→ Its normative strength is not translated into practice due to the absence of social validity leading to low overall robustness</p>
<p>Soft Norm</p> <p><i>Low Social Validity, Low Normative Stringency</i></p>
<p>A soft norm is neither upheld in practice nor sustained in discourse. The actors who once implemented, invoked, or defended it have largely disengaged from it, and it no longer aligns with its original normative intent.</p> <p>→ It no longer prescribes the originally intended behavior and fails to guide action in any meaningful way, resulting in minimal overall robustness</p>

Table 4: Four Types of Norms: Mapping Robustness by Social Validity and Normative Stringency

This new typology allows for the identification of normative shifts that remain analytically out of reach in the framework proposed by Zimmermann et al. A core assumption of this approach is that changes in normative stringency do not necessarily translate into the same changes in social validity. The added value of the two-dimensional

framework therefore depends on the possibility that these two dimensions may evolve in diverging directions. If normative stringency and social validity were to always move in parallel, the extended model would ultimately yield conclusions similar to those produced by Zimmermann et al.'s framework. Only if it can be demonstrated that norms may retain high social validity while undergoing normative weakening – or vice versa – does the proposed typology offer genuine analytical leverage. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to substantiate the relevance of the following core assumption:

The robustness of a norm is reflected not only in the stability of its social validity, but also in the stability of its normative stringency.

This assumption simultaneously challenges the prevailing assumption in the literature, particularly in the work of Zimmermann et al., that norm content and robustness can be analytically disentangled. It aims to demonstrate that attending to changes in normative substance enables a more nuanced understanding of how robust norms remain in practice. Similar to Zimmermann et al., it acknowledges that robustness is not static. However, it extends this perspective by emphasizing that norms may shift between different configurations as their social validity and normative stringency evolve – sometimes in parallel, sometimes in tension. This theoretical refinement provides the conceptual foundation for the following empirical analysis of the WPS framework.

2.6 Limitations of the Proposed Framework

While the proposed framework offers a refined lens for assessing norm robustness several limitations remain. First, it does not systematically account for the relative power of norm entrepreneurs and their coalitions. As shown by Panke and Petersohn (2016: 2; see also Sandholtz & Stiles 2009) robustness is more likely to decrease when being challenged by actors with relatively high (discursive and material) power. Furthermore (Simmons & Jo 2019; Sanders 2022), alliances of seemingly unlikely actors, „strange bedfellows” (Sanders 2018: 277), can be more harmful as diversity in challenge signals to norm addressees that a norm is being questioned from multiple angles (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2019: 10). While such configurations of actor power clearly influence a norm's trajectory, they remain analytically external to the proposed framework.

Second, the framework abstracts from structural factors that may shield norms from erosion, such as institutionalization, the broader normative environment, and a norm's

legal character. As shown by Wiener (2008, 2010) and Deitelhoff (2009), institutional settings can channel contestation into deliberative formats, thereby stabilizing norms. Legal codification and precision may likewise enhance resilience by clarifying expectations and reducing ambiguity (Abbott & Snidal 2000). However, these stabilizing effects may be ambivalent: legal rigidity and excessive precision can also reduce adaptability, making norms more vulnerable under shifting conditions (Percy 2007). Moreover, the indicators in Tables 2 and 3 focus exclusively on state behavior and do not account for possible multidirectional influence of other actors such as civil society, international organizations, or non-profit actors (Sanders 2018: 281). Taken together, these limitations indicate that the framework may reach its analytical limits in contexts where power asymmetries or institutional dynamics play a particularly influential role. Nonetheless, its emphasis on the interplay between social validity and normative stringency offers a meaningful analytical lens that can enrich existing research on norm robustness by more systematically accounting normative change.

3 Empirical Analysis

3.1 Women's Rights in the United Nations

The international women's rights agenda has long constituted a central pillar of the human rights framework within the UN. Key instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA), the ongoing work of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the WPS agenda have contributed to embedding gender equality norms within international institutions. Their emergence aligns closely with key tenets of constructivist IR theory, particularly the norm life cycle, and they are widely regarded as one of the most notable successes in the diffusion and institutionalization of international norms in recent decades (Sanders 2018: 275).

At the same time, women's rights have become a growing target of contestation. Backlash against gender equality constitutes an increasingly visible trend within international politics, and the UN has emerged as a central arena for transnational anti-feminist mobilization. Nationalist, religious, and conservative actors challenge gender-related norms, frequently portraying them as ideologically biased or incompatible with traditional cultural or religious values (Hopgood 2013; Sanders 2018: 271, 287).

This tension between institutionalization and contestation makes the UN women’s rights framework a particularly instructive case for examining both social validity and normative stringency. While norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) or the prohibition of torture have received extensive scholarly attention, the robustness of women’s rights norms remains comparatively underexplored. Yet extending such analysis to this domain is especially urgent, as normative developments in this area directly affect the rights, protection, and agency of millions of women worldwide (for further discussion, see Annex A, p. 52).

3.2 Case Selection

Against this backdrop, the WPS agenda provides a particularly compelling case. As a defined subfield of the broader UN women’s rights framework, it articulates shared expectations regarding the role of women in peace and security contexts. Initiated with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the agenda was the first to explicitly address the gendered impacts of armed conflict and to call for the increased participation of women in peace and security processes (Shepherd 2008: 6–7, for an overview see: Davis & True (eds.) 2019). Resolution 1325 establishes four thematic pillars – participation, protection, prevention, as well as relief and recovery – which define the normative expectations for states, UN entities, and other relevant actors (Shepherd 2019: 99). These include commitments to ensuring women’s inclusion in decision-making, preventing conflict-related sexual violence, and integrating gender perspectives into peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts (Kirby & Shepherd 2016: 249; Shepherd 2019: 99). Since Resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions also contain concrete provisions on how these areas are to be implemented, this study uses “implementation” as a fifth analytical pillar. To trace normative change over time, the table below outlines the core normative claims embedded in each of these pillars as originally formulated in Resolution 1325 (2000):

Pillar	Core Normative Focus
Participation	Involvement of women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution.

Protection	Safeguarding women and girls from violence, particularly in conflict settings, including gender-based and sexual violence.
Prevention	Promotion of gender-sensitive approaches to conflict prevention, including gender-responsive training for peacekeeping personnel.
Relief and Recovery	Ensuring gender-responsive reintegration and rehabilitation measures, as well as the protection of human rights in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.
Implementation	Requesting monitoring and reporting by the Secretary-General and enhancing women's representation throughout the UN system.

Table 5: Normative Core Claims of the Resolution 1325 (2000)

As a Security Council resolution, the WPS agenda is legally binding for all UN member states and thus constitutes a normative framework with legal character (for a more detailed discussion of its legal status, see Annex B, p. 52). Since its adoption, the agenda has been reaffirmed through nine follow-up resolutions. Although earlier resolutions remain formally valid, the thematic shifts and changing priorities across subsequent resolutions reveal which forms of state behavior are regarded as desirable at the time of adoption and which normative commitments states are willing to reaffirm. In this sense, the most recent resolutions arguably carry the greatest normative weight. Reactions to these developments in academic and public debates illustrate why the WPS framework is particularly suited for examining normative change. While early assessments highlighted a substantive expansion of its scope (Shepherd 2019: 99), more recent critiques point to marked normative regression (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020: 2). One notable example is Resolution 2467 (2019), which, under sustained contestation from the United States, omitted previously affirmed language on sexual and reproductive rights, particularly regarding access to healthcare for survivors of sexual violence. Its adoption, which was only possible after the removal of this terminology, provoked widespread criticism and is widely regarded as a significant weakening of the agenda (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020: 2). These diverging developments make the WPS agenda a compelling case for analyzing

change in social validity and shifts in normative content and their impact on the agenda's robustness.

3.3 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, theory-informed case study design to investigate the robustness of the WPS agenda (for an introduction and overview, see Yin 2018; Mayring 2015: 21). Its central aim is to assess both the social validity and the normative stringency, and thereby the overall robustness of the WPS agenda over time. To that end, the research design adopts a diachronic perspective, enabling the systematic tracing of shifts in the behavior of norm addressees, as well as changes in the WPS framework itself.

In order to meet the standards of theoretical coherence, methodological transparency, and empirical traceability, the study integrates the two-dimensional analytical framework into a theory-guided qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2015: 82 et seqq.). Following Mayring, this method allows for the systematic examination of texts through theoretically derived categories. It is particularly suited for capturing how described behavior and normative meanings evolve, are reaffirmed, or challenged over time.

The empirical material was selected according to the specific requirements of each dimension and consists exclusively of primary sources both authored and issued by UN institutions. Social validity is examined using only those Secretary-General reports that provide substantive information on the implementation of the WPS agenda. These are prepared by the UN Secretariat and submitted to the Council for monitoring purposes (for a complete list of both document sets, see Annex F, p. 71 et seqq.). To operationalize the two dimensions of norm robustness, two distinct coding schemes were developed. These were derived deductively from the corresponding analytical frameworks and systematically applied across the respective document corpus (for the full coding schemes, including category definitions, coding rules, and anchor examples, see Annex D, p. 54 et seqq.).

To trace changes in normative stringency, the analysis examined how the substantive content of the WPS agenda, as reflected in Security Council resolutions, has evolved over time. To ensure a consistent and comprehensive assessment, all paragraphs within each resolution were paraphrased and compiled in a thematically structured Excel matrix (for the treatment of preambular paragraphs, see Annex C, p. 53, and Annex D, p. 55). Coding

decisions were then based on the collective development of these grouped paragraphs, rather than on individual provisions in isolation. This approach enabled a comparative analysis of how each thematic area evolved across successive resolutions and allowed new language to be assessed in light of the cumulative normative content of preceding texts. Based on the analytical framework introduced earlier (see Table 2, p. 10), four coding categories were derived: Based on the analytical framework introduced earlier (see Table 2, p. 10), the analysis applies four overarching coding categories: (1) change in existing normative content, (2) introduction of new normative content, (3) omission of previously affirmed normative content, and (4) no normative change. With the exception of the “no change” category, each category was further differentiated into a positive or negative manifestation (e.g., normative strengthening or weakening).

For the analysis of social validity, the coding categories were based on the dimensions developed by Zimmermann et al. (see Table 1, p. 8). The following four categories were applied: (1) Compliance, (2) Implementation, (3) Concordance, and (4) Reactions to Norm Violations, each of which allowed for both positive and negative expressions (e.g., implementation vs. lack of implementation). The Secretary-General’s reports were coded to identify relevant descriptive indicators over time. While these codes do not in themselves represent change, they provide the empirical basis for assessing whether, and in what ways, the respective dimensions have evolved. Since the focus lay on identifying developments over time within each category, rather than conducting a direct document-to-document comparison, no matrix was required. The coding was carried out using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated the structured application of codes, transparent documentation of coding decisions, and traceable interpretation across the dataset. Relevant text excerpts are cited throughout the following empirical analysis to substantiate coding choices and interpretive claims.

3.4 Social Validity: Applying the Framework by Zimmermann et al.

3.4.1 Compliance

This section presents the findings for the category compliance, based on references in the Secretary-General’s reports that describe the behavior of states as norm addressees in regard to the core provisions of the WPS agenda. While compliance is understood as behavior that aligns with the norm, every act of implementation within the WPS agenda can reasonably be interpreted as a form of compliance and is accordingly coded as such

(Figure 4). Unlike norms with binary thresholds of fulfillment, the WPS agenda consists of a set of interrelated, aspirational commitments aimed at progressive realization. Implementation, such as the inclusion of women in peace processes, the adoption of gender-sensitive policies, or institutional reforms, signals active alignment with these normative objectives. In this sense, concrete policy measures serve as observable evidence that actors are behaving in accordance with the agenda's underlying principles. Conversely, the absence of full implementation does not automatically constitute non-compliance. Because the WPS agenda lacks a single fixed benchmark, progress is often incremental and partial. A state may already be taking meaningful steps, for example, by involving women in peace negotiations, while still more progress in this area is possible, such as parity or more far-reaching structural reforms. In such cases, further efforts are clearly needed, but the state is nonetheless acting within the normative framework rather than against it. Non-compliance requires a failure to meet core expectations; a lack of full implementation, by contrast, often reflects the open-ended nature of the agenda, where engagement exists, but room for improvement remains.

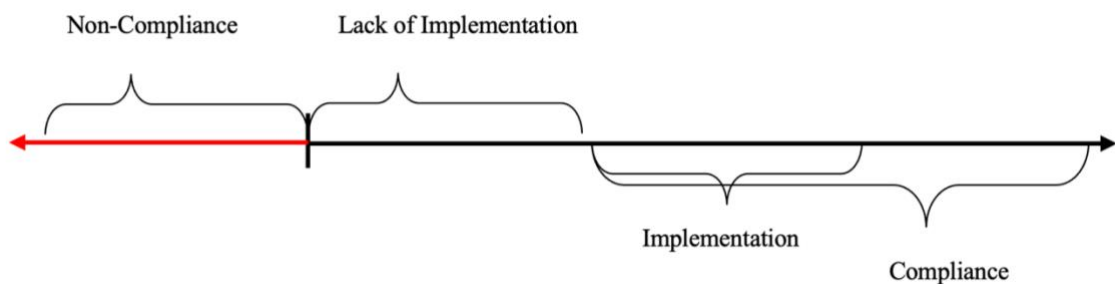


Figure 4: Coding Distinctions between Compliance and Implementation

Implementation (own illustration)

A total of 685 text segments were coded under this category across all Secretary-General's reports. Of these, 482 segments refer to Compliance, while 203 segments were categorized as non-compliance.

The data clearly indicate that while positive developments – i.e., references to compliance – have remained relatively stable over time, mentions of non-compliance have slightly increased in the last three reporting years (2022, 2023, and 2024) (Figure 5).

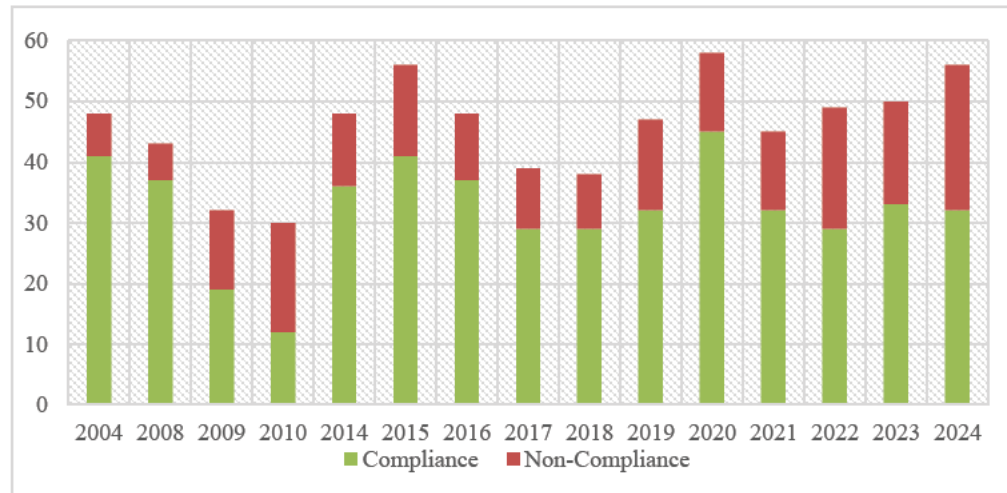


Figure 5: References to Compliance and Non-Compliance in Secretary-General’s Reports on the WPS Agenda

This impression is not only supported by the numerical analysis of the coded segments but is also echoed with similar clarity in the Secretary-General’s reports. For example, the 2022 report states:

“Despite normative agreement since the year 2000 and evidence that gender equality offers a path to sustainable peace and conflict prevention, we are moving in the opposite direction. Today, the world is experiencing a reversal of generational gains in women’s rights while violent conflicts, military expenditures, military coups, displacements and hunger continue to increase.” (United Nations Secretary-General [UNSG] 2022: 1).

Likewise, the 2023 report warns: “As these negative trends turn back the clock on women’s rights, they also turn back the clock of history, setting back both gender equality and global peace.” (UNSG 2023: 2). The 2024 report notes, that this regression is at least in part attributable to the rapidly shifting global context (Figure 6).

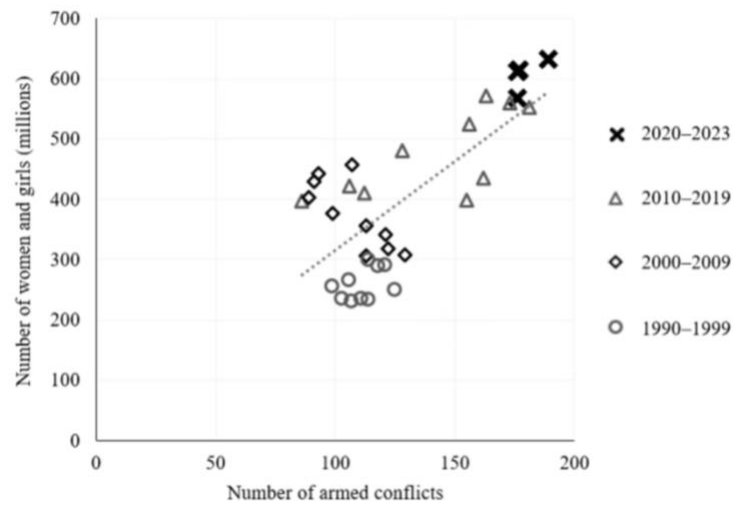


Figure 6: Number of Armed Conflicts and Number of Women and Girls Living Within 50 km of Armed Conflict, 1990–2023 (UNSG 2024: 14)

It further elaborates:

“The world is caught in a frightening spiral of conflict, instability and violence. In 2023, more than 170 armed conflicts were recorded, and approximately 612 million women and girls lived within 50 km of these conflicts, 150 per cent more than just a decade ago” (UNSG 2024: 14).

With the rising number of armed conflicts, the potential for violations of women’s rights in conflict settings likewise increases. At the same time, it is precisely under such conditions that meaningful assessments of compliance become possible as violations can only be observed where conflict actually occurs. The rise in non-compliance references in the last three reports reflects this deteriorating context and the increasing pressure on WPS commitments in practice. However, the number of compliance references continues to exceed those of non-compliance and remains strikingly stable over time.

3.4.2 Implementation

Implementation refers to the formal institutional or legal anchoring of WPS-related norms at the national level. This includes, for example, the adoption of national action plans, the introduction of gender quotas for political participation, and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening women's participation and protection. However, not all references indicate substantive progress. The data also captures instances of lack of implementation, referring to cases in which the measures taken were insufficient or required further improvement. Examples include the failure to increase women's representation in parliaments or political office, the inability to meet funding targets for gender-sensitive programming, or the absence of comprehensive legal and judicial mechanisms to protect women's rights and ensure accountability for gender-based violence.

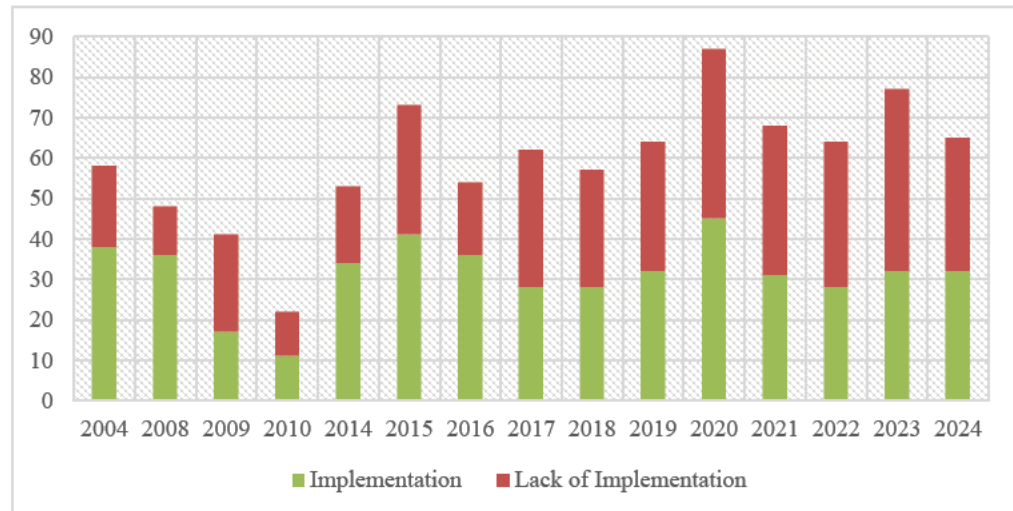


Figure 7: References to Implementation and Lack of Implementation in Secretary-General's Reports on WPS

In total, 896 text segments were coded within this category across all Secretary-General's reports. Of these, 469 segments refer to implementation, while 427 were coded as lack of implementation. As illustrated in Figure 7, references to implementation have remained relatively stable over time, indicating a continued engagement with the WPS agenda throughout the reporting period. However, since 2017 (with the exception of 2020), their frequency has slightly declined compared to earlier years. At the same time, references to lack of implementation have steadily increased since 2015. In several recent years, beginning in 2017, the number of critical assessments nearly matches or even exceeds

that of positive ones (especially from 2020 onwards). These findings also align with the assessment provided by the Secretary-General:

“However, in recent years, the annual reports of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security have warned of stagnation and regression across key indicators on women and peace and security.” (UNSG 2024: 1).

This shift in the tone and balance of reporting suggests a growing tension between the normative commitments of the WPS agenda and their effective realization in practice. While the sustained level of implementation references signals that the agenda has not lost relevance, the rise in negative observations highlights mounting obstacles to its comprehensive and consistent implementation.

3.4.3 Concordance

Beyond concrete action, the social validity of the WPS agenda is also shaped by how states articulate their positions on WPS-related norms. Concordance captures how states comment on and evaluate the WPS agenda, as reflected in the Secretary-General’s reports. The category includes both positive norm references, which signal rhetorical support for the agenda as a normative framework, and instances of disavowal, in which states are portrayed as rejecting or delegitimizing its core principles. While this discursive dimension occurs less frequently than behavior-oriented categories such as compliance and implementation, it nonetheless offers important insights into the perceived legitimacy of the WPS agenda and the extent to which its normative foundations are contested within intergovernmental discourse. In total, 30 text segments were coded under this category (Figure 8). Of these, 26 reflected positive norm references, indicating support for the WPS framework, either through direct reference to its principles or through the endorsement of behavior aligned with its normative content. In contrast, only 4 segments were coded as norm rejection, capturing rhetorical disavowals or attempts to delegitimize the agenda in multilateral settings.

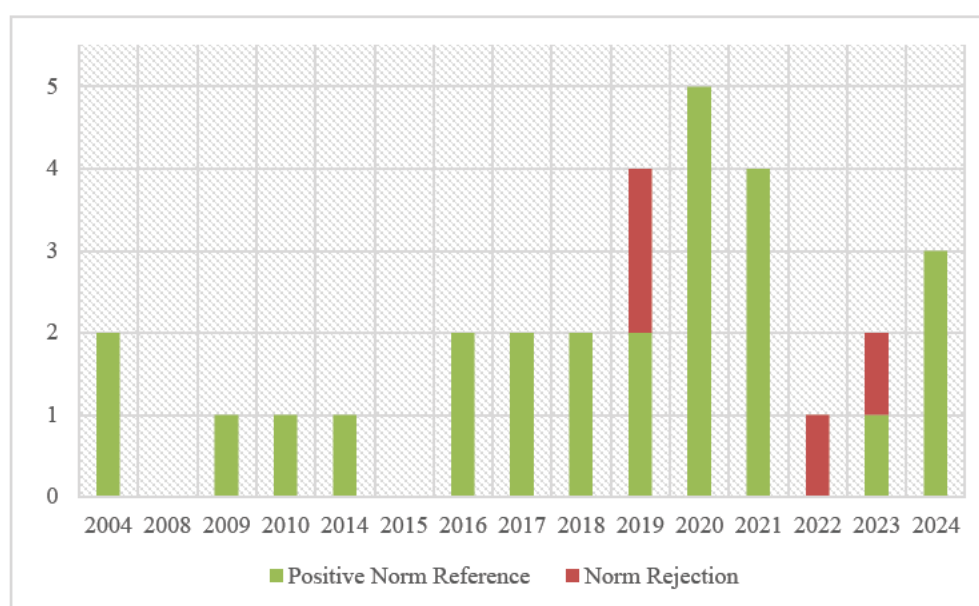


Figure 8: Frequency of Concordance and Disavowal References to WPS Norms in Secretary-General's Reports

These overall proportions are also reflected in the temporal distribution of norm-related references shown in Figure 8. While the total number remains limited, the figure illustrates a consistently supportive orientation over time. From 2004 to 2017, positive references to WPS norms appear at a low but steady level, with no instances of explicit disavowal. Starting in 2018, however, the discourse becomes more dynamic, with an increase in both positive and – albeit to a much lesser extent – negative references. The number of affirmations peaks in 2020, likely in connection with the heightened institutional visibility surrounding the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325. Although a small number of critical references emerge from 2019 onwards, these remain exceptions rather than the rule. In every year, affirmations of WPS norms continue to outweigh rejections. The reappearance of contestation may also be interpreted as a sign of growing visibility and relevance, bringing normative disagreements into sharper focus but without fundamentally undermining the agenda's legitimacy. Taken together, the data suggest that while discursive engagement with the WPS agenda has become more nuanced in recent years, it continues to enjoy wide support in statements by states repeated in the Secretary-General's Reports.

3.4.4 Reactions to Norm Violations

To complete the analysis, attention turns to how states react to norm violations, which captures how states – as norm addressees – publicly position themselves in response to violations of the WPS agenda, as reflected in the Secretary-General’s reports. This category focusses on instances in which states explicitly condemn actions or developments that contravene WPS principles, as well as those in which they remain silent or seek to justify such practices.

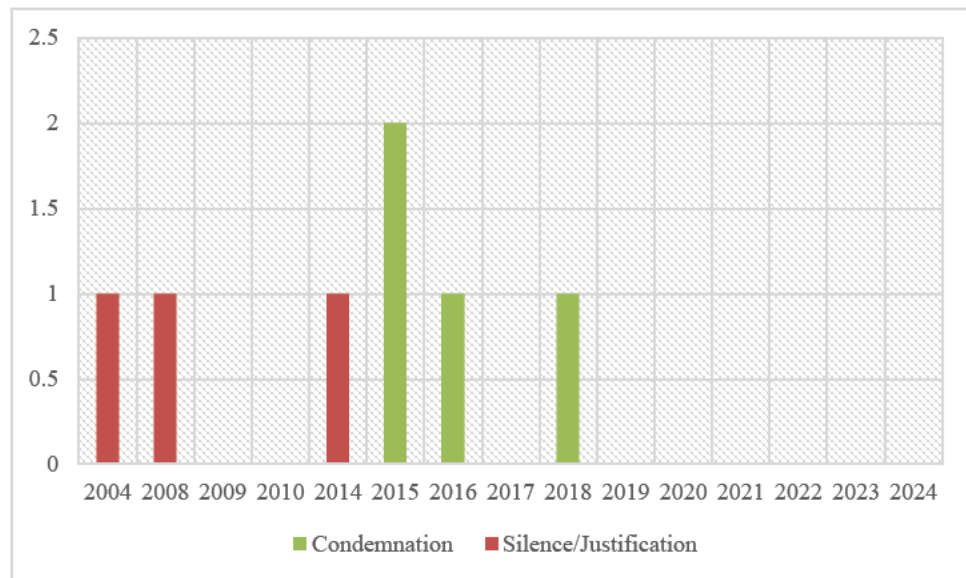


Figure 9: References to State Reactions to WPS Norm Violations in Secretary-General’s Reports

In total, only 7 text segments were coded under this category – by far the lowest number among all coded dimensions (Figure 9). Of these, 3 reflect silence or justification, while 4 were categorized as condemnation. As shown in Figure 9, references are rare and concentrated in a few reporting years. The earliest years (2004, 2008, 2014) primarily reflect silence or justification, indicating that states at the time often refrained from addressing WPS norm violations publicly, as this paragraph illustrates, for example: “The Security Council and other Member States need to send stronger signals to parties to conflict that perpetrators will be prosecuted” (UNSG 2008: 16). Between 2015 and 2018, a few instances of condemnation suggest a brief moment of stronger discursive engagement:

“At the capital-level meeting held in April in Berlin, members offered concrete recommendations on participation and representation, accountability and advocacy and the building of alliances to advance the agenda (see A/72/926-S/2018/669). They also voiced concerns about shrinking spaces for civil society

and increasing security risks for defenders of the human rights of women” (UNSG 2018: 14).

Strikingly, no relevant references were identified in the reports from 2019 onwards. Given the increasing relevance of non-compliance in recent reporting – both in absolute numbers and in the Secretary-General’s narrative emphasis – it seems plausible to assume that any open rhetorical support for such violations by states would likely have been documented. The absence of such statements may therefore indicate that other states have not been trying to justify such behavior. But at the same time there are no examples in which these growing violations have been condemned. In sum, this category was only weakly represented overall. However, instances of reactions to norm violations, rather than expressions of support or silence, were more frequent and have increased over time.

3.4.5 Findings – A Change in Social Validity?

Taken together, the findings suggest that the WPS agenda has maintained a considerable degree of social validity over time. Across all Secretary-General’s reports, references to compliance consistently exceed those to non-compliance, indicating that the core expectations of the agenda continue to resonate with states and remain part of their declared normative orientation. In the area of implementation, however, this balance has shifted in recent years: while earlier reports emphasized institutional progress, reports from 2020 onwards contain slightly more references to lacking or insufficient implementation than to positive developments. This trend does not necessarily point to a rejection of the WPS agenda, but rather to increasing difficulties in ensuring the implementation of its commitments. The current rise in critical references regarding non-compliance and implementation gaps, highlights the mounting pressures the agenda faces in an increasingly volatile international environment.

The discursive dimensions – norm concordance and reactions to norm violations – support the overall assessment of continued robustness. Positive references clearly outnumber negative ones, and open disavowals of the WPS framework remain rare. These patterns reinforce the impression that the norm still enjoys broad rhetorical support. Yet, it must be noted that the overall number of references in these categories is very low, limiting the strength of any conclusions drawn from them. While they suggest that the normative legitimacy of WPS is largely uncontested, the empirical base is too limited to provide definitive evidence.

In sum, the findings point to a relatively robust norm, whose social validity has still mostly persisted despite a more adverse global context. Nevertheless, the slight but noticeable decline in recent years – especially given the growing number of references to negative developments – raises doubts about whether this positive assessment can be sustained going forward.

3.5 Normative Stringency: Expanding the Analytical Perspective

3.5.1 Introduction of New Normative Content – More May Be Better?

The WPS agenda has not remained static in its substantive focus. Over the years, new themes and issue areas have been successively introduced into its normative framework. This section examines these additions and assesses whether they reinforce the original purpose of the agenda or shift its normative orientation.

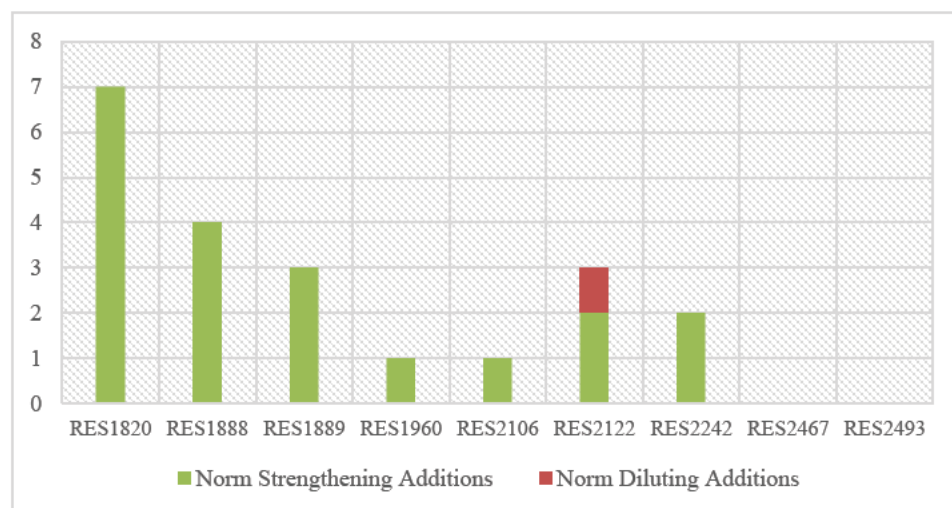


Figure 10: Normative Additions in WPS Resolutions

A purely quantitative evaluation reveals that the WPS agenda has expanded over time to include 23 new thematic areas (Figure 10). Of these, the majority fall under the pillars of implementation (10 themes), protection (5 themes), and relief and recovery (5 themes), while three were added under participation and none under prevention. When assessed against the original normative core established in Resolution 1325 (2000) (see Table 5, p. 16), nearly all the additions (22) align with the WPS agenda’s original intent, with only one identified as diverging. To explore this development in more depth, the following section highlights selected thematic additions and assesses their substantive relevance.

One notable example is the emphasis on political participation, which represents a clear thematic and normative extension of the agenda's original aim to enhance women's involvement in peace and security processes. New provisions call for ensuring women's full and equal participation in elections (para. 8, S/RES/2122, 2013) and in constitution-making processes (para. 1, S/RES/1889, 2009). In the domain of protection, the scope of the WPS agenda has also expanded to include broader issue areas. Among the most prominent are terrorism (para. 3, S/RES/2122, 2013) and the explicit attribution of state responsibility for the protection of women (pre. para. 7, S/RES/1820, 2008). Additional themes, though less extensively elaborated and only included in preambular paragraphs, include climate change and natural resources (pre. para. 13, S/RES/2242, 2015). This not only reaffirmed states' responsibility to protect women's rights but also expanded the scope of the WPS agenda to address emerging challenges, thereby strengthening its normative stringency.

In the area of relief and recovery, the most significant thematic expansion is the inclusion of healthcare. Resolution 1820 (2008) marked the first time that health systems were explicitly recognized as part of the WPS agenda's scope:

“Urges all parties concerned, including Member States, United Nations entities and financial institutions, to support the development and strengthening of the capacities of national institutions, in particular of judicial and health systems (...)” (para. 13, S/RES/1820, 2008).

However, it was not until the preamble of Resolution 1889 (2009) that the protective scope of the WPS agenda was explicitly extended to include the health consequences of conflict for women:

“Encourages Member States in post-conflict situations, (...) to specify in detail women and girls' needs and priorities and design concrete strategies, in accordance with their legal systems, to address those needs and priorities, which cover inter alia support for greater physical security and better socio-economic conditions, through education, income generating activities, access to basic services, in particular health services, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and mental health (...)” (pre. para. 10, S/RES/1889, 2009).

Although the scope for action remains limited due to the paragraph's preambular nature and its reliance on domestic legal frameworks, the topic of sexual and reproductive rights is nonetheless incorporated into the WPS agenda for the first time. Notably, in Resolution 2106 (2013), the explicit provision of healthcare for women is addressed for the first time

in an operative paragraph and also further expanded (para. 16, S/RES/2106, 2013; see 3.5.2, p. 30 for further details). This addition is normatively significant because it does not merely prohibit harm but also addresses its aftermath: the physiological impacts of conflict-related violence are recognized as requiring specific medical attention, and the resolution affirms the responsibility to safeguard and ensure women's access to appropriate healthcare services. In doing so, it shifts the normative content from preventing harm alone to actively protecting access to treatment for its effects, thereby strengthening the normative stringency of the WPS agenda through wider relief and recovery measures.

In the area of implementation, numerous themes have been added that aim to strengthen the enforcement of the WPS agenda and are therefore clearly aligned with the original normative core of Resolution 1325 (2000). These include, for example, the establishment of new UN entities explicitly dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda and/or gender issues and promoting its implementation, such as the appointment of a Special Representative to lead and coordinate efforts against sexual violence in conflict (para. 4, S/RES/1888, 2009). A particularly significant thematic addition within the implementation pillar is the explicit integration of funding as a key issue, first introduced in 2009 (pre. para. 10 and 13, para. 9, S/RES/1889, 2009). These examples illustrate a broader trend toward expanding the agenda to include practical instruments for improved monitoring and implementation.

The only addition to the WPS agenda that lacks a clear connection to the advancement of women's rights and could therefore be interpreted as a potential weakening of the norm's substantive stringency – is the inclusion of language emphasizing the primacy of state sovereignty. This provision was first introduced in the preambular section of Resolution 2122 (pre. para. 10, S/RES/2122, 2013) and reiterated in Resolution 2467 (pre. para. 3, S/RES/2467, 2019). In the latter, for instance, the Council “[reaffirms] its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all States in accordance with the Charter” (pre. para. 3 *ibid.*). Such phrasing introduces a relativizing element that may undermine the normative clarity and universality of the obligations laid out in the WPS agenda, particularly with regard to protecting women in conflict and post-conflict settings. The explicit emphasis on state sovereignty risks diluting the original intent of the WPS framework, which aims to establish universally applicable standards for the

protection and participation of women, irrespective of political or cultural contexts. By reaffirming sovereignty in broad terms, not only as a general principle but also – implicitly – in relation to all provisions of the resolution, the binding nature of these normative commitments is weakened. This generates a potential tension with other sections of the resolution that reference obligations under international law and may compromise the agenda’s transformative ambition to hold all actors equally accountable for the rights and protection of women in conflict. However, since the sovereignty clause appears only in the preambular section of the resolutions, its normative impact is limited, especially when compared to the stronger legal weight typically attributed to operative paragraphs.

In sum, the analysis of newly introduced normative content reveals that the overwhelming majority of additions align with the core normative commitments articulated in Resolution 1325 (2000). These expansions, ranging from political participation to health care access and accountability mechanisms, serve to deepen and operationalize the original aims of the WPS agenda rather than divert from them. Only one identified addition, the reaffirmation of state sovereignty, could be interpreted as potentially norm-diluting; however, its placement in the preambular section limits its overall impact. Thus, in terms of the introduction of new normative content, the WPS agenda appears to have experienced a normative strengthening over time, as new content has consistently reinforced rather than weakened its foundational principles.

3.5.2 Change in Existing Normative Content: Norms Are What States Make of It

In addition to the incorporation of new thematic elements, the WPS agenda has experienced substantial modifications to its existing normative content over time. These adjustments do not introduce entirely new topics but alter previously established commitments, either reinforcing or weakening the normative stringency of the WPS agenda. In assessing such developments, it is crucial to distinguish between mere linguistic variation and genuine normative transformation. While all normative change is expressed through language, not every change in wording reflects a substantive shift in meaning or prescriptive force.



Figure 11: Normative Strengthening and Weakening in WPS Resolutions

The analysis identified 167 instances of such normative modifications (Figure 11). Among them, 78 strengthen the overall level of protection set in the WPS agenda, whereas 89 fall short of previous benchmarks and thus signal a reduction in normative stringency. Importantly, these developments are not evenly distributed but vary across the four pillars of the WPS framework (Figure 12).

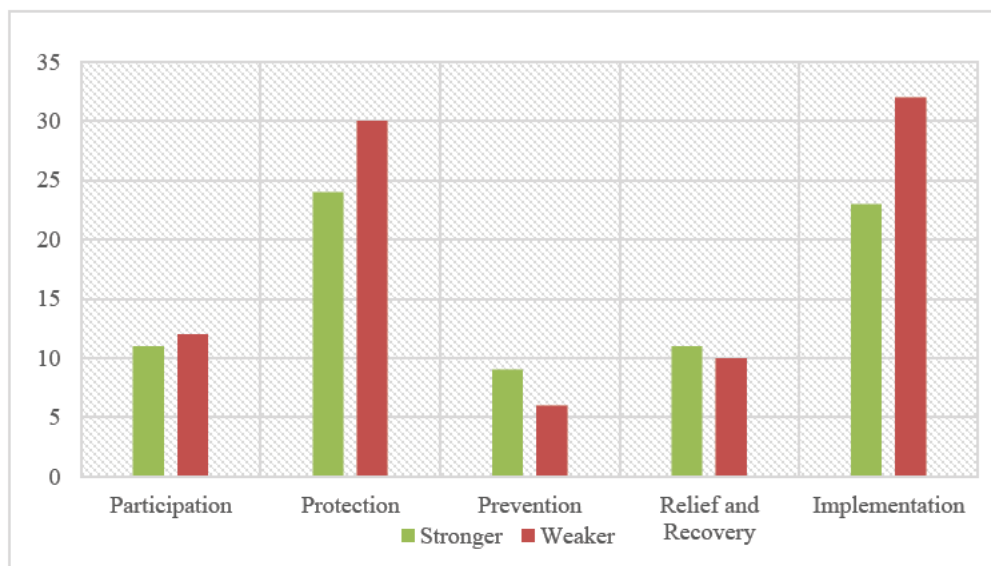


Figure 12: Distribution of Normative Strengthening and Weakening by WPS Pillars

While this numerical overview does not allow for conclusions about the quality or normative significance of each individual change, it nonetheless points to an emerging trend. Figure 12 reveals that norm-weakening developments are particularly prevalent in the areas of protection and implementation. Even though the increase in weakening

changes does not follow a strictly linear trajectory, Figure 12 indicates a broader pattern: in all resolutions since Resolution 1889 (2009), except Resolution 2106 (2013), weakening changes outweigh strengthening ones. This suggests a cumulative erosion of normative stringency in the wake of earlier periods of expansion. Against this backdrop, the following analysis focuses on selected issue areas in which changes in normative content are particularly consequential for the lived realities of women in conflict-affected contexts, namely, (1) legal frameworks, (2) conflict-related sexual violence, and (3) healthcare provision.

With regard to legal frameworks, the WPS resolutions refer to both international and domestic law. Since references to international law typically reiterate existing legal obligations, their normative stringency lies in reaffirmation rather than innovation. By contrast, references to domestic legal systems offer greater scope for the Security Council to articulate concrete normative expectations, making them more revealing for assessing substantive change. Resolution 1325 (2000) only briefly addressed domestic law, urging member states to prosecute serious international crimes, including sexual violence (para. 11, S/RES/1325, 2000). This narrow formulation was further weakened in Resolution 1820 (2008), which merely called for strengthening national institutions, including judicial bodies, without specifying what reforms should entail (para. 13, S/RES/1820, 2008). A significant normative strengthening followed in Resolution 1888 (2009), which called for concrete justice reforms, the prosecution of both civilian and military leaders (para. 7, S/RES/1888, 2009), and the development of national capacities to combat impunity (para. 6, 8, 9, *ibid.*). This elevated level of specificity and ambition, however, was not sustained. Subsequent resolutions largely retreated from these commitments, with only vague references to domestic reform. Resolution 2106 (2013) reversed this downward trend. It emphasized effective documentation of sexual violence, survivor-sensitive legal reform, and the inclusion of women in judicial institutions (para. 16, S/RES/2106, 2013). Yet this gain proved short-lived: the next resolution omitted the key paragraph and reverted to more abstract language. While still affirming gender-sensitive justice reforms (para. 11, S/RES/2122, 2013), mainstreaming gender perspectives in legal matters (para. 3, *ibid.*) and removing barriers to justice (para. 10, *ibid.*), the text fell short of restoring the prior level of prescriptive clarity. It was only in Resolution 2467 (2019) that the protective scope in this domain was meaningfully strengthened again. Alongside a cumulative reaffirmation of earlier commitments (e.g. para. 3, 14, 30, S/RES/2467,

2019), it introduced new normative content – such as recognizing the equal rights of women who became pregnant as a result of sexual violence (para. 18, 28, *ibid.*) and affirming the right to remedies and reparations for survivors (para. 15, 17, *ibid.*). In the subsequent and most recent resolution, however, this level of protection is no longer present. Only a single paragraph makes a general reference to the strengthening of national legal frameworks (para. 5, S/RES/2493, 2019). In sum, the legal dimension of the WPS agenda has undergone a fluctuating development. While some resolutions introduced substantial gains in normative stringency, particularly in 2008, 2009, 2013 and 2019, these were not consistently upheld. Especially in the area of domestic legal reform, progress proved uneven, and some earlier advances were later scaled back or diluted.

The issue of sexual violence was first addressed operatively in Resolution 1325 (2000) which “calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse” (para. 10, S/RES/1325, 2000). This marked the agenda’s initial protective framing. Resolution 1820 (2008) marked a significant normative strengthening by introducing more time-specific language and foregrounding the issue at the outset of the resolution. It “demands the immediate and complete cessation [...] of all acts of sexual violence against civilians with immediate effect” (para. 2, S/RES/1820, 2008). The resolution further emphasized that sexual violence is used as a strategy of warfare (para. 1, *ibid.*) and reaffirmed its prohibition under international law, including the Rome Statute (para. 4, *ibid.*). Connections to related issue areas expanded the normative scope: Resolution 1888 (2009) highlighted the responsibilities of military and civilian leadership (pre. para. 11, S/RES/1888, 2009) and called for the inclusion of sexual violence concerns in peace negotiations (pre. para. 12, *ibid.*).

However, this trend of strengthening was not sustained. Resolution 1960 (2010) introduced new mechanisms such as enhanced reporting by the Secretary-General (para. 3, S/RES/1960, 2010) and encouraged conflict parties to make time-bound commitments to end sexual violence (para. 5, *ibid.*). Yet, several key elements from Res. 1820 – such as the integration of prevention into peace processes, support for domestic legal reform, and training for troop-contributing countries – were no longer present, indicating a partial regression. A higher level of protection was re-established in Resolution 2106 (2013) which combined and expanded on earlier commitments. It provided for comprehensive

survivor support and reaffirmed legal accountability (e.g. para. 15–20, S/RES/2106, 2013). Still, subsequent resolutions offered a more limited scope: Resolution 2122 (2013), added important references to sanctions and disarmament (para. 12, S/RES/2122, 2013), and Resolution 2242 (2015), included gender-sensitive elements but did not significantly advance the protection framework. It was only with Resolution 2467 (2019), that the agenda’s normative content regarding sexual violence was substantially strengthened once again. In addition to reaffirming previous commitments (para. 3, 14, 30 S/RES/2467, 2019), the resolution introduced new obligations – such as assigning roles to specific UN entities and emphasizing survivors’ rights to remedies and reparations (para. 15, 17, *ibid.*). In the subsequent Resolution 2493 (2019), the issue of sexual violence is not addressed in a single paragraph (see also under 3.5.3, p. 36). Rather than following a continuous upward trajectory, the development of the sexual violence norm has been characterized by fluctuations, periods of normative strengthening have been followed by phases of stagnation or even regression. While the overall protective scope initially broadened, this progress has proven fragile.

At the same time, a similarly uneven – but even more concerning – trajectory can be observed in the domain of healthcare provision. While the issue was first introduced in Resolution 1889 (2009), it was only marginally addressed in the subsequent Resolution 1960 (2010). There, health-related content appears solely in the preambular section and remains elusive in nature – albeit with the notable inclusion of a reference to the rights of persons with disabilities (pre. para. 13, S/RES/1960, 2010). This limited scope reflected a normative regression when compared to the agenda’s gradual expansion. A significant normative strengthening occurred in Resolution 2106 (2013). For the first time, an operative paragraph explicitly addressed healthcare provision for survivors of sexual violence:

“Recognizing the importance of providing timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence, urges United Nations entities and donors to provide non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence” (para. 19, S/RES/2106, 2013).

Moreover, para. 20 established a direct link to the issue of sexually transmitted infections, further expanding the resolution’s normative scope (para. 20, *ibid.*). However, from this point onward, a gradual weakening of health-related commitments becomes apparent.

Subsequent resolutions do not reaffirm the explicit references to sexual and reproductive rights found in 2013. This omission suggests a retreat from the more ambitious normative stance of Resolution 2106 (2013). A partial revival of the healthcare pillar occurs only with Resolution 2467 (2019). It contains a more detailed operative paragraph on providing healthcare services, affirming that access to healthcare should be guaranteed for survivors of sexual violence and children born of rape (para. 29, S/RES/2467, 2019). Yet, the paragraph emphasizes postnatal care and non-discriminatory services, rather than reproductive rights or access to safe abortion. This shift in emphasis – from reproductive autonomy to postnatal protection – constitutes a substantive narrowing of earlier commitments. Although the health-related dimension has gained broader visibility since 2000, the normative standard established in 2013 has not been reasserted in subsequent resolutions.

In sum, the analysis of changes to existing normative content reveals a more complex and ambivalent picture than the introduction of new normative elements. While the developments are not linear, a discernible trend toward normative weakening, especially in the most recent resolutions, emerges over time. Particularly in the core areas examined – legal frameworks, healthcare, and sexual violence – the WPS agenda reached a comparatively high level of protection. Yet by the most recent resolutions, this protection has been scaled back or only partially reaffirmed, suggesting a gradual erosion of normative stringency in precisely those domains most critical to women's rights in conflict-affected contexts.

3.5.3 Omitted Normative Content

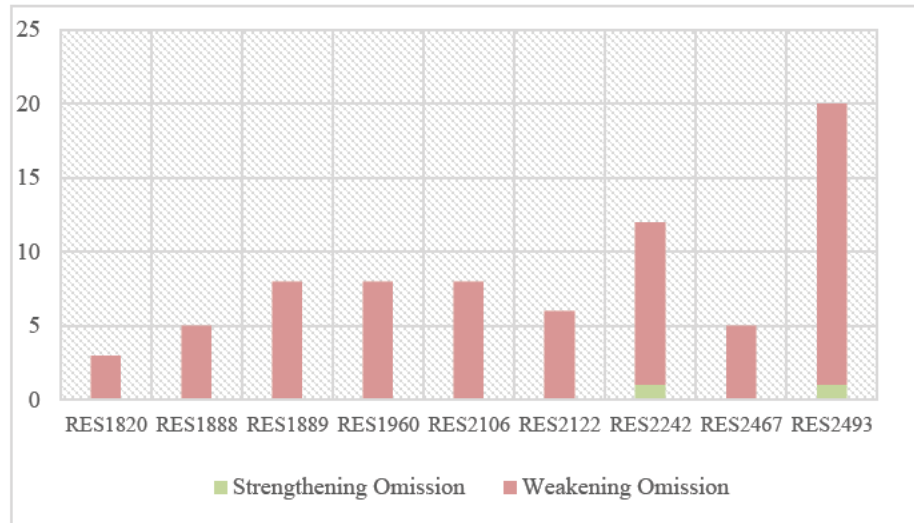


Figure 13: Omitted Normative Content across WPS Resolutions

Finally, normative content can also evolve not only through modifications that weaken or dilute existing commitments, but through the omission of previously affirmed elements. Such omissions may pertain to provisions originally included in Resolution 1325 (2000) or to additions made in subsequent resolutions. In these instances, the normative substance is not actively revised but simply no longer reaffirmed. While such omissions often reflect a weakening of normative commitment, they may in rare cases also enhance normative coherence – particularly when they remove ambiguous, inconsistent, or politically diluted language that previously undermined the normative core. Within the context of the WPS agenda, such omissions do not necessarily indicate that an issue has been permanently excluded from the normative framework. Rather, they concern issue areas that were included in one resolution, omitted in the next, and reappear at a later point – either in a stronger, weaker, or equivalent form. No cases were identified in which one issue appeared only once and was subsequently excluded entirely from the agenda. However, the coding process revealed a growing pattern of such temporary omissions over time. In total, 74 instances were identified in which a previously addressed issue area was no longer mentioned (Figure 13). The most frequently omitted topics included female empowerment (5 instances), displacement-related protections (5), the UN’s zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation (4), disarmament (5), prevention of abuse by peacekeeping personnel (4), and the establishment of new UN positions (4). These weakening omissions are particularly concentrated in the most recent resolution, significantly weakening the overall normative framework. Notably, this includes, among

other omissions, the removal of previous references to sexual violence, healthcare, reparations, security sector reform, and displacement-related protection, as well as the complete omission of the relief and recovery pillar in Resolution 2493 (2019). In conclusion, this appears to be the most significant trend identified by the analysis. When an issue area is entirely omitted from a resolution in a given year, the level of protection does not merely diminish temporarily – it disappears altogether. The fact that the most recent resolution omits core themes such as sexual violence and healthcare provision signals a substantial weakening of normative stringency. This development stands in stark contrast to the original normative intent of the WPS agenda, which was designed to protect and advance women’s rights – not to take them back.

3.5.4 Findings – A Change in Normative Stringency?

Taken together, the findings clearly demonstrate that the normative stringency of the WPS Agenda has been far from stable over the years (Figure 14).

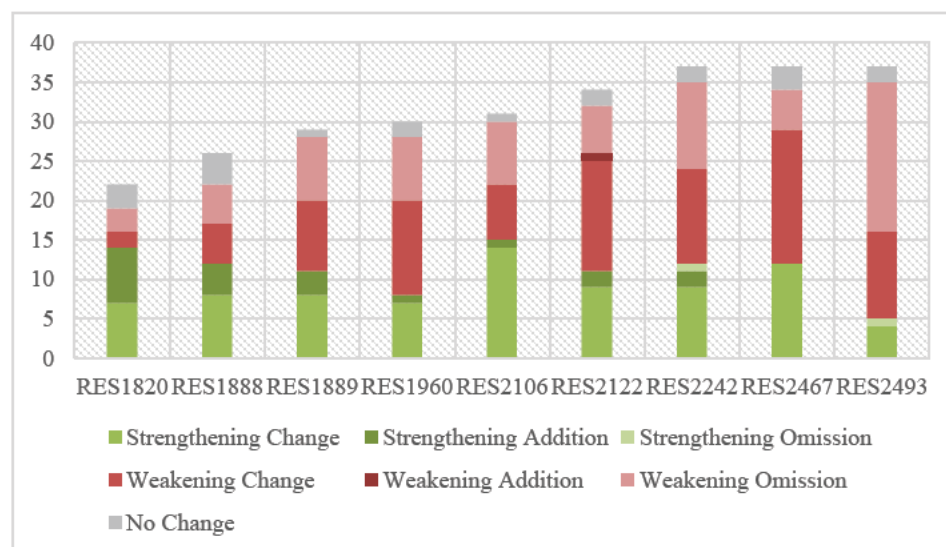


Figure 14: Accumulated Patterns of Normative Change in WPS Resolutions

In the following Figure 15, all measures that strengthen the norm’s stringency (e.g. norm strengthening additions, norm strengthening change and norm strengthening omissions) and all those that weaken it (e.g. norm weakening additions, norm weakening change and norm weakening omissions) have been combined:

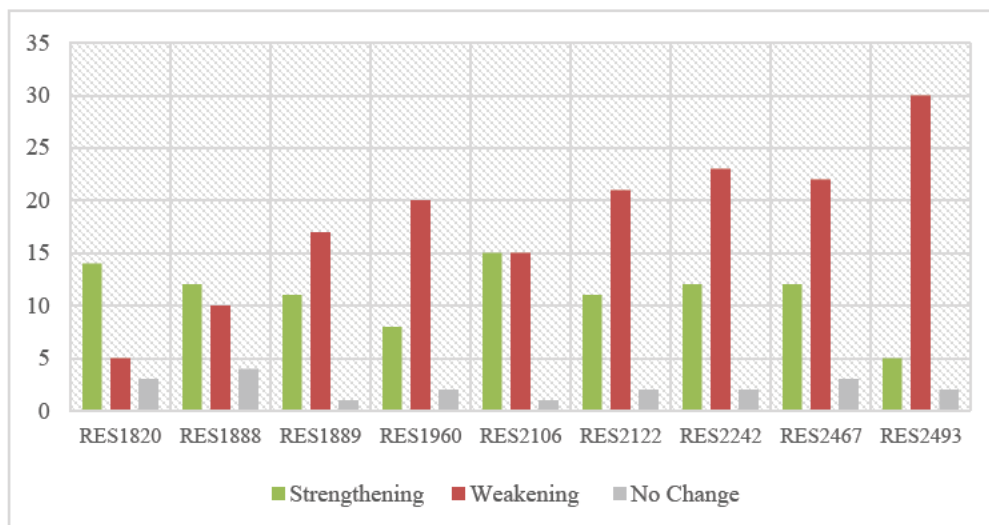


Figure 15: Overall Strengthening and Weakening of Normative Stringency in WPS Resolutions

It becomes evident that, following an initial phase in which protection standards increased, nearly all subsequent resolutions – with the exception of Resolution 2106 (2013) – failed to maintain or strengthen the highest level of protection. Instead, the prescribed behavior reflected a lower standard. Notably, the number of weakened issue areas rises significantly in the last four resolutions. A comparison between the first WPS resolution, S/RES/1325 (2000), and the most recent one, S/RES/2493 (2019), shows that the number of changes and additions consistent with the agenda’s original normative intent outweighs those that weaken it (Figure 16).

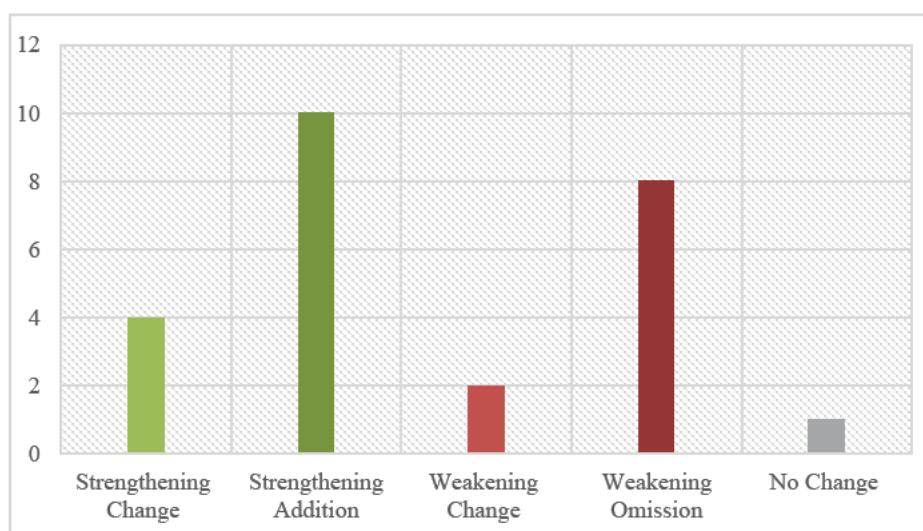


Figure 16: Types of Normative Changes between S/RES/1325 and S/RES/2493

However, a closer look at the thematic distribution of these developments reveals a more nuanced picture (Figure 17). Many of the strengthening elements are concentrated within the pillars of participation and implementation.

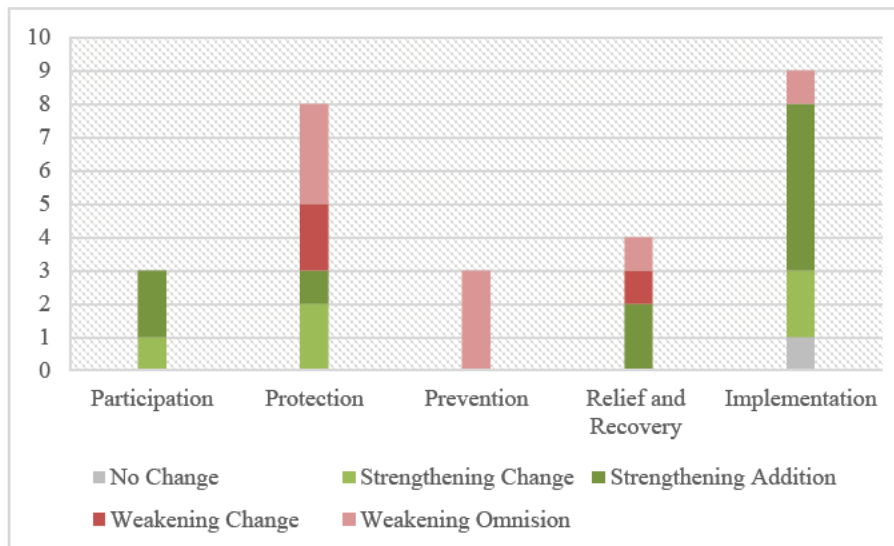


Figure 17: Normative Changes between S/RES/1325 and S/RES/2493 by Thematic Pillar

In particular the latter requires cautious interpretation. Although it includes generally strengthening provisions, such as stronger gender mainstreaming in Security Council mandates or a better integration into the work of UN entities, its primary function is to implement what is already defined elsewhere. As such, it cannot independently elevate protection levels. Where protection is simultaneously being reduced – especially within the prevention pillar, which is entirely absent in last resolution, and to a considerable extent also within protection, improved implementation alone cannot fully compensate for this normative loss.

Taken together the observations of the general development and the direct comparison between the first and last resolution, the findings suggest a downward trend in normative stringency. While not all thematic areas have experienced regression – and some have even seen normative strengthening the distribution and substance of changes matter. It is not only relevant how many amendments occur but, more importantly, what is being altered. Normative weakening in fundamental areas such as conflict-related sexual violence and reproductive rights is particularly consequential.

This observation supports existing critiques of the WPS agenda, especially those that warn against the dilution of reproductive protections as an alarming sign of decreasing

normative ambition. Moreover, it reflects a broader trend in the literature on the contestation of women's rights norms. As Sanders (2022: 278) argues, these rights do not constitute a single unified norm but a set of interlinked issue areas – some of which may be accepted while others are simultaneously undermined. In line with this analysis, Sanders (2018) identifies reproductive rights and access to healthcare as particularly contested domains. She argues that these components are so integral to the broader women's rights agenda that their exclusion risks weakening the normative core, even if other components remain untouched or are even strengthened.

3.6 Scope and Limitations of the Findings

Despite efforts to ensure methodological transparency and conceptual clarity, certain limitations of this study must be acknowledged. As with any qualitative content analysis, coding decisions, particularly in borderline cases, are subject to interpretive judgment. Moreover, the analysis is based exclusively on primary sources issued and authored by UN institutions. The views and interpretations, and direct statements of member states are only indirectly reflected and cannot be fully captured. As a result, and as can be seen above the discursive dimensions are only captured in a limited way. Finally, the WPS agenda addresses not only member states but also the UN system itself. Internal implementation measures, such as mainstreaming efforts and structural reforms within the UN system, may influence the overall robustness of the WPS agenda. However, these aspects were not systematically examined in this study, as the analysis centers on state actors. This focus is not only a methodological decision but also reflects the political reality of norm implementation, as highlighted by the UN Secretary-General himself:

“Member States remain the most influential actors in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda (...) They have the primary responsibility to ensure that global commitments to the agenda are integrated into domestic policies and laws.” (UNSG 2016: 20).

3.7 Shifting Ground: Locating the WPS Agenda Within the New Robustness Framework

The empirical findings of this study suggest that the WPS agenda has maintained relatively stable levels of social validity. However, the content analysis of the actual resolutions reveals a gradual decline in the agenda's normative stringency, marked by the increasing prevalence of weakening normative content and the omission or dilution of

previously affirmed commitments, such as references to sexual and reproductive rights, far-reaching protection from sexual violence, and calls for binding legal reforms that strengthen women's rights at the national level.

This divergence between sustained social validity and the transformation of the norm's substantive content suggests that the WPS agenda evolved into what this study defines as an empty norm (see Table 4, pp. 13–14): a norm that continues to be widely accepted and formally invoked, yet no longer prescribes the same behavioral expectations that were encoded at the time of its adoption. This shift would remain analytically invisible within frameworks that focus solely on social validity. By introducing the dimension of normative stringency, this thesis offers the analytical tools necessary to detect such internal change, underscoring that norm robustness must be understood as a two-dimensional concept.

Yet the future trajectory of the WPS agenda may not remain confined to the category of an empty norm. Should social validity continue to erode alongside the already declining normative stringency – as recent developments in implementation and compliance suggest – the agenda may shift further into what this study defines as a soft norm. In this configuration, the norm would be neither socially upheld nor normatively aligned with its original intent, lacking both institutional resonance and meaningful behavioral direction. The two-dimensional framework introduced in this thesis thus not only captures subtle transformations beneath the surface of formal continuity but also allows for tracing dynamic shifts across normative configurations over time. It reveals how a norm's decline can unfold along two distinct axes – highlighting the importance of assessing not only whether a norm continues to exist, but also whether it continues to demand the same behavior.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

This thesis set out to investigate how the robustness of international norms evolves under conditions of sustained contestation. To this end, it introduced a conceptual distinction between social validity – referring to the compliance and implementation as well as discursive support – and normative stringency, which captures the consistency and integrity of its normative content. Drawing on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

agenda as an empirical case, the analysis demonstrated that both dimensions can evolve simultaneously, resulting in distinct norm types (see Table 4, pp. 13–14).

The findings confirm the analytical value of Zimmermann et al.’s (2023) robustness framework, particularly in capturing indicators of social persistence such as continued reaffirmation and behavioral compliance. However, by focusing exclusively on structural features, the framework overlooks a crucial question: whether a norm’s original commitments remain substantively intact. Without this perspective, assessments of norm strength risk remaining incomplete.

By introducing the complementary concept of normative stringency, this thesis provides a more differentiated analytical lens, one that assesses not only whether a norm persists and continues to shape behavior, but also *what* it continues to demand. This distinction is not merely conceptual; it has direct implications for evaluating the effectiveness and credibility of norms in practice. If a norm retains its institutional structure while losing substantive content, as the WPS agenda increasingly does, its transformative potential may be significantly undermined. In such cases, institutional continuity can mask a deeper erosion of normative ambition.

The two-dimensional framework proposed here thus enables a more precise diagnosis of norm robustness and invites further empirical application beyond the WPS agenda. Future research could explore whether similar divergences between social validity and normative stringency can be observed in other policy areas, such as economic and social rights, environmental protection, or climate justice. It would also be worthwhile to examine how the two dimensions interact. Strengthening a norm’s content, through clearer obligations or expanded scope, may increase the implementation burden and jeopardize acceptance. Conversely, normative weakening may ease compliance but dilute the norm’s original purpose. Investigating such trade-offs can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of norm robustness.

Yet the implications of this framework extend beyond academic analysis. They are highly relevant for understanding current challenges to international (women’s) rights. Returning to the question set out above, this thesis has shown that attacks on women’s rights do, indeed, *hurt* – especially through undermining their normative core.

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Annex

Annex A: Why Robustness Matters for Women's Rights - A Perspective Grounded in Lived Vulnerabilities

The field of women's rights occupies a central position in contemporary international norm politics due to its structural reach and broad societal relevance. Women constitute the world's largest systematically marginalized group, and persistent disparities affect virtually all spheres of life. According to UN Women, one in three women globally experiences physical or sexual violence during her lifetime, often perpetrated by an intimate partner (UN Women 2025: 15). Beyond violence, women continue to face substantial barriers to political representation, legal protection, education, and access to economic resources (UN Women 2025). In conflict-affected settings, these inequalities are not only maintained but often exacerbated. Women are disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence, forced displacement, and the systematic exclusion from peace processes and post-conflict governance structures. These patterns entrench structural injustices and undermine the inclusiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts (for an overview see Cohn (ed.) 2013). Moreover, an expanding body of empirical research underlines the broader societal impact of gender equality. As the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General highlights, over 100 studies now point to a robust connection between women's participation and durable peace: "This remains the case even though there is ample evidence that women's participation contributes to more robust democracies and longer-lasting peace." (UNSG 2023: 1; see also Cohen & Karim 2022). Against this background, the normative robustness of international women's rights norms is not merely relevant for the rights of women, but for the functioning and well-being of societies as a whole.

Annex B: Legal Status of the WPS Framework

The legal character of Resolution 1325 (2000), and thus its status as a norm in the legal sense, cannot be deduced solely from its nature as a Security Council resolution. While such resolutions can be legally binding, they are not automatically so. Binding effect in the strict legal sense generally applies to those resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which concerns "action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression," as laid out in Article 25 of the Charter. Resolution 1325, however, was not adopted under Chapter VII but under Chapter VI, which deals

with the “*pacific settlement of disputes.*” It therefore belongs to a rather rare category of thematic resolutions that, although not formally invoking Chapter VII, may nonetheless carry legal significance. The often-invoked dichotomy, whereby Chapter VII resolutions are legally binding, and Chapter VI resolutions are not, is an oversimplification that does not accurately reflect the complexity of international legal interpretation. As confirmed by the International Court of Justice in its *Namibia Advisory Opinion* (ICJ 1971: para. 113), the legal bindingness of Security Council resolutions must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account language, context, and intent. In the case of Resolution 1325, its wording (“[t]he Security Council ... urges Member States to ...; calls on ...”), the unanimous adoption, and its consistent operationalization in peacekeeping mandates and national strategies have led a significant portion of the legal literature to conclude that the resolution should be regarded as carrying binding normative weight (German Bundestag Parliamentary Research Service 2020: 7).

Annex C: Legal Status of Preambular Paragraphs in Security Council Resolutions

It is important to note that the preambles of Security Council resolutions do not create legally binding obligations. This stands in contrast to the so-called operative paragraphs, which, under certain conditions (see above), may carry binding force under international law. Nonetheless, as Wood (1998: 86–87) points out, “preambles to SCRs may assist in interpretation by giving guidance as to their object and purpose”. From a political science perspective, where norms are not limited to legal obligations, preambular content is therefore highly relevant for assessing the broader normative orientation of a resolution. However, caution is warranted. As Wood (1998: 86–87) also notes, preambles often function as a “dumping ground for proposals that are not acceptable in the operative paragraphs,” and there is typically “no conscious effort to ensure that the object and purpose of each operative provision is reflected in the preamble.” As such, while preambular paragraphs can offer valuable insight into the thematic framing and normative aspirations of a resolution, they should not be equated with the legal or prescriptive weight of operative provisions. Their interpretive significance must therefore be carefully calibrated in light of these limitations.

Annex D: Coding Rules and Coding Schemes

The following outlines the coding rules and coding scheme used to apply the analytical framework of social validity and normative stringency. It includes guiding interpretative questions and anchor examples for each category. The coding process follows Mayring's (2015) principles of structured, theory-driven (deductive) category application.

Coding Rules: Social Validity

- **Consistency:** The same set of coding categories was applied across all documents and time periods
- **Transparency:** All coding decisions were systematically documented in a coding log using MAXQDA, ensuring traceability and reproducibility. All coding data has been submitted digitally as part of the supplementary material.
- **Theory-driven but open:** Coding followed the four analytical categories introduced (see 2.4, p. 6) and further detailed in the coding scheme. The coding scheme was developed deductively based on the analytical framework but remained open to inductive adjustments. This included, among other things, the refinement of codes to distinguish between positive and negative manifestations of each category.
- **Multiple coding:** Text segments could be assigned to more than one category where conceptually appropriate.
- **Unit of analysis:** The smallest unit of coding was a single sentence; the largest unit was a paragraph, depending on the coherence and completeness of the thematic content.
- **Focus on state actors:** Codes were assigned exclusively to the behavior of states in their role as norm addressees. Actions by UN bodies, agencies, or representatives were not coded independently, but only if they were conducted in cooperation or with support of state actors.
- **Normative reference point:** The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda served as the normative benchmark for all coding decisions.

Coding Rules: Normative Stringency

- **Conceptual Consistency:** All 10 Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) were examined using a uniform coding scheme.
- **Baseline and Comparative Reference Point:** Normative developments were assessed relative to the cumulative content of preceding resolutions, with Resolution

1325 (2000) serving as the initial baseline. For each thematic area (e.g., participation, protection, legal frameworks), the most far-reaching previous formulation functioned as the reference point to evaluate subsequent changes in scope, clarity, or normative ambition.

- **Transparency:** All coding decisions were documented in a thematically structured Excel matrix. Each entry includes the paragraph(s) examined and the identified change. This ensures traceability and allows for intersubjective review. The matrix is included in the supplementary material.
- **Theory-driven but open:** The coding scheme was developed deductively based on the analytical framework (see 2.5, p. 8) but remained open to inductive adjustments. Coding followed the analytical categories introduced in section 2.5 and further detailed in the coding scheme.
- **Unit of Analysis and Thematic Aggregation:** The basic units of analysis were thematically grouped resolution paragraphs. Instead of coding individual provisions in isolation, thematically related paragraphs within each resolution were jointly assessed to determine the direction and magnitude of normative change in a given issue area.
- **Multiple coding:** Paragraphs could be assigned to more than one thematic group where conceptually appropriate.
- **Criteria for Coding Changes:** Only substantive modifications to the content of the WPS framework were coded. This includes additions, omissions, or rewordings that altered the normative scope of provisions. Purely formal changes (e.g., updates to dates, references to other documents, or editorial adjustments) were excluded.
- **Weighting of Preambular Paragraphs:** Preambular paragraphs were included in the coding process, particularly for identifying the introduction of new thematic elements or for detecting the complete omission of previously established issues. However, in assessing the strength or weakening of existing normative content, preambular references were generally assigned less weight than operative paragraphs due to their lower normative binding force (see Annex C, p. 53).

Coding Schemes

Social Validity *(based on the Framework of Zimmermann et al. 2023)*

Category	Subcode (Polarity)	Definition	Interpretative Question	Anchor Example
Compliance	Compliance	Behavior that aligns with the norm	Are WPS norms being followed in practice? Is there evidence of practical adherence to WPS commitments?	“Data compiled using the indicators in resolution 1325 (2000) has shown an increase in women participating in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, although the indicators do not assess the quality or the impact of demobilization and reintegration support on women’s lives.” (UNSG 2015: 12)
	Non-Compliance	Behavior that contradicts or violates the norm	Are there indications of norm violations?	“For example, during governorate council elections held in Iraq in April 2013, several candidates were killed, including two women.” (UNSG 2014: 14)

				<p>“In Haiti, the use of rape as a tool of intimidation by the de facto military regime reportedly “normalized” a cycle of violence against women that has been replicated by criminal elements.” (UNSG 2010: 6)</p>
Implementation	Implementation	Formal institutional or legal anchoring of the norm at the national level	<p>Are the WPS norms integrated into laws, policies, or institutions?</p> <p>Are institutional mechanisms mentioned that support the norm?</p>	<p>“Member States, United Nations entities and civil society actors have made significant strides in implementing the resolution, including by incorporating gender perspectives in policies, programmatic tools and capacity-building activities.” (UNSG 2004: 118)</p>
	Lack of Implementation	Lack of implementation or institutional weakening of the norm	Are there missing or deliberately undermined legal/institutional measures?	<p>“More needs to be done at the country level to mainstream gender perspectives at every stage of conflict prevention, resolution and</p>

			Is implementation delayed or not addressed at all?	management as well as peacebuilding, including security sector reform; prevent and end sexual and gender-based violence; increase women's representation in decision-making bodies and security institutions; increase resources and technical support for women's organizations; and ensure stronger United Nations capacity to support Member States in implementing resolution 1325 (2000).” (UNSG 2008: 19)
Concordance	Concordance/ Positive Norm Reference	Explicit approval, positive reference, or reaffirmation of the norm (e.g., in speeches, resolutions, statements)	Are the WPS norms recognized or reaffirmed as legitimate?	“I am heartened by the level of reflection within the international community since 2015 on what preventing conflict and sustaining peace mean in practice and by efforts to bring inclusivity, equality and

				human rights to the centre of those discussions.” (UNSG 2017: 2)
	Disavowal/Norm Rejection	Rejection, questioning, or delegitimizing statements regarding the provisions of the norm	Are the WPS norms rejected, relativized, or questioned?	“The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders reported that a rise in misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by political leaders in recent years is normalizing violence against women and gender non-conforming persons.” (UNSG 2019: 11)
Reactions to Norm Violations	Condemnation	Other actors publicly condemn violations (e.g., naming and shaming, resolutions)	Are violations of WPS norms (verbally) sanctioned or condemned? Are perpetrators named or shamed in official statements?	“At the capital-level meeting held in April in Berlin, members offered concrete recommendations on participation and representation, accountability and advocacy and the building of alliances to advance the agenda (see A/72/926- S/2018/669). They also voiced concerns about shrinking spaces for civil society and

				increasing security risks for defenders of the human rights of women.” (UNSG 2018: 14)
	Silence/ Justification	No reaction to violations or justifying statements for norm- deviating behavior	Is there tolerance towards or justification of violations?	“Despite all efforts, acts of violence against women persist during armed conflict. Innovative strategies need to be developed to ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law by all actors, military as well as non-State. The Security Council and other Member States need to send stronger signals to parties to conflict that perpetrators will be prosecuted” (UNSG 2008: 16)

Normative Stringency (*Extended framework proposed in this study*)

Category	Subcode (Polarity)	Definition	Interpretative Question	Anchor Example(s)
Change in Existing Normative Content	Normative Weakening	Modifications to previously established normative content that reduce the norm's clarity, scope, or prescriptive strength (e.g. by using vaguer terms, narrowing obligations, or selectively omitting emphasis).	Has previously clear or binding language been softened, narrowed, or rendered more ambiguous compared to earlier resolutions?	<p>On the issue of domestic legal protection</p> <p>From: Emphasizes state responsibility to prosecute those responsible for crimes including sexual violence (paraphrased para. 11 S/RES/1325, 2000).</p> <p>To: Urges support for national institutions and civil society networks, particularly in the justice and health sectors (paraphrased para.13 S/RES/1820, 2008).</p>
	Normative Strengthening	Modifications to previously established normative content	Has an existing normative claim been expressed more	On the issue of protection from armed conflict

		that reinforce or extend the norm's clarity, scope, or prescriptive strength (e.g. through stronger or more specific language or broadened obligations).	clearly, precisely, or comprehensively than before?	<p>From: Expressing concern that civilians, particularly women and children, are adversely affected by armed conflict. (paraphrased pre. para. 4 S/RES/1325, 2000)</p> <p>To: Expresses grave concern over the continued, widespread, and brutal violence against women and children despite repeated condemnations. Calls for protective measures for civilians, such as military disciplinary actions, training, sanctions, creation of safe zones, and inclusion of local women in conflict resolution. (paraphrased pre. para. 8 and para. 3 S/RES/1820, 2008)</p>
Introduction of New Normative Content	Norm-Consistent (strengthening)	Inclusion of new thematic or conceptual elements that substantively reinforce or	Does the new content meaningfully advance the WPS agenda's original	Requests the appointment of a Special Representative to lead and coordinate efforts against sexual violence in

	Additions	extend the original normative intent of the agenda (e.g. emerging challenges like digital harms, intersectionality, or climate-security links).	objectives (e.g. women's rights, participation, protection)?	conflict. (paraphrased para. 4 S/RES/1888, 2009)
	Norm-Diluting (weakening) Additions	Introduction of new elements that distract from, dilute, or shift attention away from the agenda's core normative focus (e.g. gender-neutral framing, generic development language, or unrelated security priorities).	Does the new content shift attention away from the core focus on women, gender, and peace/security?	It reaffirms the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of all states. (paraphrased pre. para. 8 S/RES/2122, 2013)
Omission of Previously Affirmed Normative Content	Weakening Omission	The complete removal of previously included thematic content or normative claims, which reduces the agenda's scope, clarity, or prescriptive	Has a previously affirmed element been removed in a way that weakens the agenda's normative clarity or reach?	

		strength (e.g. deletion of reproductive rights language).		
	Strengthening Omission	The removal of earlier additions that had diluted or limited the agenda's original intent – thus potentially restoring its coherence or reinforcing its core normative direction.	Has an omission removed previously added content that undermined the agenda's core objectives, thereby restoring its normative integrity?	
No Normative Change	No Change	The normative content remains unchanged and continues to reflect the strongest formulation of the norm as established in previous resolutions.	Does the formulation fully correspond to the highest level of normative protection previously reached?	<p>The Security Council decides to remain actively seized of the matter (paraphrased para. 23 S/RES/2106, 2013);</p> <p>and</p> <p>the Council decides to remain actively seized of the matter (paraphrased para. 11 S/RES/2493/2019).</p>

Annex E: Coding Results

Coding Results: Social Validity – Overall Results

Compliance	Compliance	482
	Non-Compliance	203
Implementation	Implementation	469
	Lack of Implementation	427
Concordance	Positive Norm Reference	26
	Norm Rejection	4
Reaction to Violations	Condemnation	4
	Justification/Silence	3
Total		1618

Coding Results: Social Validity by Report Years

Year	Compliance		Implementation		Concordance		Reaction to Norm Violation	
	Compliance	Non-Compliance	Implementation	Lack of Implementation	Positive Norm Reference	Norm Rejection	Condemnation	Justification/Silence
2004	41	7	38	20	2	0	0	1
2008	37	6	36	12	0	0	0	1
2009	19	13	17	24	1	0	0	0
2010	12	18	11	11	1	0	0	0
2014	34	12	34	19	1	0	0	1
2015	41	15	41	32	0	0	2	0
2016	37	11	36	18	2	0	1	0
2017	29	10	28	34	2	0	0	0
2018	29	9	28	29	2	0	1	0
2019	32	15	32	32	2	2	0	0
2020	45	13	45	42	5	0	0	0
2021	32	13	31	37	4	0	0	0
2022	29	20	28	36	0	1	0	0
2023	33	17	32	45	1	1	0	0
2024	32	24	32	33	3	0	0	0
Total	482	203	469	427	26	4	4	3

Coding Results: Normative Stringency – Overall Results

Introduction of New Normative Content	Norm-Consistent Additions	21
	Norm-Diluting Additions	1
Change in Existing Normative Content	Strengthening of Existing Norm Content	78
	Weakening of Existing Norm Content	89
Omission of Previously Affirmed Normative Content	Strengthening Omission	2
	Weakening Omission	74
No Normative Change	No Change	20
Total		285

Coding Results: Normative Stringency by Resolutions

Resolution	Introduction of New Normative Content		Change in Existing Normative Content		Omission of Previously Affirmed Normative Content		No Normative Change
	Norm-Consistent Additions	Norm-Diluting Additions	Strengthening of Existing Norm Content	Weakening of Existing Norm Content	Strengthening Omission	Weakening Omission	
UNSCR 1820 (2008)	7	0	7	2	0	3	3
UNSCR 1888 (2009)	4	0	8	5	0	5	4
UNSCR 1889 (2009)	3	0	8	9	0	8	1
UNSCR 1960 (2010)	1	0	7	12	0	8	2
UNSCR 2106 (2013)	1	0	14	7	0	8	1
UNSCR 2122 (2013)	2	1	9	14	0	6	2
UNSCR 2242 (2015)	2	0	9	12	1	11	2
UNSCR 2467 (2019)	0	0	12	17	0	5	3
UNSCR 2493 (2019)	0	0	4	11	1	19	2

Coding Results: Normative Stringency by WPS Pillars

Pillar	Introduction of New Normative Content		Change in Existing Normative Content		Omission of Previously Affirmed Normative Content		No Normative Change
	Norm-Consistent Additions	Norm-Diluting Additions	Strengthening of Existing Norm Content	Weakening of Existing Norm Content	Strengthening Omission	Weakening Omission	
Participation	3	0	11	12	0	6	0
Protection	5	0	24	30	0	18	5
Prevention	0	0	9	6	0	12	0
Relief and Recovery	5	0	11	10	0	18	5
Implementation	8	1	23	32	2	20	10

Annex F: List of Analyzed Documents

UN Secretary-General Reports

United Nations Secretary-General (2004): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2004/814)*, available at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20S2004814.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2008): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/622)*, available at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20S2008622.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2009): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/465)*, available at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20S%202009%20465.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2010): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/173)*, available at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20S2010%20173.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2014): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/693)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2014_693.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2015): *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2015/716)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_716.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2016): *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2016/822)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_822.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2017): *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2017/861)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2017_861.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2018): *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2018/900)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_900.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2019): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/800)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_800.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2020): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/946)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_946.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2021): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/827)*, available at:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2022): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/740)*, available at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S-2022-740.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2023): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725)*, available at:

file:///Users/luisalatella/Downloads/S_2023_725-EN%20(1).pdf (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

United Nations Secretary-General (2024): *Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/671)*, available at:
<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S-2024-671.pdf> (accessed: 3rd June 2025).

UN Security Council Resolutions

United Nations Security Council (2000): *Resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325)*, available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf> (accessed: 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2008): *Resolution 1820 (2008) (S/RES/1820)*, available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/CAC%20S%20RES%201820.pdf> (accessed 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2009): *Resolution 1888 (2009) (S/RES/1888)*, available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES%201888.pdf> (accessed 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2009): *Resolution 1889 (2009) (S/RES/1889)*, available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES%201889.pdf> (accessed 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2010): *Resolution 1960 (2010) (S/RES/1960)*, available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES%201960.pdf> (accessed 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2013): *Resolution 2106 (2013) (S/RES/2106)*, available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2106.pdf (accessed 9th June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (2013): *Resolution 2122 (2013) (S/RES/2122)*, available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2122.pdf (accessed 9th June 2025).

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Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung

Ich versichere, dass ich die vorgelegte Bachelorarbeit eigenständig verfasst, keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet und die ihnen entnommenen Passagen als solche kenntlich gemacht habe. Alle verwendeten Hilfsmittel sind in der untenstehenden Tabelle aufgelistet. Bei der Verwendung von Large Language Models (LLM, z.B. Chat-GPT) habe ich den gesamten LLM-Interaktionsverlauf mit Bezug zur vorgelegten Arbeit archiviert und kann ihn auf Verlangen vorzeigen. Diese Bachelorarbeit ist in dieser oder einer ähnlichen Form in keinem anderen Kurs vorgelegt worden.

ChatGPT	Sprachliche Überarbeitung
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München, den 01.07.2025