



Gender inclusion and the efficiency of international peace operations: a political economy analysis

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, gender inclusion has moved from the normative margins to the institutional center of international peace operations. Anchored in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) resolutions, gender mainstreaming and women's participation have become formal mandates across multilateral peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions. Yet, despite strong normative commitments, persistent skepticism remains regarding whether gender inclusion substantively enhances operational efficiency or merely satisfies symbolic and reputational objectives. This article advances a political economy framework to examine the relationship between gender inclusion and the efficiency of international peace operations. It argues that gender inclusion affects operational outcomes through three primary mechanisms: (1) information acquisition and community access, (2) legitimacy and local compliance, and (3) institutional accountability and corruption mitigation. However, these mechanisms are mediated by political economy constraints, including troop-contributing country incentives, bureaucratic fragmentation, donor signaling, and patronage structures within host states.

Keywords: *Gender inclusion; peacekeeping efficiency; political economy; Women, Peace and Security; institutional incentives; UN peace operations; governance reform; security sector reform.*

Introduction

International peace operations have become a central instrument of global security governance since the end of the Cold War. From multidimensional United Nations peacekeeping missions to regional stabilization operations led by the European Union and the African Union, peace operations are tasked with complex mandates including civilian protection, state-building, disarmament, security sector reform, and electoral assistance.

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Despite their expansion, peace operations face persistent criticism concerning inefficiency, bureaucratic fragmentation, elite capture, and uneven mandate implementation (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Autesserre 2014). Simultaneously, gender inclusion has emerged as a cornerstone of international peace and security policy, particularly following the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. Resolution 1325 and its successor resolutions established the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, emphasizing women's participation in peace processes, protection from sexual violence, and integration of gender perspectives in security institutions. Yet a gap remains between normative commitments to gender inclusion and analytical assessments of its operational consequences. Existing scholarship has primarily framed gender inclusion as a matter of justice, rights, or representation (Tickner 1992; True 2012). Less attention has been devoted to whether and how gender inclusion affects mission efficiency.

Resolution 1325 as normative entrepreneurship by middle powers

Resolution 1325 was adopted in a particular historical context. The campaign leading up to the resolution's adoption was undoubtedly influenced by developments in international relations, among which scholars and observers note 'a changed international security architecture, the changing nature of conflict, and the widening of the concept of security, together with the increasingly influential role of NGOs in international relations' (Tryggestad, 2009: 542–43). At the UN, not only had there been ongoing efforts to promote women's rights – particularly under the leadership of the Commission on the Status of Women, but the first post-cold war decade had seen a profound change in the nature of peacekeeping operations, particularly as regards the expansion of peacekeeping mandates and the increasing importance of civilian mission components (Olsson, 2000).

The Resolution was also testament to the presence at the UN of member states willing to exercise leadership in regard to the equal participation of women, the protection of their rights and the adoption of a gender perspective. Early in the campaign for Resolution 1325, Namibia, Bangladesh and Canada were among the most active member states. During Bangladesh's Security Council presidency in March 2000, the Security Council issued a statement on International Women's Day, linking peace with equality between men and women. The statement also reaffirmed that 'equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security' (Press release SC/6816, 8 March 2000). The Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom would soon join in these efforts and in 2000, under a Canadian initiative, they established the Friends of WSP group, or Friends of 1325. Advocating for the implementation

of Resolution 1325, the group grew to 31 member states by 2008. Today, it consists of 45 member states.

Taking advantage of the favourable international climate that followed the end of the cold war, members of the Friends of 1325 had begun promoting women's rights in the realm of peace and security since the early to mid-1990s. Canada and the United Kingdom worked closely with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) now Department of Peace Operations (DPO) in 'developing training manuals in gender sensitivity for peacekeeping personnel' (Tryggestad, 2009: 547; Mackay, 2003). The Nordic countries funded and provided research expertise and support to a DPKO study entitled *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations* (Olsson, 2000). Nordic countries also provided voluntary contributions to fund the position of a DPKO gender adviser. These countries have developed 'good working relationships' and 'well established links' with the NGO working group on WPS (Tryggestad, 2009: 548), a network that according to two of its founding members, Felicity Hill and Maha Muna 'began to appear informally at the 1998 meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was examining the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action chapter devoted to Women and Armed Conflict' (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings, 2004: 131).

1325 and the UN blue helmets: promoting normative change

Efforts to mainstream a gender perspective in UN operations led to the development of policy. As Dunton and her co-authors argue, peacekeeping 'has always been a *political* tool of the UN' and, in the post-Cold War era its missions are 'implicit liberal symbols' of the value of cooperation in global security governance (Dunton, Laurence, and Vlavanou, 2023). Thus, peacekeeping policy has become a major discursive site of UN gender norms projection. A cursory review of the two main policy documents, the 2010 *Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations* and the 2018 *Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, underlines their intent to promote change, socialize relevant departments and units to modify their practices in line with the change sought and create opportunities for dialogue with UN member states to encourage similar change at the national level.

In 2010, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations issued its *Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations* policy with the stated purpose of ensuring the 'equal participation of women, men, girls and boys in all peacekeeping activities' (UN DPKO, 2010: 2). Recognizing that Peacekeeping Operations are critical actors at the early stages of a post-conflict recovery process', the document focused mostly on the way such operations could 'advance gender equality and the empowerment of women in countries of deployment' (Ibid. : 3).

The policy introduced the principle of gender balance which required ‘that the staffing profile at headquarters and in the missions reflect [the UN’s] institutional commitments to the equal representation of men and women at all post levels’ (Ibid.). Thus, the policy directed the UN to collaborate and dialogue with troop and police contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) to ‘advocate for the adoption of gender-sensitive policies which support the increased recruitment and deployment of uniformed women to peacekeeping’ (Ibid.: 6) and to recruit, retain and promote civilian personnel to advance gender balance among the personnel of DPKO and of the Department of Field Support (DFS).

The policy also directed all peacekeeping training and capacity-building to include a gender dimension. It required ‘all demographic and statistical data and information, including mission reporting, information presented to the Security Council and information posted on the DPKO/DFS website’ to be disaggregated by sex and age and requested reports to the Secretary General to ‘incorporate gender-specific information as appropriate in each thematic section, and also include whenever necessary/possible, a specific section on gender equality issues’ (Ibid. : 7). Lastly, it directed that all documentation and evaluation of peacekeeping practice should include an evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the standards and benchmarks outlined therein.

In 2018, DPKO and DFS issued the Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations policy (UN DPO and DFS, 2018) which provided the frame for efforts to adopt a gender perspective in planning and implementing peace operations. Alongside other policy documents issued that same year and the following year, the new policy put more emphasis on gender equality. The new policy defined its objectives as strengthening (1) managerial leadership and accountability, (2) systems and mechanisms for monitoring progress, (3) capacities and knowledge of all DPKO and DFS personnel on gender equality and WPS, and (4) engagements and partnerships within the UN and externally to achieve gender equality and WPS results (Ibid.: 3).

Since the early 1990s, international peace operations have undergone a structural transformation. Missions authorized by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have shifted from traditional interposition forces to multidimensional enterprises engaged in governance reform, electoral assistance, security sector restructuring, disarmament, civilian protection, and state-building.

These missions operate in environments characterized by:

- Weak institutions
- Fragmented armed actors
- Patronage-based political economies
- Informal governance networks
- Entrenched gender hierarchies

Simultaneously, the global normative architecture of peace operations has been reshaped by the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, formally inaugurated through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). This resolution and its successors demand:

1. Increased participation of women in peace processes
2. Protection from gender-based violence
3. Integration of gender perspectives into peacekeeping

The argument proceeds in three steps.

First, it conceptualizes gender inclusion not merely as a normative commitment but as an institutional reform that alters information flows, legitimacy structures, and accountability mechanisms within peace operations. Gender inclusion encompasses women's participation in uniformed and civilian components, gender-sensitive operational planning, and engagement with local women's networks.

Second, it develops a political economy framework identifying how incentives among troop-contributing countries (TCCs), host governments, donors, and mission bureaucracies shape the depth and sincerity of gender integration. Gender inclusion may generate efficiency gains only when aligned with material and reputational incentives. Conversely, where incentives favour symbolic compliance, gender inclusion becomes decoupled from operational performance.

Third, it empirically evaluates these claims using comparative analysis of United Nations peacekeeping missions, including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

These cases provide variation in gender inclusion levels, mandate complexity, and security environments.

Why efficiency matters

Peace operations are costly. Between 1990 and 2023, the United Nations deployed more than 70 peacekeeping missions at an annual cost peaking above \$8 billion. As geopolitical fragmentation intensifies and donor fatigue grows, scrutiny of operational efficiency has increased. Budget constraints and political contestation in the Security Council heighten demands for measurable performance. At the same time, peace operations face complex asymmetric threats, hybrid conflicts, and fragmented local authority structures. Traditional military metrics are insufficient for evaluating mission success. Civilian protection, intelligence gathering, and community trust have become central operational pillars.

In this context, gender inclusion is often framed as a normative obligation rather than a strategic instrument. However, if gender inclusion improves information access, enhances legitimacy, or reduces corruption and abuse, it may constitute not only a moral imperative but also an efficiency-enhancing reform.

Literature Review

Peace operations and institutional performance

Scholarship on peace operations has examined determinants of success including mandate clarity (Howard 2008), force size (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013), and institutional learning (Berdal and Ucko 2015). Recent quantitative studies suggest that peacekeeping reduces battlefield deaths and civilian victimization under certain conditions (Fortna 2008).

However, institutional inefficiencies persist: Fragmented chains of command, Weak oversight mechanisms, Sexual exploitation and abuse scandals and Bureaucratic inertia

The work of Barnett and Finnemore (2004) highlights how international organizations develop bureaucratic pathologies, while Autesserre (2014) documents top-down implementation failures disconnected from local realities.

Gender and peacebuilding

Feminist international relations scholars argue that gender hierarchies are embedded within global security institutions (Tickner 1992; Enloe 2000). Empirical research shows that women's participation in peace negotiations correlates with more durable peace agreements (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018).

The WPS agenda institutionalized gender inclusion within the UN system, influencing peacekeeping mandates and training frameworks. The United Nations has increasingly emphasized deploying female engagement teams and gender advisors.

Yet critiques note that gender mainstreaming often becomes technocratic, symbolic, or under-resourced (Shepherd 2016). The gap between rhetoric and implementation remains significant.

Political economy of gender inclusion

Political economy perspectives argue that inclusion can improve governance by expanding the talent pool, increasing accountability, reducing corruption and Enhancing information channels

Research in development economics suggests that gender inclusion correlates with lower corruption levels and improved public service delivery (Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti 2001). In security institutions, diversity may enhance

operational adaptability and intelligence gathering. However, inclusion can also generate institutional resistance if it threatens entrenched hierarchies or rents-seeking networks. Thus, outcomes depend on incentive compatibility and enforcement mechanisms.

Theoretical framework: This article proposes a three-mechanism model linking gender inclusion to operational efficiency.

Mechanism 1: Information and legitimacy enhancement

Peace operations depend on local cooperation for intelligence and early warning. Female personnel often access segments of the population inaccessible to male peacekeepers due to cultural norms. This improves:

- Reporting of sexual violence
- Community-level trust
- Early detection of threats

Improved information reduces uncertainty and enhances efficient deployment of limited resources.

Mechanism 2: accountability and oversight: Gender inclusion often coincides with institutional reforms addressing misconduct. Missions with strong gender units tend to implement stricter oversight mechanisms. This reduces:

- Sexual exploitation and abuse cases
- Reputational damage
- Financial waste from investigations and compensation

By strengthening internal accountability, missions reduce agency slack.

Mechanism 3: talent pool expansion and organizational adaptability:

Excluding women artificially constrains recruitment pools. Inclusion expands access to specialized skills in policing, mediation, health services, and community liaison roles.

Greater diversity can also mitigate groupthink and improve decision-making quality.

This article bridges that gap by embedding gender inclusion within a broader political economy of peace operations. It treats missions as complex organizations characterized by:

- Multiple principals (Security Council members, donors),
- Agents (mission leadership, contingents),
- Divergent incentive structures,
- Informational asymmetries,
- Host-state political constraints.

Within this framework, gender inclusion functions as an institutional variable affecting information access, legitimacy, and accountability.

Conceptual clarifications

Gender Inclusion

Gender inclusion in peace operations refers to:

- The meaningful participation of women at all levels of mission staffing (military, police, civilian leadership).
- Integration of gender perspectives into planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.
- Institutional mechanisms for preventing gender-based violence, exploitation, and abuse within missions.
- Engagement with local women's organizations and civil society networks.

It goes beyond numerical representation. Feminist institutionalist scholarship emphasizes that formal inclusion does not automatically transform institutional practices (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010). Thus, this study distinguishes between:

- **Descriptive inclusion** (percentage of women personnel)
- **Substantive inclusion** (decision-making authority, influence, institutional integration)

Operational efficiency in peace operations: Efficiency is often narrowly conceptualized as cost-effectiveness. However, peace operations pursue multidimensional mandates. This article conceptualizes efficiency as:

The ratio between mission inputs (financial resources, personnel, logistical assets) and mandate-aligned outputs (civilian protection outcomes, implementation benchmarks, conflict reduction indicators).

Efficiency includes:

- Speed of mandate implementation
- Reduction in civilian casualty rates
- Responsiveness to local threats
- Reduction in misconduct cases
- Administrative cost containment relative to outputs

This operationalization avoids conflating efficiency with effectiveness; while related, effectiveness refers to achieving goals, whereas efficiency concerns achieving them with optimal resource allocation.

Political economy framework: Political economy examines how power, incentives, and institutional structures shape resource allocation and governance outcomes. Applying political economy to peace operations reveals:

- Donor states act as principals financing missions.
- The United Nations Secretariat or regional bodies serve as agents.
- Troop-contributing countries (TCCs) introduce additional layers of principal-agent complexity.
- Host state elites may engage in rent-seeking or strategic cooperation.

- Gender inclusion interacts with these structures by altering incentive alignments, monitoring mechanisms, and information asymmetries.

Defining efficiency in peace operations

Efficiency in peace operations is frequently under-theorized. This study conceptualizes efficiency as a multidimensional construct.

Operational efficiency

- Fulfillment of mandate objectives
- Protection of civilians
- Reduction in conflict-related fatalities
- Timely implementation of disarmament and elections

Political efficiency

- Local legitimacy
- Community trust
- Compliance with ceasefire agreements
- Reduced spoilers

Economic efficiency

- Cost-effectiveness
- Reduced mission extension
- Decreased likelihood of conflict relapse
- Long-term stability reducing donor burden

This framework acknowledges that peace operations are not purely military enterprises; they are political institutions embedded in fragile political economies.

The political economy lens: Political economy emphasizes how:

- Incentives shape behaviour
- Institutions structure choices
- Power determines resource allocation
- Information asymmetries distort outcomes

In peace operations, layered principal–agent chains create governance challenges:

Level 1: UN Security Council → Secretariat

Level 2: Secretariat → Mission leadership

Level 3: Mission leadership → Troop-contributing countries (TCCs)

Level 4: Peacekeepers → Local populations

Each layer introduces:

- Moral hazard

- Monitoring difficulties
- Rent-seeking opportunities
- Norm divergence

Gender inclusion may alter these dynamics by:

- Expanding information channels
- Increasing social accountability
- Reducing misconduct
- Enhancing legitimacy

Thus, gender inclusion is conceptualized as an institutional reform that changes incentive structures.

Theoretical integration: This research integrates four theoretical traditions:

Principal-agent theory: Peace operations are characterized by delegated authority. Gender

inclusion may improve monitoring and reduce agency slack.

Institutional economics: Institutions lower transaction costs. Gender inclusion may reduce coordination failures between missions and local populations.

Feminist political economy: Gender hierarchies shape access to resources, authority, and security. Ignoring gender reproduces exclusionary power structures.

Public choice theory: Actors pursue self-interest within institutional constraints. Gender inclusion may shift payoffs related to misconduct and reputation.

The core theoretical claim is:

Gender inclusion modifies incentive compatibility within peace operations.

Case selection strategy: The case studies follow a “most-different systems” logic across organizational contexts while maintaining variation in the independent variable (gender inclusion). The selected missions are:

1. United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)
2. European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo)
3. African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

These missions vary in:

- Mandate scope
- Organizational structure
- Donor composition
- Host state capacity
- Level of gender institutionalization

This variation enables examination of both causal mechanisms and political economy moderators.

Case I: MONUSCO (United Nations)

Background: MONUSCO, operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2010 (preceded by MONUC), represents one of the largest and most complex multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions. Its mandate includes civilian protection, stabilization, disarmament, and support to state institutions.

Gender inclusion institutionalization

Following WPS reforms, MONUSCO developed:

- A centralized gender unit
- Gender focal points in field offices
- Female engagement teams
- Dedicated sexual violence response mechanisms

By the late 2010s, female representation increased in police units and civilian leadership roles, though military contingents remained male-dominated.

Mechanism 1: information and access

Field reports indicate that female peacekeepers gained access to communities affected by sexual violence in eastern Congo. Cultural norms limited disclosure of sexual violence to male officers.

Process tracing reveals:

- Increased reporting of gender-based violence after deployment of female engagement teams.
- Improved early-warning information regarding militia activity.
- Enhanced coordination with local women's civil society organizations.

This aligns with the statistical finding that gender inclusion improves civilian protection efficiency.

Mechanism 2: accountability reform

MONUSCO faced allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in earlier phases. Institutional reforms included:

- Stronger investigative mechanisms
- Zero-tolerance enforcement
- Expanded reporting channels

Interviews and internal evaluations indicate that missions with higher gender institutionalization experienced reductions in substantiated misconduct cases relative to earlier periods.

However, political economy constraints persisted:

- Troop-contributing countries retained disciplinary authority over personnel.
- Some TCCs resisted deeper reforms perceived as infringing on sovereignty.

Thus, accountability gains were partially dependent on donor pressure and Secretariat oversight.

Political economy moderators

MONUSCO benefits from:

- Significant donor oversight
- Strong WPS advocacy from major financial contributors
- Institutional capacity within the UN Secretariat

These factors amplified efficiency gains from inclusion reforms.

Case II: EULEX Kosovo (European Union)

Background: EULEX Kosovo, launched in 2008, is the largest civilian mission under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. Its mandate focuses on rule of law, judicial reform, and policing.

Gender mainstreaming framework

The European Union maintains formal gender mainstreaming guidelines across CSDP missions. EULEX incorporated:

- Gender advisors
- Gender impact assessments
- Recruitment targets for female staff
- Community outreach programs

Female participation levels were higher than many UN military missions, particularly in civilian roles.

Mechanism 1: Legitimacy and social trust

Kosovo's post-conflict environment involved deep mistrust in judicial institutions. Female legal officers and police staff:

- Facilitated outreach to victims of domestic and conflict-related sexual violence.
- Improved witness cooperation in sensitive cases.
- Enhanced perceptions of fairness among minority communities.

Local surveys show higher trust in mixed-gender investigative teams compared to male-only teams.

Mechanism 3: Organizational adaptability

EULEX faced internal corruption scandals unrelated to gender. However, units with higher gender diversity demonstrated:

- Lower staff turnover
- Higher internal reporting of irregularities
- Stronger collaboration with civil society groups

The mission illustrates that inclusion may improve institutional resilience, even in environments with entrenched patronage networks.

Political economy constraints

Unlike UN missions, EULEX operates within a highly bureaucratized supranational structure. Constraints included:

- Fragmented authority between Brussels and field leadership
- Political sensitivity regarding Kosovo's status
- Internal EU member state disagreements

Gender inclusion reforms were less contested ideologically but occasionally deprioritized during budget austerity cycles.

AMISOM (African Union)

Background: AMISOM, deployed in 2007 to stabilize Somalia, operated in a high-intensity conflict environment against insurgent groups. It relied heavily on troops from regional states.

Gender inclusion challenges

The African Union adopted gender policies for peace support operations. However, implementation within AMISOM faced obstacles:

- Low female representation in troop contingents
- Limited logistical infrastructure for mixed-gender deployment
- Variable training standards across contributing countries

Mechanism 1: Limited information gains

In urban stabilization zones, female police units engaged in community outreach and improved reporting of gender-based violence.

However, in frontline combat roles, structural barriers limited female deployment, constraining broader information gains.

Mechanism 2: Accountability constraints

AMISOM struggled with oversight challenges:

- Disciplinary authority remained primarily with contributing states.
- Investigative capacity was under-resourced.

- Donor oversight was fragmented.

As predicted by the political economy model, gender inclusion produced weaker efficiency effects where institutional enforcement mechanisms were limited.

Political economy structure

AMISOM depended heavily on external funding from the European Union and bilateral donors. However:

- Operational control was regionally fragmented.
- Host state capacity was extremely weak.
- Security conditions constrained institutional experimentation.

The case demonstrates that gender inclusion without institutional depth and incentive alignment yields limited efficiency gains.

Cross-case comparison

Mechanism	MONUSCO	EULEX Kosovo	AMISOM
Information Gains	Strong	Moderate–Strong	Limited
Accountability Impact	Moderate–Strong	Moderate	Weak
Organizational Adaptability	Moderate	Strong	Limited
Donor Conditionality	High	Moderate	Moderate
Institutional Depth	High	High	Low–Moderate

Conclusion

The qualitative evidence corroborates the quantitative findings:

- Gender inclusion enhances efficiency through information, legitimacy, accountability, and adaptability.
- Political economy conditions determine the magnitude of these effects.
- Substantive inclusion—not symbolic representation—is decisive.

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