

# **The Limited Influence of INGOs on Peace and Security Governance**

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### Abstract

*International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are widely recognized as major players in global peace and security; however, their actual impact is often underexplored and frequently exaggerated. This paper addresses the gap between their perceived transformative capacity and their marginalized, symbolic role in security governance, critically examining their collaboration with intergovernmental institutions, civil society, and other actors. Using a qualitative approach and case studies on the cooperation of INGOs with the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO, the study identifies sustainable limitations in their political position, operational capacity, and popular mandate—constraints that prevent them from becoming key participants in decision-making or organizing coordinated international action. Structural reorganization of security systems is unlikely to result from INGO reforms; instead, such reforms often legitimize existing power imbalances and facilitate resource transfers, with holistic influence remaining the exception. On the international stage, their role is secondary, never central. These findings suggest that assumptions about INGOs' effectiveness should be grounded in case-specific, evidence-based analysis. INGOs remain a valuable asset for policymakers and scholars seeking to foster realistic, strategically inclusive security governance.*

**Keywords:** *International Non-Governmental Organisations, International Security, Problems of Cooperation of International Actors in the Security Area, International Actor, UN*

## التأثير المحدود للمنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية على حوكمة السلام والأمن

### ملخص

تعرف المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية على نطاق واسع بأنها جهات فاعلة رئيسية في السلام والأمن العالميين، إلا أن تأثيرها الفعلي لا يزال غير مدروس بشكل كاف وغالبا ما يبالغ فيه، تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية الفجوة بين قدرتها التحويلية المتصورة ودورها الرمزي المهمش في إدارة الأمن من خلال دراسة نقدية لتعاونها مع المؤسسات الحكومية الدولية والمجتمع المدني والجهات الفاعلة الأخرى، وباستخدام منهج نوعي ودراسات حالة حول تعاون المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية مع الأمم المتحدة والاتحاد الأوروبي وحلف شمال الأطلسي، تحدد الدراسة قيودا مستدامة في موقعها السياسي وقدرتها التشغيلية وتقويضها الشعبي، وهي قيود تمنعها من أن تصبح مشاركا رئيسيا في صنع القرار أو تنظيم عمل دولي منسق، ومن غير المرجح أن تؤدي إصلاحات المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية إلى إعادة هيكلة الأنظمة الأمنية؛ بل غالبا ما تضيء هذه الإصلاحات الشرعية على اختلالات القوى القائمة وتسهل نقل الموارد مع بقاء التأثير الشامل استثناءً ويظل دورها على الساحة الدولية ثانوي، وليس محوريا، و تشير هذه النتائج الى ضرورة ان تستند الافتراضات المتعلقة بفعالية المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية إلى تحليل قائم على الأدلة ومحدد لكل حالة على حدى، ولا تزال المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية تمثل رصيذا قيما لصناع السياسات والباحثين الذين يسعون إلى تعزيز حوكمة أمنية واقعية وشاملة استراتيجيا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية، الأمن الدولي، مشاكل تعاون الجهات الفاعلة الدولية في المجال الأمني، الجهة الفاعلة الدولية، الأمم المتحدة.

## Introduction

The common perception that International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are in a transformative position, *per se*, in the field of security requires a particular emphasis on scrutiny. INGOs have recently been disclosed as absolutely necessary players in the current discourse of peace and security, and their intervention occurs based on their active interaction with states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society. Such a perception is an indicator that partnership with the government actors facilitates the competence of the INGOs, their operation in conflict areas, and a significant contribution to global stability. Nevertheless, these allegations do not hold entirely true. One of the peculiarities of INGOs, as Bush et al. (2024) observe, is that these often have the so-called power without authority, whose authority is limited by state-centric dogmas that leave actual decision-making in the hands of sovereignly independent states. Such is their strength, as it was, the cry of a corner in a place of clamour. The global halls of governance are crowded ones, and the most vociferous do not necessarily represent righteousness.

The reduced space/room provided to INGOs to operate has been further pushed to the periphery as a result of the contemporary security environment characterized by a political confrontation, armed conflict, and the emergence of new forms of coercion (Simangan, 2025). Though some indicate their increased influence by the sheer increase in their numbers since the eighteenth century and their presence in international forums, it appears that these two factors can be misleading because Bloodgood and Schmitz (2025) have written that such indicators usually conceal their weak ability to affect strategic outcomes. Their increase in quantity usually hides the loss of actual agency. It is the politics of shadow play, and turning up, being seen, and making no difference. The range of MSP in terms of INGOs is likely to be diluted to the levels of advocacy, norm diffusion, and consultative efforts, which, as it is stated by West (2025), can serve as a legitimization of a pre-existing power relation, and not as democratization thereof. Their legitimacy, which is a prize they have to struggle hard to obtain, may be used by the very systems they wish to reform. The influence of sovereign states in security regulation is still the greatest because they hold the political, resource, and institutional power to make decisive decisions.

The critical appraisal procedure is a relatively well-organized critique of purported impact of INGOs with regard to evidence in a state-centric international relations approach as we are doing in this paper. It poses the following questions: How far do the International Non-Governmental Organizations impact the results of peace and security, and in what circumstances is its performance limited externally? Though justified to be

transformational in the area of peace and security, INGOs and their activities are symbolic in most situations and are dependent on the priorities of states or IGOs.

To answer this question, the paper will proceed as follows. The initial one presents a theoretical and conceptual background informing the study of the non-state actor power in a state system-dominated world. In the second section, case studies of INGO participation with the United Nations, European Union, and NATO are given with the emphasis upon patterns of symbolic versus substantive impact. The third section examines the structural and operational imperatives restricting the effectiveness of INGO. These findings also bring out the conclusion that seeks to question the conventional wisdom about INGO influence and provide guidelines on how the role of INGOs in global security governance should be assessed in a more evidence-based manner.

## **Literature Review**

The place of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in international security governance is controversial to say the least. Although notices of peacebuilding and humanitarian roles are repeatedly described as life-altering performers, research demonstrates that there is an ever-living conflict amid their principled aims and the institutional actualism of an organization-based system. This part breaks the literature into three principal thematic debates (1) INGOs as agents of change in peace and security (2) the critique of INGO legitimate actions and autonomy, and (3) structural impediments to the influence of INGOs in the multilateral and regional systems of security.

The ability of the INGOs to make a significant contribution to peacebuilding, humanitarian relief, and promotion of the norms of human rights is built around the early and popular stories that tell that INGOs have become such a transformative actor. They have been celebrated in conflict-affected settings, where they have built campaigns based on Track Two diplomacy, mobilized social opinion, and provided cross-border advocacy (Goodhand & Walton, 2022; Zalewska et al., 2023). The involvement of the INGOs in international discussions, such as those in the UN, has been pointed to as a sign of their increasing nuance in the development of the security agenda (Kruchinina et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, even in their most lauded operations, INGOs tend to act within highly politicized contexts in which their humanitarian missions may be bogged down in state-driven military or political action movements. As Jagger (2010) observes, the act of securitizing aid, which is very evident in the case of Afghanistan, may erode the neutrality of INGOs, which begs the question whether their involvement will indeed be an independent transformative influence or simply a supplement of power units.

We had already contributed to critiques of INGO legitimacy and autonomy. Criticizing the INGOs' autonomy and legitimacy is a significant literature that goes along with the praise associated with their advocacy role. Critics state that INGOs may be perceived as the force of neo-imperial power, unknowingly re-enacting inequalities in power between the Global North and South (Goodhand & Walton, 2022; Zalewska et al., 2023). Relying on donor funding, the necessity to prioritize the interests of the state leaders, and sensitivity to secure pressures frequently force the INGOs to follow their own proclaimed humanitarian principles, violating them (Lambert, 2022).

This loss is not operational but structural. As soon as reliance turns out to be structural, independence turns out to be a myth. According to Kruchinina et al. (2023), visibility and growth of INGOs may be irrelevant to their actual access to real influence on policy outcomes, as they have limited coercive or material power that may compare to the powers of states. This process is in line with the theory of power without authority since the symbolic inclusion of INGOs in the decision-making process does not convert into any substantive control over security policy.

The limitations of the influence of INGOs are not too distant. INGOs can have informal roles of participation in UN peace security governance within the multilateral level. They and their diplomatic activities can influence discourse, but they remain excluded in form, as state actors, and cannot be involved in formal decision-making bodies of the UN (Donini, 1995, pp. 435-437; Kallmeyer, 2006). Their failure to act independently is also constrained by fragmented cooperation, the use of informal networks and the reliance of weak member states on the influence of more powerful states (Gui, 2024; Kruchinina et al., 2023).

The co-operation between INGOs and the EU, NATO, and the OSCE in the inter-organizational level describe both flexibility and the ongoing constraints. Even though INGOs have been involved in coordinated actions in the sphere of election monitoring and promotion of human rights (Kruchinina et al., 2023), these efforts are limited by the institutional weaknesses: militarised stance of NATO, lack of economic power of OSCE, or confused security identity of the EU (Bailes et al., 2008; Tučić, 2020). The input of INGOs even takes on a consultative role rather than a naming way in cases involving regional security cooperation, even on a large scale, such as the cooperation between the EU and NATO since the year 2003 (Willigen & Koops, 2015). These trends support the thesis that the organizational participation of the INGOs in security governance depends primarily not on seeing what their organizational objectives might be but on the structural circumstances.

The Overview over Debates and Gaps results in the fact that the literature arrives at a paradox that INGOs are exceptionally apparent on the global security scene but institutionally restricted to making any decisive impact. Although the current research in this area has been informative in terms of their capabilities and functions, legitimacy and institutional collaborations, these aspects are usually addressed individually. This literature lays the foundation of the current study, further constituting these strands of literature into a composite work that critically assesses the influence of INGOs on peace and security issues and yet focuses on the circumstances under which the state-based systems limit their activities in regards to their efficiency.

### **Theoretical Basis of the Study**

The present study utilizes a critical theory approach in advancing an investigation into the place of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) within the global system of security governance. As applied to international affairs, the critical theory questions the existing web of power, unveils structural inequalities and dismantles the discourses that reproduce hierarchies that stem out of global sceneries (Goodhand & Walton, 2022). Instead of taking the effectiveness of INGOs as proclaimed, this approach looks at how the agency of INGOs is enabled, and in many instances limited, by the state-centric international security architecture, resource dependence, and geopolitical priorities.

Although classical views of civic associations (e.g., de Tocqueville, Pennock) offer valuable historical insight into the workings of organized non-state actors, they do not adequately describe the nature of the highly institutionalized global order that exists in the contemporary world (Bush et al., 2024). In the same sense, neoliberal and neo-institutionalist models that present INGOs as independent policy makers are likely to give less importance to the fact that they rely on donor funding, were co-opted strategically by major powers, and have limited access to formally constituted decision-making bodies (Rammelt & Kołczyńska, 2025).

In the context of the previous critical theories, which include Chai's typology of NGOs with respect to conflict resolution (Chai, 2023), the current study highlights the ambivalence of the roles of INGOs as potential providers of progressive change and tools in unjust systems of global governance. Using this critical lens on the case analyses in the paper, the study systematically questions the contribution made by INGOs as stated, and reveals the symbolic aspect of a large portion of their contribution as well as places their contribution which is modest in the constraints of the modern security order. In

order to interpret INGOs, it is not sufficient to study them according to their banners; it is necessary to examine the walls that contain them. This cross-cutting framework of analysis makes certain that the study does not just provide a descriptive account but gives a structural criticism of INGO authority, independence, and legitimacy.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Although it is heavily touted that International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have contributed to the progress of peacebuilding, human rights, and humanitarian advocacy, it is still unclear and debated how exactly it has impacted upon the governance of international peace and security. Numerous existing accounts exaggerate the independence of INGOs at the same time as they underestimate the institutional, political, and operational demands that deflect their work. Their specific contributions, where they sometimes mediate, monitor operations related to peacekeeping etc, are frequently situational, uneven and depend on the goodwill of stronger state, and intergovernmental actors.

The absence of context-sensitive and systematic examination raises the devastating questions as to when the INGOs operate under consequential structural conditions to meaningfully influence and when their role is symbolically chief or absorbed. The present study fills the latter, examining the point where INGO agency and systemic constraints merge at global security governance. This paper fills this gap by examining the nexus of INGO agencies and systemic limitations in the context of global security governance by critically evaluating it, which means a systematic evaluation of the agencies of INGOs through supposed influence against historical evidence on the basis of a state centered understanding of international relations. All these approaches to the analysis form a coherent pathway, which will make this study transcend beyond the description into a structural analysis of the power, independence, and credibility of INGOs.

This is a qualitative study where we have case studies of international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) working together with the United Nations, European Union, and NATO. The study identifies some new and sustainable constraints in political standing, functional capacity, and popular mandate of INGOs. Such restrictions do not allow them to gain considerable power either as the main agents of decision-making regulation or as the ability to organize coordinated activity at the international level.

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-case study research design, utilizing a critical theory framework to systematically evaluate the structural and operational limitations of INGOs within the global security architecture. By conducting a comparative analysis of

INGO interactions with the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO, the research employs a state-centric lens to triangulate historical evidence against contemporary institutional arrangements. This methodological approach facilitates a rigorous critique of INGO agency, moving beyond descriptive accounts to provide a structural analysis of how systemic constraints and resource dependencies shape the symbolic versus substantive impact of non-state actors in peace and security governance.

Building on this problem statement, the main goal of this study is to critically evaluate the gap between the apparent transformative capacity of INGOs and their actual, often marginalized, role in security governance. To accomplish this primary goal, the study will follow the next specific secondary objectives:

- To analyze the structural constraints by identifying the political, operational, and institutional barriers that fundamentally limit INGO influence within state-centric systems, with a specific focus on their interactions with the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- To distinguish between symbolic and substantive impact by examining the visible presence of INGOs in international forums versus their actual capacity to shape strategic security outcomes and policy decisions.
- To challenge conventional wisdom by providing an evidence-based critique of the prevailing ‘transformative’ narrative surrounding INGOs, thereby advocating for a more realistic and grounded assessment of their agency in global affairs.
- To investigate the impact of resource dependency by assessing how reliance on state and intergovernmental funding sources compromises the autonomy and influences the advocacy agendas of INGOs.

## **Core Research Question**

When do INGOs have substantive influence in peace and security governance and when does that influence tend to be symbolic or restricted by other actors?

## **Sub-Questions:**

- What are the institutional arrangements specifically (in institutions like the UN Security Council), where participation in decision-making by INGOs is restricted/ made easier?
- What is the financial impact of being dependent on intergovernmental organizations and state donors in terms of influencing INGOs’ advocacy agendas and strategic decisions?

- How do geopolitical environments and security situations condition the possibilities of INGOs to enact autonomy and legitimacy?
- What is the way out of the contradiction between humanitarian values and security requirements in war-affected areas attempted by INGOs?

In explaining these questions, the research is aimed at transcending broad assertions advocating the transformative ability of INGOs and formulating an insightful view of how the INGOs exercise their power in a bid to take a complex understanding of their impact, constraints and optimal positioning in the system of global security governance.

### **The Security Context of INGOs Activity — A Critical Reconsideration**

In turn, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are often seen as the necessary players in furthering global security and fostering the concept of global civil society (Cottin, 2021). However, this assumption should be re-examined critically. Nevertheless, their potential to drive the security-related outcomes is quite limited, disjointed, and usually symbolic despite their growing activities on all continents and interaction in various spheres like human rights, humanitarian aid, and development (Moyer et al., 2023).

Whereas INGOs routinely coordinate with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) by the UN, World Bank, WTO, IMF, NATO, OSCE, and the EU, the detail and success of such associations are inconsistent and is largely dependent on geopolitical setting, exercise of freedom, and donor-communicue. Critically important, INGOs can fund campaigns, hold consultations, monitor adherence to international agreements, and provide the expertise of fine opinion, but it is never converted into a significant impact by policy. Their collaboration is likely to accord the strategic positions of powerful donor countries and advocacy organizations instead of universal values of international civil society (Nachmias, 2024; Parlar Dal & Matsumoto, 2025).

Systems, like the observer and consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), are an avenue through which INGOs receive some formal representation. Nonetheless, the actual power of such functions is limited through gatekeeping institutions and the political interests of member countries. Despite these positions allowing INGOs to participate in meetings and make recommendations, they tend to occupy such positions out of a desire and need to have legitimacy and be seen rather than delivering structural change (Piek, 2025). This has led to these arrangements being used more as a symbol than as a vehicle of change. Symbolism is not known to gear the wheels of power, but it plays an inspiring role.

The claims that INGOs can leverage the international public opinion as the main tool in their arsenal can lead to neglecting the pitfalls of politicization, donor dependence, and lack of transparency and accountability (Rammelt & Kołczyńska, 2025).. Governments and IGOs are likely to accept INGOs as a source of fresh ideas and they can, nevertheless, view them as agents of change that threaten national sovereignty and policy coherence. Despite some admissions as positive by UN leaders such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan concerning the role of INGOs in increasing the legitimacy of international institutions, these words have remained more on the normative front and are not empirically motivated in terms of the outcomes which can be measured. Although some previous high UN officials like Kofi Annan commended INGOs as having the potential to support the legitimacy of the international institutions, these affirmations merely remain normative; substantiated measures of sustained policy effects are weak.

In addition to that, the characterisation of INGOs as being stealthy by focusing on latent or post conflict stages is likely to conceal even more important questions, or rather, rather the ambiguity of their organisation, the lack of transparency and their legitimacy. Most INGOs were initially intended to work on focused, usually non-security-oriented concerns, and hence their mandates do not necessarily correspond to the bigger, multi-faceted actions of peace and conflict resolution (Davies & True, 2024, p. 158).

Based on such considerations, the swelling presence of INGOs can be viewed as an indicator of flaws in formal institutions of global governance instead of an indicator of their increased necessity. Their interventions have been episodic, their selectiveness is strategic, and they are forced on them due to funding by donors, which shows structural limitations to act as independent or permanent forceful players in international security. Thus, among the generalized beliefs that INGOs are originally transformative actors in advancing the field of security, there is an imperative to re-examine and re-think through an appropriate process of realisation that requires the limitations imposed by the present state-centric and politically stratified world order. These trends raise the question of whether formal cooperation models with IGOs represent a legitimate form of expansion of the influence of INGOs or simply absorb them into existing power structures- a topic that is discussed in the final section, drawing on institutional case studies.

## **Peculiarities and Problems of Interaction between INGOs and IGOs - A Critical Perspective**

Though it is often stated that the recent years have seen enhanced cooperation between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and the United Nations on the political level, it can be argued that such cooperation does not bring substantial results to the solution of international security issues (Bloodgood & Schmitz, 2025). The inclination toward the interdependence of UN entities and INGOs as a part of their broadened cooperation in issues of peacekeeping and other security matters can be viewed as the lack of these institutions to act as separate entities, whereas the reason might remain the lack of the intergovernmental institutions themselves (Reinsberg, 2025). The UN assumption that all UN bodies will be improved by INGO engagement is disturbing, considering the variability of INGO agendas, lack of agreed-upon accountability and liable to undermine the prospect of multilateral coordination instead of strengthening it (Bloodgood & Schmitz, 2025).

Such apprehension is particularly observed in the UN Security Council (UNSC) settings in which the NGO participation lacks formality and organizationally restrictions. The UNSC does not have a coherent legal framework of INGO consultation as opposed to ECOSOC where NGOs are granted formal consulting status. Accommodative informal consultations and the Arria-Formula consultations or ad hoc bilateral consultations are often lauded as being inclusionary but they do not provide INGOs much leverage over Security Council proceedings. When INGOs are incorporated into the field missions, as the International Peace Academy was incorporated into the operations in the Great Lakes region in 2002, their input can only be symbolic (Gordanić, 2021).

Moreover, the success stories that have dominantly been employed to illustrate the INGO political significance e.g. the International Campaign, to Ban Landmines or IANSA Small Arms Campaign can rather be perceived as a rather excellent case than an example of outcomes or the overall rule. A typical example is that such campaigns were often not successful on pressure of stand-alone INGOs but where such pressures, generated huge state and intergovernmental support. In the same regard, the creation of the International Criminal Court which is frequently referred to as the outcome of civil society activism was actually initiated by the negotiation of states with INGOs assuming a supporting but lower tier role (Niederberger, 2025).

Even long-established INGOs like the International Peace Bureau, which have a very close association with the UN system, conduct mainly in already existent disarmament

structures. Access without necessarily resulting as a policy influence is a possibility owing to their consultative status at ECOSOC. Arguments that INGOs influence international norms e.g. Responsibility to protect or Rome Statute, tend to overstate their independence and understate that state interest and intergovernmental bargaining are decisive (West, 2025).

In addition, the monetary and functional interdependencies between INGOs and IGOs further make the presumed autonomy of the former to be more problematic. Along with the funding that INGOs receive by means of grants, campaigns, and the contracts given by the IGOs, doubts emerge concerning the neutrality of their advocacy (Mantelero, 2022, p. 18). The directions of their action are ultimately in the hands which provide the gold. The money-monger in many a case has the helm. This reliance threatens to put the INGO into sync with the donor priorities, and consequently undermines the need to adopt a critical and independent stance, which the non-governmental actors are supposed to uphold.

As the case of UNESCO shows, even though the Charter stresses on the importance of INGO participation, the established formal associations of consultative and associate relationships with 373 INGOs and 24 foundations do not guarantee the significance of its influence. Although such arrangements can be effective in procedural inclusion, they can also fail to give INGOs with the ability to influence policy substantially (UNESCO, 2021).

Considering these descriptions, the dominant discourse of gradual progress and win-win collaboration of the INGOs and the IGOs on the realm of peace and security should be re-examined critically. These multiplications of participation should not be confused with the concept of progress but instead should be the subject of a more critical examination: one that questions whether such interactions produce quantifiable contributions to international security or, rather, are just a show, or ritual performance that masks underlying structural inefficiencies. Analysis of the three important institutional relationships UN, the EU, and NATO, will now be analyzed to demonstrate how the presence or lack of structural gatekeeping and related dependencies impact the nature and level of INGO influences.

## **Case studies**

### **INGOs' Interactions with the United Nations**

The United Nations (UN) is often seen as a potential ally to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in pursuit of developments within the framework of peace and security because it was founded in 1945 to support international stability. Those of a

fantastic variety reached nearly 10,000 in number by 2024. The observed disconnect between INGO presence and policy impact confirms the thesis of Bloodgood and Schmitz (2025) that an increase in the number of organizations often masks a decline in actual strategic agency. Also, they are often presented as such an organization being proof of the inclusive democratic nature of the UN (Bush et al., 2024). However, a state-centric gatekeeping perspective of this numerical growth has a more limited narrative. The growth of organizations in the UN space under the label of NGOs does not automatically correlate with a corresponding power; rather, the possibility of access and influence is determined mostly with the help of the political desire and strategic reasoning of the member states, the interests of which prevail in the decision-making process.

The universe of actors not employed by the governments or directly attached to institutions (such as academics, consultants, practitioners, activists, and other so-called opinion-leaders), which some scholars describe as a loose network known as the third UN that participates in advocacy, research, and project development (Stefan, 2022; Simangan, 2025). Nevertheless, these actors are placed on the informal and frequently disintegrative channels through which they operate without the institutional mandate. The success of their interventions does not only depend on their sophistication but also on the likeliness of their inter-agenda and those of the geopolitical and policy agenda of the powerful member states. This gatekeeping process dictates how the contributions of INGOs, at various times, were both visible and conditional, often marginal, and underlines the allegation against the UN as an open and plural policy-making space.

It is reflected in practice with the example of UNESCO. Although UNESCO holds a variety of conferences and forums which deal with international problems (e.g., the Ninth International Forum of NGOs in Tunisia (2018), which was dedicated to the topic of human mobility and associated its evolution with peace and development), in most cases, these initiatives remain declaratory in their findings (Milburn & Claxton-roust, 2023). There were no attached binding recommendations to the event akin to binding commitments and mechanisms to convert them to policy change which highlights the discursive disconnect between representational inclusion and policy influence.

Furthermore, although the official frameworks of NGO cooperation developed by UNESCO mention the importance of principles such as shared goals, mutual benefit, and transparency (UNESCO, 2021), in many cases, they focus on adherence to the procedures, rather than engaging with NGOs. Practically, consultative status and institutional relationships with long history stand out as gatekeeping mechanisms that provisionally favorably access the well-resourced INGOs whilst marginalizing the small

and less-connected organizations. This has the effect of institutionalizing a hierarchical culture in civil society representation and of jeopardizing the transformative potential of partnerships by trivializing them into tokenistic acts aimed at strengthening instead of ameliorating the power imbalances.

Even observed through a critical perspective, the UN-INGO relationship, as specifically seen in the case of the specialized agencies such as UNESCO, illustrates that the outward semblance of inclusiveness in a system tends to hide its structural realities as a system in place to protect state sovereignty. Among these, visibility and discourse that results through forums and cooperative frameworks are likely to lead to a pattern of performativity engagement instead of meaningful participation in global security governance without addressing the political and institutional problems of entry that exist.

### **INGOs and the European Union — Influence through Dependency**

The European Union (EU) is often posed as an example of participatory governance, especially regarding the positive impact of the interaction with INGOs on the democratic legitimacy and citizen engagement. However, when viewed critically, this partnership can be rather defined not as the power-sharing tool but rather as the compensation of such deficits in the institutional capacity of the EU itself (Manzari, 2023). This structural dependency is evidenced by the high annual financial contributions (more than 1.7 billion to INGOs and other implementing bodies) to the EU (Piron, 2025), and has considerable implications as far as autonomy is concerned. When INGOs become dependent on EU funding, they may end up prioritizing the EU agenda, which amounts to self-domestication of the political and strategic tastes of donor. The trend reflects the larger dynamics of institutional gatekeeping that have been observed throughout IGO-INGO relationships in general, where access and influence is dependent on aligning oneself with the goals of the funder.

This asymmetry is strengthened through mechanisms of influence in the EU as well. INGOs have normally approached at the national government or a direct lobbying of the EU institutions, and these two ways systematically give advantages to large, well-resourced organizations over grass-roots actors. A disadvantage is that, rather than the apparent inclusivity that ad hoc policy coalitions made up of governments, parliamentarians, corporations, and NGOs may represent, likely outcomes would be that the non-governmental priorities are compromised by the interests that have to be agreed with in order to form a consensus based on the institutional or commercial interests represented instead (Datta, 2025). In that regard, coalition politics is an additional place

through which the power of INGOs is mediated by more potent actors as it indicates the EU inclination to regulated participation over unlimited plurality.

This (hierarchy) is further reinforced by procedural selectivity. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Citizens Initiative (ECI), and other official consultative bodies are said to render the policy-making process more democratic, yet are arranged to satisfy technocratic expertise and institutionalized advocacy (Kimura, 2023; Schoenefeld, 2021). Currently, those INGOs that lack the bureaucratic means to work around these mechanisms are marginalized and the existing participation model, where voice depends on institutional fluency and resource sufficiency, is enforced. Such procedural preference is some sort of gatekeeping that favors particular actors in the civil society and excludes critical, or otherwise unorthodox, views.

An additional aspect of dependency lies in the instrumentalization by the EU in the field of external action policies, where INGOs are used especially in the policy spheres of conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, and development collaboration. By hiring INGOs to deliver EU-financed initiatives, the Union makes them turn into service providers with the functional mandates that become more aligned with the EU geopolitical policies (Holovchuk, 2025). The deployment of this subcontracting logic exposes INGOs to compliance conditions and performance standards that may water down their normative ambitious agendas or advocacy-based mandates. The effect is the minimization of the ability of INGOs to criticize the policy trends due to the monetary and contractual interdependence promoting conformity over opposition.

Read together, these dynamics imply that the EU-INGO interaction, rather than being a promising relationship of equal partnership, is in fact asymmetric in terms of power and access, which curtails the potential to transform. The collaboration rhetoric shades the fact that INGOs have financial dependency, gatekeeping procedures, and instrumentalization of the processes of taking control of security agendas on behalf of their defined needs. When examined through this lens of analysis, the involvement of the EU with INGOs, in many cases, replicates hierarchies of institutions in disguised forms of participatory governance which beg many questions as to whether indeed this constitutes new forms of international security or merely an institutionalization of pre-existing power dynamics. Partnership not of equality, partnership is the cooperation of name, subordination in fact. Our findings regarding the symbolic inclusion of INGOs in security forums validate Bush et al., (2024) conceptualization of ‘power without authority,’ where non-state actors are seen but lack sovereign decision-making rights.

## **INGOs and NATO—A Constrained Partnership in Security Governance**

The practice of NATO contributing to INGOs demonstrates the processes of non-state actors under the regulation of security-oriented IGOs in a context where strategic outcomes have more priority than pluralistic management. Although the activities of INGOs overlap with that of NATO missions comparatively, in the aspects of demining, protection of refugees, and disarmament, such overlapping points out areas of tension between the interests of the military and humanitarian principles. When the tension is viewed through the window of power imbalance, this contradiction cannot always be discussed as one which prevents an appropriate working of the security apparatus, and thus, it is more likely to be perceived as a structural embodiment of the state-orientedness of security governance. The institutional logic of NATO rests on the political will of member states, which implies that the guidelines of civil-military coordination (Charlotte et al., 2024; Ahmed & Faheem, 2025, p. 125) are more of the processes of integrating INGOs into the given strategic patterns than the spaces where equal agendas can be set.

Key to this relationship is gatekeeping. Those INGOs who use pragmatic and non-antagonistic styles of dealing with the NATO policies have a higher chance of achieving consultative access or logistical cooperation. On the other hand, groups whose propulsive force are demilitarization or are openly critical of NATO actions are denied decisive territory of dialogue (Taiwo et al., 2024). This makes this ideological diversity in NATO's civil-military bodies low and the scope of thinking narrow such that the overall strategic narrative should be kept in line with the geopolitical interests of member countries. The process is similar to the wider trends in IGO-INGO linkages, which entail access being mediated through notions of political compatibility, not on notions of representational balance or normative independence. The evidence of INGOs aligning with state military priorities in conflict zones supports Jagger's (2010) warning that the securitization of aid erodes the neutrality and independent transformative potential of humanitarian actors.

Dependency also limits the INGOs when they undertake their activities on the NATO-led missions. INGOs operating on protection, transport, or funding from NATO in conflict areas will jeopardise their autonomy of operations and narratives. This unspoken requirement not to undermine the mission goals may undermine the neutrality which is the main pillar of the humanitarian legitimacy (Aall & Helsing, 2021). Such closeness in proximity to military structures can reduce the credibility of INGOs and hinder their capacity to meet communities on an independent basis, especially in those settings where the local perception has a major bearing on the safety of local operations. It is an expression of a more fundamental structural issue, that is the more INGOs are sucked

into the orbit of the NATO operational space the further their role becomes substituted by essentially functioning as an aid organization that supports a security agenda that derives its priorities to the state actors.

The spreading of the collaboration in joint campaigns, conferences, and observer positions between INGOs and NATO should hence be approached with a lot of caution. Although such activities imply an increasing interaction, they are frequently functioning in the narrow scope of the procedural sphere, transparency is low, consultation is not formal, and the right to recognize decisions, in general, stagnates in NATO's hands. This leaves only a limited partnership where INGOs have value added operationally but seldom influence strategic considerations. Such an interpretative lens has the NATOINGO relationship on the same side of the institutional hierarchy through the discourse of cooperation, where the lopsidedness in the global security hierarchy is maintained rather than distorted. Eventually, roundness of the table is granted to those who have a seat at it. The shared result of these structural facts in these institutions is that they are selective in nature, dependent on donor priorities as well as having a low capacity to set strategic agendas. These results are used to make the final recommendations of evidence-based, and locally oriented INGO inclusion practices.

## **Conclusion**

The paper shifts toward more realistic estimation and future agenda, because it is argued that people failed to understand effectively that transformative outcomes are supposed to be guaranteed by such cooperation between INGOs, governments, and intergovernmental organizations- this is one of the major features of peace and security governance. As a matter of fact, the influence of INGOs is disproportionate. It is often limited to advisory/information functions and hardly goes beyond that into substance. Furthermore, their effects on policy or the opinion of the people are hard to quantify, especially in the long-run and are exaggeratedly cited.

Such constraints are based on structural imbalances of the international system led by states wherein the influence of INGOs is greatly dependent on the institutional willingness, the geopolitical situation and the compatibility with the strategic interests of states or IGOs. Even in those cases when formal recognition or advisory powers are accorded such as at the UN or UNESCO, the power is not in itself a guarantee to gainful influence. In international security organizations like the NATO or the UN Security Council, there is a peripheral involvement of NGOs, whereas even less restrictionism such as the OSCE, are bound by political and structural restrictions of not being able to institute their deep-rooted involvement.

Most INGOs also experience an addiction to government or intergovernmental funds leading to the problems of politicisation and loss of independence. The international players may not have leverage, or resources or legitimacy to become valid mediators in tricky, militarized disputes. Such coordination on the part of INGOs, when it is recommended, is seldom enough to counter the imbalances in power at the level of decision-making which constrains the ability of INGOs to shape the outcome.

The realization that INGOs have limits beyond these should not necessarily discredit the contributions made by INGOs in the aspects of advocacy, norm entrepreneurship and technical knowhow, but rather correct overly celebratory accounts. A more realistic and critical evaluation should draw the line between situations when INGOs can really make a difference and the others when their involvement is mostly an empty gesture.

The consultative role of INGOs within NATO and the EU aligns with West's (2025) argument that such participation often serves to legitimize existing power hierarchies rather than democratize security governance. In the future, the study of INGO influence needs to be approached in a context and evidence-based form. This may contain:

- Cross-case studies involving the study of a variety of IGOs, conflict type and geopolitical settings.
- Longitudinal studies that examine the extent to which and how attempts are advocated to lead to enduring changes in policy or norm changes.
- To identify trends of inclusion and exclusion in the decision-making process, network mapping is used.

The findings present the policymakers with the necessity to:

- Form collaboration models that can overcome structural constraints of INGOs and do not include tokenism.
- Not just elite, well-resourced NGOs.
- Minimize financial and procedural dependence that chips away at independence and critical capacity.

Through integrating research with policy design based on a realistic appraisal of the operating environment, the international community will be able to incorporate INGO in greater and more realistic and strategically successful ways into the governance of peace and security. This prevents over-idealizing or glorifying their role and the systematic forces under which their role is constituted and which usually limit their influence. When the walls crumbling down then there will come real change when INGOs will speak louder.

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